

adoption

A GUIDE FOR
ADOPTIVE
FAMILIES



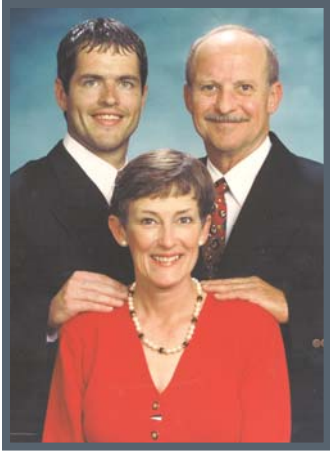
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About Us...

The Director's Story



When I was fourteen years old, I was talking with my grandmother's best friend, Mary. During our conversation, my mind drifted to the memories of her husband, Wayne, who was like another grandfather to me. He was the type of grandfather who took me to the local donut shop every weekend. Each Saturday morning I would wait in anticipation until he stopped by and we would walk to get my favorite donut, a chocolate long john. I was only five years old when he passed away, but the memories of those Saturday mornings are forever etched in my mind.

As Mary talked, I felt how much I loved her and I asked her why they never had children. It seemed Wayne and her felt they were too old to have children. Too bad, I thought, as they would have made amazing parents. I remember the sadness in her eyes as I followed her gaze to the large family which constantly surrounded my grandmother. It was at that moment she said, "In life, don't make the mistake of not celebrating your marriage every day, and do whatever it takes to become a father and raise a family of your own. Without this you will always have regret, for you will find yourself alone like me - alone and thinking about what could have been."

She completed her journey alone for twenty more years after Wayne passed away. I knew each day she regretted not having children. Sadly to me, it seems some couples are so consumed by having children on their own they lose sight of the real dream of being parents. I told her I wanted to adopt her, as I felt like she was already another grandmother to me anyway. We did not need any paperwork for I had already adopted her in my heart. This seemed to add a light to her eyes, which I think helped ease the feelings of regret she had all those years.

My parents adopted me when I was 10 days old. Before I was adopted my mom had six miscarriages in seven years. My parents adopted me because they did not want to miss out on the joy only a child can provide. Everyday I realize how important I am to my parents. The fact that I was adopted doesn't matter. It is simply another way to become a parent. My parents have been asked by other couples considering adoption if they could go back in time would they choose to have a child of their own blood. The answer has always been a resounding "No!" The love we share can be no greater than that experienced by biological children and their parents. After adopting, every adoptive family comes to learn this fact. Those who have the luxury of seeing my parents and I interact can see the bond between us. In an effort to give back some of the love we gained from adoption, we provided foster care services for over 140 babies through the years. While this was a fantastic experience, we felt we had more to give, so we started American Adoptions. Each adoption is our way of saying thank you for the life we have been blessed with.

In reality the toughest journeys allow us to appreciate things more fully. Nothing ever significant in life is gained from cutting corners. In the end, all your pain and doubt will wash away the first moment your baby snuggles in your arms. It will not matter how you became parents - it will only matter that you did.

Bringing families together,

Scott Mars
President Of The Board

The First Step ...

Choosing an Adoption Professional

What should be your first step in the adoption process?

Without a doubt, the most important step you will ever take is deciding which type of adoption professional is best for you. National adoption agency, small local or regional adoption agency, adoption facilitator, adoption law firm or adoption law center ... the choices can be confusing. What's the difference between them? Do they really offer different services or are they all the same?

American Adoptions is one of the largest domestic adoption agencies in the United States, as well as one of the most trafficked adoption information Web sites. We pride ourselves on helping families find the right type of professional for them.

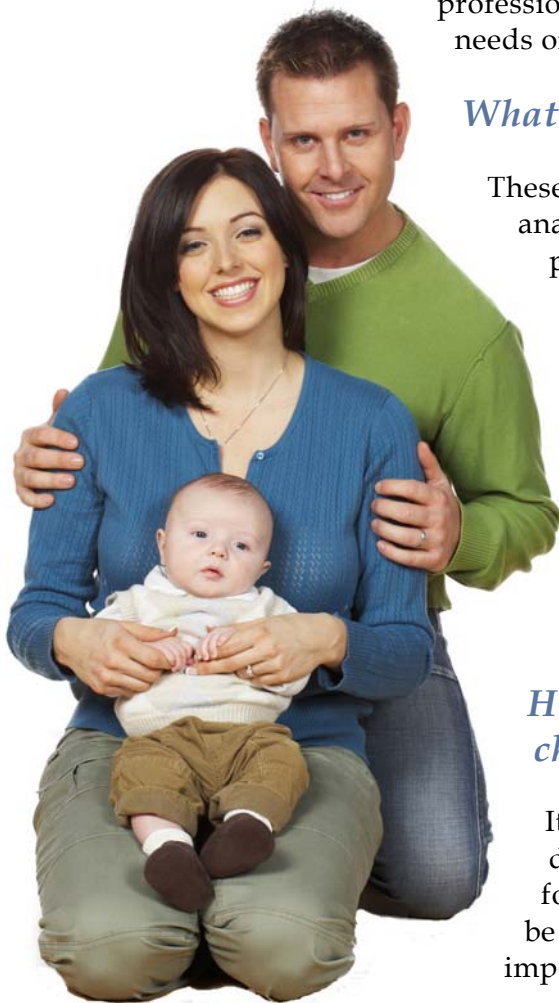
Every year, we receive over 10,000 calls, e-mails, inquiries and chats from clients looking to adopt. Unfortunately, we also take hundreds of calls and e-mails from frustrated callers who joined an adoption professional who is not meeting their needs. These families are emotionally desperate and many times financially ruined. They did not know what questions to ask, what red flags to look for or simply chose an adoption professional who was not capable of meeting their level of needs or expectations.

What went wrong?

These families did not have access to or did not read our analysis on the different types of adoption professionals. It is imperative families understand the advantages and disadvantages of the different adoption professionals so they fully understand the risks. The key to finding the right adoption professional for you is education. Learn the differences between the different types of adoption professionals, know what types of questions to ask them and, most importantly, learn how to weigh them and decide for yourself which type of adoption professional is right for you.

How can you avoid being a family who chooses the wrong professional?

It starts by reading the following pages and discussing with your spouse what you are looking for in an adoption professional. Failing to do so can be costly. The following pages can be the most important thing you will ever read on adoption.



Choosing an Adoption Professional

Law Firms

Definition- A group of two or more attorneys who practice law. In adoption, it is common for a law firm to have an attorney who specializes in adoption law. This specialty can range from step-parent to independent adoptions. Most attorneys handle the legal process but do not locate birth parents for their clients. In some cases, however, attorneys can provide their clients advertising mediums to place ads to locate birth mothers.

Advantages:

Good law firms provide for safe and solid legal work, making the adoption more secure.

Disadvantages:

- The advertising mediums available to individual families are much less effective than those available to adoption agencies. (Keep in mind the largest national agencies who buy advertisements at a discount, track carefully their marketing success, have qualified counselors talking to birth mothers, and have major networking contacts still average spending \$8,000 to \$10,000 in advertising for each successful adoption. Therefore you should expect to pay more in advertising through a law firm especially if the ad is placed on your own.)
- Placing ads individually puts more money at risk if a birth mother is not located.
- Only 40 percent of the families who place ads individually actually receive a phone call from a pregnant mother.
- Law firms often bill hourly, meaning their fees are at-risk if the adoption doesn't work out.
- Most law firm's cost estimates are the best-case scenario and rarely reflects that their clients often experience several disruptions and therefore can lose thousands of dollars before an adoption succeeds, meaning those losses will be added to the fees for a successful adoption.
- Families are frustrated with law firms because they lack a Social Service Department skilled in evaluating, educating and guiding birth mothers through the adoption process. As a result, families are often matched with birth mothers who aren't strongly committed to adoption, aren't emotionally prepared and don't understand the process.
- Families often must answer initial birth mother calls from their advertisements.
- In the early stages, most birth parents are

intimidated to talk to an attorney.

- These law firms are normally not available in the evenings or on the weekends.
- Their sense of urgency is not a priority, as they often are juggling other cases.
- Local law firms are susceptible to changes in their state laws, which can put them out of business. Florida, for example, changed their laws in 2001 and as a result, adoptions plummeted 50 percent the following year. The result caused many local agencies and adoption law firms to go out of business. National organizations simply focused their services in the other 49 states.
- Local law firms are also susceptible to negative statewide adoption stories, it could be foster home abuse such as was the case in Missouri. The negative newspaper articles made many pregnant women in Missouri choose to parent, which hurt local Missouri agencies.

Types of clients who choose law firms:

- Law firms are needed in every adoption, however, they should not be used to locate or counsel the birth mother.
- Clients who don't understand the adoption process.
- Clients that have friends that are attorneys.
- Families who want control of the adoption process and have low trust of an adoption agency's evaluation process.
- Families who are trying to save money because they believe that paying \$500 in advertising and \$5,000 for legal fees will be all they will incur. Advertising this little and through attorneys will usually cost families well over \$10,000 in advertising expenses. Furthermore, the \$5,000 legal fee is an estimate for a successful adoption and does not factor in adoptions that don't work out (keep in mind 1 birth mother places for ten who consider). You also must factor in medical and living expenses, many that will also be lost when adoptions don't work out.
- When counseling is not provided to the family or the birth mothers, this often results in birth mothers changing their minds because they are not emotionally prepared for the loss and grief this process will bring them.
- Families who must be available 24 hours a day to answer the phone from possible birth mother inquiries.

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Law Firms

How do You Find a Good Law Firm?

It should be noted that without an independent government body reviewing their files, there is no organization making sure the Law firm is indeed being truthful. Because there is no oversight, your questions should be more probing and you may wish to ask for the answers in writing.

1. How many attorneys on your staff handle the adoption legal work?
2. What percentage of your practice is adoption legal work? How do you balance your other cases when an adoption case is obviously time sensitive? What happens if you have four adoptions occur on the same day?
3. What is your hourly rate? Is the hourly rate at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
4. Does your law firm find all the birth mothers or do you have your clients advertise on their own?
5. Do you have clients advertise in other states in which you are not licensed? Do you then use other law firms to handle the process in that state? Do they charge an hourly rate? Is that hourly rate at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
6. How many families do you have on your waiting list?
7. How many adoptions did you complete last year? How many where you located the birth mother? How many where your clients advertised to locate a birth mother?
8. How much do you suggest spending a month on advertising? Is that at risk if an adoption doesn't work out? (Keep in mind the largest national agencies who buy advertisements at a discount, track carefully their marketing success, have qualified counselors talking to birth mothers and have major networking contacts still average spending \$8,000 to \$10,000 in advertising for



each successful adoption.)

9. How much money can I lose in living and medical expenses if a birth mother changes her mind?
10. Do the quoted fees include living, medical and legal expenses?
11. Is your law firm licensed in more than one state?
12. Does the state you are licensed in come to your offices and review your files, personnel records and make sure your organization is complying with state law and regulations?
13. Do you have a Social Service Department on staff? How many are on staff? Can you provide me their credentials? Are they licensed by the state?
14. If they only have one or two staff members, then ask, what happens if they retire, quit, etc.
15. Have you ever had a client lose more than \$20,000 in failed adoption expenses? How about \$15,000? How about \$10,000? Will you put that in writing and send it to me?
16. Will I have to interact directly with the birth mother providing my contact information to her?
17. Can you give me what percentage of birth parents who join your agency who decide to parent?
18. Do you answer your phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week for potential birth mothers?
19. Pick up the phone and call them on Saturday or Sunday evening. This shows whether they are doing everything they can with your advertising dollar.
20. Do their upfront advertising fees expire?
21. Do they maintain and regulate pictures and letters correspondence with the birth parents after the adoptive placement?
22. Do they handle their entire process from A to Z?

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Law Centers

Definition- Adoption law centers have come on more recently in adoption in the past five years and many clients wonder what exactly a law center is. A law center by definition is a corporation that is owned by a licensed attorney. Unlike a law firm, most adoption law centers actually refer their clients to separate law firms who actually provide the legal services.

Advantages:

- Law centers, like facilitators, often have large advertising budgets devoted to reaching out to birth mothers across all 50 states.
- Waiting times are usually lower than most adoption professionals.
- The name in their company title “law center” provides a comfort to their clients.

Disadvantages:

- Like facilitators, law center files are not annually or periodically reviewed by any objective person, government or organization. While a law center may be certified by the California Bar Association, they will only review the attorney’s work who owns the practice if a complaint is filed. Since the attorney who owns the law center is not the actual one providing legal services in other states, there is often no legal work to review. In other words, if those attorneys in other states do not properly do their job, it does not adversely affect the law center’s certification. With no objective file review, the law center’s services can not be properly monitored or regulated. (Click here to see how professionals are regulated this article is located in folder.)
- Most centers only remain involved in the early stages of the adoption process (see stages this article is located in folder). As a result, adoptive families experience more failed adoptions, which lead to disappointments both emotionally and financially.
- Like facilitators, families are frustrated with law centers because they lack a social service department skilled in evaluating, educating and guiding birth mothers through the adoption process. As a result, families are often matched with birth mothers who aren’t strongly committed to adoption, aren’t emotionally prepared and don’t understand the process.
- Law center cost estimates are often the

best-case scenario and rarely reflects that their clients often experience several disruptions and therefore can lose thousands of dollars before an adoption succeeds, meaning those losses will be added to the fees for a successful adoption.

- Some states feel law centers are trying to provide services in states they are not licensed to do so, as a result several attorney general’s offices are investigating them.
- Law centers typically provide 45 percent of the services of adoption agencies and yet many charge higher fees than full service adoption agencies.
- Law centers attract birth mothers focused on high living expenses, thus leading to increased financial risk and disruptions
- Some have advertising contracts that expire, therefore you may pay double for advertising.
- States such as California have passed laws in attempt to help regulate law centers and facilitators; it is still up in the air whether law centers will have to comply with such regulations. Even if they are required to comply, the regulations will do little to protect clients who join these organizations.
- Many law centers lack qualified staff to provide the proper counseling to adoptive families and birth parents as they go through the adoption process. Law centers typically lack the expertise to know the complexities of the various states they try to match adoptive couples with birth parents in.

Types of clients who choose to work with a law center:

- Clients who want to adopt quickly.
- Clients who are not worried about financial budget or losses.
- Clients who are willing to handle several stages of the adoption process.
- Clients who want to be gender specific.
- Clients who want control of the counseling and legal process of the adoption process.
- Clients who often have been misled by a law center’s marketing information.
- Clients who want an organization to advertise for them nationally.
- Families who plan on spending countless evenings and weekends answering their phone to counsel birth parents themselves.

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Law Centers

How do You Find a Good Law Center?

It should be noted that without an independent government body reviewing their files, there is no organization making sure the Law firm is indeed being truthful. Because there is no oversight, your questions should be more probing and you may wish to ask for the answers in writing.

1. How many attorneys on your staff handle the adoption legal work?
2. What percentage of your practice is adoption legal work? How do you balance your other cases when an adoption case is obviously time sensitive? What happens if you have four adoptions occur on the same day?
3. What is your hourly rate? Is the hourly rate at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
4. Does your law firm find all the birth mothers or do you have your clients advertise on their own?
5. Do you have clients advertise in other states in which you are not licensed? Do you then use other law firms to handle the process in that state? Do they charge an hourly rate? Is that hourly rate at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
6. How many families do you have on your waiting list?
7. How many adoptions did you complete last year? How many where you located the birth mother? How many where your clients advertised to locate a birth mother?
8. How much do you suggest spending a month on advertising? Is that at risk if an adoption doesn't work out? (Keep in mind the largest national agencies who buy advertisements at a discount, track carefully their marketing success, have qualified counselors talking to birth mothers and have major networking contacts still average spending \$8,000 to \$10,000 in advertising for each successful adoption.)
9. How much money can I lose in living and medical expenses if a birth mother changes her mind?
10. Do the quoted fees include living, medical and legal expenses?
11. Is your law firm licensed in more than

one state?

12. Does the state you are licensed in come to your offices and review your files, personnel records and make sure your organization is complying with state law and regulations?



13. Do you have a Social Service Department on staff? How many are on staff? Can you provide me their credentials? Are they licensed by the state?

14. If they only have one or two staff members, then ask, what happens if they retire, quit, etc.

15. Have you ever had a client lose more than \$20,000 in failed adoption expenses? How about \$15,000? How about \$10,000? Will you put that in writing and send it to me?

16. Will I have to interact directly with the birth mother providing my contact information to her?

17. Can you give me what percentage of birth parents who join your agency who decide to parent?

18. Do you answer your phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week for potential birth mothers?

19. Pick up the phone and call them on Saturday or Sunday evening. This shows whether they are doing everything they can with your advertising dollar.

20. Do their upfront advertising fees expire?

21. Do they maintain and regulate pictures and letters correspondence with the birth parents after the adoptive placement?

22. Do they handle their entire process from A to Z?

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Facilitators

Definition - Facilitators are unlicensed and unregulated companies who match prospective adoptive families with women considering adoption. Facilitators are usually small organizations with one or two staff members.

Advantages:

- Good facilitators can be good at locating pregnant women considering adoption.
- Waiting times can be lower than many professionals.

Disadvantages:

- Facilitators are not annually or periodically reviewed by any objective person, government or organization.
- Facilitators only match birth parents and adoptive families and the adoptive family must find a local provider to perform the adoption services. This leads to an inconsistent experience as well as causes more adoptions to fail.
- Once referred to a local adoption professional, adoptive families must put up more money and it is at-risk if the adoption doesn't work out
- Like law centers, families are frustrated with facilitators because they lack a social service department skilled in evaluating, educating and guiding birth mothers through the adoption process. As a result, families often are often matched with birth mothers who aren't strongly committed to adoption, aren't emotionally prepared and don't understand the process.
- Unlike many adoption agencies, facilitators often work with birth mothers who need significant help with living expenses (well over \$10,000). Higher living expenses means more finances are at-risk.
- Like law centers, facilitator cost estimates are the best-case scenario and rarely reflects that their clients often experience several disruptions and therefore can thousands of dollars before an adoption succeeds, meaning those losses will be added to the fees for a successful adoption.
- Some facilitator contracts expire.



- Facilitators often provide 20 percent of the services of licensed agencies and yet clients often end up spending more money.
- Facilitators do not have the skill set to properly assess birth mothers, thus leading to more failed adoptions.
- Most Facilitators are usually a one or two person operation, which leads to being overworked, burnout and not responding to clients in a timely fashion.
- More than 17 states have specific laws against the use of facilitators.
- Facilitators can easily go out of business with no repercussions.

- States like California have even developed specific certification to help regulate these entities because of their wide vary reputation. The unfortunate part is certification will do little to regulate these providers.

- Facilitators lack qualified staff to provide the proper counseling to adoptive families and birth parents as they go through the adoption process.

Facilitators lack the legal expertise to know the complexities of the various states they try to match adoptive couples with birth parents in.

Clients who use facilitators:

- Clients focused on waiting times and are planning to join several organizations.
- Families who have a high and flexible budget.
- Clients who are willing to handle several stages of the adoption process.
- Clients who wish to be gender specific.
- Clients who want control of the counseling and legal process of the adoption process, although it is similar to a person who wants to drive a cruise ship when they don't know how to drive a boat.
- Clients who often have been misled by a facilitator's marketing information.
- Clients who want an organization to advertise for them nationally.
- Families who must be available to answer calls from birth parents 24 hours a day.

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Facilitators

How do You Find a Good Facilitator?

It should be noted that without an independent government body reviewing their files, there is no organization making sure the facilitator is indeed being truthful. Adoption agencies, for example, have their marketing information, case files and personnel files reviewed. Because there is no oversight, your questions should be more probing and you may wish to ask for the answers in writing.

1. How many families do you have on your waiting list?
2. How many placements did you complete last year?
3. Is your organization certified? By how many states?
4. Explain to me what you do?
5. Does the state you are licensed in come to your offices and review your files, personnel records and make sure your organization is complying with state law and regulations?
6. So you advertise and locate birth mothers and then refer me to an adoption professional in the birth mothers state who takes it over from there?
7. If you remove yourself once the birth mother selects our family, then how do you verify the quality of work provided by the other adoption professional?
8. How much money can I lose to the other adoption professional if the adoption doesn't work out?
9. How much money can I lose in living and medical expenses if a birth mother changes her mind?
10. Do their quoted fees include living, medical and legal expenses?
11. What are typical amount of living expenses your birth mother's need?
12. How many full time staff members do you have on staff?
13. Do you have a Social Service Department on staff? How many are on staff? Can you provide me their credentials? Are they licensed by the state?
14. If they only have one or two staff members, then ask, what happens if they retire, quit, etc.
15. If you remove yourself from the process, once we are referred to another adoption professional how is your organization helpful when the birth mother is wavering?
16. If you don't have a social service department then who evaluates your birth mothers? How are they qualified to do so?
17. Are you being investigated by any attorney general's offices? Are you not allowed to perform services in certain states because of the type organization you are?
18. Are any of your upfront fees at risk? Is there any point in time where I would be required to pay the upfront fee again?
19. Since being licensed by California as a facilitator, and since it does not mean anyone reviews or inspects your files, what is to prevent your organization from merely shutting down and starting another one?
20. Do you have any pending lawsuits?
21. Are there any cases where you fear a lawsuit is forthcoming?
22. Can I adopt more quickly through your organization than with a national agency? How can I independently verify your waiting time estimates?
23. Have you ever had a client lose more than \$20,000 in failed adoption expenses? How about \$15,000? How about \$10,000? Will you put that in writing and send it to me?
24. If you typically aren't the organization handling my case, how does joining your organization benefit me?
25. Will I have to interact directly with the birth mother providing my contact information to her?
26. Can you give me what percentage of birth parents who join your agency decide to parent?
27. If I do not adopt within your timeframe, will I have to pay more money for additional advertising? If so, how long is my contract valid before I have to renew services with you?
28. Do you answer your phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week for potential birth mothers?
29. Do their upfront advertising fees expire?
30. Do they maintain and regulate pictures and letters correspondence with birth parents after the adoptive placement?
31. Do they handle their entire process from A to Z?

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Small Local and Regional Adoption Agencies

Definition - While some national agencies have local offices, local agencies are typically smaller adoption agencies who serve a specific geographic location, such as a particular state.

Advantages:

- Clients are able to meet face to face, which helps build trust and understanding.
- Local agencies also locate their birth mother's face to face and do not rely on other professionals to evaluate their client in a direct setting.
- Staff and client list is small, which results in easier communication.
- Adoption fees can be less due to lower overhead however (see advertising below).
- Licensed and state monitored organization, which provides greater accountability than law firms, law centers or facilitators.

Disadvantages:

- Because local organizations are limited geographically, their waiting times are inconsistent.
- Advertising costs are often separate from their fees. Advertising mediums available to individual clients are much less effective than mediums available to adoption agencies, which causes families to spend thousands more in ads. Small organizations who do advertise often do not spend the same amount advertising for each client as national agencies and as a result, it negatively impacts the waiting times for their clients. Less marketing equals less birth parents.
- Low number of adoptions does not provide the same expertise as larger organizations in evaluating, educating and guiding their clients through the adoption process, which makes for an unpredictable and inconsistent experience.
- Some local agencies require their clients to handle initial calls from birth parents.
- Many local agencies bill clients for work on evaluating all birth parents and this often results in paying much more fees than originally estimated. According to the National Adoption Information Clearing House, for every one birth parent who places their child for adoption, the other nine choose abortion or parenting. This means you could be billed for nine cases that their fees don't estimate. What happens if the first nine cases don't choose adoption? How much will you lose? Would you

then be able to adopt?

- Local agencies are susceptible to changes in their state laws, which can put them out of business. Florida, for example, changed their laws in 2001 and as a result, adoptions plummeted 50 percent the following year. The result caused many local agencies and adoption law firms to go out of business. National organizations simply focused their services in the other 49 states.
- Smaller agencies are also susceptible to negative statewide adoption stories, it could be foster home abuse such as was the case in Missouri. The negative newspaper articles made many pregnant women in Missouri choose to parent, which hurt local Missouri agencies
- Smaller agencies are also less financially secure and this makes some clients nervous.
- After hours and weekend availability is scarce, thus leading to fewer adoptions.
- Phones are often answered by answering machines leaving clients frustrated with accessibility of the staff. For example, imagine you are pregnant and scared. You are calling someone for the first time to talk about the adoption process and you talk to an answering machine. Would you call back? Less staff also leads to more accessibility problems, especially after hours.
- Typically living, medical and legal expenses are not estimated in their average total cost for the adoptions making their adoptions appear lower cost than other professionals available.

Types of clients who adopt through local agencies:

- Families who are not willing to travel to another state to adopt a baby.
- Families who are not as focused on waiting time.
- Families who have a tight overall budget, although they should be careful to evaluate the way in which the fees and costs are paid because clients can quickly burn through their savings.
- Families who value face to face contact from the same person who they work with.
- Families who are more financially risk tolerant.
- Families who are prepared for higher disruptions than national agencies.
- Families that want to visit the agency often.

Choosing an Adoption Professional

Small Local and Regional Adoption Agencies

How do You Find a Good Local Agency?

Local agencies marketing information, case files, personnel files and financials are typically reviewed by the state in which they are licensed.

1. Are your agency fees fixed or charged on an hourly basis? Are any of your agency fees at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
2. Do their quoted fees include living, medical and legal expenses?
3. What percentage of your agency's practice is locating birth mothers?
4. How many birth mothers did your agency locate last year who placed their child through your agency?
5. Does your agency find all the birth mothers or do you have your clients advertise on their own?
6. Do you have clients advertise in other states in which you are not licensed? Do you then use other agencies/attorneys handle the process in that state? Do they charge an hourly rate? Is that hourly rate at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
7. How many families do you have on your waiting list?
8. How many adoptions did you complete last year? How many where you located the birth mother? How many where your clients advertised to locate a birth mother?
9. How much of your adoption practice is comprised of home study services?
10. How much do you suggest spending a month on advertising? Is that at risk if an adoption doesn't work out? (Keep in mind the largest national agencies who buy advertisements at a discount, track carefully their marketing success, have qualified counselors talking to birth mothers, and have major networking contacts still average spending \$8,000 to \$10,000 in advertising for each successful adoption. How then can a small agency or individual family expect to spend less?)
11. How many clients in the past year simply quit advertising because it didn't work out?
12. How much money can I lose in living and medical



- expenses if a birth mother changes her mind?
13. Is your agency licensed in more than one state?
 14. Does the state you are licensed in come to your offices and review your files, personnel records and make sure

your organization is complying with state law and regulations?

15. How many full-time staff members do you have on staff that will work on our adoption?

16. Do you have a Social Service Department on staff? How many are on staff? Can you provide me their credentials? Are they licensed by the state?

17. If they only have one

or two staff members, then ask, what happens if they retire, quit, become seriously ill, etc.

18. If you don't have a social service department then who evaluates your birth mothers? How are they qualified to do so?

19. Have you ever had a client lose more than \$20,000 in failed adoption expenses? How about \$15,000? How about \$10,000? Will you put that in writing and send it to me?

20. Will I have to interact directly with the birth mother providing my contact information to her?

21. Do you have certain requirements for families joining your agency? If so, then why? Can these factors affect my wait time with your local agency?

22. Can I work with multiple agencies?

23. What percentage of families adopt within your estimated wait time?

24. Do you charge additional fees for special services such as ICPC if applicable, extra counseling?

25. Do you answer your phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week for potential birth mothers?

26. Pick up the phone and call them on Saturday or Sunday evening. This shows whether they are doing everything they can with your advertising dollar.

27. Do their upfront advertising fees expire?

28. Do they maintain pictures and letters correspondence with the birth parents after the adoptive placement?

29. Do they handle their entire process from A to Z?

Choosing an Adoption Professional

National Adoption Agencies

Definition - National agencies are licensed adoption agencies who work across all 50 states. In many cases, national agencies are licensed in multiple states. Being licensed by a state, means the government of that state helps regulate, review and monitor the national agency's compliance with state laws and regulations. This helps ensure the organization is following proper procedures and providing good services to their clients.

Advantages:

- Shorter waiting times than most adoption professionals.
- National exposure allows national agencies to avoid a drop off in total adoptions and insulate themselves from state or regional downturns. For example, in 2001 Florida passed new adoption laws, which resulted in a 50 percent drop off in adoptions from Florida, causing many local agencies to cease operations. Because of adoptions in 49 other states, national agencies were largely unaffected.
- Large qualified and trained social service department with vast adoption experience allows for better evaluation, education and guidance of birth mothers. This typically results in better matches between the adoptive family and the birth parents.
- National agencies are not as susceptible to the effects of staff turnover. Small agencies often only employ one or two staff members and if one leaves, the agency may suffer significantly from a loss of expertise.
- Large advertising and networking contacts offers shorter waiting times than most adoption professionals.
- There is usually less financial risk on adoptions where birth mothers change their minds.
- Most national agencies coordinate and/or are involved in all parts of the adoption process, which ensure better service for their clients.
- Vast number of adoptions makes their fee estimates more accurate than most organizations.
- Complete after hour and weekend coverage for clients 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Handle and coordinate the entire adoption process from A to Z.



- Larger agencies tend to have great resources, networking connections and marketing capabilities. Larger staff means that a team of staff work on your adoption plan, thus leading to more efficient workloads and faster turn around times on projects.

Disadvantages:

- Upfront fees can be higher due to national exposure (advertising efforts on the family's behalf) and overhead.
- Total fees can be higher than other professionals due to better services and reduction of financial losses on adoptions that don't work out. If an adoption doesn't work out, a few national agencies cover this financial loss.
- Families must be open to adopting from all 50 states.
- Families typically don't meet national agencies face to face unless they travel to various office locations across the U.S.

Families must usually travel across the United State on short notice to adopt their baby.

Clients who adopt through national agencies:

- Families who want to adopt in a timely manner.
- Families who have a slightly higher adoption budget but don't want to risk money on adoptions that don't work out.
- Families who want the dependability of a large and carefully monitored organization.
- Families who want the freedom of choices a national organization offers.
- Families who want the flexibility to choose international adoption, if after learning about the domestic process, they want to switch.
- Families who want to trust their adoption process to some of the most respected adoption organizations in America.
- Families that want a reliable organization with a proven track record, who invests their savings in essential areas to have a reliable adoption process.
- Families that would like quick turnaround time for their questions or concerns.

Choosing an Adoption Professional

National Adoption Agencies

How do You Find a Good National Agency?

The marketing information, case files, personnel files and financials of national agencies are typically reviewed by the states in which they are licensed. The more states they are licensed in, the more times their files and information is reviewed, meaning more assurances the agency you are considering is operating successfully and properly.

1. Are your agency fees fixed or charged on an hourly basis? Are any of your agency fees at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
2. What percentage of your agencies practice is locating birth mothers?
3. How many birth mothers did your agency locate last year who placed their child through your agency?
4. Does your agency find all the birth mothers or do you have your clients advertise on their own?
5. Do you have clients advertise in other states in which you are not licensed? Do you then use other agencies/attorneys handle the process in that state? Do they charge an hourly rate? Is that hourly rate at risk if the birth mother changes her mind?
6. How many families do you have on your waiting list?
7. How many adoptions did you complete last year? How many where you located the birth mother? How many where your clients advertised to locate a birth mother?
8. How much of your adoption practice is comprised of home study services?
9. How much do you suggest spending a month on advertising? Is that at risk if an adoption doesn't work out?
10. How many clients in the past year simply quit advertising because it didn't work out?
11. How much money can I lose in living and medical expenses if a birth mother changes her mind?
12. Do their quoted fees include living, medical and legal expenses?
13. What are typical amount of living expenses your birth mother's need?
14. Is your agency licensed in more than one state?
15. Annually, how many of your adoptions are completed in other states?
16. Does the state you are licensed in come to your offices and review your files, personnel records and make sure your organization is complying with state law and regulations?
17. How many full-time staff members do you have on staff that will work on our adoption?
18. Do you have a Social Service Department on staff? How many are on staff? Can you provide me their credentials? Are they licensed by the state?
19. If they only have one or two staff members, then ask, what happens if they retire, quit, become seriously ill, etc.
20. If you don't have a social service department then who evaluates your birth mothers? How are they qualified to do so?
21. How many adoptions (not home studies) has your social work department been involved in where they have evaluated and worked with the birth parents?
22. What is the estimated cost to join your organization? Does that include only successful adoption cost estimates?
23. Have you ever had a client lose more than \$20,000 in failed adoption expenses? How about \$15,000? How about \$10,000? Will you put that in writing and send it to me?
24. Will I have to interact directly with the birth mother providing my contact information to her?
25. What percentage of families adopt within your estimated wait time?
26. If I adopt from a different state than that I live in, will I have to get my own attorney? What about ICPC for us travel home? Is that included in my cost estimates you provided for me?
27. Do you answer your phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week for potential birth mothers?
28. Pick up the phone and call them on Saturday or Sunday evening. This shows whether they are doing everything they can with your advertising dollar.
29. Do their upfront advertising fees expire?
30. Do they maintain and regulate pictures and letters correspondence with birth parents after the adoptive placement?
31. Do they handle their entire process from A to Z?

Why Choose American Adoptions?

American Adoptions' Advantages

In our years of talking to and working with over 10,000 families, we have learned the things most important to adoptive clients. Our years of experience has shown us what is most important to families when beginning the adoption process:

- Waiting times.
- Clients don't want to endure many, or any, emotional or financial disappointments from adoptions that don't work out.
- Families want to set a budget for their adoption and don't want to have a bunch of variable, hidden or at-risk expenses.
- Every family wants to pay as little as possible, without sacrificing safety, time or service.
- Most clients want a healthy child with no special needs.
- Most families have race, age and/or gender preferences.
- Some clients want to help children overseas.
- Most families are concerned about birth parents changing their minds or countries closing their operations.
- Most want to work with an experienced professional who can guide and protect them through the adoption process.
- All families want to join an organization that is reliable, safe and stable.

Here is what we have done to make sure those needs are best protected:

Accurate and reasonable waiting times:

- Our agency monitors and balances the number of adoptions with the number of families joining.
- We spend over \$1.5 million a year in marketing to reach out to pregnant women considering adoption.
- Accurate waiting times and cost estimates- We carefully track our waiting times and cost estimates to ensure accuracy.
- We aren't confined to one state and therefore our adoption placements are consistent from year to year.

- Birth client accessibility- Women considering adoption for their baby are able to reach one of our counselors 24 hours a day. While this might seem insignificant, it is not. Thirty six percent of all initial birth mother inquiries occur after normal operation hours and our birth mothers are transferred directly



to an on-call specialist. They don't have to leave a message, which initial callers rarely do. Beyond initial callers, our adoption specialists are available to help our birth mothers through any emotions or thoughts 24 hours a day. You never know when they might go into labor or just need someone to help process their thoughts and feelings.

Limit emotional and financial disappointments:

- We have one of the lowest adoption disruption rates, which simply is when a birth mother changes her mind.
- We have one of the most experienced Social Service Departments in the United States. This wealth of knowledge helps better educate and prepare adoptive families for the adoption process. Furthermore, it allows us to better evaluate women considering adoption for their baby and their commitment adoption.
- Our Social Service Department helps birth parents identify their needs, prepare them for the emotions of choosing adoption, help them develop a solid adoption plan, select the best family for their baby and prepare them for the emotions once the baby is born and the adoptive placement is made.
- We offer a very unique financial protection to our clients. Our agency fees absorb many of the financial risks families typically experience with other professionals. At American Adoptions, if a birth mother changes her mind, you will not lose any money in living, medical or counseling expenses and in many cases, will not lose legal expenses. With other professionals, your financial losses in adoptions that don't work out can easily exceed \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Families set a budget and are prepared for adoption expenses:

- Families are able to set a fixed budget for their adoption.
- Clients don't have to worry about surpassing their budget due to financial risks or losses typically found with other adoption professionals. We also provide an outline of all potential fees.

Families pay as little as possible, without sacrificing safety, time or service:

- Our fees to clients are based on our costs to run an ethical, safe and solid adoption program. Organizations that charge less for their services either cut essential services or put increased financial risk onto their clients.

Health, race, age, and gender of the child:

- Domestically, 99 percent of our adoptions are healthy newborns and infants.
- Families are able to select the race(s) which they are comfortable accepting.
- All birth parent social and medical history forms provided to us are given to the adoptive family.
- All medical records on the birth mother and child that are provided to us are given to the adoptive family.
- At the hospital, the adoptive family may run medical tests on the child.
- We offer a gender-specific option whereby clients can select their gender preference.

Focus on addressing birth parent needs:

- While adoption disruptions can never be eliminated, they can be reduced by a qualified Social Service Department. Without a qualified Social Service Department, birth parents are not emotionally prepared, educated or supported, which can lead to more disruptions.
- In the last 10 years, our agency has completed

more private domestic adoptions than any adoption organization in the United States. This experience helps us understand what our clients need.

- Personal Adoption Experience- American Adoptions was founded by an adoptee and his adoptive parents. Like our founders, our staff is also unique because many were adopted, placed a child for adoption or adopted a child. Many people turn to American Adoptions because they want to work with someone who has walked in their shoes. Birth parent accessibility- Women considering adoption for their baby are able to reach one of our adoption specialists 24 hours a day.

An experienced and reliable organization to protect families through the process:

- Greater dependability and reliability- We are licensed in six states. We have six state government regulators who check our case files, personnel files, materials, financials and general operations to ensure we are following state regulations and laws. This type of regulation provides great security for the clients we serve.



- Birth client accessibility is crucial for successful adoptions.
- Experience- In the last 10 years, no organization has completed more private adoptions across all 50 states. We understand many of the conflicts that can exist between various state laws. We work with top-notch legal professionals who

complete the legal paperwork across these 50 states. Our experience helps our clients navigate successfully through the adoption process. Even when the process is bumpy, our experience helps our clients determine when it is time to get off the road and onto another.

- Marriage- We view our relationship with our families as a marriage. Together, we want to evaluate your needs with our services, so that we can be certain we are a good match.
- Families have their own adoption advocate who supports you through the process.

Our Adoption Programs

American Adoptions is a full-service adoption agency. We will be with you each step of the way, from the beginning paperwork stage to the day you meet your new baby ... and beyond. At American Adoptions you aren't just a client — **you're family.**

With each of our programs, adoptive families can place a cap on their adoption cost and their information will only be shown to adoptions that fall within their budget. We also offer limited financial risk adoptions, protecting you from losing monies paid into living, medical and other fees should a birth mother change her mind and choose to parent. Families are also able to choose which social and medical history situations they are comfortable accepting, giving you the peace of mind of knowing that you will not be placed into a situation that you are not prepared for.

Traditional Program

The Traditional Program involves the adoption of all non-African American healthy newborns/infants. Races include, but are not limited to, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, etc. or any non-African American combination of races. Please contact us for information regarding program costs.

Average Wait Until Match: 1-6 Months

Average Wait Until Placement: 3-9 Months

Parent Eligibility: Couples only, married a minimum of two years, between 25 and 50 years of age, no more than two children.

*Note: Gender specificity may increase wait time

Agency-Assisted Program

The adoption of healthy African-American or bi/multi-racial (any race combined with African-American heritage) newborns/infants. Please contact us for information regarding program costs.

Average Wait Until Match: 1-6 Months

Average Wait Until Placement: 1-9 Months

Parent Eligibility: Couples only, married a minimum of two years, between 22 and 50 years of age, no restrictions on number of children.

*Note: Gender specificity may increase wait time

Couples residing in or adopting from Florida are subject to an additional fee. All international couples will also be required to pay an additional International Processing Fee so that our agency can ensure that the adoption meets all of the requirements of the Hague Convention. The International Processing Fee is applied in all of our adoption programs, including the Agency-Assisted Program.

Giving Families *Choice*



Financial Protection:

Limited Financial Risk Adoptions

One of the tough parts about domestic adoption is families dealing with financial losses if a birth mother changes her mind. As a result, we have developed a new fee structure for our families. In this new fee structure, families would not have any fees at risk until placement.

With the new fee structure, families can rest assured that if the birth mother changes her mind and chooses to parent her child, the family will not lose money paid into that situation for items such as living or medical expenses. This allows for a more fixed budget without the worry of so many expenses at risk.

Gender-Specific Option

Have your heart set on a bouncing baby boy or a new little princess? American Adoptions now offers a gender-specific option for families hoping for a specific gender. With this option families would pay an additional Gender-Specific Fee to help our agency locate and work with birth mothers meeting this additional criteria. Please note that gender specificity may increase wait time. This fee is in addition to all other program fees and is not considered part of your adoption budget. Please contact us at 1-800-ADOPTION for minimum budget details.

International Adoptions

In 2008, American Adoptions became Hague accredited to perform international adoptions. As a result, American Adoptions developed a strategic partnership with Americans Adopting Orphans to provide efficient and dependable adoptions from China, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Burundi. For more information, visit www.orphans.com or call 1-800-4-ORPHANS.

**For more information on our programs
or our exciting program options,
please contact us at 1-800-ADOPTION**

In Their Own Words ...

Adoptive Family Stories

"As I am writing this letter, I am looking at my son climbing the slide. He has blonde hair and blue eyes that light up when they see me. When I watch the expressions on his face, I realize the happiness he has brought to my world. Playing on the slide he is the king of his world, while I am the king of mine each night I tuck him into bed. My son came to us three short years ago...where does the time go? Once you become a parent, you realize how much you would sacrifice to keep your child safe and happy. My wife and I could have gone with another agency where the fees were a little lower and services were an afterthought, but we did not want to trade our peace of mind to save money. Watching Brandon play, I realize no amount of money in the world would be equal to the pain of losing him. I am thankful my wife and I chose the protection American Adoptions provides."

Ken & Denise

"When Tony and I first began to consider adoption, we were worried because we were a little bit older. Time weighed heavily on our minds and with each passing day, the weight got heavier and heavier. Time seemed to march on, leaving us to wonder if we would ever have a child to love. Looking back, I now see I was quite emotional working with the agency, but who wouldn't be? It is, after all, a very emotional experience and one that cannot be compared to anything you will ever do in life. With that in mind, American Adoptions not only offered safety in adoption, but a relatively short waiting time. Tony and I received our baby within the time frame quoted. We followed their advice on how to show ourselves in a positive light, how to gain more exposure to birth mothers, and how never to give up hope. I cannot say enough about their staff and results. We now belong to a support group for adoptive families and we have discovered other couples who have also had great success with American Adoptions."

Tony & Martha

"Thank you so much! Through your help we have adopted an absolutely gorgeous baby girl. We would never have imagined the process of open adoption could be this fabulous and rewarding of an experience.

My wife, Jaci and I began our journey with you in the beginning of 2005. I was the reluctant one of course, with a multitude of fears. Some of the obvious being.....would I have a bond w/ an adopted child as much as I would my own? Would we get close to becoming adopting parents, with both emotional and financial investment, and in the end have it just fall apart like other stories we heard of? (Mostly from private adoptions outside of an agency) Would an "open adoption" cause us regret, because the birth mother knows who we are and the state where we live? What other things will she know about us through all our conversations? Why do we have to meet her in person? These and other fears made me very hesitant. As we got closer to potential matches I found myself even more cautious and nervous.

What American Adoptions helped provide us is beyond measure."

Jaci & Mark



“There is so much we wish to share with prospective adoptive parents. If you are researching agencies, you may wonder why we chose American Adoptions. They were one of many agencies we contacted. We actually knew about American Adoptions from a friend of a friend, but felt we needed to gather information ourselves before making a final decision. American Adoptions does so many adoptions each year that we felt confident they have seen just about everything and would be able to steer us in the right direction should something seemingly unusual occur. Another thing we liked about American Adoptions is the agency’s success rate. Many agencies list a high number of successful adoptions, but often times those numbers are skewed by spouses adopting step children, international adoptions and surrogacy. We liked that American Adoptions specializes in matching families with birth mothers.”

Todd & Romney

“I am a new mother. There was a time I wondered if I would ever be able to say those words. Words cannot describe how being a mother feels. I am overjoyed and feel very blessed. I also realize that I would not be here today writing to you had it not been for American Adoptions. When I first started calling around to check into adoption, I was surprised to find that more than half of the places I called did not even answer their phone, as I only got answering machines. I quickly realized that finding my child was far too important a job to turn over to a part-time agency. I also worried, if I could not contact them, how could pregnant mothers? I remembered something my husband and I read in an adoption article that said, ‘If your husband or wife were having brain surgery, would you be concerned about finding the cheapest surgeon to perform the surgery?’ We are not made of money, but we felt that saving a few dollars was the worst reason to choose a program. We would never choose a cheaper surgeon for such an important operation. Likewise, we would never choose a cheaper program to find our baby. We wanted the best professionals for this most important job. We made the right decision with American Adoptions.”

Laura & Steve

For more testimonials, visit:

http://www.americanadoptions.com/adopt/story_browse

◆ Licensed

◆ Not-For-Profit

◆ Confidential



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