



DOMESTIC/INDEPENDENT INFANT ADOPTION INFORMATION

Thank you for deciding to learn more about becoming an adoptive family! The process of adoption can be an emotional and complex one, and it can also be very rewarding. This packet has been designed to provide information about domestic or independent infant adoption. As you read through the steps involved, remember that the Wisconsin Family Connections Center staff is here to support, encourage, and assist you throughout your journey. You are welcome to call us at 1-800-762-8063, visit our website, wifamilyconnectionscenter.org, or email us at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org anytime.

GETTING STARTED

You probably have many questions about how to begin the process of adopting domestically or independently. What is the difference between domestic infant and independent infant adoption? What are the requirements for each type of adoption? How much will it cost? You may have additional questions, and we can help you answer them.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC/INDEPENDENT INFANT ADOPTION?

Domestic infant adoption and independent infant adoption are two different but similar types of adopting a child voluntarily placed for adoption.

A *domestic infant adoption* occurs when a birth parent(s) makes an adoption plan for their child. A licensed adoption agency then places the baby with the identified adoptive parent(s) with an approved adoption home study. The birth parents usually select prospective adoptive parents. In domestic infant adoption, while adoptive parents may be able to assume immediate physical placement of the baby from the hospital, the adoption agency maintains legal custody of the child until the adoption is finalized.

An *independent infant adoption* is when a birth parent(s) selects the adoptive parents through a source other than an adoption agency. You will be connected with the birth parent and may already be working with an adoption attorney. In Wisconsin, a licensed adoption agency must still be involved in the independent adoption process to complete the adoption home study, license the home, monitor placement, and provide/offer counseling and services to birth parents and prospective adoptive parents.

THE CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR ADOPTION

In most cases, children adopted domestically or independently are infants. In rare cases, an older child may be eligible to be adopted. This may also be true for special circumstances in which a relative may adopt a relative child or a stepparent may adopt a stepchild.

REQUIREMENTS

Some basic requirements for both types of infant adoption include:

- **Age:** You must be at least 21 to adopt in Wisconsin.
- **Finances:** You must be financially able to provide for your family.
- **Marital status:** Most adoption agencies require married couples to be married for at least one to three years before adopting. You can also adopt through some agencies if you are single, divorced, or part of an unmarried couple (only one person in an unmarried couple can adopt).
- **Home study:** All adoptive parents need to complete a home study. An adoption agency does the home study. The home study allows the agency to get to know a potential adoptive family and assess their readiness to adopt.
- **Training:** All first-time adoptive parents must complete at least 25 hours of pre-adoption training.
- **Health:** Your physical and mental health conditions do not interfere with your ability to provide care for a child.

TIME FRAME

The time frame for a domestic/independent infant adoption can vary for several reasons. The average wait for a child, from application to finalization, is two years. This can vary for several reasons, including, but not limited to, the following examples:

- Being too specific about the demographics and background history of the child you wish to adopt
- How motivated you are to complete your requirements in a timely manner
- Children are required to be placed for a minimum of six months before an adoption can occur
- Delays due to timely filing of legal paperwork
- Delays with the court process

Time frames can also vary depending on when adoption profiles of waiting families are chosen. In the domestic infant adoption process, the birth parent(s) often choose to be part of the selection process and will decide on an adoptive family for their child after reviewing several adoptive parent profiles. If birth parents opt out of being a part of the selection process, adoption agencies will step in and use their internal process to complete a match.

PROCESS

Your first step in becoming an adoptive family is to choose a private adoption agency. When choosing an adoption agency, be sure the agency meets your expectations and that you feel comfortable working with the staff. You can also ask what services are included in the fees outlined in the agreement. For more information about how to find an adoption agency,

reference the Resource Appendix.

Once you have selected an agency to work with, you will need to fill out an extensive application. After your application is approved, you are ready to start the home study.

COST

Costs associated with a private adoption can vary significantly from one agency to another. A domestic infant adoption can range from \$12,000 to \$25,000. An independent infant adoption process can range from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Keep in mind these are approximate ranges, and total costs may be significantly higher depending on several expenses that could include, but are not limited to:

- Adoption home study
- Legal fees
- Agency fees
- Allowable birth parent expenses
- Profile preparation
- Matching process
- Placement
- Follow-up services
- Education/Training
- Adoption consultant fees
- Optional or expanded support services

There are financial resources that can help offset costs associated with adoption. For information about grant, scholarship, and loan opportunities, as well as additional information on how to make adoption an affordable option, please see the Resource Appendix.

HOME STUDY

Home studies must generally include the following:

- 1. Personal and family background.** This includes writing about and/or having an interview with agency staff about the family in which you grew up, how you were disciplined, and your life experiences.
- 2. Significant people in the lives of the applicants.** Similar to personal background, you will explain your relationships with co-workers or friends and your experiences with them.
- 3. Marriage and family relationships.** Again, you will explain, either through writing or an interview, your relationship with your partner (if applicable). This includes information such as how you met and how you resolve conflicts. You will also talk about your relationships with your family members.
- 4. Motivation to adopt.** What is your motivation to adopt?

- 5. Expectations for the child.** What are your expectations for your children as they grow up?
- 6. Feelings about infertility (if this is an issue).** How were you able to resolve them?
- 7. Parenting and integration of the child into the family.** How do you plan on introducing the child to your family? How do you view the contact with your family and the child?
- 8. Family environment.** This will involve your family dynamics, how you and your significant other interact and deal with conflicts, and your home environment (condition of the home).
- 9. Physical and health history of the applicants.** All adoption agencies require a physical and a tuberculosis test. You will also need statements from your doctor(s) about your health condition.
- 10. Education and employment.** This includes insurance coverage and childcare plans if needed. You will be asked about your employment history and any job stresses.
- 11. Reference letters.** All agencies require at least three letters of recommendation from three non-relatives. Some agencies also ask for recommendations from family members, school staff, etc.
- 12. Criminal background checks.** The agency will run a criminal and child protective services check.
- 13. Summary and adoption professional's recommendation.** This summarizes the adoption professional's findings and their recommendation for a child for your family.
- 14. Autobiographical statement.** This is essentially the story of your life. Did you get along well with siblings, parents, etc.? Why would you be a good parent?
- 15. Income Statement.** You will need to verify your income by providing pay stubs, a W-4, or an income tax form.

This process usually takes about three to six months to complete. You can begin your pre-adoption training while completing your home study or shortly thereafter.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The State of Wisconsin requires all first-time adoptive parents to complete 25 hours of pre-adoption training, of which a minimum of six hours must be in-person training and a minimum of six hours must be child-specific training. The 25 hours of pre-adoption training must cover the required core competencies:

- Adoption and its impact on parenting and family dynamics
- The issues for a child in an adoptive placement
- Loss and grief for the adopted child and the adoptive family
- Attachment issues in adoptive placements
- Support and resources for adopted children and adoptive families
- Cultural sensitivity in adoption
- Effects of abuse and neglect in adoption, including sexual abuse
- Legal issues relating to adoption
- Issues of children being adopted from an institutionalized care setting

- Educational issues in adoption
- Childhood developmental stages
- Trauma issues related to adoption

Within the “support and resources for adopted children and adoptive families” competency listed above, adoption agencies are required to provide prospective parents with information about post-adoption support offered through the Wisconsin Family Connections Center. In addition, adoption agencies are responsible for providing at least six additional hours of training appropriate to the family’s post-adoption needs. These trainings can be taken before the adoption or requested by the families through their adoption agency at any time in the future. Your assigned adoption professional will give you information about your training requirements.

FINAL STEPS

After you have completed the home study process and training requirements, it is an excellent time to begin preparing your profile. Your profile is a portfolio of pictures and information about you and your family.

This portfolio is shown to birth parents trying to select a family for their child. As you prepare your profile, consider what demographics/social history of a child your family is best suited to adopt. For example:

- Can you parent a child who has been exposed to drugs or alcohol or who is of a different race or ethnic background from you?
- What level of openness are you comfortable with?
 - In a closed adoption, the adoptive parents and the birth parent(s) never know each other. Adoptive parents are only given genetic and medical histories from the birth parent(s).
 - In an open adoption, you and the birth parent(s) decide how much contact to have after the adoption has been finalized. This can be anything from sending letters and photos to the birth parent(s) once a year to including the birth parent(s) in birthday or holiday celebrations. Disclaimer: Wisconsin is a closed adoption state. Despite this, most adoption agencies and adoption professionals encourage adoptive families to consider some degree of openness when adopting. Whatever is agreed upon is usually decided before the adoption is finalized and considered an informal/non-binding agreement between the adoptive and birth parents.

At this point, there is nothing left to do except wait for your match and placement. We know that waiting can be one of the most difficult parts of this journey. In the Resource Appendix, you will find information about a tip sheet entitled “What to Do While You Wait.”

When you have been matched with a birth parent(s), you may need to travel to meet them. You may also need to make additional plans if the birth parent gives you permission or wants

you to be present at the child's birth. After the child is born, they will be placed according to the plan you have worked out with the birth parent(s) and adoption agency. The child may be placed with you (the adoptive parents), foster parents, or their birth parent(s) before the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) hearing. Following the TPR, the baby will be placed with you, and your agency will make post-placement visits to your home until the adoption is finalized. The baby must be placed with you for six months before the adoption can be finalized in court.

SELF-REFLECTION

We know this is a lot of information to take in and digest. Take some time to slow down and reflect on what you've read before deciding if this is the right path for your family or if another type of adoption would be a better fit. Some questions to think about may include:

- Do I meet the requirements to be an adoptive family?
- Does this particular type of adoption meet my expectation to grow my family?
- Are my expectations for the child I hope to adopt appropriate?
- Am I too specific about the child's race, gender, and ethnicity?
- Is the cost of this type of adoption something my family is prepared for?
- Are my partner and I in agreement about adoption and this particular type of adoption?
- Can I complete the home study process and training required?
- Will my current family and friends support my adoption plans and adoptive child?
- Do I have a support network or know how to connect with one?
- Am I open to having contact with my child's birth parents or extended birth family post-adoption?

MORE QUESTIONS?

Please remember that Wisconsin Family Connections Center staff are here for you during every step of your adoption journey, whether getting started, researching, training, or post-adoption. If you have more questions, please give us a call. We are here to help! You may also want to learn more about support groups in your area.

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 sheets titled "I'm Ready to Adopt! How Do I Choose an Adoption Agency?" and "What to Do While You Wait.")
- Support groups
- Information about making adoption affordable

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