

The Adoption Planner

Tools and worksheets to lead you through the process, from choosing your route to budgeting to hiring your team



from the editors of
Adoptive Families

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What kind of adoption is right for you?

Work your way through this decision matrix for a preliminary indication of the adoption route that may be right for you.

Characteristics of the prospective parent	International Adoption	U.S. Infant Adoption	Foster Care Adoption
<p>1. My age is:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Under 25</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 25 to 45</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Over 45</p>	<p>Age requirements vary by country. Most countries require parents to be between the ages of 25 and 45 for an infant referral. Older parents may adopt toddlers and older children.</p>	<p>No specific age requirements. Birth parents, however, may more readily select parents perceived as neither “too young” nor “too old.”</p>	<p>No specific age requirements.</p>
<p>2. I have the following financial resources to dedicate to adopting a child:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$10,000</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 to \$35,000</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than \$35,000</p>	<p>Most international adoption costs range from \$35,000 to \$60,000. Many families are eligible for the federal tax credit of up to \$13,400 per finalized adoption (in tax year 2015).</p>	<p>The cost of U.S. infant adoption varies widely. The average cost is \$33,000 to \$40,000. Many families are eligible for the federal tax credit of up to \$13,400 per domestic adoption attempt (in tax year 2015).</p>	<p>Expenses are minimal, if there are any at all. Additionally, many families are eligible for the federal adoption tax credit of up to \$13,400 (in tax year 2015).</p>
<p>3. I am:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Part of a married couple</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Single</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Gay/lesbian</p>	<p>For married couples, guidelines on length of marriage and number of previous divorces may apply. For singles, countries may prohibit placement or limit the number of children placed.</p>	<p>Typically, there are no fixed rules regarding marital status, but some birth parents prefer married couples. However, adoptions of U.S. babies by singles (both straight and gay) are not unusual.</p>	<p>There are typically no specific requirements regarding marital status. Research requirements for single and gay/lesbian adoption in your state.</p>
Characteristics of the child	International Adoption	U.S. Infant Adoption	Foster Care Adoption
<p>4. I am interested in adopting:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A newborn</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A child younger than one year old</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A toddler or an older child</p>	<p>In 2013, 8% of children adopted internationally were younger than 1 year old; 54% 1-4 years; 39% older than 4.</p>	<p>Almost all U.S. private adoptions are of very young babies. Many newborns go home from the hospital with their adoptive parents.</p>	<p>Children adopted from foster care range in age from infants to 17-year-olds. The average age of waiting children is 7.7 years old. Many foster children have siblings with whom they are placed.</p>
<p>5. It is important to me to know the complete medical and social history of my child.</p>	<p>The quality of medical and other background information varies widely by country and by adoption situation. Parents will want to research the availability of information in countries under consideration.</p>	<p>Medical and other background information is usually, but not always, available in domestic adoptions.</p>	<p>Although background information for a child in foster care may be incomplete, current medical information will be available.</p>

Characteristics of the child	International Adoption	U.S. Infant Adoption	Foster Care Adoption
<p>6. I can consider parenting a child with some level of disability.</p>	<p>Quality of early care varies widely by country. Where foster care is available, children usually fare well. Where children are adopted from orphanages, there are virtually always developmental lags and sometimes other medical consequences.</p>	<p>Keep in mind that there are no guarantees of perfect health for any child.</p>	<p>Children in foster care may experience consequences from neglect prior to entering care.</p>
<p>7. I am prepared for the visibility and responsibilities of raising a child who is racially dissimilar to me.</p>	<p>The majority of children adopted internationally are Asian or African. Less than 20% are Caucasian (primarily from Eastern Europe).</p>	<p>Infants adopted domestically can be of any race.</p>	<p>Of children in foster care currently waiting for adoption, 24% are African-American, 42% are Caucasian, and 23% are Latino.</p>
The adoption process	International Adoption	U.S. Infant Adoption	Foster Care Adoption
<p>8. I hope to adopt a child within:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 year</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 2 years</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Longer is OK</p>	<p>The average international adoption process is two years from start to finish. Wait times vary significantly, depending on circumstances in each country.</p>	<p>The timeline is unpredictable. The average adoption is complete within two years.</p>	<p>Both for placement and for adoption the wait is unpredictable, but placement can be rapid.</p>
<p>9. I would like to know the total cost of the adoption in advance.</p>	<p>Total adoption expenses usually can be predicted by knowledgeable adoption providers.</p>	<p>The cost of a domestic adoption can vary widely, depending on advertising costs to identify a birth mother, as well as birth mother medical expenses.</p>	<p>Total adoption expenses are negligible.</p>
<p>10. I am emotionally prepared for uncertainty in the adoption process.</p>	<p>In most cases, international adoptions follow a predictable path. Families that qualify can normally count on becoming parents by the end of the process. However, changing laws and practices in individual countries can lead to midstream process changes.</p>	<p>Families who want to adopt a newborn domestically can almost always count on doing so. Yet, along the way, as many as 50% of birth parents who initially consider adoption decide not to place the baby. Post-placement revocations, however, are rare.</p>	<p>Children may be placed with foster families who hope to adopt them before they are legally free for adoption. There can be uncertainty as to when or whether a child will become free for adoption.</p>
<p>11. I prefer the following level of contact with my child's birth parents:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Significant</p>	<p>In most international adoptions, there has traditionally been little to no contact with the child's birth parents. This is changing; an increasing number of parents are opening international adoptions.</p>	<p>Most birth parents and adoptive parents meet at least once. It is unusual to have no significant contact with birth parents.</p>	<p>If you foster your child before adoption, you may have some contact with the birth parents. If not, you are unlikely ever to have any contact with them.</p>
<p>12. I'd like to control the way the adoption proceeds and the professionals I work with as much as possible.</p>	<p>In international adoption, parents typically choose the adoption country and agency. Beyond that, the process is dictated by the requirements of the U.S. government and those of the child's country of origin.</p>	<p>Adopting parents will choose their social worker, their attorney, and, sometimes, the process by which they identify a birth mother. The timing of a birth parent match will not be predictable.</p>	<p>Adopting from foster care involves state adoption offices and courts. It is difficult to have control over the process.</p>

Adoption Timeline

TIMING	OBJECTIVE	TASKS	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
1-3 Months	Learn about adoption.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Join an adoptive parent support group. 2. Read adoption books and magazines. 3. Attend a pre-adoption information session hosted by a local adoption agency or a conference. (Find a local meeting or a support group at adoptivefamilies.com/events/.) 	Minimal
	Make preliminary decision about type of adoption.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See the decision matrix on the previous pages 2. Review the country overviews you'll find on buildingyourfamily.com/. 	Understand financial implications of type of adoption. See sample cost breakdowns.
3-6 Months	Choose adoption service provider.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interview local homestudy agency or social worker, adoption agency for child placement, and/or attorney (see <i>AF's</i> National Adoption Directory, at buildingyourfamily.com/directory/). 	Agency application fee (\$100-\$600) or attorney retainer (\$1,000-\$6,000) is due at this time. After retainer is disbursed, attorney fees will be due monthly.
	Begin process of locating your child.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Complete application procedures. If domestic, consult your attorney regarding legalities of independent adoption in your state and draft adoption profile. 	None
	Prepare adoption budget.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See sample adoption cost breakdowns. 2. Understand the adoption expense tax credit (see irs.gov). 	None
6-9 Months	Complete home study.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss home study questions with your spouse/partner/family members. 2. Collect documents (references, birth certificates, tax returns, marriage certificate, divorce documents). 3. Work with your home study provider on tasks specific to his or her process or your adoption route. 	\$800-\$1,200 for documentation & authentication. \$1,000-\$2,000 for the home study fee.
	Begin adoption process.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For international, prepare dossier and file U.S. visa paperwork. 2. For independent, begin networking and advertising activities to identify expectant mother. 3. For domestic agency, prepare profile for expectant mother review. 	Typically, up to half of the parent preparation fee is due at the start of the home study. With international, visa and documentation fees average \$1,000-\$4,000. If agency adoption, half of child placement fee is due at this time.
9-24 Months	Receive child referral (international) or expectant mother selection (domestic).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arrange for referral documentation review by adoption medicine specialist. 2. If independent, make arrangements for payment of expectant mother expenses, per your agreement and as allowed by state law. Make payment arrangements with medical providers. 	If agency, final half of child placement fee is due now. Expectant mother's medical, legal, living, and/or counseling expenses will be paid from this time until birth of baby.
12-30 Months	Placement of child or birth of baby	Enjoy! You are a new parent!	Outstanding agency fees, if any, and travel expenses, if any, are due now. International fees and expenses are also due now. If independent, birth mother's hospital expenses are due now (baby's medical expenses are likely covered by your medical insurance).
18-36 Months	Finalization of adoption	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arrange for post-placement reports, as required. 2. Select attorney for final court hearing, or learn how to represent yourself. 	If foster adoption, ensure that adoption assistance agreement is in place before finalization and check the availability of reimbursement for one-time expenses in your state. Post-placement fees average \$300-\$1,000; finalization costs with attorney are typically \$500-\$2,000.

Adoption Cost & Timing Survey Results

Each year, *Adoptive Families* readers help us tell the real story about the average cost and length of time it takes to adopt, by route. We're grateful to every one of you who took our Cost & Timing of Adoption Survey. Here's what families who completed adoptions in 2013 or 2014 had to say. For more data, including information about "false starts" in domestic adoption, and to see past years' results, go to adoptivefamilies.com/resources/adoption-news/adoption-cost-timing-survey-results/.

ADOPTION TIMING			
<p>U.S. Newborn Adoption Agency</p> <p>Average time from preparation of portfolio to match with birth mother:</p> <p>Less than 3 months 24%</p> <p>4 to 6 months 13%</p> <p>7 to 12 months 24%</p> <p>13 to 24 months 21%</p> <p>Longer than 24 months..... 18%</p> <p>33% of respondents were matched less than one month before their child was born. 16% were matched after birth.</p>	<p>U.S. Foster Adoption</p> <p>Average time from foster certification to placement of child ultimately adopted:</p> <p>Less than 1 month.....23%</p> <p>2 to 6 months18%</p> <p>7 to 12 months15%</p> <p>Longer than 12 months.....34%</p> <p>Before successfully adopting, 42% had placements that did not end in adoption.</p>	<p>Ethiopia Adoption</p> <p>716 adoptions to the U.S. in 2014</p> <p>Average time from completion of dossier to referral:</p> <p>Less than 6 months17%</p> <p>7 to 12 months29%</p> <p>13 to 24 months11%</p> <p>Longer than 24 months.....11%</p>	<p>Haiti Adoption</p> <p>464 adoptions to the U.S. in 2014</p> <p>Average time from completion of dossier to referral:</p> <p>Less than 3 months37%</p> <p>4 to 6 months25%</p> <p>7 to 12 months13%</p> <p>Longer than 12 months.....25%</p>
<p>U.S. Newborn Adoption Attorney</p> <p>Average time from foster certification to placement of child ultimately adopted:</p> <p>Less than 1 month.....39%</p> <p>2 to 3 months16%</p> <p>4 to 6 months20%</p> <p>7 to 12 months16%</p> <p>Longer than 12 months.....9%</p>	<p>China Adoption</p> <p>2,040 adoptions to the U.S. in 2014 (total, including traditional and waiting child)</p> <p>Average time from completion of dossier to referral:</p> <p><u>TRADITIONAL PROGRAM</u></p> <p>Longer than 5 years.....100%</p> <p><u>WAITING-CHILD PROGRAM</u></p> <p>Less than 1 month.....48%</p> <p>2 to 6 months35%</p> <p>Longer than 6 months.....17%</p>	<p>Ukraine Adoption</p> <p>521 adoptions to the U.S. in 2014</p> <p>Average time from completion of dossier to referral:</p> <p>Less than 1 month.....14%</p> <p>2 to 3 months71%</p> <p>Longer than 3 months.....15%</p>	<p>South Korea Adoption</p> <p>370 adoptions to the U.S. in 2014</p> <p>Average time from completion of dossier to referral:</p> <p>Less than 3 months31%</p> <p>4 to 6 months13%</p> <p>7 to 12 months37%</p> <p>Longer than 12 months.....19%</p>

ADOPTION COST DISTRIBUTION								
	Less than \$1k	\$1k – \$5k	\$5k – \$10k	\$10k – \$20k	\$20k – \$30k	\$30k – \$40k	\$40k-\$50k	\$50k+
U.S. Agency	0%	1%	1%	23%	32%	25%	13%	5%
U.S. Attorney	0%	9%	10%	24%	15%	19%	16%	8%
U.S. Foster	77%	18%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
China	0%	0%	0%	2%	21%	54%	21%	1%
Ethiopia	0%	1%	0%	0%	29%	26%	19%	3%
Ukraine	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%	29%	14%	29%
Haiti	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	38%	0%	13%
South Korea	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%	29%	14%	29%

U.S. foster: 80% of respondents receive an ongoing monthly subsidy. On average, those families receive \$782 per month.

Domestic Adoption Average Cost Breakdowns

	AGENCY DOMESTIC INFANT	INDEPENDENT DOMESTIC INFANT	U.S. FOSTER- ADOPT ¹
Preparation			
Home study	\$1,967	\$1,893	\$261
Documentation & authentication	\$1,148	\$990	\$0
Adoption			
Adoption agency application & program fees	\$400–\$1,000	\$5,133	\$0
Attorney fees	\$4,547	\$11,936	\$610
Advertising/networking	\$2,676	\$2,688	\$0
Birth family counseling	\$1,150	\$1,035	\$0
Birth mother expenses	\$3,460	\$5,052	\$0
Foster care	\$152	\$71	\$0
Travel			
(Airfare, hotels, etc.)	\$2,112	\$2,380	\$330
Total Average Cost			
(Before tax credit)	\$38,464	\$33,037	\$1,730
Tax Credit ²			
Maximum credit	\$13,400 per attempt	\$13,400 per attempt	\$13,400

Notes

- (1) Costs of adopting a child from foster care may be eligible for reimbursement (up to \$2,000) by the child's state, depending on state regulations. Also, adoptions of U.S. children with special needs are eligible for the full federal tax credit, regardless of actual expenses.
- (2) Maximum credit for tax year 2015. Subject to income limitations.

International Adoption Average Cost Breakdowns

	CHINA	ETHIOPIA	UKRAINE	HAITI	SOUTH KOREA
Preparation					
Homestudy	\$2,376	\$1,788	\$1,017	\$1,073	\$2,358
Documentation & authentication	\$2,812	\$5,620	\$2,167	\$3,477	\$3,050
Adoption					
Application & program fee	\$7,940	\$35,044	\$10,000+ *	\$10,788	\$28,000
In-country adoption expenses	\$6,471	\$701	\$13,500	\$11,500	\$1,075
Child's passport/visa and medical exams	\$1,311	\$656	\$1,363	\$1,293	\$700
Post-adoption expenses	\$1,923	\$1,206	\$833	\$962	\$2,6250
In-country travel	\$3,706	\$3,250	\$5,000	\$829	\$2,500
All other expenses	\$2357	\$300	\$4,896	\$783	\$1,000
Intercountry Travel (Airfare, hotels, etc.)	\$9,679	\$8,688	\$15,000+ *	\$4,011	\$10,500
Total Average Cost (Before tax credit)	\$37,945	\$57,253	\$50,000 + *	\$34,706	\$51,833
Tax Credit ¹					
Maximum credit	\$13,400	\$13,400	\$13,400	\$13,400	\$13,400
	per finalization	per finalization	per finalization	per finalization	per finalization

Notes

(*) Approximate averages may be higher than average because of a small sample size that reported unusually high costs for Ukraine adoption in 2013/14.

(1) Maximum credit for tax year 2015. Subject to income limitations.

How to Choose an Adoption Agency By Jennifer O’Riordan

Most people wouldn’t dream of making a life-changing decision without thorough research. You’ll need to put your research and networking skills to work to ensure that the agency you choose to handle your adoption will meet your needs.

START BY CALLING AGENCIES that have the kind of program you’re looking for and that place children in your state. Use the criteria on *Adoptive Families’* database, at adoptivefamilies.com/adoption-process/choosing-an-adoption-agency/.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway (childwelfare.gov) also keeps a database. Private agencies come in all stripes. Many are nonprofit. Some have a religious affiliation. Some limit themselves to certain kinds of placements or geographic areas. Agencies have individual requirements for adopters, such as age and marital status. There are also the state and, if adopting internationally, country requirements.

If you are adopting from a Hague country, make sure the agency is Hague-accredited. Even if you are not adopting from a Hague country, Hague accreditation indicates a standardized process.

FIND OUT IF YOU MEET CRITERIA as adopting parents. Agencies may offer to send you an information packet and sign you up for an orientation. Note the impression made over the phone. How thoroughly were your questions answered? If you left a message, how quickly did someone return your call? It’s important to feel good about the people to whom you’re entrusting your adoption.

FIND OUT HOW THE AGENCY OPERATES. Do they employ licensed social workers with master’s degrees in social work and experience in adoption? If you’re adopting domestically, ask how the agency locates birth parents, and about its attitude toward open adoption. Are all members of the adoption triad—adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees—respected in the process? If you’re thinking about an international adoption, ask about the local facilitators or attorneys the agency uses. (For more questions to ask, see the “Adoption Agency Worksheet” next page.)

TALK WITH THE STAFF. You’ll get a sense of the agency’s style. Does the agency stress education? Some agencies require parent training whether or not their home state mandates it. If you plan to adopt a child of a different racial and/or cultural background, or one with special needs, how will the agency prepare you? What help is given to families with post-placement difficulties? If you are adopting domestically, ask about the counseling that birth parents receive.

Where does the money go?

When you adopt through an agency, you’re paying for a home-study, parent training, support, staff travel, and birth parent expenses. Agencies vary widely in what and how they charge. Applicants typically pay a modest application fee, then a set

amount for services as they’re rendered. Reputable agencies require no more than two-thirds of the total cost before placement. Fees may be based on the applicants’ income, and may be reduced for older or special-needs children. Don’t assume that the more expensive agencies provide better service. The extra money may go toward promotion and marketing.

Because agencies vary in their services and how they charge for them, comparing costs can be difficult. Ask for an itemization of costs, and make sure you know what the total doesn’t include. Nonprofit agencies publish annual reports that describe their organizations, budgets, and programs. Ask for one if you want to know how fees support the organization’s mission and its programs. You can also find information about a nonprofit’s financial picture at guidestar.org.

Once you’ve asked the agency your questions, exercise due diligence. Call the licensing division in the agency’s home state to make sure the agency is licensed to place children for adoption there, and ask if any complaints have been filed. State adoption units are listed at buildingyourfamily.com/adoption-laws-state/.

Ask the same of the attorney general’s office and the Better Business Bureau (bbb.org) in the agency’s home state. If you’re interested in adopting internationally, check to see that the agency is officially recognized to place children from that country.

Any agency provides satisfied customers as references, but look for third-party feedback by joining an adoption support group or an online chat room and asking about previous clients’ experiences. Talk with people who have adopted recently via the same adoption route you plan to pursue. Don’t give too much weight to one unhappy customer’s experience. Rather, look for patterns in client feedback.

Red flags

There’s no way to guarantee that your adoption won’t hit snags, but there are red flags to watch for. Debbie Schmidt, adoptions director of Catholic Charities in Indiana, says to be wary of agencies that promise a child before a family assessment, that assure clients that the birth parents will relinquish a baby before birth, and those that require no home-study fee. She further warns adopters about agencies that don’t mention the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, a uniform law that sets procedures for the transfer of children to another state. In international adoptions, beware the agency that promises faster placements, an inside track to ease paperwork, or that guarantees a certain child.

Remember that agencies provide services for a fee. Approach your search with a consumer mindset. Expect to spend a month or two investigating alternatives before selecting the agency that is right for you.

Jennifer O’Riordan is an adoptive parent and a psychologist.

Adoption Agency Worksheet

Deciding on an adoption agency can be an organizational challenge. Print multiple copies of this sheet and fill one out for each agency you consider. Search for agencies in the *Adoptive Families* National Adoption Directory at: buildingyourfamily.com/directory.

Adoption agency name _____

Placement

- How many children did you place last year?
- How many children did you place from each of the programs in which I am interested?
- How long have you been placing children from each program?
- (For singles) How many children did you place with a single parent? What types of children were placed with single parents?

Timing

- How soon after I apply will my home study begin? How long will it take? When will I know if I have been approved?
- If I am not approved, can I find out why? Is there an appeal process?
- How long will it take from home study or dossier approval to the referral of a child? How much time do I have to decide on a referral? What happens if I don't accept the referral?

Finances

- What is the total cost of adopting through each program? Can I get a written breakdown of fees and a payment schedule?
- Do the fees cover the home study, all post-placement visits, fees to the placing agency (international or domestic), international processing, transportation, and miscellaneous fees (visa, dossier preparation, notarization, medical exams, document translation, exit tax, and so on)? What does it not cover?
- Do you have an annual report that demonstrates fiscal accountability? How does the agency spend leftover funds? What percentage of funds is spent on administration?

Agency Cost Structure

Application fee: _____

Home study (only) fee: _____

Program fee: _____

Timing of payments: _____

Post-placement fees: _____

Refund policy: _____

International Programs

- Is intercountry adoption stable in my country of choice? Do you have programs in other countries I could switch to if regulations change or if a moratorium is declared?
- Are the international agencies you work with licensed in their countries? How long have you worked with them?
- What information do we receive about a referral before we travel? How thorough and accurate is the medical information?
- What are the travel requirements? Do you help with travel arrangements?
- Do you have bilingual representatives respected by the authorities in each foreign country to assist with or obtain the referral of a child? Will they be there to assist me when I arrive? What is their experience and tenure with the agency? Do they work exclusively for you and exclusively in adoption?
- Do you financially support the orphanages from which you place children? How often do your representatives visit these orphanages?

Other Pertinent Questions

- Do you give clients a copy of their rights with the application form? Do you provide a contract that spells out my responsibilities toward the adoption, as well as what you are responsible for?
- Is there a written policy of quality assurance that will address my concerns during the process?
- What are the post-placement requirements, and what support services do you offer before, during, and after placement?
- What happens if I find I can't parent the child I adopted?

Adapted from "Shopping for an Adoption Agency," Adoption Information Service, Seattle, Washington.

Notes:

Tips for Domestic Adopters

WRITING A DEAR EXPECTANT MOTHER LETTER

1 Keep in mind that your goal is to connect with the right expectant mother for you. Successful adoptions occur when prospective adoptive parents and birth parents make a strong pre-birth connection. So resist making yourself into something you're not. The more authentically you communicate the essence of your personality, lifestyle, parenting philosophy, and heart, the better chance you have of connecting with a potential expectant mother who shares your feelings.

2 Paint a picture of how you live. Illustrate facts with anecdotes to help potential expectant mothers picture the events you describe. The more intimate the details, the more vivid the picture.

3 Identify the places in your life where the baby will fit. Talk about how you will raise your child. If

you love the theater, describe your plan to attend puppet shows to introduce your child to this world. If golf is your thing, make a joke about needing a caddie. Help an expectant mother imagine her baby's life with you.

4 Be positive. Put your best foot forward. Express the good your life has to offer. Mention your infertility, or any other sorrow, but do so within the context of the positive lessons that adversity has taught you.

5 Become the solution. We all wish our home were larger, our incomes bigger, our relationship with our parents better. Don't waste space pointing out deficiencies. Communicate aspects of your life that will help an expectant mother imagine you as the solution she seeks.

Nelson Handel is the author of Reaching Out: The Guide to Writing a Terrific Dear Birthmother Letter.

TALKING WITH A POTENTIAL EXPECTANT MOTHER

As prospective parents, you'll be asked to evaluate a potential expectant mother's commitment and address intimate questions in the public glare of the adoption process. How do you find connection within a process that seems to disconnect you from yourself? The key lies in returning to genuine human communication. What matters most is not a list of questions or negotiating points, but finding a way to meet genuinely as people:

- **Make a connection.** Realize that you're meeting someone with a huge problem to manage. Let your first thoughts be about her needs and concerns. There will be plenty of time later to discuss the "nuts and bolts," like medical history, or a desire for a post-placement relationship.
- **Ask about the pregnancy.** How is she feeling? Ask her if she likes her doctor, how she's getting to her appointments, what foods she is craving.
- **Ask about the people in her life.** Does she have friends or family she can talk with about what's going on? Your empathy might be just the

invitation she needs to unload her thoughts and feelings. The more comfortable and positive you are about adoption, the more you normalize the conversation.

- **Invite her questions.** Send a message that you welcome her interest. Answer her questions simply and honestly. Be as open and vulnerable as you would like her to be.
- **Let the conversation flow without an agenda.** Initially, it is less important what you talk about than that you talk—and listen. Remember that, although your biggest fear is that she won't like you, her biggest fear is that you won't like her.

Nothing can fully prepare you for the strangeness of the first phone call or meeting. But every day, people negotiate the same waters of a first contact. And every day, through the power of love and authenticity, people find a way past the awkwardness and come together for the sake of a child. You can, too.

—*Nelson Handel*

USING THE INTERNET TO ADOPT

1 Do your homework. Online groups offer supportive places to raise questions, share successes, and rejoice with others.

2 Develop a personal website that reflects your family. Describe in detail the qualities that make your family special. Make sure that family photos are close-up enough to see your eyes.

3 Find a good adoption website. Post your family's profile with a reputable posting site. Find out exactly which services adoption sites provide and how much they cost. Be

wary of guarantees that you'll find a birth mother within a certain amount of time.

4 Protect your privacy. Don't list your employer, salary, home or work phone numbers, or your address online.

5 Hire an experienced adoption lawyer or agency. Professionals can alert you to potential problems or scams. Use an adoption professional to screen birth mother inquiries. Be wary of those who send a number of e-mails but give you no way to reach them other than by e-mail. Demands for payment or a quick decision are a red flag.

Preparing for Your Home Study

Every adoptive parent must have a home study during the adoption process. Your home study will not only assess your ability to parent a child through adoption, it will also help you understand more about adoption and parenting. You are likely to be asked about the topics below, so give some thought to these questions.

About yourself

- What is your experience with infertility, and how have you resolved your grief over infertility?
- What are your religious/ethical background and beliefs and your plans for your child's religious/ethical training?
- How were you parented in your family of origin, and how might your experiences growing up affect your own parenting? Was there any drug or alcohol dependency in your family of origin? How does this affect you?
- What is your relationship with your spouse/partner? How do you approach problem-solving and handle conflict as a team? Give examples.
- Have you ever been arrested? What for? Was this the result of "youthful indiscretion"? What changes have you made in your life to avoid a repeat offense?
- What role do alcohol and drugs currently play in your life? Have you ever been treated for drug dependency?
- Have you ever been seen by a therapist or counselor? What was the result? What is the current situation?
- What is your employment status? What are your plans after your child arrives?
- What is your financial situation? Are you able to live within your means and save for future expenses?

About parenting and adoption

- What is your motivation to adopt?
- What type of child are you interested in adopting, and why?
- Can you consider a child with prenatal drug/alcohol exposure? Any other disabilities?
- Are you open to an ongoing relationship with your child's birth parents?
- Are you open to parenting a child of another race? If so, what experiences do you have with children and adults of other races? How would you incorporate same-race experiences into your child's life?
- What efforts have you made to educate yourself about adoption (books you've read, conferences you've attended, and so on)?
- What are your expectations of parenthood? Of your child?
- What are your theories about parenting (particularly discipline)?
- What experiences have you had caring for children?
- How does your family feel about your plans to adopt?
- If you are single, what are your everyday support systems, your plans to provide your child with adult role models of the opposite sex, and your plans in case of your death or disability?

Document checklist

- Birth certificates
- Tax returns
- Marriage and/or divorce certificate
- Medical exams
- Personal references

Notes:
