



## COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY BIRTH PARENTS

### ABOUT ADOPTIVE PARENTS

#### **Do I get to choose the adoptive parents of my child?**

Yes, of course. When you fill out your Background and Genetic Profile you state what type and description of family you want for your child. We have families who are waiting to adopt a child. They have filled out paper work, too. They have also listed a criteria or description of the type of birth mother they would want to work with toward an adoption. You will be shown those families in which you meet their criteria and also, those families will have met the criteria that you have listed, too.

#### **Do I get to meet them?**

Yes, we encourage you to meet with them and to develop a relationship long before the child is born. You will choose your adoptive family by looking through several profiles that we have of people who meet your criteria. You can talk to or meet with any and all of them if possible. That is up to you. We know how important that it is for you to be able to know and trust the adoptive family that you have chosen as parents for your child.

#### **What information is the adoptive family given about me?**

The agency is required to keep your confidentiality. We never disclose your last name, social security number, home address or any type of identifying information. We give out your home telephone number with your permission for the purposes of matching with the adoptive couple. When you meet with or talk to the adoptive family that you have chosen, you are free to tell them any thing about yourself that you choose.

#### **What will I know about the adoptive family?**

They will have provided a detailed profile of themselves, their home, family members, etc. This will be yours to keep after the match is complete and both you and the adoptive family have decided to go forward with the adoption plan. It includes a letter to the birth mother. They usually are very open about their reasons for choosing to create their family through adoption. Infertility is the main reason that most people choose to adopt. Our families have usually spent many years trying to conceive and have been unable to, so they have chosen adoption as a means to create the family that they want.

#### **What kind of qualifications does a family have to meet to be able to adopt from your agency?**

All families must have a home study that recommends them for adoption. The home study is done by a licensed social worker or agency. This process is very detailed. It includes a complete criminal and child abuse background check, their finances, the quality of their marital and other close relationships such as with their parents, siblings or

any children they may have. They have to provide the social worker with a letter from their doctor showing they are in good health and free of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, etc. They also have to provide the social worker documentation showing their work history, stability and financial ability to support the child. And finally, the social worker does a clinical assessment of their capacity to understand the needs of a child and to be able to meet them emotionally and mentally as well as financially. Adoptive families have to go through a lot to be able to qualify to adopt a child in Texas as well as any other state. The home study is not shared with the birth mother because of confidentiality. However, a judge will read it prior to finalization of the adoption.

**You mean the family may not live in the state that I do?**

Possibly, but you know this at the time of the match. You are told which profiles are from people who live in a different state than you do. We work with birth mothers in 37 different states and families in almost as many. Most of our families live in Texas, but we do have families in other states.

**What would a family like to know about me?**

They would like to know just about everything. They might want to know what your favorite music, food, hobby, etc. is. They are going to be very interested in your family, your brothers and sisters, your extended family members. They will want to know all you know about your family's genetic health history, of course. But they will also want to know about your heritage: German, Italian, Mexican, American Indian, etc. If you have any type of family rituals that you and your family do for special holidays, be sure to share those with the family you choose. These are things that are going to be important to your child when he gets older. The adoptive family may want to incorporate some of your family traditions into their life to honor you and your precious gift to them.

**THE BIRTH FATHER**

**What information do you need about the birth father?**

We need all of the information that you have. We have a section in your Background and Genetic Profile that is just for birth fathers. If you and the birth father are together or still friendly, please have him fill out his part of the Background and Genetic Profile. It is very important. The family will need to know the genetic health history of his side of the family. They will want to know all of the things about him that they will want to know about you. His favorite foods, hobbies, music, education level, likes, dislikes, etc. This information will be so valuable to them as they parent your child. If the birth father will not complete his part of the form, please complete it as fully as possible for him. Not all birth fathers are willing to give this much information, so work with him to get as much of it as possible. Your child's health and well being depend on our having as much of that information as possible.

**What if the birth father won't agree to the adoption?**

The agency must make every attempt to contact the birth father and offer counseling about his child's future and the mother's plan of adoption. Most of the time, the birth father cooperates with the agency and allows the mother to proceed with the adoption. In

many cases, both the birth mother and the birth father plan for their child's adoption plan together. Both birth mother and birth father meet and develop a relationship with the adoptive family. This only enhances your child's future as well as helps you and the birth father to feel good about your choice.

**Does he have to sign a relinquishment, too?**

**If you and the birth father are legally married**, he is the 'presumed' or 'legal' father. He has to sign relinquishments and, like yours, can not be signed until 48 hours after the birth of the child. You both have the right to change your mind up to the signing. At the time you sign the relinquishments they become irrevocable. That means, you can not change your mind just because you regret your decision.

**If you are married and he is not the birth father**, your husband is the 'presumed' or 'legal' father and he also has to sign a relinquishment. It is not uncommon for this to be the situation and we work closely with you and your husband to complete this process. Most 'legal' fathers who are not the birth fathers have no problem relinquishing their parental rights to the child. The legal father is considered responsible for the child and could be court ordered to pay child support if he does not sign the relinquishment papers.

**If you are not married to any one including the birth father**, he is an 'alleged' father and he will be asked to sign a 'waiver of interest in parental rights' for the child. He can sign this at any time after your first trimester is complete. When he signs this, it becomes irrevocable when you relinquish your rights after the baby is born. If you never relinquish your rights, his 'waiver of interest' can not be used in a court of law against him.

**What if the birth father won't cooperate with my plan to place my child for adoption?**

If the father does not cooperate, there are legal avenues that must be followed if the mother and the agency agree that they want to continue to work together toward the original adoption plan. If it is determined the father will upset the process, the mother is counseled about her alternatives. The decision whether or not to continue with the process is always made by the birth mother.

## THE ADOPTION PROCESS

**When do I have to sign the adoption papers?**

The actual relinquishments (the document used to terminate your rights in court) can not be signed until the child is a minimum of 48 hours old.

**Can I change my mind after I sign the papers?**

No, they are irrevocable when signed. It is very important for you to understand this prior to signing the documents.

**Do I have to go to court?**

If your child is born in Texas, you do not have to go to court. We work with mothers in 37 different states, and if you are living in a safe place we can work with you in your own state. Not all states will allow Texas relinquishments to be taken under Texas' timeframe. We will be working with an agency or an attorney in your state to make sure that all of the adoption laws have been complied with..

**After I sign my paperwork, will I need to have any more contact with the agency?**

Not if you don't want to, but we hope that you do. We have wonderful programs for our birth mothers that have placed with our agency. We offer vocational and educational counseling, grief and loss counseling by using our 1-800-385-6301 hotline as well as our educational fund for on going educational grant opportunities. We are required by Texas Adoption Standards to take care of your needs for six weeks after the birth in the same manner that we were taking care of them during your pregnancy. Certainly you may sever your relationship with us, but we hope you don't. Many of our young mothers have an on-going relationship with staff members and let us know occasionally what is happening in their lives. Also, don't forget your relationship with the adoptive family. We encourage contact between you and the adoptive family both to exchange on-going pictures and letters about any children in your families every 3 months for the first year and twice per year from year 2 through 18. This is done through our agency, so you are free to live your life, just keep up with us so we can send you pictures of your child periodically.

**What do you mean about contacts with the family afterwards?**

We offer open or semi-open adoptions, but will do the type of adoption that you as the birth mother want to do. There is not much difference between open and semi-open adoption. In both cases you meet the family, exchange non-identifying information and contact each other through our agency with letters and pictures of yourself, your children, the adoptive family, the adopted child, any future children you might have. We consider the adoption to be 'open' when you and the adoptive family have exchanged identifying information such as last names, home addresses and have decided to contact each other direct, not through the agency.

**What if I don't want to meet them or to have contact later?**

We only suggest these guidelines; we don't force you to do anything. We feel that this is a hard decision for you to make. You make the decisions. I know that at this point you must be scared and confused about whether to make an adoption plan for your child or not. You are hesitant about making any type of decision. We are sensitive to your thoughts about this and we are not going to force you to make decisions that you are not ready or don't want to make. We will be available to counsel you about the benefits of open and semi-open adoptions in an on-going manner. Our hope is that when this is over, you can feel that the people that you chose as parents of your child are going to love him/her and take care of him/her in the same way you would, if you only could. Developing a trusting relationship with us as well as with the adoptive family is helpful during this process.

**THE BABY**

**What happens if there is something wrong with my baby when it is born?**

We are committed to helping you complete your adoption plan. We can not guarantee you that the adoptive family you have chosen will be willing to continue with the placement if the child has birth defects. But, we can assure you that we will work with you to make an adoption plan with another family. We work with several networks of families who are interested in adopting special needs children. We are committed to helping you place your child with a family that is prepared to offer your child a loving, stable home and accept his limitations or medical condition.

**Will I be able to hold my baby in the hospital?**

Yes, this is your baby and until you sign your relinquishments, you make the decisions about him. We encourage you to have the child brought to your room as often as you want to so that you can love him, bless him and spend time with him.

**Will the adoptive family be able to be in the delivery room with me? May I invite my parents, siblings, birth father, etc as well?**

Some mothers want the family at the hospital or in the delivery room when she gives birth. She then wants them to begin to bond immediately with the baby as soon as he/she is medically allowed to do so. We look to the birth mother, you, to guide us in how you want this to take place. Most of our birth mothers allow the family in delivery and allow them to have a hospital bracelet matching yours and the baby's so they have access to the baby during its stay in the hospital. Certainly you may have whomever you want in the delivery room or at the hospital.

**I want my baby to be able to be placed with the family I chose as soon as it is released from the hospital. Is this possible? What about foster care?**

We try to place all of our infants direct from the hospital into the loving arms of the family you have chosen for him/her. This is a decision that we make based on the mother's wishes. Foster care is done very rarely. The child might be placed in foster care if you, as the biological parent, required more time to decide whether or not to actually go through with the adoption.

**Will my child be able to get information about me through the agency?**

No, until the child is 18 years old the only information he will receive about you and the circumstances about the birth and adoption will be from the adoptive family. They are responsible for his emotional needs and as such they know that being adopted is getting more and more common in our society. This is the reason that you need to consider exchanging letters of update and pictures of the child and any other children you might have with the adoptive family on an on-going basis. When we sent you our birth mother packet, you received a Texas Adoption Registry brochure. It explains that you can make application through them and list all information that you want your child to know about you when he reaches the age of 18 years. When he reaches his majority of 18 years, he can call or apply to the Bureau of Vital Statistics, Department of Health in Austin, Texas for all of the information that you have submitted to them regarding this adoption. If you did not receive this brochure or if you need another one at a later date, please contact us

so that we can get you another one. We recommend that you take advantage of this registry so that your child may easily find you in the future.

**I'm afraid my child will think that I didn't love him, and that is the reason that I placed him for adoption?**

Placing a child for adoption is the most loving thing any mother can do for her child when she knows that she is unable to care for him in the manner that the baby needs and deserves. We counsel with all of our birth mothers and adoptive families about how hard this decision is to make. We know that only mothers who truly love their child are capable of placing it for adoption. You love him so much and you know that you have limited options and scarce resources and adoption provides an opportunity for this child to have a stable, nurturing, loving family in which to grow.

Our adoptive families know and understand how hard this decision is for you. Their job is to be able to tell the child that you share about the circumstances of his adoption when he is old enough to understand all of it. He/she will always know that he/she is adopted. But when he/she is old enough, he will want to know more of the details and possibly be able to find his birth parents. That is one reason for the on-going contacts, keeping up with the agency and adoptive family through letters and pictures, and developing a relationship with the adoptive family.

**Can I name my baby?**

Yes, certainly you may name your baby on the original birth certificate. However, the adoptive family may rename him at the time of adoption. Most adoptive families have had the name picked out for years prior to the birth of the child. When the birth mother feels strongly about the name of the baby, we work with her and the adoptive family to help with a compromise name. Many, but not all, adoptive families are willing to negotiate on a middle name of the child.

**What sort of things can I send to my child at placement or afterwards?**

You may send anything you want to your child at placement or afterwards. Remember, the adoptive family is responsible for the child's emotional health and growth, so they may not give the item to the child right away. They may save it for him with the other 'mementos' that they collected during the process and give these items to him when he is older and can really understand how this all came to be. We encourage you to write a letter to the child to be given to him when he is 'of age' so that he can know and understand exactly how much you love him and what an unselfish, loving thing you have done for him. If you don't want to write the letter at this time, fine. You may want to in the future. So, send it to us and we will make sure the family gets it. Another thing that some birth mothers and fathers do is to compile a 'family album' including pictures of both of you, your families, yourself as children. This is an especially nice gesture and provides your child with pictures and information about your family that will be so important to him during his late adolescence and early adulthood.

