

10 KEYS TO A *Healthy Adoption*

A Step-By-Step Guide For Pregnant Women Considering Adoption

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NEUTRAL OPTIONS COUNSELING

Options counseling should cover topics such as grief and loss after adoption and abortion, religious beliefs you may have, the impact of adoption or parenting on your child, financial resources, family support and attitudes, birth father involvement, abortion laws in your state, and your career and educational goals.

Even if you think adoption is the best choice, it's still a good idea to get some unbiased and judgment-free options education from a neutral party before you make a decision.

When the test came back positive, I was totally overwhelmed. My thoughts were racing and I felt completely alone. Options counseling helped me take a step back, ask questions, understand my options, and then make a decision from a place of confidence.

LYDIA M., BIRTH MOTHER

THE RIGHT ADOPTION AGENCY AND ATTORNEY

Find a licensed adoption attorney or agency in your area. Heads up! There are lots of ads online for "adoption services," but many aren't even licensed and should be avoided. Be sure to ask these questions when choosing an adoption professional:

- Are you a licensed agency or attorney?
- What services are you able to offer me?
- Will I be offered adoption counseling?
- Will I have my own attorney?
- How many families will I have to choose from? What if I don't like any of them?
- Do you charge adoptive parents a fee for introducing us? If yes, how much?
- Will we have a written open adoption agreement? Will it be enforceable?

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SEPARATE LEGAL REPRESENTATION

If you're placing a baby for adoption, you definitely need your own lawyer. Adoption is a complicated legal process. Having your own attorney is the best way to make sure you fully understand your legal rights and responsibilities during and after an adoption. The adoption agency or attorney will pay the costs for your lawyer, as long as it's reasonable.



Looking back, I can't imagine going through an adoption without my own lawyer. I knew he would have my back and tell me the truth, without sugar-coating it.

ANGILA R., BIRTH MOTHER

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THOUGHTFUL MATCHING

Choosing an adoptive family (also called "matching") is one of the most important choices you'll ever make. It's a lot easier to make a good choice if you first spend some time thinking about which qualities are most important to you. Here are a few examples of questions you should ask adoptive parents:

- Why do you want to adopt?
- What kind of childhood did you have?
- How do you feel about open adoption?
- How will you talk about adoption with your child?
- How do you keep your relationships strong?

TIP: Be sure to meet the adoptive parents in-person before making your choice. For more in-depth information, you may also request a copy of their home study.

Choosing an adoptive family isn't easy. Try not to rush or feel pressured. Look for people you have things in common with and could see yourself being friends with.

YESENIA, BIRTH MOTHER



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LIVING EXPENSES

Most states have specific laws about how much financial assistance an expectant mother can receive from the adoptive parents. Usually, the adoptive parents will be allowed to help with basic expenses such as rent, utilities, food, and transportation. Laws about living expenses vary widely from state to state, so it's important that you understand what's legal in your state before you accept any financial assistance.

CONTACT AFTER ADOPTION

Most adoptions today are open adoptions, meaning that the adoptive parents will send you photos, videos, and updates while your child is growing up. To ensure the contact continues as agreed, we recommend working with your social worker, lawyer and adoptive parents to create an "Open Adoption Agreement," sometimes called a "Post-Adoption Contact Agreement" (PACA). This is an agreement between birth parents and adoptive families that describes how the communication will go after the adoption.

State laws vary about whether these agreements can be enforced by the court. In some states they're enforceable, but in others they're simply considered a promise from the adoptive parents to keep in touch. Regardless of your state's law, make sure your agreement is in writing before you agree to the adoption. Having a written agreement is the best way for you and the adoptive parents to avoid future misunderstandings and hurt feelings.



At the time, I didn't think we needed to put our agreement in writing, but now I'm glad we did. I trust my daughter's adoptive parents, but having a written agreement gave me one less thing to worry about.

SHELBY P., BIRTH MOTHER

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COLLABORATIVE HOSPITAL PLAN

Making a hospital plan with your social worker allows you and the adoptive parents to talk through any fears and concerns about how things will go at the hospital. A good plan includes these questions:

- Who will I notify when labor begins?
- How will I get to the hospital?
- Who will be in my room during labor? How about during delivery?
- Who will hold the baby first?
- Who will cut the umbilical cord?
- What about breastfeeding?
- Will my baby stay in my room or with the adoptive parents?
- What happens at discharge?

These questions may make you feel emotional, and that's okay. The more prepared you are, the less anxious you'll be when the time comes. Remember, you have the power to have the kind of hospital experience that you want. This is your time to spend time with your baby if you choose. You may choose to have the adoptive parents in the room with you, but you also may decide that's not something you want. Both options are just fine! When you put these details in a hospital plan everyone is informed of your decisions and can do what's needed to make sure things happen the way you want them to.

QUALITY MEDICAL CARE

It's important to have a good doctor who is supportive of your adoption decision (and your right to change your mind). If you don't have medical insurance, your social worker or attorney can show you how to get it set up at no cost. The adoptive parents will pay any pregnancy-related medical expenses not covered by your insurance.

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POST-PLACEMENT SUPPORT

Your adoption journey doesn't end when adoption papers are signed. The first several weeks after your baby's birth, as you begin to recover - both physically and emotionally, will be especially tough. Give yourself time to rest, recover, and grieve. Your body and mind will need time to recuperate. It's also important to stay connected to friends and family who are supportive. There's a strong online community of birth mothers who will be there to walk through that time with you. Sometimes, the most helpful thing is knowing that you're not the first one that has placed your baby for adoption. There are other birth mothers out there who have felt what you're feeling, and they'll be there to say, "me too." Most importantly, give yourself a break. Labor and delivery takes a toll on your body; placing a child for adoption only compounds the impact.

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COUNSELING

The psychological and emotional impact of adoption will last a lifetime. While there's nothing magic about counseling, regular sessions with a therapist who is experienced with grief, loss, and other adoption issues, can make a big difference in your short-term and long-term recovery. Your social worker or attorney will refer you to some good counselors in your area that you can choose from. The adoptive parents should pay for a reasonable number of post-adoption counseling sessions, at least 10-12. Don't be afraid of counseling! You deserve to feel okay and make sense of what you're feeling.

I forced myself to go to counseling, even when I didn't feel like it. I was dealing with so many different emotions all at once; therapy helped me make sense of what I was feeling. I learned to accept the loss and eventually found joy in the midst of it.

AMBER J., BIRTH MOTHER

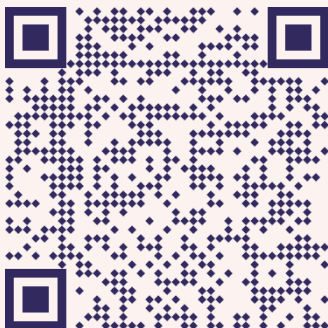


For more in-depth information on the adoption process for expectant mothers, visit:

www.adoptmatch.com

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