

LANGUAGE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Honoring Children and Families

Terms to Avoid	Terms to Use	Why it Matters...
Give up for adoption, put up for adoption	Make or made an adoption plan, placed a child	Adoption is a courageous, selfless choice a parent makes. Use language that honors and respects the parents' brave decision and intentional plan for their baby's life.
Decided to keep the baby, changed her mind	To parent, chose to parent	While adoption may be a parent's intended plan, that decision could change at any time before the legal revocation period ends. Honor the parents' courageous choice for life and respect their ability and right to make a thoughtful decision for their baby's future.
Real parent/family, natural parent	Birth parent/family	Real/natural suggests that adoptive parents are not real parents.
Adopted son/daughter/child	Son/daughter/child, son or daughter was adopted	We celebrate adoption as part of a child's story. Using language that implies that a child is an "adopted daughter/son" vs. a "daughter/son" could cause children to feel as though they are outsiders within their own family.
Children of their own, natural child, own child	Children/child or biological children/child	Again, indicating children born to a family biologically are their "own" or "natural" implies that children who enter their family through adoption are not.
Unwanted/unloved child	Parent was not prepared to parent, or the parents desired a different type of life for their child than they were able to provide at the time	Referring to children as unwanted or unloved reinforces a false narrative to and about children and their birth families. Even if parents are making unhealthy choices, the life given to their baby proves that they made one really amazing choice for life. They went on to make an intentional, selfless decision for their baby in making an adoption plan, often citing a desire to give their baby a life that they are unable to at this time.

KEEP IN MIND...

- **Always use person-first language.** This simply means you refer to a child or person before referring to his/her circumstance or diagnosis. For example, "a child who is in foster care" instead of "foster child" or a "child born with prenatal substance exposure" instead of "drug baby."
- Refer to parents who are making a parenting or adoption plan for their unborn baby as "expectant parents." After a baby is born, parents complete their adoption plan, and the legal revocation period has passed, the parents may be referred to or distinguished as "birth parents."
- We discourage prospective adoptive parents from referring to an expectant mother as "our birth mom." Again, while adoption may be a parent's intended choice, that plan can change at any time before the legal revocation period ends. We desire to celebrate life and parents' rights to make a thoughtful plan for their baby's life. We never desire to indicate that a parent's choice for life and a life parenting his/her child is negative or wrong.
- Refrain from using language like "DFCS takes the kids." Instead consider, "DFCS/Child Welfare agency removed the children from the home due to neglect, abuse or abandonment." You may even remind the listener/reader that children are removed by no fault of their own. Understand that a court order must be present to remove a child from the home. In emergency situations, law enforcement must be present and a judge must rule on the case within a few days. Help others understand the truth about how and why children are removed from their homes.