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# SHOULD ADOPTION INFORMATION BE KEPT PRIVATE OR MADE PUBLIC?

Word Generation - Unit 3.04

## Focus Words

adopt | ensure | tension | consent | duration

## WEEKLY PASSAGE



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

Phelan's situation is called a closed adoption. This means that the child and the adoptive parents have no contact with the birth family. Birth records are kept secret for the **duration** of the child's life.

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, a birth mother may not tell friends or family that she has had a baby. A closed adoption **ensures** that the child cannot appear someday and reveal her 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?

# Should adoption information be kept private or made public?

## FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

**adopt** : (verb) take into one's family as one's own

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**ensure** : (verb) to make sure; to make certain

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**tension** : (noun) a state of stress or unfriendliness between individuals or groups

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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**consent** : (verb) to agree to

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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

FORMS:

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EXAMPLES OF USE:

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NOTES:

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# Should adoption information be kept private or made public?



## PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

**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 Massachusetts, 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 is adopted, and her birth mother has FH. What are the odds that Angelina will have FH?

- A) 1/2
- B) 1/4
- C) 1/5
- D) 1/50

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**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 FH. Since then, they found out that their three children have a 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?

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

## Should adoption information be kept private or made public?



### THINKING 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 adopted children from knowing their biological parents for the **duration** of their life."

Mr. Seemy commented, "Excellent! Raul and Imani identified a **tension** 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 adopted children 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 records in some states, but not in others. In England, records have been open for quite some time. 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:

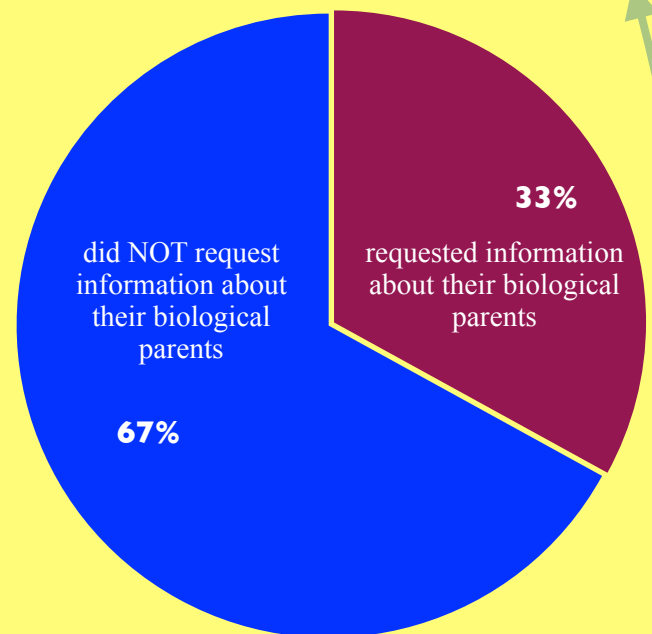
Is it common for adopted children to search for their biological parents?

#### Data Source:

- Records from adoption agencies in England (where adoption records are open).

#### Procedure:

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



Raul and Imani found out that, in England, over 70,000 adopted children requested information about their biological parents after they turned 18 when it is legal for them to do so. At first, they 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:

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

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## DEBATING THE ISSUE

### Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** It is important to let people have closed adoptions. Forcing birth families and adoptive families to exchange information may cause tension.

**B** All adoptions should be open. It is wrong to deny people information about their family.

**C** It is okay to have closed adoptions, but children should have the right to know their birth parents once they turn 18.

**D** It is okay to have closed adoptions, but adoptive or birth parents should have the right to change to an open adoption when the child turns 18.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
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### Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

*You make a good point, but have you considered...*

*I believe that...*

*I agree with part of what you are saying...*

*Can you show me evidence in the text that...*



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.  
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

adopt | ensure | tension | consent | duration

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