

This week's issue:

SHOULD ADOPTION INFORMATION BE KEPT FROM CHILDREN?



Questions for Classroom Discussion:

- What kind of information does Phelan want to get?
- What is the difference between open and closed adoptions?
- Why do some people want adoptions to be open?
- Why do some people want adoptions to be closed?
- If you didn't know your birth parents, what questions might you have?

Twelve-year-old Phelan was **adopted** as a baby. He loves his adoptive parents, but he has questions they cannot answer. Will he be tall or short when he grows up? Do health problems like diabetes, high cholesterol, or cancer run in his biological family? He wishes he could ask his birth parents, but he is not allowed to know who they are.

Phelan's situation is called a "closed" adoption. This means that the child and the adoptive parents have no contact with the birth family. Phelan's birth records will be kept secret for the **duration** of his life. Sometimes, in other closed adoptions, the child's birth records will become available once he or she turns 18.

People prefer closed adoptions for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, birth parents believe it will be too painful to see the child they gave up. In some cases, birth parents may not tell friends or family that they have had a baby. A closed adoption **ensures** that the child cannot appear someday and reveal the secret.

Sometimes adoptive parents are the ones who want adoptions to be closed. They might fear **tension** between the two families. They worry that the birth parents will disagree with the adoptive parents' parenting decisions. They also worry that the birth parents may be involved with drugs or alcohol, or may disappoint the child.

Other people, however, believe that adoptions should be "open." This means that the child can have contact with the birth parents. In many cases, the child and the birth parents exchange letters and photographs. Some adoptive parents choose open adoptions because they want to be straightforward with their child about the adoption. They want to be able to answer all the child's questions. Some birth parents **consent** to open adoptions because they still want to be involved in the child's life.

Should all adopted children like Phelan have the right to know their birth parents? Or should some parents be allowed to keep adoption information private?

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adopt | ensure | tension | consent | duration

USE THE FOCUS WORDS *and alternate parts of speech

adopt (*verb*) to take as one's own

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Twelve-year-old Phelan was **adopted** from Ireland. He loves his adoptive parents, but he has questions they cannot answer.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Why is it important to **adopt** a new attitude when faced with a difficult situation?

ensure (*verb*) to make sure that something happens; to make certain of something

➞ **Sample Sentence:** A closed adoption **ensures** that the child cannot appear someday and reveal the biological parents' secret.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How can you **ensure** that you will get accepted to a college or university?

tension (*noun*) a state of stress or unfriendliness between individuals or groups; a feeling of stress or strain

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Jamila's adoptive parents worried about **tension** between the families after Jamila decided to contact her biological parents.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What causes **tension** among groups of students at your school?

consent (*verb*) to agree to

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Some birth parents **consent** to open adoptions because they still want to be involved in the child's life.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What is an example of something to which you recently **consented**?

***consent** (*noun*) permission

➞ **Sample Sentence:** School field trips require parental **consent** before the child is allowed to go.

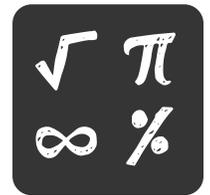
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** If someone asked to use your picture in an advertisement, would you give your **consent**? Why or why not?

duration (*noun*) the length of time something exists or lasts

➞ **Sample Sentence:** In a closed adoption, birth records are kept secret for the **duration** of the child's life.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What can you do to get good grades for the **duration** of your middle school years?

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DO THE MATH

Option 1: In the past, the secrecy surrounding closed adoptions was a source of great **tension**. Today, laws protect a child's right to information. In some states, for example, adopted children must be given their birth family's medical records. They do not need their birth parents' **consent**. This helps **ensure** that adopted children have information about inherited conditions that can help them stay healthy for the **duration** of their lives.

If a parent has a disorder called Familial Hypercholesterolemia, or FH, there is a 50% chance that his or her child will also have FH. Angelina was **adopted** as a young child, and her birth mother has FH. What are the odds that Angelina will have FH?

- A. $\frac{1}{2}$
- B. $\frac{1}{4}$
- C. $\frac{1}{5}$
- D. $\frac{1}{50}$

Option 2: Mr. and Mrs. Ruiz want to **ensure** that their family members have the best possible chances of staying healthy for the **duration** of their lives. Consequently, they think carefully about health risks. They **adopted** three siblings, and, at the time, did not **consent** to have them tested for Familial Hypercholesterolemia, or FH. Since then, they found out that their three children have one birth parent with FH. Now, **tension** is growing in the Ruiz house. Mr. Ruiz wants to have the children tested. Mrs. Ruiz wants to avoid an extra trip to the doctor.

If each child has a 50% chance of having FH, what are the odds that at least one of the three children has FH?

$\frac{7}{8}$ or $.875$. The probability that NONE of the children has FH is $.5 \times .5 \times .5 = .125$, so the probability that at least one of them has FH is $1 - .125 = .875$. Since both outcomes are equally likely for each child, a tree diagram could also be used to find the answer.

 **Discussion Question:** In most cases, no one can see your medical records without your **consent**. But some state laws **ensure** that adopted children have access to the medical records of the birth parents. The law resolved the conflict between the privacy rights of the parent and the information rights of the child, ruling in favor of the child. Why might people want their medical records to be private?

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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Mr. Seemy's class is discussing closed and open adoptions. Imani thinks that adoption records should not be opened without the **consent** of the biological parents. "We should **ensure** privacy for biological parents who don't want to be contacted," she says.

Raul disagrees. "It is unfair to keep children who were **adopted** from knowing their biological parents for the **duration** of their lives. Plus, not knowing if they have risks for genetic diseases can create **tension** for adopted children."

Mr. Seemy comments, "Excellent! Raul and Imani identified a conflict that exists between a right to privacy and a right to know the truth. But I wonder if we are making an assumption here. Do all children who were **adopted** want to find their biological parents? How could we go about researching this?"

Mr. Seemy's students Raul and Imani found this topic very interesting and decided to work together to do some research on the internet. They found that the United States has open adoption records in some states, but not in others. In England, adoption records have long been available to adopted children once they turn 18. They examined statistics about the number of English adopted children who have requested information about their biological parents.

Here is a write-up of their work

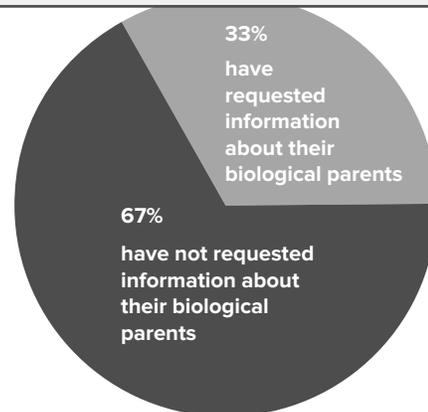
Question: How common is it for adopted children to search for their biological parents?

Data Source: Records from adoption agencies in England (where adoption records are open).

Procedure:

1. From the records, figure out the total number of children who were **adopted**.
2. From the records, figure out the number of children who were **adopted** who have asked at least once to see information about their biological parents.
3. Calculate the percentage of children who were **adopted** who have asked about their biological parents.

Sample Answer: Requests for information about biological parents by English adults adopted as children, 1975–2008



Raul and Imani found out that, in England, over 70,000 adopted children have requested information about their biological parents after turning 18, when it became legal for them to do so. At first, Raul and Imani thought it had to be over half because it's such a large number, but that's not true. With a little more research and some careful calculations, they were able to make the graph above to share with the class.

Raul and Imani do not have a title for their graph yet. Can you help them? They want people to know the following when reading their graph:

1. The information is from England.
2. The data used is from 1975 to 2008.
3. The graph is about requests made by adopted children after they turned 18.

