

Adoption Preparation

A Guide For Parents Preparing For A Successful Adoption



Chapter

03

Your Adoption Planning
Questionnaire Guide (APQ)

Chapter 3

Your Adoption Planning Questionnaire (APQ) Guide

Please use the following chapter as a guide when completing your Adoption Planning Questionnaire (APQ).

You will need to complete the APQ online. To log in to your online account, simply visit www.americanadoptions.com and click "My Account." You will then be directed to the login screen.

Your APQ will remain locked until you have read this manual in its entirety and had a consultation with your Adoptive Family Coordinator. Once this has occurred, your APQ will be unlocked so you may proceed. Both partners will need to complete the APQ together, taking time to view the videos and openly discuss your selections. Once you have completed the APQ online, an Adoptive Family Specialist will schedule a phone conference to review your responses with you and answer additional questions.

The APQ is an extremely important document. It should only be filled out with full knowledge and understanding of how your selections will affect your exposure to potential birth parents, your waiting times and your adoption experience. We recognize that this may be a daunting task, because we ask you to explore many factors that you may have never previously considered. Topics such as substance use may seem as if you are entering a whole different world, and that can be overwhelming.

Your Adoptive Family Specialist is there to talk you through any challenges you face in this process. It is a normal part of the journey, and we want to both support you through it and be realistic and transparent about what your choices mean for your family. While staying true to your comfort level, also be mindful that most expectant parents considering adoption for their child are doing so because they are in tough situations. If they were in a stable situation, it is not likely they'd be seeking an alternative to parenting themselves. Be prepared there will likely be tough factors involved. Expectant parents often come from difficult backgrounds, with little to no family support. There will be scenarios with mental health history and substance exposure. The more open you are to potential tough circumstances, the more your APQ selections will align with the reality of what we see in this process.

If your Adoptive Family Specialist identifies that your APQ selections will greatly limit your ability to find an adoption opportunity, based on what the agency is currently seeing with expectant parent situations and you are unwilling to adjust your selections, you may fall into a Highly Restrictive category. If your APQ is identified as "highly restrictive" then you will be subject to signing a "Highly Restrictive Addendum" upon activation. In addition, if a family decides to change their APQ selections, after activation, and their changes make their APQ more limited please know that a family could be subject to signing the Highly Restrictive Addendum at that time. Your Adoptive Family Specialist will let you know if any changes you wish to make would put you in a highly restrictive category.

Educating yourselves about each section is recommended. It is also recommended that you not approach the APQ thinking, "If we were having a biological child, it would fit into these categories only, so these are what we will pick." This can seriously limit your preferences and your opportunities. Because 95-98 percent of birth parents select the adoptive family, it is crucial that a

family get high exposure to potential birth parents. The more restrictive a family is on their APQ, the less exposure their profile will receive.

The bottom line is that the more you are open to on your APQ, the more your profile will be able to be shown to potential birth parents — and therefore, the better your chances are of being selected in a shorter period of time.

The APQ is broken into two parts: **Part 1** will ask you to share your preferences about your adoption, such as the race of the child, cost of adoption, etc. **Part 2** of the APQ will ask you some general questions about the adoption process to help us better understand what type of adoption you are comfortable with.

Each section of the APQ will be discussed briefly in this chapter to assist you with choosing your preferences. Remember, it is important for you to be open and flexible in every section of your APQ. For example, if a family is able to be flexible and set a high budget, this is just one variable. It will allow them some increased exposure, but if they are too restrictive in the other sections of the APQ, their high budget will likely not make a difference— because they still cannot be shown to as many situations.

The sections of the APQ are broken into the following seven categories:

1. Desired Race Combinations
2. Setting your Budget
3. Contact with Birth Parents
4. Substance Use During Pregnancy
5. Birth Parent Medical and Family History
6. Miscellaneous Situations
7. Part 2- Questions

1. Desired Race Combinations

In this section, you will select the race combinations that you are comfortable with. If you are open to adopting a child from a race different than your own, your home study provider must recommend you for those race(s) specifically, so make sure to talk with your home study provider about what races you are open to adopting.

Understand that when you select specific races, you are accepting ALL possible combinations and ethnicities of those races. For example: If you indicate in your APQ that you are open to a baby that will be Caucasian/Hispanic, you are making yourself available to ALL Hispanic cultures, including but not limited to Spanish, Cuban, Mexican, etc. You must also be open to all possible combinations, meaning that you are willing to accept a child that may be predominately Hispanic or that may be predominately Caucasian or anywhere in between. American Adoptions has this policy to prevent a

family from turning down a situation based on skin complexion at the time of placement, as it is difficult to predict what complexion any child will have based solely on race.

It should also be noted that a family who selects to adopt a child of only their own race(s) in an effort for the child to be more similar to them cannot guarantee that the child will resemble them. For example, a baby who is full Caucasian and is adopted by a Caucasian family may look no more similar to them than a child who is Caucasian/Hispanic. This is something you should consider when deciding which races you are open to selecting and, as in all aspects of the adoption process, we recommend approaching it with an open mind.

It is important to be aware that race is self-identified. Our forms identify six options when inquiring about an expectant parent's race- African American/Black, Asian, Caucasian/White, Hispanic, Native American, or Other. More information on "other" is shared below. We do not ask for proof of race from expectant parents, nor do we have the ability to obtain proof of such. In many instances, we do not have further information than what is reported on our forms. People may have varying opinions on these selections. For example, the federal government defines Hispanic as an ethnicity, not a race. We do have expectant parents who identify as Hispanic, so we have chosen to maintain this as a selection option for self-identification.

Can I receive a photo of the child's parents and/or make my decision based on physical or social characteristics?

You will not be allowed any control to accept or reject an adoption opportunity based on physical characteristics such as eye color, hair color, weight, complexion or ethnicity. Also, you will not be allowed to accept or reject an adoption opportunity based on socioeconomic factors such as education, living situation, religion, family dynamics, criminal background, etc.

A birth family's situation and lifestyle may be very different than yours. Although this can be uncomfortable for some adoptive families (especially during communication with the birth family), American Adoptions feels strongly that this can be overcome. Our specialists are always available to discuss any concerns that you may have in regards to this.

American Adoptions works with many birth parents of a lower socioeconomic status. Mothers who are considering adoption often have less financial and educational means by which to provide for a child, which is the very reason they are considering adoption. While some expectant mothers may have less education, this does not mean they are less intelligent. What it does mean is that they often have had less educational opportunities. Additionally, the mothers we work with can be of any age between 13 and 45. Despite popular belief, we encounter more birth parents in their 20s and 30s than we do teenagers. Due to this wide age range, we are unable to allow a family to decline an adoption opportunity based on the mother's age.

It is highly unlikely that we will receive photos of the child's parents. An adoptive family will not be allowed to accept or decline an adoption opportunity based on any of the abovementioned factors.

What are “other” races?

“Other” races can include any races that are not specifically addressed on the APQ. Examples of “other” races include: Egyptian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, Hawaiian, etc. If you select “other” as a race, you will be given more information when you are presented with an adoption opportunity.

If I am Caucasian, why should I consider adopting a child of another race?

Ultimately, this is an important decision based on each individual’s comfort and desire and should be considered carefully. By being open to races other than Caucasian (i.e., Hispanic, Caucasian/Hispanic, African American, Native American, other, etc.) you will receive more exposure to potential birth parents. You will still receive exposure to full Caucasian infants but will also receive exposure to infants of additional race selections.

Not every family is open to additional race selections beyond Caucasian, so you will have a higher chance of being selected. For example, let’s say that of 100 prospective birth mothers who contact American Adoptions, 40–45 percent are Caucasian. If we have 100 prospective adoptive families, — let’s say that 80–85 percent of them are open to adopting a Caucasian baby — which means those 80–85 families will be competing to be shown to the same 40–45 mothers.

Now, of these 100 mothers, let’s say that 10–15 percent are Caucasian/Hispanic, and only 25 percent of prospective adoptive families are open to being shown to these mothers. This means only 25 families will be shown to those 10–15 women, increasing each family’s exposure and their chances of being selected. These families will not only receive exposure alongside the 100 families who are open to the Caucasian baby, but they will also receive exposure to all Caucasian/Hispanic babies, as well, because there are not nearly as many families to be considered.

Here’s another example: More families are open to adopting a child who is African American combined with another race (biracial, tri-racial, etc.) than a full African American child. Therefore, by being open to adopting a full African American child, you are again provided more opportunity to be chosen.

In conclusion, even though the majority of adoptions completed by American Adoptions involve placement of full Caucasian infants, a family can greatly increase their exposure if they are open to adopting an infant of other races or race combinations. The more open you are to different races and race combinations, the more prospective birth mothers can view your profile — and the more exposure your profile gets, the more likely you are to be chosen for an adoption opportunity in a shorter amount of time.

What else do I need to think about as I consider race?

While being open to many different races can increase your profile exposure and decrease your wait time, this is not a decision to be made lightly. Prospective parents should fully educate themselves on transracial adoption and parenting before adopting a child of a race other than their own.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you consider what race combinations you are comfortable with:

- How will you help your child maintain an important connection with their culture and heritage?
- How will you educate yourself about and provide for your child's unique health needs based on their race (for example, skin and haircare)?
- How will you talk about race and race-related issues with your child in your home?
- Are your extended family members ready to welcome a child of another race into your family? How will you respond if a family member makes racially insensitive remarks?
- Can you provide, or are you willing to seek out, positive role models of your child's race within your community (for example, doctors, religious leaders, teachers and coaches)?
- How will you respond to strangers' questions and comments about adoption, your child's race and your transracial family?
- Do you live in a diverse community that will be welcoming and inclusive of a child of this race? Are you willing to seek out schools, teams and other activities where your child can develop meaningful relationships with peers of his or her own race? If not, are you willing to move communities to provide that for your child?
- Are you prepared to confront racism and other race-related issues head-on? How will you discuss racism in your home and respond to racism in the world?

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the things to think about as you consider transracial adoption. Adoptive parents should be prepared to confront their own feelings and beliefs about race, learn about the experiences of other transracial adoptees, and be honest about what they are prepared to handle. American Adoptions feels strongly that all families open to transracial adoption should complete additional education to prepare themselves for this experience. Your adoption specialist can provide additional support and resources as you make these decisions.

Can I rank my race selections? For example, if I prefer to adopt a full Caucasian infant, but may consider a child of another racial combination second, is that possible?

No, this is not possible. You must be equally accepting of every race combination noted on your APQ. This is because your profile will be shown to many different prospective birth mothers at all times and we cannot have any control over which mother selects a family.

In conclusion, when you choose the races you are willing to accept on your APQ, you must be equally comfortable and prepared to adopt a child of any of those races. Our advice is to open yourselves up to as many opportunities as you're comfortable.

There are many things to consider when making this decision, such as your community and your cultural awareness. There are also many support networks and resources out there to help educate

you and prepare you for transracial adoption. Please see the suggested readings for this topic at the end of the manual.

**Note: Because the birth parent(s) are responsible for disclosing the racial makeup of the child, American Adoptions cannot be held liable for a birth parent misrepresenting the child's race.*

Can I be gender-specific?

You cannot specify gender on your APQ. American Adoptions allows a limited number of gender-specific families into our program on a case-by-case basis. Gender specificity is not recommended and must be approved through an exception process prior to completing the APQ. An additional fee applies with approval, and choosing this route can lead to considerably longer estimated wait times. Please contact your Adoptive Family Coordinator to see if we are currently accepting gender-specific families.

2. Setting an Adoption Budget

In this section, you are asked to set your adoption budget so American Adoptions knows your financial comfort level for your adoption. American Adoptions provides you with information about the average total cost ranges for our adoption program and suggested minimums when setting your budget, but this information should only be used as a guide to help you create your post-activation budget. Fees are subject to change at any time and may change prior to your family going active.

What is the total adoption budget vs. post-activation budget?

The **total adoption budget** is the full amount your family has to spend on the adoption, including pre-activation fees such as the Pre-Application Fee, Online Marketing Services Fee, Video Profile Fee, Activation Fee as well as all fees you'll pay at the time of your adoption opportunity. Your total adoption budget will not include your home study costs or Home Study Review Fee, as families pay a wide-ranging set of fees for those services, which may be performed by a separate agency other than American Adoptions.

What is left from your total adoption budget after activating is what you have to put toward an adoption opportunity, or your **post-activation budget**. The post-activation budget is what you should list on your Adoption Planning Questionnaire (APQ). The post-activation budget does not include travel expenses to the mother's state when the baby is born (airfare, hotel accommodations, etc.) and while waiting for ICPC approval. It also does not include the fees for post-placement home visits that will be performed by your home study provider after the baby is placed with you.

Here's an example of how to set a post-activation budget on your APQ:

If a family has a total adoption budget of \$85,000, they will need to subtract the pre-activation fees (pre-application, video profile, online marketing services and activation fees) and set a post-activation budget of \$58,260 on their APQ. *Remember, this does not include home study costs or travel expenses, so a family needs to account for those costs separately.

When you receive a call from the agency presenting an adoption opportunity, you will be told how much the adoption opportunity expenses are estimated to be. This figure will include any of the following that apply to the adoption opportunity:

- American Adoptions' agency administration and post-adoption-opportunity support and education fees
- Legal/termination fees for birth mother and/or adoptive family
- Medical retainers
- Living expense subsidy
- Travel costs for agency and/or attorney
- Foster care
- Additional counseling
- Risk-sharing
- Miscellaneous

American Adoptions provides families with information about total average costs for our program and also provides minimum post-activation budgets so families can best decide where they want to set their post-activation budget.

What is the payment schedule for the fees to be paid to American Adoptions?

Fees are paid in two different timeframes: Pre-Activation Stage and Post-Activation Stage.

Pre-Activation Stage is when a family prepares to activate with American Adoptions. Fees due during this stage are necessary costs for a family to join American Adoptions.

Post-Activation Stage occurs after activation and fees may be required to be paid either before or after an adoption opportunity is identified, but are most commonly paid at the time an adoptive family accepts an adoption opportunity. . The total fees due during this stage are unique to each adoption and many of the costs are directly dependent on the particular adoption opportunity dynamics with the mother and state in which the adoption is to be completed.

Pre-Activation Stage:

Costs incurred during this stage are costs associated for a family to join American Adoptions. For most accurate and up to date fee amounts; please consult with your Coordinator.

\$995 Pre-Application Fee

Home Study Fees:

Varies by state - Home Study Fee: This fee will be paid to your home study agency. It is recommended to have American Adoptions complete your home study, if you reside in one of the

states where we are licensed to do so. Please review home study materials for current listing of these costs or ask your Coordinator for assistance.

OR \$300 Home Study Review Fee: Adoptive families who have their home study completed by another adoption professional will submit this fee to American Adoptions with their home study for review. This service is necessary to ensure that your home study will be in full compliance in all 50 states.

Remember: These fees are considered separate when figuring your adoption budget.

\$1,995 Video Profile Fee: This cost covers production of your video profile and will be paid to Show Pro Media.

\$18,750 Online Marketing Services Fee (American Family Media offers a cash discount for payment made by cashier check, money order or wire, making the fee \$18,250): This fee is due when you are ready to activate with American Adoptions. Upon completion of the APQ, home study and profiles, you will be provided an agreement via email from American Family Media to submit with the Online Marketing Services Fee. This fee goes directly toward advertising to locate prospective birth parents considering adoption. American Family Media will oversee the marketing of your family across various media platforms.

This fee is non-refundable and does not have an expiration date. The Online Marketing Services Fee is valid until a family successfully adopts a child. For example, should your family have to go inactive and later wish to rejoin American Adoptions, these funds will be credited toward reactivation.

\$5,500 Activation Fee: This fee is also due when you are ready to activate with American Adoptions. Upon completion of the APQ, home study and print profile, you will be provided the Adoption Agreement via email to submit with the Activation Fee. This fee goes directly toward networking and general overhead costs for American Adoptions.

This fee is non-refundable and does not have an expiration date. The Activation Fee is valid until you successfully adopt a child. For example, should you have to go inactive and later wish to rejoin American Adoptions, these funds will be credited toward reactivation.

\$4,500 Gender-Specific Fee (if applicable): This fee is necessary to offset the additional costs needed to locate expectant mothers meeting this criteria and for the additional time our staff must spend to locate and work with expectant mothers who know the gender of their child. This fee is in addition to other program fees and is not considered part of your total adoption budget.

**Please note that American Adoptions accepts a limited number of gender-specific families into our program on a case-by-case basis, and gender specificity must be approved through an exception process prior to completing the APQ. Contact your Adoptive Family Coordinator to see if we are currently accepting gender-specific families.*

Post-Activation Stage: Most fees associated with this stage of the adoption vary depending on the specific circumstances. These are the fees that are needed for your particular adoption opportunity

and are considered part of your post-activation budget. Remember, your post-activation budget allows American Adoptions to decipher which prospective birth parents may result in an adoption opportunity. It is important that you have access to all post-activation funds upon activation. Any fees due at time of adoption opportunity will be due within 2 business days of accepting and must be paid via wire transfer.

When a Birth Parent Specialist contacts you to present an adoption opportunity, the costs of the adoption opportunity will be explained. Any fees that have already been paid prior or during the Pre-Activation Stage **will not** be included in this amount due.

All the fees listed below may be included in an adoption opportunity and should be considered when deciding where to set your post-activation budget. As mentioned, most of these costs will differ from one adoption to the next depending on states involved, the expectant mother's needs and legal process. Costs will be estimated for each expectant mother and then factored into your set opportunity budget.

Description	Fee
Agency Administrative Fee	Varies* - \$8,750- \$15,000
Support and Education Fee	Varies* - \$8,750- \$15,000
Living Expenses	Varies on the needs of the mother and state laws
Medical Retainers	Varies on the needs of the mother and state laws
Attorney/Agency Travel Costs	Varies*
Legal/Termination/Counseling Fees	Varies*
Placement Fee	Varies* - \$13,000- \$20,000
Risk-Sharing Fee	Varies*
Additional Advertising, Marketing and Networking Fees	Varies*
Foster Care (if applicable)	Varies* (This is rarely necessary.)

**Please contact your Adoptive Family Coordinator for the most current fee estimates and how to set your budget accordingly.*

What is the Additional Advertising, Marketing and Networking Fee?

The Additional Advertising/Networking Fee helps to cover increases in advertising costs to locate adoption opportunities for waiting adoptive families. This fee helps offset differences between actual advertising costs and American Adoptions' fees, which may have been set long before a family activated or received placement.

Why would we need to pay additional fees for networking, advertising and marketing?

When a family joins American Adoptions, they are quoted costs for our services. This estimate is based in part on known and fixed costs that the agency must cover annually, such as rent, utilities, and other overhead expenses. These types of costs remain fairly consistent, making it relatively easy to quote accurate costs to a family to cover the expenses of their adoption.

Advertising costs, on the other hand, can vary over time.

For example, advertising costs with the agency were remarkably consistent from 2017 through May 2019, staying within a few thousand dollars of the expected range each month. In May 2019, advertising costs suddenly increased by 34% with no warning. American Adoptions did not change anything within our advertising campaign, but Google changed its definition of how American Adoptions' account could be advertised, leading to an unexpected increase in advertising costs.

To maintain the same level of advertising coverage, American Adoptions had to pay significantly more than we were paying before, with no increase in the number of prospective birth mothers contacting the adoption agency. Limiting our advertising budget was one option, but doing so would reduce the number of prospective birth mothers coming to the agency, which would lead to longer wait times and cause even more financial stress on the agency and adoptive families long-term.

By November 2019, the advertising costs had increased by 84.8%, marking nine months of increasing advertising costs with no end in sight — all just to maintain the same quality of advertising as before.

Starting just a few months later, advertising costs again underwent a significant change when the COVID-19 pandemic upended life as we knew it.

The pandemic and associated lockdowns caused a sharp decrease in the U.S. birth rate. Experts estimate that, as a result of the pandemic, hundreds of thousands fewer babies were born in the U.S. in 2021 compared with the previous year. Because a percentage of those babies would have been placed for adoption, the decreased birth rate correlated with a decreased number of available adoption opportunities — not only with American Adoptions but with every adoption professional.

At the same time, we saw an increase in the number of hopeful parents interested in growing their families through adoption. Due to the decline in the birth rate (and therefore the decline in available adoption opportunities), families were not able to adopt as quickly as they did prior to the pandemic. This meant that families were remaining on their agencies' lists longer, further compounding the number of families waiting to adopt.

The result was more adoptive families trying to adopt a smaller number of babies, which increased average wait times. And, because the longer a family waits to adopt, the more it costs in ongoing monthly expenses to advertise that family, this drove up the costs to advertise those families and complete a successful adoption. Factors like these can cause dramatic changes essentially overnight, making it very difficult to estimate what the agency's overall networking and advertising costs are going to be during an adoptive family's journey.

When all is said and done, a family may take a year or more to adopt from the time they start looking for an agency to the time they successfully adopt. When advertising avenues such as Google change the rules regarding advertising costs, or an unforeseen event increases the amount of time it takes to adopt (and therefore the amount of advertising that must be done), we occasionally have to pass these costs on to adoptive families because the costs of successfully completing an adoption have changed during that journey.

Keep in mind, the illustrations above highlight only a couple of examples of changing advertising costs. Other factors that can lead to sudden changes in advertising expenses include:

- Changes to search engines' algorithms. For example, updates to Google's algorithm in 2019 required us to develop additional websites to maintain and grow internet traffic for the agency, which required additional manpower and resources.
- Changes to the platforms and search engines we use. For example, YouTube has grown to be the second-largest search engine on the internet. American Adoptions is now beginning to invest in YouTube advertising, which is a different algorithm necessitating additional manpower to learn and manage this tool effectively.
- Increased competition in the adoption space. More online services and families advertising for adoption opportunities can drive up overall advertising costs.

In addition to these and other advertising costs, American Adoptions also does extensive networking with hospitals, adoption attorneys, adoption agencies and other professionals to maximize available adoption opportunities. Additional networking fees may be necessary to cover these costs, as well.

We pride ourselves on having fees that never expire, but because advertising costs can fluctuate so much and without warning, we need a way to cover them. While you may join the agency under one fee structure, those fees may have been set a year ago, or longer, and may no longer cover the costs of advertising and networking, which can change significantly from month to month.

From time to time, due to these and other factors all outside of American Adoptions' and your family's control, we have to charge additional advertising, marketing and networking fees to adjust to changes within the marketplace to find pregnant mothers willing to voluntarily consider placing their child for adoption.

Will I be presented situations that exceed my post-activation budget?

It is possible for you to be presented an adoption opportunity that either falls below or exceeds your post-activation budget. American Adoptions does its best to present your profile to situations that

have costs within your post-activation budget, but sometimes the exact costs of the adoption opportunity are not known until the mother has selected the adoptive family. It is then that the Birth Parent Specialist is able to determine her living expense budget, her attorney fees, your attorney fees in your state, medical coverage, etc. Birth parents may also select a family profile from the website and may not pick a family whose budget matches up with their needs exactly. Budgets vary greatly as there are many factors involved. For example, a birth parent in one state may not be able to receive any living expense assistance if it is not legally allowable there. However, a birth parent in a state where it is allowed may receive as high as \$20,000 in living expenses if approved for her situation. That is just one of many factors that play into the cost of the opportunity, and just one variable can cause a \$20,000 difference. It is important to be aware that there is a broad range of where opportunities fall, and to identify with your specialist where your post activation budget falls in that range.

If you are ever presented an adoption opportunity that exceeds your post-activation budget, it is up to you to decide if you feel comfortable proceeding with the adoption opportunity or not. If you choose not to accept an adoption opportunity because it exceeds your post-activation budget/comfort level, there are no repercussions.

Example: If an adoptive family has set their post-activation budget at \$45,000, and they are presented a situation where the adoption opportunity expenses are going to be \$48,000, this family may turn down this adoption opportunity and face no penalty. However, this family may decide that this is something they can and want to proceed with, so they are afforded that adoption opportunity if the prospective birth mother has selected them.

Remember, your post-activation budget does not include your Online Marketing Services Fee, Activation Fee or any other fees paid during the pre-activation phase. When you are presented an adoption opportunity, if the adoption opportunity expenses are estimated at \$55,000, this means that you'll be required to pay \$55,000 within two business days of being presented with the adoption opportunity. Once paid, your fees will be held in a prepaid expense account so that the agency can make payments on your behalf for the adoption opportunity.

If I am presented situations that exceed my post-activation budget, how would I benefit by setting a higher post-activation budget? Should I set a minimum post-activation budget knowing that I would be contacted if a potential birth mother selected me?

You should set your post-activation budget where you are comfortable. It is important that you have enough funds available for the adoption. We do not want you to set your budget higher than the amount you can actually afford. However, if you set your post-activation budget lower than the amount you have available, you may lose out on exposure to potential birth parents.

It is correct that if an expectant mother selects an adoptive family whose post-activation budget is lower than the cost of her adoption, the Birth Parent Specialist will contact the adoptive family. However, if a Birth Parent Specialist is able to determine that a particular adoption opportunity expense is going to be \$55,000, and she needs to show the mother adoptive family profiles, the adoptive families whose post-activation budget is set at \$55,000 and higher will be shown first. So,

the adoptive family whose budget is set below this amount will most likely miss out on that opportunity to have their profile shown to that mother, even if everything else matches.

It is to your benefit to set your budget as high as possible while maintaining your comfort level. It is also important to note that more than 75 percent of families receive refunds after their adoption is finalized. American Adoptions collects retainers and overestimates costs whenever possible in an attempt to not have to return to families later to collect more funds. Because of this, many families accept opportunities at a higher amount than their adoption actually ends up costing.

Can adoption opportunity costs ever exceed what is initially presented to me?

Yes. When you are presented with an adoption opportunity, you will be provided with a breakdown of the estimated costs associated with the adoption opportunity. This breakdown will itemize each fee.

The fees presented with the adoption opportunity are only an estimate, because nobody can predict 100 percent what will occur prior to the adoptive placement. However, many of the fees are set amounts, which helps cut down on some of the uncertainty. You should feel comfortable that the costs presented with the adoption opportunity are most likely accurate, but that the final costs may be higher or lower after the adoption is finalized legally.

Any monies that are not utilized will be refunded to you after your adoption is finalized and after final billing for medical and legal has occurred. If the cost of the adoption opportunity goes up due to changes in the expectant mother's living situation or medical expenses and no longer matches your APQ, you will be given the information and the choice to continue forward and pay the additional costs, or to remove yourself from the adoption opportunity.

How much could be lost financially if an adoption opportunity is not successful?

One of the difficulties of domestic adoption is dealing with financial losses if an expectant mother changes her mind. As a result, we have developed a risk-sharing fee structure that limits these financial risks.

Adoptive families sometimes invest significant funds into an adoption opportunity, only for the prospective birth mother to change her mind and decide to parent. With most agencies, adoptive families risk losing the money paid into that adoption opportunity — which can be financially devastating and even prevent them from ever adopting. But not with American Adoptions.

With American Adoptions' risk-sharing program, adoptive families have **little to no fees at risk** throughout the adoption process. American Adoptions will only collect the Risk Sharing fee one time, during the Post-Activation time period (typically at the time of an adoptive family's first opportunity), and this will provide financial coverage until a family successfully adopts. This means that, if the mother changes her mind and chooses to parent her child, expenses paid into that adoption opportunity will be refunded directly back to the adoptive family so they can invest it in the next adoption opportunity or take a break from the adoption process, if needed. In the event of an

adoption disruption, American Adoptions will cover all living, medical and agency expenses, as well as up to \$5,000 of legal expenses that have been paid out. It does not protect the family's travel expenses.

This program protects an adoptive family's budget, allowing for a more fixed total adoption budget and greater peace of mind throughout the process.

What makes American Adoptions' risk-sharing program different from other agencies' financial protection plans?

Not all risk-sharing programs are created equal. Think of risk-sharing as adoption disruption insurance; like other types of insurance, different providers will offer different levels of coverage.

Most other adoption professionals do not provide financial protection for an adoption disruption, which can lead families to financial crisis and an inability to continue with the adoption process. Those that do advertise some financial protection often do not cover all fees involved in every unsuccessful adoption opportunity a family may have. As you evaluate an adoption professional's risk-sharing or financial protection program, consider these questions:

- **What types of fees does it cover?** Other professionals may only cover certain types of fees, such as living expenses only. American Adoptions' risk-sharing program covers all living and medical expenses, plus legal fees up to \$5,000 (this covers legal fees/fees associated with termination in most disruptions, but depends on the amount of work completed at the point where disruption occurs).
- **How much of your investment does it cover?** Other professionals may cover expenses, but only up to a certain dollar amount. American Adoptions covers living and medical expenses in full, plus all legal expenses in most cases.
- **How many times will it cover you?** American Adoptions collects the Risk Sharing fee one time (typically at the time an adoptive family accepts an Opportunity) and that will provide financial protection for an adoptive family throughout their entire adoption journey with American Adoptions no matter how many attempts it takes to successfully adopt. Other professionals may protect you only in a limited number of cases. For example, your first adoption disruption may be covered, but if you were to experience a second, it would not be covered.
- **How will your fees be refunded?** Other professionals may "roll over" fees into the next adoption opportunity, forcing you to continue with adoption and with that professional. American Adoptions returns fees directly to you, so you can decide if and when to reinvest in the adoption process.

What if I locate a prospective birth mother on my own or a mother finds me through a source other than American Adoptions? What if the mother is in another state?

When a family and an expectant mother come together through their own networking, this is referred to as an identified adoption. Our agency does provide adoption services for these

situations. In addition, American Adoptions can work with the potential birth mother no matter what state she resides in. We have resources in every state to assist us when needed, and we can ensure the expectant mother is taken care of. Our fully qualified staff will assist and support both you and the expectant mother in the same manner as if you found each other through our agency.

We have worked with many families who have found their own prospective birth mothers, and we have provided them with the same quality services as we would with an expectant mother who came to us initially. If you locate an expectant mother through a source other than American Adoptions, please contact your Adoptive Family Coordinator as soon as possible so they can explain our identified adoption programs in full detail.

How can American Adoptions help in an identified adoption?

Our full range of adoption services will be available to you, including education and support during the adoption process. We can assist the expectant mother with a counseling assessment and support throughout her pregnancy. We will be available to provide living expenses, medical needs and legal assistance. In addition, we will actively be involved during the hospital process and be available to assist when needed. Our agency will coordinate with attorneys to set up the adoption and assist with ICPC, as well.

Does American Adoptions charge the same fees for identified adoptions?

No, American Adoptions has a specific fee structure for identified adoptions depending on the level of services needed. Please contact your Adoptive Family Coordinator for more information regarding our identified adoption program. It is important to be aware that we do not offer risk-sharing services for identified adoptions for any family who is not currently active with our agency.

How are living expenses disbursed to expectant mothers?

Living expenses are based on the prospective birth mother's needs and are regulated by the state laws where she or the adoptive family resides. States have varying laws on how much assistance can be provided to potential birth mothers and for how long. For example, a state's law may allow a potential mother to receive reasonable living expenses for the last three months of her pregnancy and one month after her pregnancy, while another state's law may allow a potential mother to receive reasonable living expenses for the entire pregnancy. Reasonable living expense amounts vary from state to state but typically include maternity clothing, food, rent, utilities, phone and transportation.

Not every expectant mother has the same needs, so living expenses are determined on a case-by-case basis. Some prospective birth mothers will have a lot of financial needs, and some will have minimal or no financial needs. For example, an expectant mother may be 17 years old and living with her parents and have no need for living expenses. Another prospective birth mother may be a 24-year-old single parent to two children and have needs for rent, food and utilities.

An expectant mother will work with her Birth Parent Specialist to determine what her living expense needs are, and then, based on her needs and the particular laws of the state involved, the Birth

Parent Specialist will create a budget for the disbursement of living expenses. Keep in mind that all living expenses are estimates; therefore, it is possible that the amount the Birth Parent Specialist estimates for a prospective birth mother's living expenses may be higher than the prospective birth mother's actual needs. In those cases, the adoptive family will receive a refund for unused living expenses. Conversely, it is also possible that a prospective birth mother's living expense needs will be greater than the estimate provided, and the family may need to make additional payments to cover her living expenses.

All living expenses are disbursed by adoption professionals, and an adoptive family should *never* provide assistance to a mother on their own. **Adoptive families cannot provide any expenses to prospective birth parents directly.** Some small gifts can be exchanged, but prior approval should be sought from American Adoptions before any items are provided to make sure it is in accordance with the law. This is important as gifting items to expectant parents in adoption, in some states, is considered a felony. Even in states where gifting is allowed, it is important to ensure extra care is taken so that any gifts provided are not considered coercive in nature. It is best to lean towards more thoughtful gifts, not expensive, and your specialist can assist you in considering what is appropriate.

American Adoptions requires every mother who is receiving living expenses to provide proof of pregnancy and other information deemed necessary. American Adoptions attempts to pay all living expenses to third parties such as landlords, utility companies, etc., and to provide grocery store gift cards for food and clothing needs whenever possible.

How many expectant mothers need assistance with living expenses?

Approximately 85–90 percent of potential birth mothers need some assistance with living expenses prior to placement. Our agency has a risk-sharing plan that protects these investments for adoptive families if a placement disrupts. This plan creates zero financial risk for all families working with our agency for living and medical expenses paid into a disrupted adoption opportunity.

So, if a mother is in need of living expenses, American Adoptions will collect fees for those expenses at the time of the adoption opportunity; however, if it disrupts, those fees will be returned to you entirely. This financial security, if a disruption were to occur, also includes coverage for legal expenses up to \$5,000.

We encourage you to set your post-activation budget as high as you can to ensure you are capable of providing the assistance that most mothers need during the pregnancy.

How many expectant mothers need assistance with medical expenses?

Approximately 85 percent of expectant mothers have Medicaid or private insurance, which will cover all or a portion of their medical needs. However, the prospective birth mother's Medicaid or insurance may not cover all costs or the costs for the baby. If necessary, American Adoptions will collect a medical retainer from you at the time of the adoption opportunity to cover estimated medical bills for the mother and/or baby. Should the bills end up being covered by some form of

insurance; the medical retainer will be refunded minus any fees incurred to assist in setting up the insurance process for the mother and/or baby. Should the medical bills for the mother and/or baby exceed the medical retainer collected, you will be expected to pay such bills.

As with living expenses, all medical expenses will be returned to the adoptive family in the event of an adoption disruption.

You will receive more information about medical costs at time of the adoption opportunity.

Will our insurance cover the baby's medical expenses from birth?

You should discuss with your insurance representative about when your insurance becomes effective for your child. Be prepared to address this in detail with your insurance carrier and not just your HR representative. If the insurance is effective from the date of birth, you will want to find out whether your policy will cover the baby if he or she is born out of their network. You will also want to find out whether your policy will cover the baby if the insurance company does not find out about the child until after he or she is born. Again, you will need to explore all of these details in depth with your insurance carrier — not just your HR representative.

If your insurance policy is effective from the date of birth, it must be used as the primary insurance for the child and, if Medicaid approval is granted, it will be the secondary insurance. If the adoptive family's insurance does not begin coverage until legal placement and Medicaid is obtained, Medicaid will cover the period from birth to placement. You will receive additional information about insurance and medical billing at the time of placement. It is very important to follow all directions given by the agency when applying for and providing insurance information to the hospital.

3. Contact with the Birth Parents

In this section of your APQ, you need to fill out what options you are comfortable with in regard to contact with birth parent(s). You will note that many options are already marked. These are the items that everyone joining American Adoptions must be open to and comfortable with. This section will discuss the positives of having contact and dispel common myths associated with open adoption. Should you have concerns with any of the required contact, please discuss further with your Adoptive Family Specialist as you prepare to become active with American Adoptions.

At American Adoptions, each prospective birth mother will create an adoption plan that she feels comfortable with and will decide the types and frequency of contact she wants with the adoptive family. She will then be shown profiles of adoptive families who desire the same types of contact. Although some potential birth parents start out being unsure what type of contact they may want in the future, they want to be sure that they are choosing a family that is open to everything they may desire. It is unlikely that a prospective birth mother will feel comfortable choosing a family who has not committed to this contact and to allowing the contact to develop naturally with time, as she may fear the family will not end up being open to what she ultimately decides.

What type of adoption relationships does American Adoptions facilitate?

There are essentially three types of adoption relationships that most people are familiar with. These three types are generally termed open, semi-open and closed.

Most adoptions today are considered open or semi-open. Every adoption professional may have a different definition for these terms, but in reality, there is no one factor that makes an adoption open vs. semi-open. Adoptions as a whole continue to move in the direction of being more open. It is no longer the norm for a mother to place her baby for adoption and not be involved in selecting the adoptive parents or for no identifying information to be exchanged. The rise in openness can be attributed to a decrease in social stigma surrounding unplanned pregnancy and changing technology, which makes it easier for adoptive and birth families to stay in touch. Also, continual research shows open communication in adoption is hugely beneficial for all parties, especially the adopted person.

What makes the best adoptions for all parties involved is open communication about expectations and an understanding that what works for one adoption may not work for another. American Adoptions has created minimum requirements that all families must be open to and comfortable with based on norms of what many birth parents want. American Adoptions believes that open communication lays the groundwork for the healthiest adoptions for all parties involved.

What type of contact do we need to be open to in order to work with American Adoptions?

American Adoptions requires all adoptive families to be comfortable with a certain level of contact before and after placement.

Pre-Birth/Placement Contact:

Phone calls and emails with expectant parents - You will be asked to provide a phone number and email address to the prospective birth parents for communication. Some families find it easier to create a separate private email address or a separate Google Voice phone number, which is OK as long as it is contact information that the family intends to have available for the birth parents after the placement, too. If you are creating a specific email address to share, it is recommended to keep the email address generic and *not* use anything that may be seen as insensitive or adoption-related, such as "maryjoeadoptababy@yahoo.com."

Often, the first phone call between the adoptive family and potential birth parent(s) will be a conference call with an Adoption Specialist present. American Adoptions can continue to coordinate conference calls at the request of the prospective birth mother as needed, but we encourage ongoing direct contact, as it creates the best setting for the relationship to grow.

Meeting birth parents at placement/birth of the baby - You will meet and spend time with the birth parents and their identified support persons at the hospital when the baby is born. The prospective birth mother will create a hospital plan prior to birth that will be shared with you so you are prepared.

Meetings at this time may also include visits outside of the hospital prior to the prospective birth mother being admitted (in cases of planned inductions/cesarean sections) or after discharge while the family is waiting for ICPC approval to travel home with the baby.

Post-Adoption Contact:

Phone calls and emails directly with birth parents - You will use an email address and phone number to maintain contact with the birth parents. The frequency and type of contact will vary in every situation, and expectations for contact will be established prior to placement. Often, it provides security for birth parents just knowing they have contact information for the family, even if ongoing contact is not regular or they do not use it.

Exchange of pictures and letters – You will send photos and letters to the birth parents per the outlined schedule in your picture and letter agreement. Typically, photos are sent within 30 days of birth, two times per year until the child is age 6 and then one time per year up to age 18. These should be hard-copy photos and letters so the birth parents have something tangible to hold or print for picture frames, unless another form of communication is mutually agreed upon. This is the minimum, and it is not uncommon for families and birth parents to text photos or share information in other ways more often.

One visit in the first 1-5 years of the child's life, should the birth parent(s) request – You must be open to having one visit with the birth parents (if requested) at a mutually agreed upon time and date. Typically, this visit happens in the birth parent's state or an agreed-upon state, if the birth parents move. This visit is coordinated and handled by the adoptive family and birth parents and will occur at a time and location that is agreeable to everyone. American Adoptions will not help coordinate visits, but we will always be available to help provide guidance and support to ensure ongoing stable and healthy contact.

Additional Contact Options: These contact options are not mandatory for families, but they are optional choices for your APQ because some birth parents request these forms of additional contact.

Meeting birth parents prior to placement/prior to birth of baby - Adoptive families who select this option on their APQ are open to visiting birth parents in the birth parent's state prior to the baby being born. This is a great way to create trust and rapport prior to meeting at the hospital when the baby is born, but it does add extra cost to the adoption plan for the family's additional travel.

Annual visits after placement/birth of baby - Adoptive families who mark this option on their APQ are open to having a visit with birth parents on an annual basis. Sometimes, it is important for birth parents to know that the family they choose is committed to having regular visits throughout the child's life. These visits will be coordinated by the adoptive family and birth parent(s) at mutually agreed upon dates and locations, but families should be prepared to travel up to once per year in this type of agreement. These arrangements offer the most openness possible for all parties involved.

Video calls, texting, and alternative photo-sharing options – Often, adoptive families find that their relationship with their child’s birth parents evolves naturally to include forms of contact that may not have originally been addressed on the APQ. Today, technology allows adoptive families and birth parents to stay in touch in more ways than ever before.

- **Text messaging** – For many adoptive families and birth parents, texting is a natural extension of their existing email and phone communication. Texting can allow for shorter, more frequent and casual updates, as well as more dynamic and meaningful back-and-forth discussion. For example, you might find yourself texting with your child’s birth parents monthly, rather than sending one big update in a letter every six months. Texting can be a great way to send a quick photo or video to your child’s birth parent(s) and let them know you’re thinking of them in between longer, more detailed updates.
- **Video calls** – Video can be a great way to capture and share moments with birth family as your child grows up. In addition to texting or emailing videos of your child, you can use video calling services like FaceTime, Skype and Zoom to connect with your child’s birth parents “face to face,” even if you live far apart or don’t have in-person visits.
- **Private blogs, online photo galleries and photo-sharing apps** – Adoptive parents today have more options than ever before to easily share photos of their children with the birth family. Some families set up private blogs using platforms like Blogger, WordPress or Squarespace, where they can post regular photos and updates that the birth parents can check on their own time. Alternatively, photo gallery sites and apps like Shutterfly, 23Snaps, Tinybeans and FamilyAlbum allow you to upload photos securely and share them with the birth parents instantaneously.
- **Photobooks** – Today, adoptive families have many choices for creating beautiful photobooks to send their child’s birth parents. Services like Shutterfly, Mixbook, Snapfish, and even Costco and Walmart are just a few examples. These make great gifts for birth families and can showcase an entire year of your child’s life and memories at once.
- **Social media** – Some birth parents and adoptive families choose to stay in touch via social media. There is a lot to think about when it comes to social media and adoption, and families should work with their adoption specialist to develop a plan for social media use if this is something they are interested in. But, depending on your comfort level and your relationship with the birth family, this can be another way to easily share photos and updates and stay in touch with your child’s birth parents.

The important thing to remember is that post-adoption contact can and will ebb and flow over time. As technology evolves, the way you communicate with your child’s birth family will likely evolve, as well. Every relationship is different, and you and your child’s birth family will find a pattern of contact that works best for you.

Will the birth parents know our last names? Can we protect our identity?

American Adoptions requires adoptive families to be open to sharing their last names with birth parents. American Adoptions will not voluntarily provide this information directly to birth parents, but it is likely to be shared throughout the adoption process in some way.

American Adoptions feels it is best if the adoptive family shares their last name openly with birth parents. We fully recognize that this can feel intrusive or scary, but we feel strongly about this requirement for several reasons:

- **It's likely to come out anyway.** The idea of remaining anonymous in adoption is outdated. With the advance of the internet and social media, curious birth parents can now find and learn more about adoptive parents than ever before. The intimate nature of the adoption process also makes it near-impossible to guarantee that an adoptive family's last name(s) won't be released in hospital or court documents. Hospital policy may require the prospective birth mother to know your last name so she can put you on her visitors list, or your name(s) may otherwise be mentioned by hospital staff in front of the birth parent(s). Your name could also appear on legal documents or hospital paperwork that is seen by the birth parent(s), or a potential birth parent could do some research online to find your family using whatever details they do have about you.
- **It builds trust in the relationship.** Attempting to keep this information from the prospective birth parents, when it will almost certainly come out at some point anyway, is counterproductive; it does nothing but create unnecessary fear and tension in the relationship. How can a prospective birth mother trust adoptive parents if they don't want her to know who they are? Remember, the prospective birth parent(s) are thinking about trusting you with the most precious thing in their life. You should extend that trust and respect to them, as well.
- **Birth parents are not ill-intentioned.** Most birth parents do not want information about you so they can locate you and interfere or show up after the adoption and "get the baby back." They are simply trying to find comfort in their decision and are curious about the people they are choosing to be their child's parents. As prospective birth parents try to envision their child's life with you, it is understandable for them to want basic details, like what their child's last name will be.
- **Sharing last names is common.** Think about when you meet new people — often, you build a relationship and conversation by sharing your last name, where you live, what you do for a living, etc. This is the same type of communication that can help build a healthy, trusting relationship between birth parents and adoptive families. In everyday life, it's very common for us to share our last names when meeting a new person, and we don't think anything of it. Sharing it with your child's prospective birth parent(s) is really no different.

Because it is now so rare for an adoption to occur without the sharing of last names, and because technology makes it quite easy for us all to find one another in today's world, adoptive families need to be prepared that this will likely occur. Please note that while we do not require birth mothers to

share their last names with adoptive families, we also prepare them for the likelihood that their information will be visible at the hospital or on legal documents.

**Note: With sharing of last names, you will want to review all social media and other internet sites to ensure that any viewable or “public” information is appropriate and does not disclose any personal details that you would not feel comfortable sharing openly.*

Why does American Adoptions require us to be open to these types of contact?

After decades of completing adoptions, we have seen time and time again that open adoption has tremendous benefits for everyone involved — especially the child. Open adoption allows adoptees to better understand their personal histories and the reasons they were placed for adoption, provides them with information that aids in identity formation, and more. Birth and adoptive parents benefit from openness, as well; open adoption helps many birth parents process their grief and gives them greater peace of mind following placement, and adoptive parents benefit from the updated medical history information they receive and friendships they develop with their child’s birth family.

In addition, we are seeing that adoption in general is naturally more open due to advances in technology (cell phones, internet, social media, etc.) that help keep everyone more connected. Most birth parents want the option of these types of communication with the family throughout their pregnancy and after placement.

With the internet and social media, there is also more information and education available to prospective birth parents about open adoption and more people are sharing their stories about how it works. Over the years, we have seen more women seeking openness in their adoption plan due to fears about being forgotten or concern about what the child will or will not know about them. Many women who place a child for adoption worry that the child will grow up confused about why they were placed for adoption, or that the child will grow up hating them. Many prospective birth mothers find comfort in the idea of making themselves available to answer questions and reassure the child about the reasons surrounding their adoption.

Many professionals are talking with prospective birth parents about the benefits of open adoption and communication. If a prospective birth mother senses that a family has fears about having contact with her, she is unlikely to want to place her baby for adoption with them. It is important that we provide education and guidance about this to our families before they ever go active so they can be ready to embrace open adoption.

Beyond the importance of embracing open adoption for the birth parents, it is most important for the adopted child. American Adoptions feels it is best practice to educate about and encourage as much openness as possible, as research continually shows that it is best for everyone involved, especially the child.

What is a legally binding PACA, and what should we know when agreeing to contact?

Recognizing the benefits of ongoing contact between birth and adoptive families, many states now allow for legally binding post-adoption contact agreements (PACAs). Like the PACA you will sign with American Adoptions, a legally binding PACA will include verbiage that contact will be in the best interest of the child. However, the legally binding PACA also gives birth parents an added layer of assurance that the adoptive family will follow through on their promises. Under a legally binding PACA, if a family were to cease contact with the birth parent(s) for no explained reason, the birth parent(s) could sue them for breach of contract.

While not every family will sign a legally binding PACA, they are becoming increasingly common. As such, we want every family to be prepared that this may be a possibility in their adoption. As a general rule, you should treat any contact you commit to in your APQ and at the time of your adoption opportunity as if it could be written into a legal contract and not commit to anything unless you are comfortable with it being legally binding.

What are the benefits of open adoption and contact with birth parents before, during and after placement?

There are numerous benefits of open adoption for all parties involved — but most importantly for the child.

Before placement, having contact will allow you to get to know one another and begin building a relationship. This can help all parties involved build a trusting foundation and help provide reassurance each step of the way. It allows prospective birth parents to get more comfortable with their adoption plan and the people they have chosen to be parents to their baby. All communication prior to birth provides details and information that you can share with your child when they have questions about their birth parents.

Creating a solid foundation before birth can also make the hospital time more relaxed and comfortable. Everyone will already be acquainted, and there won't be the added pressure of trying to get familiar with each other during this short period of time when emotions are heightened. Spending time with the birth parents in any capacity at the hospital can and should be a much-cherished time. Special memories for everyone, especially the child, can be created during this time, and the relationship can continue to build on an even deeper level.

The key to contact during placement is flexibility and empathy. While it is understandably a time of vulnerability for all, it can be an especially difficult and emotional time for the birth parents. You can provide a great deal of support and comfort to them at this time, which will only help to strengthen the bond you share.

After placement, openness and continued contact on any level continues to build the relationship and provide security and reassurance to everyone. For birth parents, it provides reassurance that the child is loved, is thriving and is having the type of life the birth parents imagined for him/her. It also provides security; contact provides confirmation that the adoptive family truly cares for the birth parent(s) and were not just in this process "to get the child." When a birth parent feels secure in

their adoption choice and secure in the relationship they have with the family, fears are diminished, and any need to try and seek out information in an unhealthy manner becomes unnecessary. Birth parents also feel comfort knowing that the child has access to them directly or through the adoptive parents if they have questions or want more contact in the future.

Open adoptions have also been shown to provide reassurance and comfort to the adoptive family in many ways. Besides having access to information for their child over the years, many families share that it provides them with a reassured sense of their role. They do not have any fears about the birth parents' intentions or a fear that they may reach out and make contact in an unhealthy way. Many say that contact actually helps reaffirm their role as Mom and/or Dad.

When families talk to their children from an early age about their adoption story, there will never be a time when the child doesn't know how they were brought into their family and who the special people are in their lives, like their birth parents. For many families, the relationship is comparable to a family member that you may not see all the time. The child will know they are connected to them in a very special way, but there is no confusion as to who their parents are.

Again, research shows that open adoption is most important for the child. Having contact with and information about their birth parents gives the adopted person important answers to questions they will have about their identity. When an adoptee has questions or wants to know their birth parents, it is not in any way a reflection of how they feel about their parents; having a desire to know is natural and healthy. Adopted persons will have questions and will think about their birth parents, so parents should make sure their child knows it is always a safe topic of conversation. Adopted persons involved in closed adoptions from the past often state that they wish they had more access to information and would have enjoyed knowing more about their birth family growing up.

Remember, open adoptions are not confusing for the child. For them, their adoption is just the way it always was. It was not a big event in their life like it was for the birth mother or adoptive family, as it is all they have ever known.

There are endless resources and information available about open adoption. You can and should continue educating yourselves about this topic through books, online videos and testimonials, adoptive family publications and support from other families and birth parents involved in similar situations. American Adoptions is always willing and able to help provide you with resources at any time.

What are potential challenges of open adoption and contact after birth?

While open adoption is overwhelmingly positive and has many benefits for everyone involved, challenges can arise. For example, birth parents may withdraw for a time, not following through with desired contact when they say they will, or they may expect more contact, texting or calling more often than agreed upon.

It is important that you approach open adoption with flexibility and understanding. Open adoption, like all relationships, will naturally ebb and flow over time. There will be times when birth parents

may have chaotic schedules, be busy with their own lives and families, or face changes in their life circumstances that make it difficult for them to maintain communication. On the other hand, there may be times when the birth parents do not have healthy coping mechanisms or healthy, supportive relationships in their lives and therefore come off as abrasive or needy as they deal with their grief post-placement. Sometimes, birth parents may even express this grief in hurtful ways by lashing out at the adoptive family. There may be differences in lifestyles, communication and coping styles between you and the birth family that need to be worked through at times. Often, these situations may not look much different than issues we face with other relationships in our lives with grandparents, in-laws, coworkers or friends.

These are not reasons to “go into hiding,” stop contact with birth parents or “close” an adoption. Rather, there needs to be open dialogue about what the issue is, why it is an issue and how to come to an agreed-upon resolution. There will be a need to listen to the other person’s point of view and reasoning and to respect their viewpoint, as well. Usually, we find that most issues are simply miscommunications or circumstances where one party did not even think about how their words or action may have affected the other party. We acknowledge that sometimes there may be issues that are more serious in nature, but rarely is stopping all contact the solution to any problem.

American Adoptions will be available to help provide guidance and support to all parties whenever necessary.

Why is ongoing contact so important to birth parents after the adoption?

Birth parents choose to have contact after the adoption for multiple reasons. One of the biggest reasons is for the security and peace of mind that they made the right decision by choosing adoption for their child. Through ongoing contact with the adoptive family, they can see how everyone is doing, and that provides reassurance and comfort. Birth parents feel love and respect from the family and often love and respect the family just as much as the child. When a birth parent does not receive updates or have any contact, they will often feel fearful about how the child is doing, have unresolved grief and loss and possibly feel regret about the adoption.

Many birth parents also feel it is very important for the child to have access to information about their medical history and biological family, and staying in contact provides a direct way for the child and adoptive parents to get that information and answers to other questions. Research shows that when a child has information and access to their birth family, it can help create a better sense of identity and a healthier view of their adoption story. Having information also provides security for an adopted person, because they do not have unanswered questions or holes in their life story. Birth parents also want to have contact to ensure their child will know why they chose adoption and that they love them.

A common fear birth parents have is that the child will not understand why they chose adoption, or that the child may be angry at them. Having contact diminishes this fear and provides the opportunity to explain their decision directly.

What is the birth parents' role in our lives?

A birth parent's role in a family's life is whatever the birth parent and family make it and desire it to be. Each open adoption looks different. There is no one-size-fits-all adoption relationship.

Many times, the birth parents' role would be much like an extended relative that you may see periodically, talk to on occasion and stay in touch with via texts or social media. Some have more frequent contact and may visit each year. Contact often ebbs and flows over the course of the relationship, and there may be disagreements or hurt feelings at times, just like with all other relationships in our lives. However, when the relationship is established and each side understands and trusts the other, healthy communication can happen, differences can be overcome and the relationship continues forward just like other important, cherished relationships.

When a birth parent chooses adoption, they understand that they are choosing you to be the parents of this child. They are under no misguided expectation that a family will look to them to assist with the parenting piece of this relationship. Most birth parents are afraid to ask for anything that may upset the adoptive family or be seen as interfering, as they truly do not want to offend or risk losing the relationship.

Again, it is really up to you and the birth parent(s) to decide how much involvement you are comfortable with. Healthy boundaries must be established and respected on both ends, and sometimes they will need to be reestablished over time. However, keeping the door open and being flexible in an open adoption is worth it, especially for the child.

Remember, American Adoptions is here to help you establish healthy boundaries, help answer any questions and give guidance in the future.

Who are typical prospective birth parents?

No two birth parents are exactly alike. While we will discuss some common characteristics of many birth parents below, just as many birth parents do not match these characteristics, and you may receive an opportunity with prospective birth parents who are very different from what you expect.

With that said, most mothers are in their second or third trimester of pregnancy when they create an adoption plan. They often have had minimal prenatal care due to the chaos in their day to day lives. Most will attempt to lessen or cease use of drugs or alcohol once they learn of the pregnancy if there was prior exposure, although many will continue to use tobacco products and marijuana. A percentage of expectant parents struggle with addiction - with a rise in methamphetamine and opiate use in recent years. Many mothers are between the ages of 20-40 and are already parenting at least one child. Most mothers have little financial or emotional support from family and friends, and the father is often not involved (or minimally involved) in the adoption process.

A prospective birth mother's life is often chaotic and filled with crisis at the time of her pregnancy. Often, this is because she is lacking resources and support, which is ultimately part of the reason she is choosing adoption. She is nervous about the process and concerned about what her child will think of her — even worried that the child will harbor anger towards her in the future for her

decision. She loves her child and wants to find the best possible parents for him or her. She is selflessly choosing adoption because she believes she cannot provide everything she wants for her child.

After she selects the adoptive parents, a big fear is being judged or adoptive parents backing out of the adoption plan. In addition, her biggest fear about choosing adoption is that she will be forgotten and agreed-upon correspondence, such as pictures and letters or future visits, will not be provided to her. Most birth mothers have similar fears and anxieties about the unknowns of adoption as adoptive families have.

While we often specifically discuss birth mothers throughout the manual, some adoptive families will receive an adoption opportunity where the birth father is very much involved. The adoptive family may have as much or even more information and contact with the birth father than the birth mother. Should your situation include an involved birth father, you will be provided information and guidance on how to handle contact with him.

How can we best prepare for contact with prospective birth parents?

You will be provided with information about the prospective birth parents when you are presented an adoption opportunity. Your Adoption Specialist will help guide you and provide you with suggestions as you get to know them. You will also receive a *Preparing for Your Adoption Opportunity* manual that provides detailed information about what questions to ask, how to best answer certain questions and what things potential birth parents may want to know about you.

In the meantime, while you are waiting, you should talk with others who have adopted about their experiences. American Adoptions can provide you with former adoptive family references that you can talk with and ask questions. There also are a lot of personal stories on our website that are helpful to review. In addition, you should review the prospective birth mother side of American Adoptions' website and read the personal stories posted so you can understand the birth parents' thoughts and feelings. There are also numerous books, publications and videos online that explore relationships between birth parents and adoptive families.

It is very important for you to walk in the prospective birth parents' shoes and identify with their fears so you can help comfort and relate to them. Many families find that, by doing these things, they become more comfortable having contact with birth parents, because they are better able to understand their thought process and intentions. Having open and trusting communication with the birth parents also increases their comfort with their placement decision, therefore increasing the chances of a successful adoption.

What if we talk with the prospective birth parents and they don't like us?

This is a common concern for adoptive families but is something that we rarely see. It is imperative that the expectant mother feel comfortable with the adoptive family she has chosen, so it is crucial that you prepare for contact with birth parents and be as open and flexible as possible. You will need to take on the role of providing support and comfort for the expectant mother so she feels

comfortable and you can establish a mutual trust. She needs to feel that you like her as a person and genuinely care about her, not just the baby. Contact with the birth parents should not be viewed as an interviewing process, but more like a casual conversation with friends.

There are some scenarios where prospective birth parents may request to set up calls with multiple adoptive families they are considering; this allows the prospective birth parent(s) to get to know potential adoptive parents better prior to choosing a specific family for an adoption opportunity. While this is not routinely part of the adoption process, a prospective birth parent may express interest in getting to know you along with some other families, then decide that another family is a better fit for their specific adoption plan. Try not to take this personally if it happens to you — it does not mean that the prospective birth parents do not “like” you, just that another family may have been a better fit for their adoption plan for any number of reasons.

Regardless of the situation, remember that the right adoption opportunity is out there for you, just as the right adoptive family is out there for every baby. This process is about finding the best possible fit for every prospective birth mother and adoptive family.

What if we don’t “click” with the expectant mother? Can we choose not to work with her?

A family should come into this process expecting that their lifestyle will not likely be similar to that of the expectant mother. Adoption requires a high level of stability for prospective adoptive families, while for many expectant parents; it is the lack of stability that has led them here.

It is possible for an adoption opportunity to be very successful, even when the adoptive family and expectant mother do not establish a close relationship or have similar personalities and interests. There are all types of adoptions and relationships between birth parents and adoptive families, and there is no right or wrong formula.

If you do not feel comfortable with aspects of the expectant mother’s personality or lifestyle, these concerns can be addressed with the Adoption Specialist, but they will have no bearing on the adoption opportunity. You cannot choose to back out of an adoption opportunity for personal reasons, such as not liking the birth parents.

Again, what is most important for an adoption to be successful is for the expectant mother to feel comfortable with the adoption plan.

What if the expectant mother’s desire for contact changes?

Many expectant mothers are unsure of the amount of contact they desire with the adoptive family in the initial stages of the adoption process. It’s only normal; they don’t know how they will feel at placement and beyond. They are likely experiencing adoption for the first time and have fears and concerns comparable to yours.

It is crucial that you are flexible and willing to adjust to changes that may occur. American Adoptions has no control over a mother who wants to change her adoption plan. When discussing future communication with a prospective birth mother, our adoption specialists are essentially asking

women to imagine how they may feel in the future and asking them to request anything that they think they may want at any point. Some women will ask for more communication up front, but end up not wanting as much when time comes. Others may start off feeling strongly that they do not want communication but, with time and as they become more comfortable with the adoptive family, request more.

You should go into your adoption plan understanding how the feelings and needs of the birth parents may change. Try to be flexible in regard to communication over time. It is not uncommon for contact to ebb and flow between birth parents and adoptive families. Some birth parents need more reassurance and contact right after placement when emotions are still raw, and frequency of contact will dissipate later on when they are busy with new life changes. Some birth parents may need more space at times to cope and move forward but will want more contact at other times.

When an open relationship is formed with trust and communication, everyone can feel comfortable knowing that the door is never closed. As the child gets older and may have contact with the birth parents, there may be need for dialogue about what is and is not appropriate when increasing or decreasing levels of contact. For instance, it may be hurtful to a child who is expecting a phone call with their birth mother if she chooses to decrease contact and does not follow through. These types of situations can usually be worked out when everyone is communicating openly and appropriate boundaries and expectations are established and agreed upon.

Ultimately, if an expectant mother decides prior to birth that she wants more visitation than what was initially agreed upon (or contact that is outside of your APQ preferences), you can talk with your Adoption Specialist and can be removed from the adoption opportunity if you are not comfortable. It is important that the prospective birth mother find a family that can fulfill the contact she needs for her adoption plan — and that you are matched with a prospective birth mother who is comfortable with what you can provide.

What if we want an open adoption and the prospective birth mother wants it closed or wants less contact than we desire? Do we have the option to decline the opportunity?

American Adoptions does not allow a family to turn down an opportunity if a prospective birth mother does not want openness in her adoption. Openness is something that we strongly encourage on both sides, but ultimately, if a prospective birth mother feels it is best for her not to have contact, we have no option but to respect her wishes.

American Adoptions will provide education to a prospective birth mother about the benefits that open adoption provides for everyone, especially the child, in hopes that she may become more comfortable and eventually decide to have more open communication. Sometimes birth parents start off not desiring any contact but, with time and changes in their own lives, end up wanting contact after all, sometimes years later. It can be comforting for birth parents who start off with very little or no communication to know that the family is open and willing to embrace a relationship with them when they feel emotionally ready.

How do pictures and letters work?

In addition to more casual updates through phone calls, email and social media, most birth parents also want to receive hard-copy pictures and letters after placement. In most adoptions, birth mothers request hard-copy letters and pictures one or two times a year until the child is 18. They are usually provided around the child's birthday and then again six months later.

These are minimum standards, and many families go above and beyond to communicate with the mother through other forms of contact, as well. Other means of sharing photos and updates with the birth parents, such as through photo-sharing sites like Shutterfly, may be used when agreed upon. Some prospective birth parents may prefer these alternatives to hard-copy photos if they move a lot or do not have a stable address, if they don't want others living in their home to see/receive the updates, etc. However, it is good to still send hard copies if the birth parent(s) request them, and pictures and letters are still included in our standard post-adoption contact agreement to ensure birth parents are receiving these updates, at the minimum.

After placement, you will receive an email reminding you of your post-adoption contact agreement and the due dates for your pictures and letters to the birth parent(s). When an update is due, families and birth parents will mail their pictures and letters to each other directly.

If you lose contact with your child's birth parent(s) for any reason, please notify the adoption agency. You should continue to create and hold your pictures and letters for the birth parent(s) in case they regain contact in the future.

It is extremely important to send letters and pictures on time and in the manner agreed upon in your contract, even if you do not hear anything from the birth parent(s) in return.

If we are updating the birth parent(s) through email, text messages, etc., do we still need to send hard-copy pictures and letters?

No; if you have direct contact with the birth family through text, email and other forms of communication, it is okay to just continue with that contact. However, we would suggest asking the birth parent(s) if they would like hard copies as well. Even if you are updating the birth parent(s) another way, it is a good idea to mail hard copies of photos occasionally, if the birth parents request them. Many birth parents love receiving professional photos or school photos you have done of your child. You can mail these updates directly to the birth parent(s) if they are okay providing their mailing address to you.

Keep in mind that some birth parents don't have access to print out photos, and many appreciate the opportunity to display them in frames or keep them in a special photo album or scrapbook. If periodic picture and letter updates are included in your post-adoption contact agreement, you should continue to send those pictures and letters on the agreed-upon schedule to ensure that, at minimum, the birth parent(s) are receiving these updates, even as other forms of contact (phone calls, text messages, email, etc.) naturally ebb and flow.

Why are these post-adoption updates so important?

After the baby is born, it is a time of intense happiness for the adoptive family, but it is a time of grief and sadness for the birth parent(s). While they are glad to give a better life for their baby, choosing adoption is still extremely hard. Birth parents feel an intense loss, especially during the first year. Post-adoption contact can help with the uncertainty they feel from the separation. Adoptive families who delay sending updates increase this grief and anxiety.

Pictures and letters, as well as other forms of post-adoption contact, are a very important part of the healing process for the birth parent(s). Receiving updates is a great way for the birth family to know that you are all OK and that their child is happy and healthy. This contact reassures the birth parent(s) that they made the right decision and allow them to move forward with life and have a healthy acceptance of their decision. The unknown is always worse, and if they are left with no information, it may be harder for them to find acceptance with their adoption choice, and they may feel angry or hurt.

When we don't have answers, it is easy for us to imagine the worst. One family provided an example to us: They raised a puppy and then sent him off to a good home, but were left knowing nothing about how he was doing. They felt silly making this comparison, but they were able to acknowledge that if they felt this way about their puppy, a birth mother would feel incredibly worse if she were left knowing nothing about her child. For them, this clicked.

If your child's birth parent(s) want ongoing communication with you, your child will know that being placed for adoption was a very loving decision made with a great deal of thought. By showing respect and concern for the birth parents, you show that same respect and care for your child.

Many families fear the birth parents will want to locate them or will change their mind about the adoption if they receive regular updates about the child. This is not true. Exchanging emails and sending photos to your child's birth parents should be viewed similarly to exchanging emails and sending pictures to a member of your extended family. This process is not an invasion into your family and your life, but it is a window for you to show how thankful you are for the birth parents' decision that allowed you to become a family. After receiving placement and spending time with the birth parents, most adoptive families find that this fear diminishes. They look forward to providing updates because they are so proud of the child.

In our experience, the relationships built by ongoing post-adoption contact can be significant. This exchange can also be great way to keep in touch with the birth parents for future medical information.

American Adoptions can help with communication if needed, so we encourage both birth and adoptive parents to keep current contact information on file at our agency.

Won't sending updates to the birth parent(s) just remind them of their loss and make them regret their decision?

Some adoptive parents worry that birth parents will be sad when they see pictures and updates of their child; they think these updates will only serve as a reminder of the birth parents' grief and loss. Sometimes, families fear that when a birth parent sees how happy their child is and how well they are doing in their adoptive family, it will make the birth parent realize what they missed out on by deciding not to parent.

However, these fears are completely unfounded. In fact, contact with you can actually help to reassure your child's birth parent(s) that they made the right decision. Remember, they chose adoption because they wanted to give their child a happy life full of opportunities. They want to know that their child is thriving because of that decision.

After placement, can we exchange gifts with our child's birth parents for the holidays and/or their birthday? How does that work, and what guidelines do we need to follow?

Yes. If you have direct contact with your child's birth family and they have shared their mailing address with you, you can send gifts and correspondence to them directly, as you would with any other friend or loved one.

While there are guidelines in place for families who want to give the prospective birth parent(s) gifts during the adoption process, you are generally free to send any gift you'd like after the adoption has been finalized. If you are concerned that a gift may be misconstrued as "payment" to the birth parent(s), you can always reach out to your Adoptive Family Specialist for guidance.

It is very common for birth parents to want to send gifts and other correspondence to the child and/or the adoptive family, as well. Some birth parents may want to send a graduation announcement, a wedding or baby announcement or photos of their other children to the adoptive family in the future. Other birth parents want to send a holiday or birthday gift to the child each year. For many birth parents, these gifts are their small way of contributing to the child's life. As your child grows up, it can also be important to them to know how their birth parent(s) are doing, and these items can be a meaningful reminder that their birth parents love and are thinking of them. American Adoptions asks that adoptive families graciously accept items sent from a birth parent, as they would gifts from any other friend or loved one.

What should we include in our updates to the birth parents?

There are no hard-and-fast rules for what to include in your updates to the birth parents. In general, you can share the same types of updates and information about your child and family as you would if you were catching up with a friend. Sometimes, an update may simply be a quick text letting your child's birth parents know you're thinking of them or telling them about your child's latest milestone — a picture of their first smile, a video of their first steps, etc.

But, when it comes to longer updates, like the pictures and letters you send to your child's birth parents every six months, you may want some additional guidance about what to include. Here are a few tips you can keep in mind as you put together these updates:

- **Include a minimum of 8-10 photos.** The more you can include the better. Try to choose pictures that capture your child's personality, the activities he or she is involved in and the life he or she has in your family.
- **Capture milestones.** Include pictures and descriptions of special moments, like your child standing, rolling over and smiling.
- **Show life with your family.** Choose pictures of and tell stories about your child interacting with their parents, visiting their grandparents and playing with siblings.
- **Show their interests.** As your child gets older, send photos you take at their dance and piano recitals, sports games, and on family vacations. Write about their progress in the activities they are interested in, and describe their favorites (foods, toys, colors, hobbies, activities, etc.)
- **Share their progress.** When your child is an infant, you might write about their developmental milestones and health updates; as they get older, share information about how their sports teams are doing, what they're learning in school, etc.
- **Include mementos.** You may want to include pictures your child has drawn or notes they have written for their birth family.

How do post-adoption visits with the birth parents work?

Adoptive families are required to be open to at least one in-person visit with the birth parent(s) within the first five years of placement, and some adoptive families schedule more regular in-person visits with the birth family as their child grows up. These visits can be nerve-racking at first, especially if you haven't had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with your child's birth parent(s) in person.

Your post-adoption contact agreement may address some of the basics of future visits with your child's birth parents, but it will be up to you and them to coordinate the details when the time comes. Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you schedule in-person visits with your child's birth family:

- **Plan an activity.** Many adoptive families find it helpful to have a specific, structured activity planned that everyone will enjoy. Going to a zoo or aquarium, spending a day at a theme park or beach, making a pottery or painting project at an art studio, and even playing on a playground are all possibilities.
- **Set expectations ahead of time.** It is a good idea for adoptive families and birth parent(s) to discuss their expectations for the visit ahead of time, like pre-determining how much time everyone will spend together, who will be present at the visit, etc.

- **Be flexible.** Visits can be emotional for everyone involved, especially early on. During the visit, your child's birth parent(s) may request more or less time with you and your child. Try to be understanding and make reasonable adjustments to your plans when you can.
- **Put the birth parent(s) at ease.** Birth parents are often worried about stepping on adoptive parents' toes, so they may be uncomfortable speaking up or making requests during visits. Take the lead and try to make them feel comfortable. For example, if you have a visit while your child is still an infant, you might ask the birth parent(s) if they'd like to hold the baby; if they say no, you may wait a little while and then offer again. It can also be helpful to have some topics of conversation ready to go ahead of time. For example, if the birth mother is in school, you might ask her how classes are going; if she has other children, ask about them.

How can social media impact our adoption?

It is becoming more common for adoptive families and birth parents to find and communicate with each other via social media such as Facebook, Instagram or personal blogs. Before becoming active with our agency, you should review any online personal accounts and search yourselves to identify what information comes up. If desired, you should set any social media accounts to private at this time. If you choose to post or share any information about your adoption journey, you should be careful to not share any specific information about any possible adoption opportunity that may come up for you. Instead, just stick with general adoption information.

We ask families to keep in mind the potential for any adoption opportunity to not end in a successful placement. If information has been posted about your progression in the adoption journey, it can be difficult to answer questions or explain any setback to others who may not fully understand the process. This can be emotionally difficult, so American Adoptions advises that you refrain from using social media to publish information about your adoption. If you have public profiles, you must take into consideration that a prospective birth parent may search and locate your profile, and therefore view what is being posted (which could include your posts, plus any and all comments on it by other people — positive or negative — that are out of your control).

If you choose to create a social media profile to share information or connect with birth parents, it is advised that you not complete this until after the adoption is complete. Then, rather than sharing a public profile or one linked to your friends or family members, you may decide to create an entirely new account and only grant access to the birth parent(s). This allows for control of who is viewing the information posted (including any pictures) and keeps any uncontrolled parties from posting anything that may be hurtful to the birth parents or the relationship you share with them. As you create your post-adoption contact agreement (PACA), your adoption specialist can also help you create a social media plan that addresses the use of social media in your open adoption.

Will American Adoptions stay in contact with everyone in the future and help with our future contact after placement?

Most families and birth parents are able to find a natural pattern of contact within their relationship as they would with any other friendship or relationship, and a professional will not need to be

involved. It is important that you and the birth parents learn to communicate openly and directly with one another, because this is how meetings and phone calls will be arranged throughout your relationship.

However, we want you to feel supported in your relationship with your child's birth parents, which is why we are always here to provide guidance and answer questions in the years to come. You can always contact your Adoptive Family Specialist with questions or advice about your post-placement relationship.

American Adoptions also maintains contact information for both parties, and we will assist you in reconnecting if you lose touch over time. ***If you do lose contact with your child's birth family, you should notify American Adoptions immediately.*** We will attempt to contact the birth parents on your behalf and, if we can't reach them, make a note in our system in case they reach out in the future seeking to reconnect. In the meantime, you should continue gathering and saving your updates to send to the birth parent(s) if and when direct contact can be regained.

What happens if we don't hear back from a birth parent when we send them updates? Should we continue sending them?

Yes. Just because you don't get a response from the birth parent(s), that doesn't necessarily mean they aren't still looking at enjoying your updates. Sometimes, birth parents may just be busy with their own lives, or they may find that they need to take a break from their contact with you while they deal with their grief or address other challenges in their personal lives. This doesn't mean they won't want to resume contact with you again when they're ready. Adoptive families should always keep sending updates to the birth parents on the agreed-upon schedule, even if they don't get a response, until they hear otherwise from the birth parent or the agency.

Even if a birth parent loses contact with you and does not respond to your updates for several years, you should continue to adhere to your post-adoption contract. If you are concerned that the birth parents are no longer receiving your updates because their contact information has changed, you should notify American Adoptions.

If you cannot reach the birth parents and stop sending updates for a time, you need to be prepared for the possibility that the birth parent may make contact again and may want to resume regular communication. It is not uncommon for some birth parents to disappear for a time as they process the feelings of their adoption or deal with other life-altering events, then reappear months or years later and want to initiate contact. If this happens and the birth parent contacts American Adoptions, we will notify you that the birth parent has made contact again and ask that you resume your contact with them.

If and when a birth parent reaches out to re-establish contact, you will need to catch them up on the time missed. For this reason, some adoptive families continue to prepare and set aside pictures and letters at the intervals of their post-adoption contact agreement in anticipation that the birth parent will reappear so they have things ready and do not have to dig out old pictures and information.

How do we navigate open adoption and contact with birth parents for this child if we don't have any contact with our other child(ren)'s birth parents?

We recognize that this can be a concern for families who navigate adoptions that may look and feel very different from each other. However, trying to create an adoption plan that has the same contact as a previous adoption is unrealistic. Remember, contact desires can and do change over time.

The first important thing to remember is that each child's story is unique and special in its own way. Just as families who have biological and adopted child(ren) must maneuver those differences, there are going to be differences in every adoption story, as well. There are many families who successfully navigate having an open adoption with one child's birth parents and not with another child's.

You should give each child every opportunity to have information and the ability for open contact, should the opportunity present itself. It's not fair to take the opportunity away from one child because another child's birth parent does not desire that. Sometimes the child who does not have contact with his/her birth parents can benefit from a sibling having an open relationship with their birth parents. Being able to talk to their siblings' birth mother can provide reassurance to them that their birth mother chose adoption out of a tremendous amount of love for them, regardless of the amount of contact she desires and how the circumstances may have differed.

The important thing is finding an age-appropriate way to explain the differences in each situation, provide all information possible and include all children in contact with any birth parents.

What if we are ultimately not comfortable with contact with birth parents? Can we only work with a prospective birth parent who doesn't want any contact after the adoption?

No. American Adoptions is unable to assist families who are only interested in closed adoption situations. We recognize that many families have fears coming into the adoption process, and it is very normal. Some families who are beginning the adoption process say they don't know if they will feel comfortable having a visit after birth or sending pictures and letters because it may take away from their feeling of being "true" parents to the child.

It is important to understand that having a relationship and contact with birth parents is in the best interest of the child you are going to parent. It will actually help you feel more comfortable in your roles over time.

If you do not feel comfortable with the level of communication that American Adoptions requires, then we may not be the best agency for you. There are a lot of really great resources out there that you can utilize in order to learn more about openness in adoption and hopefully gain a level of comfort regarding contact with birth parents. We need our hopeful parents to embrace the idea of openness in their adoption, as well as all the benefits that openness can provide to the child and to their relationship with the birth mother.

If you have done further education and find that one of you or both of you is still struggling to 100 percent commit to what American Adoptions requires, then our agency is not the best fit for your family. Please locate a professional that has guidelines that you do feel comfortable with. It is never good for a family to try and make it work or ignore their true feelings, as it will create problems later on. Ultimately, we want each family to have comfort in the adoption plan they create and feel comfortable with the adoption professional they choose.

4. Substance Use during Pregnancy

In this section of the APQ, you will be asked to fill out what substances you are open to the expectant mother using during the pregnancy and specify how often an expectant mother uses each substance.

This section allows you to select different usage amounts for each substance: “occasionally” (1-5 times), “monthly,” “weekly” or “daily” during pregnancy. If you are not open to a particular substance, simply leave the line blank and do not check any of the boxes. When completing this section of your APQ, it is imperative to do your research and to be as open and flexible as possible. It is also important to remember that the information is being self-disclosed by the mother and that it may be subjective. What she may consider daily use, you may consider weekly or vice versa. It may also be difficult for her to remember every possible time she used something during the pregnancy.

Please read this entire section of the manual to find out how often American Adoptions works with expectant mothers who are using certain substances and what research we have found about each substance so you can make the best decisions for you.

This section of the APQ can often be difficult for adoptive parents to complete because if this were your pregnancy, you would probably not choose to take any illegal or potentially harmful substances. Often, when a person first considers adopting a child, they refuse to consider the possibility of adopting one whose mother used drugs or alcohol during pregnancy. On the surface, this seems like a reasonable course to take, but careful research into the matter may help one make a more educated decision.

Many doctors, social workers and psychologists have spent decades studying the effects of prenatal drug and alcohol exposure, and these studies have yielded widely varied conclusions. Much of the research shows that environment after birth plays a much larger role in determining the child's development than prenatal substance abuse. For example, a child exposed to cocaine may show behavior and educational delays when raised by the birth parents; however, a child exposed to cocaine who is removed from the environment will often show little or no delays and may even excel among his/her peers.

Prenatal substance use is an unfortunate reality in today's world, and by ruling out prenatal-exposed babies, you are ruling out a significant portion of the adoptable population, many of which will be healthy and lead productive lives.

What does the research show?

Research on the effects of prenatal alcohol and drug exposure on children began in the 1970s and continues today. The tone of this research has changed dramatically since its beginnings.

Findings during early investigations were largely pessimistic, predicting that these children would not be able to function normally. Around 1993, the tone began to shift, as longer-term studies began to show great variations in the outcomes for these children. Suddenly, there was irrefutable evidence that some of these children demonstrated normal long-term development.

As research continues, the focus is now shifting from the outcomes that may be associated with prenatal drug and alcohol exposure to the relationship between the prenatal and the postnatal environment. The Child Welfare League of America published a book in 2000 called *Adoption and Prenatal Alcohol and Drug Exposure*. This book focuses on studies that have been done in this area and attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the impact of prenatal substance exposure on children's immediate health and well-being?
2. What are the long-term implications for children's health and development when there is a history of prenatal exposure to alcohol or drugs?
3. What role does a positive postnatal environment play in remedying the effects of prenatal substance exposure?

All of these are difficult questions to answer, and even careful scrutiny of the available research leaves one with a cloudy picture. No one can know for sure the impact of prenatal drug or alcohol exposure on a child, just as no one can predict how a child will develop when no prenatal exposure occurs. What is encouraging and exciting about this book is that it makes one stop and think before placing an unwarranted label on these children. Is it possible that taking a child from an unstable and unhealthy environment and immediately placing him/her in a positive environment can change the long-term outcome for the child?

Opening your mind to these children will make more adoption situations available to you. We at American Adoptions do not want any family to accept an adoption opportunity with a child that they are not comfortable raising; however, after careful research, you may find that you are more comfortable with a wide range of situations.

Because the research on prenatal substance exposure is always changing, we encourage every family to do their own thorough research to determine what situations they are and are not comfortable with. MothertoBaby.org is a great resource to learn more about the effects different substances can have on a developing baby, and CreatingaFamily.org has an entire course dedicated to prenatal exposure for hopeful adoptive parents. You can find the course at: www.adoptioned.org/courses/introduction-to-prenatal-exposure.

Who should I ask to learn more about prenatal drug exposure?

Traditionally, families will go to their personal physician or a local pediatrician to ask questions about prenatal-exposed babies. This is a sensible first step, but a better move might be to seek out a doctor who has actually had experience with this type of situation. Just as you would choose a podiatrist for a foot ailment versus a general practitioner, you should choose a doctor with this specific knowledge to address your questions. For the most part, doctors from middle-class suburban areas are not going to have as much firsthand knowledge about drug-exposed infants. There are some suggested resources you can find in your online account under "Helpful Links and Resources" that may help with researching this topic.

Information provided on such drug and alcohol effects in this section was researched from various scientific studies and health/pregnancy books. Families are often scared of drug use and assume use of drugs guarantees birth defects, which is not typically the case.

Many studies on the negative effects of drug use were performed on animals. Results from studies done on humans cannot be solely attributed to the drug due to many environmental factors with the pregnant mothers, such as diet, vitamins and genetic coding. Furthermore, studies on intelligence or developmental delays have to consider the influence of environmental factors, such as the child's home life, educational system, etc. Unfortunately, studies illustrating the negative effects of drugs and alcohol produce vague and scientifically weak evidence.

In conclusion, drugs or alcohol can have varying effects depending on the frequency and amount of use, and one cannot draw conclusions without carefully considering a child's environment and the major impact it has on a child's outcome.

Does American Adoptions drug test expectant mothers?

At American Adoptions, we **do not** perform drug testing on pregnant mothers; the information regarding drug use comes from their confidential disclosure to us.

There are several reasons why we do not require our mothers to be drug tested. Testing is intrusive and often causes distrust by the expectant mother. In the past, these types of requests have resulted in many non-drug users withdrawing from our adoption program. When asked to do drug screens, non-drug users are often offended and feel our staff and/or the adoptive family does not trust them. Besides putting the adoption at risk, drug tests are inconsistent and inaccurate.

We know that we can find an adoptive family for every situation. So, from the agency's perspective, we prefer to encourage our expectant mothers to be honest about their use, rather than force every mother be tested. Most women are typically honest about drug use.

The only exception for testing will be if the obstetrician suspects drug use and requests such drug screens.

Adoptive families are allowed to perform drug screening on the baby at their own expense only after custody has been established. If drug exposure is discovered at any point during the adoption

opportunity that conflicts with the APQ, the adoptive family may withdraw from the situation. It should be clearly understood that the agency is not liable for any misrepresentations made by prospective birth parents.

What types of situations are typical for American Adoptions, and how will my APQ preferences affect my exposure to potential birth parents and my wait time?

Below, we will share with you what your APQ preferences may mean for you, given the substances most commonly used by expectant mothers. Remember, you should always research this information for yourself and make decisions based on your comfort level.

When it comes to cases that involve substance use, we often have fewer adoptive family options to show to a prospective birth mother. If you are comfortable being more open and willing to be considered/shown in these opportunities, it can play a part in potentially decreasing your wait time.

Cigarettes/Vaping (Tobacco): *Adoptive families joining American Adoptions must be open to an expectant mother who smokes cigarettes or uses e-cigarettes (vape) daily.* Cigarette smoking is the most common addiction among pregnant women in the United States and therefore can be very difficult for a person to quit, especially during a stressful and emotional time in life such as an unplanned pregnancy.

If an adoptive family is not open to considering an expectant mother who vapes or smokes cigarettes, they may cut their exposure to all potential birth parents by more than half. Therefore, adoptive families are not given an option and must be open to daily smoking of cigarettes.

The possible effects most commonly associated with cigarette smoking are low birth weight, asthma and allergies. However, these effects can often be present in babies whose mothers have not smoked cigarettes. Often, mothers who have smoked during their pregnancies deliver full-term babies and/or babies who do not experience allergies or asthma. Less is known about the potential health effects of e-cigarettes; however, some groups argue that vaping is likely to be much less harmful to pregnant women and their babies than continuing to smoke cigarettes.

It is important to remember that one cannot be certain how much an expectant mother is smoking or vaping because it is subjective; what she may categorize as monthly, you may categorize as weekly, so this is why a family must be open to any amount of smoking or vaping. Nobody can be with an expectant mother at all times to know the extent of her smoking.

Alcohol: Alcohol is one of the most common substances used by the adults in the United States in general. While considering alcohol, it is important to understand that we are seeing mostly unplanned pregnancies - situations in which women are not paying attention to their body the way that a woman who is planning to become pregnant would be. Therefore, it is common for us to see women who had a few alcoholic drinks before they knew they were pregnant. It is well known that alcohol is not healthy during a pregnancy; therefore, most women cease use entirely after learning they are pregnant.

It should be noted that alcohol used in excess during the entire pregnancy can have some of the most devastating effects of any prenatal substance exposure. Alcohol is the leading known cause of birth defects, and excessive drinking can lead to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

American Adoptions may not always be able to obtain exact amounts of alcohol consumed due to the mother's self-disclosure and her recollection of events. Many mothers will say that they have consumed alcohol occasionally (one to five times) during the pregnancy. Most often, we hear that a mother drank in the first weeks or months of pregnancy prior to knowing of the pregnancy. This usually falls into the occasional category or monthly category. If an adoptive family is open to accepting an expectant mother who discloses alcohol use during the pregnancy, it does not automatically mean they are open to adopting a baby with FAS; this would be considered special needs, as FAS is a leading cause of intellectual disabilities.

Marijuana: This is typically the second-most common substance that mothers will use during pregnancy. More than 19 million people in the United States use marijuana and with many states legalizing marijuana for medical and recreational use, these numbers continue to grow. By some estimates, approximately 14 percent of pregnant women use marijuana to some extent. The number is not near as high as expectant mothers who smoke cigarettes, but often a mother may smoke marijuana recreationally, especially at the beginning of her pregnancy. Many expectant parents who utilize marijuana will continue to use it at a weekly to even daily frequency throughout the pregnancy.

Research on marijuana use during pregnancy shows effects to the baby that are very similar to those of smoking cigarettes. Some believe that the effects of marijuana use during pregnancy are far less than smoking cigarettes, and research confirms this belief. No lasting effects on motor development have been reported. An adoptive family who feels comfortable with an expectant mother who smokes marijuana may see increased exposure to potential birth parents.

Additional Substances (Cocaine, Methamphetamine, Ecstasy, Speed, Heroin, Methadone, Suboxone, etc.): If you're considering openness to additional substances opiates methadone and methamphetamine are probably the three most commonly used by pregnant mothers we come in contact with.

Use of methamphetamine among pregnant women is rising. Research varies on the long-term effects on a child exposed to these substances during pregnancy. Many of the problems and difficulties may be more directly related to environment than to exposure. While withdrawal and agitation can be present, it appears that most often these infants are discharged with the same course of treatment and in the same amount of time as infants not exposed during pregnancy.

If you're considering these substances, as well as heroin, ecstasy, speed or methadone, we strongly recommend that you take time and do your research on each individual drug and its effects. American Adoptions has completed many adoptions with cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and methadone-exposed infants who are reportedly healthy and developing on target. Your Adoption Specialist would be glad to share stories and provide references to families who have adopted drug-

exposed children, if you are interested in learning more. This information is vital, and whatever your preferences are, it is important you are fully educated.

Antidepressants: Many expectant mothers may be prescribed antidepressants during their pregnancy to help them handle emotions of anxiety and sadness. If an expectant mother is taking antidepressants, it is likely that she has been prescribed the medication by her doctor and he or she feels they are safe, or that she was taking them prior to learning of her pregnancy. Depression and/or feelings of depression are very common in prospective birth parents, as it is often a result of the situation they are facing or a lack of resources and support. You will be provided information about this or any prescriptions the prospective birth mother may be taking during the pregnancy.

What if the father has used drugs?

Research continually shows that drug use by the prospective birth father has no bearing on the baby. Drug use can affect sperm mobility, but it does not have any bearing on the child's health. This should not be considered a factor when choosing to accept or decline a situation.

**Note: There are many drugs and substances that are not listed on your APQ that an expectant mother could use. If the mother is using any substance or medication that is not present on your APQ, you will be provided this information when being presented with the adoption opportunity. That way, you can decide your comfort level with moving forward.*

**Note: The information provided here is not intended to be medical advice. American Adoptions is not a medical professional, and while we can share general information about trends and situations we have witnessed in our experience, an adoptive family should consult with a medical professional.*

5. Prospective Birth Parent Medical and Family History

This section of the APQ addresses your comfort level with the prospective birth parents' medical history. When an expectant mother makes an adoption plan, she completes a self-disclosed medical history of whether she or members of her family have cancer, depression, etc. This information is a voluntary self-disclosure and it will be shared with you as part of the adoption opportunity.

When completing this section of your APQ, it is important to be open because it is unlikely to find anyone with a spotless family medical history. We realize that there are many other conditions that we have not listed on this page of your APQ. The items listed on the APQ are those that are most common in family histories and/or that are most likely to be genetic. Any other medical information that is shared by the prospective birth parents will also be provided to you.

It is very important to understand that the medical history provided to you may be limited by the expectant mother's knowledge. For example, some women are not close to their family and therefore cannot provide a detailed report of their family medical history. Some expectant mothers have been adopted themselves and have very limited information about their own medical history. It is also likely that there will be limited or no information on the father's family medical history, because approximately 70 percent of birth fathers are unknown or not involved with the adoption.

An adoptive family cannot reject an adoption situation because of lack of information. Everything that is shared by the prospective birth parents will be provided to you with the adoption opportunity, and you will be expected to make your decision based on the information at hand.

Below are some commonly asked questions regarding this topic.

What common medical conditions should we consider being open to in our APQ?

Medical conditions that are commonly seen in prospective birth parents and/or their extended families include cancer, diabetes, depression, ADD/ADHD and bipolar disorder.

American Adoptions does prefer that adoptive families research and carefully consider being as open as possible to different health conditions. It is highly unlikely to get a complete medical history of both prospective birth parents, so it is possible that a condition could exist and be unknown.

When considering mental health conditions (depression, bipolar disorder, ADD/ADHD, etc.), it is important to consider misdiagnosis as well as environmental factors (such as socioeconomic status, abuse, family systems, etc.), which can increase the likelihood of these conditions. It is common for a prospective birth parent considering an adoption plan to have feelings of situational depression and/or anxiety and even be diagnosed with depression.

Many different medical opinions exist about the genetic predisposition of mental health conditions. There are many instances where one is diagnosed with a mental health disorder and has no family history of the condition. Likewise, there are many instances where an individual has a family history of mental health disorders and it is not passed on. It should also be noted that as these disorders become more openly discussed and diagnosed within our society, American Adoptions is seeing more self-reporting of mental health conditions. Expectant parents in the process of adoption are often coming from difficult backgrounds and tough situations. Mental health conditions are commonly experienced and expected given their environment/circumstances.

What about sexually transmitted diseases?

There are many sexually transmitted diseases not listed on your APQ that are seen in some adoption situations. This information will be provided to you with the adoption opportunity or when it has been disclosed to American Adoptions. You should recognize that many STDs can be managed during the pregnancy and delivery to ensure the baby is not affected. However, because risk to the baby can vary widely depending on the STD and how it has been treated, your Adoption Specialist will speak with you about any known STDs on a case-by-case basis.

Can I expect to receive information about the father?

In most adoptions, the expectant mother's medical and family history information can be provided to you; however, in the majority of cases, the father is not involved with the adoption process. In fact, this is a common reason why many expectant mothers place their child for adoption. As a result, it is generally much more difficult to obtain detailed background information on the birth

father, and most mothers are able to provide limited or no information on the father's medical and family history. In many adoptions, only general physical traits are provided about the father.

You cannot accept or decline a potential adoption opportunity based on a father's lack of involvement. You should be prepared that you may learn very little or nothing about the father. You also need to be prepared that there may be more than one possible father, and it may never be determined who the baby's biological father is. Regardless of the number of potential birth fathers involved, termination of all birth father rights will be pursued. For more information about legal issues and risks associated with unknown birth fathers, review "Chapter 9: Legal Considerations."

**Note: Due to the likelihood that you will only be provided with the expectant mother's medical history, it is beneficial to be more open when selecting medical conditions. For example, an unknown birth father may have bipolar disorder or cancer in his family history, and this information would never be known. This is a good reason to be more open when considering what conditions you are accepting of in the expectant mother's medical history.*

Can I expect to receive prenatal records prior to accepting an adoption opportunity?

Most adoption opportunities take place prior to American Adoptions having access to prenatal records. You cannot reject an adoption opportunity because there are no prenatal records to review. You also cannot delay an adoption opportunity until prenatal records are available.

Some expectant mothers do not receive regular prenatal care prior to working with American Adoptions due to lack of support and resources. This does not mean that the mother has not been taking care of herself or that the baby will not be born healthy. If American Adoptions were to delay adoption opportunities or force an expectant mother to receive prenatal care prior to working with us, trust would be lost and she may decide not to place her baby for adoption. Most adoption opportunities occur without prenatal records available at the time. This should not be alarming.

American Adoptions strongly encourages prenatal care and will attempt to set up services as soon as possible for any woman who has not had regular care. If the expectant mother has been receiving regular prenatal care, American Adoptions will request the prenatal records as quickly as possible, but because we are working with doctor offices and clinics, we cannot always access them as quickly as you would like. Due to confidentiality laws (HIPAA) and release procedures, this process can be lengthy.

When prenatal records are received anytime during an adoption opportunity, they will be forwarded to the adoptive family immediately. If any new information is received that does not match the family's APQ, the adoptive family may remove themselves from the adoption opportunity.

What do adoptive families need to prepare for and agree to in regard to medical care for the child?

American Adoptions requires all families to follow well visit and vaccination schedules per the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. If the family has any reasons that would cause them to not seek medical care or

vaccinations for the child to be adopted, these reasons need to be discussed thoroughly to ensure they will not hinder the family's adoption process with American Adoptions. American Adoptions also requires families to provide proof of health insurance for the child to be adopted.

What if a family has an exemption for vaccinating a child?

If a family has an exemption recognized by their state of residence, they must provide clear documentation evidencing the exemption during their home study and review process.

When an exemption is provided, the adoptive family must understand that it may cause issues in their adoption process if the birth parent's state does not allow for similar exemptions. American Adoptions is a National Adoption agency and therefore must always consider what is required and permissible in all 50 states, not just the state of the adoptive family. It is impossible to predict what state an adoptive family will adopt from and what the guidelines or exemptions in that state will be regarding vaccination.

In some cases, your adoption may require the consent of another agency or person outside of American Adoptions and they may require vaccinations before consenting to the adoption.

Are there any other reasons American Adoptions will allow a family not to vaccinate?

American Adoptions will also recognize medical exemptions whereby the family provides a written statement signed by a licensed physician recommending against or delaying vaccinations for the child.

6. Miscellaneous Situations

This section of the APQ asks you to consider scenarios that American Adoptions sees from time to time.

Rape – This is probably the most common miscellaneous situation we see. A rape situation most often is an acquaintance rape where the expectant mother knows her assailant or where she was under the influence of a substance and cannot remember the sexual encounter. These scenarios are common. It could also refer to a situation where the attacker is completely unknown, but this is much less common.

You need to be open to each type of situation if you state you are open to rape. In most rape situations, prospective birth father medical/social history is not available, as the prospective birth father is unknown or uncooperative in providing his information. If an expectant mother is raped and does not know the race of her attacker, our agency will then send her profiles of adoptive families open to every race.

If you are considering not opening your APQ up to a rape situation due to not being able to receive prospective birth father medical/social history, please keep in mind that many of our adoption opportunities involve situations where a rape did not occur and prospective birth father medical/social history is still not available.

Multiples – American Adoptions probably places one to five sets of multiples per year. We will always place multiples together with the same family. If a family marks this option, they will be shown to expectant mothers who are having multiples. The cost for the adoption of twins/triplets is the same as the cost for one newborn; however, medical expenses and court filing costs may be increased.

Sibling Groups – This is also a very rare situation but one that American Adoptions does see occasionally. If a family is open to adopting siblings, who will most likely be older than newborns, they should mark this box. The adoptive family would not be contacted for situations where one of the children is older than the age they mark for older child option. It is rare for a sibling group to be a newborn and an older child. Typically sibling groups are older children. Your home study would also need to reflect you are approved for a sibling group adoption.

Special Needs – American Adoptions defines special needs as a condition that will affect the life expectancy or quality of life of the child. American Adoptions does not specialize in this type of adoption, and it is very rare with our agency to have a situation that fits special needs. However, if it is something an adoptive family is open to considering, they should mark this box so we can contact them with more information should a situation arise. Once again, your home study would need to reflect that you are approved for this type of adoption.

Older Children – Most placements through American Adoptions are infant, newborn adoptions. However, from time to time we do have parents of children who are “older” in age reach out who are exploring adoption as an option. The prevalence of these situations has risen in recent years. If you are open to adopting an older child, you will need to decide how old of a child you are willing to accept. American Adoptions does not typically see situations where a child is older than 4 years in age. Families who are interested only in newborn opportunities should list “0,” and families who are open to considering opportunities beyond a newborn placement should list the months and/or years of age they would consider.

When determining what age of a child you are willing to accept, you will want to take into account what type of bond an older child might have to the biological parents. You should be committed to providing a suitable environment to successfully parent such a child. If you are open to adopting an older child, you will need to make sure your home study approves you for such an adoption. You will also want to consider birth order, and not open up to an age older than any children you currently have in the home, as well as any age in which children would be in the same grade level when school age. It is also recommended that if open to a child over 6 months in age, the family be prepared to enlist the assistance of an attachment therapist upon returning home to assist in forming healthy bonds and attachments for the child upon placement.

Older child adoptions are often times a bit more complex than newborn adoptions, as there is not a typical time in which transition occurs. For newborns, the hospital time after birth is typically when transition is set to take place; whereas, with a situation in which the child is already born, we are tasked with developing a transition plan from the birth family to the adoptive family. These plans vary based on the needs of those involved and intricacies of each situation, working to keep in mind what is in the overall best interest of the child. Parents considering adoption for their older children often times have fewer families available to choose from- as many families are hopeful for a newborn- so if you are interested in these types of situations or want to discuss them further, do so with your specialist during the APQ review.

7. Part 2 - Questions

This section of the APQ asks you to answer several questions about the adoption process that you may or may not have thought about yet. These questions have no right or wrong answers. Instead, they are an exercise to help you prepare for the adoption process and allow you to see what remaining questions and concerns you can share with your Adoptive Family Specialist.

American Adoptions recommends that you and your partner consider answers to each question individually, and if you have different answers/feelings, note that in your answers. It is not uncommon for some couples to have varying answers, and it is helpful to know and talk about how you each feel. Your Adoptive Family Specialist will review these questions along with your entire APQ and discuss all of your answers in order to provide you with guidance, suggestions and information about what to expect as you go through the adoption process.

Once you have completed your entire APQ, you will submit it to American Adoptions, and your Adoptive Family Specialist will contact you to set up a time to review your APQ with you. We require both of you to be present for your APQ review so everyone can benefit from the discussion and we can ensure that everyone is on the same page.



American Adoptions

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