

THE
EXPECTANT
MOTHER'S
GUIDE
-TO-
ADOPTION



Your Baby. Your Choice. Your Rights.

Dealing with an unintended pregnancy is one of the most difficult things you'll ever have to do. If you've explored your options and are considering adoption, it is crucial that you connect with trustworthy organizations and people who will support you and your baby through the adoption process and beyond. More than ever, you need reliable and honest information. The Expectant Mother's Guide to Adoption was written in collaboration with adoption attorneys, birth mothers, adoptive parents and adoptees to give expectant parents a roadmap through the adoption process.

If you have questions, please [call](#)
[or email us here.](#)

With Love,
The TruAdopt & AdoptMatch Team



ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY

If you've done any research about adoption, you've already discovered that there's a whole lot of adoption terminology out there. While you don't need to become fluent in Adoption-Speak, there are some key terms and concepts you should know.

SIX TERMS YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 Private Adoption

Private adoption is when an expectant parent places her baby for adoption with a family of her choice. There's no foster agency or county social worker involved. A private adoption can be an [agency adoption](#) (handled by an agency) or an [independent adoption](#) (handled by an attorney).

2 Open Adoption

Open Adoption technically just means that you and the family who adopts your child have basic information about each other including names, where everyone lives, whether you have other children, etc. It also usually means that you and the family who adopts your baby (also called the "adoptive family" or "prospective adoptive parents") agree to stay in touch until your child turns 18. Be careful here. Just because an agency or family says that they want an "open adoption," doesn't guarantee that you'll have the opportunity for an ongoing relationship with your child. To be safe, you will need a "Post-Adoption Contact Agreement" (sometimes referred to as a PACA), which is a written agreement that clearly spells out your plan for contact. Even then, ongoing contact is not guaranteed. You'll need to check the laws of your state and the adoptive parents' to make sure these agreements are enforceable, meaning that a judge will order everyone to stay in contact as agreed.

3 Post-Adoption Contact

This is the term that describes how much contact, if any, you will have with the adoptive family after the adoption is final. In some states, it is customary for each adoption to include a Post-Adoption Contact Agreement ("PACA"), which clearly states the type and frequency of contact. In many states, these agreements are not enforceable, but are more like a promise you and the adoptive parents make to one another. Whether and how you can enforce the agreement varies from state to state. A typical PACA gives you the right to receive pictures, letters and sometimes, visits.

4 Home Study

In all states, adoptive parents must complete an extensive process involving background checks, interviews, home visits, references, and medical examinations to ensure that they are a safe, emotionally healthy family, and are ready to adopt a child. This process is called a home study and is conducted by a licensed adoption agency. Before selecting a family, it is important to confirm that they have successfully completed, or are at least in the process of completing, their home study. You also have the right to ask the adoptive parents if you may review a copy of their home study. They should be allowed to remove identifying or highly personal information first, but should be happy to have you know much of the same information that their agency does. After all, you are considering them to be parents of your child.

5 Relinquishment and Consent

These are the documents you'll sign with your social worker and/or attorney after baby is born. They give your authorization for the adoption. These are the most important documents in the process because they make the adoption official and permanent.

6 Revocation Period

This is the period of time you have to change your mind about the adoption and to reclaim custody of your child. The revocation period varies greatly between states, from states with no revocation period to others which have a 30-day revocation period.

ESSENTIALS OF ADOPTION

Simplifying the process



NO. 1 KNOW WHO YOU CAN TRUST

Finding an Adoption Professional

We hate to say it, but adoption is a big business for some, which is why you need to be smart about who you choose to work with. Here's an ugly truth: there are many unscrupulous people and organizations who claim to have your best interest at heart, but who really just want you to place your baby with a family who has already paid them lots of money to find them a "match." It may turn out that you truly like one of these families and want them to be the adoptive parents. If so, great. But if you feel that none of their families are the right match for you, you should be given lots of other options. Think of it as though you were looking for someone to marry. Would you limit yourself to just one dating website in your search for the right match? No! You'd keep looking until you found people that you felt were compatible with what you wanted and would narrow down your choices from there. You also need guidance from someone who is knowledgeable about adoption law in your state and who can advise you about issues including birth father rights, living expenses and contact after the adoption. If you're not sure whether adoption is your best option, it's important to first get connected with someone who can provide neutral options education.

Beware of any so called adoption professional who doesn't immediately refer you to a licensed social worker or attorney to answer your questions or who starts off by promising generous living expenses – while you may be entitled to receive living expenses from the adoptive parents, you don't want to work with someone who uses a promise of money to entice you to work with them. Likewise, if the adoption professional only shows you a few profiles of families who don't meet your criteria, either move on or insist on seeing other profiles. There are thousands of families in the U.S. and other countries, wanting to adopt. Your adoption professional should be willing to do whatever is necessary to help you find the right family for you and your unborn baby.

NO. 1 KNOW WHO YOU CAN TRUST (cont.)

Finding an Adoption Professional

AdoptMatch is a great place to start when looking for an adoption agency or attorney committed to your rights and your child's best interests. All of our adoption professionals have pledged to follow our six guiding principles:

01. TRANSPARENCY

There is transparency between all of the parties involved.

02. SEPARATE LEGAL REPRESENTATION

Expectant Mothers are offered separate legal representation.

03. OPEN DIALOGUE

There is open dialogue about a specific plan for [post-adoption contact](#) between Expectant Parents and Adoptive Parents.

04. COMPLETE SUPPORT

Expectant Mothers receive the support needed to ensure a healthy pregnancy, delivery and recovery.

05. PRENATAL CARE

Expectant Mothers are committed to consistent prenatal care and a substance-free lifestyle during pregnancy.

06. NO EXCESSIVE FEES

Adoption Professionals are reasonably compensated for their services, but do not charge excessive fees.

[Consulting with an adoption attorney in your state](#) who specializes in expectant parent representation is another good starting place. [TruAdopt Law](#) works with birth mothers across the country and can also help connect you with an attorney in your own state. [AdoptMatch](#) is also a good starting place for finding a professional in your area. Most adoption attorneys have relationships with reputable local agencies.



NO.2 LET THE SEARCH BEGIN

Finding an Adoptive Family

There are thousands of couples who are ready and longing to adopt. Regardless of your circumstances, you should never feel like your choice of families is limited or that you have to go with the best of some not-so-thrilling options. Choosing an adoptive family is one of the biggest decisions of your life; you need to be aware of all of your options.

Don't rush and don't settle.

There are **five** main ways for you to find a family:

1. Someone you know from your community or contacts

You may already have a friend or relative in mind for your child. If so, make sure they have a home study and their own adoption professional to handle the legal process. They will be responsible for paying for their own attorney or agency to handle the adoption and your separate attorney.

2. Adoption Agencies

Adoption agencies are organizations licensed by the state to provide adoption services, including expectant parent and birth parent counseling. They are paid by hopeful adoptive parents and typically will only show you the families who have signed up with them. If you like one of these families, that's a good start, but you need to make sure the agency you work with is one of the good ones. Ask to see more families if you don't feel certain. Many agencies may limit your choices to just families signed up with their agency. If they aren't willing to show you other families and none of theirs are right for you, don't be afraid to move on (just make certain you let them know that you are speaking with other agencies or attorneys).

NO.2 LET THE SEARCH BEGIN (cont.)

Finding an Adoptive Family

3. Adoption Attorneys

As with agencies, most attorneys specializing in adoption are paid by hopeful adoptive parents to find a child for them and to handle the adoption process. Attorneys are usually working with fewer families than an adoption agency. However, they often are part of a network of other adoption professionals who can connect you with additional families if you don't select one of theirs. Just as with agencies, before you begin working with an adoption attorney, you must ask him/her the following questions:

- **Will I have my own legal representation? Will he/she be paid for by the adoptive parents?**
- **Will we have a written agreement regarding post-adoption contact? If allowed in your state of residence, will the post-adoption contact agreement be filed with the court?**
- **Will I be offered counseling by a licensed therapist for at least six months after placement?**

The answer to all of the above questions should be "yes." If not, find a new attorney.

[TruAdopt Law](#) is unique because we focus exclusively on expectant parent representation. TruAdopt Law only represents women making an adoption plan, not adoptive parents. If you're not in California, [AdoptMatch](#) can help you find attorneys who represent expectant parents in other states. We have access to a large network of families looking to adopt, but who are not our clients.

4. Facilitators

Facilitators are individuals who are hired by adoptive parents to find an expectant parent who wants to place her baby for adoption with them. A facilitator's fee usually ranges from \$8,500 to \$25,000 with an average fee of about \$12,000. Facilitators are usually not licensed by their state and are not social workers, attorneys or agencies. A facilitator will introduce you to couples who have hired her, but may also have access to a larger network of adoptive families. Before you are matched with an adoptive family, you should be represented by your own attorney.

NO.2 LET THE SEARCH BEGIN (cont.)

Finding an Adoptive Family

Be very careful when contacting an adoption facilitator. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and don't stop until you get answers.

Some facilitators will push you toward their family who has been waiting the longest, rather than helping you find a family that is truly right for you and your baby. Facilitators may also try to downplay any concerns or requests you may have about the family in hopes of making a "match." For instance, you may want more post-adoption contact than a particular family is comfortable with; the facilitator may fail to tell the family what you're hoping for until you're so far down the path that it feels hard to back out. Facilitators are also notorious for misrepresenting possible issues with the baby or the adoption, such as drug exposure, possible mental health issues, your need for financial support or uncooperative birth fathers. When any of these issues are present, it's better for the adoptive family to be fully informed about it, before your match happens. Rest assured that whatever your circumstances, there's an adoptive family out there ready to embrace whatever issues you may be dealing with. Bottom Line - Don't work with a professional who wants to sugarcoat tough topics or who encourages you to keep things hidden. Full disclosure is a must.

Remember, adoption facilitators (or social workers) are not allowed or equipped to give you legal advice or provide counseling. If you do end up choosing a family through a facilitator, insist that you be connected to your own attorney and a licensed social worker as soon as possible. To find a licensed adoption professional who is both ethical and compassionate, [click here](#).

5. Online Matching Sites

There are several online matching sites designed to help connect you with potential adoptive families. While these can be a good resource, we strongly advise that you make your match through an adoption professional, who has already screened the prospective adoptive parents. [AdoptMatch](#) is exceptional because all of the families on AdoptMatch are home study approved and working with an adoption agency or attorney screened by AdoptMatch to ensure that they practice the highest standards of ethics in adoption. When you submit a Request for More Info about a family, you are immediately connected with their adoption professional. All initial communication is between you and the family's attorney or agency, until you decide that you want to make direct contact with the family.

NO.2 LET THE SEARCH BEGIN (cont.)

Finding an Adoptive Family

Regardless of where you find the adoptive family, we highly recommend that before you make a decision to "match" with an adoptive couple (officially choose them to adopt your baby), you meet them in person. Talking on the phone, texting or exchanging emails is a good first step in getting to know each other, but shouldn't replace spending some time together before your baby's birth, if at all possible. Doing so makes the whole experience easier. It's best to avoid meeting for the first time in your hospital room where you will likely be physically uncomfortable (aka "in a lot of pain!"), self-conscious about the way you look, exhausted and emotional. Not the ideal circumstances to be getting acquainted and making important observations.



NO. 3 FORMS, FORMS AND MORE FORMS

Get Ready to Write

Whether or not you have already selected a family for your baby, one of the first things you'll be asked to do is complete intake forms designed to gather information about you and the birth father's medical and family history, if known. These forms are usually quite lengthy and may take you a while to complete. Take your time and provide thorough, accurate answers. Be honest about your background – even when it comes to things like drug/alcohol use or a family history of mental illness. Your goal is to find adoptive parents who are well-equipped to raise your child, so there's no point in withholding important information. Everyone has issues, and there is a family out there who will compassionately embrace yours.

You'll also be asked to provide information about your financial situation and the support you may need during and after your pregnancy, your relationship with the birth father and his position regarding adoption, and your feelings about staying in contact with the adoptive family. Some of these questions may be difficult to answer and should only be completed after you've had the opportunity to review them with your own attorney.



NO. 4 YOURS, MINE AND OURS

The Importance of Separate Representation

The question of legal representation in an adoption can get a bit tricky.

Regardless of how you find your adoptive family, it's the adoptive parents who will pay for all of the adoption professionals involved. The adoptive parents usually have their own attorney and they may also have hired an adoption agency. Unfortunately, in many adoptions, the expectant mother is not represented by [her own attorney](#). A few states require that an expectant mother be separately represented or at least be offered separate representation and require that the adoptive parents pay her legal fees. Regardless of your state's laws regarding separate representation, you can and should expect that the adoptive parents will pay for your attorney's fees, as long as they are reasonable.

Even if you don't have your own attorney, in most states you're required to be formally advised of your rights by a social worker. Sometimes, though, that advisement doesn't happen until very near the birth of your child. Make sure you know your legal rights early on and don't be afraid to ask questions frequently throughout the process. **If you ask your social worker for a chance to meet with your own attorney and he/she tries to convince you that you don't need one, it's time to find a new social worker.**



NO. 5 YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Finding Support

Emotional

Whether you are working with an agency or an attorney, you need and deserve to have counseling both before and after the birth of the child. While meeting regularly with a counselor is no magic cure to feelings of sadness and loss that adoption will cause, it can make a huge difference in your emotional stability during and after baby's birth. Don't choose just any counselor; ask for help finding one that is experienced with issues of adoption, grief and loss. There are several well-qualified and compassionate therapists who will provide counseling to you via phone or Skype, if necessary. The agency or attorney you choose to work with should be able to help you locate someone right for your circumstances, and the adoptive parents should pay for your [counseling sessions](#) for a reasonable amount of time after the adoption. AdoptMatch and TruAdopt Law suggest a minimum of six months.

Financial

Most state's laws allow you to receive [financial support](#) from the adoptive parents for a few months surrounding the birth of your child. The purpose of the support is to make sure your needs for food, shelter, clothing, medical care and transportation, during and after your pregnancy are adequately met. It's crucial that you work closely with your attorney to make sure you are complying with the laws of your state regarding financial support. It should go without saying that you must never accept financial support from anyone unless it is your sincere intention to place your baby for adoption with them. Unfortunately, a quick Google search for "adoption scams" will yield countless stories of cruel and unscrupulous people who have tricked unsuspecting adoptive parents into giving them money in exchange for the promise of adoption. However, the majority of expectant parents request living expense assistance for the exact purpose it was intended – to help get through the pregnancy and recovery period without the additional stress that comes from not being able to work in the latter stages of pregnancy.



NO. 6 THE BIG EVENT

Making a Hospital Plan

The two keys to minimizing stress at the hospital are communication and planning.

It's crucial that you work with the adoptive parents (and usually a therapist, social worker, or adoption doula) to talk through your respective concerns and wishes surrounding the baby's birth and make a written plan. Questions regarding who will be with you during labor and delivery, who will cut baby's umbilical cord and what name baby will be given should be discussed way before you get to the hospital. Don't be reluctant to ask to spend time alone with baby at the hospital, if that's what you want. If you explain your plan to the adoptive parents beforehand, they will be less likely to misinterpret your request and worry that you're changing your mind about the adoption. These conversations with the adoptive parents and the social worker will be used to create a document called the Hospital Plan that should be sent to the hospital and placed in your file before your due date. It is a good idea to make sure you, your attorney and the adoptive parents all have a copy of the Hospital Plan as well.

The Hospital Plan not only serves as a roadmap for the labor, delivery and post-partum experience, but also gives the hospital staff, including social workers, nurses and doctors, a heads up as to who is involved in the adoption. From the time you arrive at the hospital to the time you leave, everyone will know that there is an adoption plan in place and will usually do their best to support everyone involved. We say usually because sometimes our clients encounter a social worker or nurse during the hospital stay who is not supportive, so don't be surprised if that happens to you. Our best advice is to just smile, thank him or her for the input and end the conversation there. Also, don't worry if you end up wanting to change something in the Hospital Plan. You're not tied to the plan and are free to change your mind about any aspect. The focus of your time at the hospital should be exclusively on you and your baby's comfort and well-being, not on the adoptive parents, your family or even the birth father. After all, you're the one doing the heavy-lifting.



NO. 7 MAKING IT OFFICIAL

Signing the Adoption Consent or Relinquishment

State laws vary as to when you'll be allowed to sign the documents which make the adoption official. Some states allow you to sign them at any time after baby's birth, while others require a waiting period before you are allowed to sign. California allows you to sign the consent once you've been "medically discharged" from the hospital (which is usually 24 to 72 hours).

As the time to sign the consent draws closer, everyone's stress levels usually begin to rise. The adoptive parents are on an emotional rollercoaster – they are falling in love with the baby, but are afraid to let themselves. They're usually full of sympathy for the birth mother and want to ease her pain, while simultaneously hoping, and often praying, that she will follow through with the adoption.

Meanwhile, you will be physically exhausted and hormonal, but relieved and happy that your beautiful baby has arrived safely after all these months inside your belly. As the hours tick by, you will become more and more aware that soon you'll be expected to say goodbye to this little person whom you've nurtured for nine months and brought into this world. Even though you believe adoption is the best decision for your baby, you will probably question your decision and experience deep sadness during this time. If honest, most birth mothers will tell you that they had second-thoughts about their adoption plan after baby was born.

There's very little you or the adoptive parents can do or say to lessen the intensity of the hospital experience. Thorough planning and honest communication are the best ways we know of to make things a bit easier on everyone.

NO.7 MAKING IT OFFICIAL (cont.)

Signing the Adoption Consent or Relinquishment

Before you sign the adoption consent, you must:

- **Be confident that you're making the best decision possible. If you need further help in making the decision, ask to be connected with an experienced and trustworthy therapist who is familiar with adoption.**
- **Fully understand the consent paperwork process, including your state's laws about when the consent becomes irrevocable and the terms of the post-adoption contact agreement. You should review all of the documents with your attorney before you sign anything. Ask questions if you have them. Ask again if you don't fully understand the answer you're given.**
- **Receive copies of all documents you've signed.**

Even if you ordinarily don't like to rock the boat or are a natural born people-pleaser, now is the time to voice your concerns or ask questions about things you don't understand. Most adoptive parents truly want their child's birth mother to look back on her adoption experience knowing that she made a fully-informed decision and was treated with respect and compassion by everyone involved in the process.

Despite the difficult emotions, the majority of women who get to this point follow through with their adoption plan. However, if you do change your mind about the adoption, you have an ethical and legal duty to immediately communicate your decision to your attorney, social worker and the adoptive parents. Stop accepting financial support the moment your plan to place your baby for adoption changes. It is crucial that you are honest with the adoptive parents as you don't want to ever be accused of fraud.

It is your right to change your mind about the adoption prior to placing the child. As discussed above, state laws vary considerably on how long following the birth you are given to withdraw your consent. Of course, it's better for all parties involved, including your baby, if you make that decision prior to the child's birth. The most important thing is to communicate promptly and honestly with the adoptive parents, social worker and your attorney.



NO. 8 STAYING CONNECTED

Self-Care After Placement

Your adoption story doesn't end at the hospital or when your adoption consent becomes final. It will continue on and have new beginnings for baby, for you, and for the adoptive parents. Its legacy will bind you and the adoptive family together for a lifetime.

Immediately following the birth of your baby, support is key. Ideally, you will be surrounded by supportive family members, friends and a trusted counselor during this time. Luckily, other than sore breasts and something that seems like the longest period ever, your body will rebound pretty quickly and you should be able to resume your normal activities within a few weeks. If you have a C-section, count on a longer recovery period. Emotionally, the first few weeks following the birth may be very difficult. The feelings of grief will be real and your emotions raw. The peace of knowing you made a good decision will help you get through this time. Force yourself to stay connected with your adoption counselor and your support system. Again, your adoption plan should include counseling visits, with a therapist of your choice, paid for by the adoptive parents following placement. It should also clearly state the type of contact you will have with the adoptive parents during the first few weeks after baby goes home with them. They will be emotionally and physically exhausted too, so communicating about everyone's expectations in advance is the best way to prevent hurt feelings.

As the weeks and months progress, it's crucial for you to stay connected to support resources. Thankfully, the community of [post-placement support resources](#) available for birth mothers is rapidly expanding throughout the U.S. Some of these resources offer online peer support and others hold annual, no-charge retreats especially designed for birth mothers.

NO.8 STAYING CONNECTED (cont.)

Self-Care After Placement

Many of the organizations offer counseling, mentoring and educational scholarships. You will inevitably face the challenges that come with returning to life before your pregnancy and adoption as you navigate what it means to be a part of a newly formed extended family, bound together by your mutual love of your baby. Keep close to the important people in your life and seek out the support you need.

As normal life resumes and time passes, your Post-Adoption Contact Agreement (PACA) becomes very important. Your relationship with the adoptive parents and your son or daughter will be governed by that agreement. Like all relationships, yours with the adoptive parents will evolve over time. In California, if the adoptive family doesn't follow through with the agreed-upon communication, you have the right to have the agreement enforced by a judge. The adoptive parents' failure to uphold the agreement will never undo the adoption, but in California and approximately 18 other states, the court will order them to keep their promises to you, unless it finds that doing so would not be in your child's best interest. If you stop receiving communication from the adoptive parents, be sure to immediately notify your attorney and social worker and ask for their help.

Hopefully, as is the case in the vast majority of adoptions, your relationship with the adoptive parents will be a positive one, despite the occasional rough patches that all relationships weather. As you remain in contact, you will have the opportunity to witness your child's growth and development over the next 18 years, and she will grow up knowing that you are a part of her life, standing on the sidelines, loving her and cheering her along.



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