



BIRTH PARENT INFORMATION

We hope the information in this packet will provide answers and help you decide if making an adoption plan is right for you and your child. Pregnancy can be a difficult time for a woman, especially when it is unexpected or unplanned. Many women with unplanned pregnancies struggle with their options. It is essential to take some time to let your emotions settle, as well as seek counsel from trusted family or friends. Ultimately, the decision to place your baby for adoption is yours.

You may have many questions about the adoption process, how everything works, and what happens after the adoption. We know that making this decision can be very emotional, and your choices will have lifelong implications. We aim to help you make the best decision for you and your child. We'll support you as best as possible and refer you to others who will be supportive. You are welcome to call us at 1-800-762-8063, visit our website, wifamilyconnectionscenter.org, or e-mail us at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org at any time.

WHAT IS ADOPTION?

Adoption is the legal process where the birth parent's parental rights are ended through a legal procedure called Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). After the TPR and adoption finalization, the adoptive parents become the legal parents, and the adoptive parents are responsible for the child.

The adoption will take place after the child is born. The adoptive parents will be there to care for the child daily and be responsible for the child legally and financially. Calling an adoption agency for more information does not mean you must make an adoption plan for your child. You are allowed to change your mind at any step of the process before the TPR.

GETTING STARTED

You probably have many questions about making an adoption plan and about adoption in general. Your first step is choosing an adoption agency to help you get started. One of the most important things to remember when choosing an adoption agency is to be sure you feel comfortable working with them.

- Our "How Do I Choose an Adoption Agency to Help Me Make an Adoption Plan?" tip sheet will be very helpful as you decide which agency to work with. Please see the Resource Appendix for where to find this tip sheet.
- There is also a list of licensed Wisconsin adoption agencies in the Resource Appendix. You can also call us at 1-800-762-8063 for a copy.

When you have selected the agency you want to work with, that agency will provide you with a birth parent counselor or another adoption professional. That person will be there to help you through the adoption process.

- They are not there to convince you that you should choose adoption.
- They will talk to you about adoption honestly. They will provide information and discuss all options with you. This will help you make an informed decision that is best for you.
- They will ask about prenatal care and other things to ensure that you are staying healthy and taking good care of yourself and your baby. If you do not have health insurance or have not yet received prenatal care, the counselor can help you get insurance, and the necessary health care you and your child require.
- If you need additional financial help with living or medical expenses, they can help you obtain the necessary resources.
- They will also provide emotional support and help prepare you for the day that your child is born.
- Another responsibility they hold is to work with you to obtain the adoptive parents' prenatal records and/or genetic history.

COSTS

There will be no cost to you as the birth parent. If you need assistance to ensure your child's safety and health, the adoption agency will help you find those resources.

The adoptive family is responsible for the financial part of the adoption process. The adoptive parents pay for the adoption, legal fees, and fees to the adoption agency.

TIME FRAME

It is important to contact an adoption agency as early as possible in your pregnancy or as soon as you have decided to consider adoption. This will allow you time to examine all your options and choices throughout the process. After your child is born, the TPR petition is filed, and a court date is set, you will go to court and terminate your parental rights. This time frame varies depending on the county and how busy the courts are.

HOME STUDY AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

It is required that all adoptive parents have a completed home study by a licensed adoption agency. A home study is the process of reviewing a family for adoption. The home study includes criminal background, employment, safety checks, and several extensive interviews by an adoption professional. During the interviews, adoptive parents will be asked about their personal and family backgrounds, parenting styles, relationships, references, and more.

First-time adoptive parents are also required by state law to complete 25 hours of pre-placement training. Within these 25 hours, families will be oriented to the adoption process and fulfill competencies required by the Department of Children and Families. The adoption agency is responsible for assisting both the birth family and adoptive family through the legal process of adoption.

OPEN ADOPTION

“Open” refers to the amount of contact that you and the adoptive family will have after they have placement of the child.

- Start to think about how “open” you would like your adoption to be.
- You can agree on the types and frequency of communication.
- Although openness agreements are not legally recognized in Wisconsin, your agency will help you negotiate this agreement with the adoptive family. This will also help the adoption agency connect you with a family that would like the same type and frequency of openness.
- You can select an adoptive parent(s) from a group of profiles the agency provides.
- You may also meet the adoptive parent(s) that you have chosen and interview them.

YOU ALSO HAVE THE OPTION OF A CLOSED ADOPTION

- The agency would choose an adoptive parent(s) for you.
- There will be no contact or identifying information between the birth family and adoptive family.
- You can still complete an Affidavit with the state of Wisconsin, allowing your child to search for you when they are 18 years old if they choose.

A BIRTH MOTHER’S STORY

Being pregnant at age 16 was definitely not part of my life plan. I didn’t tell my parents until I was almost five months along. With time running short, we contacted a local adoption agency that we were referred to. Although I knew that adoption would be the best choice for me, I still toyed with the idea of keeping my baby and being a thriving, young, single mother. After all, movies, TV, and magazines frequently showcase young mothers making it in the adult world, so why couldn’t I?

It was a turbulent couple of months filled with so many new emotions that, at times, I felt like giving up. Adoption was still at the forefront of my mind; I wanted my son to grow up with two stable parents who never wondered whether or not they could afford the next phase in life, vacations, or school expenses. I hated to admit it, but I knew this would be his life if I kept him.

To help me sift through my thoughts, I started a journal, which proved one of the best ideas I had had in a while!

My first meeting with the adoption agency went as well as expected. We discussed several types of adoption, the choice to pick and meet the adoptive couple, birthing classes, and much more. I could feel some weight lifting off my shoulders, like I had found a new friend. I looked through several family profiles and narrowed them down. I felt an undeterminable

connection to one couple and decided to meet them with my parents.

I felt an instant bond, and even before I finished asking all my questions, I knew they were the ones for my little man. After announcing my decision, I said to myself, "I guess this means I am going with adoption." The adoptive couple I selected and I agreed to a semi-open adoption where we could exchange letters and pictures. I needed the assurance that he was okay, but I also needed distance to go through the grieving process. My little man was born two weeks before Christmas. My family and the adoptive couple visited him for a few weeks at his foster home before the Termination of Parental Rights hearing. It was a bittersweet time. I wanted to bond with him and let him know that I was doing this out of love for him; at the same time, the visits caused pain for the life I would miss out on.

During the last few months of pregnancy, I started putting together a binder of pictures and letters, which I gave to the adoptive couple after the hearing. I wanted my little man to know where he came from, who he looks like, why he has certain personality traits or talents, and, most of all, that he means a lot to me. To this day, I keep in contact with his family and receive letters and pictures twice a year. Knowing he is an ordinary boy enjoying life, love, and friendship is a blessing. I write occasionally to update them on my now mundane adult world. I assure my not-so-little man that I still love him and am ready to meet him when the time is right. Although many view adoption as a scary, outdated process, I have had quite the opposite experience and feel blessed.

WHAT ABOUT THE BIRTH FATHER?

Under Wisconsin law, the parental rights of both the birth mother and the birth father must be terminated before a child can be adopted. There are ways to handle this, even if the birth mother does not know the birth father's identity or where he lives. The adoption agency professional will help you through this process.

If both the birth mother and the birth father agree that adoption is the best plan for the child, the judge can terminate their rights. It is recommended that the birth father appear in court to terminate his rights, but he is not required to be there. Your adoption agency can handle the needed paperwork and contact the birth father. If the birth father does not agree to terminate his rights, two things could occur:

- He could file for custody of the child. He would then have the legal responsibilities and rights of fatherhood. The non-custodial parent would be responsible for child support.
- His parental rights could be involuntarily terminated if he does not want to raise the child. A judge determines if an involuntary TPR is in the child's best interest.

PATERNAL INTEREST REGISTRY

In Wisconsin, both parents must be notified before their parental rights are terminated or their child is adopted. However, if the child's father is not married to the mother or has not

acknowledged his paternity, it may not be easy to locate the father and give notice. The Wisconsin Paternal Interest Registry is a way for putative (possible) fathers to get notification if their child is involved in a Termination of Parental Rights or adoption.

The Department of Children and Families records all potential fathers who have registered with the Paternal Interest Registry by filing a Declaration of Paternal Interest. Courts, attorneys, social workers, and parents may ask the Department to review its records and either provide a copy of a Declaration of Paternal Interest or state in writing that no Declaration of Paternal Interest for the child at issue has been filed. The information may then be used to move a child forward to either reunification or adoption.

FINAL STEPS

Call your adoption agency professional and/or family when your labor begins. You may spend time alone with your baby at the hospital if you want. Take as much time as you need. In Wisconsin, your child can go to a foster (receiving) home or the adoptive parent's home upon discharge from the hospital. If you are uncomfortable placing your child in either of these situations, you can place them with a relative or bring the baby home with you.

After your child is born, the adoption agency will file a petition for TPR with the county courts.

- The time period to appear in court can vary depending on when the petition to terminate parental rights (TPR) is filed with the court.
- The birth father can attend the hearing in person or sign the Termination of Parental Rights and send it to the court.
- The adoptive parents will be able to visit the baby with the approval of the birth and foster parents. You, too, can see the baby if you want to. Utilize this time to seek counseling and be sure of your decision.
- Upon TPR, the adoptive parents will take the baby home.

Guardianship of the baby is transferred to the adoption agency until the adoption is finalized, approximately six months after the TPR. This means you will no longer have any legal relationship with or responsibility to your child. The adoption agency will supervise the adoptive placement for six months, called the post-placement period. After six months, the adoptive parents will go to court and officially adopt the baby. They can change the baby's name at this time, and the birth certificate will be altered to show the new name. The birth certificate will also name the adoptive parents as the child's parents.

SELF-REFLECTION

When facing an unplanned pregnancy, the decision about how to proceed is one that no one else should make for you. You can consider other's thoughts and opinions, but ultimately, the decision is yours.

Here are some ideas for sorting out your thoughts and feelings regarding this decision:

- Make a chart of each option you are considering with two columns: gains and losses.
- Briefly write or imagine what your life and your child's life would look like after each option.
- Seek counsel from someone you respect and trust or a professional.
- Continue to seek support from your family, friends, counselor, and birth father (whoever positively influences your life).

SUPPORT

You can expect to feel some grief and loss over your child's adoption. This is a normal reaction to placing your child for adoption. Take time to heal and seek support from your family and friends. Accept that you have made a very difficult decision and take time to recover.

You may need additional support throughout your pregnancy and after your child is born. Interacting with others who have made the loving decision to make an adoption plan for their children may be comforting. Please see the Resource Appendix for a link to a list of support groups for birth families in different parts of Wisconsin.

We know that you are facing a challenging time and that no one can decide about your child but you. If you have questions, need a resource, or want someone to talk to about making this decision, contact the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at 1-800-762-8063.

RESOURCE APPENDIX

The Wisconsin Family Connections Center website, wifamilyconnectionscenter.org, has several resources that may be helpful to you through your journey. By exploring the website, you can find:

- Tip Sheets (We recommend the tip sheet titled "How Do I Choose an Adoption Agency to Help Me Make an Adoption Plan?")
- Licensed Wisconsin adoption agencies
- Support groups and resources for birth parents

If you need assistance navigating the website or any other information or resources, please call us at 1-800-762-8063.