



How to Select and Adoption Agency

Adoption Services Inc. was the first private, non-profit, non-sectarian adoption agency in Wisconsin. We have been around a long time and throughout the years we have seen the great, the bad, and the scandalous.

At ASI, our goal is to give you as much information as you need to be able to make a well-informed decision. After that our main priority is to listen and answer your questions, even a few you didn't asked.

Hopefully, this article will help you begin the first real step in your adoption journey, finding an agency and a partner that is right for you.

Step 1: Get Online

Search and create a list of adoption agencies in your community and/or State.

[Search Tip: Every State has a division of child welfare (DCF), it may be called something else where you live. Many of their websites contain a list of licensed/approved/registered adoption professionals within that State. It is a good place to start. If that information or division is illusive or hard to navigate, give your search bar a workout. Phrases like "Adoption in (Insert State)" and "Private Adoptions in (Insert State)" are a good start. Quick Tip: Skip right on past those top paid "Ads" listings.]

Before I send you off into the world wide web there is a bit of adoption lingo you need to know first. Keep in mind that unless an agency is able to provide services and supervision at every stage, they really shouldn't be operating in adoption.

1. Adoption Agency: This is a licensed child placing organization that is staffed by social workers and accredited adoption professionals (they will have one or any combination of these fancy letters after their name: BSW, MSW, LSW, CSW, LCSW, ACSW). They are regulated/licensed/overseen by the State in which they operate. They offer the full spectrum of services needed to complete an adoption and the highest level of protection from adoption fraud, scam, and disruption caused by legal oversight or unethical practices.
2. Independent Matching Agency: This is an agency (see description above) that only provides services to connect/match adoptive parents with birth parents. They typically have a network of other adoption professionals throughout the US that provide birth parent services. Adoptive parents and birth parents will typically reside in different States. Adoptive parents have a home study and are approved for adoption in the State that they reside by a different agency/organization based on their states requirements. The Adoptive parents provide the

matching agency profiles that are sent throughout their network. The Pros of working with a matching agency is that there is a much larger pool of birth parents to be matched, and wait times have the potential to be less. The Cons are increased fees working with multiple agencies, you will need to travel to baby and birth mom, you may need an attorney in both States, you will need to arrange to stay for an undetermined amount of time in the State where baby is born while you wait for ICPC approval, and you may be required to return to birth State to finalize the adoption.

- We believe that, in most cases, an open-adoption with consistent, meaningful post-finalization communication and/or visitation with birth family is in the best interest of the child. Every member of the adoption triad benefits when birth parents are well counseled, treated, served, and respected no matter their decision. However, for adoptive parents that are determined to have little to no ongoing communication, this type of adoption would be recommended due to the likelihood of a vast geographical distance between adoptive and birth parents.

3. Adoption Facilitator: **Disclaimer: Adoption Facilitators are only legally allowed to operate in 10 states.** Even if your resident State does not allow Adoption Facilitators that doesn't mean you can't work with one operating in one of the 10 that do (For the record WE DON'T RECOMMEND it) Adoption Facilitators are unlicensed, unregulated, unaccredited, and untrained individuals who have some knowledge of the adoption process. Typically, they are only allowed to provide matching services. The process is like working with a Matching Agency but there is little to no protection against scam, fraud, and disruption by the birth parents, but more importantly, a predatory facilitator. Because these individuals are neither social workers nor attorneys, they have little to no knowledge of the legal process in any State. Mistakes are a normal occurrence which could cost you time, money, and even the legality of your adoption.
4. Adoption Consultants: Hiring an adoption consultant is like hiring a personal assistant. They find, screen, and connect you with adoption professionals that provide Home Study/Licensing, legal, matching, and profile creator services. It is their job to support you and help you navigate the process, but they are not involved in any of the actual services that are required to adopt.

As you search make sure to explore their websites and social media pages. Take notes on your observations, impressions, and questions that arise. Things to look out for are:

Do you like their website?

Is information easy to find and clearly stated?

How well do they promote their Waiting Adoptive Parents?

If I had a penny... for every time a caller is in frustrated agony because they had an important question to ask but... poof... it has slipped their mind and is lost... I would be living somewhere much warmer.

Those are the kinds of questions that will keep you up at night, and you want to get as much sleep as possible while you still can. I recommend my clients to start a notebook, write down their thoughts, questions, concerns, fears etc. It is all important and there isn't a question not worth asking.

[Quick Talk: Online and Social Media Reviews: While reviews can be informative, they can also be just as misleading. Off the top of my head, I could go into a dozen examples of misleading reviews, but I will spare you my rant. If you were to believe every review on every website, social media page, and blog you would be left believing that adoption is the worst, every agency corrupt, and case a horror story. Here is my suggestion, pay attention to PATTERNS not POSTS. If you see a pattern of complaints, add it to your notes and ask the agency about those specific claims. Save your final judgement for after you hear their explanation.]

Now, you've gone online... you have your list of potential agencies... you are almost ready for Step 2, but first a bit of preparation.

Ultimately, your primary goal is to arrange to meet with each agency IN PERSON.

I know what you're thinking, "That sounds like a huge time commitment especially with technology and video calling so readily available." You are correct but hear me out.

The following is the soliloquy every potential adoptive parent gets from me (Whether they ask for it or not).

In Wisconsin, adoptive parents and birthparents alike are required, by law, to work with a licensed adoption agency. Every agency in the State is required to follow the same licensing laws and procedures. So, the adoption process varies little from agency to agency.

So what separates us?

Answer: The People & The Experience

Adopting a child is a HUGE decision. It is a live long commitment emotionally, financially, all the "ly's" and you don't want to jump in with professionals you don't trust.

The Home Study process alone can, at times, be a bit intrusive and uncomfortable. Not to mention that by the end of it the agency staff you are working with will know a great number of details about you and your life.

At each stage of the process there are periods where you may feel uncomfortable talking about yourself, scared of being judged, lacking any control, or that the future is filled with unanswerable questions and unknown outcomes. Imagine going through those moments and not having someone you are familiar with, trust, and who communicates openly and consistently with you.

Eesh, I am shivering just thinking about it.

Meeting, in person, with the staff you will be working with can answer a great number of important questions.

- Are you comfortable talking about intimate details of your life with them?
- Do you feel they are trustworthy?
- Do their words match their actions?

I could go on and on but in short, the information and instincts you get from talking in-person with staff cannot be replicated or gained talking on the phone or over video.

Set aside some free time, collect your thoughts, and start making calls

Step 2: Call and Schedule

You have your list of potential agencies; next you will want to prepare for your first call with them. Remember your ultimate goal is to schedule an in-person meeting/interview/informational session of any kind.

When you call, they will want some basic information from you, totally normal, and undoubtedly share some information about their agency and it's programs with you.

[Side Note: You will most likely be asked, "What type of adoption program are you interested in?" If you haven't already decided, that's ok. You can find information on each of the adoption programs on our website under the scroll down menu on the "Adoptive Parents" tab. While you don't need to be set on a specific program right now, having a general understanding of which ones you want to explore will be helpful to you and the agency you are communicating with because different professionals/agencies will have different expertise's.]

During your initial conversation, make sure to listen for and note anything that strikes you as unusual or is a potential red flag, for example:

- Is anything too good to be true?
- Do you feel they are being evasive or shady answering your questions?
- Did they refuse to provide you answer or information?
- Do they use any identifying information about current or past clients as an example or as proof of something they have said?
- If you have to leave a message or send an email, how long does it take them to get back to you?

Trust your gut, be discriminatory with your time! First impressions are often invariably right.

During the call be prepared to ask your questions. In addition to those, we have created a list of FAQ's specifically selected to help you determine several things.

-We want to trust everyone's intentions, but we need to be safe. Is this agency ethical, lawful, and capable?

-Are their fees designed to profit or are they in this profession to provide a service to their community?

-Are they just filling their agency pool and pockets?

-Will they aggressively, ethically, and tastefully promote their Adoptive Parents to Birth Parents?

The following are questions to get you started and you may find that some are questions you didn't even think to ask. Just remember, these are not a substitute for your personal questions.

Questions About the Agency/Professional

1. Are you licensed? Who oversees your licensing?
2. Is your agency For Profit or Not for Profit?
3. Are you affiliated with, or do you have a partnership with any other religious sect, organization, business, agency, etc.?
4. How experienced is your staff with adoption?
5. Do you have a high staff turnover rate?
6. Throughout the process how many people will have access to the private details in my file?
7. What confidentiality standards and protections do you have?

Questions About the Program and Process

1. What adoption programs does your agency specialize in?
2. What are the costs for home study, license renewal, matching, placement, post-placement, and finalization? What is included in those fees and when are they due (for each of the listed)?
3. What are the program eligibility requirements for Adoptive Parents?

Questions About Timelines, Statistics, & Other

1. Typically, how long do Adoptive Parents wait to be matched with birth parents? (*Red Flag Alert: If they give you a very specific amount of time, this may be too good to be true. In Wisconsin, birth parents choose the adoptive family. There is no real way of knowing when you will be selected.*)
2. How many waiting adoptive parents do you have in the program? How many are you licensed to have at one time?
3. How many placements do you typically have in a year? Is that number specifically for this program or is that all the programs combined?
4. How do you promote adoptive parents to birth parents?

Ask questions, attend meetings, ask more questions at another meeting about information you were told at a previous meeting.

As you interview each agency cross off the "No's", develop a rating scale for the others, and whittle down your list until you reach the finalists. After that make your decision knowing that it is based on logic, information, and instinct.

Hopefully, we have provided you with some tools and guidance to start you off on the right path in your adoption journey.

If you are interested in interviewing us or would like some more specific advice, please feel free to contact us through our website, Facebook, or phone.

[Shameless Plug: We provide free one-on-one informational meetings for anyone interested in our agency program]

If you have a moment to **like, comment, share, or review** on your favorite online spaces, it would be greatly appreciated by both our staff and our clients.

Thank You, for your gift of time and we wish you all the best on your adoption journey.