

5 WAYS PROSPECTIVE PARENTS SHOULD PREPARE FOR ADOPTION

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Adoption is a wonderful way to expand your family and your life. As you begin this process, make it your goal to learn everything you can, develop relationships with trusted professionals on whom you can rely, and enjoy the adventure! One way to enhance the experience and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome is to prepare by learning about the process and following several basic legal suggestions.

- 1) **BE EMOTIONALLY READY FOR ADOPTION.** Be comfortable with the differences a child will bring to your life. Do not begin the adoption solely because of family or peer pressure or the impact of the proverbial biological clock. If you are adopting with a spouse, it is important that the two of you are on the same emotional page and are starting this process as a team.
- 2) **BE AWARE OF THE TYPES OF ADOPTIONS AND THE CHOICES YOU WILL NEED TO MAKE.** Unlike having biological children, the process of adopting brings with it a number of decisions to be made about fundamental issues. For example, are you interested in adopting domestically or internationally? Do the age, sex, ethnic background or health of the child play important roles in your decision making process? Are you comfortable with an open style of adoption or do you want to maintain more confidentiality? Can you afford all kind of adoptions or do you need to concentrate on more cost-effective types of adoptions? Are you going to work with an agency, attorney or adoption facilitator of some kind? These types of issues should be considered and decisions made as you begin the adoption process.
- 3) **CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO ASSIST YOU IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS.** Who you work with on your adoption is often the most critical factor in making the experience smooth and successful. People often pursue adoption with little or no professional help. When complications or problems arise, the family may be left with gaps of knowledge or may be lacking sources of help. The better and safer approach is to develop relationships with licensed adoption agencies or attorneys with experience in adoption. The State of Arkansas maintains a list of licensed agencies and their websites are good places to start your search. Similarly, the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys is a good place to locate an experienced adoption attorney in your area. Whatever route you choose it is usually wise to develop a relationship with someone locally who can help you through the process from beginning to end.

- 4) **BE PREPARED FOR THE FINANCIAL COST OF ADOPTION.** Adoptions of children through the State of Arkansas may be free to the adoptive family or even subsidized. Similarly, adoptions without the involvement of an agency may be relatively inexpensive. Federal adoption tax credits or employer- based benefits may ease the cost of adoption. However, adoption through an agency or attorney can cost tens of thousands of dollars. The prospective adoptive family should be good consumers and seek the options which best fit their financial situation. The costs of adoption, childcare and the impact on careers should all be considered and planned for at an early stage.
- 5) **PREPARE YOUR FAMILY FOR THE FUTURE.** Adoption is not second best or somehow less than building your family through having biological children. But adoption is certainly different. Be prepared for your child's questions and concerns regarding their identity as they grow. Be prepared for public attitudes toward adoption, some positive and others negative, which you will absolutely encounter during your adoption experience. Counselors and organizations such as the Centers for Youth and Families can provide guidance as you navigate through kids' tough questions.