



## Are You Pregnant and Thinking About Adoption?



Are you pregnant and not sure that you are ready or able to raise your child? If so, you might be thinking about placing your baby for adoption. This factsheet gives you information about adoption, and it directs you to resources in your community, as well as on the Internet. Information for fathers and for relatives is also provided. Being well-informed may help you feel better about whatever decision you make.

### What's Inside:

- Exploring your options
- Making the adoption decision
- Placing your baby through an agency or independent adoption
- Selecting adoptive parents
- Staying in touch with your child after adoption
- Taking care of yourself after adoption
- Additional resources



## Exploring Your Options

There are a number of places to find information about adoption and your other options when you are pregnant.

- Your local library or bookstore and the Internet let you find information in private.
- A counselor (e.g., a therapist or social worker) may help you make a decision based on your own personal situation and values.
- An adoption agency or lawyer can provide adoption-specific information.

These three types of resources are discussed below.

### Books and the Internet

If you are just beginning to gather information about adoption and other options, books and the Internet may be a good starting point.

**Books.** To get a complete view of adoption, you may want to look for books about:

- Parents who placed their children for adoption (birth parents)
- Parents who formed their families by adopting children (adoptive parents)
- Children and adults who were adopted (adopted people or adoptees)

You may want to read about how other parents felt when they placed their children for adoption, and how they felt later in life.

**The Internet.** If you don't have a computer at home to search the Internet for information and support, you can usually use one at a library. Searching under the terms "adoption" or "pregnancy" may be too general to be useful. Here are some ideas for search terms if you use a search engine like Google or MSN. (Using quotation marks around the term usually allows you to search for that exact term.)

- "Adoption options"
- "Parenting"
- "Teen Parenting"
- "Single motherhood"
- "Pregnancy options"
- Adoption "birth mother"
- Adoption "birth father"
- "Adoption impact"
- "Unexpected pregnancy"
- Adoption birthmother
- Adoption birthfather
- "Healthy pregnancy"
- "Support group" "birth mother"
- "Adoption triad"

*It's important to remember that information on the Internet can be one-sided or incorrect. Try to look at a number of different websites. You may have questions about what's true or what applies to your situation. If so, you may want to talk with a counselor, therapist, or social worker.*

### Counselors, Therapists, or Social Workers

While you are considering adoption, it's important to find a therapist or counselor who can provide information and answer your questions in a sensitive and neutral

way. This means finding a counselor who doesn't stand to gain from whatever decision you make. Here are some possible questions to ask a counselor:

- *What are my options for this pregnancy?*
- *Can you help me explore my feelings about my pregnancy and what I want for myself and my child?*
- *If I decide to parent my baby myself, how can you help me?*
- *If I want to place my baby for adoption, will you help me find an adoption agency or lawyer?*
- *What are my rights and responsibilities? What are those of the expectant father?*

There are many different places to find professionals trained to counsel pregnant women about unexpected pregnancy. Here are some places to start looking:

- Departments of social services or family services offered by your county or city
- Health departments or mental health centers at your local health clinic or through your local hospital or county or city government
- Faith-based counselors, including pastors, rabbis, or others associated with a place of worship
- An adoption agency that has pregnancy counselors or "options counselors" (see section below for more information)

You can also dial 211 (available in some areas) or call your local United Way for help in locating a counselor.

No matter where you go, a counselor should always treat you with respect. A counselor's

own feelings about adoption or other options shouldn't affect the information that he or she provides. In order to make up your own mind, it's important for you to get clear, full, and unbiased information.

## Adoption Agencies and Adoption Lawyers

Talking with someone at a licensed adoption agency or with a lawyer who specializes in adoption may be a good choice if you are already leaning toward adoption. They can tell you more about the actual adoption process. Talking to an agency or lawyer doesn't mean that you're promising to place your child for adoption. You can get information from agencies and lawyers without making that plan. It's just another way to collect information so that you can make a well-informed decision. Some States also require that free counseling be offered to you and the baby's father by an agency or lawyer providing adoption services.

## Making the Adoption Decision

The decision to place a child for adoption is never easy. Like the decision to parent a child, it takes courage and much love. Once an adoption is finalized, it is permanent, and it will change your relationship with your child forever. The adoptive parents will raise your child and have full legal rights as the child's parents.

The following are some questions you may want to think about as you make your decision:

***Have I explored all my options?*** Pregnancy can affect your feelings and emotions. Are you thinking about adoption only because you have money problems, or because your living situation is difficult? If so, there might be other answers. Have you called Social Services to see what they can do? Have you asked friends and family if they can help? Social workers may be able to help you find a way to parent your baby if that is your decision. For instance, they may be able to help with finding a place to live or job training.

***Have I involved the baby's father in thinking about adoption?*** You need to know what the laws in your State say about the father's rights, responsibilities, and role in adoption. Most States require that the father—or the man you think is the father—be told about the baby before the adoption. This is true even if you aren't married to the father. If you are married and your husband is not the baby's father, your husband may still have legal rights, responsibilities, and a role in the adoption.

Your baby's father (or your husband) may have to sign legal papers agreeing to the adoption—giving “legal consent”—before you can place your child.<sup>1</sup> There are also laws requiring the father to pay child support if you decide to parent your baby.

In some States, if the parents are not married, the father has a certain amount of time to put his name on the State's “putative father registry” to claim that he is the baby's father. In other States, the father

may be required to take other legal action to claim his rights as a father. If he doesn't do this within a certain amount of time, he may not receive notice of the mother's decision to place the child for adoption.<sup>2</sup> If you don't know the father's name or where he is, some States require that a notice be published before the adoption can be completed. The notice is published in a newspaper in a place where the father is likely to see it. A licensed adoption agency or qualified adoption lawyer can explain to you what is required in your State.

If you're thinking about adoption, your agency or lawyer should be able to explain your State's laws about the father's role. In a few cases, agencies or lawyers have pushed through adoptions without telling the father and getting his consent. In some of these cases, the court has legally overturned the adoption and awarded custody of the baby to the father. Any agency or lawyer working with you must obey the law and obtain the father's consent if needed. If your agency or lawyer is not willing to do this, you may want to go somewhere else.

If you have a good relationship with your baby's father, he may be a source of support for you. You may be able to help each other in making this decision. The father of your baby may be asking some of the same questions about adoption that you are asking.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on laws in your State about consent, read Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Consent to Adoption* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/consent.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/consent.cfm).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, read Child Welfare Information Gateway's *The Rights of Presumed (Putative) Fathers* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/putative.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/putative.cfm).

***Have I involved my own family and the father's family in the decision?***<sup>3</sup> Your family may be a source of support as you consider what to do, even if the pregnancy has put a strain on your relationship. Besides emotional support, your family may be able to provide money, housing, and other kinds of help. The father's family may be able to help, also.

In a few States, if you are under 16 or 18 years of age (it depends on the State), your own parent or parents may also have to give permission for you to place your baby for adoption. Laws vary, and you need to find out the consent laws in your State.

If you decide to go ahead with adoption, there may even be someone in your family or the father's family who would like to adopt your baby.

***How might I feel in 20 years if I place my child for adoption or if I parent my child myself?*** While it's impossible to know for sure how you will feel many years from now, you may want to consider the long-term effects of any decision you make. For instance, you may want to think about your future both with and without this child. What were your plans before you became pregnant? How would raising a child or placing a child for adoption change those plans? How might you feel if you go on to have other children and a family of your own?

***Why am I placing my child for adoption?*** If your answer is because it is what you, or you and the father, think is best for

yourselves and the baby, then it may be a good decision. It's important to gather all the information you can and to hear the thoughts of your family and friends. In the end, however, you must make a decision you can live with. Don't allow others to pressure you toward one outcome.

***Why do some expectant parents choose to place their baby for adoption?*** Everyone's situation is different, but many women (and their partners) choose to place their baby because they feel that the baby will have a better life in an adoptive home with parents who may be better prepared to care for a child. These mothers feel that they are putting their baby's best interests ahead of their own by placing their baby with parents who are ready to welcome a child and to love and provide for that child for at least 18 years.

***Why do some expectant parents choose to raise their baby rather than place the baby for adoption?*** Pregnant women (and their partners) who consider adoption but decide to raise their child themselves may do so because they feel that they have the time, resources, and support from family and friends necessary to raise a child for at least 18 years. They may feel that their biological connection with their child is more important than the advantages that the child might receive from an adoptive home.

***When do I have to make the decision?*** You don't have to make the final decision about adoption until after your baby is born. You may prepare for adoption, and adoptive parents may be waiting for your child. However, the final and legal decision is made by you, or you and the father, after the child's birth.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on laws in your State about consent, read Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Consent to Adoption* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/consent.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/consent.cfm).

Think of it as making the adoption decision twice—once while you are pregnant and then again after the baby is born. It’s hard to know what you’ll feel like after the birth. This is why most State laws require that the final decision to place a child for adoption be made after the baby is born. As of December 2006, only Alabama and Hawaii allow a birth mother to agree to adoption before the birth of her child. Even in these States, the mother can change her mind after the birth. Some counselors suggest that you wait until you have left the hospital before signing papers that make the adoption final.

## Placing Your Baby Through an Agency or Independent Adoption

If you are seriously considering adoption as an option, you will need to talk to some licensed adoption agencies or qualified adoption lawyers, or both. This section outlines the process of adoption through an agency (agency adoptions) and through an independent (private) adoption. Some legal considerations and infant safe haven laws are also discussed.

### Selecting a Licensed Adoption Agency or Qualified Adoption Lawyer

There are some differences and similarities in agency adoptions and independent adoptions. Agencies are generally full-time organizations whose main work is adoption. They usually employ a number of people

and work with many families and pregnant women in order to find the best homes for babies. In an independent adoption, the pregnant woman generally works just with a lawyer and the family that she selects to adopt her child. Read the descriptions below under “Placing Your Baby Through an Agency” and “Placing Your Baby Through an Independent Adoption.”<sup>4</sup>

You may not know which type of adoption will work best for you and your baby until you talk to some licensed agencies and qualified lawyers. Talk to several agencies or lawyers before making a decision and ask as many questions as you need to feel comfortable. Here are some general questions to ask either an adoption agency representative or adoption lawyer:

- *Will I get counseling all through my pregnancy, after I sign the papers allowing my child to be adopted, and after my baby is placed?*
- *Can my baby’s father and other people who are important to me join me in counseling?*
- *Will you help with medical, legal, and other costs?*
- *If I change my mind about the adoption and decide to parent my child, will I have to pay for services I received?*
- *How will you handle obtaining the consent of the baby’s father?*

<sup>4</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway has two factsheets that are designed for adoptive parents but may also provide good information to birth parents about the differences between agency and independent adoptions. See *Adoption Options* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_adoptoption.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptoption.cfm) and *Adoption Options-at-a-Glance* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_adoptoptionglance.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptoptionglance.cfm).

- *How would you handle the situation if my baby were born with a disability?*
- *Does your agency practice open adoption where I can meet and get to know the family who will adopt my child? [If this is what you want]*
- *If you don't practice open adoption, what information will you share with the adoptive parents about my family and me?*
- *Do the adoptive families receive education and training on adoption in addition to their home study?*

Talk to your counselor or lawyer about the type of adoption that is best for you. Do you want to help decide who adopts your child, or would you rather allow the agency to select the best parents for your child? Would you like to be able to communicate with your child in the future through an open adoption, or would you rather not participate in this type of arrangement? If you have strong feelings about these things, work with an agency or lawyer who will listen to what you want.

If you choose to work with an agency, you should make sure that they are licensed to place children in your State. If you choose to work with a lawyer in an independent adoption, be sure that the lawyer has a license and adoption experience. It's important to check on the reputation, license, and authority of any agency or lawyer that you are considering. An honest agency or lawyer will have nothing to hide and won't mind answering your questions.

For information on how to find out whether or not an agency is licensed, follow the instructions provided in Child Welfare Information Gateway's *How to Assess the*

*Reputation of Licensed, Private Adoption Agencies* at:  
[www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/twenty.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/twenty.cfm)

Some States permit adoption facilitators to arrange adoptions between birth mothers and families seeking to adopt. State laws vary quite a bit on this topic. In some States, facilitators can be anyone at all. In other States, they need to be licensed. In some States, "facilitators" is a general term that also refers to adoption lawyers who arrange adoptions. In other States, adoption facilitators are completely illegal. In these States, birth parents and adoptive parents who work with a facilitator also may receive penalties for disobeying the law.

Before you work with anyone, find out what the laws in your State say. In every State, there are people who may try to take advantage of your situation.<sup>5</sup>

## Placing Your Baby Through an Agency

Once you contact a licensed agency, you will work with a counselor. The counselor's first job is to provide you with information and support as you consider your decision about your baby. The counselor will ask you to think about many of the same questions that you have been considering, such as

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Use of Advertising and Facilitators in Adoptive Placements* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/advertising.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/advertising.cfm).

your own hopes and dreams for yourself and your child. The counselor will ask about your living situation, family support, and educational and career goals. She or he may ask questions about the baby's father and your relationship with him. The counselor works with you to help you come to the decision that is right for you and your baby—whether it is to parent the child yourself or to make an adoption plan.

If you decide to make an adoption plan for your baby, the counselor will explain the agency process. This may include information about how adoptive parents are selected for babies, your role in the process, and how the actual adoption is finalized. The counselor will also ask questions and collect information about you and the baby's father in order to put together a medical and social history of the baby. This may include:

- Your age, race, what you and the father look like, and other facts about you and the father
- Medical history for you, your family, and the father's family
- Any family history of mental illness
- Whether you have been to see a doctor since you became pregnant
- Whether you have been pregnant or given birth before
- Whether you smoked cigarettes, took any drugs, or drank any alcohol since you became pregnant

It's important for you to be honest in your answers. The counselor asks these questions so that the best decision and placement can

be made for the baby. It's also important for your baby to have a full medical history.

In some cases, the agency will collect both identifying and nonidentifying information for your baby's record or to share with prospective adoptive parents. Identifying information includes things like your name and address. Nonidentifying information includes things like the color of your hair and eyes and your medical history.

Agencies may provide you with a number of services, such as:

- Providing counseling throughout your pregnancy and after your baby is born
- Paying your medical, legal, and living expenses
- Arranging medical care and the hospital stay for the birth

Most agencies will encourage you to look at descriptions and photo albums of families who want to adopt a baby. Many families write letters telling about themselves, their homes, and why they would love to adopt. Many agencies will arrange for you to meet the families, if you like.

Agencies also work with the couples who want to adopt—the prospective adoptive parents. The agency will visit them in their home and interview them. They will find out about their medical and family histories and check to see if they have a criminal record or a record of child abuse. If the prospective parents have such a record, it may mean that for your baby's safety, and for yours, the family will not be allowed to adopt. Safety is another reason for you to make sure that any agency or lawyer



you work with is licensed by the State and experienced in adoption.

The agency will ask about the prospective parents' interests, careers, and hopes for a family. This does not guarantee that they will be perfect parents. However, they will have completed a home study process that shows their desire to adopt and their potential to be good parents and provide a safe home for the baby. Some agencies also require that prospective adoptive parents complete special training on adoption issues.

### Placing Your Baby Through an Independent Adoption

This type of adoption is usually arranged by a lawyer, depending on the laws in your State. Independent adoption is legal in most but not all States. There is generally no agency involvement. Your lawyer works with the lawyer for the adoptive parents to arrange the adoption. All States require that the adoptive parents in an independent adoption complete a home study.

In an independent adoption, as with many agency adoptions, you would generally expect to meet the adoptive parents. In most cases, you, as the birth mother, or you and the birth father actually choose the adoptive parents. The information you receive about the adoptive parents will come directly from the family members themselves or their lawyer.

You should plan to have your own lawyer represent you and your baby, while the adoptive parents will have a different lawyer represent them. It's important that you have your own lawyer, especially if you change your mind about the adoption. In addition,

it may not be legal in some States for the same lawyer to represent both you and the adoptive parents. Look for a lawyer who won't charge you a fee if you decide not to place your baby for adoption. In most States, adoptive parents are allowed to cover the cost of the birth parents' lawyer.<sup>6</sup>

**Finding a lawyer.** It is important to find a lawyer who is currently licensed in your State, is in good standing with the State bar association, and has experience with adoption. Remember, you need a lawyer who can represent you and your interests and is able to protect your legal rights and those of your baby.

Here are two organizations that keep lists of adoption lawyers:

- *The American Academy of Adoption Attorneys* lists lawyers who specialize in arranging adoptions: [www.adoptionattorneys.org](http://www.adoptionattorneys.org)
- *The American Bar Association* has listings of lawyers by location, as well as other helpful information: [www.abanet.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/home.cfm](http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/home.cfm)

Also, many States have a toll-free number you can call to find specific types of lawyers in your area.

**Finding adoptive parents.** In an independent adoption, there are many ways to find potential adoptive parents, including through your lawyer, doctor, family, friends, or faith community (church, synagogue, or mosque). Some couples who want to adopt run personal ads in local newspapers or magazines. This type of advertising is

<sup>6</sup> See Child Welfare Information Gateway's *State Regulation of Adoption Expenses* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/expenses.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/expenses.cfm).

restricted or illegal in some States but is very popular in other places, as well as on the Internet. If you decide to answer a personal ad, you call the family and talk to them or you email them. After that, your lawyer can help you follow up, if you would like to do so.

With an independent adoption, the prospective adoptive parents generally pay for your medical and living expenses. There are strict laws in each State about what prospective parents and adoption agencies can and cannot pay for. These laws exist to make sure that “baby selling” doesn’t occur and that mothers aren’t tempted to place their child with the person willing to pay the most in money or gifts.<sup>7</sup>

### Legal Considerations in Some Cases

Adoption agencies that receive Federal money are required to follow the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act. This states that agencies cannot delay or deny the placement of a child due to the race, color, or national origin of either the child or the adoptive family. It also requires agencies to find adoptive families that reflect the diversity of the babies and children available for adoption.

If your baby will be Native American (American Indian) because you or the baby’s father are Indian or even part-Indian, then there are special laws that will affect the adoption.<sup>8</sup> The Indian Child Welfare Act, a Federal law, states that if a baby is placed for

adoption, the child’s extended family must be given the chance to adopt. If they choose not to adopt, members of the child’s Tribe, followed by members of other Indian Tribes, must be given the chance to adopt the baby. This law gives the Tribal court the right to decide on the adoption. Talk with a lawyer who specializes in adoption law if you have a question about this or how it could apply to your baby.

### Infant Safe Haven Laws

You may have read about infant safe haven laws in many States. These are laws written to protect newborn babies when their mothers feel they have nowhere else to turn. These laws allow the mothers to leave their babies at certain places—often, hospitals or fire stations. Mothers can leave their newborns without giving their names or other identifying information. Some States require that a mother leave her child with a person working at an approved safe haven location within 72 hours (3 days) of the child’s birth. Leaving a baby in a safe place is a much better choice than leaving the child in a place where there is not a responsible person who will make sure that the baby is safe and that the proper authorities are contacted to take custody.

Some States require that infant safe haven providers ask mothers for family history and medical information. If this information is not provided, the child may grow up with little or no information about his or her heritage and medical history. Also, it may be difficult for mothers who leave their

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway’s *State Regulation of Adoption Expenses* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/expenses.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/expenses.cfm).

<sup>8</sup> For more information, visit the National Indian Child Welfare website at [www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org).

babies at safe havens to receive medical care or counseling.<sup>9</sup>

## Selecting Adoptive Parents

If you're thinking about adoption, you're probably thinking a lot about the kind of parents or family you would want for your child. Whether you place your child through an agency or through an independent adoption, you will probably have a great deal of choice in selecting the parents or family for your child. Many of the considerations for selecting parents—either directly or through parent profiles—are the same, regardless of whether you use an agency or a lawyer.

Here are some questions to consider in selecting parents for your child:

- *Do I want my child to be raised by two parents?*
- *Do I want my child to be an only or first child, or would I like my baby to have older brothers or sisters?*
- *Should the family practice a certain religion?*
- *Do I want the parents to be a certain age or have a certain income?*
- *Does it matter if both parents work full-time outside the home?*
- *Do I want my child raised in a certain part of the country or in a city or in a small town?*

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Infant Safe Haven Laws* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/safehaven.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/safehaven.cfm).

- *Does the family share my interests, for example, sports or music or pets?*
- *What is the family's style of parenting and disciplining children?*
- *Does the family share my values and beliefs?*
- *Does the family feel the same way that I do about staying in touch after the adoption?*
- *How much does the family know about the special issues associated with raising an adopted child?*
- *Will I be able to see a copy of the family's home study?<sup>10</sup>*

Talking to your counselor or lawyer and getting their answers to these questions may help you in choosing a family. If you talk to a prospective family—or to several families—you will want to ask them similar questions.

## Staying in Touch With Your Child After Adoption

After the adoption, the birth mother and adoptive family often exchange pictures and letters. An adopted child may grow up knowing his or her birth parents through letters or email or, in some cases, through visits. Sometimes, this is called “open adoption” or “postadoption communication.” Of course, the type of communication and how often it occurs

<sup>10</sup> For more information, read Child Welfare Information Gateway's *The Adoption Home Study Process* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_homstu.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm).

vary greatly from adoption to adoption, depending on the people involved.<sup>11</sup>

When birth parents decide that they don't want contact with their child after the adoption, they may arrange a "closed" adoption. In closed adoptions, the birth parents and the adoptive parents never know each other. Adoptive parents receive nonidentifying information from the agency or lawyer about the birth mother and father that they might need to help them take care of the child, such as medical information or family history, but they don't know your name or where you live.

In most States, the court seals the adoption records of all adoptions (open and closed) at the time of the adoption, and no one is permitted to read them. The records remain sealed unless an interested party, such as the adopted person who has reached adulthood, petitions the court and can show good cause to have the records opened. Laws vary from State to State, so check with a lawyer if you have questions about access to adoption information.<sup>12</sup>

## If You Want to Be in Touch With Your Child

If it's important to you to be in touch with your child after the adoption, you should find adoptive parents who will agree to an open adoption and who truly believe that it will be best for the child. You and they should work out in advance how you

will keep in touch, how often, who will be involved, and how you might change this agreement later. Sometimes, lawyers or mediators can write up a "communication agreement" for you and the adoptive parents to sign.

Your lawyer or agency should be able to tell you the laws in your State about these agreements, what they can include, and if they can be enforced in any way. In most cases, these agreements cannot be enforced. There is no State that lets an adoption be overturned if adoptive parents refuse to allow contact between their child and the child's birth mother.<sup>13</sup>

## Finding Your Child Later

If you place your baby through an agency or an independent adoption that is closed, you will not be given the adoptive parents' names or address, nor will they have this information about you. This will make it harder to find out about your baby later in life, if you decide you want to know how your child is doing. Many birth parents do search for their children after the children are grown, just like many adopted people search for their birth families.<sup>14</sup>

Many States and some private organizations have set up mutual consent adoption registries to help birth relatives find each other. More than 30 States have adoption registries, where a birth parent or other family member (such as a brother or sister)

<sup>11</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Openness in Adoption* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm).

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Access to Family Information by Adopted Persons* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/infoaccessap.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/infoaccessap.cfm).

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Postadoption Contact Agreements Between Birth and Adoptive Families* at [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/cooperative.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/cooperative.cfm).

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Searching for Birth Relatives* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_search.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_search.cfm).

can register to find the adopted person. If the adopted person also registers, then the registry can provide information to let them find each other.<sup>15</sup>

There is another way to allow your child to contact you later in life. Some adoption agencies and lawyers who arrange independent adoptions will hold a letter from you in their files. Usually, the letter says why you chose adoption and how to get in touch with you if the child ever wants to do so. If you move to a new address, it is your responsibility to contact the lawyer or agency so that your contact information remains up to date.

## Taking Care of Yourself After the Adoption

If you have an unexpected or crisis pregnancy, you would benefit from counseling both during and after your pregnancy. The counseling during your pregnancy may help you make the decision about whether to place your baby for adoption. Counseling after the birth should help you learn to live with whatever decision you make. Most licensed agencies will provide free counseling throughout your pregnancy. They should also provide counseling after the adoption—for as long as you need it. Most States let adoptive parents pay for counseling in independent adoptions. In fact, some States *require* that adoptive parents at least offer, through

<sup>15</sup> For more information, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway's *National Foster Care & Adoption Directory* at [www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad](http://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad).

the birth parents' lawyer, to pay for this counseling.

Grief and loss are common reactions for birth parents after they place their child for adoption. Some birth parents also go through phases of feeling guilty and angry. It's important to admit these feelings to yourself and to know that they're normal. Counseling may help you through the grief process as you learn to live with your decision, feel good about yourself and your decision, and plan for your future. Whether you choose an adoption with a great deal of contact or a closed adoption, you will probably be helped by counseling as you learn to adjust to the new phase in your life.

There are many examples of birth parents who have gone on to live happy, productive lives after placing a child for adoption. Moving forward does not mean that you will ever forget your baby, just that you are ready to accept the adoption and move on to a new part of your life.<sup>16</sup>

## Additional Resources

If you do not have access to the Internet to get these resources (or those mentioned earlier, especially in the footnotes), please contact Child Welfare Information Gateway at 800.394.3366, and they will be sent to you for free.

### Information for Pregnant Women

Child Welfare Information Gateway provides information for pregnant women.

<sup>16</sup> For more information, read *Child Welfare Information Gateway's Impact of Adoption on Birth Parents* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_impact/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_impact/index.cfm).

Visit the webpage:  
[www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/birth/for/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/birth/for/index.cfm)

### **Adoption Agencies**

Use Child Welfare Information Gateway's  
*National Foster Care & Adoption Directory*

to find agency information. Or, contact Child Welfare Information Gateway for the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of adoption agencies in each State and the U.S. territories. The information is free.  
[www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad](http://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad)