



Adoption: Exploring Your Options

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Adoption is the process of transferring the legal parental responsibilities for a child in order to meet the ongoing needs of that child. There are children all across this country, and around the world, in need of loving, stable caregivers. For families struggling with typical means of conception, adoption can provide a path to parenthood. For others, providing a stable, loving home to a child in need is the primary goal. However, adoption can be a daunting undertaking for many reasons. As you begin to consider whether your family is ready to engage in this process and commitment, we have provided some topics which may help you assess and prepare.

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International Adoption

Overview

International adoption involves adopting a child outside of the United States. The ages of children for this scenario tend to range from toddlers to school aged children. Information on the child's medical history and family medical history may be limited in certain countries. Sometimes, there are restrictions on choosing the gender of your child, but generally this is an option. The adoption paperwork is usually extensive for this type of adoption, as is the wait time. It can take between 12 and 36 months to bring your child home. Generally, international adoptions are closed adoptions. Same sex couples will have difficulty finding agencies that can serve them in many countries, and marital status can also be a factor. The cost of this type of adoption can be between \$20,000 and \$60,000 plus the cost of traveling to the country you are adopting your child from.

Process and Timeline

The first steps to starting this adoption process are selecting an agency to work with and selecting an attorney to advise you. The international adoption process can become very complicated, as it is governed by three sets of laws: U.S. federal law, the laws of the child's country you are adopting from, and the laws of your state of residence. Selecting both an attorney and an adoption agency you are comfortable with is extremely important. Once you have made these selections, you will need to fill out an application and accompanying paperwork, complete a home study and then apply to be pre-qualified to adopt a foreign born orphan by Citizenship and Immigration Services. Once this is complete you can submit your dossier and wait for the matching process to begin. Once you have been matched with a child and are sure you are ready to commit, all agencies will need to be notified of your decision and you must travel to the child's location to complete the adoption. After the adoption process is complete in your child's country of origin, you will immigrate the child into the United States through the approval of a Citizenship and Immigration Services. This will require a visa issued by the U.S. Embassy located in your child's country of origin. After you are able to return home with your child, there will also be a period of supervision and perhaps even years of postadoption reports to ensure the child is being cared for according to the standards of all involved. This type of adoption process can be expected to take a minimum of one year and can sometimes take several years.

Relevant Resources

- [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) — immigration through adoption
- [A "How to" for International Adoptions](#) — provided by Immigration Direct
- [International Adoption Help](#) — a website dedicated to providing helpful resources for prospective parents
- [Creating a Family: International Adoption](#) — provides resources to answer common questions or concerns

Domestic Private Adoption

Overview

Parents selecting this option are typically trying to adopt newborn babies in the United States. Usually, a complete medical history is available for the child and possibly family medical histories as well. It can be difficult to choose the gender and age of your child because expecting parents generally get to choose who to give their child to. This type of adoption involves agency paperwork, attorney paperwork, home study paperwork and creating a family profile. Depending on the state, birth parents have the chance to change their mind for a certain amount of time after birth. Wait time varies as you have to wait to be chosen by birth parents and it may take time for someone to select you. There are greater trends towards increased openness toward birth parents after adoption. Single parents are selected less often. If adopting from another state, adoptive parents are usually asked to spend a week in the state with the child. The cost can be between \$15,000 and \$45,000.

Process and Timeline

The first step in the process of private, domestic adoption is to select an adoption agency and attorney to best fit your family. What makes this type of adoption unique is the active input from the birth parents. Once you have found the agency you feel comfortable with, you will need to fill out an application, conduct a home study and construct a family profile. At this point, birth parents can review available profiles and select the family they would like to have adopt their child. They will initiate contact with families they are considering and, once they select a family, they will likely keep in contact with them for the duration of the pregnancy. This is also the point where both families need to discuss whether they will be conducting a closed, open or semi-open adoption. The adoptive family will often have the opportunity to travel to the hospital to welcome their child when it is born and it is at this point that the placement can occur. If the birth parents have not changed their minds about the adoption, they will proceed with terminating their parental rights and the child will be placed with the adoptive family. For the next three to six months, a series of post-placement visits will occur and the details of the termination of parental rights and adoption paperwork will be reviewed. At the end of this process there will be a finalization hearing, where the adoption is officially recognized by the court and is complete.

Relevant Resources

- [American Adoptions](#) — domestic adoption resources
- [Creating a Family](#) — domestic adoption resources
- [Private Adoption Agencies](#) — an overview of domestic private adoption and the agencies that provide this service
- [Adopt a Baby - What is Domestic Infant Adoption?](#) — outlines the process for domestic private adoptions

Domestic Foster Care Adoption

Overview

This option involves adopting a child or children from the foster care system in the United States. There are two types of foster care adoption: direct foster care adoption, where parental rights have already been terminated; and foster to adopt, where you can choose to open your home to children in the foster care system and will be given first choice to adopt them if parental rights are terminated. The majority of children available for direct adoptions are ages 6 and up, with younger children usually belonging to a set of siblings. Foster to adopt families will generally have access to younger children, but only about 25% of children in foster care will ultimately be adopted. Children will generally have a health history available, but family medical history can be more challenging. You are able to specify preferred gender and age group. Paperwork is comparatively less than private agencies, but families must attend a 30–35 hour educational preparatory course as part of their application. If parental rights have already been terminated, there should be no contest. If not, parents still have the ability to reunify with their children. Timeline varies greatly but it is possible to have the child in your home while adoption is being finalized. The process can be as short as a few months in some instances. The openness of the adoptions varies, but usually contact with birth siblings and extended family is requested. Adoption decisions are made based on what is in the best interest of the child. Age of the parent, sexual orientation and marital status are less of a factor here. The cost of adopting from foster care is also significantly less. For families that foster, the cost of adoption might be covered, but all families can look to see if they are eligible for adoption subsidies to help pay for expenses.

Process and Timeline

All prospective parents hoping to adopt from the foster care system must fill out an application and undergo initial screening. You will need to provide a doctor's note verifying your health, financial records, personal references and all necessary clearances. After this initial screening, you will undergo a series of home visits to determine if your home is a safe place for a child. Once this is complete, matching can begin and the agency will provide you with information about children who may be a good fit for your family. You will get a chance to meet children and spend time together in a pre-placement visit before making any decisions. If you feel comfortable, the agency can arrange to have the child placed in your home. If you are ready to finalize the adoption, your lawyer will need to file a "Report of Intent to Adopt." Before the adoption can be finalized, there is a period of supervision and support for the child and the new family. Children must be in the home for a period of no less than six months before adoption can be finalized. Foster parents who have already had the child in the home can usually count that time and complete this process more quickly.

Relevant Resources

- [Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network](#)
- [Department of Human Services](#) — adoption in Pennsylvania
- [Foster Care and Adoption in Pennsylvania](#)

Surrogacy, Sperm, Egg or Embryo Donation

Surrogacy

There are two types of surrogacy: traditional surrogacy, where the birth mother uses her own egg; and gestational surrogacy, where the birth mother is not biologically related to the child and an egg and sperm from donors or intended parents are used. Traditional surrogacy is treated legally as an adoption and is rarely practiced anymore. The birth mother would have to relinquish her parental rights after birth and adoption paperwork would be processed. Gestational surrogacy is far more common, and considered less risky as the birth mother does not have parental rights. It can take several attempts before a successful pregnancy can be established. The overall process can cost between \$80,000 and \$200,000. Generally, both egg donors and surrogates are heavily screened, so there is a wealth of health information available. Sexual orientation and marital status are also not generally a factor in this process.

Sperm Donation

This is the process of using donated sperm to fertilize an egg and produce a child. It is not considered adoption, as the donor will relinquish any parental rights prior to fertilization. The cost of this option is generally around \$2,000 and may be covered by insurance in some instances, but it is important to note that it may take several attempts before a successful pregnancy is established.

Egg Donation

This is the process of using a donated egg to produce a child. It is not considered adoption, as the donor relinquishes any parental rights prior to fertilization. The cost of this option is generally between \$30,000 and \$70,000 and it may take several attempts to establish a successful pregnancy.

Embryo Donation

This type of adoption is for an embryo, which will be implanted and carried to term by someone other than the biological parents. If implantation is successful, the resulting child will legally be a member of the adoptive family upon its birth. Health information for the embryo is generally known but gender is rarely known. If adopting from a fertility clinic the paperwork is minimal. If adopting from an adoption agency, there is significantly more paperwork. Biological parents will sign over their rights before implantation, but it is important to note that only 36% of embryo donation transfers typically result in a live birth. This type of adoption features no contact with biological parents if facilitated by a fertility clinic, but may have the possibility of contact if facilitated by an adoption agency. Age may be a factor in ensuring a successful transfer, but clinics will not consider marital status or sexual orientation a factor. Some adoption agencies might consider these factors. Travel might be involved in order to reach the donating clinic, and the costs range between \$4,500 and \$16,000 per attempt.

Surrogacy, Sperm, Egg or Embryo Donation

Process and Timeline

The process for any of these options usually starts in a fertility clinic. Sperm donation is by far the most expedient process, and usually involves placing an order with a sperm bank and setting up an appointment for the procedure. It is often advised that you seek legal advice to secure the rights of the parent not biologically related to the child, or if you are using a known donor. The process of using an egg donor is more complex and requires that the donor and recipient synchronize their menstrual cycles to ensure successful transfer of the egg. Once synchronized, there is a waiting period while the egg reaches maturity, then the egg will be fertilized by either your partner or donor sperm and a number of days will pass while the embryo develops. Usually, multiple embryos will be created and you can decide how many to implant, while storing the remaining embryos for later attempts. If all goes well, the remaining wait time will be the length of a typical pregnancy.

Sometimes, not all embryos are used in this process and the remaining embryos can be donated to parents who wish to “adopt” them. In order to adopt an embryo, parents will have to apply to either a fertility clinic or an adoption agency and will likely undergo a health screening and home study to ensure the home environment is a safe place for the child. At that point, the matching process can begin. Despite the terminology, this process is governed by contracts and is different than the typical legal process for adopting a child.

Surrogacy is a different process, in which there is extensive interaction between the surrogate mother and the parents. Before the embryo is implanted, there is an extensive matching process during which parents look for a willing surrogate who fits their needs. The main role of an agency in this scenario is to facilitate matching and the resulting contract that must be signed before implantation. Once terms are agreed upon, the surrogate will undergo synchronization of her cycle and receive an embryo donated by the parents or by other donors. If successful, she will proceed with the pregnancy and the parents will travel to her to connect with their child at birth.

Relevant Resources

- [The National Infertility Association](#) — provides an overview of different types of surrogacy and related resources
- [Family Equality: Affording Surrogacy Guide](#) — provides various approaches to affording the surrogacy process
- [National Embryo Donation Center](#) — provides an extensive FAQ about embryo adoption
- [American Society for Reproductive Medicine](#) — provides a factsheet covering the use of sperm, egg and embryo donation

Important Topics and Tools

Finding an Adoption Agency

- [Adoption Service Provider Search](#) — Provided by the Department of State, this search returns accredited and approved providers by program country who are connected with Hague intercountry adoption.
- [National Foster Care & Adoption Directory Search](#) — There are thousands of adoption agencies in America. Narrowing down this field to those that meet your specific preferences can be overwhelming; however, it is important to find the right agency for you. This search tool can provide options relevant to your state.
- [Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network](#) — This resource can provide a listing of children in the foster care system who are available for adoptions and facilitate becoming a foster parent.
- [Pennsylvania Surrogacy Professionals](#) — This resource provides listings of agencies, clinics, lawyers and more.

Finding an Adoption Lawyer

As you consider different types of adoption, you will see that most options require the assistance of an adoption lawyer. Finding a reputable lawyer who fits your price range can be difficult, but also very important, because they will guide you through various state and possibly international laws and regulations. Below are some resources to assist in the search process.

- [Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys](#) — national membership organization of attorneys with expertise in adoption; includes a directory of adoption attorneys in all 50 states
- [American Bar Association](#) — listings of lawyers by location as well as a referral service

Adoption Scams

Unfortunately, there are people who will take advantage of children and families going through the adoption process. Considering the amount of money that changes hands during the adoption process, it is important to ensure that you are protected. The best way to protect yourself is to educate yourself about the process, know who you are working with, and know the laws and regulations that apply to your situation. Guides provided by [My Adoption Advisor](#) and [Considering Adoption](#) explain steps to take to prevent fraud.

Important Topics and Tools

Home Study

A home study is a step in the adoption process in which the agency or organization that received your application must certify that your home is a safe place for a child. While different states have different laws regarding adoption, all states require a home study, which is essentially a written report or profile that a caseworker creates after interviewing your family. It can include financial statements, educational background, prior and current relationships, letters of reference, experiences and attitudes towards children, details about your home and neighborhood, your reason for wanting to adopt, how you cope with pressure and interpersonal discord, and potentially even what kind of supports you have in place to help with the child. Ultimately, the caseworker makes a determination whether your home is safe for a child and makes recommendations on what a good match would look like. This process consists of a series of visits, some of which take place in your home. It can take anywhere between three and six months for the paperwork to be finalized, and these meetings provide a great opportunity for families to ask the agency questions about costs, financial aid, postadoption services, etc. The Child Welfare Information Gateway provides useful information explaining the process such as [Requirements for Domestic Adoption](#) and [The Adoption Home Study Process](#).

Topics to Consider

There are several topics that merit careful consideration for families entering into the adoption process.

- Transracial adoption:
 - [The Adoptive Parent's Responsibility when Parenting a Child of a Different Race](#)
 - [PACT Support Resources](#)
 - [Doing Race, Family and Culture Through Transracial Adoption](#)
 - [Transracial Adoption: Becoming a Multicultural/Multiracial Family](#)
- Adopting a child with special needs:
 - [Trauma Informed Care](#)
 - [9 Things to Consider When Adopting a Child with Special Needs](#)
 - [Love Without Boundaries Resource List](#)
 - [Typical Behaviors of Children Adopted Internationally](#)
- Blending biological and adopted children:
 - [Blending Children by Birth and Adoption](#)
 - [Adopting When You Have a Birth Child — and Vice Versa](#)
- Adopting older children:
 - [Suggested Reading List by Creating a Family](#)

Important Topics and Tools

Further Reading and Resources

- [Becoming Your Own Advocate: Learning to be Assertive](#)
- [Nine Qualities of Successful Foster and Adoptive Parents](#)
- [Tapestry Books](#)
- [16 Things to Ask Yourself Before You Adopt](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway: Exploring the Pathways to Adoption](#)

Financial Assistance

- [Adoption Tax Credit](#) — Tax benefits for adoption include both a tax credit for qualified adoption expenses paid to adopt an eligible child and an exclusion from income for employer-provided adoption assistance.
- [PA State Adoption Assistance](#) — Children in foster care who meet the indicated requirements are eligible to receive adoption assistance from the state.
- Adoption Loans — It is possible to find lender that will loan you the money needed to adopt a child, making it easier to afford the cost up front and break down the payments over time. However, this is not always a wise financial choice. Before taking out one of these loans, it is best to speak with an unbiased financial professional who can evaluate the terms of the deal and the likelihood that this will be a good financial decision in your situation.
- [Adoption Benefits for Military Personnel](#) — Military service members who adopt a child under 18 years of age may be reimbursed qualified adoption expenses up to \$2,000 per adoptive child (up to a total of \$5,000 if more than one child is adopted) per calendar year.
- Adoption Grants — Some non-profit organizations will provide grants to families for the purpose of assisting them in the adoption process. Many of these organizations are faith-based, so there may be restrictions on who can use the funds.
 - [A Child Waits Foundation](#) — provides adoption loans and grants for international and domestic adoption
 - [National Adoption Foundation](#) — provides grants and loans for all legal adoptions, public and private.
 - [Gift of Adoption Fund](#) — the largest provider of adoption assistance grants awarded without regard to race, religion, age, marital status or sexual orientation; grants of up to \$15,000 are awarded monthly to qualified applicants
 - [Help Us Adopt](#) — awards grants up to \$15,000 and provides for both single and two-parent families as well as same-sex households, does not require a statement of faith or religion, and does not charge for an initial application
 - Adoption Agencies — many adoption agencies have funds available to qualified families, although most are intended to assist with the placement of children with special needs or who have had difficult finding a placement
- Fundraising for Adoption — It is also possible to raise the funds you need to cover adoption costs.
 - [Adopt Together](#) — a non-profit, crowdfunding platform
 - [How to Fundraise for Adoption](#) — ideas for fundraising initiatives

Transitioning Home

- **Adoption Finalization Day** — Many parents expect the day that they get to take their new child home to be the end of their adoption journey, but this is usually not the case. Generally, there is a supervision period during which the child is in your care, but the adoption is not yet finalized. The final step of the adoption process actually happens some months later at your final court hearing.
 - [What to Expect During Your Adoption Finalization Day](#) — by American Adoptions
 - [What to Expect During Your Adoption Finalization](#) — by Adoptive Families
- **Bonding** — Bonding can be especially important when welcoming a new child into your home. Many families are anxious to form a secure attachment and lay the foundation for a successful family dynamic and a well adjusted child.
 - [How to Bond with a Child in Foster Care or Adoption](#)
 - [What Are the Best Ways to Bond in a New Adoptive Family?](#)
- **Sleep Issues** — Many children who have gone through the adoption process suffer from sleep difficulties. Since sleep is essential for healthy growth and development, it can be a pressing topic for parents as they try to acclimate children to their new home.
 - [Sleep Issues with Adopted Kids](#) — a podcast discussing the issue
 - [All Through the Night](#) — an article discussing several factors and possible solutions
- **Postadoption Depression** — The adoption process can be a stressful change for any child, but it is rarely discussed that this process can take an emotional toll on parents as well.
 - [Child Welfare Information Gateway: Postadoption Depression](#)
 - [Post-Adoption Depression: How Common? Who is At Risk?](#)
 - [Understanding Parental Postadoption Depression](#)
- **Adoptive Parenting Resources** — All parents look for help and advice when it comes to their child's specific needs. For adoptive parents, this may mean finding strategies that acknowledge their child's unique life experiences.
 - [Parenting After Adoption](#)
 - [What Makes Adoptive Parenting Different From Parenting a Biological Child?](#)

Transitioning Home

- **Parent Support Groups**

- Special Kids Network — 800-986-4550; connects families to a variety of resources
- [Together as Adoptive Parents](#), Inc. (TAP) — 215-256-6438; provides adoptive families with information on therapists and tutors available to work with their child
- SWAN Helpline — 800-585-7926; foster care only
- [NACAC Parent group database](#)
- [Chat-N-Chill parent support group](#)
- [Pittsburgh Adoption Support Group](#) — 412-767-4250 / pghadoptsuptgr@webtv.net