

THE ADOPTION OPTION



A GUIDE FOR EXPECTANT MOTHERS AGENCY ADOPTION

PRODUCED BY: FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. (AUGUST 2023)



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AN INTRODUCTION

When a woman finds herself pregnant and the pregnancy is unplanned, she has several options and choices. The decision she makes and the options she chooses are usually influenced by her personal moral beliefs, religious philosophies, age, social situation, relationship with the father of the child, support from family and friends, future goals and aspirations, and other personal circumstances.

This Adoption Guide is written to educate birth parents and prospective adoptive families regarding adoption as an option for an unplanned pregnancy. Information contained within the Guide is specific to New York State and the practices and policies of Family Connections, Inc., a duly authorized New York State adoption agency.

OPTIONS – PARENTING OR ADOPTION

When a woman chooses to give birth to her child, she has two options: parenting or adoption. Considering both options when the pregnancy is unplanned is important for both the woman (and the baby's father if involved) and the baby.

Parenting is when a birth mother and/or a birth father decides to exercise her/his/their parental rights to raise the child. If the birth father is not married to the birth mother, he can ask the birth mother to include him in parenting the child or get a ruling from the Courts to provide him his parental rights.

Adoption is when a birth mother (and birth father if involved) surrender or voluntarily give up their parental rights to the child and the child is legally placed into an adoptive home and the adoptive parents are granted the rights to parent the child.



WHO IS A BIRTH MOTHER¹

Every birth mother is a special individual who chooses to give life to her child and then give life to a new family through adoption. She gives her most precious life (her baby) to a loving couple who will forever rejoice in the miracle of the child and who will be forever grateful to her for entrusting them with her child. Every birth mother and every child is a precious gift.

So, who is a birth mother? She is any woman who is faced with an unplanned pregnancy and who may not be ready or able to parent the child. She may be a teenager, young adult or mature woman. She may be single or involved in a committed relationship. She may be economically secure



or financially unstable. She may be from any ethnic heritage. She may be a victim of assault or abuse. She may be well educated or a student of life. She may be supported by loving family or experience difficult or abusive relationships. She may be healthy or experience physical health, mental health and/or addiction concerns. Every birth mother is unique, but they all have common traits. Every birth mother makes a loving and selfless choice to give life to her child. Every birth mother loves her baby. Each birth mother has the ability to look beyond themselves and consider the best interests of their child above their own needs. Every birth mother has the forethought to plan for

their child in the making of an adoption plan with adoptive parents. Birth mothers are willing to experience the emotional loss of their child in exchange for the peaceful feeling of knowing their birth child is treasured in their adoptive home. Many birth mothers also stand up against family members, friends, and society pressures that question or negatively judge their decision to make an adoption plan for their child. Every birth mother is loving, courageous, sacrificial, thoughtful, proactive, selfless, ...

¹ Adapted From: Stevens, Anita F. and Hettich, Renee. "A Birth Mother – A Very Special Person". *Family Connections* magazine, Volume 4, Issue 2, Spring 2011. Anita F. Stevens is the founder of Family Connections, Inc.

Each birth mother faces choices. The first choice a birth mother makes is to give life to her child. She then must decide what is in the best interests of her child and herself – should she parent the child or make an adoption plan for the child. There will be many factors that influence her decision about parenting. For example, does she have the financial resources needed to raise a child, does she have the support of the birth father or other family members in parenting, can she provide a safe environment for the child (e.g. free from abuse and drugs), is she physically and mentally healthy, and is she mature enough to parent a child.

Every birth mother is an exceptional woman who makes life-changing decisions. It is with tremendous respect and admiration that we say “thank you” to every birth mother who makes the decision to give their child life and their child a family through adoption.

ADOPTION VOCABULARY

Adoption has its own vocabulary. Some vocabulary is legal and some is common terminology used by the adoption community.

- ***Birth Parent/Father/Mother*** is the name given to the biological mother and biological father of the child. Studies have shown that this is the name that most biological or genetic families like best and children can understand easily.
- ***Birth Child*** is the name given to a biological child. If your mother is your biological mother, you are her birth child. If she had placed you into an adoptive family, you would still be her birth child.



- ***Adoptive Parent*** is the name given to the parents who adopted the child.
- ***Adoptive Child*** is the term for a child that is placed into an adoptive home.

- ***Adoption Triad*** is the name given to the relationship that exists forever between the birth parent, the adoptive parents and the child. This term recognizes that the birth parent gave life to the child, the adoptive parents foster the child's growth, and that the adopted child is forever linked to both sets of parents.
- ***Surrender Instrument*** is the legal document that is signed by the birth parent(s) that surrenders their legal rights to parent their birth child.
- ***Conditional Surrender Instrument*** is the legal document that is signed by the birth parent that surrenders their legal rights to parent their birth child on the condition that their birth child be placed into the specific adoptive family they chose and who are named in the surrender instrument. If the child is not placed into the named adoptive family, the surrender is nullified.
- ***Identifying Information*** is any data such as last name, address, phone number, e-mail address, etc. that would let a person know who you are and be able to locate you.
- ***Closed or Confidential Adoption*** is where no identifying information is shared between the birth family and the adoptive family and the identity of the birth parent and adoptive parents are held in the strictest of confidence.
- ***Semi-Open Adoption*** is an adoption where the birth family and the adoptive family agree on the information that is shared by each party in the adoption. Each party could agree to share some identifying information, but not all. The birth family and the adoptive family may agree to maintain contact post-adoption through a third party such as an agency. The wishes of the birth parent determine the degree of openness.



- **Open Adoption** is an adoption where the birth family and adoptive family have an on-going relationship. The birth parent chooses the adoptive family, the two families share identifying information, and they develop a relationship with one another. The extent of the relationship is defined by the birth parent. A birth parent can ask to have on-going contact with the adoptive family prior to the child's birth and after the adoption of the child. All of the choices for openness belong to the birth parent and are agreed upon by the birth parent and adoptive family.
- **Family Profile** is a booklet, web page, or video that features pictures and information about a prospective adoptive family. The profile is used by birth parent(s) in the selection of adoptive parents for their child.
- **Post Adoption Contact Agreement (PACA)** is a legal agreement that details the post-adoption contact agreed upon by the birth parent(s) and adoptive family. For example, the Agreement may state how many times the child and the adoptive parents will send pictures and letters about the child's progress and/or visit with the birth mother until the child is 18 years old. The Post Adoption Contact Agreement is legally binding and court enforceable for the adoptive parents in agency adoptions but not in independent adoptions (adoptions where an agency is not involved).
- **Independent Adoption** is where an adoption is arranged between the birth parent and the adoptive parent with the assistance of a lawyer who represents the birth parent and a different lawyer who represents the adoptive parent. Independent adoption is legal in New York State, but there are states that will only allow agency adoptions. Each state has their own laws regarding adoption.
- **Agency Adoption** is where an adoption is arranged between the birth parent and the adoptive parent by an agency. In New York State, any agency that is placing children in adoptive homes has to be authorized by the New York State Office of Family and Children's Services. Each state has its own laws for licensing or approving an adoption agency. The birth parent has the right and the opportunity to be represented by a lawyer in an agency adoption.



MAKING ADOPTION CHOICES – BIRTH PARENTS

Adoption is truly a choice. Birth parents make the decision whether to place their child for adoption or to parent the child. Sometimes birth parents are afraid to explore adoption as a choice for an unplanned pregnancy. Many fear that somehow, they will be persuaded against their will to surrender their parental rights. Please know that *NO* person (family member, friend, lawyer, judge, social worker, doctor, employer, etc) can force or coerce a birth parent into implementing an adoption plan and placing their child with an adoptive family. If anyone attempted to pressure or coerce a birth parent to place their child for adoption, it would be certainly unethical and in New York State illegal. New York State adoption law has many protections in place to prevent a forced adoption. The core belief and practice philosophy of Family Connections, Inc. (adoption agency) is that every person has the right to self-determine – to make their own choices without influence or pressure. Any plan for adoption is made solely by the birth parent and is a voluntary act. It can't be stressed enough that no person can force a birth parent to place their baby in an adoptive family. Adoption is a voluntary choice.

Birth parents have an array of choices when making an adoption plan and can design a plan that best meets their and their baby's needs. Birth parents are in the "driver's seat" - they have the power of choice. Birth parents have the right to choose the type of adoption they wish for themselves and their child (e.g. confidential, semi-open, or open) and to choose the adoptive family they wish to place their child with.



An adoption agency will explore with the birth parent(s) her/their choices regarding a confidential, semi-open, or open adoption.

CONFIDENTIAL ADOPTION: A birth parent may choose a confidential adoption (aka closed adoption). In a confidential adoption the identity of the birth parent(s) and the adoptive parents is held in strict confidence. The adoptive family will not know the identity of the birth parent(s) and the birth parent(s) will not be told the adoptive family's identifying information. The birth parent may specify the characteristics of the adoptive family they wish for their child. The birth parent may choose the adoptive family from

profiles and/or meet the adoptive family; it is up to them! If the birth parent decides not to choose the adoptive family, the adoption agency will choose an adoptive family who meets the birth parent's criteria. A confidential adoption guards the identity of the birth mother, birth father, child, and adoptive parents.

SEMI-OPEN ADOPTION: A birth parent may choose a semi-open adoption. In most semi-open adoption relationships, the birth family and the adoptive family agree on what identifying information is shared. For example, the birth family and the adoptive family may only exchange first names or the name of the town in which they live. The adoption agency would know all of the identifying information for the birth parent and adoptive family, but would hold that information in confidence. The birth parent may choose to pick a family for their child from family profiles or meetings with prospective adoptive parents. The birth parent(s) and adoptive family may or may not develop a relationship with each other prior to and/or after the birth of the child (based upon the wishes of the birth parent). The birth parent may or may not request post adoption contact (e.g. pictures/letters regarding the child's growth). Any post adoption contact requested by the birth parent would be maintained through a third party such as an adoption agency. The wishes of the birth parent determine the degree of openness.

OPEN ADOPTION: A birth parent may choose an open adoption. Open adoption relationships are unique to each adoption triad (birth parent – adoptive parent – child) and vary greatly. The level of openness with the adoptive family depends upon the choices of the birth family. Most open adoptions are characterized by:

- a) the birth parent(s) meeting and choosing the family for their child
- b) the sharing of identifying information between the birth and adoptive family
- c) the development of a relationship between the birth family and adoptive parents prior to the child's birth (if possible), and
- d) the maintenance of a relationship between the birth parent, adoptive parents, and adopted child throughout the child's childhood through pictures, letters and visits.



The possibilities are many and the decisions belong to the birth family.

The overwhelming majority of birth parent(s) choose the adoptive family for their child (the agency will choose a family *only if* the birth parent(s) do not wish to make the decision). The birth family can specify the characteristics that are important to her/them in an adoptive family. The birth family may designate:

- The religion of the adoptive parents
- Type of family (two-parent family, traditional stay-at-home mom, two career couple, same sex couple, single parent, childless couple, multi-child family)
- Racial composition of the family
- Education level of adoptive parents
- Age of adoptive parents
- Financial status of family
- Place of residence (city, suburban, rural)
- Any other characteristic important to the birth parent

Once the adoption agency understands the birth parent(s) preferences for adoptive families, the agency will canvas their waiting families who meet the birth parent's criteria and then present the birth parent(s) with families who wish to be considered for the adoption of their child. The birth parent will typically receive family profiles from the agency for their review. From these profiles, the birth mother and/or birth father may choose a family or may request to meet two or three of the families before making their decision. After reviewing the family profiles and/or meeting with prospective adoptive families, the birth parent(s) will make their choice. Again, like all other aspects of adoption, the birth parent's choice of a family will not be influenced by her/their adoption agency, counselor, lawyer, judge, doctor, etc. The decision belongs to the birth parent.



Again, adoption is a choice and within adoption a birth parent has many choices. An adoption agency, like Family Connections, Inc., can provide birth families guidance and support as they consider all of their options.

CHOOSING AN ADOPTION AGENCY

One of the first decisions a birth mother will need to make is to choose an adoption agency to support her adoption plan. Finding an adoption agency can be daunting and frustrating with so many agencies trying to get the attention of birth parents via print advertising, social media, and internet sites. It is important that a birth parent work with an agency where they feel comfortable and confident. As birth parents research adoption agencies, they should consider the following. An agency should²:

- Guarantee the birth parents that they have the right to make their own decisions regarding the placement of their child.
- Educate the birth family regarding all their adoption options and parenting options.

² Adapted from: Anita F. Stevens, "Choosing an Adoption Agency to Help You Design an Adoption Plan for You and Your Baby", *Family Connections* magazine, Volume 3, Issue 6, Fall 2010. Anita F. Stevens is the founder of Family Connections, Inc., a New York State adoption agency.

- Allow and encourage the birth family to choose the adoptive family for their child (via meetings with prospective adoptive families or family profiles).
- Support the birth family and prospective adoptive family as they build a relationship (if wanted).
- Help the birth family get a lawyer.
- Assist the birth family get needed services (e.g. housing, maternity clothing, prenatal medical care)
- Support the birth family's emotional needs and provide counseling services (if wanted).
- Be available to provide emotional support to the birth parent's extended family (if needed).
- Never influence or pressure the birth parent(s) into a decision.
- Make sure that any agreed upon post-adoption contact is honored.
- Be available 24/7 to provide support to the birth family.



The right adoption agency is key to ensuring a positive and successful outcome for the birth mother, birth father (if involved), adoptive family and baby.

ADOPTION PLANNING

Birth parent(s) who wish to make an adoption plan for her/their child will be guided by an adoption agency through planning steps³.

STEP ONE: Choose and consult with a qualified adoption agency like Family Connections, Inc. The agency will assist the birth family with the design and implementation of an adoption plan for their child.

STEP TWO: Choose and consult with an adoption lawyer who will explain the birth parent's legal rights and the legal process of adoption. An adoption agency should refer the birth parents to a lawyer who specializes in adoption.

STEP THREE: Create a preliminary adoption plan with the adoption agency. The plan may include, but is not limited to, the

³ Adapted From: Hettich, Renee. "Adoption: A Loving Option. How Can I Make An Adoption Plan for My Unborn Child?" *Family Connections* magazine, Volume 3, Issue 6, Fall 2010 and Volume 4, Issue 2, Spring 2011. .

level of openness, type of adoptive family, need for resources, and wishes for counseling services. This preliminary plan can and will change over time as the birth parent gets to know the adoptive family as they wait for the baby to be born.

STEP FOUR: Consider adoptive parents. The birth parent(s) will be given the profiles of the adoptive families that match their choices regarding the type of family they want to consider for their child. The birth parent(s) may choose a family from these profiles or she/they



may wish to meet with two or three of the families over lunch to get to know them better before making her/their decision. The birth parent(s) will then decide which adoptive family she/they wish to make an adoption plan with.

STEP FIVE: Change the adoption plan and build a relationship with the chosen adoptive family (if the birth parent wants an open adoption). The adoption agency will support the birth family as she/they continue in the pregnancy and adoption planning. If the birth family chooses to build a relationship with the adoptive family prior to the child's birth, the agency will help them work out additional visits with the adoptive family. If the birth parent(s) wish to have post adoption contact with the child and adoptive family, the adoption agency will help the birth family and adoptive family develop a post-adoption contact plan (e.g. sharing of pictures/letters regarding the child's growth and/or visitation between the birth family and adoptive family) and draft a Post Adoption Contact Agreement with their lawyer.

STEP SIX: Design a hospital plan with the birth mother. The adoption agency will give *options* to the birth mother so she can make decisions regarding her wishes for the delivery and care for her baby at the hospital. For example, the birth mother can decide who she wishes to have at the hospital. She can choose how and by whom the baby will be cared for while at the hospital. The hospital plan can be changed by the birth mother at any time, including during the hospital stay.

STEP SEVEN: Make the decision about adoption; to surrender custody of the baby and place the baby into the adoptive family of the birth parent's choice. Up until the child's birth, the birth parent's adoption plan is just that - a plan. Once the baby is born, the birth parent will decide whether to surrender the custody of the child to the adoption agency for placement with the adoptive family.



STEP EIGHT: If the birth parent(s) decide to place the baby in an adoptive home, they will meet with their lawyer to review and sign the required legal documents for the surrender of custody of the child. The birth mother and birth father (if involved) will sign the surrender instrument and supporting documents granting custody of the child to the adoption agency. The adoption agency will then legally place the child into the adoptive family that the birth family chose for the child. If the birth family wishes for post-adoption contact, her/their lawyer will also have her/them and the adoptive parents review and then sign the Post Adoption Contact Agreement.

STEP NINE: After the birth parent(s) surrender custody of the child and the child is placed into the adoptive family, the adoption agency will provide needed support to the birth family and adoptive family in the short and long term (life-long services). These supports many include but are not limited to: therapeutic counseling for the birth parent(s), supervision of the adoptive family's progress by a social worker, guidance for the birth parent and adoptive parents regarding their post-adoption contact, etc.

STEP TEN: Participate in the post adoption relationship with the adoptive family as chosen by the birth parent(s). The Post Adoption Contact Agreement will guarantee minimum contact requirements. Many birth family and adoptive family relationships change over

time but the minimum contract requirements are enforceable by the agency and the Courts.

An adoption agency will ensure that supportive counseling is available throughout the adoption planning process, the surrender and placement of the child, and post-adoption for the birth mother, birth father, and birth parent's extended family.



Ten steps in adoption planning may seem overwhelming. However, know that with the assistance of a qualified adoption agency, a birth mother and birth father (if involved) will be guided through the process over months or over only a few hours depending upon the circumstances of the birth family and the birth of the child.

BIRTH MOTHER & BIRTH FATHER LEGAL RIGHTS

Every birth parent should be represented by a lawyer to make sure their rights are understood and protected. The birth parent chooses their own lawyer. If the birth parent(s) has no lawyer or needs assistance finding a lawyer, the adoption agency with which she/they are working will refer the birth parent(s) to qualified lawyers in their community. Most lawyers who specialize in adoption are members of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, a national professional organization for adoption lawyers. The adoptive family and the adoption agency will also have lawyers to represent their best interests. In New York State, the birth parent(s), adoptive parents and adoption agency cannot share the same lawyer. Each lawyer will inform and protect the rights and best interests of the party they are representing. The cost for each lawyer is the responsibility of the adoptive parents. The birth parent will not pay for their legal counsel (even if they decide to parent the child and not to place the child for adoption).



Every State in the United States has different laws, regulations, and case laws that determine the rights of birth parents. A birth parent needs to seek proper legal counsel to ensure her/his/their rights are properly represented in the State in which they live.

In New York State, all agency adoptions have common legal processes. No birth parent can surrender or relinquish their custodial rights to their child until after the child's birth. Once the child arrives, the birth parent(s) may choose to surrender custody of child by signing a Surrender Instrument or Conditional Surrender Instrument. The custody of the child will then be transferred to the placing adoption agency. The adoption agency will retain custody of the child and be responsible for his/her welfare until the adoptive parents finalize the child's adoption in a New York State court. However, after the birth parent surrenders custody of the child to the agency, most adoption agencies will immediately place the child with the adoptive family and provide the family with physical custody of the child. Thus, the child will be discharged from the hospital into the arms of the adoptive family. The adoption agency will supervise the family (via home visits and phone calls) to ensure the safety and well-being of the child until the adoptive family finalizes the child's adoption.

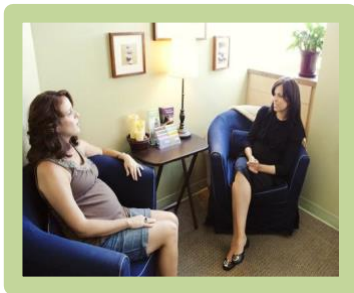
The adoptive family may petition the court to finalize the child's adoption 90 days after the child was placed in their family. When the court finalizes the child's adoption, the legal custody of the child is transferred to the adoptive family.

A full exploration of New York State adoption law, regulations, and case law is beyond the scope of this Adoption Guide. In addition, each birth parent's situation and adoption plan is unique and thus will need individualized legal counsel from an adoption lawyer.

Many birth parents are curious about three major legal questions. In the next pages, Kevin P. Harrigan, Esq., a New York State adoption lawyer, answers the most common birth mother questions:⁴

Question: Do I have to go to court? No, not necessarily. For birth parents who are considering adoption as an alternative to parenting, the legal process begins with the voluntary termination of parental rights (aka surrender or relinquishment), and many times, this is done without the birth parents going to court. Following the child's birth, the birth parent(s) may choose to sign either a Judicial Surrender Instrument (in the court) or an Extra-Judicial Surrender Instrument (outside of court).

The vast majority of surrenders are executed outside the courtroom (extra-judicial), in most cases before the birth mother leaves the hospital, or shortly thereafter. Extra-judicial surrenders are signed in the presence of the birth parent's lawyer and witnessed by an adoption agency worker. The birth parent(s) do not appear in court. If the surrender instrument is signed outside of court (extra-judicial), the birth parent(s) may file a revocation within 30 days that will revoke their surrender and return the child to their custody.



⁴ Adapted From: Harrigan, Kevin P. Esq., "Birthparents Most Common Legal Questions", *Family Connections* magazine, Volume 4, Issue 2, Spring 2011. Mr. Harrigan is an adoption lawyer practicing at the Harrigan & Dolan Law Firm, Syracuse, New York. Mr. Harrigan is a Fellow of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and a Member of the New York Attorneys for Adoption and Family Formation.

Question: Do I need to involve the birth father? Ideally, the goal of every adoption is to have both the birth mother and the birth father be part of the adoption plan. In reality, the birth father is often not an active participant. The birth mother is not legally obligated to inform the birth father that she is pregnant. She does not have to identify him in a sworn statement. She cannot, however, intentionally hide from him or lie to him about the pregnancy.

State laws, regulations and case laws establish which birth fathers must consent to an adoption as well as those who must receive notice of the adoption proceeding. A birth father who is currently married to the birth mother must always consent to the adoption. If the husband is not the biological father of the child the husband can deny paternity. For a birth father who is not married to the birth mother, in general, the Courts look to the six-month period immediately preceding the placement of the child for adoption and ask if the unwed birth father has sufficiently shown his intention to accept parental responsibility. A birth father's acknowledgement of paternity does not automatically entitle him to notice or content in the adoption proceeding.

New York State law defines birth fathers who must receive notice of the adoption proceeding. Among these are birth fathers who are named on the birth certificate or whom the birth mother has named in a sworn statement; birth fathers who have initiated paternity proceedings or filed with the putative father registry; birth fathers who have supported the birth mother both financially and emotionally during the pregnancy; or birth fathers who have paid hospital, medical, or nursing expenses for the birth mother while holding themselves out to be the child's father. A birthfather who meets these criteria is entitled to receive notice when an adoptive proceeding is initiated. He is then given an opportunity, if desired, to appear before the court to challenge the adoption plan and assert his rights as a parent. At this point, the birthfather must demonstrate to the court that he is personally capable of parenting and supporting the child.



Birth father rights are complex and vary by State. It is important that a birth mother fully explore her rights and the rights of her child's birth father with her lawyer.

Question: Am I permitted to have contact with my child after the adoption is finalized? Yes! A Post Adoption Contact Agreement details the arrangements between the birth parent(s) and adoptive parents for ongoing contact to update the birth parent(s) on the child's progress and development.



Typically a Post Adoption Contact Agreement provides for the sending of periodic letters and pictures of the child to the birth parent(s) on an agreed upon schedule (e.g. twice a year). An Agreement may also provide for scheduled visits between the birth parent(s), the adoptive parents, and the child. The frequency of these contacts depends on the wishes and consensus of the birth family and adoptive family. The Post Adoption Contact Agreement sets forth the minimum required contact between the birth and adoptive families;

many families exceed this legally binding contact.

In agency adoptions, the Post Adoption Contact Agreements are legally binding and court enforceable. It should be noted that a breach of the Post Adoption Contact Agreement will not invalidate the adoption. However, if the adoptive parents do not honor the Agreement, the birth parent(s) have legal recourse.



QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY

Birth parents should only consider qualified/approved prospective adoptive parents for their child. All adoptive families must be approved by an authorized adoption agency or the courts in the State in which they live to be eligible to adopt a child. Every State has different requirements for the approval of adoptive parents. New York State has strict requirements for prospective adoptive parents. Any family planning to adopt a child must successfully complete a home study investigation conducted by an authorized adoption agency or licensed social worker.

To qualify as an adoptive family in New York State, a family must successfully complete a home study investigation that includes the following:⁵



- ✓ A meeting with a qualified social worker face-to-face. The social worker must interview each prospective adoptive parent, their minor children, and any adult household members.
- ✓ A home inspection by a qualified social worker to ensure the safety of the home for a child.
- ✓ Child abuse and neglect history reviews from any state and country in which the prospective adoptive parents and any adult household members have lived as an adult. *NO* person with a history of child abuse, neglect or maltreatment will be approved as an adoptive parent. All approved adoptive parents have *NO* history of child abuse, neglect or maltreatment.
- ✓ State and federal criminal history reviews conducted by the New York State Department of Justice Services and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). *NO* person with a criminal history of violence or endangering the welfare of a child will be approved as an adoptive parent.
- ✓ Medical examinations for the prospective adoptive parents, minor children, and any adult household members.

⁵ Adapted From: Hettich, Renee. "Becoming an Adoptive Parent". *Family Connections* magazine, Volume 3, Issue 6, Fall 2010 and Volume 4, Issue 2, Spring 2011. Renee Hettich is a Licensed Master Social Worker working in the field of adoption with Family Connections, Inc.

- ✓ Autobiographies of the prospective adoptive parents.
- ✓ Verification of income, assets and liabilities.
- ✓ References from friends, clergy, co-workers, childcare providers, etc.
- ✓ Proof of birth and marriage.
- ✓ Adoptive parent questionnaires and surveys.
- ✓ Adoption preparatory training (requirements vary depending upon agency).

At the conclusion of the home study investigation, a family will either be approved as a prospective adoptive family or denied approval as adoptive parents. *All* prospective adoptive parents who are considered by a birth parent must be approved as adoptive parents at the conclusion of their home study investigation. A birth parent can be assured that any prospective adoptive family they wish to consider for their child is fully investigated and well prepared to parent a child in a loving and safe home.

MAKING ADOPTION CHOICES – ADOPTIVE PARENTS

For families facing infertility and unable to have a biological child, adoption can be a wonderful way to become parents. Most prospective adoptive parents choose adoption after many years of trying to have a baby and yearning to be parents.

Just like birth parents, adoptive parents have the right to self-determination and have many adoption choices. Prospective adoptive parents can choose to become parents in an open, semi-open, or confidential/closed adoption relationship with the birth family. They can decide to parent a child of the same race or of a different race than themselves. They may wish to parent a



typical child or a child with special medical or developmental needs. The adoptive parents may choose to parent only one child or have multiple children. The choices are theirs to make. For birth parents, finding the right adoptive family whose profile and whose adoption plan matches their adoption plan is key. The birth parent's

adoption agency is central in helping the birth family match with the adoptive family who is the perfect fit.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Birth parents typically have many more important questions. Hopefully this guide can answer a few ...

Will my child know that I made a loving choice? Yes! Adoptive parents have tremendous respect and admiration for birth parent(s) and their decision to entrust their birth child to them. They will honor their child's birth parents and speak with great reverence and love regarding the birth parents to their child.

Will my privacy be respected? Yes! Birth parent(s) privacy is ensured. Confidentiality is maintained at all times.

Will the adoption cost me anything? No! Birth parent(s) will have *no* costs. All expenses are supported by the adoption agency and adoptive parents. If the birth parent needs resources to support their pregnancy and adoption plan, the adoption agency will help the birth parent secure the needed resources (e.g. legal counsel, maternity clothes, housing, food, transportation, medical services) and may be able to provide financial assistance for pregnancy related expenses.

Will I receive counseling services? Yes! Every birth parent will be provided with adoption options counseling by their agency. This counseling provides the birth parent with information regarding her/his/their adoption choices and helps the birth parent(s) formulate an adoption plan that is right for them. In addition, if the birth parent chooses, the agency will provide therapeutic counseling services prior to and after the adoption.



Will my right to post adoption contact be protected? Yes! In a New York State agency adoption, if the birth parent(s) wish for post adoption contact with the adoptive family (e.g. exchange of pictures and letters, annual visitation with the child) the birth parent and adoptive parents will sign a legally binding and court enforceable Post Adoption Contact Agreement

that obligates the family to comply with all agreed upon post-adoption contact until the child becomes an adult (age 18).

Will I and my birth child be able to contact each other once the child is an adult? Yes, if both the birth parent and birth child agree to the contact. Please know that each State has very difficult laws regarding adult reunification of birth children and birth parents. In New York State, the Department of Health maintains an Adoption Information Registry. If both the birth parent and birth child voluntarily registry with the service, the Department of Health will release the birth parent's name and address to the birth child upon the birth child's request after the child's 18th birthday. In open adoption relationships the birth parent and birth child maintain a relationship from infancy into adulthood.

IN CONCLUSION

Adoption is a loving option for expectant mothers facing an unplanned pregnancy. A birth mother may not have chosen to conceive a child, but she can choose to give birth to the child and then choose to parent the child or freely give the parenting responsibilities to another family through adoption. Only a birth mother (and birth father if involved) can decide the future of the child.

We understand that the reality of an unplanned pregnancy and making decisions regarding the care and parenting of your child is challenging. Family Connections, Inc., an adoption agency, can guide a birth mother as she makes positive choices for her and her unborn baby. If you would like more information about your adoption options, please contact Family Connections, Inc. at 1-607-756-6574, or info@adoptfamilyconnections.org All communications are confidential. We look forward to supporting your plan for your child.



NOTES & QUESTIONS

A GUIDE FOR EXPECTANT MOTHERS AGENCY ADOPTION



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PRODUCED BY: FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. (AUGUST 2023)



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