

# Your Decision: Suggestions for Birthmothers Considering an Adoption Plan

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## Introduction

Facing an unintended pregnancy has the potential to leave women<sup>1</sup> or couples frightened and confused. If you are facing an unintended pregnancy, you deserve accurate information about all of your options, compassionate support, and the space to make your own decisions. The information presented here is intended to help you understand the option of adoption, help you consider whether adoption is for you, and provide some suggestions that will help to ensure a positive experience should you choose to make an adoption plan.

## What is Adoption?

If you make an adoption plan, you are deciding that someone else will parent your child after he or she is born. Adoption is the legal process by which all parental rights and responsibilities are transferred to an individual or couple who has agreed to adopt.<sup>2</sup> Adoption is permanent and grants a child full membership in a family, equal to children who are born into a family. For you, the birthparent, adoption means you will not be required to parent the child. After the child is born, you will go through a process that ends your legal responsibilities as a parent.

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1 For the sake of grammatical ease, this article often addresses women as the decision-makers and, when referring to birthparents, refers to “she.” This language choice is not intended to deny the importance of birthfathers or their role in the decision-making process.

2 National Council For Adoption. (2009). Glossary of adoption terms. *Consider the Possibilities: Adoption Specialist Handbook*. Washington, DC: Author.

## Is Adoption For Me?

There are many questions to consider when facing an unintended pregnancy. Below are some of the different questions birthmothers ask about adoption, and some resources to help you better understand the adoption process as you consider whether it is the right option for you.

### *Whose Decision Is it to Make an Adoption Plan?*

The decision to make an adoption plan belongs to you—the birthparents. While support systems consisting of family members and friends can be helpful and important to help you think things through, ultimately the decision belongs only to the birthparents. Both the birthmother and birthfather have the right to be involved in this important decision. Birthfathers have the right to be notified if a child has been conceived and an adoption plan is being made. In many states, if the birthparents are not married, birthfathers may assert this right to notification by registering with a putative father registry. (For further information, see “Section 9: Putative Father Registries” in this edition of the *Adoption Factbook*.) By registering, a birthfather is provided with the right to notice of court proceedings regarding the child, including petitions for adoption.

### *Will I Parent?*

Women should carefully weigh all three of their options. For women who are trying to make the decision between parenting and adoption, the

following questions may help you think about what parenting involves and whether it is the right choice for you.

- What do I want out of life for myself?
- What would I have to give up in order to parent? (School? Career plans? Social life? Free time?)
- Could I handle a child and a job and/or school at the same time?
- Can I financially support a child?
- Can I provide for a child's health and safety?
- Am I patient enough to deal with the noise, confusion, and 24-hour responsibilities of parenting?
- Will I be a single parent?
- Who will help care for the child, and how often will they be available to help?
- Am I willing to spend a significant part of my life—at least 18 years—raising a child?<sup>3</sup>

### **Who Chooses Adoption?**

For many women it is helpful to hear from and talk to other birthparents that have faced an unplanned pregnancy and chosen adoption. Understanding why other birthparents chose adoption, how they feel about their decision, and what their life and the child's life is like because of adoption may help you better understand whether making an adoption plan is right for you.

Adoption agencies can often connect you with a birthparent that is willing to share her adoption experience. You can find an adoption agency near you by searching local listings or by using the agency database available at: <http://www.ichooseadoption.org/members/index.php>

You may also find it helpful to read about the experiences other birthmothers have shared here:

<sup>3</sup> National Council For Adoption (2009). Questions to ask yourself if you are pregnant. *Consider the Possibilities: Adoption Specialist Handbook*. Washington, DC: Author.

- <http://www.ichooseadoption.org/birthmothers.php>
- <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/infant-adoption/testimonials.html>
- <http://www.openadoptioninsight.org/>

### **What Happens After I Make an Adoption Plan?**

It is natural to want to know what will happen to you and your child if you make an adoption plan. While every story is unique, below are some facts about women who choose adoption and children who are adopted that may help to answer some of your questions.

#### **Women Who Choose Adoption...**

- Are more likely to finish school and obtain a higher level of education;<sup>4</sup>
- Attain better employment, earning more than twice the per capita income and achieving greater financial stability;<sup>5</sup>
- Are less likely to receive public assistance;<sup>6</sup>
- Are more likely to marry in the future—and when they do, are more likely to delay marriage until an older age;<sup>7</sup> and
- Report a high level of satisfaction with their decision to make an adoption plan.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Children Who are Adopted...**

- Are all around us! Two-thirds of Americans have had a personal experience with adoption<sup>9</sup> and approximately seven percent of the American population is adopted;<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Donnelly, B.W. & Voydanoff, P. (1996). Parenting versus placing for adoption: Consequences for adolescent mothers. *Family Relations*, 45, 427-434.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> McLaughlin, S., Manninen, D., & Wings, L. (1988). Do adolescents who relinquish their children fare better than those who raise them? *Family Planning Perspectives*, 20, 25-32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Placek, P. (2007). National adoption data. In T.C. Atwood, L.A. Allen & V.C. Ravenel (Eds.) *Adoption Factbook IV* (pp. 3-69). Washington, DC: National Council For Adoption.

<sup>10</sup> National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. (2004). How many children were adopted in 2000 and 2001. In T.C. Atwood, L.A. Allen & V.C. Ravenel (Eds.), *Adoption Factbook IV* (pp. 79-108). Washington, DC: National Council For Adoption.

- Are less likely to have divorced parents;<sup>11</sup>
- Are more likely to be raised by parents with college degrees;<sup>12</sup>
- Score high on indicators of wellbeing including school performance, friendships, volunteerism, optimism, self-esteem, social competency, feelings of support from others, and low levels of anxiety;<sup>13</sup>
- Are less likely to have high risk behaviors such as alcohol use, depression, vandalism, group fighting, police trouble, theft, weapon use, driving/riding while drinking, and not wearing a seat belt;<sup>14</sup>
- Are as well integrated into their families and schools as children who are not adopted;<sup>15</sup>
- Often have a greater range of childhood experiences and opportunities than would have been available had the child not been adopted. These include a higher standard of health care, access to higher education, and greater family stability.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Who Can Answer the Rest of My Questions?***

Adoption professionals are also a helpful resource and can answer any of your remaining questions about adoption. Information and counseling is provided for free to women, no matter what decision they make. Adoption professionals at licensed, accredited adoption agencies will help you understand the following:

- **How it Works:** An adoption professional will be familiar with the adoption process and can answer your questions about what happens at different stages of the adoption process.

- **Local Laws:** A local adoption professional will know about the laws and procedures that apply to you. Every state has different laws about adoption and it is the professional's job to understand and explain the system to you.
- **Local Resources:** A local adoption professional is often familiar with services in your area that may be of help to you during your pregnancy as you consider your options.

There are many more questions that may come to your mind when considering adoption. Often the best way to find answers is to ask an adoption professional. They can help you find the answers you need to make a fully informed decision.

You can also find answers to some common questions at iChooseAdoption.org's Frequently Asked Questions: <http://www.ichooseadoption.org/info.php>

### **How Do I Choose an Adoption Agency?**

If you have chosen to make an adoption plan, you might already be working with an adoption agency, or you might still be looking for one. Adoption agencies are the most common way adoptions are facilitated and typically provide a wider variety of services, but attorneys can also facilitate adoptions. The following services are helpful to consider in either case. Know that you have the option to choose the professionals you work with based on the services and assistance they provide to you and how comfortable you feel there. You may discuss the services that are provided by different agencies and determine which services are important to you. Some common services to consider include: financial assistance with pregnancy-related medical expenses and reasonable housing costs during pregnancy, counseling services, and the number and type of adoptive parent profiles available for you to review.

When choosing the adoption agency you will work with, keep in mind that you have the following rights. You have the right to:

11 Benson, P., Sharma, A., & Roehlkepartain, E. (1994) *Growing up adopted: A portrait of adolescents and their families*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.  
 12 Ibid.  
 13 Ibid.  
 14 Ibid.  
 15 Palacios, J. & Brodzinsky, D.M. (2005). Recent changes and future direction for adoption research. In D. Brodzinsky & J. Palacios (Eds.), *Psychological issues in adoption: Research and practice* (pp. 258-268). Westport, CT: Praeger.  
 16 Fergusson, D.M., Lynskey, M. & Horwood, L.J. (1995). The adolescent outcomes of adoption: A 16-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 36, 597-615.

- Be free from any pressure or coercion;
  - Choose your own attorney or to refuse legal representation if you choose;
  - Counseling before, during, and after the adoption;
  - Approve the parents who will adopt your child and meet them if you choose to;
  - Create a written adoption agreement that allows you to share pictures, letters, and have possible future contact with the adoptive family;
  - Financial help with certain reasonable expenses;
  - See your child before he or she is adopted;
  - Decide to parent your child any time before you sign a consent or surrender and complete the revocation period.<sup>17</sup>
- Should one parent be a “stay-at-home” parent or should both parents work?
  - Is the income level of the family important to you?
  - Is the age of the adoptive parents important? What age do you think is appropriate?
  - Is it important to you that a child be raised with a strong religious faith? Do you have a preference for a specific religious faith?
  - Do you want the child to have brothers or sisters?
  - Are there certain interests or opportunities that you believe add to a child’s experience in a family (such as music, art, sports, politics)?<sup>18</sup>

You can view some sample adoptive parent profiles here:<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ichooseadoption.org/families.php>

## How Do I Choose an Adoptive Family?

Adoption agencies have profiles of potential adoptive parents hoping to adopt a child. Through a process called a homestudy, the agency has already determined that these potential adoptive parents are appropriate to parent children. A homestudy involves extensive interviews of potential adoptive parents, background checks, character references, and an actual examination of the house where a child would live with the potential adoptive parents.

You will be given the chance to identify qualities that are most important to you in an adoptive family. The adoption agency or attorney can then help you find potential adoptive parents who match your preferences. Here are some questions that may help you consider which characteristics are most important to you in an adoptive family:

- Do you want the child to have both a mother and a father?
- Do you want the mother and father to be married?

<sup>17</sup> See: [http://www.ichooseadoption.org/resources\\_birthmother.php](http://www.ichooseadoption.org/resources_birthmother.php)

Additionally, many adoption agencies provide profiles of adoptive parents that you may review on their agency website.

## Will I Know My Child?

You and the adoptive parents will decide upon the continued relationship you might have with your child. An adoption agency can help direct you to adoptive parents who will be comfortable with the type of relationship that you decide is right for you. There are three common arrangements regarding birthparents continued knowledge of and relationship with a child that has been adopted:

### *Confidential Adoption*

Confidential adoption is an adoption in which only non-identifying information about the birthparents is shared with the adoptive family. Only social and medical information is given to the adoptive parents through the adoption agency.

<sup>18</sup> National Council For Adoption (2009). Discussion guide for selection of adoptive parents. *Consider the Possibilities: Adoption Specialist Handbook*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>19</sup> These profiles are fictional and only to give an example of what parent profiles might look like.

There is no continued relationship between the parties. Confidential adoption is also sometimes referred to as “closed adoption.”<sup>20</sup>

### ***Semi-open Adoption***

Semi-open adoption describes any situation in which birthparents and adoptive parents have an ongoing relationship and exchange information, but there is not full disclosure of identifying information such as full names and addresses. Some examples of semi-open adoption arrangements might include: anonymous meetings, sharing pictures and development information through periodic letters, or occasional phone calls to report on the development of the child.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Open Adoption***

Open adoption is an adoption in which all identifying information is exchanged between the birthparents and adoptive parents, and birthparents are able to remain fully aware of the child’s development and stay involved in the child’s life.

## **Conclusion**

As you face this important decision, please remember that the decision is yours to make, but you don’t have to make it alone. There are many organizations and individuals who are committed to helping you understand the option of adoption. Don’t hesitate to take advantage of the many resources available to you as you consider what decision is right for you.

Excerpt from National Council For Adoption’s Adoption Factbook V.  
More more information visit: [www.adoptioncouncil.org](http://www.adoptioncouncil.org)

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<sup>20</sup> National Council For Adoption. (2009). Glossary of adoption terms. *Consider The Possibilities: Adoption Specialist Handbook*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.