

Choosing Adoption

The Initial Exploration

This is your opportunity to find out about adoption options. First you need to be honest with yourself in exploring what you need, what you want and what is best for children. Professionals will explain what they believe about adoption and answer your question about their services. They will want to hear your story: what has happened so far in your quest to build a family, why you are thinking about adoption, what child you are looking for, what attempts you have made previously to adopt, and what your goals are.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Are You Ready to Adopt

What differences have you felt in your excitement about adoption as compared to trying for a pregnancy?

What reservations do you have about adoption?

Why haven't you adopted already? Why is now the right time?

What kind of grief process have you gone through for your inability (if applicable) to have a biological child?

What will you do if you get pregnant while awaiting an adoption?

Are you prepared for the emotional stress of the adoption process? What kind of stress do you anticipate? How do you handle stress in other areas of your life?

Are you emotionally ready to become a parent tomorrow? Next month? How do you handle situations, which require instant decision making?

Once you have an adopted child, how do you expect adoption to affect you? your family? your children? What strategies do you think you might employ to deal with these issues?

Are you comfortable meeting the birth parents? Do you want future contact?

What impact do you anticipate adoption a child will have on your other children (if applicable)? How do you plan to integrate adopted and biological within your family?

Questions to Ask Professionals

Adoption Structure

What style of adoption are you comfortable with?
What degree of openness do you feel is appropriate?
What is a reasonable budget for an adoption?

Contact Strategy

What strategy is employed to help you find your child?
What kind of help can you expect to develop an ongoing strategy for contact?
What is a typical birth parent profile?
How much information will you be given about each particular adoption situation?

Triad and Identity Issues.

Why is the birth mother doing what she is doing?
What is reasonable in an adoptive situation?
How do you handle the emotional issues that are bound to come up for your clients in adoption?

Parenting Issues

What are the special issues of parenting an adopted child they think you should prepare for?
Who, what, why when & how do they suggest you tell about your adoption process?
How do you help your child develop a positive identity?
What parenting issues can you expect when your child first comes home?
What parenting issues can you expect down the road?

After speaking to various organizations and professionals you are in a position to decide what adoption route most fits your needs.

Understanding Adoption Terms

Private or Independent Adoption

In private or independent adoption the principals (birth parents and adoptive parents) determine who will have custody of the child and how the process should proceed. Custody of the child is transferred directly from the birth parents to the adoptive parents rather than passing through an intermediary. Professionals such as attorneys, facilitators, psychotherapists, social workers and others may help make the process easier, but the principals are in charge of the decision-making aspect of the process as well as determining which professionals they wish to work with.

Agency Adoption

In agency adoption, the agency is responsible for the adoption plan and chooses an adoptive family with whom to place the baby. Many agencies allow adoptive and birth parents to participate in these choices and in some states if the birth parent chooses an "identified placement," then legally the agency must inform the birth parent if they for some reason place the child with a family other than the one chosen by the birth parent, but the legal authority and responsibility for oversight of the placement remains with the agency.

Open Adoption

An open adoption means there is direct contact between the adopting family and the birth family. This term includes a wide range of interpretations. The birth and adoptive families may speak only once before the placement of the child and have no further contact or they may engage in extensive contact throughout their lifetimes. Some adoption practitioners prefer particular styles of interaction between families and will only facilitate adoptions that conform to their ideas. Related terms that are sometimes employed include "semi-open adoption," which usually means that the adoptive and birth parents meet and exchange non-identifying information and maintain contact through an intermediary or "cooperative adoption," where the birth and adoptive parents agree to remain in close and ongoing contact and where the birth parents agree to play an active role in the child's life.

Closed or confidential adoption

A closed adoption is where no identifying information passes between the birth and adoptive family. A closed adoption does not fulfill the legal requirements for independent adoption in many states because the law requires certain minimum standards of identifying information to be exchanged. Agency adoptions can be closed if the agency or principals so desire. Some agencies chose to participate exclusively in open or closed adoptions.

Relinquishment or Consent

Both terms apply to the transfer of legal custody from a birth parent to an agency or to a family, which assigns legal custody to the adopting family upon approval from the state of residence for the adopting parents. Neither act can be completed until a child is born. Transfer of custody must be completed in front of a licensed social worker or in some cases an attorney or notary who can verify that no form of coercion has been applied. A birth parent who makes a commitment to place a child for adoption before the birth of the child cannot be held to that commitment after the child is born, i.e., birth parents rights to change their minds after the birth of the child is legally assured by all states.

ICPC (Interstate Compact)

There is no uniform adoption law in the United States but there is provision to move children between states in a secure manner. The Interstate Compact (ICPC) is the legal structure designed to protect the safe transit of children who are born in one state and will be adopted by a family residing in another. A set of steps must be taken by the sending state (where the child is born) to insure that the receiving state (where the adoptive family resides) is aware of and in agreement with the legal movement of the child. Fulfilling interstate compact requirements is normally the responsibility of the agency or attorney who is handling the legal steps of the adoption and the child cannot return to the state in which the adoptive family resides until approval from both states has been obtained. This usually takes between two days and two weeks after the child is born and at least one birth parent has signed a consent or relinquishment.

At Risk Placement

When an adoptive parent takes physical custody of a child before the birth parent's parental rights are legally terminated the placement is called an "at-risk placement." It is rare that placements of infants are not at-risk since most families prefer that the baby be with the adopting parents as soon as possible and it can take weeks or even months to terminate all parental rights if one or both of the birth parents are not available to sign relinquishments or consents. Once the rights of unfindable or uncooperative birth parent(s) are terminated by a court, the legal termination is just as binding as if they had relinquished or consented.