

## 2002-2003 Survey of OA&FS Clients Emotional Intelligence in Children of Open Adoption

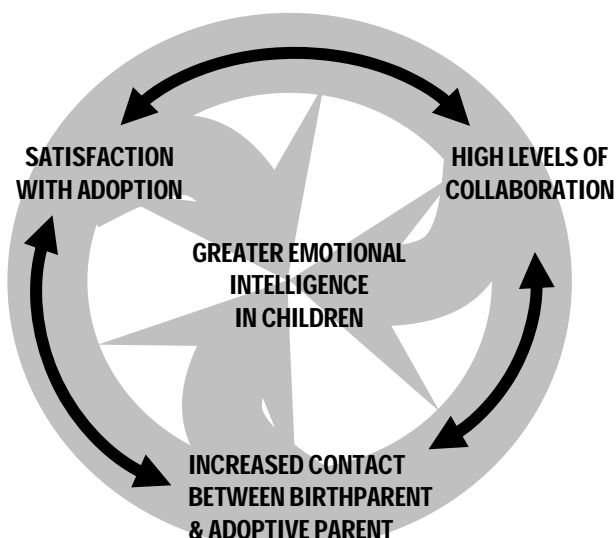
In late 2002, Open Adoption & Family Services mailed surveys measuring several components of healthy adoption relationships and overall adoption satisfaction to 143 birthmothers and 156 adoptive parents of children ages 7 to 18. In addition, surveys measuring emotional intelligence were administered to their children, in person when possible. A total of 455 adults and children were asked to participate in the survey. **Completed surveys were gathered from 92 adoptive parents, 38 birthmothers and 41 children – for a 38 percent response rate.** The results include 11 complete triads (child, birthmother and adoptive parent).

Along with evaluating overall adoption satisfaction, the aim of the study was to gauge the level of healthy collaboration between adoptive parents and birthmothers – and to determine whether these collaboration levels correlate with children's emotional intelligence scores. (Collaboration was determined with questions focusing on: feelings of being valued and respected; feelings of mutual compatibility; ability to demonstrate communication skills, conflict resolutions skills and empathy; and ability to create and access support systems.)

**The results show that these clients' open adoption relationships are thriving. Triad members are continuing high levels of contact, have good relationships with one another, and are satisfied with the outcomes of their adoption arrangements. In addition, the children scored above the national average on an emotional intelligence test measuring skills such as adaptability and the ability to understand and communicate feelings. The following major findings show how adoption satisfaction, collaboration and emotional intelligence are interrelated.**

### Summary of Major Findings

- **Families have high levels of ongoing contact:** 80% of adoptive parents and birthmothers reported ongoing visits between the birthmother and child *at least once a year -- 7 to 18 years after placement.*
- **Ongoing contact is linked to adoption satisfaction:** As the amount of contact (through visits, phone calls and letters) between birthmothers and adoptive families increases, so does overall adoption satisfaction as reported by all triad members.
- **Families are collaborating:** 91% of adoptive parents and birthmothers reported high levels of healthy collaboration with one another.
- **The children have positive self-images and are satisfied with their open adoptions:** 100% of older children (ages 13 to 18) and 93% of younger children (ages 7 to 12) reported positive self-image and satisfaction with their open adoption relationships.
- **The children score high in emotional intelligence:** 94% of the adopted children are at or above national averages for emotional intelligence. 53% of these children are considered *highly* above average.
- **Adoption satisfaction is related to emotional intelligence:** When triad members report high levels of adoption satisfaction, children score higher on emotional intelligence tests.
- **Healthy collaboration is related to emotional intelligence:** Children who perceive strong levels of collaboration between their adoptive parents and birthparents score higher on emotional intelligence tests.



- ❖ **To summarize: Ongoing visits contribute significantly to open adoption satisfaction. As open adoption satisfaction increases for triad members, so do levels of healthy collaboration between birthmothers and adoptive parents. Emotional intelligence in children increases with their perception of healthy collaboration between birthmothers and adoptive parents.**

### **Demographics:**

The 92 adoptive parents surveyed reported the following about their children:

- 54% are female and 46% are male. (Females scored a bit higher, overall, than males.)
- 92% were newborns or infants up to three months old at the time of placement.
- 30 were ages 7 to 12 at the time of the survey, and 11 were ages 13 to 18.
- 20% were adopted between 1985 and 1989, 60% between 1990 and 1994, and 21% between 1995 and 1998.

Of the 130 birthmothers and adoptive parents surveyed:

- 91% placed or adopted when their child was a newborn or infant up to three months old.
- 21% placed or adopted between 1986 and 1989, 59% between 1990 and 1994, and 20% between 1995 and 1998.
- 79% of adoptive parent surveys were completed by adoptive moms, 15% by adoptive dads and 5% by moms and dads together.

## **Adopted Children**

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### **Summary of Major Findings:**

- **Children ages 13 to 18 who report strong feelings of love and acceptance from both adoptive parents and birthmothers score higher on emotional intelligence scales.**
- **Children's emotional intelligence scores are also higher when triad members report high levels of compatibility with one another.**

### **Summary of Emotional Intelligence Scores:**

The following scores were calculated using the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory published by Multi-Health Systems, a standardized test measuring emotional intelligence components and comparing them with national norms.

**Intrapersonal Scale**, measuring ability to understand own emotions and communicate feelings and needs (includes self-regard, assertiveness and independence):

64% of children surveyed are at or above the national average, with 48% of these considered high, very high or markedly high on this scale.

**Interpersonal Scale**, measuring quality of relationships, ability to listen and understand the feelings of others (includes empathy and social responsibility):

86% are at or above the national average, with 41% considered high or very high on this scale.

**Emotion Regulation Scale**, measuring levels of calm, ability to work under pressure and ability to respond to stressful events (includes impulse control and stress tolerance):

83% are at or above the national average, with 31% considered high or very high on this scale.

**Adaptability Scale**, measuring flexibility, ability to manage change, ability to find positive ways of dealing with everyday problems (includes problem solving):

93% are at or above the national average, with 29% considered high or very high on this scale.

**Total EQ score**, indicating how well an individual deals with daily life and how happy he/she is:

**94% are at or above the national average, with 26% of these considered *high* in emotional intelligence, 17% considered *very high* in emotional intelligence and 10% considered *markedly high* in emotional intelligence.**

## **OA&FS Emotional Intelligence Survey**

Emotional intelligence questionnaires designed by OA&FS were administered to the children in addition to the nationally standardized test. The results were very positive, strongly correlating with those of the national EQ instrument. Questions focused on levels of empathy, self-awareness, flexibility, social ease, self-regard, role security and feelings of being loved and accepted. A sample of the questions and responses follows:

*Eleven teenage children (ages 13 to 18) were asked to respond to the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being “agree completely,” 4 being “somewhat agree,” and 1 being “do not agree at all.” Scores of 5, 6 and 7 are considered “agree” statements. Scores of 1, 2 and 3 are considered “disagree” statements.*

I like who I am.

**100% agree**

I feel positive about life.

**100% agree**

I feel wanted.

**100% agree**

My adoptive family and birth family are good friends.

**82% agree**

It is important to me that my birthmother and my parents like each other.

**91% agree**

I think my birthmother respects my parents.

**100% agree**

I think my parents respect my birthmother.

**100% agree**

I look forward to visits from my birthmother.

**91% agree**

My birthmother wants to keep in touch with me.

**91% agree**

Staying in touch with my birthmother isn't worth the effort.

**91% disagree**

Knowing my birthmom doesn't make me confused about who my parents are.

**100% agree**

I am uncomfortable talking about my adoption with others.

**100% disagree**

I find it easy to make friends.

**91% agree**

Keeping friendships is important.

**100% agree**

I feel loved even though I am different from my parents in some ways.

**100% agree**

My family understands my feelings.

**100% agree**

I feel I can share all of my feelings, even if my parents might not agree with them.

**91% agree**

I am glad I was adopted into my family.

**100% agree**

My parents are happy they adopted me.

**100% agree**

I feel being adopted has helped me to understand many points of view.

**82% agree**

I feel being in an open adoption has made me a more sensitive and loving person than other kids my age.

**91% agree**

*Thirty younger Children (ages 7 to 12) were asked to respond to the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being “very often true of me” and 1 being “very seldom true of me.” Scores of 3 and 4 are considered “agree” statements.*

I am happy.

**100% agree**

I think I am a good person.

**97% agree**

I feel wanted.

**100% agree**

My parents and my birthmother are good friends.

**83% agree**

My birthmother likes my parents.

**93% agree**

I think knowing my birthmom is important.

**87% agree**

My birthmother likes to visit or call me.

**83% agree**

I feel I can ask my parents anything I want to know about my adoption.

**97% agree**

I feel that there are a lot of grown-ups in my life who love me.

**100% agree**

**Other findings:**

Of the 92 adoptive parents surveyed:

- None reported that their children are mentally ill. This is below the national average; experts estimate that, nationally, 6 to 20% of children suffer from mental illnesses.
- 2% reported that their children are developmentally disabled. This figure is below the Oregon average for mental retardation, which is 7.6% for children ages 6 to 17.
- 14% reported that their children experience some form of learning disability. 5% reported mild disabilities, 9% reported moderate and 0% severe. For comparison's sake, 4.6% of all children in Oregon are physician diagnosed with learning disabilities. (Please note that parent report often leads to higher numbers than physician diagnosis.)
- 16.5% reported that their children experience attention deficit disorder. 7% reported mild ADD, 9% moderate and 1% severe. Statistics indicate that about 6% of children nationally are diagnosed with ADHD.

# Birthmothers

## Summary of Major Findings:

- **95% of birthmothers gave positive overall evaluations of their open adoptions.**
- **92% reported high levels of feeling respected and honored in their open adoption relationships.**

Participants were asked to respond to the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being “agree completely,” 4 being “somewhat agree,” and 1 being “do not agree at all.” Scores of 5, 6 or 7 are considered “agree” statements; scores of 1, 2 or 3 are considered “disagree” statements.

By placing my child in an open adoption, I feel I have truly made the best decision for both my child and me.  
**100% agree**

My overall experience with open adoption has been positive.  
**95% agree**

Ongoing contact with my child’s family helps me feel better about my adoption decision.  
**90% agree**

I respect my child’s parents.  
**100% agree**

I like my child’s parents.  
**95% agree**

I feel as though my child’s family has a deep respect for me personally.  
**90% agree**

I feel my child’s parents respect my role as birthmother.  
**87% agree**

I feel our initial adoption contact agreement has been honored.  
**87% agree**

My child’s parents make me feel like a welcome part of the family.  
**87% agree**

My child’s adoptive parents have handled this adoption with sensitivity and love.  
**97% agree**

I feel as though my child’s parents and I have nothing in common.  
**84% disagree**

It’s easy for me to communicate with my child’s adoptive parents.  
**84% agree**

My child’s parents and I have open and honest communication.  
**90% agree**

I feel my involvement in my child’s life is helping him/her form a strong sense of identity.  
**82% agree**

It is important for me to know my child feels loved by both me and his/her adoptive parents.  
**100% agree**

It is painful for me to visit my child and his/her parents.  
**79% disagree**

I respect the way my child is being raised.  
**97% agree**

The bond between my child and his/her parents makes me feel uncomfortable.  
**100% disagree**

I feel that the relationships that develop from the open adoption experience have added to my child’s emotional maturity.  
**82% agree**

My child seems confused about who his/her parents are.  
**92% disagree**

My child seems well adjusted and happy.  
**97% agree**

# Adoptive Parents

## Summary of Major Findings:

- **91% reported high levels of feeling respected and honored in their open adoption relationships.**
- **92% of adoptive parents gave positive overall evaluations of their open adoptions.**

Participants were asked to respond to the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being “agree completely,” 4 being “somewhat agree,” and 1 being “do not agree at all.” Scores of 5, 6 and 7 are considered “agree” statements; scores of 1, 2 and 3 are considered “disagree” statements.

I feel that open adoption is the best way to approach the adoption process.

**93% agree**

I have great respect for my child’s birthmother.

**86% agree**

I like my child’s birthmother.

**82% agree**

My child’s birthmother intimidates me.

**94% disagree**

I worry my child’s birthmother is monitoring or evaluating my parenting style.

**92% disagree**

I feel that my child’s birthmom and I have healthy boundaries.

**81% agree**

I feel my child’s birthmother respects and supports my role as my child’s parent.

**89% agree**

My child’s birthmother holds a place of honor in our family regardless of how much contact we have with her.

**93% agree**

Forming a relationship with my child’s birthmom has reduced my open adoption fears.

**79% agree**

My child seems to have a solid understanding of what it means to be adopted.

**87% agree**

I feel my child’s relationship with his/her birthmother is very important.

**80% agree**

I feel it is important for my child to know as much about his/her heritage as possible.

**97% agree**

I feel a closed adoption may have been easier on everyone emotionally.

**87% disagree**

My child seems well adjusted and emotionally secure.

**89% agree**

I worry my child holds in negative feeling about his/her adoption.

**80% disagree**

I feel comfortable initiating a dialogue with my child about his feelings about open adoption.

**95% agree**

## Areas for Growth

The questions below received a 75% or lower positive response rate. Few of these questions received a resounding negative response; most are neutral. But OA&FS views these questions as areas for potential relationship skills growth, and plans to address them with a collaboration skills workshop scheduled for early 2004. General themes among these questions indicate that adoptive parents and birthmothers would benefit from supplemental training regarding: communicating during times of conflict and disagreement; identifying with one another and focusing on similarities; working together to help children better understand open adoption.

### **Adoptive Parents:**

I feel that my child's birthmom and I have good communication.

**71% agree**

My child's birthmother has a lifestyle that I really don't approve of.

**67% disagree**

I feel my child's birthmother forgives me for my shortcomings.

**72% agree**

I find it easy to forgive my child's birthmother for her shortcomings.

**75% agree**

I feel that the relationships that form as a result of open adoption have helped my child develop emotional maturity.

**71% agree**

When my child doesn't hear from his/her birthmother, he/she seems hurt.

**21% agree**

I am often moved by the amount of empathy that all members of the adoption triad seem to have for each other.

**74% agree**

My child's birthmother and I are actually very much alike.

**16% agree**

When there is a conflict with my child's birthmom, we can usually resolve it with relative ease.

**58% agree**

I feel my child's birthmother and I have good communication.

**73% agree**

Our open adoption has helped my child and I to have open communication in all areas of our relationship.

**52% agree**

### **Birthmothers:**

I continually find myself dealing with issues of loss.

**71% disagree**

I currently have the support of friends/family when I am struggling with adoption issues.

**68% agree**

When there is conflict, my child's parents and I find a healthy way to resolve it.

**71% agree**

I find it easy to forgive my child's parents for their shortcomings.

**74% agree**

If I have a problem (with the adoptive parents), I feel comfortable discussing it.

**66% agree**

My child understands the circumstance of his/her adoption.

**69% agree**

My child seems to understand why I chose to place him/her for adoption.

**66% agree**

**Children:**

It seems like my parents don't like my birthmother.

**73% disagree**

My birthmother tells me I should listen to my parents.

**73% agree**

Visits with my birthmother make me feel uncomfortable.

**73% disagree**

Because I am adopted, I get confused about who I really am.

**73% disagree**