

PATHWAY 2 FAMILY

Biology Matters

— And That's Why —
Open Adoption
Does, Too

.....

Another

Family's Story

is Connected to
Our Own

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Have you heard?

Embryo donation and adoption has allowed more than 6,000 babies to find loving homes. It may be the solution you have been searching for. Learn more in this issue of Pathway2Family.



Additional Copies Available at Pathway2Family.org

For more information about embryo donation and adoption, you can watch videos and webinars at www.EmbryoAdoption.org/Education

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Trying to conceive can be exhausting, and when your world revolves around creating a baby, it can seem like there’s no time left to do anything else – especially exercise. But keeping your mind and body healthy before conception is critical.

So, how do you find the time to stay fit in-between having a career, baby-making, and taking countless pregnancy tests? We’ve got some tips that make staying fit easier than you may think!

Go for a stroll. Taking a daily, 30-minute walk is a great way to get your body moving and increase blood flow, especially in the pelvic region. Move at a comfortable pace, but don’t be afraid to take it up a notch and transition to a light jog.

Sign up for a yoga class. Yoga helps to strengthen core muscles, regulate breathing, and relax the mind. Strong core muscles are essential for a healthy pregnancy, and the relaxation benefits of yoga can help you take your mind off of your fertility struggles, if even for a bit. Did we mention that this form of exercise can boost libido, too?

Try one of these exercises, or all four! No matter which one you choose, it’s important to remember that you’ve got to keep moving.

Take a dip. Swimming is a great way to stay active. It’s fun and relatively-low impact and provides a killer cardio workout. Swimming can also help you feel less fatigued and sleep better – because really, who couldn’t use a couple extra hours of quality snooze time?

Bust a move. Have you ever considered taking a dance class? From ballroom dancing to Zumba, this form of exercise gets your heart rate going, helps to reduce stress, and increases flexibility. It’s a great solo activity, as well as a great activity for couples (if you can manage to drag your partner along).

A photograph of a baby crawling on grass, with a woman and a man smiling in the background. The baby is wearing a light blue shirt. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green grass and trees.

Biology Matters **AND** That's Why Openness Does, Too

*By: Lori Holden, MA and Author
of The Open-Hearted Way to
Open Adoption: Helping Your
Child Grow Up Whole*

People dealing with infertility often go to great lengths to have a biological child. They have long nurtured the dream of beholding a baby who is the perfect combination of his eyes and her lips. Of witnessing the lifelong emergence of her abilities and his talents – combined together and wrapped up in an entirely new person. Putting this dream to rest isn't always easy for people who choose embryo adoption.

But it's helpful for both donors and receivers to remember how strong that desire is to have a biological connection. With that understanding comes empathy, and with empathy may come a willingness to offer the resulting son or daughter insight into his/her background, allowing him/her to feel less conflicted about "The Split."

What might I look like 20 years from now?

Do I have another family out there? What would my other life have been like?

What do I say when the doctor asks about my family history?

Where did I get this trait, that mannerism?

What might I look like 20 years from now? Do I have another family out there? What would my other life have been like? As with traditional adoption, the person created by embryo adoption may one day have a loss to grieve – a split to heal.

Parents in an embryo adoption can take steps to help their child heal this split right from the very start. By embracing **a spirit of openness**, the child will be well-supported during her growing-up years, as she integrates her various biological and biographical pieces and forms her identity.

“The Split” refers to what happens when a child shares the biology (genetics) of one set of parents and the biography (the life that is written) of another. Chances are that the child will end up valuing biology just like adults do, and at some point may wonder: *Where did I get this trait, that mannerism? What do I say when the doctor asks about my family history?*

Why not just stick with secrecy?

The way we once did traditional adoption didn't always work so well, especially for the child at the center.

With secrecy, we acted “as if” nothing remarkable had happened in the building of our family. **But it had.**

With secrecy, we assumed the baby would be a blank slate on which we could write our own story. **But she wasn't.**

With secrecy, parents may not have fully grieved their own losses, been comfortable with difficult emotions that stem from those losses, nor have been open to answering questions the child may have asked of her beginnings. If we ignored those icky feelings and pushed away those hard conversations, we once thought, they'd just go away.

But they didn't.

People used to choose secrecy out of fear.
But we no longer need to.

Openness is the antidote to both secrecy and fear.

With openness, we deal with *what actually is*.

With openness, we free the child from dealing with our issues, leaving her to focus on her own and on the task of growing up.

With openness, we allow for increased intimacy between us and our child as she travels her journey and trusts us with her innermost thoughts.

With openness, we are able to deal with emotions and tough conversations in the moment, as they arise. We don't refuse to acknowledge these things in hopes that they'll just go away.

Openness may come regardless of our efforts to offer it, thanks to the Internet, so we might as well lead the parade rather than pull up the rear.

Openness facilitates connection. Humans seek connection.

To honor a child's biology is to honor the child, to connect with her, to give her the pieces she needs to put together her identity puzzle. The Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program can help make all those connections possible for those who bring a spirit of openness to parenting.

Granting Permission to Grieve

By: Kris Probasco, LCSW, LSW, Fertility and Clinical Counseling Associates

The business of baby making is full of ups and downs, positives and negatives, and plenty of uncertainties. However, as a medical provider, the most difficult aspect is discussing infertility. One-sixth of the married population has fertility difficulties, but assisted reproduction has brought many children to families that otherwise might not have any. Unfortunately it doesn't work for everyone. Patients

look to their medical providers for answers and solutions, and when there is a concern about their ability to produce and give birth to a healthy genetic child, there are many emotions involved. It isn't easy to give patients the news that their best chance of having a healthy baby would be through donated sperm, eggs, or embryos. However, medical providers have the responsibility to

Medical expertise is a lifeline to emotional healing

be open and honest, to encourage grief for the loss of a genetic child, and to encourage patients to become educated about their options.

Many patients have tried for years to have a child. Couples tell me they appreciate when their physicians are honest about the reality of their infertility treatment possibilities; alternative paths to parenthood should be part of that discussion.

While it may not be the news I want to give the couple, it is their new reality. The biggest gift a medical provider can give a patient is to openly present their options, discuss future decisions and possible treatments, and help them recognize what their next best choice for becoming a parent will be – including the use of a donor.

When you, as a physician, recognize that using a donor is a viable path to parenthood for a couple, you are giving them permission to grieve the loss of their genetic child. This grief process will include anger,

questioning, and sadness. They'll need to go through this grief both as a couple and individually. As a practitioner, it's difficult to be a part of this grief process and assist them in their fertility treatments, so you may want to recommend professional counseling to help them work through these emotions. Your support as their medical provider will help them move through the grief process successfully. They'll thank you for giving them permission to grieve, helping them process their difficult decisions, and assisting them with the move toward becoming parents.

When a patient is ready to move on with her treatment, you want her to be thoroughly rested, informed, and positive in her decisions. She'll have processed her grief and acknowledged the different path that she and her partner are on to becoming parents. The couple will also know that they can trust you, your recommendations, and your practice. Not only will you be highly-regarded for your practice of medical treatments, but you'll also be the medical provider who is known for caring for your patients' emotional well-being and future family.

Evidence that biology matters

- In the 1970s, we had Roots. Today we have *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Ancestry.com and dozens of other vibrant sites devoted to genealogy. People consider biology an important facet of identity.
- The emerging field of epigenetics reveals that some experiences may become encoded in our genes. Our biological makeup may include bits of ancestral memory.
- There have been movements in every state – more and more of them successful – to unseal birth records for adoptees. On a grand scale, we see the innate drive to uncover one's biological roots.

For more on the spirit of openness, read *The Open-Hearted Way to Open Adoption: Helping Your Child Grow Up Whole*, by Lori Holden, M.A. with Crystal Hass.

Or watch the webinar recording of 'Fearful to Fearless: Understanding the Benefits of Open Adoption' at bit.ly/OpenAdoptionBenefitsWebinar.



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Understanding Open Embryo Adoption Relationships

The term *'Open Adoption'* can cause anxiety

Why?

Unfortunately, there are misconceptions about what an open adoption relationship really is. The reality is that openness in adoption benefits all of the people involved, but it primarily benefits your adopted child – and isn't it your role as a parent to cultivate your child's success?

STEP 1

Introducing Your Family

- Both donating and adopting families create a family profile, which includes:
- An introduction of your family
 - Photographs – the more the merrier
 - Why you are choosing to donate/adopt

STEP 2

Getting Matched



Both families provide preferences for matching



The donor reviews the adopting family profile



If accepted, the adopting family reviews the donor profile



When the adopting family accepts the donor family's profile, the match is finalized

STEP 3

Choosing a Communication Plan



All contact between donating and adopting families is done through the adoption agency



Families communicate directly through communication channels, such as email, phone, or Skype



Some families choose to connect on social media, like Facebook, which allows for less direct contact, but leaves it open as an option



Families meet face-to-face and may even choose to vacation together

Understanding the particulars of the program you choose for your adoption journey is important.

A little research may go a long way in helping to ease your fears!

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OPEN ADOPTION AND CREATING A FAMILY PROFILE?

Check out the Embryo Adoption Awareness Center's archive of online webinars at bit.ly/EmbryoAdoptionWebinars

Left: The Trabun Family
Right: The Smith Family



“Another Family's Story is Connected to Our Own”

How Two Families Make Open Adoption Work *By: Erica Corbett*

Many couples have questions about the open adoption model used by the Snowflakes® Embryo Adoption Program. They wonder how much will be expected from them when it comes to communicating with another family about their children. How “open” does an open adoption have to be?

The open adoption model simply gives families the opportunity to stay in contact. How much or what method they use to do that is entirely up to the families themselves. For the Trabun and Smith families, an open adoption means staying in contact through email and sending presents for special occasions.

Stephanie Smith and her husband, Brian, say that the embryo donation program was an answer to their prayers about what to do with their remaining embryos. The open adoption model was an added blessing.

“This idea that we could know something about [the Trabuns] and that they would know something about us – that was extremely appealing,” Stephanie said. “These people truly are in a position of providing these embryos with something that we can’t.”

She said that it is comforting to stay in contact with the Trabuns and see the children growing up. “We touch base, which I’m very grateful for, and to know that [the children] are running around, laughing, playing,

reading, and growing...I’m glad they’re open to sharing that with us.”

“I’ve really appreciated the communication we’ve had with the Smiths,” said Christy Trabun, mother of four, three of whom were born from the remaining embryos she and husband Mike adopted through Snowflakes. “I love seeing photos of their children and seeing some of the ways our kids look similar. I think they have a lot of similar personality traits, too.”

Staying in contact with the Smith family has also been beneficial for health reasons. When the Smith’s children developed a food sensitivity, they alerted Christy who was able to watch for and diagnose the same sensitivity in their son, Cade. Without an open adoption arrangement, Christy would not have been able to diagnose the allergy so early.

The Trabuns talk openly to their children about where they each came from, including the embryo adoption process. Christy uses pictures and age-appropriate information to help them understand how they became a part of the family and plans on continuing the discussion in the future as they are able to understand more. She and Mike say that being in open communication with their children’s biological family has helped prepare her for questions that they will likely have as they get older.

“We have to be respectful of their lives and privacy. But I feel comforted knowing that they love the children with all their heart.”

“[An open adoption model] has made us all the more sensitive to our children’s story of how they came to be a part of our family, and better prepares us for the day when they will have more questions about their genetic parents and siblings,” Mike

said. “In a closed adoption model, you can easily forget that other lives and another family’s story is connected to your own.”

For now, the families have no plans to meet in person but will continue communication through email. In the future, though, they say they are open to whatever their children want.

“I don’t have any set idea of what may take place in the future,” said Stephanie. “We have to be respectful of their lives and privacy. But I feel comforted knowing that they love the children with all their heart.”

“As our children grow older, I think it will be good for our kids to be able to communicate in their own ways with the Smiths too, if all parties are comfortable with that level of interaction,” Christy said. “With regard to our connection to them and their children, we’re certainly open to however the future might pan out.”

To learn more about a directed donation and open adoption through Snowflakes, please contact:
HannahDea@nightlight.org
714.693.5437 – Donation inquiries
Amy@nightlight.org
970.663.6799 – Adoption inquiries

Holistic OPTIONS

for a Successful Pregnancy *By: Dr. Rita Stanford*

Many couples experience success with non-traditional medicines during their fertility journey and may find solutions through practices, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, where Western medicine has failed.

Dr. Rita Stanford, Doctor of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, recently joined the Embryo Adoption Awareness Center in a webinar about holistic care options that can help couples experience a successful

pregnancy, even during frozen embryo transfer and in vitro fertilization. Methods such as acupuncture, dietary therapy, and herbal supplements can all be beneficial to women before, during, and after their pregnancy.

Acupuncture

Studies have shown that when acupuncture is done before a frozen embryo transfer, it can increase the success of the procedure by 50%. Acupuncture can also be used to alleviate symptoms of morning sickness, as well as help mothers provide the energy and blood circulation that babies need during development. Thin needles are placed at strategic points on the body to increase energy, lessen anxiety, and promote sleep and digestion. It is especially beneficial for circulation, which plays an important role in ensuring a successful, full-term pregnancy.

Dietary Therapy

Most expectant mothers know the important role nutrition plays in the health of their baby and how they feel during their pregnancy. Avoiding pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics and eating foods that are in season are all good guidelines. Meat, fish, eggs, and cherries will help build blood and strengthen the uterine lining.

What you eat isn't the only important consideration – how much you eat is important, too. Follow the ¾ rule: filling half of your stomach with solids and one quarter with liquids leaves a quarter of your stomach empty, which allows for easier digestion. Eat these light meals at the same time every day, at least 3 times a day.

Herbal remedies

Before starting any herbal supplement, talk to a professional and get their advice on which herbs would be best to add to your diet before, during, and after a pregnancy. Herbal supplements can be used to increase energy, promote overall health, and prepare your body for the trials of labor. Talk to your herbalist about current symptoms and goals and they'll help you find the combination of supplements that's right for you.

Other holistic care options are as simple as making some lifestyle choices that allow for a healthier, happier mom and baby. Try to reduce stress through meditation or cutting back on work, taking plenty of naps,

and participating in gentle exercises like walking, yoga, or Tai Chi. Working with a doctor who can help you make the right holistic choices for your pregnancy is a good first step toward a healthy pregnancy. If you'd like to find an acupuncturist or herbalist in your area, you can visit acufinder.com. Access the full webinar, 'Acupuncture and FET: Holistic Options for Increasing Your Fertility,' online at bit.ly/HolisticOptionsWebinar.



Dealing ^{WITH} Morning Sickness Naturally



Struggling with morning sickness during your pregnancy?

Here are a few all-natural ways to combat those symptoms without medication:

Drink tea. Try brewing your choice of tea, and adding slices of fresh ginger or lemon. You can also try tea brewed with coriander, peppermint, or cardamom.

Enjoy a Preggie Pop. A unique combination of all-natural ingredients, including essential oils, natural flavorings, and aroma therapy in these lollipops will help keep your nausea at bay. Visit threelollies.com for more information.

Make an appointment with an acupuncturist. Acupuncture can help your internal systems function better during pregnancy, eliminating some morning sickness symptoms.



The Newest Orphanage?

Imagine: a dark and frigid world, the life you were created for suspended by cryopreservation. How long will you remain in this state? One year, ten years, 20 years? Forever? Each year nascent human lives are created for the purpose of bringing them life – but what happens to them if they become ‘leftover embryos?’

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This is not science fiction – more than 600,000 potential lives are cryopreserved in the United States. They were created through the process of in vitro fertilization to help families conceive the children they had dreamt of for years. Now, the patients have given birth to the number of children they desire to parent and face a difficult decision about their remaining embryos. Unfortunately, some people choose to quit paying their storage fees and walk away from their responsibility to make a decision.

The options are simple. Families can continue to pay to store the embryos, destroy them, or choose to donate them – either to science or another family through an anonymous or directed program. The embryos were created for life, and the only life-giving option for the embryos is donating them for reproduction. Donation for reproduction allows the recipient family to experience pregnancy and childbirth and eliminates the expensive option of purchasing donated human eggs.

If you choose to donate your embryos, you become eligible to use a low-cost storage option that is available as part of a partnership between the Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program and Fairfax Cryobank. For \$350, your remaining embryos will be shipped to Fairfax Cryobank and be stored for up to 12 months, giving you the time you need to find the perfect match for your embryos.

Donation doesn't mean that you'll never know the children born from those donated embryos – open adoption relationships have become increasingly common for families. An open adoption means that the genetic parents may still have contact with their offspring. This can take shape in any form, from occasionally exchanging photos to taking vacations together. It's a choice agreed upon by both families – that's the beauty of open adoption.

To learn more about directed donation, contact Hannah at Snowflakes at 714.693.5437 or HannahDea@nightlight.org.

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