

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

What is the adoptive family allowed to know about me?

The family is only given non-identifying information which includes: health and genetic family history, pregnancy and delivery information and hospital birth records.

What does the adoptive family usually want to know about me?

The adoptive family usually wants to know how old you are, the size of your family, which part of the state you live in, how far along you are in your pregnancy, if you have any other children, your educational background and medical/genetic family history.

How much can I be involved in choosing the couple for my child? May I meet them?

You can choose to be very active or not at all active when picking the adoptive parents for your child. When you choose a family that you are interested in, you can meet them. Many birth parents may go out to dinner with the adoptive family, go to doctor visits together, talk on the telephone and/or write to each other. You can be the one to hand the baby to them in the hospital. If this type of open adoption does not appeal to you, you can make your choice without meeting the adoptive parents. Open adoption allows you to decide how open or private you want your relationship to be with the family you choose.

How much will I know about the adoptive parents?

After meeting with the adoptive family that you have selected, you and the family will decide how much information disclose to one another. You are free to exchange last names, addresses, occupations, family background, etc.

Does the agency ever deal with couples who are out of this state, or must they live in the state where the agency is?

Yes, the agency does work with couples who live out of state; however, most of our prospective adoptive families live in Wisconsin.

May I select what religion I wish the couple to be and be assured that the child will be raised in that religion?

Yes, it is your right as a birth parent to have a child raised in the religion that is important to you.

May I know how long a couple has been waiting for a child, and why the wait?

Yes, you may know how long a couple has been waiting for a child. That information is on the parent profiles you view when choosing a couple. There are many factors which can play into how long the couple has been waiting, from failed plans, their level of openness, type of child desired, how much they are willing to pay in extra expenses for the birth parent as well as what they are willing to accept in the health history of the birth mother.

May I write the adoptive parents a letter explaining to them the reasons for placing my child for adoption, and will I have the assurance they will receive and read it?

You may write the adoptive parents a letter explaining to them the reasons for placing your child for adoption. This question is also asked in the social history form you fill out, if you feel the need to explain further, you can write a letter. You have our assurance that they will receive it, and most adoptive families would be very pleased to share this letter with their child at the appropriate age.

What qualifications must a couple meet before they are accepted as clients in your agency?

A single person or married couples who are at least 21 years old and who have a favorable home study completed by a licensed agency are able to adopt. A home study includes: health exams, personal references, background checks through their county of residence as well as state records and a visit to their home by the social worker to ensure that the home meets foster licensing requirements. Other documents needed for the home study include: proof of insurance, state and federal income tax records, birth certificates, marriage license, physical exams, letters of employment, five (5) non-relative references, a financial statement of their assets and income, and individual testing detailing their emotional well-being, life experiences and relationships with others from childhood to adulthood.

Do I Need the Birth Father's Permission?

Whether you are married to the birthfather or not, he has a role in the adoption. Under Wisconsin law, the mother of a child born while not married to the birth father has custody.

However, the father also has to agree to the adoption in order to make your child available for adoption. In fact, this cannot be done without his voluntary consent or a legal procedure to terminate his rights involuntarily.

In some cases, the birth father may be unknown. There is a specific legal process that addresses unknown birth fathers.

Adoption Services, Inc. offers free and confidential birth parent counseling. A quick meeting with an adoption professional can provide you with helpful information about the adoption process and can answer specific questions you may have regarding your case.

After the adoption is finalized, will I need to have any further contact with the adoption agency or adoptive family?

Any future contact is controlled by the adoptive family. Agreements about communication after adoption are not legally enforceable. However, the vast majority of adoptive parents honor their agreements for contact with birth parents.

Will my child be able to get information about me if he/she desires?

Your child will be able to search for you according to the Wisconsin Adoption Records Search Law. When the child is 18 years old, they can request non-identifying social history and medical/genetic information about the birth parents. At age 21, the child may request

a search for their birth parent's identity and location as well as a copy of the original birth certificate, if the birth parents have signed an Affidavit of Consent.

What are sealed records?

Sealed records, as opposed to open records, refer to the practice of impounding the original birth certificate of an infant upon adoption. The original sealed birth certificate is replaced with a birth certificate declaring the adoptee to be the child of his/her adoptive parents. When a person who was adopted in Wisconsin turns 18, he/she may request a search for his/her birth parent and request a copy of the sealed birth certificate.

Can I request that the files be sealed until the child is 18 or is that automatically the case?

The files are automatically sealed until the child turns 18.

Who has access to my file with the adoption agency?

While all records are kept confidential, the State reviewer for agency licensing does have access to files when they perform site visits.

What information do the adoption agency's files contain?

The file contains complete medical/genetic history, pregnancy/delivery information, social history form, intake form, consents for disclosure of confidential information (hospital, doctor, adoptive family, etc.), hospital birth plan and consents to release information, voluntary consent for placement, birth certificate and Termination of Parental Rights paperwork.

In the years to come, if my child searches for me, would the agency contact me before my child does?

It depends, if you have not signed the Affidavit of Consent, you will be contacted by the agency first to be given the chance to sign the Affidavit of Consent or refuse. The child might contact you first without the agency's knowledge or involvement.

Will I be able to find my child if I decide I want to search for him/her?

In Wisconsin, adoption law does not allow birth parents the ability to search for their birth children. However, birth parents can sign an affidavit that states their willingness to have contact with their birth child. This affidavit is then placed in their file at the adoption agency and with the State. Therefore, when an adoptee initiates a search they will know that their birth parent wants to be contacted.

May I have pictures of my baby?

Yes, you can take as many pictures as you want at the hospital. You can also make arrangements with the adoptive family to receive pictures from them as well.

What may I send to my child?

You may send a gift with your child and the agency will ensure that the child receives any gifts or letters that you want your child to receive.

Are my parents, friends, father of the baby etc. allowed to see the baby?

Before the Termination of Parental Rights, other family members, friends and birth father are allowed to see the baby with your permission. After the Termination of Parental Rights, visits can be arranged with the adoptive family if all parties are comfortable with that.

Will I be able to spend time with my baby in the hospital?

After your baby is born, you may have the baby stay with you in the hospital room, if that is what you would like. If you are having an open adoption, which is most common, you may want to consider including the adoptive parents in caring for the baby during your hospital stay. However, make sure that you take enough private time for you and your child. If you find that it is easier not to see the baby at all, that is fine. You must do what feels most comfortable for you, not what others may expect you to do. Inform your counselor of your choices in this matter.

Will I have to go to court?

In Wisconsin, the procedure for permanently ending the legal relationship between parents and their child is called a Termination of Parental Rights or TPR. The TPR takes place in court, in front of a Judge. The petition for the hearing is signed by the birth parent. The attorney involved will file the petition with the court. The petition is filed soon after the birth of the child and the court date is generally two to four weeks later. Your social worker will prepare you for the court hearing and she will be present at the hearing.

How soon after the baby is born can it be placed in its new home?

The baby may go home from the hospital with the adoptive family in what is known as a “Legal Risk” placement. In order for the child to go home with the adoptive family, they must have a current home study on file with our agency and pre-adoptive foster home license. The other option is for the baby to be placed in one of our agency’s licensed foster homes during the time between hospital discharge and the TPR court hearing.

Why do some babies go into foster care before they are placed with the adoptive parents?

After discharge from the hospital and before the TPR hearing, the baby can either be placed in the home of the adoptive family (who are licensed as foster parents) as a legal risk placement or in one of our licensed agency foster homes. This decision is made between the adoptive parents and the birth parents. Agency staff will often advise all parties in the decision making process.

How long will my baby be in foster care?

If it is decided that the baby will be placed in an agency foster home until the TPR hearing, he/she will usually be in foster care for three weeks. This can vary from 14 to 30 days, depending on how quickly the TPR hearing can be scheduled. Birth parents and adoptive parents may visit during this time.

Do my parents need to sign papers for me to place my child for adoption?

No.

Once I appear in court and the Judge signs the order termination my parental rights,

can I change my mind about the adoption?

Under Wisconsin law, your decision does not become final until you terminate your parental rights (TPR). After the TPR petition is filed, you will have approximately 30 days before you go to court to terminate your parental rights. Once the TPR is finalized, you will no longer have any rights to your child and no right to change your mind.

Will I be able to have a visit with my baby before the TPR?

Yes, you are able to see the baby in the hospital, and if you decide you would like to see the child again before the TPR, a visit to the adoptive family's home or the foster home will be arranged.

What information is needed about the birth father?

The birth mother is required by the court to provide as much information as possible about the identity of the birth father so that legal notice can be given to him prior to the Termination of Parental Rights court hearing.

When, if at all, does the birth father have to be present? Do I have to be there with him?

The birth father does not have to be present at any point. However, any identifying information must be disclosed so that he can be legally notified. If the birth father does not appear at the court hearing, and he has not declared paternal interest before the hearing, his rights will be terminated by default.

If there was an accident and the child's adoptive parents were killed, would I then be responsible for the child?

No, you would not be responsible for the child. Your parental rights would have already been terminated. If this happens before the adoption is finalized, the agency would place the child with another adoptive family. If this would happen after the adoption is finalized, the child would go to the guardian that the adoptive family designated in their will.

Can I name the baby and will the adoptive parents keep the name I pick?

You can name the baby at the hospital. The child's original birth certificate will have your name and the name you chose for your child. However, the adoptive families can choose to change the child's name when they finalize the adoption. When they finalize the adoption, they will be issued a new birth certificate with their names as the parents and the name they chose for the child.

What happens if my baby is born with birth defects? Will the adoptive parents still want to adopt my baby?

Most of the time, the adoptive family continues to be involved in the adoption plan and continues to want to adopt the baby. They will take the child to medical specialists, as needed. If, in a rare case, the adoptive family did not want to continue with the adoption plan, the agency would work with you to make an alternative plan or to find another adoptive family.

Will my medical costs be covered by either the agency or the adoptive parents?

Usually medical costs are covered by your insurance. If that is not the case, adoptive

parents may pay for your birthing expenses, depending on the amount of the medical bills and the amount of expenses they are willing to pay for.

If the adoption agency and/or the adoptive parents help with my expenses, what would that include?

Expenses paid on behalf of the birth mother and child by the adoptive parents can include: birth parent counseling, legal services, medical and hospital care, services provided by the agency in connection with the adoption, foster care for the child, transportation related to the pregnancy or adoption, living expenses (not to exceed \$5,000), birthing classes and maternity clothes (not to exceed \$300), or gifts to the birth mother (not to exceed \$100).