

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

Tips for families considering adoption

The decision to adopt a child can lead to an overwhelming number of choices. What is the right way to proceed and how do you begin? There are several options to explore.

What Route to Take?

Before deciding which adoption route will be best for you, it's important to determine your needs, desires and ability to meet the needs of different children. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you want to adopt an infant or an older child?
- Could you cope with a special needs child? Some children may be physically, intellectually or emotionally disabled and others may be healthy, but considered "at risk" due to factors such as the birth mother's alcohol or drug intake.
- Do you want to adopt a child from a similar racial or cultural background to your own or would you prefer a child from a different race, religion or country?
- What are you able to offer a child? You may find it helpful to create a "portrait" of your family and yourself. Describe your life and the life you plan for your child. Include details about your home, pets and extended family. If you choose to pursue an independent or identified adoption, your "portrait" can be a useful tool for adoption sources. If the birth mother is involved in selecting adoptive parents, the portrait can help her see your specific strengths as potential parents.
- Would you prefer a closed or an open adoption?

For many prospective parents, the first step is to join a support group for adoptive parents. There they can talk to people who have navigated the adoption maze and can serve as useful sources of advice and support. This can be extremely helpful, as there are many different options available.

Closed adoptions. In the past, most adoptions were closed with neither birth nor adoptive parents receiving any information about the other—for some, this remains the preferred option. Sealed records may eliminate any risk of the birth mother appearing uninvited in their lives, or they may not feel the need to learn about her beyond the key medical facts.

Open adoptions. Open adoptions vary in their degree of openness. Some provide both birth mother and adoptive parents with full information about each other's lives and backgrounds. Others allow adoptive parents to meet the birth mother, continue contact until the child is born and even be present at the birth. Contact may cease thereafter, but in some instances, may continue throughout the child's life, with the birth mother becoming part of the extended family. These are usually independent or identified adoptions.

Public adoption. These adoptions are government funded and operated by government agencies. The goal is to find appropriate families for children in care who are frequently a little older or in some way qualify as special needs children. These adoptions are usually closed.

Private adoption. Private agencies or adoption professionals arrange for these adoptions, and counselling is often provided for both birth mother and adoptive parents. Private adoption agencies

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usually organize the required Home Study and coordinate the legal process. Costs may include the birth mother's expenses, plus counselling and legal fees.

Independent or identified adoption. Some people prefer more control over the process and opt to independently seek out a birth mother. These adoptive parents should work through a lawyer who specializes in arranging this kind of adoption, and can put the word out to professionals who come in contact with pregnant women seeking adoptive parents. These contacts may include doctors, clergy or pregnancy support group professionals. Other methods may include personal ads in newspapers or magazines.

Independent or identified adoptions are always open to some degree. It will be up to the adoptive parents to determine how much, if any, personal contact they want with the birth mother. Costs will again include the birth mother's expenses plus legal fees. A private adoption agency or professional may be required to arrange for the required Home Study.

Although counseling for the birth mother and adoptive parents is not mandatory, it can reduce the risk of the birth mother changing her mind. Again, you will probably need to work with a private agency or adoption professional to arrange this.

Others work through a private adoption agency with connections in the desired country. Still others visit the country and work with an adoption professional there. Once a child has been identified, the adoption process varies according to the country involved and the adoptive parent's needs and availability.

Whatever route you decide to take, U.S. law requires that every intercountry adoption follows certain procedures so it's important to do your research and enlist in legal support. Visiting .gov websites such as the Guide for Outgoing Cases for more information is a good place to start.