

## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CONSIDERING A DOMESTIC INFANT PRIVATE AGENCY ADOPTION

1. Is the agency licensed in New York State? The NYS Office of Children & Family Services maintains a list of adoption agencies licensed by New York State. You can view the list at [www.ocfs.state.ny.us/adopt/agcymenu.asp](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/adopt/agcymenu.asp) or you can call the OCFS in your area. If you plan to finalize the adoption in NYS, the agency needs to be licensed by the state of NY.
2. What types of domestic infant adoption programs does the agency have (full service, agency assisted, minority, hard to place)? A full service adoption program is when an adoption agency works with prospective adoptive parents to find a prospective birthmother and the agency shares the adoptive parent profiles with prospective birthmother which they can review and choose a family. Some agencies have programs where prospective parents are not involved in the search for prospective birthmothers and are on a more traditional waiting list. An agency assisted program would have the prospective adoptive parents locate a prospective birthmother and the agency would do the service portion of the adoption. Agency assisted programs do not match families. Ask the agency how many years it has had the adoption program you are interested in?
3. Are there any restrictions on who can adopt through the agency (age, income, length of marriage, previous divorce, sexual orientation, religion, single parent)? Do the restrictions vary with different programs or types of children?
4. How many children did the agency place last year in the program you are considering? Two years ago? Is there currently a waiting list?
5. How many families are currently working with the agency in the program you are interested in?
6. Is it possible to talk with families who have adopted from the program you are interested in? Can you talk to parents that did not have a completely positive experience with the agency?
7. What support is available throughout the adoption process? Does the agency have meetings or online groups for waiting parents? Are you assigned to a different caseworker during different phases of the adoption?
8. What paperwork is involved in the application process? How long does it take?
9. Does an agency social worker complete the home study? When will you know if you received a positive home study recommendation? If you are not approved, can you find out why? Can you attach an addendum to a negative home study recommendation? Is there an appeal procedure? How many copies of the home study report will you receive?
10. After your home study and application are completed what is the average time frame for a family to adopt?
11. What fees does the agency have? What is the price range for their agency adoptions? What type of payment schedule does the agency have? You should never pay all the fees up front before the child arrives. Does the fee cover the home

study, post-placement visits? Are you asked to setup an escrow account for birth mother expenses or do you only pay birthparent expenses after placement? What are typical expenses for prospective birthmothers (e.g. counseling, medical expenses, legal fees, rent)? Does the agency pay prospective birthmother expenses directly to the vendor (e.g. landlord, electrical company, doctor)? What happens to expenses if the prospective birthmother changes her mind? What is the agency's position on how quickly to pay the prospective birthmother's living expenses? Some agencies believe in paying funds early in the contact with the prospective birthmother to show interest in her and her child. Others believe the prospective birthmother should first complete background paperwork, sign a release for her medical records from the obstetrician so that the prospective adoptive parents have time to evaluate her seriousness in making an adoption plan. What are typical expenses for out-of-state placements?

12. What is the agency's policy about fee payment if the adoption is not completed ?
13. What is the agency's position on open adoption? If the adoption is open, will the agency help negotiate contact with the birthmother and baby during the hospital visit (e.g. feedings) and after the baby is placed? Open adoption agreements between birthparents and adoptive parents can be legally binding in NYS if the Post Adoption Contact Agreement (PACA) is written into or attached to the Adoption Agreement.
14. What advice will you receive about networking, advertising, profile writing, talking on the phone to prospective birthparents, establishing an adoption phone line? Do the profiles look like marketing brochures, flyers, multipage booklets? Are profiles done by a graphics specialist or are they homemade? Do they convert profiles to .pdf format? Do they use DVD profiles? Do they list prospective parents on their agency website?
15. Which states does the agency recommend advertising/networking in and why? Which states should you avoid advertising/networking in and why?
16. What can the agency tell you about the Interstate Compact?
17. Will the agency answer phone calls from prospective birthparents and screen them prior to you talking with them?
18. Does the agency have a toll free phone number? Does it accept collect calls from prospective birthparents? What is the holiday & weekend coverage?
19. What are the agency's policies and procedures with prospective birthmothers that approach the agency? How does the agency determine which waiting parents will have an opportunity to be matched with the prospective birthparents that make the initial contact with the agency?
20. What happens if the agency presents you with a potential placement and you feel it is not a good match?
21. What medical records will you be able to receive on the prospective birthparents? Will the agency request drug screens and HIV tests for the prospective birthparents? Will the agency contact the hospital to learn of their adoption procedures? Does the agency try to get the prospective birthmothers on Medicaid if they do not have private insurance?

22. What is the agency's role in getting the prospective birthmother legal representation?
23. Will you need your own attorney? The American Academy of Adoption Attorneys [www.adoptionattorney.org](http://www.adoptionattorney.org) can be a resource for finding an adoption attorney. To verify an adoption attorney is in good standing in NYS call the Office of Court Administration at 212-428-2800.
24. What criteria does the agency use to determine if the prospective birthparent(s) is at risk for deciding not to make an adoption plan? How many prospective birthmothers last year changed their mind about adoption after the birth and before placement? How many prospective birthparents decided to raise their child after placement & before finalization? Will the agency advise you not to proceed if it appears an adoption is at risk or will the agency take a more reserved position and leave the decision to you? How many cases in the last two years that were not identified at risk did the prospective birthparents change their mind after the birth of the child?
25. Will the agency arrange for or provide counseling for the prospective birthparents? Does the agency have a support group or online group for birthparents? Does the agency have a worker that works specifically with prospective birthparents? What services are available for birthparents after placement?
26. Does the agency believe you should go to the hospital before the prospective birthmother has signed the relinquishment of her parental rights?
27. If you need to travel out of town, will the agency provide advice on traveling and hotel stays with a small child?
28. How and when will the birthparents parental rights be terminated? What happens if the birthfather cannot be located?
29. How long will it take to finalize the adoption? What are the procedures necessary to finalize the adoption? In what state would the adoption be finalized?
30. What post adoption services are provided? Can the agency be an intermediary between you and the birth family to exchange photos & letters after placement? Does the agency host social events/picnics for families?
31. If the agency hears from your birth parent after placement will the agency let you know?
32. After you take your child home will you be the foster parent or the legal guardian of your child while you wait for the adoption to be finalized? Foster parents do not have the same parental rights concerning the child in their care as do parents or guardians.