



Broadening Access to Adoption, One Miracle at a Time

Adoption can be a win-win situation for those of us who enter into it with an open mind and an open heart. The joys and rewards of parenting are many and varied. There are as many varieties of children needing good homes as there are varieties of adoptive parents. At Family to Family Adoptions, Inc. (Fam2Fam), we pledge to help you find that special child waiting for your love and nurturing.

We specialize in placing healthy newborns but occasionally place older children through direct placements with adoptive families. Our professional staff is dedicated to providing you the most confidential and caring adoption services.

About Us

Fam2Fam is a 501C 3 non-profit licensed agency and was founded by experienced professionals in the child advocacy field. We were licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services as a child-placing agency on February 14, 2001. We were founded on February 14, 2001 as an international agency and began our domestic programs on August 2, 2001. Our first placement of a domestic infant was January 2002. That year we placed 33 children, twenty (20) of whom were domestic. In 2003, our second full year of our domestic program, we placed 63 children, 57 of whom were domestic. We discontinued our international programs in August 2003 and now we work only with domestic adoption. In 2004 we placed 37 children and 2005 our total was 39.

Our **MISSION** is to broaden access to adoption for eligible adoptive parents. Eligibility requirements for adoption as practiced by many agencies have become prohibitively restrictive for families who should be able to adopt. Fam2Fam is more flexible in our criteria and can more often meet the needs of qualified prospective parents.

Our **GOAL** is to initiate a personalized adoption plan that is right for you and your family. You have the right to turn down a 'match'. Only you know when it is right for your family.

Our **AIM** is for you to be able to adopt the child of your choice within a framework of convenience and cost management. You never lose your agency fee until you are successfully placed and you can control the cost of your adoption by deciding how much in living expenses you wish to pay. Or you can guarantee your birth mother's living expenses through other options.

Our **PLEDGE** to you is that we will do everything we can to assure that your adoption is a fulfilling and joyful experience for you. We can not guarantee you that it will be 'easy'

and ‘uneventful’, but we want to assure you that you will be working with an agency that values both you and your birth family.

Our **DESIRE** is to make your adoption experience a positive and exciting one. This is a very special time in your life. You are about to become parents! If you decide that you would like us to help you in this journey, please review the enclosed packet of information and we will begin the process together!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The staff of Fam2Fam realizes that adoption is a sensitive issue and probably one in which you have never been involved before. We know it can be overwhelming, confusing and possibly frightening. The following terms and processes are included to help you understand the process and procedures we go through on your behalf and behalf of your adopted child. Our process is thorough and professional, but we always treat our clients with respect, compassion and understanding.

Where do the birth mothers come from?

We advertise for birth mothers in 37 states and have residential facilities in Richmond, Texas for full-service care of our birth mothers. If a birth mother is living in a safe place and wishes to remain in her home near her family during the pregnancy and placement, we are able to help her with her living expenses there. Your birth mother may or may not live in a state other than Texas. If the birth mother is out of state, she will receive the same support for her decision and living in her home as she would if she came to our facilities. We have dedicated staff who serve our birthmothers and offer them a variety of professional counseling for adoption, education and/or vocational training. We are dedicated to helping women deal with an unplanned pregnancy in an individualized way so that they may make the best decision for themselves and their babies for the long term. Our scholarship fund has allowed some of our mothers to get an education and make real plans for their future. We want their next pregnancy to be a planned one.

What is a match?

The birth mother chooses the family that she wants as parents for her child by looking at your profile, talking to you on the telephone and in some cases, meeting with you in our offices. Depending on where you live and where your birth mother resides, you should get an opportunity to meet her before either of you makes a decision. Birth mothers can choose the family and the family has a right to turn down the selection. When the birth mother and the family agree to go forward with the placement, we call it a ‘match’. At that time, you and the birth mother will agree on and sign an Adoption Plan that includes all of the information we have including her social and genetic history, pre-natal care, on-going contacts agreed upon by both of you and an estimated cost of her living expenses and after care.

What if I turn down a match?

It is not uncommon and perfectly acceptable to turn down a match. We want you to feel comfortable with this decision and do not ‘punish’ our adoptive parents. If you do turn down a match, you do not go to the bottom of the list. You will remain on our active list, (we do not use ‘waiting lists’) and your family will continue to be shown to birth

mothers. We understand that this is your decision and you will know when the match is right.

How do the Birth Mother and Adoptive Family stay in touch?

After the baby is born, you and the birth family will want to keep in touch about the growth of the baby. Mothers that place their children for adoption do so because they love them. Birth families want the child to have a better opportunity in life than what they can provide. Naturally, they will want to know how the child progresses throughout its early years. Also, the chances are that when the child is old enough to understand adoption, he will probably want to find his birth parents.

We recommend that you don't give your last name or identifying information to the birth mother and we won't either. We will only give you her first name and telephone number. Try to get to know each other first before you give information in which you might feel uncomfortable later on. Use our agency as your intermediary. We recommend that all letters of update and pictures of the baby be sent to our offices every 3 months for the first year and twice per year from years 2 through 18. Your birth mother may have children remaining with her and your child has a right to know about his siblings when he is older, so she may be sending us pictures and letters of update too. We will distribute those to the two parties until the child is 18 years old. About 25% of our families exchange identifying information by the date of placement, but each situation is unique. Over the years, you will have plenty of time to open this adoption more if everyone decides it's the right decision.

Why don't you perform closed adoptions?

In a closed adoption the birth mother and the adoptive parents never meet and no names or information about the exchange are shared between them. If we have a birth mother who insists on this type of adoption, we will oblige her. However, we do not endorse or recommend this type of adoption. It is our opinion that when this is requested by the birth mother, she is not dealing with the issue of placement and it will only be harder for her to reconcile this choice in the future. Many birth mothers who state they want a closed adoption later back out of the match prior to birth of the child.

Can you tell us more about your birth mothers?

Our typical birth mothers are anywhere from 23 to 37 years old. The youngest we have had is 16 and the oldest is 42. Most are in their mid twenties to mid thirties. She is typically undereducated, is divorced or has children from previous relationships, and can not provide a stable home and a living wage for herself and her children. She loves this child and wants it to have the best life can offer, so she will make an adoption plan. When she looks back on this she will probably say it is the hardest thing she ever did, but she should be able to say to herself that the people she chose as parents for her child will love the baby and care for him the same way she would if she only could.

What happens at the birth?

When the birth mother is ready to give birth, you will travel to where she will deliver and likely be in the delivery room when 'your child' is born. The majority of our birth mothers want the adoptive mother and/or father to be with her in delivery.

After the delivery, you will wear a baby bracelet (same as birth mother) so that you can have access to the baby in the nursery or bonding room. This will give you permission to speak to your baby's pediatrician on its behalf. Most babies, depending on their health, the mother's pre-natal history and the hospital policy, are able to leave the hospital 24 to 48 hours after its birth. The mother will have to sign a third party release in most hospitals. This releases the hospital from any liability about the placement of this child. After this is done and the pediatrician has released the child from the hospital, a staff member (or if the birth is outside the state of Texas, an agent) of Fam2Fam will perform the placement physically putting the child in your car and doing the paperwork required.

What if we live out of State?

If you reside in state other than the one in which your baby is born, Fam2Fam will go through an Interstate Compact (ICPC) agreement regarding the movement of children from state to state. An agency in each state is charged with making sure that the laws of that state have been complied with before the child can be allowed to cross the state line from the sending state to the receiving state. We will do the ICPC documents and make sure to have these available for our agent in the state in which your baby is born. Most of our babies are born in Texas, but we still have many born each year in other states. We are very experienced with this process and complete it in a timely manner. Please expect to wait at least 1 week after the birth of your child before ICPC allows you to go home. In some cases this will be less and in some cases this will be longer. Before the birth of your child, the agency will discuss with you the laws and policies of that particular state and how long the process should take.

What is the difference between Termination and Finalization?

Your agency fee includes \$2500 for terminating the parental rights of your child's birth parents. Fam2Fam always controls that process. Regardless where your baby is born, its birth parents' rights will be terminated under Texas law in Fort Bend County, Texas. Under Texas adoption law, a child does not have to be born in Texas for its parents to relinquish their parental rights to a Texas agency. Therefore, the birth parents will relinquish their rights to Fam2Fam and we will go to court to have the parents' right terminated and Fam2Fam will be designated as managing conservator of the child until it is finalized.

If your child is born in Texas, the birth parents may not relinquish their rights until the child is 48 hours old and when they sign the relinquishment, it is irrevocable. Most states will honor the irrevocability of a Texas relinquishment; they ask only that it is taken under their time frame, such as 72 hours after birth. These are individual issues that will be discussed with you at the time of match.

Finalization is not included in your agency fee. Under Texas adoption standards, we can not tell you what attorney to use for your finalization. Finalization may or may not be done in Texas. But you must decide at the time of the Interstate Compact where you want to finalize. Under Texas adoption law, you may return to Texas to finalize your child's adoption or you may have it done in your home state.

Texas post placement requirements must be met and the child must reside in your home for six (6) months before you can finalize your adoption. Your home study agency will

be given a copy of our post placement adoptive report guidelines and the report must be filed with us prior to our giving our consent for adoption.

After we have terminated your birth parents' rights, we will contact you with the good news. If you want to finalize in Texas, we can give you the name and telephone number for our adoption attorney who is a member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys

What about my baby's birth certificate and social security number?

Your baby will have a birth certificate completed by the birth mother. She can name the child anything she chooses at that time. You can call him what you want and change his name officially at finalization if desired. However, many of our parents and mothers agree before birth on a name everyone is pleased with. After you have finalized, you will receive an 'amended birth certificate'. It will list date of birth, state of adoption, and adoptive parents. This is usually mailed by your attorney direct to you in about six to eight weeks after finalization.

Social Security Cards are usually requested at the time the birth certificate is ordered by the hospital. Your baby's social security card will be in the name that is on his original birth certificate until you finalize and ask the governing state for a name change. The social security card is generally mailed to our office and forwarded to you.

What exactly is post placement?

All states require that the adoptive family have a home study and follow up visits by their social worker after the baby comes home to live with them. Each state has different specifications and timeframes for these requirements.

Fam2Fam will mail a copy of our Post Adoptive Placement Report Guidelines to your home study agency and they will mail you a self-report survey about the baby each month. A social worker is required to visit with you and your baby face to face twice during the six months after placement and before finalization. She will report to us on specific issues such as the child's development and his health. The social worker is there to help you with any problems that may arise and to make a report for us so that we can feel comfortable in consenting to the adoption when the six months time frame is complete.

If you are finalizing in Texas, a copy of this report and a signed consent for adoption must be presented to the court before adoption is granted. All states have similar requirements.

Fam2 Fam offers an online information system that allows you to login and maintain your self-reports during this period. When you enter your reports in the system, they are instantly 'turned in' and an email notification is sent to the Fam2Fam team. This simplifies the post-placement dramatically for our adoptive parents.

Will our birth mother require medical care paid for by us?

It is not likely that your birth mother will need to have her medical care paid for by you. Most birth mothers qualify for Medicaid and we enroll them before they begin their pre-

natal visits with the doctor.

Occasionally a birth mother may have to have a procedure such as an ultrasound before her Medicaid is received. We pay for those costs and a copy of the actual bill will be given to you for reimbursement. In the case of c-sections, Medicaid in Texas will not cover a surgical assistant who is not a MD to assist during this type of surgery. Typically, our doctor will use a surgical assistant and we will pay that directly to him. These are the types of reimbursements which may be needed in particular cases.

Medicaid covers the baby as well, but once we place the child with you, your health insurance company will cover him just as a biological child. Since 1996, health insurance coverage for adopted children is now available to all families covered by group health plans as soon as those families assume financial responsibility for the child. There are some exceptions, so please check with your insurance company for their rules prior to the birth of your child.

What if our birth mother changes her mind?

This is called a 'failure'. It is very sad and disappointing and thankfully, rare in our agency. If you read your 'Letter of Understanding', it points out that you never lose your agency fee until you are successfully placed. This means that if she changes her mind you only lose whatever money that has been put forth on your behalf for her living expenses, if any. In our fee schedule we offer an option to guarantee the birth mother's living expenses.

If I change my mind after application but before I am matched with a birthmother, may I have a refund on my fees paid to date?

Unfortunately, our fees are non-refundable. Check our references and be certain that Fam2Fam is the right agency to create or complete your family through adoption before you make your first payment. You will find that this is standard practice in the field.

What do I have to pay for at the time of placement?

At the time of placement, you will be paying your placement fee plus any outstanding living expenses owed for your birth mother. We are required to take care of her needs for six (6) weeks after the birth of the child. At the time of placement, you will be expected to provide us with certified funds or a wire transfer for all outstanding money owed and an estimate of her six (6) weeks living expenses after the birth. You may call 10 days before the expected birth of the child to get a quote of the estimated amount due at the time of placement. Any overpayment will be promptly returned to you after all bills are paid on behalf of your birth mother.

ADOPTIVE FAMILY ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Couples or singles. If married, there are no requirements of how long you have been married.
- Demonstrate a stable employment history, sufficient financial resources and adequate living conditions conducive to a child's well being.
- Demonstrate that you are free from communicable disease and in sufficiently good physical and mental health.

- Demonstrate that you are emotionally and mentally capable of understanding the needs of a small child and being able to meet them. This is demonstrated by a recommendation for adoption in your home study.
- The age limit for acceptance into our program is 25 to 55 years of age

The above requirements are preferred, but exceptions are made when possible.

THE F2F ADOPTION PROCESS

1) You will need an application on file with our agency

If you received a printed adoption packet, an application is included in it. You may also download an application from our website under forms. Complete and return it to our office with your check for the application fee. This will signal your entrance into our program and the first step towards a new baby.

2) You will need a home study

You must have a home study completed prior to being accepted into our program. If you live in Texas and have not identified a home study agency or licensed social worker, call our office. We perform home studies, but can refer you to a reputable social worker in your area.

If you live out of state, fingerprint cards are required to do a FBI background check. The State of Texas' adoption standards require that all adoptive families residing outside the state of Texas undergo a FBI background check. You may have done the same for your home study agency, but Texas requires that we have it done through the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. We will mail you the specific type of fingerprint cards required. You will have your fingerprints put on the cards by the police department or other authorized fingerprinting agency and return the cards to us for processing through TDFPS.

3) You will develop your adoptive family profile which usually includes a letter of introduction to the birth mother, stories and pictures. This is the tool we use to present your family to our birth mothers, so it needs to be done well. We recommend double sided pages, but no more than 10 pages in length. It should be bound with spiral wire or similar and have laminated or thick cover paper. We will need 10 copies and will return all that are not used.

After we have received your home study recommending you for adoption, your criminal background check and child abuse clearances or your FBI background check has been received by us and you have been accepted into our program, you should submit the following documents (*found at www.fam2fam.org*):

1. Contract signed by both parties
2. Fee schedule signed by both parties
3. Letter of understanding that has been signed and notarized
4. Adoptive Family Worksheet
5. 10 Profiles for the purpose of matching you with a birth mother

6. Your check for the initial payment of the agency fee (*this is found on the Fee Schedule*)

Fam2Fam is here to help you through these documents.

4) You are now on our Active Adoptive Parent List

We do not work on a waiting list, only an active list. When a birth mother meets your criteria as stated in the Adoptive Family Worksheet and you meet her criteria, we will present your profile to her for matching.

5) Check on the status of your adoption process

While you are an active client of Family to Family you may check on your file's status electronically from the convenience of your home computer. Call our office to find out what your username and password is for our CTK system, www.ckodm.com/ffas . Using this network, you may find out if there are any documents needed to complete your file or when your profile was shown to a birth mother. You may also use this system to file your monthly post placement self reports after you are home with your new baby.

6) You are matched with a birth mother

When a birth mother choose to consider your profile, we like to have you talk on the telephone and begin to determine if this is something in which you and the birth mother want to continue. If you both want to continue with the process, Fam2Fam will schedule a meeting and attend it with you. After the initial meeting, you and your birth mother will continue to develop a relationship prior to the birth of your child. Be sure to take lots of pictures for your baby's album.

7) You attend the birth of the baby

You will travel to where you child is being born and in most of our placements, the adoptive family is invited by the birth mother to be in the delivery room.

8) You will take your new infant home from the hospital

After the baby has been released from the hospital and its birth parents have relinquished their parental rights, you may take the child from the hospital. A Fam2Fam staff member will accompany you. At that time you will be given documents to sign that will enable your insurance company to cover the child as if you gave birth to her. If you reside outside the state of Texas or your child is born in a different state from which you reside, we will complete the Interstate Compact requirements and notify you when you may return home with your child.

9) Post Placement supervision

Fam2Fam will contact your home study agency as well as give you instructions about Texas requirements for post placement reports to be completed during the six (6) months wait before you can finalize your adoption as per Texas legal statute. During the six months after placement and prior to finalization, you will file monthly post placement self reports with Family to Family electronically using our www.ckodm.com/ffas system.

10) Finalization of your adoption

Texas has no residency clause in its adoption laws. If you reside in Texas or even if you reside in another state, you are free to finalize your adoption in Texas after the child has been in your home for 6 months and your post placement supervision has been complete.

The staff at **Fam2Fam** looks forward to working with you to complete or create your family through adoption. Our staff is available to answer any questions you may have about the adoption process, agency policies or the rules and regulations governing adoptions in Texas.

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