

Considering Adoption

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Why adopt? To parent a child who needs a home brings much joy and meaning to everyone involved; it is one of the most important, far-reaching decisions an individual or couple will ever make. Some parents immediately know that they were meant to form a family via adoption, while other parents are more comfortable weighing options and gathering information before committing to the process. Adoption research makes for fully informed parents, and adoption preparation helps parents form realistic expectations. All parenting is a leap of faith, however, and at some point of readiness prospective parents simply open their hearts and take the plunge...

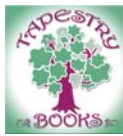
Dealing with Infertility

A large number of adults come to adoption via a long, hard struggle with infertility. Making the decision to adopt is a positive move toward the baby of an infertile couple's dreams, but past difficulties, if consciously acknowledged, will make an infertile couple even better adoptive parents. Parents that have had to deal with infertility understand the heart-wrenching concept of 'loss' when applied to creating a biological family—in the same way an adopted child may feel about losing biological parents. Adoptive parent awareness of these losses creates empathy and intimacy, and allows for honest acknowledgment of the life experiences of both parent and child.

Infertile couples should also be aware of the impact of their battle with infertility on their hopes and wishes for their adopted baby, toddler or child. Sometimes being denied the 'perfect' biological baby makes a perceived 'imperfection' in an adopted baby even tougher to shoulder. An adoptee's undisclosed special need, for instance, may be taken very personally by a parent who has not finished mourning his or her fertility losses.

Family Support for Adoption

Extended family may be surprised, pleased or dismayed by an individual or couple's decision to adopt. The negative reactions may come as a shock to the prospective adoptive parents, and may cause some initial friction within the family. Realizing that the extended family may not have moved through the same steps as the prospective parents, and may not have had time to process the new direction toward adoption, will help the adopting couple or single be patient with relatives' responses. Recalcitrant grandparents may be trying to protect their adult children from further pain after seeing them suffer through infertility. Grandparents may also need some time to process their feelings of loss as they face giving up their own dream of a biological grandchild. These grandparents typically become fierce supporters of their adopted grandchildren, but may need some understanding and some gentle education during the wait.



Non-Traditional Parents

Single parent adoption choices are not as varied as those for married couples, but there are programs for individuals available domestically and internationally. Savvy singles plan past the adoption process; as sole primary caregivers, singles have all aspects of this central role to consider when investigating parenthood. Laying groundwork during the early stages of the adoption decision will make single parenting ultimately less stressful: finding a pediatrician knowledgeable about adoption, arranging for childcare (and childcare back-up) in advance, and developing friendships with other families with young children, all contribute to a single parent's future all-important support network.

Some domestic and international adoption options are also open to gay and lesbian individuals and partners. Prospective gay or lesbian parents need to first check with state law, the local homestudy agency and the international agency (if the adoption is out-of-country) to review legalities and sending country policies.

Considering International Adoption

There are thousands of healthy girls and boys, and special needs children, in international orphanages who are waiting for adoptive parents. Choosing a reputable agency, and an international program that parents are comfortable with, requires some exploration and some personal insight. Before working on compiling a dossier (official adoption paperwork), parents should examine the type of preliminary questions they can expect from their social worker:

- Are you willing to travel around the world for your child?
- Are you willing to parent a child of another race?
- Are you willing to maintain a connection to your child's birth culture?
- Are you willing to parent a child at least one year old?
- Are you willing to accept a child with any special medical needs?
- Are you prepared to help a child grow to potential after he or she has spent time in an institution, or in neglectful circumstances?
- Do you have access to therapeutic, post-adoption resources?

Honest answers to these questions, and knowledgeable personal choices from parents, can make international adoption a loving solution for a child and an amazing, life-changing adventure for the entire adoptive family.

Considering Domestic Adoption

Domestic Adoption offers parents a variety of options. Newborn babies are available, often through private attorney adoptions, while older children, transracial children and sibling groups are available through public agencies. The domestic wait for a healthy child is often less than the wait during an international adoption, and usually far less costly—especially if parents adopt from a public agency or from the foster care system. The government also offers medical subsidies to families domestically adopting a public agency / foster child with medical or emotional needs.



Adoptive parents may have the choice of entering into an open domestic adoption with the birthparents, which may be the best possible plan for a child that is beloved by two sets of families. The most successful open relationships abide by thoughtful boundaries, and are guided by the needs of the adoptee.

Prospective parents who are considering domestic and /or transracial adoption may be asked:

- Are you willing to work at understanding what it is like to grow up a child of color in a white family?
- Are you willing to make connections for your child with other people of his or her race and ethnicity, and will you be able to learn to give your child the tools to combat racism?
- Are you willing to adopt a toddler or older child who has a history of his or her own, and who may bring both joys and challenges to your family?
- Do you have access to therapeutic, post-adoption resources?
- Are you comfortable with long-term contact with birthparents?

What may initially feel like options to be avoided (older child adoption, transracial adoption, birthparent contact) may actually be unexpected gifts to parents willing to take the extra leap of faith. *Informed* faith makes some of these alternative placements flourish, however, and parents need to be thoroughly educated before leaping.

Considering a Sibling

Considering an addition to the family may be the parent's decision, but realistically preparing an existing child for the arrival of a new sister or brother is part of the whole family's adoption process. Typical sibling issues may be expected with adoption, but parents may wish to do some conscious family building in order to firmly meld an adoptee into the family circle. If the original sibling is a biological child, he or she should be educated about adoption and what it means to be an adoptive family. Children's books are excellent tools of explanation, and also help young children express normal, conflicted sib-feelings of anticipation, jealousy, nurturing and rivalry. Adoption is a lifelong process, as are family relationships...a careful, considered meshing of the two creates a happy, strong and successful adoptive family.
