



the ultimate guide to
ADOPTION

FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

brought to you by



*Kevin and Craig, with
LifeLong baby boy, Ian*

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part one:

GROWING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH ADOPTION



*LifeLong twins, Rowan and Dylan,
children of Joseph and Thomas*

Adopting a baby is an exciting journey. Adoption gives a precious child a new chance at life, and it gives you the opportunity to be the loving parent that child needs. It gives a loving family an opportunity to grow.

Is Adoption the Right Choice for You?

Adoption is a choice that lasts forever. The adoption process can be overwhelming and emotional, so be absolutely sure you and your entire family are ready for it. This choice will significantly affect everyone, so take the time necessary to make sure everyone is ready to welcome a new child into the family.

While we wholeheartedly believe that adoption is a perfect way to grow a family, we also know that adoption is not the right fit for everyone. As you seek your own answer to the question, “Is adoption right for me?” it’s equally important to explore the question, “Am I right for adoption?”

Adoption is forever. It is an irreversible process that requires a lifelong commitment from everyone involved. If you choose to adopt a baby, it is extremely important that you adopt for the right reasons. If you are looking to adoption to save your marriage, to provide an heir, to alleviate external pressures from your parents or your spouse/partner, or simply because you feel envious that all your friends have babies, this might not be the right time to begin the adoption process.



**The baby that is meant for YOU will
come to you in time.**

Julie & Melissa

If you plan to adopt a newborn baby, you must be prepared to properly deal with the financial and lifestyle commitments that are necessary to be a responsible parent. Before you decide to adopt, be absolutely sure you are ready and able to give a baby all the love and attention that he or she needs and deserves.

In the end, should you decide that adoption is the right choice for your family, it can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life!

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADOPTING

1. Do you and your spouse want the same adoption plan?

Once you’re both ready to adopt, you need to discuss your individual ideas about adoption. Consider the following questions:

- Do you want to adopt domestically, internationally, or through foster care?
- What is the age of the child you would like to adopt — a newborn, toddler, or older?
- Do you have a preference regarding gender or race?
- Do you want to have any contact with the birthparents after the adoption is complete?

2. Can you afford an adoption?

If you aren’t prepared, an adoption can quickly drain your financial resources. Do your research to find an average price range, and then determine travel, medical, and legal expenses. Also, look into financial aid options. An adoption agency can help figure out an average cost and give you ideas for where to find financial aid. Remember, you don’t have to go through this journey alone. There are people who have the answers to your questions and who can connect you to the right resources.

The important part is that you know what to expect ahead of time and have a financial plan in place for the adoption.

3. Have you sufficiently grieved infertility?

Many couples choose adoption after suffering from infertility. Being unable to have your own biological child can be heartbreaking. Both you and your spouse deserve time to grieve your loss and adjust to new dreams for the future. Allow each other to grieve at your own individual paces. Neither spouse should feel pressured into adopting until he or she feels ready to take that step.

Once couples decide to adopt, some wonder if the fact that they attempted to have a biological child first means that they value adoption less. At this point, couples must distinguish the difference between viewing adoption as the

“second choice” versus the “second best.” In the natural order of things, most people do attempt to have a biological child first, and that’s okay. Even though adoption was not your first choice, it can still be an equally good one. The fact that you’re considering adoption proves that you believe it’s a good choice.

Your feelings of grief about infertility will probably return occasionally, even after adopting. This doesn’t mean you’re being disloyal to your adopted child or that you don’t love him or her. This is just the way grief works. You and your spouse should communicate about how to work through those moments together.

requirements for adoption

THE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS DEPEND ON WHETHER YOU WANT TO ADOPT DOMESTICALLY OR INTERNATIONALLY.



LIFELONG FAMILY
Julie, Melissa & Grey

1

For both domestic and international adoption, the adoptive parent(s) must be 21 or older and pass background checks.

2

Parents must also have stable medical and emotional conditions, prove they can provide medical insurance for the child, and have a safe home environment.

3

To determine whether couples are eligible to adopt, home studies are conducted to evaluate the parents, their documentation and background checks, as well as their home environment.

ways to adopt

You can choose to adopt a baby **internationally**, **domestically**, or through **foster care**. For all three, the birthparents' legal rights are completely terminated once the adoption is finalized. Here are some specific details for each form of adoption so you can be sure to choose the right one for you.

	DOMESTIC	INTERNATIONAL	FOSTER CARE
PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No traditional waiting list • Expectant mother chooses solely based on the adoptive family profile you create • Can take a couple months to a couple of years • More unpredictable than an international adoption • Possibility that a planned adoption could fail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional waiting list <i>Start at the bottom of list and rise to the top as the families before you adopt</i> • Process is slightly more structured and predictable than domestic adoption • Planned international adoptions rarely fail <i>May be affected by delays, such as changes in the law, social or political issues, or natural disasters</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin as a foster parent • Child will already be in your home by the time you begin the adoption process. Wait time for a finalized adoption is usually longer than it is for private, domestic adoption <i>State's goal is to reunite foster children with their rehabilitated biological parents</i> • State can remove the child from your home at any time before the adoption is finalized
EXPENSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs for traveling + staying in the expectant mother's state + adoption and expectant mother costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal adoption costs + foreign travel + lodging expenses + costs associated with visa and immigration documents • Most expensive way to adopt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often, the adoption costs are no more than the price of home study fees • Least expensive way to adopt
PLACEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only way to adopt a newborn baby <i>Baby can usually go straight home with you from the hospital, avoiding foster care</i> • Have access to expectant mother's medical history and sometimes birthfather's as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt an older infant or a toddler <i>Child will have spent most of its life in foster care or an orphanage</i> • May receive a child's medical reports <i>Probably will not receive any information about the medical history of the child's family</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of all ages are entered into foster care <i>Most foster care adoptions are for toddlers and older children, not infants</i> • Wait time is longer if you want to adopt an infant

CHOOSING THE RIGHT *way to adopt* FOR YOUR FAMILY

Each type has its own pros and cons. To help you choose one, **decide which aspects of the adoption are most important for you**. An adoption professional can walk you through all the different elements to consider and help you figure out which form of adoption is best suited to your preferences. Ultimately, though, the choice is up to you.

Three Types of Adoption

1. Open Adoption

Open adoption is the most common form of adoption in the United States. In an open adoption, you and the expectant mother share identifying information with each other, including names, phone numbers, and email addresses. An open adoption also includes varying degrees of openness with the birthmother after the adoption process is finalized. This typically includes the exchange of emails, letters, pictures, phone calls, and sometimes even in-person visits. The child knows who his or her birthparents are and can access any information he or she needs about them.

In every adoption with any degree of openness, birthparents and adoptive families need to have the same understanding of what “open” means. Depending on how open the adoption is, the child can get to know his or her birthparents in a role similar to that of extended relatives. The child could also meet birth grandparents and siblings.

2. Semi-Open Adoption

A semi-open adoption is like an open adoption, but it's limited to only the exchange of photos, emails, and phone calls between the birthmother and adoptive parents. The child normally doesn't have any direct communication with the birthparents but does have access to basic information about them.

Both open and semi-open adoptions allow birthparents to stay up-to-date on their child's life and allows adoptive parents to gain information about the birthparents to share with the adopted child. Hearing why the biological parents chose adoption often helps reassure the adopted child that he or she is deeply loved by both sets of parents.

3. Closed Adoption

With a closed adoption, no identifying information is shared between expectant parents and adoptive families, and they never meet each other. The adoption is 100% anonymous and doesn't involve any contact after placement.

Closed adoptions are not synonymous with sealed records. Sealing records affects whether or not someone (such as the adopted child) can access the legal documentation surrounding the birth and placement of the adopted child once the adoption is final. Sealing records doesn't affect post-adoption contact between the birthparents and adopted children. In fact, it's possible to have a closed adoption with unsealed records or an open adoption with sealed records.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT *type of adoption* FOR YOUR FAMILY

In recent years, the trend has moved toward having more openness in adoption. When trying to decide how much openness, if any, to have in your adoption, consider the following:

Will you follow through on the promises you make to the birthmother regarding sending pictures or letters and staying in touch?

Which type of adoption is in the best interest of the child?

Would your child appreciate knowing about his or her birthparents and seeing letters or pictures from them?

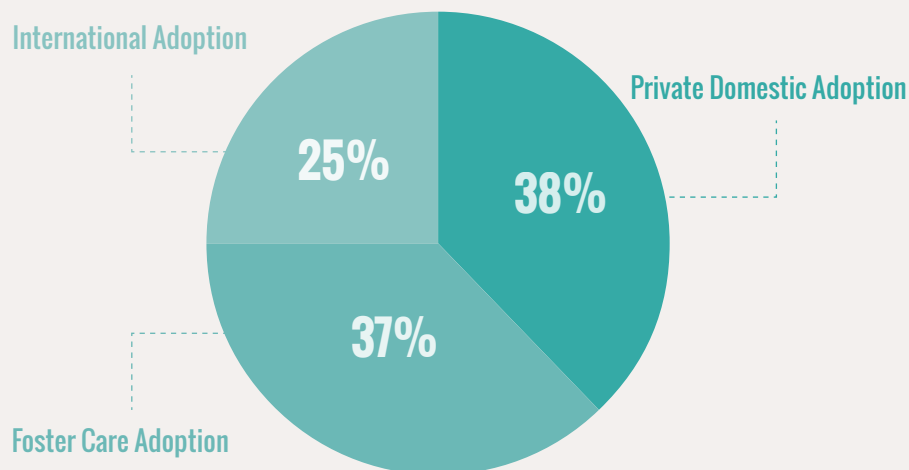
Are you willing to wait longer for a closed adoption, since more expectant mothers are seeking open or semi-open adoptions?



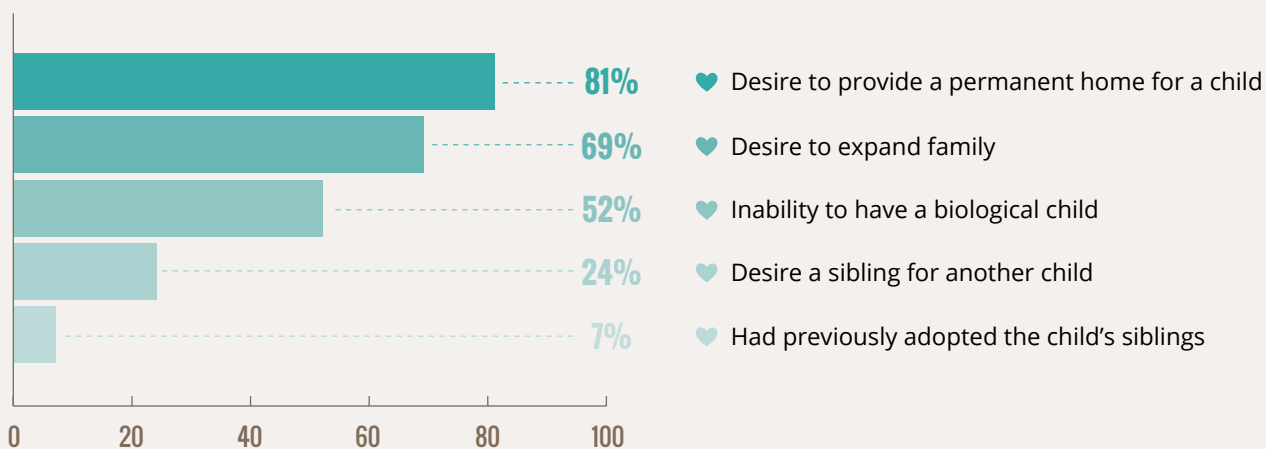
adoption statistics

FORM OF ADOPTION

Pursued by Adoptive Families in the United States



WHY AMERICAN FAMILIES ADOPT



87% of American families who've decided to adopt would make the same decision again.

part two:

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Amanda and Jessica, with
LifeLong baby boy, Gabriel*

Yes, adoption is expensive. So is raising a child. But in the end, having a child to call your own is priceless.
And for these kids, so is growing up in a loving home with a family who chose them.

The Cost of Adoption

To be best prepared for a successful adoption, you need to think about the cost.

Costs depend on whether you adopt domestically, internationally, or through foster care. This guide will specifically focus on domestic adoptions.

MAIN EXPENSES

Adoption Program Fee — The fee is determined by the adoption professional you choose to work with. They should be able to give you a detailed breakdown of their fees and tell you which are refundable and which aren't.

Home Study Fee — The fee is determined by the state you live in.

Legal Fees — The fees include hiring a social worker or attorney in the expectant mother's state. The amount is determined by the state in which the expectant mother lives.

Court Fees — The fees include those associated with legally finalizing the adoption in court.



LIFELONG FAMILY
Whitney, Stephanie & Blake

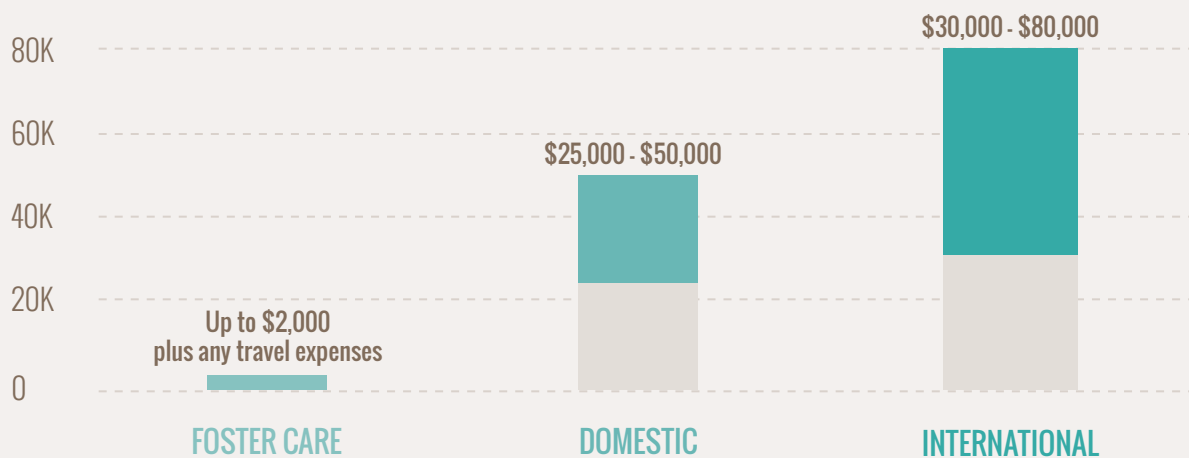
Travel Expenses — Usually, some amount of travel is required to pick up your baby after he or she is born. Travel may also be required if you and the expectant mother meet before the birth. Expenses include airfare, ground transportation, lodging, and meals.

Expectant Mother Expenses — As permitted by state law in domestic adoptions, you may be required to pay for some of the expectant mother's expenses during her pregnancy, including medical fees, counseling, and living expenses. These expenses vary by adoption case.

Fees for Citizenship and Immigration Applications — These fees are associated with international adoptions.

PRICE RANGES

Every adoption is different and so is the cost; but most adoptions fall into a common price range according to the kind of adoption.



Financial Assistance

Adoption agencies can help you find tax credits and deductions, as well as suggest other ways to fund your adoption.

Adoption Tax Credit

A credit is an amount that can be deducted directly from the taxes that you owe. It means you can get reimbursed dollar for dollar, unlike a deduction. For the 2025 tax year, the Adoption Tax Credit can give you up to \$17,280 back.

While most adoptive parents will still have to pay substantial sums of money prior to the adoption, this credit should relieve some of the financial burden after the adoption. In a domestic adoption, adoptive parents can take the credit even if the adoption is not finalized.

You can apply the tax credits to qualifying adoption expenses, such as attorney and court fees, traveling expenses (including amounts spent for meals and lodging) while away from home, and other expenses directly related to the adoption. To qualify for this credit, you need to ask for and save receipts for all legitimate adoption expenses.

Contact a tax professional for details.

Loans and Grants

If you can't afford the immediate costs prior to adoption, talk to your bank about home equity or line of credit loans. If you qualify for the Adoption Tax Credit, their reimbursement could help you repay the loans.

Loan options include:

- Home mortgage refinance
- Home equity line of credit
- Credit cards
- LifeSong for Orphans — offers interest-free loans for adoptions

Loans can give you the extra help you need for your adoption, as long as you take them out responsibly and have

a plan for paying them back. In addition, there are several adoption grants available through organizations, such as:

- Gift of Adoption Fund
- God's Grace Adoption Ministry
- National Adoption Foundation

Employer Adoption Benefits

Check with your company's human resources or personnel department to find out if your employer offers adoption benefits. These benefits could include any of the following:

Informational Resources — Employers can provide referrals to adoption organizations and/or access to an adoption specialist.

Financial Assistance — Employers can provide a lump sum payment, payment for certain adoption-related fees, and/or partial reimbursement.

Parental Leave — In many states, employers are required by law to offer some length of paid or unpaid parental leave to adoptive parents.

Military Adoption Benefits

If you or your spouse is currently serving on continuous active duty in the military, you can receive military adoption benefits. Active duty families may receive up to a \$2,000 reimbursement for adoption-related expenses of a single child and up to \$5,000 per year if more than one child is adopted. The adoption must be arranged through a state-authorized source if the adoption is supervised by a court under state or local law. The reimbursement is made after the adoption is finalized. Expenses that can be reimbursed include agency fees, legal fees, placement fees, and medical expenses. However, you won't be reimbursed for travel expenses.

part three:

THE DOMESTIC NEWBORN ADOPTION PROCESS



*Rickie and Daniel, with
LifeLong baby boy, Caleb*

Once you decide to adopt, you can begin finding an adoption professional and preparing for your home study. The process below is specific to domestic newborn adoption, but many of the preparatory steps will apply to any kind of adoption. Whatever type you choose, your adoption professional can outline all the necessary steps.

step one: Choosing an Adoption Professional

Adoption professionals will be your guide through this process. They will answer your questions, make sure all state regulations are met, and connect you with expectant mothers. You can even seek them out before you make a final decision about adoption, just to learn more about it.

You can speak to a national or local adoption agency, adoption facilitator, or adoption attorney. Adoption agencies are able to offer you many helpful services that will make the adoption process easier and less stressful for you. They provide assistance, from the very beginning to the very end of the adoption process. For this reason, their services may cost more than those of other adoption professionals.

A national agency may have a shorter waiting time than a local one, since they reach more expectant mothers. But because a local agency only connects with expectant mothers in their area, you may not have to travel as far.

Adoption facilitators only help connect you with expectant mothers. Once they connect you, they'll refer you to a law firm or agency. While the wait time to find an expectant mother may be shorter than with an agency, facilitators may not evaluate and counsel expectant mothers as effectively as agencies do. In addition, some states have laws against using facilitators.

Adoption attorneys can offer counseling about the legal side of adoption, ensure you meet all state regulations, and help with the paperwork. They may not evaluate and counsel expectant mothers in the same way an agency does, risking a failed adoption and leaving you to do much of the communication and planning with the expectant mother yourself.

How to Choose the Right Professional for You

Take the time to do as much research as you need to be comfortable with your choice. Feel free to research and meet with multiple professionals. Write down your thoughts on each one to compare.

Here are some helpful questions to consider in evaluating professionals:

- What is their track record in the kind of adoption you desire?
- What services do they provide?
- What services do they not provide?
- What are their fees?
- What's included in their contract?
- What is their average wait time for a successful adoption?
- Are they licensed, bonded, or certified?
- Are any of their fees refundable?
- Is their team helpful, friendly, and easy to reach?

step two: Filling Out Paperwork

Once you choose a professional, you'll likely have an application to fill out or some kind of paperwork to sign.

If you choose an agency, they will send you all the information, resources, and contacts you need upon approval of your application.



LIFELONG FAMILY
Brooke, Dustin & Everett

step three: Complete Your Home Study

All adoptive families are required to complete an adoption home study. The home study determines whether adoptive families are emotionally, physically, and financially ready to adopt a child. This process can take anywhere from three to six months.

What is involved in an adoption home study?

Orientation and/or Training — Some adoption agencies and organizations will have prospective adoptive families attend one or several orientation sessions before completing their home study application. Others will have a social worker meet with family members first and then ask that they attend adoption training later.

Interviews — To help determine if you're qualified to adopt according to the guidelines of your state, a social worker will interview you a number of times. You'll likely be asked about your experiences with children, your family and relationships, why you decided to adopt, your approach to parenting, how you handle stress, and much more. The questions can get quite personal. In order to ensure the best possible outcome, it's important to be honest with both your social worker and yourself during these interviews.

Home Visit — Your social worker will complete at least one home visit during the process. The social worker will need to view all areas of your home to ensure it can comfortably and safely accommodate a child. Some states might even require a visit from local health and fire safety departments.

Health and Medical Statements — Most states require adoptive parents to have recently undergone a physical exam by a health provider to confirm they are generally healthy and are physically and mentally capable of caring for a child.

Income Statements — Most states require you to submit proof of income and other financial documentation to prove your finances are in order and that you are financially responsible.

Background Checks — To ensure the safety of all adopted babies and children, all states require criminal and child abuse record checks for adoptive parent applicants.

Autobiographical Statement and References — You may be asked to write an autobiographical statement to give the

social worker a better understanding of you, your family, and your background. You may also need to provide the contact information for personal references.

The Home Study Report — The home study report is a written report compiled by your social worker specifying his or her findings from the home study process. The end of the report will feature a summary and the social worker's overall adoption recommendation for your family.

HOME STUDY DETAILS

The home study report will detail information covered during the interviews and throughout the rest of the home study process, such as:

- ✓ Education, employment, and finances
- ✓ Physical and medical history
- ✓ Marriage and family relationships
- ✓ Readiness to adopt a baby
- ✓ Motivation for adopting
- ✓ Feelings about infertility (if applicable)
- ✓ Parenting and integration of the adopted child into the family
- ✓ Family environment
- ✓ Home environment and community
- ✓ Religious or spiritual beliefs
- ✓ Expectations for the adopted child
- ✓ References and criminal background clearances

a small reminder...

While the home study process may seem long and frustrating, remember that it's done in an effort to ensure precious children only go to safe, capable, and loving homes. Do your research before each phase of the process to be fully prepared and to know what to expect.

Rather than viewing this step with anxiety and impatience, view it with excitement—it's bringing you one big step closer to bringing a child into your home.



Jamie and Paul, with LifeLong baby boy, Alexander Rene

step four: Wait

Once you've done your part to prepare, you'll face perhaps the hardest part yet—the wait. Once a connection is made with an expectant mother seeking the same kind of adoption as you, then you and the expectant mother can begin to learn about each other, either in-person or through your adoption professional.

How to Minimize the Wait Time

Wait times vary by type of adoption (domestic, international, or through foster care), and from family to family.

The more flexible your adoption plan is, the greater chance that your wait time will be shorter. When you're open to more possibilities with your soon-to-be-child's race, ethnicity, and gender, your profile will be sent to more expectant mothers, increasing your odds for a successful adoption. Financial preparedness can also play a big role in the adoption process.

What to Do While You Wait

No matter how flexible your plan, wait times can't be eliminated. Even if you find an expectant mother quickly, you still have to wait until her delivery date.

The chart to the right shows possible proactive ideas to fill your time waiting.

MAKE IT COUNT



♥ Take advantage of your free time before your life completely changes—go on vacation, spend time with your spouse and family, get pampered, go out with friends, etc.

step five: Make A Birth Plan

Once you and the expectant mother have agreed to move forward with the adoption, you can discuss what the birth experience will be. Some birthmothers want to hold their baby and meet the adoptive family, while others don't want to do either.

Some birthparents allow the adoptive parents to be in the delivery room while the baby is born, and some adoptive families don't arrive at the hospital until after the birth.



step six: Take Your Baby Home and Finalize the Adoption

In most cases, you'll be able to take your baby home directly from the hospital. However, the adoptive parents must remain in the state of the baby's birth until the official state paperwork has cleared. This usually takes between 4 and 10 days.

The legal procedures for finalizing the adoption differ drastically from state to state. It's important to be aware that either the expectant parents or the adoptive parents can stop the adoption process at any time before the adoption is finalized, even if the child has already gone home with the adoptive parents.

Once the birthparents' legal rights to the child are terminated and the adoption is finalized, the baby is officially yours. That moment will make this entire process worthwhile.



Our hearts were already feeling full and we had nothing but joy and excitement to be in this moment.

Holly & Jessica



part four:

NON-TRADITIONAL ADOPTIVE PARENTS

*Quan and Kelvin, with
LifeLong baby girl, Harper*

As a gay-friendly service, we will guide you through the adoption process with understanding, sensitivity, and reliability. Our philosophy is based on one-on-one support during this fragile time, and our experienced, knowledgeable staff will do all they can to make it as easy as possible for you.

Single Parent Adoption

Single parent adoption is becoming more widely accepted. In fact, studies have shown that children raised in single-adoptive parent families do just as well as, if not better than, children adopted by couples.

Single parents have successful adoptions and raise completely healthy and happy children. It may be hard work, but most will agree that the difficulties that come with raising a child as a single parent are far outweighed by the dream come true of welcoming a child into your home.



Gina with LifeLong baby boy, Hudson



when adopting as a single parent, consider:

Support

All parents need support, and for single parents, having a strong support system is critical. Consider which of your family and friends would be able to provide you with some relief from the responsibility of parenting. For example, who could you trust to come over when you or your child is sick, to pick up your child from school if you can't, or to serve as your child's guardian, if needed? Even as a single parent, with a solid support system, you won't be raising your child alone.

Your Career

As a single parent, you'll likely be working in conjunction with raising your child. Consider your current work schedule as well as your future career goals. Does your employer offer a healthy work-life balance? What about health and/or adoption benefits? Think about how you will handle

childcare, after-school care, medical care, job-related travel, and your child's sporting events and activities. Have a thorough plan in place when you bring your baby home.

Your Finances

With the availability of adoption subsidies in almost every state, personal finances have become less of an issue. However, it's important to ensure you can financially support a child beyond the cost of adoption itself. The latest *Expenditures on Children by Families Report* from the USDA indicates the average cost of raising a child from birth to age 18 is about \$233,600, which is roughly equivalent to about \$12,900 a year. Use the USDA's *Cost of Raising a Child Calculator* to get a more specific idea of how much raising a child will cost you each year based on personal factors like your income and location.

Gay & Lesbian Adoption

If you are a gay or lesbian couple or single adult considering adoption, you may have unique questions about the adoption process.



LifeLong family Holly, Ellen, and baby girl, Samantha



COMMONLY-ASKED QUESTIONS

Do expectant mothers choose gay and lesbian adoptive families?

Yes! In our experience, most expectant mothers are open to exploring all family types.

What challenges do children of same-sex families face?

Recent studies show that children growing up with gay or lesbian parents are no different from children raised by traditional, opposite-sex parents. Having gay or lesbian parents could be somewhat difficult when adopting an older child, but if you adopt a newborn baby, having same-sex parents will be totally normal for your child. You're no doubt already aware of the difficulties your child may face growing up in a non-traditional family. Most gay and lesbian people see these as an opportunity for their child to grow and develop as a person. You should be prepared for some rough spots, but so should all adoptive parents.

Do gay and lesbian adoptive parents wait longer to adopt a baby than traditional parents?

Prospective gay and lesbian adoptive parents may feel they'll have a harder time adopting, but that's not necessarily true. The wait time to adopt depends on a number of other factors, including pre-adoption classes, your home study, and how long it takes to find the right child for your family.

What are the laws regarding gay and lesbian adoption?

Adoption laws and processes vary from state to state. If you reside in a state that prohibits gay and lesbian adoption, you'll likely still be able to adopt a child. The vast majority of states currently permit single-parent and second-parent adoptions regardless of sexual orientation. In addition, the U.S. Constitution requires that adoptions finalized in one state must be legally recognized by all other states. When it comes time to find an adoption attorney, try to find one that is experienced with gay and lesbian adoptive parents.



part five:

CONNECTING WITH EXPECTANT PARENTS

*Olivia and Jessie, with LifeLong
baby boy, Gryffin, and Gryffin's
birthmother, Shannon*

Carrying a baby for nine months and then placing him or her with another family to raise is a painful and difficult action. Whatever an expectant mother's reason for choosing adoption, she may not be as emotionally stable or confident as you. Assure her that she can depend on you and be open with you.

Why Communicate with the Expectant Mother?

Good communication between the expectant parents and the adoptive parents makes the process much smoother and easier. While developing a relationship may seem awkward at first, with enough time and effort, it can become a meaningful relationship for the adoptive couple, the birthmother, and the child, particularly if you choose a semi-open or open adoption.

Not all expectant mothers are looking for a relationship with the adoptive parents. But those who are looking for a

relationship want reassurance that they're making the right decision. Staying in touch over the years and watching her child grow and mature can assure her that she made the right choice. Through this relationship, the birthmother is able to provide any information the child and family may need, as well as help the child understand why she chose adoption.

A good starting point in your communication with her is to talk about what level of openness everyone is comfortable with before, during, and after the adoption.

DURING PREGNANCY	DURING & AFTER DELIVERY	AFTER THE ADOPTION
What forms of communication work best for everyone? Would you like to talk in person or on the phone, or via text, email, or social media?	How will she notify you when she goes into labor? Will she tell you directly, or would she prefer a social worker or other adoption professional tell you on her behalf?	How often would the birthmother like to receive updates from you? What would these updates include? Does she want to have in-person visits? If so, how often?
Is the expectant mother comfortable with any of your family members joining her when she goes to her doctor's appointments?	Is she comfortable with any members of your family being in the room with her when she delivers the baby?	Would she like to give you a picture of herself and/or the birthfather, a letter, a video recording, or something else to share with the baby in the future?
Would you like her to send you updates about the growth and progress of the baby? How about ultrasound pictures?	How much time would she like to spend with the baby in the hospital after he or she is born?	Is she comfortable providing you with her family's medical history and the birthfather's medical history, if possible?

consider this...

Ironing out these details early on will put you all on the same page throughout the adoption process and, hopefully, avoid any misunderstandings or hard feelings along the way. It's important to set clear boundaries, to be specific, to show respect, and to be guided by what is best for the baby. Also, try to be flexible and accommodate changes that may happen over time.

positive adoption language

Instead of using outdated and hurtful terms, such as “giving up the baby” or “real parents,” change the world for the better (and encourage your adopted child to do the same) by using positive adoption language.

You may have to retrain your mind to choose the right words, and you may also need to gently correct and educate your family, friends, and coworkers on the best way to say what they mean. By using positive adoption language, we help abolish the myth society has perpetuated that adoption is a second-best or lesser alternative to building a family.

INSTEAD OF...	SAY...
Real Parent or Natural Parent	Birthparent, First Parent, Biological Parent
My Adopted Child	My Child
Adoptive Parent	Parent
Give Up for Adoption	Place for Adoption, Create an Adoption Plan, Choose Adoption, Choose an Adoptive Family
Relinquish, Surrender, Abandon	Transfer of or Terminate Parental Rights
Child is Adopted	Child was Adopted
Unwanted Child	Child Placed for Adoption, Unplanned Child, Unexpected Child
Illegitimate Child	Child Placed for Adoption, Unplanned Child, Unexpected Child
Biracial Child	Mixed-Race Child
Handicapped Child	Child with Special Needs
To Keep a Child	To Parent a Child
Track Down Birth Parents	Search for Birth Parents
Reunion with Birth Parents	Making Contact with Birth Parents

Navigating Adoption Fraud and Other Risks

Unfortunately, there are people who try to take advantage of a couple's deep desire to have a child. Knowing the tell-tale signs of adoption fraud or a risky adoption process can protect you.

Expectant Mother Scams

Some women will pretend to be pregnant (or may truly be pregnant but only pretend to consider adoption) to try and get money or other favors from the couple looking to adopt.

If a random woman contacts you directly about adopting her baby, verify her identity and situation with your adoption professional. She may pressure you to act fast, threatening you'll lose the opportunity if you don't. However, adoptive parents and expectant mothers can choose adoption at any time, even after the baby is born. It's more important to make sure you aren't going to lose all your adoption money in a scam than to act impulsively to bring a child into your home. Feel free to connect her to other resources to receive any immediate help she says she needs, but avoid giving her any of your personal resources until you know she can be trusted.

If you do receive a random message about adoption, consider these questions:

- What is she asking for — a plane or bus ticket, money for food, etc.?
- Is she willing to talk with your adoption professional?
- Will she agree to a video chat?
- Is she willing to give you any contact information besides her email?
- Is she openly flattering you?
- Does she keep canceling or postponing appointments to meet, either in person or on video chat?
- Is she threatening to change her mind or harm the baby in any way?

Things to consider about your adoption professional:

- Are they accredited to legally handle the kind of adoption you want?
- What is their success rate?
- Are they licensed?
- Are they making lofty promises that don't sound realistic?
- Did they give you a list of the potential costs before asking you about your financial status?
- For international adoptions, are they giving you clear information about what the travel fees are, whether they are included, how many potential trips you may need to make to the child's country, and what the estimated total cost is?
- Have any complaints been listed against them online through the Better Business Bureau?

Unethical Adoption Professionals

Adoption is hard enough in itself. The last thing you need is an adoption professional who'll make the process even harder.

Your adoption professional is supposed to help you navigate risky situations and be your go-to source of help during the adoption process. Be sure to do sufficient research while choosing a professional and pick someone truly qualified, competent, and trustworthy. There are plenty of reliable, truly helpful adoption professionals out there.

Coping with a Failed Adoption

Since parents retain their parental rights until signing the final papers, failed adoptions are an unfortunate possibility. Depending on state laws, birth parents typically sign the final adoption papers between 12 and 72 hours after the baby is born.

While a failed adoption can be devastating to adoptive parents, it doesn't have to deter you from adoption. Many other adoptive families have endured this heartache and gone on to have successful adoptions. If this happens to you, don't lose hope. Here are some suggestions for coping with a failed adoption:



Take some time.

This is a painful loss, and you're allowed to grieve. You may need a break to work through your feelings before you're ready to move forward again with the adoption process. Keep in mind that you and your partner might not grieve in the same way or for the same amount of time.



Get answers.

If possible, try to get answers from the expectant mother about why she changed her mind. Legally, she's not required to give you an explanation. But any information she provides may help you better understand her decision and provide you with some closure.



Lean on your partner and/or your family for support.

Being open about your feelings will allow you all to move forward in a healthy way. You may even consider telling the next expectant mother you meet about your experience to establish a degree of openness and trustworthiness in your relationship.



Talk to a counselor.

If you're still having difficulty coping after some time has passed, consider talking with a counselor. This could help you process the experience better and move forward.



Join a support group.

One of the best ways to get through a difficult situation is to connect with others who have had the same experience. Look for a support group specifically for parents who have adopted or are waiting to adopt a baby. Chances are you'll find others who understand what you're going through.



Don't give up.

Most importantly, don't give up hope. It may be especially difficult to be optimistic, but other parents who have successfully adopted a baby will tell you that the hard times eventually pass. When you find the baby who is truly right for your family, it will all be worth it.

A photograph of a baby girl with brown hair, wearing a white headband with a bow, a blue denim jacket, and an orange skirt. She is sitting on a white and brown fur rug in front of a large green fern. To the left, there are potted plants, including a small tree in a tan pot and a cactus in a black pot. The background is a grey wall.

part six:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*LifeLong baby girl, Hayden,
daughter of Nathan and Lucas*

We have devoted many years to guiding adoptive parents through the adoption process, and we understand you will have many questions. Our small size, coupled with our years of experience, allow us to guide you through your adoption journey with compassion, understanding, and a truly personalized level of service and support.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How do I start the adoption process?

A: Start by researching the different kinds of adoption and deciding your preferences for your adopted child. Also, research adoption expenses and start making a plan for how you'll afford them. Then, find an adoption professional who can answer your questions and guide you through the rest of the process.

Q: How long does the adoption process usually take?

A: The adoption process varies case by case. Typically, a domestic adoption takes anywhere from a couple months to a couple years. For an international adoption, you'll be placed on a traditional waiting list. Your wait time depends on how many prospective adoptive parents are ahead of you. Once you're matched with a child, the adoption process is usually more predictable and stable than it is for a domestic adoption. In a foster care adoption, the state's goal is to reunite foster children with their rehabilitated biological parents, when possible. As a result, the wait time for a finalized adoption through foster care is usually longer.

Q: How can I speed up the adoption process?

A: The more flexible your adoption plan is, the greater chance that your wait time will be shorter. Being more open to race, ethnicity, and gender means your profile will be sent to more expectant mothers.

Q: Is there a waiting list to adopt a baby?

A: With domestic adoptions, adoptive families are usually matched with expectant mothers based on whether or not they're the right fit for each other, not by the order in which families apply. In an international adoption, there is a waiting list.

Q: How much does an adoption cost?

A: Every adoption case is different, and so is the cost. Adoption expenses include the home study fee, legal fees, your adoption professional's fees, expectant mother's expenses, and travel costs. A domestic adoption often costs between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

Q: What is an open adoption?

A: In an open adoption, the expectant mother communicates with the adoptive family and may meet them in person. There is also contact after the adoption is finalized. The adoptive family and expectant mother will agree ahead of time about what kind of communication they want before and after the adoption.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONTINUED...

Q: What is a home study?

A: Every parent who lives in the United States must complete a home study in order to adopt a baby. Home studies are meant to determine whether your family is emotionally, physically, and financially ready to adopt a baby, as well as educate and prepare your family for the adoption process. Home study requirements vary from state to state, but on average, the process takes three to four months to complete. The process includes adoption training, interviews, a home visit, background checks, and other types of paperwork, such as medical statements.

Q: Can I choose the gender and/or race of my adopted baby?

A: Yes, there are adoption professionals who allow gender or race-specific adoption requests. However, we usually advise hopeful parents to be as flexible as possible with their preferences to increase their odds of finding an expectant mother. The most certain way to adopt a child of your preferred gender is to adopt one already born, rather than connecting with an expectant mother.

Q: What expectant mother expenses will we be responsible for?

A: Your expectant mother expenses may involve any reasonable pregnancy-related expense, such as housing, utilities, transportation, food, and maternity clothing. These costs vary by adoption case and by state laws. Depending on your adoption professional, you may be able to set a budget for what you can spend on expectant mother expenses and request not to be matched with expectant mothers whose initial needs exceed your budget.

Q: Will we be required to cover the expectant mother's medical expenses?

A: In most cases, the expectant mother's prenatal care, labor, and delivery are covered by their personal medical insurance or government-issued medical insurance.

Q: What happens if the expectant mother changes her mind after signing the adoption papers?

A: Depending on state laws, birthparents typically sign the final adoption papers 12 to 72 hours after the baby is born. After the legal papers have been signed, the birthparents no longer have any legal parental rights over the baby. Based on our experience, most birthparents who go through the adoption process are proud of their decision and rarely change their minds after signing the final adoption papers, despite how difficult it was.



Since 2011, LifeLong Adoptions has been connecting caring birth parents with loving adoptive families across the United States. We are wholeheartedly committed to preparing, nurturing, supporting, and advocating for all those involved in the adoption process.

We are Carolyn and Sharon, founders of LifeLong Adoptions. As adoptive mothers who both experienced the miracle of adoption after the pain of infertility, we have a deep passion for spreading the word about adoption. With our firsthand knowledge of private adoption and our professional backgrounds in marketing, communications, and advertising, we realized we could provide a unique, personalized service that would help people realize their dream of adopting a baby.

As a gay and lesbian adoption friendly agency, LifeLong Adoptions believes in LGBT adoption, and specializes in assisting LGBT couples and individuals. Our philosophy is based on one-on-one guidance, providing adoptive parents with an adoption specialist to guide you through the process.



VISIT US ONLINE AT LIFELONGADOPTIONS.COM OR CALL 888-829-0891