

# The Massachusetts Adoption Process

A Guide for Adoptive Parents

 Adoptions  
with Love, Inc.



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## Massachusetts Adoption

In this guide, we will walk you through choosing an adoption agency, making an adoption plan, sharing the news, advertising, & more!



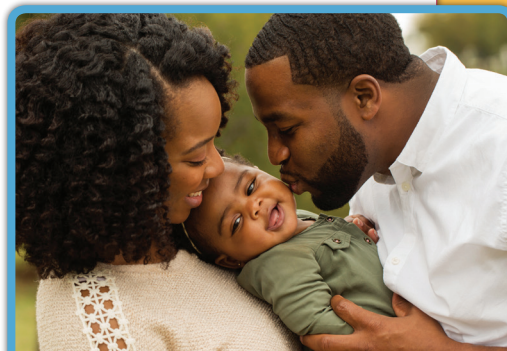
## Introduction

Adoption is an incredible way to grow a family. It is a path taken with great compassion, consideration, hope, and strength. When you make the choice to adopt, you are making the choice to provide safety, stability, and love for a child. You are choosing to open your stable home, to become a forever family, and to fulfill your dream of becoming a parent.

The adoption process, as exciting and joyous as it may be, can also feel intimidating for prospective adoptive parents. You may have heard about all the legal, financial, and emotional preparations that adoption entails. If you have experienced infertility, you may be feeling especially overwhelmed about starting the adoption process. We understand what you are going through, and want you to know that you do not have to go through this process alone.

If you are considering adopting a baby in Massachusetts, rest assured that Adoptions With Love is here for you. We are a non-profit, private, domestic adoption agency providing services to adopting families across the Bay State. It is our goal to help you through the adoption process and ensure that it is a positive, favorable experience for your family. It is our mission to find the best possible home for each child, and to find that home right here in Massachusetts with you.

In this guide, we will walk you through each step of the Massachusetts' adoption process. From choosing an adoption agency to finalizing the adoption, from telling family and friends to meeting with an expectant/birth mother, we will show you exactly how adoption works with Adoptions With Love. If and when you are ready, know that you can always call and set up a private consultation, free-of-charge, with one of our experienced social workers. We will help you decide if adoption is the right path for you and your family, and help you prepare for the process.



### How to Adopt in MA

Adoption and home study requirements vary state to state. Adoptions With Love can help you navigate the adoption process in Massachusetts.



## Choosing a Path Towards Adoption

If you are ready to grow your family through adoption, your first step will be deciding which type of adoption you would like to pursue. In Massachusetts, you have the option to adopt a child from foster care, adopt a child internationally, or adopt domestically through a private adoption agency.

### Foster Care Adoption

About 25 percent of children in the United States' foster care system are eligible for adoption. These children have been removed from their homes or parents' care, and are in need of a permanent family. Many of these children are older, have siblings, or have additional needs. Foster care adoption is a great option for those who are open to adopting any child (or multiple children), regardless of their age or background. To adopt a child from foster care, you will work with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) and/or an agency with a DCF contract.

### International Adoption

Adopting a child from another part of the world is also possible for hopeful parents in Massachusetts. This is known as an "international" or "intercountry" adoption. To adopt internationally, you must work with a Hague Accredited intercountry adoption agency. It is important to note that the requirements, laws, costs, and wait times associated with international adoption will vary, depending on the country and the agency you choose.

*more* →



### Types of Adoption

If you would like to adopt a baby right in the U.S., you can do so through foster care or a licensed, private adoption agency.



## *Choosing a Path Towards Adoption (continued)*

### *Private, Domestic Agency Adoption*

While there are many orphans overseas, there are also thousands of children and infants here in the United States looking for stable, permanent homes. If you would like to adopt a newborn domestically, private adoption is the best route. Many waiting adoptive parents choose to adopt a baby domestically because they get a lot of medical information and personal information about the birth parents. They also choose private, domestic adoption for the openness it offers. For example, most domestic infant adoptions today are open. This means that a relationship between the birth mother and adoptive parents exist, which studies show is very beneficial for the child.

To adopt an infant in Massachusetts, prospective parents are required to work with a licensed agency like Adoptions With Love. We are a licensed, full-service, private, non-profit, domestic adoption agency offering a range of services to waiting adoptive parents. Adoptions With Love is currently in contact with expectant/birth mothers nationwide, and can help you grow your family when you are ready.



### *Private Adoption Agencies*

Most families who decide to adopt a baby in the U.S. will work with a private, licensed, full-service adoption agency.



## Selecting an Adoption Agency

Massachusetts is considered an “agency” state, which means all families are required to work with a licensed adoption agency in order to adopt a baby. If you have decided to pursue a private, domestic infant adoption in the Bay State, choosing a reputable adoption agency will be your next big step.

In general, there are two types of private agencies you can work with in Massachusetts. You can choose a full-service adoption agency, which offers complete legal assistance, advertising and matching, home study services, post-adoption support, and more all for a flat-fee. Or, you can choose to work with an agency that charges variable fees per expectant/birth parent situation, but has limited service offerings. The latter agencies might appear to be less costly, however, there is greater financial risk and the possibility of losing your finances should the adoption fall through. A full-service adoption agency will commit to working with you on adoptions until you have your baby.

### *The Benefits of a Full-Service, Private, Non-Profit Adoption Agency*

There are many other benefits to working with a local, full-service adoption agency. For example, you can meet face-to-face with social workers to talk through the adoption process. You will have numerous opportunities to ask questions, get answers, and express your wishes and concerns along the way. With a local, full-service agency like Adoptions With Love, you can expect a lot of support through the process, a more personalized adoption plan, continued post-adoption support, and many services relating to the legal and emotional aspects of adoption. Continue onto the following page for details!



#### What is “Full-Service”?

Full-service adoption agencies like AWL offer full legal assistance, advertising, home study services, post-adoption support, and more.



## Adoptive Parent Services at Adoptions With Love

As a full-service, private adoption agency, the staff at Adoptions With Love is trained and licensed to provide the following services to hopeful adoptive parents in Massachusetts:

- Home study services
- Comprehensive advertising and matching with expectant/birth parents
- Full legal services, including termination of birth father's rights
- ICPC and adoption finalization services
- Pre-adoptive educational seminars to prepare for your baby's arrival
- Post-adoption education and counseling for you and your child
- Post-placement letter and picture program

An adoption agency is an integral part of the adoption process, so it is important to take your time while researching adoption agencies and their offered services. Adoption is a lifelong decision. Follow your heart and your mind with this decision, and choose wisely. The right agency will be by your side not only as you prepare to adopt, but also after the adoption is finalized. Their support services will help you navigate the adoption process and beyond.

As a full-service agency, Adoptions With Love wants you to know that our staff is always here for you. We will not only commit to you, but also to your child as he or she grows – through counseling sessions, through our Search & Reunion or Letter & Picture programs, or simply to chat. We are always here to answer your questions and provide you with the services you need to truly grow your family.



### Lifetime Adoption Services

Adoptions With Love is always here for you, from navigating the adoption process to providing counseling for your family.



## Massachusetts Adoption Requirements

Once you select an adoption agency, it will be time to apply to adopt. If you are considering working with Adoptions With Love, one of our clinical social workers will schedule a consultation to meet with you and go over the preliminary application process and requirements. At this private consultation, you will have the opportunity to ask questions and have a conversation about the realities of domestic adoption.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires all prospective adoptive parents to complete a thorough application process, which includes a several-month-long home study, FBI background checks, as well as relevant documentation. In order to adopt, state law also requires:

- You are an adult
- You either rent or own a home
- Your home has adequate space, privacy, and safety for all family members (children of the same gender may share a bedroom)
- You attend a training course that prepares you for adoption and parenthood
- You complete a home study before being approved to adopt

Private adoption agencies may also have guidelines and requirements for prospective adoptive parents. For example, Adoptions With Love asks that all hopeful parents submit letters of recommendation in addition to their adoption application.

Once you submit your application, including all supporting documents, Adoptions With Love will contact you within two weeks. Your family will be assigned a social worker from our staff, and the first meeting of the home study process will be scheduled. You will also enroll in baby care training sessions to prepare for parenthood (if you are a first-time parent, per Massachusetts law) in addition to group sessions at Adoptions With Love. These sessions are a great opportunity to meet other waiting parents and to learn about things like the adoption process, meeting expectant/birth parents, traveling to pick up your child, and talking with family, friends, and your child about adoption.





## Starting the Home Study Process

A home study is a two to three-month long process that allows us to get to know you, your family, and your home. It involves a series of interviews and planned visits by a licensed social worker, as well as several background checks to ensure you can provide a safe and stable home. In Massachusetts, only a licensed adoption professional can perform a home study and determine if families meet the necessary requirements.

While this may sound intimidating, the home study process is designed to educate as well as evaluate a family's readiness to adopt a child. At Adoptions With Love, we help prepare you to become parents through adoption. We are here to find the best possible home for each child, while also helping you to find the best possible match for your family. By learning more about you during the home study, we are able to match you with expectant/birth parents who are looking for a family like yours, too!

During the home study process, an Adoptions With Love social worker will meet with you in our office and make planned visits to your home. These will help us become better acquainted with your family members, your household, and your community. We will ensure that your home is equipped with safety measures like smoke detectors, and that there is adequate space to raise a child.

We will also use this time to get a better sense of your family compatibility and relationships, parenting ability, personal and medical background, and financial stability. You do not need to be wealthy to adopt you just need to be financially, emotionally, and physically able to meet your family's basic needs. During your home study, we will talk about your reasons for wanting to adopt as well as your wishes and hopes for the adoption.

You will also be required to submit a series of documents as part of the home study process. This will include your birth certificate, tax documents, marriage certificate (if applicable), educational and medical histories, a statement from your physician, and personal references. The Massachusetts home study will include you (the adoptive parents) as well as any household member.

Not only does the home study process allow us to get to know you, it also provides a great opportunity for you to get to know us. During the home visits and interview stages, we encourage you to ask us questions and get to know more about how our compassionate, non-profit adoption agency works.



## Creating Your Adoptive Family Profile

Completing the pre-screening process means you are one step closer to becoming a parent! Now comes the fun part – creating your Adoptive Family Profile.

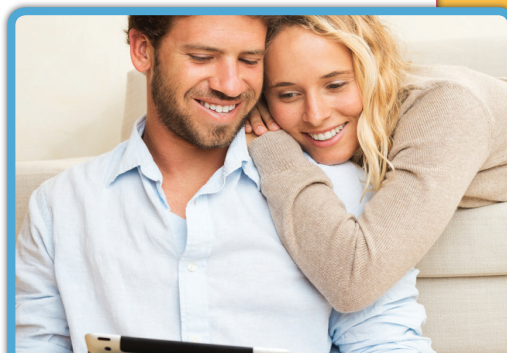
An Adoptive Family Profile is a compilation of photos, personal letters, and information about your family: who you are, where you live, what you love doing, and your reasons for adopting. It will be shared with expectant/birth parents who are looking to find a family for their baby.

Your adoption profile will be an expectant/birth mother's "first look" into your family and life. It will help paint a picture of the type of home her child can possibly have. She will want to know things like, "Will my child have siblings, pets, a big yard to play in, or a close-knit community in the city?" and "Is the family be religious, educated, working, creative, outdoorsy?" Most expectant/birth parents will be looking for a connection with you. The more information you include in your adoption profile, the more likely they are to connect with it.

The goal of an adoption profile is not to connect with every expectant/birth mother out there, but to connect with the right one for you. Your Adoptive Family Profile should therefore represent who you are, what makes you unique, as well as what you feel will make you a great parent.

Adoptive Family Profiles are mostly visual, including colorful photos of your life, family, and the love that you share. If you love adventures, include photos of your family traveling or enjoying a hike. If you are married, share photos from your wedding day. Include photos of your pets, too! Your album will be complemented by personal letters to the birth/expectant parents, which will speak more to your family and your adoption journey.

If you work with Adoptions With Love, we will assist you in designing your album and writing your letters. We will also help you reach (and put you in touch) with expectant/birth parents. An adoption profile promoted by a licensed agency is generally better received than a profile posted on the internet, because we are committed to helping you grow your family.



### Making a Connection

AWL will help you design your album, write your letters, advertise your profile, and put you in touch with expectant/birth mothers.



## While Waiting...

Adoptions With Love will begin promoting your Adoptive Parent Profile from the moment it is finished, however, it can take several months before a match is made. Our goal is to find the best possible match for your family and for each child, which inevitably will take time. At Adoptions With Love, waiting families can expect to welcome a child home within 6 to 18 months of completing their home study.

Most adoptive parents will agree that this – waiting to be chosen by an expectant/birth parent – is the hardest part of the adoption process. Fortunately, there are ways you can take advantage of the time:

- **Join support groups and meet with other waiting families.** Joining a support group will allow you to get to know other families who are in similar shoes. This can be a great opportunity to talk through your feelings, ask questions, and get the advice and support you need.
- **Read everything you can.** Gather resources about adoption and raising adopted children. Do not forget to pick up some child care and development books, too, especially if this is your first baby.
- **Keep a journal.** Journals are a great way to document your feelings and excitement throughout the adoption process. Written or video journals can also make great keepsakes for your child.
- **Prepare your home.** While you do not need to buy a crib just yet, you can start preparing your home by making sure it is child-proofed. You can also tackle your to-do list, which might include some outstanding organization or home improvement projects, before your baby's arrival. This might also include preparing your pets, as well.
- **Exercise.** You will soon be lifting, carrying, bending, and running more than you have in ages, and doing it all while holding a baby. Try to get in-shape pre-parenthood!
- **Do something for yourself.** Whether it is spending a day at the spa, traveling to a new place, or taking up a new hobby, be sure to check something off your "someday" list. Once you become a parent, your schedule will get crazy. Do the things you want to do while you have the time now.

Most importantly, remember that adoption is a marathon, not a sprint. Keep a positive attitude and never lose hope throughout the process. Adoptions With Love is dedicated to expanding your family through adoption. It will all be worth the wait.



## Considering Open Adoption

As part of the adoption process, you will spend some time talking with your social worker about your desired adoption plan. She will ask you a series of questions to help determine which expectant/birth mothers are the best match for your wishes, and vice versa. You may share preferences such as race, medical background, substance usage, and perhaps most notably, your desired level of openness in the adoption.

Openness, or an open adoption, means that a relationship exists between the birth and adoptive parents. Of course, this can mean different things to different people. For some, an open adoption will involve an expectant mother choosing and meeting the parents for her baby. Some open adoptions entail ongoing communication between a birth mother and the adoptive family, whether through letters, pictures, phone calls, texting, emails, Skype, or in-person visits.

Today, about 95 percent of domestic adoption plans are open, meaning that the majority of adoptive families have established a relationship with their child's biological family. At Adoptions With Love, all our adoptive families have agreed to at least a semi-open adoption. They are committed to sharing letters and pictures with their child's birth parents, and many have continued deeper levels of contact.

It is important to know that open adoption does not mean co-parenting. We understand this is a common concern among waiting adoptive parents. Open adoption, rather, provides an opportunity for the adoptive and birth families to get to know one another. Adoptive parents can reach out to their child's birth mother with any questions regarding medical or family history. Children also have a direct avenue to learn about their birth family's history and further form their identity having that information.

Studies show that children in open adoption arrangements are generally happier than those with closed adoption plans. Children who meet their birth mothers in-person have the highest levels of satisfaction.

As an open adoption agency, Adoptions With Love encourages you to be flexible with your preferences and to consider the benefits of open adoption. The more flexible and open-minded you are with your plan, the more adoption opportunities you will be eligible for and the less time you will wait for match. Many birth mothers will only look for families who are open to openness.



## Meet or Establish Contact with an Expectant/Birth Mother

Once an expectant/birth mother selects your family, it is common for them to want to get to know you. In an open or semi-open plan, this might involve meeting in-person, talking on the phone, or exchanging emails before the adoption takes place. Adoptions With Love encourages this level of contact and will help to coordinate this communication. For example, we can arrange a conference call for you and the expecting mother and/or schedule a meeting for all of you. If you and the expectant/birth mother choose to meet in-person, keep in mind you may have to travel to the state in which she resides.

It is completely normal to feel a bit nervous about this next step. Meeting the expectant/birth mother can feel much like a first date. You want to be the perfect match for her baby. You want her to like you. You want the conversation to go smoothly. The good news is, it most often does.

When you meet with an expectant/birth mother, you will have the opportunity to ask questions and get to know her – what she likes to do, what her family background is, what she is looking for in an adoptive family. She will ask you questions, too, about your family, your hobbies and traditions, and even what you look forward to doing with the child once he or she is born. Together, you can also discuss things like your hopes for the adoption and even post-adoption contact with one another. This conversation can help reassure everyone if there is a true match.

This initial connection could happen prior to the baby's birth, or even at the hospital once the baby is born. The choice to meet you will be up to the birth mother, her comfort level, and ultimately her desire for openness. It is important that you, as future adoptive parents, remain open-minded and flexible as you wait to welcome your child home.



### Open to Openness

After matching, a birth mother may want to get to know you - her baby's future family. This meeting can bring peace of mind for everyone.



## Telling Family and Friends

Choosing to adopt a baby is one of the most exciting, momentous decisions you will ever make in your lifetime. You are on the way to fulfilling your dream of becoming a parent, and are likely very eager to share the news. Before you do, there are just a few considerations you will want to keep in mind.

**Adoption can be a long process.** Unlike pregnancy, there is not always a set “due date” for waiting adoptive families. Before you can adopt a baby in Massachusetts, you must complete the several-month home study process and then wait to be matched with an expectant/birth mother. If you tell friends and family about the adoption right away, bear in mind you might get endless questions about when your little one will arrive. That said, many adoptive parents choose to tell a handful of trusted loved ones (for an extra line of support) but wait until they have a match, until the birth mother’s due date is near, or until they are sure of the outcome before sharing the news with everyone else.

**Your family might have a lot of questions.** Adoption has changed a lot over the years, but when many people think of adoption, they think of what it was decades ago. In the past, open adoptions were not a part of the adoption process. Expectant/birth parents and adoptive parents were often left in the dark about one another. Many people are still in the dark about the emotional and practical aspects of adoption, as well as the different options. Be prepared to answer impersonal questions such as: “Don’t you want ‘your own’ child?” and “What if the birth mother changes her mind?” Try not to take these to heart. Use these questions as an opportunity to teach your family about the positive aspects of adoption today.

**Give your parents (the soon-to-be grandparents) time to adjust.** You know your parents will make wonderful grandparents, but maybe you are not-so-sure how they will react to your adoption plan. Most likely, they had pictured you carrying children and continuing the family lineage. They may need some time to adjust to the idea of having a grandchild that will not look like them or that is of a different race. Chances are, your family wants to embrace your decision to adopt — they may just need more time and information before doing so. Stay patient and positive.



## Legal Aspects of Adoption



Your home study is completed and approved, your album and letters have been submitted, you have been selected by expectant parents, the baby has been born, and you are about to welcome a beautiful son or daughter into your home and lives forever. This is the beginning of your journey as a family together.

There are just a few remaining steps before finalization can take place.

It is important to note is that each state has their own laws regarding consent and adoption. In Massachusetts, for example, birth parents may not terminate their parental rights until at least four days after the baby is born. This means that, as an adoptive parent, you might be waiting a little bit longer than expected to bring your baby home or you may be bringing your baby home “at legal risk.” If you are adopting outside of Massachusetts, these days will most likely be spent in the birth mother’s state.

If you are adopting from another state, you must also comply with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) prior to returning home to Massachusetts with your baby. If you work with Adoptions With Love, we will take care of the ICPC process and documentation, and further coordinate finalization. Adoptions With Love will provide you with legal representation, so that you are fully informed about the legal process in your adopting state.

Once you bring your baby home to Massachusetts, we will continue with post-placement visits. Post-placement visits are a requirement in the state, and will be completed by your home study provider over the course of six months. This is called the supervisory period, which is simply a way for us to check-in with you and see how everyone is adjusting. We will bring you any updates regarding the birth family, assist with any necessary services, and welcome you to share any updates with us. We would love to hear how your baby is doing.

After the supervisory period ends, six months after placement, we will file to finalize your adoption in court. The finalization will grant you legal guardianship and officially make you parents.



### Completing Your Family

Adoption is a beautiful way to grow your family, and this is just the beginning of your journey together. We look forward to staying in touch!



## Ongoing Adoption Support

Though finalization officially ends the adoption process, no adoption truly ends with finalization. Adoption is a lifelong journey, which is why Adoptions With Love promises to always be here for you and your child. We extend ongoing educational seminars to you as new parents, as well as individual and family consultations if you or your child should need it.

If you are in an open adoption plan, know that you can always reach out to Adoptions With Love for advice and support. We can help you coordinate meetings with your child's birth family, or even mediate any communication that occurs. We can also help you establish successful open adoption relationships, navigate any sensitive conversations, and if needed, potentially re-negotiate the level of openness in your adoption contract (with your child's best interests first).

If you have a closed adoption plan, know that Adoptions With Love also has an active Search and Reunion program called "The Journey of Search." This will become available to your child as he or she grows. Every day, we hear from young adults and their families hoping to reconnect with biological family members. We extend this opportunity to you, if and when you are ready.

If you are a hopeful parent in Massachusetts and would like to start the adoption process, know that you can always reach out to Adoptions With Love. Our compassionate staff is here to help you navigate everything from the application and home study to the finalization in court. We have placed more than 2,000 beautiful children with loving Massachusetts families, and look forward to growing yours, too.

Call Nancy, Amy, Amelia, Claudia, and Nellie today at 617-964-4357 to learn more.



*We Are Here for You*

If you are a hopeful parent in Massachusetts & considering adoption, contact Adoptions With Love at 617-964-4357. We are always here for you.