

Adoption

Adopting a child is one way to become a parent after cancer treatment. Over 125,000 children are adopted each year in the US. This booklet will provide a basic overview of adoption. Additional resources are listed at the end.

What should I consider when deciding about adopting a child?

Do you want to adopt a newborn baby? Or, are you comfortable adopting an older child? Do you want to adopt a child of the same race and ethnicity? Or, are you comfortable with an interracial adoption? Are you comfortable adopting a child who may have special health care needs?

Adopting a child can be a complicated process. Find out about the challenges you may face. Talk with other adoptive parents about what they experienced. Talk with family and friends about your choices and ask for their support. There are many organizations that provide support for adoptive parents. Examples are the American Fertility Association and the Adoptive Parents Committee (see web addresses at the end).

What are the different types of adoptions?

Domestic Versus International/Intercountry Adoption

Domestic adoptions

- This type of adoption means that the child was born and lives in the US and is a US citizen. A match is usually made between the birth mother and the adoptive parents before the child is born. Domestic adoptions provide the best chance to adopt a newborn child. Depending on your ethnicity, they may provide the best chance to adopt a child of the same ethnicity as you.

International or intercountry adoptions

- This type of adoption means that the child was born and lives in a different country than the adoptive parents. Regulations on adoption vary from country to country. They also change often. Most of these children have lived in orphanages for a period of time in their native country. They are usually at least six months old. They may be of a different race or culture than you. The international adoption process is highly regulated. It requires completing a large amount of paperwork. You are usually required to travel to the child's country of origin. Sometimes multiple visits are required.

Agency Versus Private Adoption

Adoption agencies may be public or private. The agency case worker is often involved in matching the birth parents with the adoptive parents. The match is based on what the birth parents are seeking in adoptive parents. It is also based on what type of child the adoptive parents are hoping to adopt.

- Public agencies are part of the state Department of Social Services. They usually work with children who have been removed from their biologic parents due to alleged abuse or neglect.
- Private agencies specialize in domestic or international adoptions, or sometimes both. Each agency has its own standards about who they will accept as adoptive parents. Children adopted through private agencies are usually younger than in public agencies. You are more likely to adopt a newborn from a private agency.

With *private adoptions*, there is no adoption agency involved. Instead, the birth and adoptive parents locate each other and decide to make an adoption plan together. They can find each other in many ways. Examples include newspaper advertisements and word of mouth. Adoption laws vary widely by state. As a result, adoptive parents must speak with adoption professionals to make sure they are obeying state laws.

Open Versus Closed Adoption

The amount of information shared between the birth parents and the adoptive parents can vary.

Closed adoption

- The birth parents and adoptive parents do not know the identity of each other. There is no direct contact after the adoption is over. Closed adoptions were common in the past in the US. They are also common with international adoptions today.

Open or semi-open adoption

- The birth parents and adoptive parents may contact each other after the adoption. This may involve visits between the birth parents and the child. Or, the contact can just be letters sent through the agency or attorney. The manner and amount of contact depends upon the desires of everyone involved. The state laws where the baby is born, or where the adoption is finalized, will also impact this issue. Open or semi-open adoptions are more common today in the US.

Are there any special issues I should be aware of because of my history of cancer?

In an adoption, everyone's main concern is for the well-being of the child. A history of cancer should not be an issue in a domestic adoption if you are healthy now. However, you will need a letter from your doctor that says you are healthy. With international adoptions, there may be more restrictions. Many countries require you to be cancer free for a period of time before they allow you to adopt. For example, you may be asked to wait five years. Some countries also have restrictions based on your age and marital status. It is important to select an agency that knows about these issues. Therefore, you can focus your efforts where you will have the greatest chance of success.

What are the steps I have to take if I want to adopt?

1. Decide on the type of adoption you want to pursue. Adoptive Families Adoption Guide provides a good summary to help you decide what is best for you. (www.theadoptionguide.com/tools/planner/matrix)
2. Select an adoption agency and/or attorney. Do your research. Speak with other adoptive parents that used the agency or attorney you are considering. Interview the professionals you are considering. Feel confident that whomever you hire will do their best to help you adopt a child.
 - To find an agency: Get familiar with the laws of your state before selecting an agency. Some states will only allow you to work with agencies licensed in your state of residence. One research tool you can use is the National Foster Care and Adoption Directory. Select your state and the type of agency you are looking for (i.e., public, private domestic, private intercountry) (www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad)
 - To find agencies focused on international adoption: Search the Intercountry Adoption list (adoption.state.gov/hague/accreditation/agencies.html)
 - To find an adoption lawyer: Search the American Academy of Adoption Lawyers (www.adoptionattorneys.org)
3. Find out about all the costs that will be involved. This can vary and generally ranges between \$15,000 and \$35,000. Some agencies have payment plans or sliding scales based on your income. Ask about the Adoption Expense Tax Credit. It allows you to take a tax credit on your federal income taxes for your eligible adoption expenses. Some employers provide adoption benefits to help with costs as well.

4. Participate in a home study. A social worker will evaluate you as a potential parent. He or she will ask you many things that may seem very personal. This is to ensure you have the ability and resources to care for an adopted child.
5. Prepare to wait. The amount of time will vary, but generally the waiting time is between one and three years.
6. Once the child is placed in your care, the social worker stays in contact to help with any issues that may arise.
7. After a set time period, the adoption is finalized by an attorney.

What resources are available for additional information about adoption?

Adopting.org

www.adopting.org

Adoption Guide

www.theadoptionguide.com

Adoption.com

www.adoption.com

Adoptive Families

www.adoptivefamilies.com

Adoptive Parents Committee

www.adoptiveparents.org

American Fertility Association

www.theafa.org

American Society for Reproductive Medicine

www.asrm.org/Patients/patientbooklets/adoption.pdf

Fertile Hope

www.fertilehope.org/tool-bar/referral-guide-results.cfm

www.fertilehope.org/financial-assistance/adoption-assistance.cfm

Intercountry Adoption Office of Children's Issues, US Department of State

adoption.state.gov/adoption.homepage.html

National Adoption Clearinghouse

www.adoption.org/adopt/national-adoption-clearinghouse.php

Yahoo Groups: Adoption after Cancer

groups.yahoo.com/group/adoption-after-cancer/



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