

the ultimate
ADOPTION GUIDE

FOR EXPECTANT PARENTS



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part one:

CHOOSING ADOPTION



We all have important choices to make in life. If you're experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, deciding if you want to place your baby for adoption is one of those choices. We understand facing this pregnancy may be difficult, but it's important to understand you do have options.

Is Adoption the Right Choice for You?

Adoption is a loving decision. Even considering it takes love, sacrifice, and a sense of responsibility. Some people feel that adoption means you are “giving up” your baby. This negative and hurtful viewpoint is absolutely not what we believe to be true. In fact, we know the exact opposite is true: by choosing adoption, you are not giving up at all. You are actively choosing a life for your baby.

Making the decision to place your baby for adoption clearly shows you already have strong maternal feelings and real love for your baby. It means you love and care enough about your baby that you are able to place his or her needs above your own.

Choosing adoption is a significant life decision, and every expectant mother has to decide based on her own unique situation. There is no universal right or wrong answer. You may feel pressure to choose one option or another, but as your baby's mother, the decision of who should parent your child is ultimately up to you.

Adoption vs. Parenting

If you don't feel ready to parent, adoption is a viable, responsible option. It ensures your baby will still have a loving, stable family.

Even for the most prepared parents, raising a baby is tough, especially when juggling it with school or work. Caring for a newborn is a 24/7 job. When you become a parent, you must shift your focus and put your baby first. It requires a lifelong commitment, suitable financial means, and emotional stability. If, for whatever reason, you don't feel ready or able to take on such a big commitment, don't let anyone pressure you into it. If you feel the need to explore other options, you have the right to do so.

Here are some common reasons expectant mothers choose adoption for their baby.

- She does not feel ready to be a parent.
- She feels too young or immature to raise a baby.
- She is not in a financial position to care for a baby.

WHAT ADOPTION CAN OFFER YOUR CHILD

Adoption is one of the most loving and selfless gifts you can give both your baby and an adoptive family. You won't be giving your baby to just anyone. You'll be placing your baby with a responsible family who has been waiting and longing for a child to love. Your act of love will make someone's dream of becoming a parent come true. Adoption can provide your child:

- ✓ Love
- ✓ Safe, stable home life
- ✓ Financial security
- ✓ Emotionally ready parents
- ✓ Loving relatives and grandparents
- ✓ Medical, dental, and eye care
- ✓ Quality education
- ✓ Many opportunities for a happy and fulfilling life

- She fears a baby might interfere with finishing school or furthering her career.
- She is not in a relationship with the biological father and does not want to be a single parent, or she wants her baby to grow up in a two-parent family.
- She believes adoption is the best chance for her baby to grow up being well cared for, both emotionally and financially.

MYTH vs. FACT

Myth	Fact
<p>A loving and caring person wouldn't place her child for adoption.</p>	<p>A mother who unselfishly creates an adoption plan is placing her child's best interests above her own. Adoption does not mean you don't love your child with all your heart. In fact, it often means you love your child so much that you're willing to sacrifice your own emotions for the good of the baby.</p>
<p>An adoptive family won't be able to love my baby as much as I can.</p>	<p>Because of their great desire for a child, many adoptive families have put a lot of effort into becoming parents and faced struggles and heartache along the way. Adoptive parents have a true, unconditional love for and devotion to a child they adopt because they understand what a blessing it is to have a child in their lives. Since adoptive parents make the deliberate choice to parent, they take the responsibility of parenting very seriously.</p>
<p>Adoption is a selfish and irresponsible choice.</p>	<p>Choosing adoption for your child is one of the most loving and unselfish decisions you could make. Planning for your child's future is your responsibility. No part of looking into adoption is irresponsible or selfish.</p>
<p>My child will feel abandoned or angry with me for placing him or her for adoption.</p>	<p>Your child will know you loved him or her enough to put aside your own feelings so he or she could have the best possible life. Your child will grow up well cared for, enjoying many wonderful experiences and opportunities, and being loved by a family who actively sought to bring him or her into their lives. Your child will know you made a huge sacrifice to make all of that possible.</p>
<p>A baby will improve my relationship with my boyfriend or husband.</p>	<p>Unfortunately, a baby cannot ensure your relationship will improve. An unplanned pregnancy may even add more strain to a relationship rather than mend it. Raising a baby together does not in any way guarantee your relationship problems will be resolved.</p>
<p>My family and friends will help me raise this baby.</p>	<p>No matter how much your family and friends offer to help, your baby is ultimately your responsibility. You are the one responsible for his or her health, financial and material needs, schooling, and more. Parenting is a 24-hour job, and while having occasional help is wonderful, it won't remove the pressure and responsibility of parenting.</p>

Birthfathers

Birthfathers are an important part of the adoption process. In our experience, when both expectant parents are actively involved in the adoption and on the same page, it makes for the most successful adoptions.

There are two types of birthfathers: legal fathers and putative fathers, also referred to as potential fathers. The specific rights for either type of birthfather depend on the laws in your state.

Types of Birthfathers and Their Rights

If you are married to the birthfather, or you listed the birthfather on the baby's birth certificate, he would be considered the **legal father**. A legal father has automatic parental rights and must consent to an adoption plan. Consent does not just mean involvement. At the very least, he would need to sign papers for an attorney or social worker.

If you were never married to the birthfather, he would be considered a **putative father**. A putative father is a man who claims to be the father, or who the birthmother claims is the father. Whether there's one or more putative fathers in the picture, these men do not have automatic legal rights. They do, however, have the right to be notified of an adoption plan taking place.

Once given notice of the adoption plan, a putative father has two options. First, he has the right to take legal action to prove paternity and fight for custody or parental rights if he wishes. His second option is to acknowledge his potential paternity and consent to the adoption plan, giving up any legal rights to the baby.

Putative Fathers

- Were never married to the birthmother
- Claim, either themselves or by the birthmother, to be the father
- Do not have automatic parental rights
- Must consent to an adoption plan

Legal Fathers

- Are married to the birthmother or listed on the birth certificate
- Have automatic parental rights
- Must consent to an adoption plan

What If I Don't Know Who the Father is?

This is not an uncommon situation. If there are multiple potential fathers, they must all be notified of your adoption plan so they can decide whether to prove paternity and fight for custody or to consent to the adoption. If you don't know the potential father's identity, where he is, or how to reach him, your adoption service provider will explain the process of how an unknown birthfather is handled in your state.

family and friends

Many expectant mothers wonder about their relatives' role in the decision between parenting and adoption. The decision is yours and only yours. Your parents, grandparents, and other relatives cannot make the choice for you, nor can they stop you from pursuing one choice over the other. You can certainly go to them for advice or guidance, but you should not let them pressure you into making a decision one way or another.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How do I know I am making the right decision?

A: There are many emotions that correspond with adoption. The fear of regret is a very real one for many women considering adoption. It's normal to question your thoughts and feelings about such a difficult decision at any point during the process. Only you know what is best for you and your baby. Take your time and carefully consider all of the reasons why you are exploring adoption and remind yourself of those reasons.

Q: How do I tell other people about my adoption plan?

A: Once you've made your decision, you can tell whoever you choose to. Some women share their adoption plan with just a few close friends or family, while others are comfortable sharing it with anyone who asks. If you do decide to tell others in your life about your adoption plan, telling people one at a time or in small groups may be easier than telling everyone at once. Telling those you think will be most supportive first may give you the courage and support you need to tell the rest.

Q: How will I know I chose a good family for my baby?

A: Before a family is eligible to adopt, they must complete a home study through their state. The home study is a thorough and invasive process that lasts about three to four months on average. It includes a full FBI background check and an in-depth evaluation of their finances, marital stability, lifestyle, personalities, physical and mental health, medical history, background, education, reasons for adopting, and much more. All families who successfully complete this difficult process are prepared to be parents in every way and will provide a safe, stable, and loving home for your baby. Since you have the freedom to choose an adoptive family for your baby, you can be confident that whichever family you choose will give your child the best possible life.

Q: Will I be able to spend time with my baby at the hospital?

A: You will be able to spend as much or as little time as you wish with your baby in the hospital following the birth. If you want the hospital experience to be a special one that includes just you and your baby, then that can be arranged. Or, if you wish to spend as much time as possible with your baby and the adoptive family together, that may be arranged as well. It's completely up to you and what you're comfortable with.

Q: What if I'm in labor and haven't made an adoption plan yet? Can I still choose adoption?

A: Yes, you can choose adoption even when you are at the hospital in labor or have already had your baby. This is not an unusual situation. Nearly all adoptive families are ready and willing to travel anywhere in the country at a moment's notice.

part two:

YOUR ADOPTION PLAN



After you've chosen to pursue adoption, the first step is to create an adoption plan. Your adoption plan outlines your personal preferences for the entire adoption process. You'll choose an adoption service provider to work with, decide which type of adoption you want, choose an adoptive family for your baby, and make plans for the delivery. As the expectant mother, you have total control over each of these phases of the adoption process to ensure you're comfortable with how it moves forward.

Step one: Choose an Adoption Service Provider

Navigating the adoption process is not something you should do on your own. You will need to connect with an adoption service provider or other professional who can help guide you through the process.

The adoption professionals you choose to work with will be your guides along your adoption journey. They will answer all your questions, help you make your adoption plan and get financial assistance, assist you with finding the right family for your baby, and make sure all your state's requirements are met.

If you haven't connected with an adoption service provider yet, you can easily search online for an organization or professional that is a good match for you. Adoption service providers offer many helpful services that will make the adoption planning process easier and less stressful for you, and most offer their services to expectant mothers for free.

Unfortunately, unethical adoption organizations and professionals do exist, and they aim to take advantage of women interested in placing their baby for adoption. For the safety of you and your baby, it's important to be aware of what to watch out for so you can stay away from these types of organizations and professionals.

Questions to Ask

When you first connect with an adoption service provider, you can ask any and all the questions you have to help you decide whether they are a good match for you.

- What are my options?
- What services do you provide for expectant mothers and birthmothers?
- How can you help me make an adoption plan?
- What types of adoption are available?
- How do I find an adoptive family through your organization?
- How do you screen your adoptive families?
- What sort of financial assistance am I eligible to receive during my pregnancy?

BE SAFE: RED FLAGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Here are some red flags to watch out for when choosing an adoption professional or organization:

- They pressure you into placing your baby for adoption.
- They offer you money in exchange for your baby.
- They offer to keep your baby after he or she is born while they find a family.
- They do not involve an attorney or lawyer in the adoption process.
- They require you to pay for their services.
- They aren't easily available to you via phone or email, or they don't respond to you.
- They do not screen adoptive families, or they do not require adoptive families to have a completed home study.
- They tell you that you need to make a decision right away.

Step two: Choose the Type of Adoption

You're probably wondering what type of communication you can have with the adoptive parents and the baby before and after the birth. The level of communication depends on the type of adoption you'd like to have.

There are three different types of adoption: open, semi-open, and closed. Your adoption professional will help you find a family who is interested in the same type of adoption as you are.

Open Adoption

Open adoption is the most common form of adoption in the United States. In an open adoption, you and the adoptive family share identifying information with each other, including names, phone numbers, and email addresses. This type of adoption includes varying degrees of openness before and after placement, including the exchange of emails, letters, pictures, phone calls, and yearly in-person visits.

Semi-open Adoption

Semi-open adoption is like open adoption, but it is limited to only the exchange of photos, emails, and phone calls. With this adoption type, the child doesn't usually have any direct communication with the birthparents.

Closed Adoption

In a closed adoption, no identifying information is shared between birthparents and adoptive families. You have the option of choosing the adoptive family and having contact with them before the birth, but you won't have any level of communication with the family or the baby after placement. Birthparents usually choose a closed adoption if they're concerned about their privacy or if they feel like it would be too difficult for them to move forward otherwise.

See below for comparisons between each type of adoption.

	OPEN ADOPTION	SEMI-OPEN ADOPTION	CLOSED ADOPTION
BEFORE THE ADOPTION			
Choose a Family	✓	✓	✓
Get to Know the Family before Birth	✓	♡	♡
Meet the Family	✓	♡	♡
Meet Your Baby	✓	✓	♡
AFTER THE ADOPTION			
Phone Calls & Texts	✓	✓	—
Emails	✓	✓	—
Pictures	✓	✓	—
Yearly Visits	✓	—	—

✓ Typically Included ♡ If You Choose — Not Typically Included

Step three: Choose a Family

One of the most fulfilling parts of the adoption process is choosing an adoptive family for your baby. Choosing the right family always starts with asking yourself what's important to you in a family. This will help you pick a family that best reflects your own wants and dreams for your baby.

How to Choose an Adoptive Family

To decide which family is the best match for your baby, consider these questions:



Are you open to a single parent, or do you prefer a two-parent household?

Are you open to a same-sex couple?

Do you prefer a family in a specific location?

Is the family's religion or spiritual beliefs important to you?

What kind of family values and views on parenting are you looking for in a family?

Do you prefer a family that already has children or plans to have/adopt more?

What hobbies and interests do you want the family to have?

Does it matter to you whether one or both parents work outside the home?



We as mothers and as women are capable of anything when it is in the best interest of someone we love more than ourselves.

- Cassie, Birthmother

Communicating with the Adoptive Family

Once you've chosen an adoptive family, your adoption service provider can help facilitate your communication with them. When you're communicating with a family, be as open with them as you're comfortable with. A good starting point is to talk with the family about what level of openness you're all comfortable with before, during, and after the adoption.

Open communication is the basis for a healthy adoption journey. Below are some questions for you to consider at different points of the adoption process. Your answers to these questions are important to share and discuss with your adoptive family to keep the lines of communication open and to keep everyone on the same page.

consider these questions

If you don't know the answers to any of these questions or are uncomfortable discussing any of them with your adoptive family, talk with your adoption service provider, social worker, or attorney.

During Your Pregnancy

- What forms of communication work best for everyone?
- Would you prefer to talk in person, on the phone, or via text, email, or social media?
- Are you comfortable with any of the adoptive family members coming with you to your doctor's appointments?
- Will you be sending the family updates about the growth and progress of your baby? How about ultrasound pictures?

During and After Delivery

- How will the adoptive family be notified when you go into labor?
- Are you comfortable with any members of the adoptive family being in the room with you when you deliver your baby?
- How much time would you like to spend with your baby in the hospital after he or she is born?

After the Adoption

- How often would you like the adoptive family to send you updates? What would you expect these updates to include?
- Would you like to have in-person visits? If so, how often?
- Would you like to give the adoptive family a picture of yourself and/or the birthfather, a letter, a video recording, or something else for them to share with your baby in the future?
- Would you consider providing the adoptive family with your and the birthfather's medical history? This will help during your baby's future doctor's appointments.

step four: Make a Birth Plan

The hospital stay can be a difficult time for a birthmother. This makes your birth plan very important. This plan consists of your preferences for the hospital stay and birthing process. It's beneficial to create such a plan to help avoid any unwanted scenarios at the hospital.

Below are some questions to help you get started. These choices are entirely up to you, so choose whatever you're most comfortable with.



Are there any family members or friends you want to be in the delivery room with you?



Do you want the adoptive parents in the delivery room with you?



Who will be able to drive you to and from the hospital?



Do you have a preference about whether you'd like to deliver vaginally or have a scheduled C-section?



Who would you like to hold your baby first?



How much time do you want to spend with your baby and/or the adoptive family after the baby is born?



A birthmother puts the needs of her child above the wants of her heart.

- Skye Hardwick

part three:

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



The sacrifice you're making for your child should not burden you financially. Your adoption service provider will guide you through the process and connect you with a lawyer - at no charge to you - who will handle all the financial and legal aspects of your adoption plan for you.

Adoption Financial Assistance

If you make an adoption plan, you are guaranteed to receive financial assistance for medical, legal, and counseling fees during your pregnancy. You could also qualify for assistance with reasonable living expenses. Typically, these living expenses include rent, bills, groceries, transportation, and maternity clothes. Birthmothers are usually eligible to receive assistance with living expenses for about one to two months after the birth.

All financial assistance must be handled through your lawyer or social worker. *It is never acceptable for an adoptive family to simply hand over money to a birthparent at any point before or after the birth.*

On top of the financial assistance you'd be eligible to receive, most adoption professionals provide their services for expectant mothers free of charge.

State Restrictions

The specific types and amounts of financial aid allowed depends on the laws in your state. Your lawyer will work with you and the adoptive family to ensure you get any financial aid you're eligible for to make the adoption process as easy as possible for you.

Adoption financial assistance laws vary by state. For example, some states...

- ...have restrictions on the total amount allowed.
- ...only allow assistance with medical, legal, and counseling fees.
- ...have qualifications that must be met before receiving assistance.
- ...have time restrictions.

GET ASSISTANCE WITH LIVING EXPENSES



Rent



Groceries



Bills



Transportation

take your time

We encourage you to take your time with this decision. You don't have to make up your mind right now. Learn everything you can about your options so you can make an educated decision you feel comfortable with.

If you do choose to make an adoption plan, you have the right to change your mind at any point during the adoption process, even after the baby is born. Depending on the state in which you give birth, the final adoption papers aren't usually signed until **12-72** hours after the baby is born.

part four:

AFTER THE ADOPTION



An adoption is a joyous event that creates love and family, but with every adoption, there is the emotional and heroic sacrifice of a birthmother. Even if a birthmother was sure about her decision to place her baby for adoption, she usually goes through a grieving process after the adoption. Here are a few tips and resources to help birthmothers move forward in a healthy way.

Moving Forward

Even if you are absolutely sure about your decision to place your baby for adoption, you may still experience feelings of doubt and denial after your baby is born.

When you first meet your baby, you may feel a strong attachment to him or her, which is totally normal. After your baby goes home with his or her adoptive family, it's also completely normal to feel a sense of sadness, guilt, shame, anger, grief, or loss.

Come to Terms with Your Emotions

Whatever emotions you experience after the adoption, don't ignore them. It's important to acknowledge, express, and accept your feelings. It's only after coming to terms with these feelings that you can go on to live a happy and fulfilling life. Get support: lean on your family and friends, talk to your adoption professional, or speak with a counselor. You are not alone. Connecting with other birthmothers who have gone through the adoption process can be very helpful during this time.

Set Goals for Your Future

As you move forward, set some goals for yourself and begin working toward them. Would you like to begin or finish school? Do you want to pursue a particular career path? Is there a charitable organization you'd like to do volunteer work for? Are you interested in getting involved in an organization that helps other birthmothers? Whatever you'd like to do, pursuing these goals will help the healing process and give you a healthy sense of purpose.

Over the Years

Your adoption experience will always be with you. Being a birthmother will be a part of your identity forever. Be prepared for feelings of grief and loss to surface every so often over the years, especially on holidays or your child's birthday. This is normal, and you should never push these feelings away. Acknowledge them and allow yourself to feel them. Then actively shift your focus to the wonderful life you gave your child and how your selfless and loving choice made a family's dream of parenthood come true.

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR BIRTHMOTHERS

You are not the only one going through this process. There are many wonderful support groups filled with women who have faced the same struggles you're facing. Your adoption service provider can help you find national, state, or local support groups you can look into.

If you are not comfortable with in-person support groups, the internet is also a terrific place to find support from other birthmothers. Online, you do not have to tell your story if you don't want to; simply reading about other birthmother experiences is a way to find comfort and peace with your decision and the road ahead. Finding support throughout your adoption journey can be comforting, reassuring, and soothing. Please know that you are never alone in this journey.

Nationwide Support Groups for Birthmothers

BirthMom Buds Peer counseling, support, encouragement, and friendship for birthmothers and pregnant women who are considering adoption

Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) Support for birthparents and anyone else affected by adoption

Tied At The Heart Education, support, and retreats for birthmothers and others touched by adoption

Real Stories

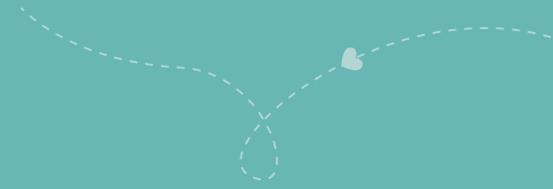
Birthmother Adoption Stories Read real adoption stories from LifeLong birthmothers



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

Choosing adoption is a huge decision that should be made with much thought and consideration. We believe expecting parents deserve to be thoroughly educated about the adoption process in order to make an informed choice. To help with your decision, we put together this guide to give you all the information you need to know about adoption. We hope you found it helpful!

If you'd like to learn more about adoption as an option for you and your baby, the team here at LifeLong Adoptions is always here to listen, talk, and answer any questions you may have. You are welcome to call, text, or email us anytime, day or night.



VISIT US ONLINE AT LIFELONGADOPTIONS.COM // CALL OR TEXT ANYTIME, DAY OR NIGHT 224-410-0522