



Guide to Choosing an Adoption Agency

For Expectant/Birth Parents



Adoptions
with Love, Inc.



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Pregnant and considering adoption?



You have made the brave decision to place your baby for adoption. You have done your research, understand your options, and are ready to take the next step in creating a loving adoption plan for your child. Who will you choose to support you throughout this journey?

In facing an unplanned pregnancy, it can be difficult for expectant/birth parents to know just where they can turn for reliable, ongoing support. There are thousands of different adoption services and professionals available today, but who is best able to give you the assistance you need and deserve?

The adoption agency you select will be an integral part of your adoption plan, so it is important to take your time with this decision and choose wisely. The right adoption agency will be by your side not only as you prepare for the adoption, but also after placement and throughout your life. These are the professionals who will help you design the perfect adoption plan for your baby and the people who will ensure everything stays on track with your plan. The right agency will not only remain committed to you, but also to your child as he or she grows. It is important, therefore, to follow your heart and your mind throughout this process. Choose the agency that can best answer your questions, that makes you feel most at ease, that listens to your wishes, and that can give you the support you deserve.

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Pregnant and considering adoption? con't



Are you ready to make an adoption plan for your baby? If so, it is time to find a trusted, reputable, and compassionate adoption professional to help you start the process. Your first step will be to research your various options. Once you have an idea of the type of adoption support you want to pursue, you will want to prepare a list of all of the questions that are important to you. Then find an agency that welcomes your questions and is prepared to provide you with open, unbiased answers and advice.

In this guide, we will walk you through the many questions you should be contemplating (and asking!) before settling on an adoption agency. In providing you with these considerations, we hope to lead you to the best possible adoption agency for you and your baby.

Before we get started, let us take a minute to understand the different types of adoption professionals out there today.

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Facing an Unplanned Pregnancy?

This guide can help you find the adoption support you need and deserve.



Types of Adoption Professionals



Adoption Facilitators

Adoption facilitators connect expectant/birth parents with prospective adoptive parents in exchange for a fee. In most cases, that is the extent of what they do. Adoption facilitators are not professionals and typically only provide matching services for expectant parents and potential adoptive parents. The benefit of working with a facilitator is that they often have many waiting families available that you can choose. This makes it easy for you to find a family for your baby that fits both your wants and needs.

The drawback with adoption facilitators is that they are not licensed professionals and are therefore illegal in many states. They are unregulated by the government and are not certified to complete your adoption plan. This means that you, as an expectant parent, will be required to find additional support to legalize your baby's adoption and provide you with any other assistance you need throughout your pregnancy and after the adoption takes place. Adoption facilitators do not offer any ongoing contact or extensive services, like counseling or financial assistance, to expectant/birth parents.

Adoption Attorneys

Adoption attorneys are legal professionals who specialize in adoptions of their state. They are needed for the legal aspects of the adoption process, and for that reason, are often included in the offerings of a full-service adoption agency. However, many adoption attorneys choose to work independently to assist expectant and adoptive parents and facilitate the adoption process.

If you choose to work with an adoption lawyer as your primary adoption professional, you will be pursuing an independent adoption. Frequently, this means that you will seek out an adoptive family on your own or with the help of your attorney, and then together create an adoption plan for your baby. There are some attorneys who will have prospective adoptive families from which you can choose. In an independent, lawyer-facilitated adoption, you will transfer your parental rights directly to the adoptive parents. There may not be a contract regarding post-placement contact or services following the adoption.

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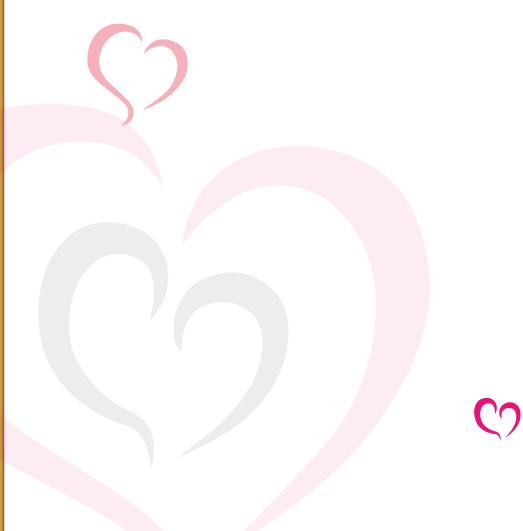


Types of Adoption Professionals con't

Private Adoption Agencies

Private adoption agencies work with expectant/birth parents and waiting adoptive families to assure the best possible future for the child. They are licensed by the state to provide services to pregnant women, birth parents, and adoptive families at each stage of the adoption process. Unlike adoption facilitators, law centers, and attorneys, the majority of adoption agencies today are fully committed to YOUR adoption plan. They will offer resources and guidance to you at each stage of the process, and even after the adoption takes place. Adoption agencies are legally able to complete adoptions from beginning to end, and typically provide the most adoption services to expectant mothers like you.

If you choose to work with a private adoption agency, you can rest assured that your baby will be placed in a safe and stable home. Adoption agency social workers are the only professionals certified to complete an extensive screening process and home study for all adoptive families. Many agencies today allow you to design your adoption plan, offering guidance and support throughout your adoption journey.





Once you know who can best help you with your baby's adoption plan, schedule a meeting or phone call with some prospective adoption professionals. Then, prepare the following questions.

Are they a licensed adoption agency?

While there are many different adoption services out there today, it is vital to work with someone who is reputable, trained, and licensed. Licensed adoption professionals are the people who are best trained to complete your baby's adoption plan.

One benefit of working with a private adoption agency is that they are required to maintain updated adoption licensure. Adoption agencies are obliged to follow state standards regarding adoption and are reviewed regularly by the government to ensure that they comply with the proper adoption regulations and ethics. Agencies such as **Adoptions With Love** have expert teams throughout the United States who are up-to-date on adoption laws and have experience completing adoptions in all states—including yours!

You may be wondering, "Why does working with a licensed adoption agency matter to me?" Why not do this on your own? An independent adoption with the help of an adoption lawyer or facilitator is not always guaranteed to give your baby the adoption plan you desire. Because facilitators are unlicensed and unregulated by the government, they are not able to fully support you throughout the entire adoption journey. They cannot complete home studies for potential adoptive families, and therefore, cannot assure the safety of your baby's prospective home. If you desire an open adoption, they are not able to offer you legal contracts regarding post-placement contact.

Licensed, private adoption agencies, on the other hand, are required to perform home studies and background checks for every potential adoptive family to ensure that they are fit to parent a baby. Like Adoptions With Love, most private agencies have trained adoption experts who can design legal, binding contracts regarding your post-adoption plan. With a licensed adoption agency, you will have control over your adoption plan as well as consistent, professional support.





How long has the agency been in existence?

Adoption has changed greatly over the last several decades. The services, opportunities, and personalized plans available to expectant mothers today are greater than ever before. In choosing an adoption agency, you will want to consider who has the most experience with all types of adoption. Who has seen adoption transform over the years, and who can offer you the most balanced, knowledgeable advice?

By asking how many years an adoption professional has been in existence, you will be able to gain a better sense of who is most experienced in the adoption field. A reputable adoption agency should be able to provide you with their ethics, background, and their staff's qualifications as adoption professionals. Their team of experts should be able to tell you about their training and education within the field. Most of all, a highly experienced adoption agency will be able to educate YOU on all the options you have surrounding your baby's adoption.

Adoptions With Love has been assisting expectant parents nationwide for over thirty years. Since 1986, we have thoughtfully placed nearly 2,000 children in loving adoptive homes.



Years of Experience

Adoptions With Love has been assisting expectant parents nationwide for over 30 years. Ask your agency about their experience.



Is this agency a non-profit organization?

There are over two thousand adoption agencies today. Some agencies have a mission to generate profits from each adoption placement, while others' main purpose and true hope is to build loving families and provide the best possible homes for children.

It is extremely important, therefore, to research your potential adoption agency. Even more than this, it is important to listen to your heart. Who do you feel is most trustworthy and concerned with your wellbeing? Who will be there for you throughout this emotional journey? Who will extend a hand to you at every step of the way? The right adoption agency will fully commit to you and your child not just now, but for years to come.

A not-for-profit adoption agency is a social service agency. They will put the life and safety of your child first, no matter the cost. While for-profit adoption agencies may match your baby with the most accessible adoptive family, a non-profit agency will seek out the best fitting home for your child.

As you consider this question, try to keep your own comfort level in mind and choose an agency that truly cares about your unique situation.



Non-Profit Agencies

Non-profit adoption agencies are social service agencies. They will put the life and safety of your child first, no matter the cost.



Does the agency support open, semi-open, and closed adoption plans?



As adoption has evolved over the years, more and more options have become available to expectant/birth parents making an adoption plan. Today, expectant parents like you can control the adoption plan for their baby. You can now choose between an open, semi-open, or closed adoption plans. These are your choices.

Thirty years ago, nearly all adoptions were closed. Pregnant women who were not ready to parent often had no say in where their child would be placed. They could not choose or meet an adoptive family; these important decisions were entrusted to their adoption agency. Now, open adoption has become the norm. In fact, nearly 95 percent of adoption agencies offer open adoption, semi-open, as well as closed adoption plans. This means that you can now maintain some form of contact with your child and his or her family if you wish.

As you begin your adoption plan, be sure to ask your agency what types of adoptions they offer. Are all of their waiting families comfortable with some form of openness? By having some extent of openness, you will be able to meet the family ahead of time, and communicate them before and/or after the adoption takes place. Even if open adoption is not what you want at this time, you may want access letters and pictures, or the contact information of your child, somewhere down the road. An agency that supports open adoption will support your wishes and help you in this process. They will also educate you regarding open adoption plans and help you decide the amount of contact that works best for you. They do not have policies that will limit your communication options.

The beauty of adoption today is that you now have all of these choices, so it is important to work with a professional who gives you options. By choosing an agency that offers all types of adoption plans, you can rest assured that your plan will be in your control. Only you know what is best for you and your baby. Adoption plans are not one-size-fits-all. Every woman has a unique situation, and your agency should support you in whichever path of adoption you choose. Your selected adoption agency should never try to pressure you into making a certain kind of adoption plan.



How will the agency support your adoption post-placement?

Before you commit to an adoption agency, make sure you fully understand their involvement with your adoption plan after the birth of your baby. Do they offer post-adoption contracts to support your adoption plan? Are they available to mediate any ongoing contact with the adoptive family, if you wish?

Once your baby is placed with an adoptive family, your adoption agency should ensure that your wishes as a birth mother are still met by everyone involved in the adoption. Many private adoption agencies offer post-adoption contracts to help birth parents and adoptive families stick to their desired adoption plan. These agreements create clarity regarding post-placement contact, visits, and the amount of information that can be shared with your child. While binding, these agreements can be updated as the years go on and as your wants and needs, as well as your child's, change.

Only private adoption agencies can offer these legal contracts. If you choose to pursue independent adoption, there is a risk that your adoption plan may be disregarded following your baby's placement. Because adoption facilitators are not certified to issue these contracts, adoptive couples do not legally have to follow the adoption plan.



Sometimes in a semi-open adoption, expectant/birth mothers only want limited contact with their child or the adoptive family. This may be the case for you. Right now, you may only wish to receive letter and picture updates from your child's adoptive family. Is this something your agency can promise? Perhaps you want to communicate with the adoptive family over the phone. Will the agency serve as an intermediary for that call, and help ease the conversation? If you want face-to-face visits with your child and his or her parents, will an agency social worker help to arrange and facilitate that meeting?

The right adoption agency will be there for you if you want them to get involved. **Adoptions With Love**, for example, still receives calls from birth mothers who placed their children almost thirty years ago asking for assistance. We are always here for them.



Do they work with attorneys who know the adoption laws of your area?

Adoption attorneys, while not always sufficient as independent adoption professionals, are necessary for the adoption journey. These are the professionals who can finalize an adoption and ensure that your baby is safely placed in his or her new home. For this reason, it is crucial to find an adoption agency who works closely with experienced lawyers specializing in the adoption field.

Adoption laws vary state to state. When interviewing prospective adoption agencies, you will want to make sure that both agency attorneys and social workers understand the laws of your region. If the adoption agency has experienced teams working throughout the United States, there is a better chance they are up to date with the laws of your area.

It is also important to choose an adoption agency that recognizes all of your rights as an expectant mother considering adoption. Your right to confidentiality, financial and emotional assistance, and your right to respect should always be upheld. Make sure to choose an agency that works with attorneys to protect those rights.

Private agencies such as **Adoptions With Love** want to ensure that you have the right legal support and representation. That is why we will provide you with an adoption attorney who is specifically trained in the adoption laws of your state, at no cost to you. Our adoption lawyers are available to answer your questions, ease your concerns, help you navigate paperwork, and defend your rights at every stage of your adoption plan.



Legal Support

Adoption laws vary state to state. Ask your agency if they work with attorneys who specialize in the adoption laws of your area.



Do they offer financial assistance for expectant/birth mothers?

We understand that an unplanned pregnancy involves several unexpected (and expensive) costs to expectant mothers. If you choose to create an adoption plan for your baby, however, you will not have to pay for these bills all on your own. Today, the majority of private agencies offer some financial aid for pregnant women considering adoption. Before you select an adoption agency, be sure to ask what specific financial assistance they can provide throughout this journey.

Unlike adoption facilitators and lawyers, private adoption agencies are able to cover many of the costs associated with your pregnancy. We recognize that it may become difficult for you to work as your pregnancy progresses. We also realize that you may not be able to live in your current home, especially if your family or friends are unsupportive of your pregnancy.

That is why **Adoptions With Love** will assist you with living expenses. We can pay a deposit for a new apartment, for example, and help with rent towards the end of your pregnancy and for the weeks following your baby's birth and placement. In this time, we can also assist with utility bills, food and medications, and maternity clothing as needed. We will help you to find quality medical care, provide transportation for you to go back-and-forth to doctor's appointments, as well as help with any uninsured medical expenses and delivery fees once your adoption is complete.

No matter your age or location, you should never feel as though certain resources are unavailable to you. No adoption agency should make you feel afraid to ask for financial help. The right adoption agency will strive to make sure all your needs are met throughout your adoption journey.



Financial Assistance

Does your agency offer financial aid?
Do they offer assistance with food,
living, or maternity-related
expenses?



Are there counseling services available throughout the adoption process?

Adoption is a lifelong journey. As you go through this experience, you will want a trusted hand to guide you. That is where a private adoption agency can help.

Unlike adoption facilitators or lawyers, most agency social workers are professionally, clinically trained and are there for you throughout the entirety of the adoption process: during your pregnancy, through your baby's placement, and long after the adoption has been finalized. Most private agencies today offer free counseling services to expectant/birth parents considering adoption.

The right adoption agency will consist of compassionate, experienced professionals who can educate you regarding your options, prepare you for adoption, and be there for you around the time of your baby's birth. They will continue to offer you emotional support following your baby's adoption, as you transition back to your life once again. Your relationship with your adoption counselor does not have to end after placing your baby with a loving family. Your counselor does not just disappear. With a private agency counselor, you can always reach out for support.

Adoption is a positive option for women facing an unplanned pregnancy. Making an adoption plan for your baby is one of the most difficult and emotional decisions you will ever make. It is also one of the most loving, caring and unselfish decisions you will ever make. In choosing an adoption agency, you will want to ask about their ongoing counseling options. Can you continue to talk with their therapists after the adoption? Can they provide other resources for you as you continue your adoption journey? Do they offer support groups or meetings for additional help?





What is the agency's screening process for adoptive families?



The goal of any considerate, professional adoption agency is to find the best possible home for your child. In order to do so, they must be able to prove the safety, security, and readiness of each potential family.

One of the most important questions you can ask a prospective adoption agency is how they screen their many adoptive families. How do they ensure that a family is fit to raise your baby? How do they confirm that your baby will be placed in a safe and secure environment? How do they determine the well-being of the family and the future of your child?

Having the answers to these questions may give you peace of mind as you move forward in the adoption process. Knowing that your baby will grow up in a thriving, devoted, loving and stable home can be one of the most fulfilling validations for you as an expectant parent. Before you ask this question, however, it is important to understand what makes a good screening process, and who offers it.

A good adoptive family screening process is a long and thorough one. It should include a several month-long home study process, as well as a series of background checks for the immediate family. They must pass all home study requirements according to state regulations before being considered ready to adopt a child. In the home study process, a trained agency professional will visit potential adoptive parents in their home. She will evaluate the family's motivation to adopt, their relationships and emotional stability, their education histories, medical backgrounds, jobs and financial income, as well as their parenting attitudes and aptitude. The social worker will also make note of the family structure (pets and other children included), the family's home and neighborhood, and perform FBI and state background checks to ensure the safety of your child.

This is a detailed process designed to prepare potential adoptive families for adoption and make certain that your baby will be placed in loving hands. This extensive screening process can only be conducted by licensed adoption agencies. Adoption facilitators and lawyers are not qualified to investigate the home environments of your child's future adoptive family.



Can the agency offer unbiased advice and respect for any choice you make?

In the end, it is your choice whether you wish to complete an adoption plan for your baby. As an expectant mother and as a birth parent, you maintain the right to explore other unplanned pregnancy options, to take time in making your final decision, as well as the right to change your mind. The time you have to change your mind regarding your baby's adoption will be limited depending on the laws of your state.

Take all the time you need to decide whether or not adoption is right for you. Even when your baby is born, temporary care is available for your baby as you contemplate this choice. This is one of the biggest decisions of your life. You should never, at any point, feel pressured or misled by your adoption professional. You should never feel coerced by family, friends, or peers to make a decision you are not comfortable making. This is your choice.

From the very beginning, the adoption agency you choose should be there to educate you about all of your options—not only your options surrounding adoption. The right adoption agency will discuss all your choices and help prepare you for what you may experience in the future regarding your adoption plan. While many adoption agencies are in the business to facilitate adoptions, there are compassionate, non-profit agencies that are there support you through this significant choice. What if you change your mind? Will they support your choice? Most of all, will they respect your decision? The right agency will.



This is Your Choice

You deserve to know all of your options.
Make sure you feel comfortable,
confident, and free to make your
own decision.



Can the adoption agency put you in contact with birth mothers they have worked with previously?

When exploring your various adoption agency options, you may consider asking for references from a prospective agency. Instead of asking for reviews, ask the adoption professional if you can speak directly with other expectant/birth mothers they have worked with in the past.

Sometimes it helps to talk to others you can relate to, and the right adoption agency will recognize this. If you request, they will put you in touch with other women who have been through similar situations. Many agencies today also offer group meetings where birth mothers come and speak to expectant mothers. If this is something your potential agency offers, ask if you can join the conversation.



Connect with Others

It may be helpful to speak with other birth mothers who have gone through this process. Ask your agency for references.



How long will it take to place your baby with a loving adoptive family?

When considering adoption agencies, you will want to assure that your baby is cared for from the minute he or she comes into the world. Whether it is with you, the nurses at the hospital, or the adoptive parents you choose, you want to rest assured that your baby is nurtured, safe, and loved. It is important to have a good understanding of how quickly an adoption agency will find the perfect home for your child.

For most adoption agencies, the time between the birth of a baby and the placement is usually short. However, if you contact an agency late into your pregnancy, finding the right family for your baby may take some time. If this is your case, do not worry. The right adoption agency will help you find the best family for your baby and create a plan that works for you and your baby. In this plan, you can decide whether you want to spend time with your baby in the hospital or if you want your baby to bond with an adoptive family. If you have not yet chosen an adoptive family, you can plan how your baby will be cared for until the right parents are found.



Waiting Period

Your baby should be cared for the minute he or she enters the world. Ask your agency how much time it will take to find an adoptive family.



How will you know when you have found the right adoption agency?



Just as you knew adoption was the right choice for your baby's future, you will also know when you have found the right adoption agency to help you through this journey. As you explore your many adoption agency options, decide what is truly important to you. Then see what adoption professional can best address your wishes and your needs. The right adoption agency will always listen to you, will warmly answer all of your questions, and will continue to be there for you and your child.

After interviewing prospective agencies, ask yourself which adoption professionals will take a lifelong interest in you and your baby. Who will be there for you throughout the process, not just the day the baby is born? At **Adoptions with Love**, we encourage you to contact us at any time before, during and after your adoption plan takes place.

Choosing an adoption agency is a decision that is as equally as important as choosing a reputable doctor. You should use the best professional to help you with this important decision. There are thousands of potential agencies out there, some local and others at the click of a button, but only one will make the most sense for you. How do you choose which is the right one for you and your child? It is a decision that should be made with a little research, a lot of trust, and all of the right questions asked.

We hope this guide has helped you understand how to choose the best adoption agency for you. If you have any questions, or would like to set up some time to meet with the staff at **Adoptions With Love**, do not hesitate to contact us. You can reach Amy, Nancy, Claudia, and Amelia toll-free at 1-800-722-7731, or **text us confidentially at 617-777-0072**. We truly look forward to being a part of your journey.



It's Never Too Late

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