

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Domestic Adoption Agency

1. What is the level of contact, if any, that your birthmothers tend to expect after the adoption?

Many adoption agencies are gravitating toward leading their birthmothers to expect contact after the adoption (open adoption). If you are not comfortable with this, this question is KEY. Levels of contact can range from: no contact, a yearly letter to birthmom, pictures and a letter every few months, sporadic phone conversations, regular phone conversations, or even face-to-face contact. Bottom line, know your agency's philosophy with birthmother contact after adoption! This can be a deal maker/breaker.

2. How many babies/children do you successfully place a year? How many adoptions do you have per year that are disrupted?

A healthy agency will be doing many placements a year with very few disruptions. For example, an agency that only places 8 babies a year is probably not an agency you want to work with. One of our local agencies does approximately 50 placements a year with only 2-3 disruptions per year. This is the result of seasoned birthmother counselors, an agency attorney/director excellent at sniffing-out potential scammers and an experienced, professional team of good communicators working with you. You are paying a great deal for their services – expect a lot!

3. Adoption Fees: What is the total fee for an adoption with your agency? How is the total fee split for legal fees, counseling services, the baby's birth, birthmother expenses, and agency work?

Ask for a fee schedule and have it thoroughly explained.

4. Do most of your birthmothers utilize Medicaid for the maternity/birth costs? If she has insurance, how much could we stand to pay toward her maternity bills? When in the process do we learn of her medical financial situation?

This is crucial. Adoption services are expensive and you need to know various financial situations for which you could be responsible.

5. How much do we stand to lose if the birthmother changes her mind and decides to keep the baby?

In the unfortunate event that a birthmother has a change of heart before the termination of her rights, refunds are not typical since your payments have paid hospital bills, services you've received, etc. Depending on how far along you are in the process, you could have paid a substantial amount of money. Know the maximum amount you could stand to lose in this unlikely-but-possible situation. Some agencies' boards will forgive some of these expenses and apply them toward another adoption if you are willing to adopt minority or hard-to-place infants.

6. Does this agency conduct its own home studies for clients, or do we need to utilize an outside agency for the home study? What is your home study fee?

Home study fees range from \$1200 – 2000 or more. If an agency has its own home study program, they will want you to utilize them.

7. Do you do the post-placement visits once the baby is in our home or do we need to find another agency to do these? What is the fee per post-placement visit?

You will have several post-placement visits prior to finalization where a social worker observes how the baby is adjusting and developing in your home.

8. Do we need to find an attorney on our own to represent us at termination and finalization or do you have adoption attorneys that you already work with regularly that we should use? What is the typical legal fee cost for these procedures?

You will need an attorney throughout the process to read and sign your “risk letters” that the agency sends you regarding the financial/emotional risks in adoption. You will also need an attorney to represent you (the adoptive family) at termination and finalization of the adoption. There are many attorneys in the area specializing in adoption law. If you are a Highview member, there is an attorney that provides her services to members at half price. Her contact information is listed online through the adoption link at highview.org.

9. What is the required adoptive parent training required prior to our adoption? How many hours are required? Do you have mandatory support group meetings for adoptive parents? What is the cost of this training?

With domestic adoption in Kentucky, you will be foster parents for 30-60 days following the birth of your child. It simply takes that long for parental rights to be terminated in the legal system depending on the circumstances of your adoption. You will receive training to be foster parents to an infant in accordance with state standards. Infant CPR is almost always required, as well as several reading assignments and support group meetings. If this is your first child, an infant care class is suggested.

10. Questions to ask yourself:

a. Do I feel comfortable with these people?

Bad vibes that you get from phone or face-to-face contact with an agency are almost always true. If you don't feel comfortable with an agency – don't entrust the future of your family to them.

b. Are the people in this agency friendly and helpful? Are they on our “team?”

Domestic adoption is characterized by support. Your agency should be continually available, cheerful and easy to work with. If they're not friendly and helpful when you're consulting them before your adoption, they will never be friendly and helpful through the process.

c. Do I feel like I can call my caseworker *anytime* I have a question?

Your caseworker should be ready and waiting to talk to you. It's his/her job! A good caseworker will let you know that you can always contact them. Though you are in a professional relationship with your caseworker, you should feel as if they are a friend because they are walking with you through the entire adoption!