



GETTING STARTED

ARE YOU READY?

A few years ago, I was caring for a baby who was going to be adopted. I had him in my arms and was standing outside my church after services when Grace, a woman I knew, came up to me. She was spry and cheerful at the age of 82, and she looked at the child with shining eyes.

“Babies are so wonderful,” she said. She was quiet for a time. “I wish I had known you when I was younger. I would have asked you to find a baby for me to adopt.” It turned out Grace and her husband were unable to have children of their own.

Grace was a loving person who was always around children, so I had assumed she was a mother. But on that Sunday morning, I learned she had lived her whole life without the joy of sharing her love with a son or daughter.

It was so sad watching Grace look in wonder at the baby, while she seemed to reflect back on her life with regret; it brought tears to my eyes. She had never adopted because she was afraid to.

“We didn’t know what to do or where to begin,” she said. “So we never did have a baby.” If only someone long ago had helped her get started on the road to adoption, she would have had her little one.

If, like Grace, you are unable to have a biological child or have always wanted to adopt and with all your heart you want to love, nurture and bring up a child, then you should set out to find yours. Fifty-five years ago, there was a child out there who was meant for Grace, and today there is a child waiting, or yet to be born, who is meant for you.

As an adoption professional, I have devoted 29 years of my life to bringing together prospective parents seeking a child to adopt with birth parents or guardians needing to place one. During this time, I have seen the internet transform the way adoptions are planned. From birth mothers looking at families online, or adoptive families viewing web-listings of waiting children, or just the speed with which documents are prepared and transferred via email, the internet has changed the very landscape of how adoption is being done. The internet will not replace face-to-face meetings between birth mothers and adoptive parents, appointments with lawyers to sign papers or travel to pick up your adopted child and bring him home.



That's where this program comes in. I have gathered my years of experience and knowledge and put together this package to help families who want to play an active role in their adoption. Doing your own footwork will definitely save money and time, enabling you to have more control of your unique adoption story.

I believe strongly that for every person that wants to be a parent, there is a child. Your path to find each other may be winding and not what you are expecting, but there are thousands, if not millions of children, who need loving, stable parents to make a lifelong commitment to them.

Many families find their way to adoption after a journey through infertility. This was my story. Others may choose adoption as the primary way to build their family or because they are unable to conceive biologically. Still others have not found a mate yet feel strongly that single parenthood is calling them.

*Before you get started, please refer to the document titled **Positive Adoption Language**. When beginning adoption, many people learn that modern adoption refers to aspects of adoption with different language than was used historically.*

One example of this is the phrase “putting a child up for adoption.”

That phrase comes from the seventeenth century during the slave trade. Slaves were put up on the auction block to be sold to the highest bidder. Later, the phrase made its way into conversation as a means of describing relinquishing parental rights so that that another family could adopt a child.

Take this time when you are getting started to learn more about positive adoption language and its effects on perceptions about adoption.



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THE NEED FOR ADOPTION

Most prospective adoptive parents begin their adoption journey today due to infertility. They desire to adopt a baby, just as I did so many years ago. Traditional closed adoption has been replaced by open and semi-open arrangements that allow the biological parents, or birth parents, to choose the family for their child and choose to have ongoing contact.

However this is not the only reason to adopt. Whatever the reason people choose to embark on an adoption journey, underlying it is a deep, heartfelt wish to be parents, to share their home, their family and their lives with children.

Statistically, the need for parents to adopt is clear in the U.S.:

- There are approximately 400,000 children in foster care in the U.S., and about 100,000 are available for adoption.
- The average child who is adopted through the foster system waits three years to be adopted.
- Of those children in foster care, about 30,000 age out every year. (This means they turn 18 and are “free” to begin lives as an adult, without any home, parental guidance or other assistance.)
- Only 25% of children who age out have a high school diploma or GED.

Internationally, it is even worse:

- Asia is home to 60 million orphans.
- Every 15 seconds, a child in Africa becomes an orphan due to AIDS.
- Worldwide, there are 143 million children in orphanages. (There are no longer orphanages in the U.S. The foster care system has replaced them.)
- In Russia, 60% of the girls who age out of the system become prostitutes.
- In Eastern Europe, 10 to 15% of the children raised in orphanages will attempt suicide before the age of 18.

Who Can Adopt?

Over 18 years old – to over 50 years

Married couples or single parents with or without children

Families that are childless or have biological children already

Families that have already adopted children



MARDIE'S STORY: ANSWERED PRAYERS

As the oldest of five children, I had one sister and three brothers in my family. I loved and helped care for them starting when I was quite young. Mothering came naturally to me, and by the age of 11, I knew when I grew up, more than anything else, I wanted to be a mother. I collected clothes and quilted a baby blanket that I kept in a hope chest for the child I would have one day. I fell in love with a man who also wanted children. Bill especially wanted to have a son he could teach to fish, ride a bicycle and play baseball. From the first days after our wedding, we set out to have a family.

The months went by, then two years passed, but no baby came. Couples all around us seemed to get pregnant without even trying. I must have gone to a dozen baby showers during those early years of our marriage. I laughed with my friends as the expectant mothers opened their gifts, but I was crying inside. We decided to go see specialists, and we discovered that we both had fertility problems. I remember the months starting in the spring of 1985 as a blur of tests and fertility drugs, another ovulation on the temperature chart, more poking and prodding, the start of one more menstrual cycle.

I came to dread holiday gatherings because of the humiliating questions. Getting dressed before one New Year's Eve party, Bill and I took bets on how many insults we'd hear that night. He said 10, and

that was about right. The topper was when my Grandpa asked at the dinner table, "Haven't you figured out how to do it yet?" "We lost that page of the manual," I said with a smile, though his words had pierced me to the bone. Some friends I had confided in offered remedies they said had worked for people they knew. We were supposed to eat fish twice a day, make love on the night of a full moon, and I was to lie on a propped up board that stood me on my head.

Read Mardie's latest book, [Called to Adoption](#) to get more inspiration from her own personal adoption journey.

I started to avoid those friends and even my business associates, fearing that someone would ask when we were going to have children or if I was pregnant yet. Bill and I continued to see a specialist who was growing less hopeful. As the months passed, life did not seem so bright. As the owner of a medium-sized manufacturing company, I had come to believe that if you wanted something bad enough, worked hard and smart enough, you could have it. But that didn't seem to help with pregnancy. As the CEO, I came to expect that when I needed something, I could pick up the phone and have it delivered. But I could not order a baby.



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In my spiritual life, I came to wonder, since I was sure that God wanted us to have children, why He had not blessed us with a family. Was I doing something wrong? I prayed for an answer and prayed for a baby. An avid reader, I bought books on infertility and human reproduction, on infant care and early childhood development. I hoped that somehow a baby might pop up out of a book as a result of all my study. I went to the library almost every day (there was no Internet yet), and the librarian became my friend. One morning she gave me a book on adoption. I took it over to a table and set it down. I sat in the chair and looked at its cover, but I could not bring myself to open it. I pushed it away and got on with my research into getting pregnant.

When I left the library, I set the adoption book next to me in the passenger seat of my car and took it home. Finally that night, I opened it and started to read. It was scary, because it was about 15 years out of date and written about the old ways of adopting, which seemed cold, secretive and formal. Then I read another book about modern adoption, which seemed warm, honest and comfortable.

After some really bad news from our doctor, Bill and I lay in bed one night talking. I saw that the door to adoption was opening, just as the door to making our own baby seemed to be closing shut.

Within days we decided to adopt. Right away it seemed like there was light shining into our lives again. We were excited about our future with

children. Adoption was the answer to my questions and to my prayers.

The Two Biggest Adoption Myths

- 1. There are not babies available*
- 2. There are only drug exposed children infants*

When I began researching adoption, these myths were widely believed. Thankfully I learned that they are absolutely untrue!

INFERTILITY

One out of every six couples in America is unable to conceive a child after trying for one year. Some will go on to have a biological child, others will not. And each year, some 60,000 couples from all walks of life will adopt because they share a belief that their lives will not be complete without a child.

For 40 percent of couples who can't have babies, the quality of the husband's sperm is the cause. Some women have had surgery to remove reproductive organs; others have trouble carrying a baby to term. And since fertility declines with age



and so many women are pursuing careers, trouble conceiving is common among those who wait to start families.

Some infertile couples will try to become pregnant by utilizing home tests to detect ovulation, by taking fertility drugs or by going to a clinic where the husband's sperm is injected into his wife's cervix. Others will pursue more advanced treatments that use technology to combine sperm and eggs.

The most proven method is in vitro fertilization (IVF) where eggs are drawn from the ovaries and fertilized in a lab dish with concentrated sperm. Grown for three days into tiny embryos, several are placed in the uterus. If attempted for five cycles, this will make a baby in three out of nine patients. The cost? About \$15,000 per cycle.

Driven by a seemingly desperate need, some patients have spent over \$150,000 on the procedure. And with the financial toll comes an emotional one as well. When embryos fail to implant, or when one finally does but then, eight weeks later, an ultrasound shows that the fetus has died, it can be utterly devastating. After one such tragic IVF procedure, one woman shared online that it was like the death of a child.

"We cried and mourned the loss, and I don't know if I'm over it yet. Since we couldn't afford to try again, we had to find a new dream."

RESOLVING FERTILITY ISSUES

Sometimes I see people rush into adoption without taking the time to grieve the loss of the biological child they did not have. They risk sabotaging an adoption or, worse, treating an adopted child as second best to the son or daughter they might have had.

Before you can adopt with success, you must come to terms with your infertility. For some couples this may take years. Move at your own pace, but realize that you are not getting any younger, and the longer you wait, the more you delay the precious time you could have with your child.

For me, coming to terms with infertility meant accepting that there was a reason for everything. I don't know why I was unable to have babies, but were it not for my infertility, I would not have adopted my wonderful son. I would not have opened an adoption center that has brought thousands of children and parents together, changing their lives.

I have known many couples who have faced infertility and moved on quite naturally to adoption. I have known others who have edged toward it uneasily, because their dream of having a biological child meant so much to them.

Before you are ready to adopt, you have to know the answer to this question: Do you want to be a parent or do you want to have a biological child?



Without resolving this issue, you run the risk that you will back out and break the heart of a birth mother. You may settle for adoption, but this you cannot do, because the child deserves to have parents who love and cherish him as the most precious thing on earth.

We recommend at our center that if you have unresolved issues about infertility, you seek counseling before you adopt. You may choose to put adoption aside and press on with treatment until you have exhausted all medical options. Then, when you return to take up adoption, you may find, as many people do, that the adoption process is less stressful than conceiving through medical technology.

If you are not sure you can accept a child who will not inherit your genes, it may help you to talk with other adoptive parents or a counselor.

We are still amazed by the traits and characteristics that parents pass on to their adopted children. Will science ever explain what we have seen?

Like the adopted daughter whose hair and skin color change so she looks just like her mother. Or the son who has the same walk as his adoptive father, the same crinkling of his eyes when he laughs.

Families created through adoption are true families. After adoption, you are a parent, and your child will depend on you for his needs, both physical and emotional. All the joys and heartaches

any parent experiences will be yours. You will be Mom and Dad.

A MOTHER'S NOSE

Russ and Julie Connor were in their mid-forties and looked much older than the first time I saw them, two years before, when they first came to our center to inquire about adopting.

Now they were ready, Russ told me, after spending \$60,000 on infertility treatments, trying but failing to conceive. The greatest cost, it occurred to me, was to their relationship. They had seemed so loving before and now they seemed edgy with each other.

Within months, we located a beautiful birth mother named Sarah who chose them to adopt her unborn child. The Connors met with her several times, and they really got along. Sarah thought they were just perfect for her baby.

Late one afternoon, as I was setting my desk straight and preparing to go home, Julie showed up. She seemed anxious. There was something she wanted to say.

We talked for a little while about how healthy Sarah looked and how happy she was. "She's a great person," said Julie. "Very engaging and all."

"I knew you'd like each other."

"Yes," she hesitated. "But we're declining her offer."



This is a decision that adoptive parents, once matched and after bonding with a birth mother, cannot take lightly. A birth mother is having a tough enough time. She finds the parents she wants and is so relieved. Then comes this, like a bolt out of the blue.

I asked Julie to explain, but she was evasive.

“Come on,” I said at last. “What’s really going on here?”

“Well,” she answered. “It’s her nose.”

“Her nose?”

“That’s right,” she said. “We don’t like Sarah’s nose.”

I was incredulous. I’d seen her nose. She had a cute little nose. I didn’t know what to say.

Julie sat down in a chair. “Seeing Sarah pregnant like that, I don’t know, it stirred up some feelings. I always wanted to be pregnant. Russ and I always wanted to have our own baby.”

She looked away and choked back tears. “I want to be pregnant, Mardie. We’re going back to Dr. Lewis and try again.”

I went straight to Sarah’s house. She cried when I told her. She loved the Connors, and they had broken her heart.

From home, I called the wife of another couple. They had three sons and wanted to adopt a

daughter. After a miscarriage, she had become pregnant again, only to carry the baby for eight months before it died.

She had known for a week that she’d have to deliver a still born girl.

I knew for certain that this couple had resolved their fertility issues.

When I told the new adoptive mother about Sarah and her baby, who we knew was a girl, she was thrilled.

It took time for Sarah to get over the Connors but she did. In the hospital, just before going into labor, she said, “This new family we found was just made in heaven.”



Mardie with one of the first adoptions she helped with.



WHEN ADOPTION IS YOUR FIRST CHOICE

Many people enter into adoption eagerly as their primary choice for building their family. They come to this journey with a deep desire to help and love a child who otherwise might not have the love and support of a family. For some, considering adoption through the foster system in the U.S. or traveling abroad to adopt from an orphanage is their first consideration. This choice enables parents to enter adoption eagerly, without grieving the loss of their dreams of experiencing a pregnancy.

Some families begin adoption with the hope of truly rescuing a child from their current circumstances. This is wonderful and honorable. My best advice for this is to be prepared, go into each opportunity with your eyes wide open, and research all along the way. No child is perfect, and the more prepared you are to parent a child who may have spent time in a less than optimum situation, the better equipped you will be to provide love, stability, and care to your child.

ADOPTING AS A SINGLE

If you are pursuing adoption as a single, ensure you have the support of your family and a wide network of friends before you begin. It will be vital later on when you are parenting to have more than just you for your child's family.

It is important to realize that adoption is often a journey of a few years. If your marital

circumstances change prior to finalization, it will affect your adoption. That is not to say that it will affect it in a negative way, but it is a consideration as you begin this journey.

I have worked with many single women who have expressed the deep desire to be a mother; however they just haven't met a mate. Adoption as a single parent is possible and many of the women I helped have even found the mate of their dreams after adopting!

Singles should look into specific requirements of their state of residence. I have encountered a few challenges through the years but thankfully this seems to be changing quickly. If you are considering international adoption, each country will have requirements for whether or not they allow single parent adoption.

Often people think they can't adopt because they haven't been married long enough, they live in an apartment, they work full time, they have gone through bankruptcy, they have been divorced, and the list goes on.

Life happens, parents aren't perfect, and that's okay!



“EMPTY NESTERS” ADOPTING

There is an interesting phenomenon that I have seen taking place in adoption. Some parents who have already raised children still have an abundance of love and energy to give. Many parents with grown children who have left the home have stepped forward to begin the process of adoption. They feel that they still have much to offer to a child and, at this point in their lives, have the time and money to provide a permanent home and family. This becomes a blessing for not only the child, but also others in their lives (including their own grown children) that can provide a larger family and support system.

There are considerations, such as ensuring care for the child should something happen to the parents since they are usually older than other adoptive parents. Also, when considering international or foster adoption, there may be age requirements.

Whatever the apparent reason people choose to adopt, underlying it is a deep, heartfelt wish to be parents, to share their home, their family and their lives with children.

FEAR OF ADOPTING

If you tried to adopt before and something went wrong, remember it is not an indication that something is wrong with you, with the birth mother or with your adoption professional. Adoption is a complex process embedded with

emotion. Sometimes, circumstances spin out of control.

Learn what you can from your experience and keep looking for the child who is uniquely yours. If you stop your search because of a setback, you may miss out forever on the joy and love of your child. The bottom line is: Never give up!

I have had a few birth mothers who, during the pregnancy or after the birth, have decided not to place a child. But the prospective parents did not give up, and it didn't take long for me to match them with another birth mother.

At my urging, they tried not to project their fears of what happened before onto the next adoption. But some couldn't help themselves. If they didn't hear from the birth mother after a week or so, they'd say, "Oh my God, she's changed her mind."

In a few cases, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. One adoptive mother, Barbara, was so afraid her birth mother, Christie, would disappear that she moved her into an apartment near her house and came to check on her at least once a day.

Christie e-mailed me. "This chick is too weird," she said. "I'm outta here."

If you have had a bad experience that you haven't resolved, you should discuss this with your adoption professional until you realize that this particular case of failed adoption is isolated, and you can move on to the next one with confidence.



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In Barbara's case, I was able to explain that after screening and counseling her new birth mother, we were certain from years of experience that any risk of a reclaim was minimal. Barbara's fears diminished, she relaxed and the adoption was successful.

Fear is the #1 cause of families not moving forward with adoption. They see adoption stories sensationalized in the media. There are a few cases that have had red flags early on or it may have been started without all the facts. Occasionally there is dishonesty or illegal activity. The majority of adoptions go on to be completed and finalized without any problems.

ADOPTION PREFERENCES: WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Before you begin on any path to adoption, ask yourself what it is you are seeking for your adopted child. The answers will make up what is commonly referred to as your adoption preferences. Over time, and as you learn more about adoption, you may find your preferences changing. But spending some time defining what you are seeking initially gives you the information you need to start your adoption.

Here are the main areas you want to define your preference for:

- Race
- Age
- Exposure to substances during pregnancy
- Level of contact with birth parents, if any
- Special needs
- Sibling group or twins

Defining your preferences together is the best way to start because it begins to paint a picture of your child in your mind. Talk together about each item and see what your comfort zone is. It is important to not be too narrow or you may not be successful.

Jake and Sara from Washington were referred to me by a couple who had successfully adopted a few years prior. We spoke on the phone and they were a great couple who had a lot to offer a child. During the call, I asked about their adoption preferences.

"I had a dream that we were a family with a beautiful three-year-old. She had blue eyes and blond hair. So we would like to search for a two- or three-year-old Caucasian girl with blond hair and blue eyes."

Knowing that being that specific could create an adoption plan that takes years and years, if it even happens at all, I gently encouraged them to consider what they would say "Yes" to, rather than what they specifically had in their minds eye.



“I understand that your dream must have been very vivid,” I said, “but I want to share with you that limiting your search to a child *that* specific will be extremely difficult to find success. Remember, parents to conceive cannot select blond hair and blue eyes.”

Deflated, Sara said to me “But since we can choose, we want to be specific.”

I explained that adoption does allow choice, but ultimately adoption has to be about becoming parents, and not designing families for the perfect photo. Expanding their search to a Caucasian child, up the age of five years old would be much easier than specifying gender, hair, and eye color. They would also have many more paths to adoption to consider, including private, foster, and international.

In the end, Jake and Sara found a waiting three-year-old through the foster system. They had spent weeks pouring through online photo listings from many states. A little girl became available in Florida who had the bluest eyes they could ever imagine. She was African American mixed with Caucasian and had beautiful black ringlets. In speaking with them later, Sara spoke frankly to me about their preferences.

“I realized that adoption wasn’t just about me having a child, it was about giving a child a forever home,” Sara confided. “And for me to put limitations on what I would accept that were so

narrow, was very selfish. We stuck with our preference for a little girl but other than that, we were wide open. I realized that we have a wonderful life to offer any child.”

Today, they are a growing family, having chosen to adopt internationally from Africa a few years later. They discovered one of the most important lessons in adoption, that what makes a family is not blood or skin color, but the opportunity to love a child that didn’t grow in your body, but rather in your heart.

Take the time to define your adoption preferences. Some families say “We’ll take anything!” but this usually isn’t true. It is easier to define what you are and are not open to now, when you don’t have a situation to consider.

With this knowledge, you won’t have to agonize over every opportunity you hear about, wondering if it is “the one.”

You can always modify your preferences to be more open, but having a starting point will serve you well.



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DEFINING YOUR PREFERENCES

Your adoption preferences are not a decision to consider lightly. It is good to define what you are looking for so you know when a birth mother contacts you if she fits into what you are seeking. Sit down with your [Adoption Preference Worksheet](#) and work through it together and with extended family members if you feel as though there may be some resistance from them to accept a child of a different race.

Many times, we have heard adoptive parents say “I’ll take *any* child!” We know from experience, however, that it isn’t often true. There are some parents who are ready to make a commitment to any child, but most of us have some preferences, and that is fine. You just need to know what they are and have them clearly defined.

We have seen many families back out for many reasons relating to preferences or other issues. Here are some excuses we’ve heard over the years:

- I have a vacation planned when the baby is due.
- The birth mother is a redhead. I don’t want a redheaded child.
- The birth mother is short and we are tall.
- We realize that we really just want a girl.
- The baby’s skin is too dark. He will stand out in a family photo.
- We are afraid the baby will be obese since the birth mother is.

- We can’t get medical records on the birth father.
- I don’t want to go to a hospital in a rough neighborhood to pick up a baby.
- We don’t smoke, so we don’t want a birth mother who smokes.
- We didn’t know the birth mother has tattoos. We aren’t open to that.

Setting preferences allows you and your adoption professionals know what you are and are not open to. This enables you to not get too far into a situation before knowing it isn’t what you are looking for. The problem with the excuses above is that they typically came after the baby was born or they agreed to match. In adoption, adoptive parents don’t have as much control as with a biological pregnancy. They can exert some control through their preferences, but it is good to remember that some things, like tattoos and city of birth, have no effect on the baby. And others, like hair color or gender, are things we cannot select with a biological pregnancy.

Be specific, but be realistic.

Choosing race is good, choosing physical characteristics is not.



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TALKING ADOPTION WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Your family and friends will create your emotional and practical support network before, during and after adoption. They will rejoice when you celebrate, listen when you are frustrated, and reassure you when challenges or roadblocks arise. However, they may also pose difficult questions or opinions that are rooted in their lack of knowledge or understanding about modern adoption.

It is an individual choice as to when you let family and friends know about your intentions to adopt. There is no right or wrong time. Some prospective parents prefer to wait until they know a baby is coming or after they've brought the child home. Others choose to talk early on about their plans. Some tell everyone they know, others tell only a few trusted friends or family members. You know your family, you are the best one to make that decision.

Whenever you do decide to get the word out about your adopted child, here are some points you'll want family members to know:

- Anticipated birth date, along with the understanding that if the child is born out of state, it may be two to three weeks until you can return home
- The child's name, age and gender, a nickname if relevant
- The child's birthday

Remember, parts of your child's story may need to remain private.

Not everyone needs to know about drug exposure, family history of mental illness, circumstances of conception, or other personal details.

Keep private details private.

- Whether or not the birth parents will be involved in the child's life
- How you intend to treat the subject of adoption with the child
- Any information you intend to withhold from the child that others already know
- Medical conditions – allergies, asthma etc., especially important for those who will be caring for the child in your absence

A word of caution... not every part of your child's story is something that everyone needs to know. Drug exposure, history of abuse, how the birth mother found you, birth family history, and other factors need to be kept on a "need to know" basis, and only people who really need to know (such as physicians, teachers if a problem arises, and other professionals) really need to know.



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WORKING TOWARD A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION

Most people would define adoption success as building your family through a safe and secure adoption, and they would be right. But it is so much more than just that. A successful adoption should be a positive experience for everyone in the adoption triad (adoptive parents, birth parents, and child), and while some completed adoptions may not have that, especially if the children have been removed by the state, it is something to strive for if at all possible. Along with this, there are other ways you can work toward this goal.

Just as you have taken time to consider your adoption plans, remember that birth parents typically have as well. They need to be treated just as you would hope they would treat you. Not all birth parents that contact you may fit into your preferences for a child, but they still deserve to be shown care and encouragement for reaching out to explore adoption. (When you encounter this situation, give them our 24 Hour Adoption Answer Line (1-800-923-6784) so they may be connected with families who are open to adopting their child. Or just pass their contact information on to your adoption coordinator.)

Remember that your relationship with a birth mother begins with your Dear Birth Mother Letter and online profile. It takes time and effort to do this right. Don't cut corners here. Be open, honest, and ready to share who you are and what you have to offer.

If someone asks for confidentiality, this request should be honored. This can ensure that an adoption goes smoothly and that everyone feels respected. Similarly, honoring the request or agreement for ongoing contact after the adoption is vital. Adoptive parents make commitments, and those commitments play into a birth mother feeling comfortable enough to consent to the adoption.

All families have an adoption budget, and it is okay to know what your limits are with birth parent expenses. It can be uncomfortable to have that conversation, especially if you have already agreed





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upon expenses and now are being asked for more. Remember that most birth parents qualify for medical assistance through the state (Medicaid) as well as other help and support (welfare payments, food stamps and WIC). Encourage them to take advantage of the help available to them, and offer to assist them if needed. Understand that most birth parents are not able to fully support themselves and will need assistance, but don't budget to spend more than you can afford to lose. Ensure that your birth parent expenses are always paid through your attorney.

Legally, adoption is a specialty. This is another area to not skimp on. Qualified adoption attorneys know what to do and when to do it. They are familiar with birth parent advisements, requirements for collecting birth parent relinquishments, terminating the rights of an unknown birth father, and interstate compact paperwork. Many adoptions have been put in jeopardy due to an inexperienced attorney or one who was working outside of his specialty.

Remember, we will provide you the names of adoption attorneys who are qualified in the states you will need them. Please be prepared to pay for all legal costs in adoption. Birth parents are never expected to pay their own legal fees for adoption.

After you have matched with a birth mother, you begin to develop a bond that will be different from other relationships in your life. It is a relationship that needs time, effort, care, and understanding to fully bloom. It is vital that you understand that if

you are matched, it is not appropriate to begin working with another birth mother as a "backup". It isn't fair to measure one against the other. If something changes and you no longer wish to be matched, alert your adoption coordinator and she will help you gracefully explain this and encourage the birth mother to continue with adoption, finding another family who is qualified and possesses some of the qualities she admired in you. Similarly, if the child is born and there is a reason you no longer wish to proceed, do not tell the birth mother until you have discussed it with your adoption coordinator and worked out a plan of action.

Open or semi-open adoption a new experience for most families. We want to ensure you have all the information, help, and support you need to make a successful adoption for you and your child!

In adoption, there are areas that you can save money, however your legal team should not be one of them.

Families can jeopardize the success of an adoption by cutting corners. Remember, we provide qualified, experienced referrals for you!



INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION

Here are some key ingredients that have helped many families adopt:

1. Research and understanding of the adoption process.
2. Working in a timely manner to complete the required home study interviews and documents to be legally ready to accept a child.
3. Creating an excellent adoption profile and website.
4. Making yourself available to birth parents and adoption professionals by cell phone, email, and text.
5. Be flexible! Situations will change. Your adoption profile will need to be changed. Your home study provider will require certain things. Staying flexible will help throughout the whole process.
6. Don't give up!
7. Appreciate your birth parent for their sacrifice and gift of life to their child and to you.

OPEN OR CLOSED ADOPTION?

In the past, adoption was that of secrets, pain and shame for many birth parents. Women (and men) had little say in what happened to their children. Well-meaning hospital staff very often would not allow the birth mother to see her baby. The birth parents of yesteryear faced silence and denial. Don't feel, don't talk, and it will all be better soon was the advice of

many. Social workers coldly told birth mothers, "You need to get on with your life."

As we now know, many of these women experienced years of pain, struggling with unanswered questions and shame. Dark secrets ate at their hearts on each anniversary of their child's birth, and years of silent Mother's Days would bring not flowers and cards, but revisits of the shame and anguish.

Today, birth parents have many choices with open adoption. Open adoption is seen as a viable practice in adoption and is growing in popularity. There are not only practical reasons to have an open adoption, but real benefits for the child too. Families must understand and believe in open adoption before they can proceed, or they will find they may struggle with the concept for years to come.

A number of websites are devoted to open adoption, while others are filled with stories of birth parents reliving the horror stories of their closed adoptions. With an open adoption, many birth parents have the opportunity to select the family who will parent their



Birth mother, her baby, and the adoptive mother she chose



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child. The adoptive parents and birth parents may meet only once before the birth, then afterwards communicate only by mail or by sending pictures and photos. For families online, it is common to share e-mails and scanned photos of each other. As the birth mother progresses in her pregnancy, she can send photos of ultrasounds and often additional photos throughout the pregnancy.

Even though the ultimate decision regarding the future of their child is up to the birth mother and father, many birth grandparents are being included in choosing the adoptive parents who will raise and nurture their grandchild. Some birth grandparents even have an option to remain in contact after the birth, again through photographs and letters, though a few might request an occasional meeting, if the adoptive parents agree.

Some birth families and adoptive families have become so close they vacation together and celebrate holidays as one big family, with the child receiving double doses of love and attention!

The choice is up to both families to consider what is best for the child. As an adoptive mother and an adoption professional, I have seen a variety of scenarios that work out beautifully. There are many open adoption online communities where visitors gather to talk and exchange ideas about open adoption, many of which include both ordinary and challenging experiences.

MARDIE'S STORY

When I first started my adoption journey, I wanted a white stork to just drop the baby off on my doorstep. I

wanted to see him or her in a Victorian wicker basket swaddled in a pastel pink or blue blanket. I imagined opening the door, gazing down on my precious heir, and with one fell swoop, parenthood would begin.



After years of dealing with infertility and several pregnancy losses, I desperately wanted a break, something easy that would bring me into parenthood. As usual, I discovered that adoption is not always easy. However, the rewards are great for the informed and caring. After speaking to other adoptive parents and reading some informative books on open adoption, I had a new awareness of the value of openness.

We eventually adopted a beautiful little boy at five weeks, after a long, drawn out and difficult adoption. But, even after the heartache and pain, I still believed that my son deserved to know about his birth parents



and that his adoption was to be celebrated. For without my son's beloved birth mother, I would not be a mother myself.

We both deeply loved the same child and wanted the best for his life. The love and courage his birth mother had to give my son to me allowed me to feel some of the heartbreak and loss that she and most birth mothers quite naturally experience

CLOSED AND SEMI-OPEN ADOPTIONS

Traditional closed adoptions still exist and are requested by some families who fear the birth parent might come back to reclaim the child. But, once finalized and provided there is no fraud or coercion, an adoption is irrevocable. Being open or closed has no bearing on that fact.

Most adoption professionals know from personal experience and from research that it's a disservice to an adopted child if his parents do not have adequate information to share about his birth parents and why he was placed for adoption. When he asks a simple question about his heritage, for the sake of his emotional health, parents cannot respond with secrecy, lies or blank stares.

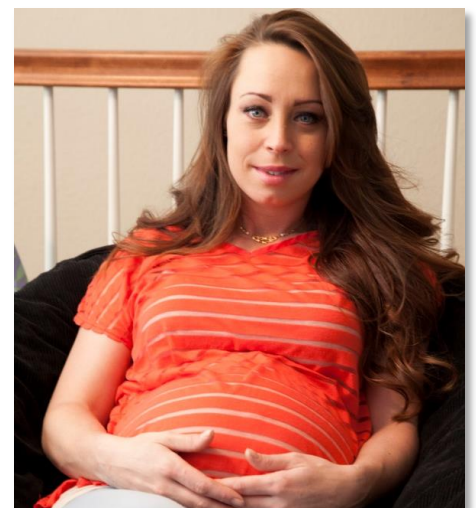
Even in an adoption where there is little contact with the birth mother, called a semi-open adoption, you can, in a domestic adoption, garner enough information so you can answer such questions. In adopting a foreign-born child, you will learn very little about the birth parents. But you can usually discover enough about the village the child came from or the circumstance that brought him to the orphanage, to be honest in telling his story.

Children who grow up knowing that they were adopted by honest, trustworthy and supportive parents will grow up with a healthy self-image.

Here are two birth mother experiences that speak to the differences in closed and open adoption:

Jackie: I was 19 when I gave birth to a child I put up for adoption, back in the olden days, you'd probably think. It was 1982. I had just delivered the baby when a nurse came in and took it away to another room in the hospital. They cleaned me up and never said a word about the baby. I asked the nurse, "Is it a boy or a girl?" and "How much does it weigh?" Nobody told me a thing. I was sad lots of times because I never knew what became of the baby. I'd go to the mall and see a child and wonder if it was mine.

Rachel: I couldn't have done that. I know the adoptive parents of my baby really well. They live in another town not far away. We went to lunch, like, four times. I talked with the mom on the phone. She asked me if I liked the name Sophia, and I probably wouldn't have even thought of that name, and I loved it! They came to the hospital when I was admitted for the delivery. Knowing them made me feel good; I mean giving up the baby was still hard, but





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knowing that Sophia was going to be raised by this great couple, that made me feel good.

HEAR THE CHILDREN OF CLOSED ADOPTION

Some agencies have refused to embrace open adoption. But the Internet era empowers birth mothers to choose the adoptive parents and professionals they will work with—something they both want and need. Many agencies that have resisted have had to close their doors.

If you search the Internet for “closed adoption,” you will find stories by people opposed to the practice of closed adoption. Visitors to the various sites are often searching, sometimes desperately, for a way to connect with their heritage, their birth parents and the circumstances of their adoptions.

Before you consider adopting a child through a closed adoption, you may want to visit some of these sites and learn how the practice has hurt some adoptees even 20 and 30 years down the road of life. Closed adoptions will continue, though less than one in 10 adoptions is closed today. Some birth parents and adoptive families feel that it’s best for their situation. Time will tell if it truly is.

We always counsel a birth mother, especially when she is young, not to close off her options to find out about her child. How a young pregnant woman at the age of 14 feels now and what she wants in 10 years may be vastly different. We ask all families to be open to at least letters and photos.

Remember to watch and listen to the webinars to learn more about what open adoption looks like.

Families often feel apprehensive until they meet a birth mother and realize that she is simply seeking reassurance that her child is happy and healthy, and that she did the right thing.

OPEN ADOPTION SUPPORTS EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Sometimes a birth mother requests a closed adoption. She’ll say, “I just want to get it over with and go on with my life.” This is probably not good for her emotional health. There is no closure, and there will always be uncertainty about what became of her child.

The fear of open adoption typically grows out of a birth mother’s low self-esteem and her impending sense of loss. At our center, we provide a network of past birth mothers to speak with those women considering placing their children. Afterwards, a new birth mother feels reassured and generally will agree to an open adoption. By knowing the child is going to a family who can offer the good parenting and loving home she wants, the healing can begin.



BEING OPEN TO OPEN ADOPTION

Several times a month, adoptive parents will contact us, asking that we choose a birth mother for them in an adoption that is essentially closed. In other words, they do not want to meet the birth mother or to have any contact with her and little information is exchanged. They are motivated by fear of meeting the birth mother and the fear that she will one day come to take back the child.

Many prospective adoptive parents shun the idea of any type of open adoption because they don't understand what this means or that there are varying degrees of openness. Usually, after some discussion, they are willing to consider at least a semi-open adoption and meet once with the birth mother prior to placement.

Open adoption is healthier for the adoptive family and for the birth parents. The birth parents will be satisfied that they made a correct choice, and the adoptive parents will have access to the medical information necessary to raise their child. That's what adoption is all about: raising a child in the best atmosphere possible. This can mean putting your emotions aside until you grow used to the situation, but it's worth it. The benefits far outweigh the minimal risk.

In any case, I believe it's important to release to the adoptive parents any and all information allowed by the birth mother. Today, in almost every adoption, agencies, attorneys or facilitators will provide to the adoptive parents any medical records available as long as the birth parents sign a waiver of confidentiality and have them available because they have seen a doctor. If you are working with a birth mother who only provides

a proof of pregnancy but no medical records, be sure you are able to have it verified by the provider.

“Open adoption heals the hearts of the birth parents and helps them get on with their lives. The child is more satisfied and secure because they know the heritage and love of his birth parents. Open adoption gives added security in the adoption process.” --Terri

OPEN ADOPTION: A QUICK STUDY

Virtually all adoptive parents and birth parents in domestic adoptions can learn each other's identities whether they decide to have contact or not. Until the late 1970s, agencies generally selected adoptive families for children without consulting birth parents.

Today, in many agency adoptions and in virtually all independent adoptions, birth parents are actively involved in selecting the adoptive families for their children. It is increasingly common for birth and adoptive families to have some form of contact before and after placement.

The degree of openness can vary significantly: Birth and adoptive parents may meet before the adoption is finalized and have no further contact, or the families may maintain some level of contact throughout the



child's life. They may exchange photos and letters or have more direct contact such as telephone calls, or, in some cases, getting together on occasion. It is really up to both parties.

BIRTH PARENT CONTACT AGREEMENT

Though not recognized as a legal document in most states, adoptive and birth parents often write out an agreement that describes the contact they intend to have over the next five years.

It is recommended to have the parties to the adoption sign a contact afterwards form. It provides a checklist of the kind of contact they want: cards and letters, telephone calls or in some adoptions, visits on holidays. (See the [Adoption Contact Form](#).)

It is important that you honor any commitment you make to a birth parent for ongoing contact, whether made in your adoption profile or verbally. Your willingness to have contact has played into her decision to place her child with you.

If you are not prepared to do this, then don't say that you are.

After that, it is up to the adoptive family and birth parents to maintain the agreement.

AFTER THE AGREEMENT

When a birth mother allows herself to place another individual's life above her own, maturity and growth begin in her life. For many parents, it may be the first unselfish step they have ever taken. They feel empowered, knowing the choice was theirs to make and they made it not for themselves, but for their child. In turn, the child will always have the knowledge and reassurance that the birth parents wanted the best for him. A sacrifice and a dream of a better life was made by the biological parents and a promise and a plan by the adoptive parents.

I ask many of the adoptive parents coming to us for help in building their families to do a simple yet effective exercise, helping to clarify their thoughts and feelings toward open adoption.

Picture this scenario: You have two wonderful young children and have just found out you have an incurable disease. Your life expectancy is one to six months, but within one month you will be incapacitated.

Your dilemma is that you have no family or friends who can adopt your children or help you. All your life you have struggled on your own to care for yourself and your children, and you have been successful, at least up until this point.

Now, you sit in your living room, watching your children play. Time is passing swiftly; you realize that you must find a loving home for the most precious people in your world, all within one month. You will have to depend on



total strangers to help you find permanent homes for your loved ones.

What information would you want to have about the people who will adopt your children? Who will adopt your children? Would you want to know what they look like? About their lifestyle and religious beliefs? Would you want to receive photographs, letters and updates on their progress for as long as possible? Or, would you feel more comfortable just saying good-bye?

Many times, we ask others to do what would be impossible for us to even consider. When I look through the eyes of the birth mothers I work with, I see a completely different view. With love, compassion and knowledge about what a birth parent is faced with, we can have a deeper understanding of the true gift she is giving her child and the adoptive family. How can we deny the birth parents the peace of mind of knowing that their choice was the right one and their child is thriving in a loving home that they chose?

Open adoption is a loving choice. Even if the birth parents choose not to continue contact, the choice is theirs. They will know that the first gift they gave their child was the breath of life and a chosen family for a lifetime. By visiting birth parent sites dedicated to birth parents, you can read about the struggle many go through to provide what they feel is the best future for their child.

There is still a great need for education regarding open adoption. It is making its way into many conferences and is the topic of many books. You'll find a number of sites on the Internet with information on open and semi-open adoption. Research this option, explore it and become comfortable with deciding how much

contact you are comfortable with. Much of the fear can be alleviated and questions answered, leaving your child the opportunity to move upward in his life without secrets.