



# A Clinician's Guide to Adoption



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### *A Guide for Professionals*

Our Clinician's Guide to Adoption will equip you with the knowledge needed to assist and care for women facing an unintended pregnancy.



## Introduction



Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. This means that with about 2,000 new pregnancies happening every day, approximately 1,000 women on a daily basis are surprised by this unexpected news. 

Unplanned pregnancies are in no way simple. Upon discovering she is pregnant, a woman will experience a range of emotions: confusion, fear, disappointment, shock, worry. She will soon embark on a journey full of lifechanging decisions and that, to her, can feel overwhelming. As a physician, social worker, counselor, or other clinical professional, it is up to you to help guide these women (and often their partners) through this time of need. In this moment, you might be their strongest support.

If you have a patient who recently discovered she is pregnant, there are specific next steps you must take as a clinical professional. One of these may be educating your patient on her various unplanned pregnancy options, including parenthood, adoption, and abortion. Beforehand, however, there are certain questions you must ask. There are also clinical ethics you must be aware of, as well as a specialized knowledgebase you must carry, before handling this type of situation.

As a non-profit, licensed adoption agency with over 30 years of experience, Adoptions With Love can help. We work with expectant parents, birth parents, social workers, and clinical professionals nationwide in efforts to provide free-of-pressure, free-of-cost adoption services. We have created this guide especially for the doctors and nurses, counselors and social workers, whose patients may be considering adoption.

Our *Clinician's Guide to Adoption* will equip you with the knowledge needed to better assist and care for women facing an unintended pregnancy. This guide is also designed to educate you as well as your patients on the act of making an adoption plan.

In this guide, you will dismantle the myths and discover the facts about adoption. You will also learn about the adoption process for expectant/birth mothers, as well as the feelings and thoughts they may experience throughout this unanticipated journey. Here, we will provide you with the right questions to ask, positive language to use, as well as 24-hour, reputable resources to offer your patients who are facing an unplanned pregnancy.



## Initial Considerations for Clinicians

Whether you are an OB/GYN, pregnancy counselor, therapist, or part of a hospital team, you may find yourself at the center of an unplanned pregnancy situation. As a healthcare professional, you play a vital role in providing the medical and emotional support that each pregnant woman deserves. When assisting expectant or birth mothers, there are key considerations you must keep in mind:

- If you are delivering the news of a pregnancy, remember that you may not know how your patient will feel or react. She may be excited or she may be distraught. Facing an unplanned pregnancy is an emotional time for many women, especially if they are not ready to parent a child. Know that a patient's feelings of guilt, grief, anger, and sadness are in fact normal. If your patient is considering adoption for her child, she may experience feelings of loss even before her child is placed. Adoption most often involves a grieving process for expectant/birth parents, so it is imperative that you remain compassionate and refer her to an adoption professional for longer-term adoption support.
- Your patient may already have a plan for her pregnancy. On the other hand, she may need your help in making a plan for herself and her child. No matter the case, it is vital that you remain respectful as you listen to her wishes. Be empathetic and unbiased as she contemplates her options. If your patient is considering adoption, refer her to an adoption agency that will also be attentive to her desires and needs.
- Your patient is likely to take to heart everything that you offer, whether it is guidance on her options, conversations involving her pregnancy, or your own attitudes regarding her decision. It is important you remain sensitive towards your patient and consider everything you say or do that involves her pregnancy. Every conversation you have on this subject should be positive, only reflecting her wishes and your respect for her decision.
- Use positive language when talking about your patient's options, particularly adoption. Adoption is a positive, loving choice and should be talked about as so. Using language such as "make an adoption plan" instead of "giving up for adoption" and "birth/biological parents" instead of "real parents" will help rid any negative connotations or judgment. By using positive language, you can help your patient truly feel good about her choices.





## Questions for Patients Facing an Unplanned Pregnancy

In order to help someone facing an unplanned pregnancy, it is important to first gain a complete understanding of her experience. If you are her primary physician or counselor, you should know about her current state of health and medical history, as well as her feelings, values, relationships, and support system beyond your office.

To start the pregnancy and options conversation with your patient, ask a series of open-ended, delicate questions such as:

- How do you feel about this pregnancy?
- How will the father of the baby feel about your pregnancy? Will he be supportive? If she is unsure who the father is, you may be able to help her pinpoint when she became pregnant.
- Do you feel safe with him? Do you feel safe at home?
- Prior to discovering you were pregnant, what were your personal feelings about parenthood? How did you feel about adoption and abortion?
- Was motherhood always a part of your long-term plan? If so, under what circumstances would you like to become a parent?
- Do you feel ready to raise a child now, for the next 18 years and beyond?
- Do you feel abortion is an option for you now?
- Do you feel adoption is an option for you now?
- What are your goals for the future?
- How do your options impact these goals?
- Would you like to learn more about adoption?

Asking these questions will allow your patient to evaluate her current situation, beliefs, and to begin exploring her different options. At the same time, her answers can help you gain a better understanding of how she feels about her situation and what she may want to do next.



### Ask Open-Ended Questions

Give your patient time to reflect on her feelings and values, and openly explore the options that are best for her and her child.



Many of the expectant parents you counsel will be unsure about their next steps. In order to make an informed decision, they will need to gather the most accurate, unbiased information possible on each of their potential unplanned pregnancy options. It is your responsibility as a health practitioner to educate your patients on the full scope of these options – without avoiding any of the options or advocating for one option over another.

Remember, your patients trust you. They trust your experience and all of the guidance that comes with it. To maintain this sense of trust during options counseling, and to help your patient make the most informed decision possible, it is important that you:

- Create an open, comfortable, yet confidential environment for your patients. Give them the opportunity to ask questions that they may be afraid to ask at home. Let them know that you will respect their wishes and their choice, whatever it may be.
- Deliver the most neutral, factual information possible. This may require you to reach out to other professionals with relevant experience, such as an adoption agency, for third-party support. You may also choose to keep adoption pamphlets in the reception area of your office. Educate your patient on the possible outcomes of each option you discuss.
- If your patient needs further information before making an informed decision, refer her to a reputable professional for help. Adoptions With Love is a licensed, private adoption agency that offers counseling on all potential options for expectant/birth parents considering adoption.
- No matter how the information is delivered to your patients, make sure that all your personal biases are kept aside. This is an ethical standard. For example, your feelings and opinions about abortion, or your personal experiences with adoption, should not be disclosed to your patients.
- Encourage your patient to share her short-term and long-term goals. By looking ahead, she may develop a more realistic outlook on the choice that is best for her and her child.

As a professional, your role is to medically and/or emotionally support your patients. This entails active listening, providing unbiased support where it is needed, and assisting expectant and birth parents in evaluating their options. You must remember, however, that this is ultimately your patient's choice.



## The Truth About Adoption

There is no doubt adoption is an emotionally charged subject. It is often surrounded by a lot of questions, opinions, and misunderstandings. As a clinical professional, it is essential for you to separate any misinformation from fact, and learn the truth about adoption. In order to be an advocate for *all* unplanned pregnancy options, and therefore an advocate for your patients, you must retain accurate, unbiased information about adoption as a positive choice.

Coming into your office, your patient may not have great knowledge surrounding adoption. She may not be ready to parent her child, but may not have considered adoption as an option previously. Adoption once carried a stigma, and today, many expectant/birth parents fear that they will be judged negatively for making this choice. They may not know about the benefits of adoption, for their children as well as themselves.

As you educate your patients on the positive act of adoption, try to reiterate the following:

### *Adoption is not "giving up."*

All too often, society and the media say "give a child up for adoption." In hospitals, we often see BUFA, or "baby up for adoption." When we take a step back to truly look at what goes into making this choice, we realize that placing a child for adoption is the opposite of "giving up." Choosing adoption, rather, means choosing to make a thoughtful and loving, long-term plan for a child. It means providing a child with a devoted family, a secure home, an education, and a fulfilling life – a life that many women facing an unplanned pregnancy feel they cannot provide at the time of their child's birth. She may not have planned to have a baby but she can plan for that child's life.

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## *The Truth About Adoption (continued)*

### *Adoption can be positive for everyone involved, including the child and the birth mother.*

Adoption benefits all who are touched by it, not solely the adoptive parents. Research shows that expectant/birth mothers who make a loving adoption plan go on to also live a very fulfilling life. Compared with single mothers who decide to raise their child, those who choose adoption are more likely to finish school and have goals for higher education. Statistics show that these women are also less likely to divorce in the future or have another single-parent pregnancy.

Contrary to popular belief, women who make an adoption plan are not any more likely to experience negative emotional conditions like depression than single mothers. In fact, those who choose adoption have proven to have more comfort and peace of mind knowing their children are in safe and loving homes.

Adopted children also experience many advantages, including having a more stable home life and financial situation, as well as a greater propensity to excel academically and finish school. In comparison with their non-adopted counterparts, studies show that adopted children are more likely to have regular family dinners, participate in extracurricular activities, reside in safe neighborhoods, live in a two-parent home, and have consistent health insurance. Today, nine out of ten adopted children have positive feelings about their adoption. Eight out of ten have a warm and close relationship with their adoptive parents.

### *A birth mother can choose the family for her baby.*

Adoption has taken great strides over the last few decades. In the past, birth mothers did not have any say in where their child would be placed or what type of family would raise their baby. Today, expectant and birth parents can actually select the perfect adoptive family for their child. With an open adoption agency, expectant/birth parents also have the option to meet the adoptive family in person or speak with them online, over the phone, or through letters.



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## *The Truth About Adoption (continued)*

### *A birth mother has the option of maintaining a relationship with her child and the adoptive family.*

Not only can birth parents meet their child's adoptive family, they can also stay in touch with them over the years. This is called an open adoption plan. In an open adoption arrangement, expectant/birth parents define the level of contact they want with their child and his or her adoptive family after the adoption takes place. They can choose the form of contact – letters and pictures, phone conversations, texting, Skype, email, in-person meetings – as well as the frequency of contact – once a year, etc. Today, nearly 95 percent of all adoption plans have some level of ongoing contact between the biological and adoptive families.

### *It is never too late to make an adoption plan.*

Your patient may have just discovered her unplanned pregnancy. She may be in her third-trimester and still unsure of what to do next. She may be in the delivery room holding her child when she realized that she is not ready to become a parent. When parenting is not a viable option for biological mothers and fathers, they may choose to make an adoption plan.

Adoption is not an easy decision; it takes time, consideration, and strength to come to this choice. Feelings and circumstances can change over time. For example, a young woman may believe that abortion is the right choice, but may later realize she cannot go through with the procedure or it may be too late in the pregnancy to have the procedure. In this case, she may choose adoption. On the other hand, she may believe adoption is the right choice but over time decide that it is in her best interest to raise the child.

Most expectant/birth parents choose adoption later in their pregnancies or after delivery. In fact, in all states today, no woman can sign papers allowing an adoption until a certain amount of time after the baby is born. No matter how far along your patient is, even if she has just given birth, it is not too late to make an adoption plan.



### *Open Adoption is Positive*

Today, birth parents can choose the family for their baby. They can also stay in touch with the adoptive family and child over the years.



## How to Make an Adoption Plan

When expectant/birth parents choose adoption, they choose to make a plan: a plan for their pregnancy, a plan for the birth, and a plan for their child's future. They are encouraged to look ahead and thoughtfully form a plan that will benefit both themselves and their child long-term.

If your patient has chosen adoption for her baby, her next steps will be to meet with a reputable adoption professional and design a plan around her desires and needs. In creating this plan, she will have the opportunity to make momentous choices such as: who will raise her child, who will be in the delivery room, how much contact she will have with an adoptive family, as well as if and how she will stay a part of her child's life long-term.

At Adoptions With Love, expectant/birth parents have a say in how their adoption plan will go, starting with the family for their baby. We will welcome your patient to tell us all that she is looking for in an adoptive family, whether it be siblings or a two-parent home. Together, we will look through pictures, profiles, and letters from waiting parents and choose the family that best meets her wishes.

Your patient can also choose the type of adoption plan that will best meet her and her child's needs. Adoptions With Love offers open, semi-open, and closed adoption plans:

- **Open Adoption:** Open adoption typically means open communication between birth and adoptive families. If your patient desires to keep in touch with her child and his or her adoptive family, Adoptions With Love can help create a long-term, open arrangement for online, in-person, or indirect contact.
- **Semi-Open Adoption:** Some birth parents desire to receive updates of their child over the years, but prefer that any communication be mediated through an adoption agency. This is a semi-open adoption. At Adoptions With Love, we can facilitate contact between your patient, her child, and an adoptive family. We can also keep her updated through our letter and picture program.
- **Closed Adoption:** If your patient is overwhelmed by the idea of an open adoption and would prefer to keep it confidential, she can choose to leave her plan in the hands of our experienced and compassionate counselors. We will protect her identity and privacy. We will also keep letters and pictures on file, in case she would like to check-in on her child in the future.





## Adoption Resources for Clinicians and Their Patients

Clinical professionals often find themselves at the center of an unplanned pregnancy or adoption decision. Perhaps that is why you are here. You have a patient who is facing an unintended pregnancy and now exploring her options. Or, you have a patient who has just given birth and is ready to make an adoption plan. What is next?

It is imperative for you, as a healthcare or clinical professional, to stay equipped with accurate information and reputable adoption resources in order to help pregnant patients learn more about adoption. To ensure you are offering your patients the utmost adoption support, you may also consider partnering with an available, trusted adoption agency working in your state.

Adoptions With Love is a licensed, non-profit, full-service domestic adoption agency serving expectant/birth parents nationwide. Founded in 1986, our mission is to find the best home for each child in need, while offering lifelong support to all members of the adoption triad. For expectant and birth parents considering adoption, we extend a range of free services, including:

- **Complete counseling services** at all stages of the adoption journey—before, during, and after placement
- **Custom adoption plans** designed to meet the needs of each expectant/birth parent
- **Help finding quality medical care** for prenatal treatment as well as hospital delivery. We will also cover any uninsured medical expenses when birth parents complete the adoption.
- **Legal assistance** and protection provided by experienced lawyers who specialize in adoptions throughout the country
- **Housing assistance** including a deposit and several months of rent
- **Financial assistance** with utilities, maternity clothing, and other related necessities
- **Ongoing contact** through our letter and picture program or an open adoption contract



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## *Adoption Resources for Clinicians and Their Patients (continued)*

At Adoptions With Love, your patients will never be obligated to make an adoption plan; our goal will be to guide them in exploring their options, making thoughtful and educated choices, and navigating the adoption journey if and when they choose.

Adoptions With Love is fully committed to the adoption triad members we serve, as well as the social workers, physicians, hospitals, and clinical professionals that refer these young women to us. Rest assured we have the resources, experience, and devotion necessary to guide you and your patients through the adoption journey. Please do not hesitate to call us toll-free at 1-800-722-7731 for more information. Amy, Nancy, Nellie, Amelia, and Claudia are available at any time of the day, seven-days a week to answer your call.



*We are Always Here for You*

Call Adoptions With Love toll-free  
at 1-800-722-7731 or text us  
confidentially at 1-617-777-0072  
for immediate, 24/7 assistance.