

Calvary Bible Church
Orphan Care & Adoption Ministry

Our purpose is to be obedient to God's call as a church body to care for the orphans. For this reason we want to offer support, information, care, and service as a ministry to those who are called to adopt.

Information Guide

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Table of Contents

I. GETTING STARTED.....	1
Questions Everyone Asks When Considering Adoption . . . (<i>And What They Really Want to Know</i>).....	1
Exploratory Questions to Consider.....	2
Adoption: Myths and Concerns	3
II. OVERVIEW OF THE ADOPTION OPTIONS.....	4
Adoption Options Article.....	4
Domestic Adoption	4
A Summary of the Foster Care and Foster Adoption Alternatives	4
III. CHOOSING AN ADOPTION/FOSTER CARE AGENCY.....	6
Suggested Questions for Selecting an Adoption Agency for a Domestic Adoption.....	6
Suggested Questions for Selecting an Adoption Agency for an International Adoption	9
IV. ADOPTION FINANCES.....	13
Adoption Costs and Financial Assistance Resources.....	13
Financial Assistance Resources for Adoptive Families	14
Federal Adoption Tax Credit	14
Adoption Grant and Loan Programs.....	15
Employer Benefits.....	15
Adoption Subsidies	15
V. HOW TO WAIT WELL	16
Making the Wait Worthwhile: Helpful Ideas As You Wait.....	16
Ideas to Help Make Your Adoption Wait Worthwhile	24
APPENDIX.....	26
CHOSEN HERITAGE CHRISTIAN ADOPTIVE SERVICES HANDBOOK	26
REFERENCES	27

I. GETTING STARTED

Questions Everyone Asks When Considering Adoption . . . (And What They Really Want to Know)

Questions are a normal and expected part of exploring adoption and working through some of the challenging and difficult aspects of making a confident adoption decision. We encourage you to be open and honest about the questions you have and we want to assure you that CBC is a safe place to ask these questions and find honest and reliable answers.

Here are just a few of the questions that most everyone asks when considering adoption – and what they really want to know. Please know that there are many CBC families, with a diverse array of experiences and backgrounds, that would love to listen and talk with you as you consider the life changing adventure of adoption.

1. How do I know if adoption is right for me? (What if I make a mistake?)
2. What process is best for me/us? (Which process is risk-free?)
3. How long will it take? (What is the shortest process I can pursue?)
4. How much will it cost? (Will I go into a huge amount of debt or go broke trying to adopt?)
5. What agency or service provider should I use? (Will someone just tell me which agency I should use?)
6. How will my family and friends react? (What if my family thinks I'm crazy and my friends don't "get it"?)
7. What will I have to "give up" if I adopt? (Will I still get to have a baby shower and will people still celebrate with our family?)
8. Will I be able to love a child that is not biologically related to me? (What if I don't feel a connection or this child doesn't bond with me?)
9. What if something goes "wrong"? (Is this going to hurt?)

If you would like to talk with an experienced adoptive or foster/adoptive family in CBC, contact Justin and Tiffany Reeves at jcreeves03@gmail.com to set you up with appropriate adoptive family.

Exploratory Questions to Consider

These questions are designed to help those who are exploring adoption think through some important considerations and ideas relating to the adoption decision process. Please keep in mind that there are not right or wrong answers to these questions. After you have thought through your answers we would encourage you to discuss these questions and your thoughts with your spouse, and then identify an experienced adoptive family to talk with as well. Please feel free to contact Justin and Tiffany Reeves at jcreeves03@gmail.com and they will put you in touch with a CBC family who will walk with you as you explore adoption.

1. What are my biggest fears regarding adoption?
2. Do/will my close family and friends support my decision to adopt? If not, why?
3. How do I define the concept of family? In other words, what is a family?
4. What personal experience(s) do I have regarding adoption – whether positive or negative?
5. Does adoption seem “normal” to me?
6. Does my spouse have the same ideas about adoption?
7. What have I done thus far to educate myself about adoption?
8. What, if anything, do I feel that I would lose or be “giving up” if I choose to adopt?
9. Why do/would I want to adopt?
10. How do I feel about birthparents (i.e., the biological parents of children who were adopted)?
11. If you have experience infertility, discuss with your spouse the grief of this loss and communicate your silent hopes (i.e. maybe I’ll get pregnant if I adopt).
12. Pray together and ask the Lord to give you a willing, obedient, and unified spirit towards adoption.

Adoption: Myths and Concerns

1. I can't afford to adopt--- it's too expensive.
2. It will take years to adopt.
3. Birthparents are likely to try to "reclaim" their child or insist on an unwanted ongoing relationship.
4. It is difficult- or impossible to bond with an adopted child.
5. My friends and family members will have a difficult time understanding and accepting adoption and adoptive families.
6. Adoption is second best and if I choose to adopt I will miss out on the normal experiences.
7. When adopting through foster care and/or Child Protective Services, you cannot discipline the child.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE ADOPTION OPTIONS

Prospective adoptive parents have many adoption options. The way you choose to adopt will depend on what is important to your family, including how you feel about contact with birth parents, how flexible you can be about the characteristics of the child you wish to adopt, the resources you have available for adoption fees, and how long you are willing to wait for your child.

Adoption Options Article

See article titled “Adoption Options” found here for details on Domestic/International Adoption, as well as Licensed Private Agency/Facilitated Unlicensed Adoption:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptionoption.cfm

Domestic Adoption

See article titled “The Truth About Domestic Adoption” here:

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/AdoptionMyths.pdf>

A Summary of the Foster Care and Foster Adoption Alternatives

When it comes to understanding the alternatives concerning foster care and foster adoption in the State of Texas, the various definitions and requirements can sometimes be hard to keep straight. In order to provide a clear understanding of the alternatives we have prepared the following brief overview.

Alternatives Requiring Certification

Each of the following ways to care for children in foster care requires you to obtain a foster care and/or adoption certification. Singles and married couples are eligible and the basic requirements to obtain a foster care and/or adoption certification are:

- Complete background check and fingerprints
- Complete application process
- Complete required training
- Acceptable home study recommendation (including home safety inspection)
- Moral character and sound judgment deemed appropriate for parenting

Foster Care – involves the temporary care of a child (or children) who has been removed from his home due to abuse, neglect or abandonment and is now in state custody. A child remains in foster care until such time as he is able to return home safely, be placed with relatives or is placed in an adoptive family. You can choose to foster an individual child or a sibling group, a child with or without special needs, and a child within an age range of your choosing.

Foster to Adopt – involves foster care for a child (or children) where the foster parents have indicated a desire to adopt the child when and if that is possible. Foster to Adopt parents understand that a child they are fostering may or may not become eligible for adoption.

Legal Risk – involves foster care for a child (or children) primarily with the plan to adopt the child once her parental rights have been terminated. A placement that is classified as “legal risk” typically implies a higher likelihood (when compared to Foster to Adopt) that the foster parents will be able to adopt the child being fostered, although that is not certain.

Adoption from Foster Care (also referred to as Foster Adoption) – involves the adoption of a child (or children) in state custody whose parental rights have been terminated. You can choose to adopt a child from foster care without the commitment to foster. Children waiting for adoptive families are typically 5 years old or older, part of a sibling group and/or have some special needs.

Respite Care – involves caring for a child (or children) in foster care for a short period of time (generally anywhere from 3 days to a couple of weeks) while the child’s foster parent(s) take a break or a vacation. Respite care parents go through the same training and home study process as foster parents.

Alternative Not Requiring Certification Relief Care – involves caring for a child (or children) in foster care for a period of less than 72 hours. Relief care is a great way to provide loving care to a foster child while providing a much needed short break for foster parents. Relief care does not require a foster care certification, but does require the following:

- Age 21 or older
- Completed background check and fingerprints
- CPR/First Aid training
- Relief Care training (consisting of one 3 hour session covering the basic
- Information needed to provide quality relief care)
- Signed confidentiality and discipline policies
- Signed safety acknowledgement
- Recommendation letters (can be obtained from CBC or other source)

III. CHOOSING AN ADOPTION/FOSTER CARE AGENCY

Suggested Questions for Selecting an Adoption Agency for a Domestic Adoption

The following is a list of suggested questions that are designed to help families in selecting an adoption agency for a domestic adoption. Use of an adoption agency is only one of several different means of pursuing adoption, but is a commonly used and often beneficial approach for many families.

A very important consideration in selecting an agency is determining whether the agency is a “good fit,” and this can generally be achieved by ensuring that the family has accurate information and realistic expectations about the agency, its services and costs and its adoption process (in particular estimated wait times). You may also want to understand clearly the motivations of the agency (e.g., are they involved in the placement of children as a “ministry” or as a business) and whether or not the agency and its staff share your faith and moral convictions. In addition to obtaining answers to the following questions, adoptive families are strongly encouraged to read carefully any contracts or policies that they are asked to sign or agree to by the agency and to ask questions (including consulting an attorney, if necessary).

General Questions About the Agency

- What are the agency’s requirements for adoptive families (e.g., age, marital status, number of children already in the home, religious, criminal background, financial, health considerations, home size)?
- How long has the agency been licensed in Texas? How long has the agency been in operation?
- Is the agency a non-profit or for-profit organization? If a for-profit organization, who owns the agency?
- Does the agency have any religious or denominational affiliation?
- How long has the agency’s director been working in the adoption field? How long has he/she been the director of the agency?
- How many professionals are on staff with the agency? What is the average length of service at the agency for the agency’s case workers who are currently on staff?
- What is the education and licensing background of the agency’s director and professional staff?

- Will the agency provide contact with families who have recently used the agency to adopt (i.e., family references)?
- Are families allowed to specify the gender of the child they wish to adopt?
- Who handles the agency's legal work? Is the attorney a member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys?

Questions About Fees and Costs

What fees and costs are charged by the agency in connection with the adoption process and when are they due?

What costs and expenses will likely be incurred in addition to the agency's fees and costs (i.e., home study expenses, legal expenses, filing and processing expenses, etc.)? *Note: It is advisable that you request a total estimate for all fees, costs and expenses that can be expected in connection with the adoption process – not just the agency's fees and costs.*

Questions About Wait Time

What is the current estimated wait time for families? How many families are currently waiting? *Note: Wait times at most agencies are often highly dependent on the adoptive family's parameters (e.g., age, gender, racial/ethnic and health factors that the adoptive family is willing to consider). To the extent that an adoptive family has already determined certain of its fundamental parameters, questions regarding wait times should be asked in specific relation to those parameters (e.g. what is the estimated wait time for an infant girl).*

What is the longest wait time for any of the families that are currently waiting?

Have average wait times for families increased, decreased or remained generally the same over the past several years (and if they have increased or decreased, why)?

How often should I expect to hear from the agency workers during the waiting process?

Questions About the Agency's Previous Placement Experience

How many children has the agency placed in each of the past five years?

What is the general break-down along racial and ethnic lines of the agency's placements in the last several years? Has the agency experienced any noticeable trends regarding the race or ethnicity of children placed in the last several years (i.e., an increase or decrease in the number of placements of children of a certain race or ethnicity)?

What number of failed adoption placements has the agency experienced in each of the past five years (i.e., how many instances of a family being matched with a child but such match did not result in a final adoption)?

How does the agency handle failed placements (e.g., where on the wait list is a family that has experienced a failed placement placed, are there are any additional fees or costs imposed, etc.)?

Questions About the Agency's Matching and Placement Process

What information does the adoptive family know about birthparent(s) and vice versa?

How does the agency define terms such as "open" adoption and "semi-open" adoption?

What degree of ongoing contact and/or communication between birthparent(s) and adoptive family/child does the agency require, promote or allow?

What role does the agency play in facilitating ongoing contact and/or communication between birthparent(s) and adoptive family/child?

How does the agency's matching process work? How are birthparents and adoptive parents matched?

If adopting an infant, how involved is the adoptive family with the birthparent(s) prior to the baby being born?

If adopting a newborn, when is the baby generally placed with the adoptive family?

Questions About Services Provided by the Agency

What pre-placement training does the agency offer to adoptive families? What other support services does the agency provide (e.g., support groups, social events, newsletters, etc.)?

What post-placement services for adoptive families are provided? What help or services are available for adoptive families experiencing post-placement challenges and difficulties relating to their adoption?

What counseling and support services do the birthparent(s) receive both prior to and after the adoption?

Suggested Questions for Selecting an Adoption Agency for an International Adoption

Use of a licensed adoption agency is generally required when pursuing an international adoption. The specifics of an agency's adoption program vary considerably by country.

The following is a general list of suggested questions that are designed to help families in selecting an adoption agency for an international adoption. Families should also ask additional questions relating to specific country programs.

A very important consideration in selecting an agency is determining whether the agency is a "good fit," and this can generally be achieved by ensuring that the family has accurate information and realistic expectations about the agency, its services and costs and its adoption process (in particular estimated wait times). You may also want to understand clearly the motivations of the agency (e.g., are they involved in the placement of children as a "ministry" or as a business) and whether or not the agency and its staff share your faith and moral convictions. In addition to obtaining answers to the following questions, adoptive families are strongly encouraged to read carefully any contracts or policies that they are asked to sign or agree to by the agency and to ask questions (including consulting an attorney, if necessary).

General Questions About the Agency

- What are the agency's requirements for adoptive families (e.g., age, marital status(including previous divorce(s)), number of children already in the home, religious, criminal background, financial, health considerations)? *Note: Requirements will vary by country.*
- How long has the agency been in operation?
- In what countries does the agency have adoption programs? How long has the agency had an active adoption program in the country of interest?
- Is the agency Hague accredited?
- Has the agency's program in the country of interest ever been suspended or terminated (as a result of loss of accreditation or otherwise)? If so, why and for how long?
- What is the current adoption climate in the country of interest? How stable has the country program been in recent months/years?
- In what regions/cities within the country of interest does the agency work? Can families specify a specific region/city within the country?
- Does the agency have any religious or denominational affiliation?

- How long has the agency's director been working in the adoption field? How long has he/she been the director of the agency?
- How many professionals are on staff with the agency? What is the average length of service at the agency for the agency's case workers who are currently on staff?
- How long has the director for the country of interest (i.e., the country program director) been working with adoptions from the country of interest?
- What is the education and licensing background of the agency's director and professional staff?
- Will the agency provide contact with families who have recently used the agency to adopt from the country of interest (i.e., family references)?
- Are families allowed to specify the gender of the child they wish to adopt? *Note: The ability to specify gender will vary by country.*
- How are waiting children cared for in the country of interest (i.e., orphanages/institutions, foster homes, etc.)? How is the funding for such care provided?
- Does the agency have any affiliations with orphanages, social service agencies, facilitators or others in the country of interest that will be significantly involved in the adoption process? If so, obtain details regarding such arrangements (including the length of such relationships).
- Who handles the agency's legal work in the country of interest? In the United States?

Questions About Fees and Costs

What fees and costs are charged by the agency in connection with the adoption process and when are they due?

What costs and expenses will likely be incurred in addition to the agency's fees and costs (i.e., home study expenses, legal expenses, filing and processing expenses, etc.)? *Note: It is advisable that you request a total estimate for all fees, costs and expenses that can be expected in connection with the adoption process – not just the agency's fees and costs.*

Questions About Wait Time

(Note: All questions regarding wait times should be asked in relation to a specific country program.)

What is the current estimated wait time for families? How many families are currently waiting? *Note: Wait times at most agencies are often highly dependent on the adoptive family's parameters (e.g., age, gender and health factors that the adoptive family is willing to consider). To the extent that an adoptive family has already determined certain of its fundamental parameters, questions regarding wait times should be asked in specific relation to those parameters (e.g., what is the estimated wait time for an infant girl).*

What is the longest wait time for any of the families that are currently waiting for an adoption?

Have average wait times for families increased, decreased or remained generally the same over the past several years (and if they have increased or decreased, why)?

How often should I expect to hear from the agency workers during the waiting process?

Questions About the Agency's Previous Placement Experience

How many children has the agency placed in each of the past five years from the country of interest?

What number of failed adoption placements has the agency experienced in each of the past five years (i.e., how many instances of a family being matched with a child but such match did not result in a final adoption)? *Note: Although generally uncommon even in the context of domestic adoptions, "failed placements" are even more uncommon in the context of international adoption and the risk of a failed international placement will vary greatly by country.*

How does the agency handle failed placements (e.g., where on the wait list is a family that has experienced a failed placement placed, are there any additional fees or costs imposed, etc.)?

Questions About the Agency's Matching and Finalization Process

What children are available in the country of interest (i.e., children of what age, gender, sibling groups, etc.)?

How does the agency's matching process work for the country of interest?

What background information (e.g., medical, social, family history, etc.) is generally available regarding the child and/or the child's biological family?

Does the agency provide pictures and/or video of the referred child?

Once matched, does the agency provide the adoptive family with pictures and/or videos of the child? Does the agency provide updates regarding the child's growth, medical condition and/or development?

Once matched, does the agency allow the adoptive family to travel to visit the child? If so, are there any significant limitations regarding such visits?

What are the travel requirements for the country of interest (i.e., are families required to travel in order to bring their child home or is an escort service available as an option)? Are both parents (if applicable) required to travel? How long must they stay in country?

Questions About Services Provided by the Agency

What pre-placement training does the agency offer to adoptive families? What other support services does the agency provide (e.g., support groups, social events, newsletters, etc.)?

What post-placement services for adoptive families are provided? What help or services are available for adoptive families experiencing post-placement challenges and difficulties relating to their adoption – specifically relating to parenting children of a different racial, ethnic and/or cultural background?

What humanitarian aid/support does the agency provide to the countries in which it operates?

IV. ADOPTION FINANCES

Adoption Costs and Financial Assistance Resources

The financial costs relating to adoption are often one of the primary challenges that families face when pursuing adoption. However, many people are unaware that there are an increasing number of ways to meet this challenge through a variety of adoption financial assistance resources. This overview is intended to help you better understand the costs of various adoption options and identify potential ways that you may be able to better address the financial cost challenge.

Overview of the Costs of Adoption

How much will it cost? This is the inevitable question that is often asked when people begin to consider adoption. So they go in search of solid information about the cost of adoption and quickly find relatively unhelpful ranges of adoption costs such as \$5,000 to \$40,000. This type of information leaves many asking the obvious question – which is it, \$5,000 or \$40,000?

When it comes to the cost of adoption the most honest answer often is – *it depends*. But don't despair because there are some general guidelines that you can rely on in order to help you identify the range of adoption costs you are likely to face.

The Type of Adoption Process Matters

The type of adoption process that you are considering will greatly influence the overall adoption costs that you are likely to encounter. For example, families can often adopt children from the state foster care system for very little or no financial cost. In addition, families are often able to adopt privately without using an adoption agency or facilitator (e.g., adopting independently, such as by sending "Dear Birthmother" letters to family and friends in order to identify a birthmother) for a total cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000. If you choose not to use an agency we highly recommend that you use a highly versed lawyer in the adoption process. (In our opinion independent adoptions are prone to scams, and mounting lawyer fees. However, they are done well when the cases are family related. Seek wise counsel when pursuing an independent adoption.) However, as a general rule the use of an adoption agency for a domestic or international adoption will result in much higher costs than adoptions from foster care or independent adoptions.

Some General Guidelines Regarding the Cost of Adoption

In 2006 and 2007 *Adoptive Families Magazine* conducted an updated non-scientific readers' survey on the cost of adoption. The survey reflects the experiences of more than 1,500 respondents (of which a majority adopted internationally) and, combined with the results from the results of the *Adoptive Families Magazine* 2005 Cost Survey, reveals some interesting facts:

In general, domestic adoptions, on average, cost less than international adoptions. Many people paid nothing for adoptions through the foster system, while \$60,000 was the highest amount paid for a single adoption.

The most common price of an adoption was \$20,000 to \$25,000.

Of those who adopted internationally in 2006-2007, 14.5% of the adoptions cost \$20,000 or less, while 22.6% cost \$20,000-\$25,000, 21% cost \$25,000-\$30,000 and 41.5% cost over \$30,000 (before tax credits and employer benefits).

Of those who adopted domestically in 2006-2007, 30.5% of the adoptions cost less than \$15,000, while 17.5% cost \$15,000-\$20,000, 19% cost \$20,000-\$25,000 and 29.4% cost more than \$25,000 (before tax credits and employer benefits).

Regarding international adoptions in 2006-2007, respondents reported that adoptions from Russia and Guatemala cost the most (over 85% and 74%, respectively, cost in excess of \$30,000), while adoptions from Korea ranked in the middle (54% cost less than \$25,000 and 40% cost \$25,000-\$30,000) and adoptions from China and Ethiopia ranked among the lowest costs among the major sending countries (over 78% of adoptions from China cost less than \$25,000, while 84% of adoptions from Ethiopia cost less than \$25,000)

For more information regarding the *Adoptive Families Magazine* 2005 Cost Survey and the 2006-2007

Cost of Adoption Update, visit www.adoptivefamilies.com/adoptioncost.php and www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1685.

Financial Assistance Resources for Adoptive Families

As the costs of various types of adoptions continue to escalate, there has been a similar increase in the financial assistance resources available to help families deal with these costs. Information regarding several of these financial assistance resources is provided below.

Federal Adoption Tax Credit

Currently there is a federal adoption tax credit that provides a non-refundable federal tax credit of up to \$12,150 (for 2009) for unreimbursed "qualified adoption expenses," and is subject to certain income limitations above \$182,180 (for 2009) of Modified Adjusted Gross Income.

See IRS Tax Topic 607: Adoption Credit (www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html), which provides general information about the current federal adoption tax credit. For more information regarding the federal adoption tax credit, see the information on the Adoption.com website at <http://tax-credit.adoption.com/>.

Note: Please be sure to consult your tax adviser for additional information and to understand how the federal adoption tax credit works and may impact you.

Adoption Grant and Loan Programs

Below is a partial list of potential financial assistance resources (in particular various grant and loan programs) that are generally available for potential adoptive parents and usually cannot be submitted till your homestudy is complete:

LifeSong for Orphans – www.lifesongfororphans.org

The Abba Fund – www.abbafund.org

Show Hope (formerly Shaohannah's Hope) – www.showhope.org

The Gift of Adoption Fund – www.giftofadoption.org

International Children's Adoption Resource Effort – www.intlcare.org

National Adoption Foundation – www.nafadopt.org

Adoption Financing – www.adoptionfinancing.com

National Council for Adoption's Adoption Assistance Program through MBNA American Bank – <https://www1.fni-stl.com/cgi-bin/ncanet.pl>

In addition, CBC has established an **Adoption Assistance Fund** to help qualified families connected to Calvary Bible Church with the financial cost of adoption. You can find more information about the CBC fund by contacting Justin Reeves and Tiffany Reeves at jcreeves03@gmail.com.

Employer Benefits

More and more employers of all sizes are offering employees adoption benefits. These benefits typically range from \$2,000 to \$8,000 and up, with average benefit around \$4,000. For more information visit www.adoptionfriendlyworkplace.org.

Adoption Subsidies

Certain children (including those with special needs) adopted from the Texas foster care system may qualify for a subsidy to help parents pay for ongoing treatments and services. In addition, the State of Texas offers college tuition and fee exemptions for certain adopted children and adoption support programs that provide post-adoption services to adopted children and their families. See the following link for more detailed information regarding available adoption subsidies and assistance in the State of Texas: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Adoption/adoption_assistance.asp

Other Resources

Special Report: Affording Adoption – www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1371

How We Afforded Our Adoption – www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1259

V. HOW TO WAIT WELL

Making the Wait Worthwhile: Helpful Ideas As You Wait

A. Preparing Friends and Family

It is a wonderful blessing to share your adoption journey with your family and friends, but getting friends and family “on board” and bringing them along on the journey can sometimes make your journey a bit challenging. This is why it is important to first educate yourself so that you can then effectively educate others. As well intentioned as they may be, you are almost certain to hear many insensitive, and sometimes unbelievable, comments from those who are closest to you. Here are just a few things that can help you prepare your friends and family to travel the adoption journey with you.

1. Make your decision first

Let your family and friends know about your decision to adopt once you have made your decision, rather than asking for everyone’s opinion as to what they think about you adopting. When you share your decision to adopt with your family and friends remember that they are generally going to follow your lead in terms of how you feel about your decision and the path that you have chosen. If you are excited and can’t wait to get started then chances are that they will probably be excited also. If you seem hesitant, uncertain or fearful, they are likely to feel and react the same

2. Help your family and friends deal with their fears and concerns

It is important that you deal with your own personal fears and misconceptions about adoption so that you can know what to say to others when they share their feelings and fears. Please know that it is completely normal and okay for you and your friends and family to have concerns and fears. Some common fears include:

- Is adoption just long-term care? Is it permanent?
- How can you bond with a child that is not biologically connected to you?
- How long will it take?
- How much will it cost and where will you get the money?
- What about differences involving race and culture?
- What about “open” adoption? Will the child be confused having “two sets of parents”?
- What if the adoption doesn’t work out?

Help your friends and family dispel the myths and their misperceptions about adoption. It is possible that you will hear some typical myths from friends and family when you announce that you are adopting. A few of these myths include:

- Just wait you will get pregnant as soon as you adopt
- Adoption costs way too much for you
- All children who are adopted have problems

3. Keep family and friends updated

When you bring your friends and family along on the journey you are inviting many questions. Those who have not adopted or do not know much about the adoption process may not realize that you may go weeks, if not months, without hearing any news. Some people may ask you if you have heard anything every time they talk to you. Let's be fair, from their perspective if they don't ask questions they are afraid you might see them as not caring, but if they ask too many questions you may get frustrated and see them as being too nosy. You may want to share with them that the adoption process can be unpredictable and that you will be more than happy to share appropriate updates with them as you receive them. You may also want to consider creating a blog. Many people find this to be a fun and great way to keep family and friends up-to-speed on everything that's happening.

4. Privacy – Be the guardian of your child's story

It is important to remember that you are the guardian of your child's story and that you have a responsibility to keep certain facts about your child and his/her birthmother private. Your child's information belongs to them exclusively. It is normal to want to share every detail about your child's birthmother and her "situation" with others because you may be excited.

But consider this important question when deciding what is appropriate to share with others: *Would I want my child to find out this information from someone other than myself or my spouse?* If the answer is "yes," you wouldn't mind if my child found out this information from someone other than you or your spouse, then it is okay to share that information. If the answer is "no," you would not like for your child to find out this information from someone other than you or your spouse, then you should keep that information private until the appropriate time.

Be sure to share this important privacy concept with your friends and family early on in the process. Explain to them that you will not share every detail of your child's situation or that of his/her birthparents' situation with them – not because you don't want them to know – but simply because you are respecting the privacy of your child and his/her story as well as his/her birthparents.

It is important to never 'tear down' your child's birthparents in front of your child or to others – regardless of the facts and circumstances. This does not build you up as a better parent and it does nothing positive for your child. While an honest telling of your child's history is important in the right way and at the right time, 'tearing down' your child's birthparents can often serve to 'tear down' a part of who your child understands himself or herself to be.

5. Correct Adoption Language

It is important to educate yourself on positive or respectful adoption language. For example:

- “She placed her baby for adoption” or “She made an adoption plan for her baby” instead of “She gave her baby up for adoption.”
- “This is Melissa’s son, Miles, who was adopted.” Instead of “this is Melissa’s adopted son, Miles.” Your child’s adoption is just a part of their story – it is not what defines them as a person.

See *Speaking Positively: Using Respectful Adoption Language* by Patricia Irwin Johnston at www.perspectivespress.com/pjpal.html

Once you have educated yourself then begin to educate others. Sometimes you may need to correct others about their adoption language very inconspicuously. For example: When someone says to you, “Did you get to meet his real mother?” You can respond by saying, “Yes, we did get to meet his birthmother.” Typically, the person you are talking to will catch the difference and begin using the correct words. Remember, you don’t have to be rude to be effective.

B. Making Your Adoption Agency Relationship Work Well

Listed below are a couple of key ingredients to help make your relationship with an adoption agency (or other adoption professionals) work well.

1. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

There is nothing more important than effective communication in making your relationship with your adoption agency work well. Questions to ask your agency to foster better communication:

- Who will be my primary contact when I have questions or need assistance?
- What is the best way for me to contact that person? (phone, email, in person)
- How often can I expect to hear from this person? How often do they expect to hear from me?
- How long will it generally take for them to respond to my calls/emails?

2. Expectations, Expectations, Expectations

Your relationship with your agency is a give and take. You have expectations of your agency and they have expectations of you. Just a few examples of these expectations are:

- How to best communicate (mode, frequency, etc.)
- Wait times (and changes in expected wait times)
- Costs and expenses
- Notification of changes in the adoption process

It is very important to clearly establish the proper expectations with your agency early on in the adoption process in order to avoid as much frustration as possible.

3. Flexibility, Flexibility, Flexibility

One of the keys to a successful relationship with your agency is the understanding that there are many situations that are out of your control and out of the control of your agency – especially in international adoption. For example:

- Changes in in-country government procedures
- Implementation of new international laws and treaties
- In-country bureaucratic “slow downs”
- Accreditation changes
- Local holidays
- Political unrest
- Unique circumstances in your case

It is critical to remember that flexibility with your agency is a two way street.

With that said, flexibility has its limits. Always be willing to ask questions and seek quality and responsive service and to demand that your agency act ethically in every way.

C. Naming Younger Children

How should we choose our child’s name? Should we keep part of the name they were given at birth or the name chosen by our child’s birthparents? What about choosing a name that is part of their culture/heritage or the name I have always dreamed of choosing for my child?

These could very well be questions that you find yourself asking and there is definitely plenty of information and opinions out there related to this topic. Therefore, it may be worthwhile and fun for your family to think about this and decide what is best before you bring your child home. Each family and adoption situation comes with its own unique and special circumstances. Only your family can decide what is “right” for you and your child. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, although there certainly are some things to consider particularly as children get older. So enjoy researching all the different name options and buy as many naming books as you would like. Make naming your child an exciting time for your family and something to look forward to discussing while you wait.

Below are links related to naming as it pertains to adoption. Keep in mind that there is no “right” answer that applies to all situations.

What’s In A Name? – from *Adoptive Families*

<http://adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=709>

The Name Game – from *Adoptive Families*

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=201>

Naming Madison – from *Adoptive Families*

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/hot-topic.php>

Share your story – What’s in a name? – from *Adoptive Families*
(Responses to the article “Naming Madison”)

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1442>

Considerations for Naming Your Trans-Racially or Inter-Culturally Adopted Child
<http://library.adoption.com/blended-families/considerations-for-naming-yourtrans-racially-or-inter-culturally-adopted-child/article/510/1.html>

Adoption is a Family Affair! by Patricia Irwin Johnston (See specifically the chapter entitled Home At Last, discussing the idea of “naming as claiming”)

D. Choosing a Pediatrician

For several reasons interviewing pediatricians can be a productive way to spend some of your “waiting” time. First, it is helpful because your pediatrician may serve as a valuable person to speak with when you receive a referral or after you have accepted a referral. Giving your pediatrician a medical history to review prior to your child’s arrival will allow them to prepare and have a plan in place prior to your first doctor visit. It is also nice to already feel comfortable and have a relationship with the pediatrician you have chosen.

Adoptive parents should take time to find a pediatrician who is sensitive to adoption and one who has experience working with children who were adopted. Finding a pediatrician with a positive attitude toward adoption and one who is willing to work with you on matters that specifically relate to your adoption situation is important. The physicians’ knowledge of adoption, attitude towards adoption and his or her attitude toward your specific referral will likely be evident after spending some time discussing these topics with him or her.

In addition, if you plan to adopt a child internationally it is beneficial to find a pediatrician who is familiar with the full battery of testing that needs to be completed once your child has arrived home. If you use an international adoption doctor to review your referral, they will most likely provide you with a list of recommended tests to take to your pediatrician. This information can also be found in your physician’s Red Book, the report from the Committee on Infectious Diseases, and from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

See the special section, Adoption Medicine, on the *Adoptive Families* magazine website at <http://adoptivefamilies.com/medical> for more information on post-arrival medical evaluations and other adoption medicine topics.

E. Thinking Through Accepting a Referral

After being presented with a referral, you may find yourself ready to say “yes” right away. However, for some, a referral may raise questions, concerns, fears or simply the desire to conduct further research. Whether due to a particular medical condition or diagnosis, a family history of mental illness or the fact that the birthmother engaged in high-risk behaviors during the pregnancy, it is important to take the necessary time

before accepting a referral in order to be sure that you can provide the best medical care and can be the best loving family for this child. After you have gathered as much information as possible you may also want to seek out medical professionals who are able to answer questions specific to your situation. After all, you do not want to feel that you have made a decision based on a lack of knowledge and/or fear. Below we have provided some basic steps to help you as you think through whether to accept a referral.

Step One: Pray

We believe that God is the ultimate professional and absolute best counselor in the field of adoption. Taking your fears, questions and uncertainties to Him is a crucial step. We most certainly recommend that you spend time praying about your referral, while at the same time being careful to guard your heart, realizing that it is okay to keep your referral information private. In other words, you do not have to share every detail of your referral with everyone who asks.

Step Two: Gather Information, Research, and Conduct Your Own Assessment

Make sure that you have gathered all available information from your agency. If you are adopting internationally, this may mean that you have relatively little medical information to go on. Those adopting domestically may have more medical information and and/or medical history on the child and his/her birthparents. Every adoption situation is different and therefore the information you receive will be specific to your case. If there is something you would like to know, don't be afraid to ask your agency in the case that it may be available. All of this information will be helpful as you pursue research on your own and seek the help of medical professionals and other experienced adoptive parents. Gathering information and researching the situation surrounding your referral will not only educate you on the type of professional you may need to work with, but it will also give you important information so that you can provide the best care for your child if you accept the referral.

For more information see the Pre-Adoption Medical Assessment and Developmental Indicators Chart (www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1040) from *Adoptive Families* magazine. This article provides helpful tips on understanding what referral information you may receive on a child and how to go about assessing the information you have been given. This article also includes a developmental indicators chart which may be very helpful in understanding typical developmental milestones.

Step Three: Speak with Medical Professionals if Needed

It may be that you need to seek advice from an experienced medical professional or experienced adoptive families in order to better understand the needs surrounding your referral. This information will not only help you make an educated decision, but will also provide you with valuable information in raising your child and providing the best care for him/her.

Your pediatrician or family physician is a great starting place. Keep in mind that it is always beneficial to speak with someone who has experience in the area of adoption. If needed, your pediatrician can refer you to a professional with specific medical expertise related to your referral situation.

For more information see the American Pediatrics Section on Adoption and Foster Care (www.aap.org/sections/adoption). The member physicians of this section of the American Academy of Pediatrics have specific adoption and foster care experience. In addition, listed below are a few references for international adoption physicians. These professionals can provide pre-adoption counseling, review of referral information and some will provide consultation during travel. Check with each professional to find out what services are provided. There are certainly many more doctors who specialize in international adoption and this list is simply to give you a place to start in finding a physician that meets your needs. These physicians will use all the information you have provided in an effort to help you make an educated decision. They may also suggest more questions that you can ask your agency in order to gain further information.

Susan D. Dibs, M.D., M.S.

International Adoption Medicine Program Children's Medical Center (Dallas)

Phone: 214-456-6788

<http://www.childrens.com/specialties/template.cfm?groupid=105&pageid=503>

Julia Bledsoe, M.D.

Dr. Julian Davies, M.D.

University of Washington – Seattle

Pediatric Care Center

Center for Adoption Medicine

4245 Roosevelt Way, N.E.

Seattle, WA 98105

Phone: 206-598-3006

<http://www.adoptmed.org/>

Dr. Bledsoe and Dr. Davies will review your medical information and consult with you by phone when you travel. Dr. Bledsoe is an adoptive parent herself and has completed a great deal of research on fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and internationally adopted children. Approximately 50% of their clients are adopted internationally. Dr. Bledsoe and Dr. Davies also provide consultation to families adopting domestically.

Dana E. Johnson, M.D.

International Adoption Clinic

University of Minnesota

Minneapolis, MN

Phone: 612-626-2928

Jerri Ann Jenista, MD
Adoption/Medical News
Ann Arbor, MI
Phone: 734-668-9492

North Texas International Adoption Clinic at the Child Study Center– Ft. Worth, Texas
1300 West Lancaster
Ft. Worth, Texas 76102
Phone: 817-390-2929
www.ntiac.org

Texas Children’s Health Center for International Adoption – Houston, TX
6621 Fannin Street, CC 1570
Houston, TX 77030
Phone: 832-822-1038
Toll free: 1-866-824-5437
www.texaschildrens.org/CareCenters/InternationalAdoption/Default.aspx

Step Four:

Move Forward with Hope

Keep in mind that after you have gathered information, researched, talked with the appropriate professionals and come to a decision, there will most likely still be uncertainties. That’s okay. However, we hope that these resources and ideas will assist you in your effort to make an educated decision regarding your referral as you trust God in all things and move forward with a hope-filled faith.

Ideas to Help Make Your Adoption Wait Worthwhile

1. Begin to collect children's books while you wait. The following two websites have a wide range of adoption related books that you can choose from:
 - CBC Library
 - www.tapestrybooks.com
 - www.perspectivespress.com
 - *A is for Adopted* by Eileen Tucker Cosby
 - *Adopted For Life* by Russell Moore
 - *It's Okay To Be Different* by Todd Parr
 - *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis
 - *The Day We Met You* by Phoebe Koehler
 - *We're Different We're the Same* by Bobbie Jane Kates
2. Try cooking foods of your child's birth country or birth culture. There are many international cookbooks at your local bookstore.
3. Begin to work on your child's lifebook or scrapbook. Listed below are just a few websites that have different lifebooks that you can order:
 - www.scrapandtell.com
 - www.sharedbook.com
 - www.lifebook.com
 - www.aimeej.com
4. Journal during your wait and/or write letters to your child. See the following link for a great article on "writing while you wait":
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=514>
5. Prepare your child's nursery/bedroom.
6. Make arrangements for childcare. Interview nannies, babysitters, or childcare centers.
7. Prepare some meals and freeze them.
8. Do some research on attachment and bonding. There are many resources in the attachment/bonding section of this packet.
9. Do some research on sensory integration. Many post-institutionalized children deal with various types of sensory integration issues. Find out what you can do to help your child as soon as they come home. *It's a Sensory World* is a great place to contact for more information.
10. Learn as much as you can about your child's birth country or birth culture.
11. Take foreign language classes.

12. Learn about dealing with a language barrier and possibly find a translator if needed.
13. If you are adopting outside of your race or ethnicity you can research transracial adoption.

APPENDIX

CHOSEN HERITAGE CHRISTIAN ADOPTIVE SERVICES HANDBOOK

REFERENCES

Adapted from Tapestry, a ministry of Irving Bible Church, Copyright 2006

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Chosen Heritage Christian Adoptive Services Handbook

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