

## 01/30/09 - "Dating" Potential Birthparents



Most domestic private adoptions are considered open adoptions nowadays. This can vary from the Birthparents knowing the adoptive couple's first names to the Birthparents being invited over to the adoptive couple's house to celebrate the child's birthday. No matter how open the adoption will be, there is usually time for the adoptive couple to speak with the potential Birthparents prior to the baby's birth. The communication between them is a difficult one to fully understand unless you've been through it. The best way I can describe it is that it felt as if I, the soon to be adoptive parent, was dating the potential Birthparents. People tend to laugh when I say this until I explain why I use the term "dating".

When you are waiting for your profile to be selected by Birthparents you are wondering why you aren't being selected. It feels like you are the only one not being chosen to dance at your school prom. You start to wonder, "Am I not pretty?" or "Am I too heavy?" or any other superficial reason why you aren't good enough.

Once you get "The Call" you find out information about the potential Birthparents. You are overjoyed that your profile has finally been chosen. But then you must talk to them and you naturally will be extremely nervous. Possibly you are meeting the potential Birthparents in person. You may change your outfit many times to figure out the best one. You could go get a new haircut to look more presentable. If the wife is like me then she will inspect what her husband will wear from head to toe so he will give the best first impression.

The couple will discuss with one another what they are going to say or how to act around the potential Birthparents. How they will greet them (a handshake or just a smile)? How will they ask about the baby? Will they sit next to them or across the table from them? It is appropriate to give them a hug? If they are meeting at a restaurant, then who will pay the bill? A lot of these actions and feelings are extremely similar to going out on a first date with someone. You want to impress them and make them like you. You feel like every little thing is being evaluated and so you're nervous about doing or saying the wrong thing.

It's possible that your first time talking with the potential Birthparents will be over the phone. That was how my situation was with my son K's Birthparents. My husband, P, and I were so nervous to pick up the phone and dial the potential Birthparents. Our palms were sweaty. We picked up the phone and hung it up before dialing quite a few times because our nerves got the best of us. We practiced with one another what we should say and not say to them. Next to us were a list of possible questions and topics we could bring up if there was a lull in the conversation. We even had blank paper and pens so we write one another comments while talking on the phone.

The nervous energy we were experiencing was very much like calling someone to ask them out on a date. You want to sound confident and say all the right things. You want to end the conversation on a positive note leaving the other person wanting to talk to you again. The biggest difference with this call and one for a first date is that you probably haven't done this in conjunction with your significant other.

Our conversation with the potential Birthparents went excellent and by the end of the phone call they confirmed that we would definitely be the parents to their baby. We ended up speaking to them every other day for two months before the delivery date. During those phone calls, we would share things with one another such as childhood stories, funny times with friends, what we did that day, what our dreams are for the future and other personal details. It felt exactly like long-distance dating. The potential Birthmother and I could easily spend hours on the phone chatting

away with one another. The only other time I have done that was when I lived in a different city from my husband prior to us being married.

We did meet the potential Birthparents one time prior to the birth. We flew to their city and spent a wonderful day with them. We took them out to lunch, did some sightseeing and drove them home. We all talked non-stop and hated to have to say good bye. Again, this seemed like P and I were dating them. We later met up with the potential Birthparents the day before the scheduled C-Section and treated them to dinner and a movie. That sounds like a date to me.

During our conversations with the potential Birthparents we were definitely nervous about us saying the wrong thing and upsetting them. We didn't want them to ?break-up? with us. At one point before the delivery, the agency told me that the potential Birthmother was upset because she got the feeling I wasn't ?happy enough? to be getting the baby. I was shocked to hear this because I was thrilled to be a parent soon. However, I then realized that I was holding back some of my feelings of excitement because I was nervous it wouldn't work out. I had just endured three years of infertility treatment only to be disappointed over and over. Apparently, by protecting my emotions I came across as not being ?happy enough?.

I called the potential Birthmother immediately and started crying as I told her that I was ecstatic about this adoption. I was just terrified of the adoption not happening. She then explained that she too was very nervous of it not happening because we could walk away at any moment. She said that they selected us because they knew we were the right couple for their baby. But they were scared that they may say the wrong thing at any time and frighten us away. Never before then did I ever consider that the potential Birthparents could be as nervous as we were. The potential Birthmother and I talked through these emotions and came to a better understanding of one another. It was a difficult conversation but one that I cherish dearly.

When you date someone, there are always misunderstandings. It may be the fault

of one person or both. You work through these hard times and become a stronger couple afterwards. I knew in my heart after I had that conversation with the potential Birthmother that everything would work out for all of us at the end. Being open with my emotions and expectations made our relationship stronger.

The process of dating includes finding the right person, wanting to make a good first impression, talking to them about you, opening yourself up to them and possibly falling in love. Of course, getting your heart broken is always a risk too. This unfortunately happened to us during our second attempt to adopt when the potential Birthparents chose to parent. A failed placement is a risk most adoptive parents are willing to take on in an open adoption. After mourning the loss, the couple will get back into the adoption scene ready to put their heart back out there to ?date? someone new.

In our first adoption we definitely found love with our son?s Birthparents and are proud to call them our family. We are glad we survived the dating phase and look forward to a lifetime relationship with them.

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