

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Adoption Options

There are many different types of adoption and choices to be made in adoption. Find information in this factsheet to help you understand the various options and determine the best route to building your family through adoption.

The way you choose to adopt will depend on what is important to your family, including your feelings about contact with birth family members, your flexibility about the characteristics of the child you wish to adopt, your resources, and how long you are willing to wait for your child.

Federal legislation sets the framework for adoption in the United States; States then pass laws to comply with Federal requirements. Within each State, State laws regulate adoption, so you will find many references to "your State" in this factsheet.

Relatives interested in adopting a related infant or child may follow any of the four paths outlined here, depending on the circumstances.

Types of Adoption

One of the first decisions many prospective adoptive parents make is whether to adopt a child from the United States or from another country. Some of the considerations in deciding between domestic and inter-country adoption include the importance of having access to your child's medical and genetic history and how much contact you might want with your child's birth family, now or in the future.

Domestic Adoption

In domestic adoption, you may choose to work with a public agency, a licensed private agency, an attorney ("independent adoption"), or an adoption facilitator (if allowed by laws in your State) or unlicensed agency. Public and licensed private agencies are required to meet State standards and have more oversight to ensure quality services. Unlicensed agencies and facilitators often do not have the same State oversight; consequently, there may be more financial, emotional, and legal risk for adoptive and birth families using unlicensed services. Many public and private adoption agencies offer free orientation sessions that will allow you to gain an overview of their available services prior to making any commitment to work with them.

Whether you adopt an infant or an older child, you are likely to receive more extensive history and background information about a child who lives in the United States than one who lives in another country. Domestic adoptions make it more likely that you will be able to arrange for some degree of contact between your family and the child's birth family after the adoption (referred to as "openness"), if you choose. Even if the adoption is not "open" (i.e., there is no contact with the birth family), people adopted domestically may have an easier time locating their birth families or obtaining their genetic history if they decide to search for that information later in life.

Public Agency Adoption

Public agencies mainly handle the adoption of children in the State foster care (child welfare) system. Children in foster care have been removed from their families for a variety of reasons, including abuse or neglect, and they may have experienced trauma as a result. These children range in age from infants to teens.

There are many children in foster care waiting for adoptive families. Children ages 8 and up, children of color, sibling groups, and children with disabilities are especially in need of adoptive families. Online adoption exchanges provide photo-listings with pictures and brief descriptions of children in the foster care system across a State or region.

AdoptUSKids.org - provides a national website featuring children available for adoption in the United States as well as information and resources about adopting a child from foster care

By asking questions, observing interactions, and coming to understand what is most important to your family, your social worker can work with you to determine what type of child or children would benefit from your family's style of parenting and have their needs met with your family's particular strengths.

You may also want to find out about becoming a foster or resource family, serving as a child's foster family and working with the agency to support the child's return to his or her birth family. Sometimes a foster family can become a child's permanent adoptive family, if the court decides adoption is in the child's best interests.

In public agency adoptions, matches are generally arranged by the agency, through a meeting of several social workers and supervisors and/or by a placement committee, based on the needs of the child and the ability of the family to meet those needs.

Licensed Private Agency Adoption

In a licensed agency adoption, the birth parents relinquish their parental rights to the agency, and adoptive parents then work with the agency to adopt. These agencies are required to adhere to licensing and procedural standards.

Many prospective parents work with licensed private agencies in order to adopt healthy infants. Waiting times for infant adoptions vary tremendously and can be as long as several years or more. In the United States, agency criteria for prospective adoptive parents are often more restrictive for infant adoptions than for adoptions of older children, again because fewer infants are available. Many agencies allow birth parents to choose a prospective adoptive family for their child based on profiles, books, or videos that prospective families create to share information about them. Prospective parents may have an opportunity to meet the birth parents face to face; however, social workers may make decisions about which families' profiles are shared with expectant parents considering adoption, or agency staff may make the match of a child and prospective adoptive parent. In addition, agencies may give preference to certain types of individuals or couples (e.g., due to religious affiliation or marital status).

Independent Adoption

In an independent adoption, attorneys assist prospective parents with the adoption process, which usually involves the adoption of an infant. Families adopting independently identify the expectant parents (or pregnant woman) without an agency's help. Each family's situation is different; it is impossible to predict the length of time you may wait for a child. Some adoptive parents and expectant mothers find each other and make a plan within a week, while other adoptive parents search for years.

Infants usually are placed with the adoptive parents directly from the hospital after birth. While State laws differ about the timing of the birth parents' consent and the conditions and timing of the birth parents' right to revoke that consent, there is always the possibility that birth parents will change their minds when the baby is born. The birth parents are the child's legal parents until they consent to the surrender of their parental rights.

If you decide to choose independent adoption, you will interact with the expectant parents or their attorney. Birth parents typically provide a written consent for the adoption that must be approved by the court. Attorneys who facilitate independent adoptions must adhere to the standards of the American Bar Association. Some attorneys who specialize in adoption are members of the American Academy of
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Adoption Attorneys, a professional membership organization with standards of ethical practice. Not all states allow independent adoptions.

Facilitated/Unlicensed Agency Adoption

Adoptive placements by facilitators and unlicensed agencies offer the least amount of supervision and oversight. A facilitator is any person who links prospective adoptive parents with expectant birth mothers for a fee. Facilitators may or may not be regulated in their State and may have varying degrees of expertise in adoption practice. Families who work with facilitators often have little recourse if the plan does not work out as they had hoped. Some States prohibit adoptions by paid facilitators. Check the adoption program or policy in your State.