

# Research Tips and Explanation of Terms

**And just a few quick things:** As I was writing this book, I kept a list of other things that I wanted to try to squeeze in. If you're new to the adoption world, these might not make sense, but they will one day. Just tuck them away for now and research them when the time is right.

**PACA** (Post-Adoption Contact Agreement). If you have an agreement with your child's birth family or your adoption agency, honor that agreement and send updates as you said you would. Go above and beyond to keep your door to communication open. Even

if your child's first family doesn't do their part, always do yours. And if the relationship is strained, for whatever reason, please still do your part and send updates to the agency so that one day, if a first family or birth mom is in a healthier place, they can go there and see you're still there, holding space for them and keeping your word.

**Store and document every piece of information you can get about your child's biological, medical, and cultural background.**

Not everyone gets that opportunity, but when I was in the hospital with our kids I kept running notes with things mentioned, little things and big things. I knew I was too tired and sleep deprived to remember the information later. And it might not all be documented in the paperwork. The same can be said on the visit to the orphanage or transitional care facility if you adopt internationally. Take meticulous notes and make sure you store that information for your children one day.

**Names.** This is a WHOLE thing. You should research keeping your child's name and why you should or shouldn't. If you have an international adoption, do your best to keep, honor, or incorporate your children's names. If you have an open adoption, consider keeping the name the birth mother gives. In both of our instances, our children's first parents didn't name them and wanted us to name them. The first time we just named our son and the second time we had a list of names and worked through them with our son's birth mom. But whatever you decide, naming is important and often holds significance for adoptees later in life (especially if their name is changed), so be sure to learn from adoptees and first families before making such a big decision.

**Here are a number of topics related to racism and racial identity that you should do more research on:** cultural appropriation, colorism, racism in hair standards, and imposter syndrome. All these issues are things you should be aware of in raising a child from a different ethnicity.

**Laws and policies you should research and know about:** ICWA (if you, like us, adopt a child with a Native American heritage), MEPA (Multiethnic Placement Act), FFPSA (Family First Prevention Services Act), ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act), ICPC (Interstate Compact on Placement of Children), Adoptee Citizenship Act, Hague Convention, The Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000, the UAA (The Universal Accreditation Act of 2012).

**The History of Adoption and Transracial Adoption.** If you haven't studied the history of transracial adoption in your country, you should consider spending some time navigating the complexities of your country's adoption (same-race, transracial, and transcultural) laws and how they came to exist. For example, the history of transracial adoption in the United States is fascinating, and in my opinion, there is so much from our past that informs our policies and systems today.

## EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The following isn't an exhaustive adoption language list. But it's enough to get you going and should be helpful when reading this book if you're new to the adoption world. There are many language lists online that can be of assistance for you, but hopefully this is a great start!

**Adoptee:** The child or person who was adopted.

**Adoption:** "The complete transfer of parental rights and obligations from one parent or set of parents to another. A legal adoption requires a court action." (<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/how-to-adopt/adoption-terms-glossary/>)

**Adoption Triad (or just Triad):** The Adoption Triad refers to the three units of people involved in adoption: Birth parents, Adoptee,

and Adoptive parents. It is often depicted in the form of a triangle, where each corner of the shape represents one of the participants in adoption. Often you'll hear people involved in adoption refer to their "corner of the triad" or another corner of the triad. That simply means they are specifically talking to a particular group in the adoption triad. For example, this book is written with a specific corner of the triad in mind: adoptive parents.

**Adoptive family:** The family unit that legally adopts an adoptee.

**BIPOC:** A BIPOC person is a person or persons who are Black, Indigenous, and/or a People of Color. Language changes with time, especially language that describes race and ethnicity. However, this term (at the time of writing this book) is used when describing people of color and you are describing multiple races and/or ethnicities, or when you're talking about a population and it isn't possible to discuss their specific race or ethnicity. For example, when I can not specifically name a person's ethnicity, I use that instead. But when I'm talking about a broad range of ethnicities represented by transracial and transcultural adoptees, I use BIPOC if I'm talking about non-White transracial adoptees. However, I don't call them "non-White" as that is centering their identity around Whiteness.

**Birth Mom or Birth Mother:** A woman who has made an adoption plan and carried it through. This name is reserved for women who have already placed their children for adoption and their parental rights have been terminated; *it is not used for women who are considering an adoption plan*. Adoptive families and adoptees might refer to this woman as mom, birth mom, bio mom, biological mom, first mom, belly mama, etc. Each family is unique and language changes with time, and so when referring to a birth mother, it is best to follow the cues of the family and/or adoptee. One example

of this is that when our children were really young, we used the term “belly mama” so our children could understand that they grew in another woman’s belly (it was very confusing to one of our sons so we chose this language intentionally). But as they grew in their understanding, we stopped using that language and now refer to her as their bio mom or birth mom. That might change as the relationship grows and our children will later decide what they want to call her and we, the parents, will follow their lead on that.

**Closed Adoption:** An adoption that is closed in its nature doesn’t involve any contact between the birth family and the adoptive family and adoptee. More often than not, adoption records are sealed and any contact between the birth family and adoptive family isn’t permitted. However, if any contact is initiated, it must be mediated via the adoption agency or a case worker.

**Domestic Adoption:** A domestic adoption is an adoption that takes place within the country that you live in, for example, when an American couple adopts a child from the USA.

**First Family:** This refers to the adoptee’s birth family. Sometimes, when children are adopted at older ages and have memories of their birth family, they prefer to identify them as their first family or bio family. Again, our perspective as adoptive parents is to follow the lead of adoptees and birth parents, and to foster a healthy relationship between the two.

**Foster Parents:** “State- or county-licensed adults who provide a temporary home for children in state custody whose birth parents are unable to care for them.” ([http://www.families4children.com/adoption\\_definitions.cfm](http://www.families4children.com/adoption_definitions.cfm))

**International Adoption:** An adoption where the adoptive parents and the adoptee are not from the same country.

**Open Adoption:** An open adoption is open in its nature, meaning that in some form or fashion there is an open relationship between the birth family and adoptive family. There are a wide variety of open adoptions ranging from sending letters, gifts, texts directly to each other, to also sharing in-person meetings, birthdays, etc. For example, we have open adoptions with two of our children's birth families and they look very different. Our approach has been to follow the lead of our children's birth families and our children in what they are ready for and then to respect the boundaries they need while also doing our best to keep those lines of communication open.

**Semi-Open Adoption:** This adoption is a lot like it sounds, semi-open. Information is shared between adoptive families and birth families, but it is done through a mediator like a social worker or an adoption agency. Personal contact information is not shared.

**Transracial Adoption:** An adoption where the adoptive parents and the adoptee don't share the same race.

**Transcultural Adoption:** An adoption where the adoptive parents and the adoptee don't share the same ethnic culture. It is also referred to as transnational adoption or international adoption.

**Transracial Adoptee:** Sometimes referred to as TRA. A transracial adoptee is a person who was adopted by a family that does not share their race.

**Transcultural Adoptee or International Adoptee:** A transcultural adoptee is a person who was adopted by a family with a different ethnic origin. For example, if a White Australian couple adopts a White child from Romania, that child is a transcultural adoptee. However, if a Black American couple adopts a White child from Romania, this is both a transracial and transcultural adoption.

# Notes

## Chapter 1: Welcome to the Journey

1. This quote by Maya Angelou has been widely used but was popularized by Oprah Winfrey: <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-life/class/the-powerful-lesson-maya-angelou-taught-oprah-video> at 2:27.
2. Transracial adoptions are adoptions where a child of one skin color is adopted by parents of another skin color (for example, this could be a BIPOC individual or couple adopting a White child, or a White couple adopting a BIPOC child, etc.). Transcultural adoptions are adoptions where a child from one country is adopted by parent/s of another country. BIPOC is the current abbreviation for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

## Chapter 2: Shedding the Savior Complex

1. A great resource to read for mission trips and a savior mentality is *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert (Moody, 2012). Much of what I've learned on this topic has been greatly shaped by this book. Also by these authors is *Helping without Hurting in Short-Term Missions* and other practical resources.
2. Melissa Guida-Richards, *What White Parents Should Know about Transracial Adoption: An Adoptee's Perspective on Its History* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2021), 19–20.
3. This quote by Maya Angelou has been widely used but was popularized by Oprah Winfrey: <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-life/class/the-powerful-lesson-maya-angelou-taught-oprah-video> at 2:27.

### Chapter 3: Race-Conscious Parenting

1. Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 318.
2. Do not be deceived by the title of Dr. Tatum's book. This book isn't limited to the concepts of race from a Black and White relationship. Chapters 8 and 9 are essential to any transracial adoptive parent as she specifically addresses issues of race and racism from multiple other ethnicities' perspectives. In fact, I highly recommend this book to cross-cultural adoptive families. It's long and somewhat academic, but it's worth the perseverance. And if you're not the reading type, get the book for those specific chapters alone.
3. Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*, 319–20.
4. This training was provided through Be the Bridge ([www.bethebridge.com](http://www.bethebridge.com)).
5. Brian M. Howell and Jenell Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 36.
6. Ibid.
7. Evan P. Apfelbaum, Michael I. Norton, and Samuel R. Sommers, "Racial Colorblindness: Emergence, Practice, and Implications," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 21(3), June 2012: 205–209, <https://doi.org/10.1177/096372141141434980>.
8. Retrieved March 16, 2021 from *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, <https://www.cc.com/topics/cwg3bq/growing-up/l7z117>.
9. Adia Harvey Wingfield, "Color Blindness Is Counterproductive," September 13, 2015, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/color-blindness-is-counterproductive/405037/>.
10. Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019), 23.
11. Trillia J. Newbell, *United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 75.
12. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.

### Chapter 4: More Than Haircare

1. Jane Jeong Trenka et al., eds., *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Boston: South End Press, 2006), 27–28. This account is the first part of a four-part essay and was written by Jeni C. Wright. The other portions can be found in *Outsiders Within*.
2. Although I've recommended this earlier in the book, chapters 8 and 9 of Dr. Beverly Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* are a fantastic resource for families who have Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or Indian children.

3. “A Conversation with Transracial Adoptee Bonita Croyle,” All God’s Children International, podcast February 24, 2021, <https://allgodschildren.org/podcast/027-antiracist/>.

## Chapter 5: Offering Our Presence in the Hard

1. Alison Cook, “The Danger of Bypassing Your Emotions,” *Relevant*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.relevantmagazine.com/faith/growth/the-danger-of-bypassing-your-emotions/>.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. For more information, check out Be the Bridge at [www.bethebridge.com](http://www.bethebridge.com).
5. When we moved to West Texas, I was certain we’d have to travel the almost three hours to Dallas-Fort Worth to find a good counselor, but lo and behold, when I looked up trained trauma-informed counselors at the Karyn Purvis Institute for Child Development (<https://child.tcu.edu/tbri-practical-list/#sthash.5164Mxsu.dpbs>), I realized that a local foster care and adoption agency had counselors onsite for children ages 6+ and they offered play therapy for younger children who qualified. Don’t be afraid to travel to find a good therapist—but also you’d be surprised at how many offer virtual sessions, *and* you might even be surprised to find one near you!
6. Margaret A. Keyes, Stephen M. Malone, Anu Sharma, William G. Iacono and Matt McGue, “Risk of Suicide Attempt in Adopted and Nonadopted Offspring,” *Pediatrics* 132 (4) (October 2013): 639–46, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-3251>.  
Also, Gail Slap, Elizabeth Goodman, and Bin Huang, “Adoption as a Risk Factor for Attempted Suicide During Adolescence,” *Pediatrics* 108 (2) e30 (August 2001): <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.108.2.e30>.
7. Jessica M. Hadley, “Transracial Adoptions in America: An Analysis of the Role of Racial Identity Among Black Adoptees and the Benefits of Reconceptualizing Success Within Adoptions,” *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice*, vol. 26 (3): (2020).
8. *The Adoptee Next Door with Angela Tucker*, season 1 episode 4: Nancee Winslow: “Who Would I Be If I Hadn’t Been Adopted?”
9. *The Adoptee Next Door with Angela Tucker*, season 1 episode 8: Kristen Garaffo: “Everyone Just Assumed I Was White.” 30 minute 36 second mark.
10. These two resources are great starting points. However, let it be said that although I appreciate the Adoption Networks’ age range and many of their suggestions, the birth/newborn age begins centering the adoptive parent in the story. A child’s story starts with their family of origin. And that is where we always begin our children’s stories. <https://adoptionnetwork.com/adoptive-parents/parenting/talking-about-adoption/> and <https://www.psychologytoday.com>

.com/us/blog/navigating-the-adoption-journey/201703/how-and-when-discuss-adoption-your-child.

11. Nigel V. Lowe, Margaret Borkowski, Mervyn Murch et al., *Supporting Adoption: Reframing the Approach* (London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 1999).
12. Again, this is where a trauma- and adoption-informed counselor can help speak into your specific family and your unique adoption story. They will be able to help you develop a plan to foster ongoing conversation in your family.
13. Some people in the adoption community believe that being matched with an expectant mom is malpractice as though it is a form of coercion. I can only speak to our specific adoption, but we were matched early because it was what our son's birth mom requested emphatically. Our adoption agency let us know that this was a rare request and that it came with "risks." She wanted and needed to get to know us extremely well, and so we went into being matched, knowing that until she terminated her parental rights, that sweet baby was 100 percent hers. We chose to use that time to encourage her at every moment we could that if she chose to parent, we would support her 100 percent and that she had the right to change her mind at any moment. And we cherished getting to know her and all our time together, and we believe that time spent together prior to placement has served both her and our son well.

## Chapter 6: Representation Matters

1. H.U.E.: *Heal. Unite. Engage. Redeeming the Race Narrative*, episode 1, "Trans-racial Adoption: How Can I Teach a Heritage That Is Not My Own?" <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-1-transracial-adoption-how-can-i-teach-a/id1310951014?i=1000502666989>.
2. Again, I attribute much of what I've learned to sitting under the leadership of other people. Latasha Morrison has an entire organization dedicated to building bridges in racial reconciliation. I love that she uses the imagery of bridge building, and must give her credit here for the concept of "building bridges."
3. Krista Maywalt Aronson, Brenna D. Callahan, and Anne Sibley O'Brien, "Messages Matter: Investigating the Thematic Content of Picture Books Portraying Underrepresented Racial and Cultural Groups," *Sociological Forum* 33, no. 1 (March 2018): 165–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12404>.
4. Rudine Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom* (Summer 1990): x.
5. Rudine Sims Bishop, "Walk Tall in the World: African American Literature for Today's Children," *The Journal of Negro Education*, 59(4) (Autumn 1990): 557.
6. Krista Maywalt Aronson et al., "Messages Matter," 165.
7. "Study: White and Black Children Biased toward Lighter Skin," <https://www.cnn.com/2010/US/05/13/doll.study/index.html>.

8. <https://schools.texastribune.org/districts/wylie-isd-taylor/>.
9. <https://www.abileneisd.org/our-district/district-information/>.
10. I want to clarify that this is a question asked by White transracial adoptive parents. This book is for all people who adopt cross-culturally, but in my experience, BIPOC parents who adopt transracially are already professionals at this. They are used to living in diverse settings with a wide variety of people and are used to navigating White culture. It's typically White adoptive parents who often wrestle with this question.

## Chapter 7: More Than Love

1. Stuart WG Derbyshire and John C. Bockmann, "Reconsidering Fetal Pain," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2020, 46:3–6, <https://jme.bmj.com/content/46/1/3>.
2. Nancy Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1991), 5; also see 18–21.
3. Some in the adoption world call this season cocooning. Depending on the type of adoption and age of the child, it can last up to 6–12 weeks.
4. There are two specific resources I would recommend for further reading on this topic. First, *The Connected Child* by Dr. Karen Purvis. Second, *Created to Connect: A Christian's Guide to The Connected Child*. You can find both of those resources and more at [www.empoweredtoconnect.org](http://www.empoweredtoconnect.org).
5. Some details about this situation have been changed/withheld to protect privacy.
6. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 52–58.
7. *Ibid.*, 53.
8. *Ibid.*, 52–58.
9. Many of these are listed and addressed in Arleta James's book *The Science of Parenting Adopted Children: A Brain-Based, Trauma-Informed Approach to Cultivating Your Child's Social, Emotional and Moral Development* (Baltimore: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019).
10. Arleta James, *The Science of Parenting Adopted Children*, 36.
11. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 52.
12. James 2:14–26.
13. For further learning on trauma and attachment, I highly recommend *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk. It was a hard read, but an important one. Also, Dr. Karen Purvis, author of *The Connected Child* and *The Connected Parent*, has a center that studies TBRI (Trust Based Relational Intervention). You can read her books, articles, and other resources by visiting [www.child.tcu.edu](http://www.child.tcu.edu). And again, a Christian guide to

her work *Created to Connect* can be found at [www.empoweredtoconnect.org](http://www.empoweredtoconnect.org). I also highly recommend *The Science of Parenting Adopted Children: A Brain-Based, Trauma-Informed Approach to Cultivating Your Child's Social, Emotional and Moral Development* by Arleta James.

## Chapter 8: Adoption: It's Not about You

1. Again, I want to be careful as to not paint adoptees as some sort of monolithic entity and I do not want to speak on their behalf as a group. There are many adoptees online who have created consulting firms, written books, and share their unique perspectives on social media, and I would like to take this moment to encourage you to seek them out!
2. To read the Lord's Prayer in its entirety, see Matthew 6:9–13.
3. Marlena Graves, *The Way Up Is Down: Becoming Yourself by Forgetting Yourself* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 144.
4. This list isn't one that I came up with on my own. It's a conglomeration of multiple lists that I've read. Over the years, I've reworded them and added some of my own questions.
5. For the record, I don't like the term "failed matches" but it is one that adoption professionals use. Anytime a mother chooses to parent her child, that's not a failure, that's something we celebrate and support.

## Chapter 9: Adoption Allies

1. We must also acknowledge that having biological children doesn't always end happily. We live in a world where sin has broken everything. There isn't a thing left untouched by brokenness—including birthing children. To my friends who have gone through difficult pregnancies, to the ones who have left the hospital with empty arms, I see you and I'm sorry. This is not how it was meant to be and I grieve that with you. This example is of a typical, healthy birth and is not meant to pour more salt in your wound.
2. In the adoption world it is respectful to use healthy adoptive language. When a pregnant woman is considering adoption, she is called an expectant mom. Once she places her child for adoption, she is referred to as a birth mom. This gives the woman space to make the best decision possible for herself and her child, without pressuring her to become something she hasn't yet chosen to be.
3. Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 189.
4. Along this line, please do not call Black or Brown children "monkeys" or gift them with pajamas or clothing with pictures of monkeys on them. White people call their children little monkeys and other animals often, but there is a history of White people calling Black people monkeys, and it's not a good one. Here

are some resources for further reading: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/business/hm-monkey.html>. You can also read about the history of the weaponization of the term “monkey” against Black people in the United States from an educator’s viewpoint here: <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=The-problem-with-picture-book-monkeys-racist-imagery-libraries>.

5. Stephen Um, *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 156–57.

## Chapter 10: Responding Well: The Power of Words

1. The course is called Conspicuous Families and it’s produced by Adoption Learning Partners. We took it in 2015, and it was dated then, but still provides some incredibly helpful information. If you’d like to check out that course and others, you can find them at: <https://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org>.
2. Conspicuous Families by Adoption Learning Partners, <https://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org>.
3. Again, this idea was something I learned from Adoption Learning Partner’s Conspicuous Families course.
4. Conspicuous Families training course from: <https://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/catalog/courses/conspicuous-families.cfm>.
5. Elisabeth O’Toole, *In On It: What Adoptive Parents Would Like You to Know about Adoption: A Guide for Relatives and Friends* (St. Paul, MN: Fig Press, 2011), 130.

## Chapter 11: Kingdom Eyes and a Holy Imagination

1. Marlena Graves, *The Way Up Is Down: Becoming Yourself by Forgetting Yourself* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 146.
2. Sharon Hodde Miller, “Imagination Is Everything,” *She Worships*, January 27, 2011, <https://sheworships.com/imagination-is-everything/>.
3. Skye Jethani, With God Daily devotional from [www.SkyeJethani.com](http://www.SkyeJethani.com) on October 29, 2020.