

ADOPTION

RESOURCE GUIDE

A resource curated by Legacy685 with additional content from Show Hope,
Tapestry Ministries, and Empowered to Connect.



“A father to the fatherless, a defender of
widows, is God in His holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families...”

Psalm 68:5-6a

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TYPES OF ADOPTION

Adoptions fall into two main categories: domestic and intercountry. Domestic adoption occurs when both the child and the prospective adoptive parents are citizens of the same country. Intercountry adoption occurs when a child is adopted into a family whose country of origin and citizenship differs from the child's own. Within each category, there are a variety of avenues to consider.

Domestic Adoption

The term domestic adoption simply refers to the process of a citizen adopting a child with the same citizenship. The most common types of domestic adoption are listed below.

Wait times, fees, and the level of legal risk vary among domestic adoption processes. Because of this, it is not unusual for a family to feel a level of apprehension. Education and preparation can help as well as a solid support system that comes alongside you with encouragement and resources.

1. Adoption Through Foster Care

Today, there are more than 400,000 children being cared for in the U.S. foster care system. A child under the conservatorship of the state may be eligible for adoption if parental rights have been terminated. More than 125,000 children in the U.S. have had parental rights terminated and are in need of the permanency of a family.

If you are the relative of a child in foster care, the child can usually be placed with you as long as you can adequately care for the child. This type of adoption is known as relative/kinship adoption.

2. Licensed, Private Adoption

Licensed, private placing agencies are subject to operational oversight and are required to meet state standards to ensure ethical practices.

Gathering references from others who have used an agency is one simple way to ensure an agency's standards align with your own, but a consultation, either by phone or in person, is encouraged. When adopting through a licensed, private agency, the adoptive and birth families will each be represented by a social worker. Once you complete a home study, the agency you choose will present your family profile to prospective birth families based on that agency's specific procedures and policies.

Although the wait time for placement can range broadly, domestic adoption can offer the benefit of gaining important information about your child's birth family history as well as a degree of openness in the adoption as agreed upon by both families.

3. Independent Adoption

In an independent adoption, the birth and adoptive parents have a prior connection and work through an attorney to facilitate the adoption directly. This type of adoption allows for the possibility of more extensive background information for the child.

Intercountry Adoption

Intercountry adoption occurs when a child is adopted into a family from a country of origin and citizenship status different from the child's own.

Many intercountry adoption programs are available, so determining which country you are interested in will guide you in choosing an agency. When considering intercountry adoption, prospective adoptive parents should also be aware that the amount of information available about a child's history will range broadly between intercountry programs and care organizations.

Intercountry adoption is governed by three sets of laws, each seeking to ensure a child is legally able to be placed into a family through adoption:

- U.S. federal laws
- State laws where the adoptive family resides
- Laws of the child's country of origin

NOTE: In addition, because the U.S. is party to the Hague Adoption Convention, it is important to understand how those laws affect the process.

Intercountry adoption will generally involve the following steps:

1. After your home study is finished, you will be required to complete and gather additional paperwork and documentation for submission to the U.S. government and child's country of origin for approval.
2. Once approved, prospective adoptive families are eligible to receive a referral. A referral is a profile of a waiting child who is eligible for adoption.
3. After a child's referral is accepted, the adoptive family will begin taking steps toward completing paperwork necessary to travel to the child's country of origin and finalize the child's adoption or obtain legal guardianship.

Source: www.howtoadopt.org/first-steps/adoption-basics/types-of-adoption/

WHAT IS OUR “WHY”

Doctrine of Adoption

One of the most prominent pieces of imagery running throughout scripture depicting the character of God and His work on our behalf is the picture of family. Specifically, the illustration is rooted in the relationship between God as our Father and us as His dearly loved children.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that we are!” — John 1:12–13

The hinge upon which this entire new relationship with God has been formed is beautifully illustrated in scripture through the continuous use of the word “adoption.”

“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’” — Romans 8:15

We were once outside the family of God but now, through the work of Christ on our behalf, have been adopted as dearly loved sons and daughters. We experience the rights and privileges of being known and loved as His! A new identity born out of a new way of how we relate to God — as our Father — and how He relates to us — as His children.

If our adoption into God’s family is at the core of the gospel, then the gospel is certainly at the core of our calling to care for kids who need loving, safe and permanent families to call their own.

The theology of our adoption helps form the basis of our “why.” Why would we care for orphaned and vulnerable children by bringing them into our family? Because that’s what Christ has done for us.

But it doesn’t end there.

The truth is we’re not all called to adopt — or bring children into our homes through other avenues like foster care. So how does this doctrine of adoption into the family of God practically translate into a message that might not include adoption as an application?

This is where a distinct, yet intricately intertwined understanding of the doctrine of “incarnation” can be incredibly helpful to press into as we form the theological motivations and articulations of our “why.” It acts as a theological blanket, if you will, that can be laid out over us all under which implications and applications for everyone can be identified.

Doctrine of Incarnation

The word “incarnation” literally means to assume human form. The doctrine of Christ’s incarnation speaks to God stepping into humanity, wrapping Himself in flesh, and living completely and fully as both God and man. It’s most notably recognized at Christmas with the celebration of the birth of Jesus, yet its implications are far more pervasive than just on December 25th of every year.

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel (which means God with us.)” — Matthew 1:22–23

At Christmas God effectively said, “I see you where you are and I’m coming after you!” He stepped out of His glory and into the fulness of our mess and brokenness as humanity. The incarnation reveals much about who God is and what God does. It tells us He is the kind of God who sees hard places and broken people and moves towards them, not away. He is “with us” in our failures, struggles, fears, and anxieties. He doesn’t just get us through the mess and the pain of life — He walks with us in it. Jesus immersed Himself in our brokenness, carried our brokenness to the Cross and was literally broken by our brokenness so that we don’t have to be broken anymore. God saw our plight and moved toward us, not away from us. That is the good news of the Gospel!

The Apostle Paul reiterates the incarnation of Christ and beautifully ties it into God’s redemptive pursuit of humanity to make us His children, when he writes,

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” — Galatians 4:4–5

Jesus was “born of a woman” (incarnation) in order “that we might receive adoption” into his family. If the incarnation of Jesus is at the core of the Gospel, then our stepping towards the hard and the broken is certainly at the core of our calling to care for the vulnerable.

The theology of Christ’s incarnation helps form the basis of our “why.” Why would we immerse — or incarnate — ourselves into hard and broken places?

Because that is what Christ has done for us.

The implications of the doctrine of incarnation are broad. The opportunities for each individual person to “incarnate” themselves into hard and broken places are endless and full of creativity.

Frankly, this moves the conversation beyond just foster care, adoption, and orphan care in some capacity — although these are clear and vivid outlets to respond (see James 1:27). Incarnation, however, speaks to a renewed posture and perspective towards the world around us in all matters of justice, mercy, and sacrifice.

The world says we should avoid hard and broken things, insulate ourselves from them and isolate our families from them. The Gospel, however, suggests an entirely different posture and perspective. It compels us to “incarnate” — to step toward and wrap ourselves up in them. It invites us to not just “do” these things but instead to become the kind of people who lean into towards and get involved with hard places and broken people around us – not step back, isolate, and insulate.

The gospel also changes the kinds of questions we ask ourselves. As we increasingly become more aware of what Jesus has done for us our questions begin to subtly and yet profoundly shift from things like, “Why would we do this?” to “In light of what Jesus has done for us, why would we not?” An entirely different question coming from an entirely different place.

The opportunities to incarnate ourselves into hard and broken places are endless and full of diversity. The application of incarnation in foster care and adoption efforts is clear and undeniable – they are beautifully powerful opportunities for us to see kids and families in hard places and say to them, “I see you where you are and I’m coming after you.”

So, when friends and family members and co-workers and strangers at the grocery store look at you like you're crazy for doing this and wonder why you would go against the "script" of life (to pursue comfort and convenience at all costs by isolating and insulating whenever possible), you have a pretty compelling "why" to answer them with. And in those moments when you're left with nothing but your own thoughts and doubts and fears and concerns — wondering why you would consider doing something like this — you have a pretty compelling "why" to remind yourself of as well.

Why would you immerse yourself into hard and broken places?

Because that is exactly what Christ has done for you!

Source: *"Everyone Can Do Something"* by Jason Johnson

Implications and Motivations

This theological framework acts as a grid through which our perspectives on adoption and motivations for getting involved are confronted, refined and properly established. A few examples of how the gospel influences our thoughts and perspectives going into adoption include:

- The gospel crucifies our hero complex in the most helpful ways possible. It reminds us that we are not the heroes in these stories — and it frees us from the burden of trying to be. We don't strut into these children's lives with a cape on our shoulders; we crawl into them with the cross on our backs. (Matthew 16:24 - "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.")
- The gospel is first about giving, not receiving. A gospel-centered approach to adoption recognizes that our goal is not first to get a child for our family, but rather to give our family for a child. This is an entirely different posture with significantly different implications.
- The gospel does not operate in a vacuum but rather works to restore all things — not only that which we are directly involved in but also the systemic issues that caused the problems we're now trying to address. Adoption is not just about children who need safe homes; it's also about the families and communities these children come from which are likely plagued by generational cycles that are in need of healing and redemption.
- The gospel then requires we hold a loving, hopeful and helpful posture towards the biological families these children come from. In light of what Jesus has done for us, we can absolutely and unequivocally be for them as people in need of healing and grace not unlike ourselves.

QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

These questions are designed to help people who are exploring adoption think through some important considerations and ideas relating to the decision process. Regardless of the path you are exploring, please keep in mind that there are not right or wrong answers to these questions.

After you have thought through your answers we would encourage you to discuss these questions and your thoughts with your spouse or close community, and then identify an experienced adoptive family to talk with as well. Contact us at legacy685@HoustonsFirst.org and we will put you in touch with a Houston's First family who will walk with you as you explore.

1. Why do/would I want to adopt?
2. How do I define the concept of family? In other words, what is a family?
3. What are my biggest fears regarding adoption?
4. Do/will my close family and friends support my decision to adopt? If not, why?
5. What personal experience(s) do I have regarding adoption — whether positive or negative?
6. Does adoption seem "normal" to me?
7. What have I done thus far to educate myself about adoption?
8. What, if anything, do I feel that I would lose or be "giving up" if I choose to adopt?
9. How do I feel about birthparents (i.e., the biological parents of children who are adopted)?
10. If married, does my spouse have the same ideas about adoption?

What to Consider When Considering Adoption

So, you are considering adoption? You may think to start the adoption process by seeking quality information and resources, evaluating the pros and cons of the various adoption alternatives and trying to identify a good agency. While all of these considerations are very important and certainly necessary steps along the way, we believe there are some equally important, but often overlooked, things you should consider as you get started.

Assess Your Motivations

Being honest about our motivations can be a tricky thing at times. The reality is, however, that when making an adoption decision, healthy motivations are very important. For most people their motivations for adopting are often multi-faceted and even complex. It is not so much that there is one right motivation for wanting to adopt, as there are several wrong motivations that more often than not lead to great disappointment and much hurt and heartache for everyone involved. It is important not to adopt because you are trying to prove something or make a point, because it is the in thing or even the Christian thing to do or because you want to "rescue" a child. Instead, a primary motivation for adopting should always be love that you have and are willing to unconditionally give to a child for a lifetime . . . love that will enable a child to heal and fully experience the blessings and security of a forever family . . . love that will point a child to the ultimate love of the unfailing love of God. So, as you consider adoption be sure to honestly and openly examine and discuss your motivations.

Develop Realistic Expectations

Adoptive parents that have realistic expectations about the adoption journey are far more likely to thrive even in the midst of the challenges often associated with adoption. Adoptive families who are willing to be honest and open about their experiences both the highs and the lows are often the best resource for helping those considering adoption learn what to truly expect. As you move forward it is essential to avoid overly romanticized notions and fairytale dreams of how your adoption will unfold. There will undoubtedly be "miracle moments" and indescribable joys along the way, but there will be deep frustration, struggle and disappointment as well.

No matter what you do, don't do it alone. Talk with experienced adoptive families and others about what you should realistically expect and know that God is doing something truly beautiful, even if it does not always appear as you might have imagined.

Pray Every Step of the Way

With the vast amount of detail and complexity associated with the adoption process, it is far too easy to forget to prayerfully approach every step along the journey. Each decision and each alternative should be prayerfully considered yet, pray for wisdom and discernment, and maybe start by asking God to lead and guide you as you honestly assess your motivations and expectations. Also, remember that so many lives are affected and impacted by each and every adoption, so remember to pray for that child God may have for you one day, the family that child comes from, your own family, extended family and community of friends and neighbors around you. All of them and many more will be touched by this adoption story in one capacity or another.

*"See what great love the Father
has lavished on us, that we
should be called children of
God! And that we are!"*

John 1:12-13

ADOPTION MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

It can be difficult to absorb the amount of information available addressing the complexities of adoption. Below, we have shed light on some common misconceptions (or myths) as you navigate these first steps.

MYTH: There are no orphans in the U.S.

TRUTH: There are thousands of children in need of the permanency of a loving family in the U.S. In fact, each year there are more than 20,000 infants born in the U.S. who are placed for adoption, and more than 125,000 children in foster care have had parental rights terminated and are waiting to enter a family through adoption.

MYTH: It's faster and easier to adopt internationally than from the U.S.

TRUTH: All adoption processes are unique, even among established programs, so it depends upon the specific parameters involved in the adoption.

MYTH: Personal wealth is a prerequisite for adoption.

TRUTH: While there are a number of variables that can contribute to adoption costs, families of varying socio-economic status open their homes each year to children through adoption. In light of adoption-related expenses, there are many resources available that can help bridge the financial gap families may experience in the adoption process. See the "Adoption Costs" section to learn more.

MYTH: You are not allowed to adopt a child you have fostered.

TRUTH: While the goal of foster care is family reunification, it is sometimes possible to adopt a child who has been cared for in your home through foster care when family reunification is not possible.

MYTH: You cannot adopt a child you know personally or who is a relative.

TRUTH: Relatives of children who have had parental rights terminated are often considered a preferred placement for adoption or foster care in an effort to preserve the child's relationship with his/her biological family—so long as they are able to provide for the child's safety and well-being.

MYTH: Children who are adopted into families through the foster care system are no longer able to have relationships with their biological families.

TRUTH: When the court system has determined it to be beneficial and safe, children can have continued relationships with their biological families.

MYTH: It is not beneficial to keep sibling groups together when the children are adopted into a family.

TRUTH: Placing siblings together is generally the optimal outcome after being separated from biological parents. It helps provide continuity and alleviates the trauma of additional loss.

MYTH: You can't adopt a child or sibling group from another state.

TRUTH: Currently, there are more than 125,000 children in foster care who have had parental rights terminated and are waiting for placement into a loving and permanent family. Often, children will be adopted by a family who lives in a different state. These adoptions may take longer but are not uncommon.

MYTH: A birth parent or other birth relative can regain custody of a child even after the adoption is finalized.

TRUTH: Before an adoption can be finalized, the parental rights of both birth parents must be terminated by a court of law. Birth parents can challenge or attack the validity of a final order of termination or adoption for a limited time and for limited reasons. Therefore, it is important that the legal process for termination and adoption is carefully followed to protect against attack. Once the legal time period for attack of the termination or adoption order has lapsed, the birth parents cannot regain custody of the child.

MYTH: You must be under the age of 40 in order to adopt.

TRUTH: While it is true that requirements differ based on the type of adoption being pursued, parents over the age of 40 are often among those who qualify to adopt.

If you have a question that we have not included in this list, please reach out to us at legacy685@houstonfirst.org. We'd love to help you find an answer.

Source: <https://howtoadopt.org/first-steps/adoption-basics/misconceptions-about-adoption/>

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

Galatians 4:4-5

Adoption can be a varied and sometimes complex process, making each experience unique. However, there are several basic steps common to most adoptions, and understanding these can help make the journey more manageable:

1. Understand the Types of Adoption

There are two main categories for adoption: domestic and intercountry. Domestic adoption occurs when both the child and the prospective adoptive parents are citizens of the same country. Intercountry adoption occurs when a child is adopted into a family whose country of origin and citizenship differs from the child's own. And within these distinct categories, there are different avenues to be considered. See the “Types of Adoption” section to learn more.

2. Find an Agency

If you decide to work with an adoption agency, there are several factors to consider when choosing. Once you have settled on an agency, you will likely sign a contract that outlines services provided and be assigned a case manager who will help guide you through the process. For domestic adoptions, families often choose to work with an agency in their general geographic location as this adds to the convenience of coordinating home study, post—placement visits, and required classes/training prior to the adoption. For intercountry adoptions, families will often work with two agencies—a placing agency (to facilitate the actual adoption process and placement) and a home study agency (to coordinate home study and post—placement reports). Because of this, a placing agency does not necessarily need to be in the same geographic location as the family. Regardless of which path you take, it is important to trust the integrity, ethics, and practices of any adoption agency before making any commitments. See the “Questions to Consider When Choosing an Agency” section to learn more.

3. Apply for a Specific Program

Once you have chosen an agency, you will then begin to fill out paperwork in order to apply for the program you have chosen. It can be helpful (and is sometimes required) to attend a seminar to understand what programs are available and what to expect in the journey ahead. Although most agencies will be able to give you an understanding of what programs you qualify for before you apply, the formal application process will be able to affirm that you meet all the requirements of a specific program before moving forward in the process.

4. Build a Support System

Adoptive families do not thrive in isolation. As you begin your journey, it's important to identify and enlist friends, family, and/or neighbors who can provide ongoing support for your family.

5. Begin the Home Study Process

The next step is to complete your home study. This is a document compiled by a caseworker who visits you at your home, conducts interviews to ensure you and your family will provide a healthy environment for a child. It's fairly extensive and covers a range of factors. The home study is specific to the type of adoption for which you have applied (in regard to country, age of child, number of children, etc.), and once it's completed, a summary is provided giving approval for the adoption to continue. (In some cases, the caseworker may feel that an adoptive placement is not in the best interest of the child or family.)

“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’”
Romans 8:15

6. Accept a Referral or Placement

After the home study process is complete, you then work with your agency to complete the necessary steps to be matched with a child. This step varies between programs. For some, a family will be given a list of children who are waiting for adoption, and in others, biological parents or caseworkers choose the adoptive family based on the needs of a specific child. Once a family has been chosen, the referral is presented to the adoptive family. If accepted, the adoption process moves through any remaining necessary steps before placement. The timeline from acceptance of the referral to placement varies based on the specific program. This is often a season of prayerfully waiting and trusting God’s perfect timing in the process.

7. Finalize the Adoption

Work closely with your adoption agency to ensure that all paperwork and requirements are complete. Specific to intercountry adoption, it is imperative that you—as the parent—ensure your child’s citizenship credentials are in place and finalized in welcoming him/her into your family.

8. Resource and Support Yourself and Your Child

The adoption journey does not end the day a child is welcomed home. Children impacted by adoption and foster care have often experienced loss due to attachment injuries and/or early trauma. We encourage you to stay educated and equipped in order to bring hope and healing to your child and family. See the “Additional Resources” section to learn more.

Source: <https://howtoadopt.org/first-steps/adoption-basics/overview-of-the-process/>

While the average cost of agency adoption can range between \$25,000 and \$50,000, many resources are available to help bridge the financial gap families may experience in the adoption process. Listed below are some of the financial aid opportunities available to individuals and families.

- State and federal tax credits
- Low— or no—interest loans
- Adoption aid grants (like those offered through Legacy685)
- Subsidies for adoptions through foster care
- Adoption fee benefits provided by employers
- Sliding scale fees based on a family’s income or ability to pay
- Reimbursements for adoption costs for those serving in the armed forces

Adoption Aid grants are a key cornerstone of our work at Legacy 685. One of the primary barriers standing between children and families is the cost associated with adoption. Our grants can help break down that cost and have been a part of more than 200 children coming home to families at Houston’s First. Other adoption grant and loan programs are listed below:

- LifeSong for Orphans – lifesongfororphans.org
- The Abba Fund – abbafund.org
- Pathways for Little Feet – pathwaysforlittlefeet.org
- Show Hope – showhope.org
- Adoption Financing – adoptionfinancing.com
- The Gift of Adoption Fund – giftofadoption.org
- International Children’s Adoption Resource Effort – intlcare.org
- National Adoption Foundation – nafadopt.org
- Kingdom Kids – kingdomkidsadoption.org/Default.aspx?tabid=37

Disclaimer:

Houston’s First Baptist Church does not necessarily endorse or recommend any of the above organizations or financial assistance resources. In addition, this document is not intended to constitute, nor does it represent, legal or tax advice of any kind. For questions about any of the above listed resources or to discuss issues relating to the costs of adoption, please contact us at legacy685@HoustonFirst.org or 281.246.9904.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING AN AGENCY

Use of a licensed adoption agency is generally required when pursuing an international adoption. The specifics of an agency's adoption program vary considerably by country. The following is a general list of suggested questions that are designed to help families in selecting an adoption agency for an international adoption.

Families should also ask additional questions relating to specific country programs. However, a very important consideration in selecting an agency is determining whether the agency is a "good fit," and this can generally be achieved by ensuring that the family has accurate information and realistic expectations about the agency, its services and costs and its adoption process (in particular estimated wait times). In addition to obtaining answers to the following questions, adoptive families are strongly encouraged to read carefully any contracts or policies that they are asked to sign or agree to by the agency and to ask questions (including consulting an attorney, if necessary).

Questions for INTERNATIONAL Adoption Agencies

General Questions About the Agency:

- What are the agency's requirements for adoptive families (e.g., age, marital status (including previous divorce(s)), number of children already in the home, religious, criminal background, financial, health considerations)? Note: Requirements will vary by country.
- How long has the agency been in operation?
- In what countries does the agency have adoption programs? How long has the agency had an active adoption program in the country of interest?
- Has the agency's program in the country of interest ever been suspended or terminated (as a result of loss of accreditation or otherwise)? If so, why and for how long?
- What is the current adoption climate in the country of interest? How stable has the country program been in recent months/years?
- In what regions/cities within the country of interest does the agency work? Can families specify a specific region/city within the country?
- Does the agency have any religious or denominational affiliation?
- How long has the agency's director been working in the adoption field? How long has he/she been the director of the agency?
- How many professionals are on staff with the agency? What is the average length of service at the agency for the agency's case workers who are currently on staff?
- How long has the director for the country of interest (i.e., the country program director) been working with adoptions from the country of interest?
- What is the education and licensing background of the agency's director and professional staff?
- Will the agency provide contact with families who have recently used the agency to adopt from the country of interest (i.e., family references)?
- Are families allowed to specify the gender of the child they wish to adopt? Note: The ability to specify gender will vary by country.
- How are waiting children cared for in the country of interest (i.e., orphanages/institutions, foster homes, etc.)? How is the funding for such care provided?
- Does the agency have any affiliations with orphanages, social service agencies, facilitators or others in the country of interest that will be significantly involved in the adoption process? If so, obtain details regarding such arrangements (including the length of such relationships).
- Who handles the agency's legal work in the country of interest? In the United States?

Questions About Fees and Costs:

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

Questions About Wait Time:

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

- What is the current estimated wait time for families? How many families are currently waiting? Note: Wait times at most agencies are often highly dependent on the adoptive family's parameters (e.g., age, gender and health factors that the adoptive family is willing to consider). To the extent that an adoptive family has already determined certain of its fundamental parameters, questions regarding wait times should be asked in specific relation to those parameters (e.g., what is the estimated wait time for an infant girl).
- What is the longest wait time for any of the families that are currently waiting for an adoption?
- Have average wait times for families increased, decreased or remained generally the same over the past several years (and if they have increased or decreased, why)?
- How often should I expect to hear from the agency workers during the waiting process?

Questions About the Agency's Previous Placement Experience:

- How many children has the agency placed in each of the past five years from the country of interest?
- What number of failed adoption placements has the agency experienced in each of the past five years (i.e., how many instances of a family being matched with a child but such match did not result in a final adoption)? Note: Although generally uncommon even in the context of domestic adoptions, "failed placements" are even more uncommon in the context of international adoption and the risk of a failed international placement will vary greatly by country.
- How does the agency handle failed placements (e.g., where on the wait list is a family that has experienced a failed placement placed, are there any additional fees or costs imposed, etc.)?

Questions About the Agency's Matching and Finalization Process:

- What children are available in the country of interest (i.e., children of what age, gender, sibling groups, etc.)?
- How does the agency's matching process work for the country of interest?
- What background information (e.g., medical, social, family history, etc.) is generally available regarding the child and/or the child's biological family?
- Does the agency provide pictures and/or video of the referred child?
- Once matched, does the agency provide the adoptive family with pictures and/or videos of the child? Does the agency provide updates regarding the child's growth, medical condition and/or development?
- Once matched, does the agency allow the adoptive family to travel to visit the child? If so, are there any significant limitations regarding such visits?
- What are the travel requirements for the country of interest (i.e., are families required to travel in order to bring their child home or is an escort service available as an option)? Are both parents (if applicable) required to travel? How long must they stay in country?

Questions About Services Provided by the Agency:

- What pre—placement training does the agency offer to adoptive families? What other support services does the agency provide (e.g., support groups, social events, newsletters, etc.)?
- What post—placement services for adoptive families are provided? What help or services are available for adoptive families experiencing post—placement challenges and difficulties relating to their adoption – specifically relating to parenting children of a different racial, ethnic and/or cultural background?
- What humanitarian aid/support does the agency provide to the countries in which it operates?

Questions for DOMESTIC Adoption Agencies

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

A very important consideration in selecting an agency is determining whether the agency is a “good fit,” and this can generally be achieved by ensuring that the family has accurate information and realistic expectations about the agency, its services and costs and its adoption process (in particular estimated wait times). In addition to obtaining answers to the following questions, adoptive families are strongly encouraged to read carefully any contracts or policies that they are asked to sign or agree to by the agency and to ask questions (including consulting an attorney, if necessary).

General Questions About the Agency:

- What are the agency’s requirements for adoptive families (e.g., age, marital status, number of children already in the home, religious, criminal background, financial, health considerations)?
- How long has the agency been licensed in Texas? How long has the agency been in operation?
- Is the agency a non—profit or for—profit organization? If a for—profit organization, who owns the agency?
- Does the agency have any religious or denominational affiliation?
- How long has the agency’s director been working in the adoption field? How long has he/she been the director of the agency?
- How many professionals are on staff with the agency? What is the average length of service at the agency for the agency’s case workers who are currently on staff?
- What is the education and licensing background of the agency’s director and professional staff?
- Will the agency provide contact with families who have recently used the agency to adopt (i.e., family references)?
- Are families allowed to specify the gender of the child they wish to adopt?
- Who handles the agency’s legal work? Is the attorney a member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys?

Questions About Fees and Costs:

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

Questions About Wait Time:

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

- What is the longest wait time for any of the families that are currently waiting?
- Have average wait times for families increased, decreased or remained generally the same over the past several years (and if they have increased or decreased, why)?
- How often should I expect to hear from the agency workers during the waiting process?

Questions About the Agency’s Previous Placement Experience:

- How many children has the agency placed in each of the past five years?
- What is the general break—down along racial and ethnic lines of the agency’s placements in the last several years? Has the agency experienced any noticeable trends regarding the race or ethnicity of children placed in the last several years (i.e., an increase or decrease in the number of placements of children of a certain race or ethnicity)?
- What number of failed adoption placements has the agency experienced in each of the past five years (i.e., how many instances of a family being matched with a child but such match did not result in a final adoption)?
- How does the agency handle failed placements (e.g., where on the wait list is a family that has experienced a failed placement placed, are there any additional fees or costs imposed, etc.)?

Questions About the Agency’s Matching and Placement Process:

- What information does the adoptive family know about birthparent(s) and vice versa? How does the agency define terms such as “open” adoption and “semi—open” adoption?
- What degree of ongoing contact and/or communication between birthparent(s) and adoptive family/child does the agency require, promote or allow?
- What role does the agency play in facilitating ongoing contact and/or communication between birthparent(s) and adoptive family/child?
- How does the agency’s matching process work? How are birthparents and adoptive parents matched?
- If adopting an infant, how involved is the adoptive family with the birthparent(s) prior to the baby being born?
- If adopting a newborn, when is the baby generally placed with the adoptive family?

Questions About Services Provided by the Agency:

- What pre—placement training does the agency offer to adoptive families? What other support services does the agency provide (e.g., support groups, social events, newsletters, etc.)?
- What post—placement services for adoptive families are provided? What help or services are available for adoptive families experiencing post—placement challenges and difficulties relating to their adoption?
- What counseling and support services do the birthparent(s) receive both prior to and after the adoption?

Disclaimer: This document is not intended to constitute, nor does it represent, legal advice of any kind. A qualified attorney should be consulted with respect to any legal questions or issues.

Source: <http://tapestryministry.org/choosing—an—adoption—or—foster—care—agency/>

MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Before you begin your adoption journey, it's wise to honestly assess of your motives and expectations. This document will guide you through that process. If you're unsure how to answer a question, we recommend asking a mentor or someone who knows you well. Please don't be intimidated; you do not need to answer "yes" to every question. Just keep these questions in mind as you move forward.

- As an adoptive parent, you will be called upon to shoulder your child's trauma, and you may never know their full story. Are you prepared to embrace every aspect of your child's history?
- Frankly, your child's story is not your story to tell. Are you willing to respect and protect your child by sharing only what is necessary to advocate for his/her needs?
- Are you prepared to parent with compassion, patiently bearing with your child in order to cultivate connection and promote healing at great cost to yourself?
- Are you prepared to lay aside leisure, preferences, desires, expectations, and convenience in order to cultivate a loving bond that can promote healing?
- Are you prepared to love and serve your child for months, even years, before they truly begin to "feel" like your child?
- Are you willing learn new parenting strategies in light of your child's trauma and unique history? Are you prepared to exercise these new parenting strategies in the presence of family and friends who may not know your child's story?
- As a parent, you cannot control everything, but you do have a great deal of influence over how your child attaches, connects, heals, and matures. Are you prepared to assess and reassess your motives, strategies, personal growth, and effectiveness?
- Foster/adoptive families are often transracial, and their children may have behavioral issues or learning disorders. This means that some people may misunderstand foster care and adoption. Are you prepared for criticism from family members? The awkward states at the park? Questions at the grocery store?
- Are you prepared for the thankless and unseen daily task of loving your child sacrificially?
- Somewhere in the world there may be biological parents mourning the loss of the child placed in your home. Can you sympathize with them? Are you willing to advocate for them and serve them (perhaps anonymously) by loving their child? Are you prepared to speak well of them to your child?
- Foster/adoptive children often require medical help, therapy, and/or counseling. Are you prepared to meet your child's needs holistically?
- Are you prepared to be overwhelmed? Are you prepared to feel inadequate? When faced with unique challenges, are you ready and willing to ask for help from others?
- Do you know other foster/adoptive families? Do you have a strong support system?

Set aside some time to intentionally reflect on following questions — both personally and with a significant other. If you're married, maybe arrange a date night to walk through these questions with your spouse. If single, gather those around you who know you best and invite them into this conversation. Lean on them to ask you these questions and create honest dialogue (by the way, what a gift you are offering them by inviting them into this journey!)

While this list is certainly not exhaustive, let it be a clarifying guide for you as you continue to consider and pursue taking your next best steps together.

What's Our Motivation?

Adoption is less about getting a child for your family and more about giving your family for a child. A slightly different statement with significantly different implications. That's not to say that a family can't grow through adoption — it obviously does — or that a family doesn't receive endless amounts of blessings and joy through adopting — they no doubt can. It is to say, however, that our first call is to give, not receive. Why is this important? Several reasons, but most notably being what happens when the process is especially difficult? Do you stick with it because it's worth it, or step out because you're not getting what you want? Check your intentions.

Are We On the Same Page?

While the sentiment behind the question is good, perhaps the better question to ask is: "Are you at least reading the same book?" Because sometimes we might be a few pages ahead of or behind our spouse (or closest friends in community), but as long as we're reading the same book — i.e. sharing the same convictions and vision and taking steps forward together in the same direction — that's what's most important. Needing to be on the "same page" sometimes makes people feel like until they are both absolutely and equally comfortable, confident and clear than they can't do anything. I don't necessarily agree. Maybe it starts small and simple; one step at a time. Attending an informational meeting or orientation class; going to dinner with a family that is fostering; reading a good book; etc. Don't let being on page 17 while your spouse is on page 29 paralyze you. As long as you're reading the same book, meet each other in the middle and go from there!

Do We Have a Support System?

You can't do this alone. Nor should you try. You need a collective diversity of people around you to sustain you through this journey. Don't have a built in circle or support? Start building one. Go out of your way to ingrain yourself into a local church ministry, an agency's support systems or some other kind of community resource opportunities...even if the best you can do right now in your area is an online Facebook group! Don't go at it alone! When you don't ask for help, or when you refuse to lean into systems of support being offered to you, you deprive others the opportunity to serve. It's that important — not just for you, but for them as well. These kids deserve for you to be connected and supported. Everybody wins when you are; everybody loses when you're not. Don't go at it alone.

Have We Counted the Costs?

Have you removed the rose-colored lenses yet? If not, let's do that real quick. It. Will. Cost. You. Maybe some money, certainly some time, definitely some energy, and absolutely some emotion, convenience, comfort and normalcy. No one ever said, "I want to foster so that my life will be the same." No. Everything changes. It's hard, and it's important to be aware of the costs; to not go into this wearing rose colored lenses. But here's the point — we accept the costs to us as worth it for the gain a child may receive. That's why we do this. And when it's all said and done, don't just count the costs you will incur if you do it without considering what it will cost these kids if you don't. Perhaps the question you need to be asking is not "Can we afford to do this?" but rather "Can we really afford not to do this?" A slightly different question with significantly different implications.

How Do We Know if We're Ready?

Prepare and get ready, but be ready to not be fully ready. I've never met a foster parent that *felt* completely capable or ready; but everyone of them have been available and willing. That's what it took. Many who ARE capable don't always FEEL it. Fear lies and paralyzes. It keeps a lot of good people away from a lot of great kids. So, how do you know if you're "called" or "ready"? When you know just enough to be afraid of it but too much to let fear have the final say about it. This means you don't wait for fear or worry to subside before you act; you simply choose to fight forward so that fear loses and kids and families win. What if you started to assume the answer was "yes" until you heard a "no", rather than "no" until you heard a "yes"? A lot would change. It might just change what you do next.

How Will It Effect Kids We Already Have in Our Home?

Adoption can give your kids a gift you as mom and dad would likely never be able to give them on your own. They will grow up in a different world — a world they can't pretend doesn't exist. There are certainly legitimate boundaries you have to set for the safety of your kids. You might have to say no to certain things, but you might also say yes to things you never dreamed you would. It will change and impact your kids in deep and profound ways — perhaps for the better. While it's certainly not prescriptive — it's not guaranteed that your kids will grow up to adopt as adults — no doubt the impact of growing up in a home that's oriented around that cause is immeasurable in terms of how it may potentially express itself in the values and rhythms of their lives in the future. What a gift. Read more here.

How Will We Prioritize Our Marriage?

(Alternative question for singles – How Will I Prioritize My Closest Relationships?)

We don't just bring children into our homes; we bring them into our marriages and our closest communities of friends. The weight of caring for kids from hard places can either break your relationships or better them. You want to be more connected throughout — but that doesn't just happen. It must be intentionally pursued, cultivated and fought for. That's why the best thing you can do for your marriage (and closest relationships) on the adoption journey is not allow your marriage/relationships to become all about adoption. In the midst of mounds of paperwork, training, home studies, fundraising and appointments, it's easy for the activity of adoption to replace the intimacy of marriage/relationships. Be prepared to proactively work against that. Date each other. Pray for each other. Give each other breaks. Who knows, the beauty and brokenness of this journey might just reveal a version of you as husband and wife (and friends) to one another you have yet to fully see in your marriage. A stronger, braver and more intimate one.

When is the Right Time?

There's never really a perfect time to adopt; just a lot of opportunities to say yes despite the many reasons you may have to say no. It's possible that the perfect season of life you are waiting on before adopting will never come. Have you considered that the parameters you have set to define when you're "ready" may be too narrow? What if they leave no space for you to actually ever feel "ready"? What if you're more ready now than you realize? This is not to disregard the very legitimate things you need to consider before fostering — like health, your marriage, your community of friends, your kids, your finances, etc. However, for most people it's an issue of time, busyness and of margin. Sometimes this is valid, but sometimes it's a smokescreen. Only you, through an honest examination of your own heart, can really determine that. Take the time to consider that in the grand scheme of things, the perfect time will never arrive. So what are you waiting on?

What are We Expecting?

God is more pleased by your willingness to be faithful along the journey of foster care than He is concerned about your ability to achieve a certain outcome through it. Be free from the expectation to fix or control everything in the process. The good news is that He does not call you to control everything in foster care. Some days will be filled with victorious breakthroughs, and other crippled under the weight of confusion and heartache. Your "success" in this is not dependent upon the momentary ups and downs; it is determined the moment you first say yes to this; everything that follows will be the mercy of God. Your job is not to save these kids; it's simply to love them — fully, freely and faithfully — and to trust Him with the rest. That's your hope and assurance — that what's completely out of your capacity and control is absolutely in His. Expect it to be hard, and expect it to be beautiful. Most importantly, expect it to be worth it.

So, Now What?

Don't be so afraid of what's to come along the journey that you never actually end up starting it. Just focus on what's next. It could be registering for the next orientation class — no strings attached — just going to listen, learn and feel. Maybe it's grabbing coffee with another person or couple that has fostered or adopted just to hear and learn from their story. Or perhaps it's finally giving into what you've known has been true for quite some time — you just need to say yes and do it. Stop praying about it (yep, I said that), stop reading about it, stop doing studies about it, stop talking about the "what ifs" or the "maybe one days" — and just do it. Don't worry right now about the many, many other steps that will come after that. Just take your next best step. That's all you can do.

Source: *"Ten Questions for Parents Preparing to Adopt or Foster"* by Empowered to Connect (empoweredtoconnect.org) and *"Ten Questions To Ask Before Becoming Foster and Adoptive Parents"* by Jason Johnson (jasonjohnsonblog.com).

*"He predestined
us for adoption
as sons through
Jesus Christ"
Ephesians 1:5*

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books

- *The Connected Child* by Karyn Purvis
- *The Connected Parent* by Karyn Purvis
- *ReFraming Foster Care* by Jason Johnson
- *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson
- *Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma* by Debra Wesselmann, Cathy Schweitzer, & Stefanie Armstrong
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* by Sherrie Eldridge
- *Dear Birthmother* by Kathleen Silber
- *In Their Own Voices* by Rita J. Simon and Rhonda M Roorda
- *Black Baby White Hands: A View From The Crib* by Jaiya John

Websites/Online Resources

empoweredtoconnect.org
jasonjohnsonblog.com
resources.cafo.org
special-needs.adoption.com
showhope.org

Podcasts

- The Empowered Parent Podcast
- The Forgotten Podcast
- Creating a Family: Talk about Infertility, Adoption, & Foster Care
- The Real Mom Podcast by Foster the Family
- Archibald Project Podcast

Legacy685

Legacy685 exists to connect, equip, and sustain you along your adoption journey. We believe you not only shouldn't do this alone, but that none of us can. We need one another along this journey. There's never a question we're not willing to help you find the answer to or a conversation we're not willing to have with you. Always feel free to reach out to us if there's any way we can serve or support you, no matter where you are on your journey. Contact us at Legacy685@HoustonsFirst.org.



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