

HOW TO ADOPT IN NEW JERSEY:
A Roadmap to Family Building



New Jersey Adoption
Resource Clearing House

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LEGACY OF AN ADOPTED CHILD

Once there were two women
Who never knew each other
One you do not remember
The other you call mother.
Two different lives
Shaped to make yours one
One became your guiding star
The other became your sun
The first gave you life
And the second taught you to live it
One gave you a nationality
The other gave you a name
One gave you the seed of talent
The other gave you aim
One gave you emotions
The other calmed your fears
One saw your first sweet smile
The other dried your tears
One gave you up—
It was all she could do
The other prayed for a child
And God led her straight to you
And now you ask me
Through your tears,
The age-old questions
Through the years
Heredity or environment
Which are you the product of?
Neither my darling —neither
Just two kinds of love.

Author Unknown

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I. INTRODUCTION



The purpose of this handbook is to give those who are thinking about adoption a road map to start the process. As a potential adoptive parent, you will have many decisions to make as to the type of adoption you choose to pursue. This handbook will give you information that can assist you and your family in deciding what kind of adoption is best for you.

While we can offer ideas and suggestions, we strongly encourage you to work closely with the adoption agency you have chosen. In addition, we recommend that you join an adoption support group that can also assist in guiding you through the maze of adoption.

It is not possible to cover any of the topics introduced in this booklet in great depth. Our goal is to summarize some of the most common adoption options and to identify support services and resources.

The addition of the New Jersey Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ•ARCH) to the existing adoption-related services in New Jersey offers further support and guidance to all persons touched by adoption. You can access NJ•ARCH the following ways:

By Telephone: 973.763.2041

Warm Line: 1.877.4ARCHNJ (1.877.427.2465)

Internet: www.njarch.org

Office: 76 South Orange Avenue, Suite 209
South Orange, New Jersey 07079

II. WHAT IS ADOPTION?¹



Adoption is the permanent, legal transfer of all parental rights from one person or couple to another person or couple. Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as parents whose children are born to them. Adoptive parents are real parents and have all the emotional, social, legal and kinship benefits of birth parents.

There are two common types of adoption: One is of the child by a relative (a stepparent, grandparent or other family member); the other is of a child or children who are unrelated to the adopting parents. This handbook primarily addresses the adoption of unrelated children.

Within this category of adoption, several options are available. You can:

- Adopt from the foster care system, by:
 - Adopting an older child or a child with special needs, or by
 - Becoming a “Fost-Adopt” parent for a child who is not yet legally free for adoption, with the possibility of adoption when he or she becomes legally available
 - If you are a regular foster parent, you may possibly adopt your foster child if he or she becomes legally available
- Adopt an infant or older child from the United States, or
- Adopt a child from another country.

There are several ways in which you can pursue adoption. You can:

- Use a public agency,
- Use a private agency, or
- Use an attorney. The latter is called an “independent” or “private” adoption.

¹ [A Child is Waiting—A Beginner’s Guide to Adoption](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/). Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.
<http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/>

III. MAKING THE DECISION TO ADOPT



Many couples come to the decision to adopt after being diagnosed with infertility. Since medical treatment to achieve pregnancy is fraught with emotional ups and downs, it is usually best to take some time to grieve for the biological child who will not be. Often one partner may feel more ready to pursue adoption than the other. This can cause tension in the relationship. Participating in a support group such as “Resolve” (1-888-RNJ-2810) is often helpful in working through feelings of anger, sadness and loss. Some couples may require professional counseling to resolve these feelings and to reach a mutual decision about building a family. Only when these feelings are understood and faced is it appropriate to move on. Some families may decide to no longer pursue becoming parents. Others may wish to pursue additional fertility treatment. Many will embrace adoption because they feel parenting, not giving birth, is their true goal.

Some families consider adoption for other reasons. These include families who want to provide a home for a child already waiting for a family, single persons who want to become parents, older couples who have already raised biological children, and gay and lesbian couples who wish to parent a child together.

Whatever the reasons may be, it is critical to fully explore them. Adoption is a life-long commitment and will greatly impact every member of the family. If you want to adopt in order to provide care, love, and a permanent family for a child, you are moving in the right direction. If you believe that adoption will help you resolve relationship problems with your partner or if your primary motivation is to provide a sibling for your child, then you should reconsider; adoption may or may not be right for your family.

Once you have made the decision to pursue adoption, the next question is what type of adoption: domestic or international, infant or waiting child, agency or private. This handbook explores these options.

IV. KINDS OF ADOPTION



DOMESTIC INFANT ADOPTION

Domestic infant adoption can be done through a private non-profit adoption agency, through an attorney, or through the state child welfare agency, if you are flexible enough to consider infants with a variety of birth histories. All methods require a home study completed by an agency licensed in New Jersey.

Very few healthy Caucasian infants are available for adoption, and the wait for one can be lengthy. Some agencies open for applications only during limited periods to avoid long waiting lists. If you are only interested in a healthy Caucasian infant, you will have to be persistent: you can repeatedly call various private agencies until they are accepting new applicants, or you can pursue adoption through an attorney. If you are open to broadening your required characteristics of the infant and the infant's medical history, you may adopt an African-American or bi-racial infant or an infant whose birth history poses some potential medical or developmental risks.

To identify an agency, obtain a list of licensed agencies from the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) Bureau of Licensing or from NJ•ARCH (see page 19 for more information on selecting an agency). Check with your local adoption support group to find out what other families' experiences were with these agencies.

As you narrow your search, you may want to ask each prospective agency for the names of families who have previously worked with it and who may be comfortable discussing their adoption experience with you.

Part of the application process includes participating in a home study and attending training. You will also have to provide references, undergo a check for criminal history and child abuse, and provide reports of physical exams for each family. (See page 23 for more information about the home study process.)

Under certain circumstances your agency may ask you to create a presentation book and/or write a "Dear Birthmother" letter. This means that the birth mother is working with a social worker to

make an adoption plan and will be involved in choosing prospective parents for her child. In this case, the applicants wait until they are chosen.

DYFS (the state child welfare agency) and some private agencies participate in the ***Fost-Adopt Program***. In this unique program, the fost-adopt parent provides foster care initially but makes a commitment to adopt if adoption becomes the long-term goal for the child. Children who are placed in fost-adopt homes have been determined to be less likely to be returned to a birthparent than those placed in regular foster homes; however, there is no guarantee that the child will become available for adoption. Fost-adopt placements are designed to bridge the gap between the initial need for temporary care and the long-term need for consistent parenting for children unlikely to return to the birthfamily care. Children placed in fost-adopt homes are typically, three years of age and younger and are usually born of high-risk pregnancies. They are not considered to be medically fragile, but may require extra stimulation and medical supervision to ensure their healthy development.

Being a fost-adopt parent requires that you be able to tolerate a certain level of risk while providing a loving home for a child who may ultimately be returned to his/her birth family. Pursuing adoption through this program should be carefully considered in advance, especially the possibility that adoption may not happen. Although most children in fost-adopt homes are adopted by their fost-adopt parents, the ultimate decision is based on what is considered to be in the best interest of the child and on the legal considerations in the case.

Another route using an agency, ***identified adoption***, is to locate a potential birth mother on your own through word of mouth or advertising. Once you have located the biological mother, you must connect her with an adoption agency licensed in New Jersey. Using an agency allows the surrender of parental rights to be effective as soon as 72 hours after the birth provided the birth mother has had adequate counseling. It may take longer if the mother had no prenatal counseling. The state requires a minimum of three counseling sessions although the birth mother can waive them. Most reputable agencies will encourage the mother to fully participate in counseling and to identify the birthfather. Once the birth father is identified, the agency should obtain health information and a legal surrender of parental rights from him.

Another way to adopt an infant is a ***private adoption through an attorney***. When using an attorney to identify a birthmother, there is typically a certain amount of openness between the

birthmother and the potential adoptive parents. Once a birthmother is identified, the attorney interviews the birthmother and completes the required paperwork. The adoptive parent or parents request a home study from a licensed agency. The surrender of parental rights is taken before a judge. This can be a quicker, less costly route, but the surrender usually does not become final until the court date, which is typically 30 to 60 days after the child's birth.

In this situation, there is a real risk that the birthparents may change their minds about their surrender. For a family that has the child in its home prior to the legal surrender, the time prior to the court hearing can be extremely stressful.

As mentioned above, in some domestic infant adoptions, the birth parents may request a degree of openness. This can range from a pre-birth meeting, to yearly letters and pictures, to agreed-upon meetings on holidays and significant life events, or to an ongoing relationship with the adoptive family and the child. One of the goals of the home study is to enable prospective adoptive parents to determine how much openness they are comfortable with. It is unwise to agree to more contact than you will feel comfortable with as the child grows older and asks questions about the birth parents.

It is also unwise to keep secrets about the child's adoption and/or family history. If this is a concern, there are numerous books and articles on our NJ•ARCH website that can provide more information on this topic.

WAITING OR OLDER CHILD ADOPTION²

Over 150,000 children in North America are available for adoption. Most of them are in foster care because they have been abused, neglected or abandoned. State child welfare agencies work with families to resolve their problems with the goal of family reunification. If this is not possible, the state agency pursues the termination of parental rights and seeks an adoptive family for the child.

Waiting children range in age from toddlers to teens. They are from many races, ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Most wait in foster care but some may reside in group homes or residential treatment programs. Some have medical or emotional disabilities due to birth and placement histories. They may be withdrawn, angry, impulsive and/or provocative. They may be academically below grade level. Some have medical challenges such as a heart condition, mental

retardation, or another chronic illness. Many of these conditions are treatable. Other children may be part of a sibling group that should be placed together. While caring for waiting children may be a challenge, the rewards are enormous. These children need prospective parents who are flexible, patient problem solvers and adept at accessing community resources.

If you adopt a waiting child, he or she may be eligible for subsidy or adoption assistance. If so, you will receive payments from the state or federal government to offset the short and long-term costs of special services. Most children adopted from foster care are also eligible for medical assistance through Medicaid. If you adopt a child with special needs from the Division of Youth and Family Services, there are no adoption fees; legal fees within specified guidelines are also paid by DYFS.

Most agencies placing older children offer adoption and parenting classes as part of the home study process. It is strongly recommended that prospective adoptive parents take these courses or an online preparation course such as the Adoption Road Map Course offered by the National Adoption Center at www.adoptnet.org.

Older or special needs children can be adopted through the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services and a number of private agencies in the state including our parent agency, Children's Aid and Family Services, Inc.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

United States citizens and residents are adopting children from all over the world with increasing frequency. International adoptions provide safe, loving homes to children in need of parents for a variety of social and political reasons. Over 20,000 inter-country adoptions take place each year in the United States, adding to the more than 200,000 foreign-adopted children already living in our country. Overall, China is currently the greatest source for inter-country adoptions, followed in descending order by Russia, South Korea, Guatemala, Romania, Vietnam, Ukraine, India, and Cambodia.

Inter-country adoption may be a viable alternative to domestic adoption for many families, especially those who want to adopt an infant. However, the process can be complex, paperwork-intensive, and expensive. Like domestic adoptions, costs and waiting time vary significantly depending on the country and child chosen. Costs can range from \$12,000 to \$30,000, although

most inter-country adoptions cost between \$15,000 and \$25,000 at the time of this publication.³

The waiting time for intercountry adoption, including the home study and the approval process of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services – (USCIS) formally called Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), can take from one to three years. Adoptions of children with special needs may have lower fees and shorter waiting periods.

International adoption has the same requirements as domestic adoption; however there is additional paperwork that the prospective adoptive parent(s) will need to complete.

Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to familiarize themselves with inter-country adoption processes before they begin filing applications for a particular child. A good place to start is with the booklet, *The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adopted Children* or you can download the booklet from the USCIS website.⁴

The following are forms that the prospective adoptive parent must submit to begin the process of adopting a child from overseas. We strongly recommend that you work closely with your adoption agency for guidance on how to fill out the forms and the timeframes. Since many of these forms have time limitations, the submission timing is important.

- **USCIS Form I-600A “*Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition*”.** The purpose of this application is to complete the part of the process relating to the prospective adoptive parent(s) before a child is identified. The USCIS is determining in advance whether or not a prospective adoptive parent will be able to properly care for an orphan. This decision is based, primarily, on FBI fingerprint clearances and the home study.
- **USCIS Form I-600 “*Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative*”.** The purpose of this form is to classify an alien orphan who is, or will be, adopted by a U.S. citizen as an immediate relative of that citizen and to allow the child to enter the U.S. The petition is filed by the U.S. citizen who is adopting the child. This form is required in all instances. If a Form I-600A has not previously been filed, then the U.S. citizen will also be required at this time to submit the documentation that is normally submitted with Form I-600A. (see Footnote 4)

- **USCIS Form I-824, “Application for Action on an Approved Application or Petition”.**
This form is used to request a duplicate approval notice, to request approval notice to another U.S. Consulate, and to request notice to a U.S. Consulate for derivative visas to family members. This form should be filed with the USCIS office that approved the original application or petition.
- **USCIS Form I-864, “Affidavit of Support”**, to be accompanied by notarized tax returns for the last three years. The purpose is to show that an intending immigrant has adequate means of financial support and is not likely to become a public charge.
- Dossier (papers and documents required by country)
- Appropriate Visas

The USCIS publishes a helpful booklet that explains more about the I-600A entitled “*The Immigration Guide of Adopted and Prospective Adoptive Children*,” publication M-249, which you can request either from your adoption agency or from your local USCIS office. To obtain the guide from the USCIS, contact the national office at 1-800-375-5283 or visit their website at www.uscis.gov. Each country and agency has its own requirements. With some, travel to the country may be preferable or necessary. Work closely with your adoption agency and refer to the appropriate websites for more information on how to process the required paperwork.

Whether you plan on adopting domestically, internationally, or if you are undecided, we strongly recommend that you join an adoption support group in your area. There, you will meet other families who have already adopted and /or others whose experiences are similar to yours. There is nothing like speaking to someone who has already navigated your path. For a listing of New Jersey adoption support groups, log onto www.njarch.org or call the Warm Line at 877- 4ARCHNJ (877-427-2465).

Child Health Considerations (International Adoptions)

Certain health risks are inherent when adopting foreign children. Generally, children come into care because of abandonment, poverty, illness or death of parents, or family dysfunction (including alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse and/or neglect).

Children may have experienced poor prenatal and/or postnatal care, early neglect, and a lack of

health care services, including immunizations. Specific health problems may include malnutrition, parasites, minor congenital defects, developmental delay, tuberculosis, hepatitis (A, B, or C), HIV/AIDS, fetal alcoholic syndrome, and/or attachment disorder and symptoms.

Children may also be affected by living in institutions during critical developmental periods or over long periods of time. Reputable agencies should provide prospective parents with as much information as possible on a child's background and medical history, however, they cannot guarantee its accuracy or completeness. Medical evaluation (including lab testing) in developing countries does not match U.S. standards. The birth parents' medical and genetic histories are not always known, especially for abandoned children.

You should educate yourself about the impact that these factors can have on children. They can all affect a child's physical and emotional development. Learn what resources are available in your community should your child need professional help to address early delays. Talk to other families who have adopted from different countries, orphanages and foster care families to see how their children are doing immediately after arrival and several years thereafter.

If you would like more information about these and/or other disorders or issues, please check the NJ•ARCH website for books and articles relating to these topics.

²This section was developed in conjunction with "A Child is Waiting" from the Dave Thomas Foundation. For more information on the Dave Thomas Foundation, visit their website at: <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/>

³ Excerpts from the National Adoption Information Clearing House. <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov>

⁴ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Website: Inter-country Adoptions: <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/index2.htm>. For definitions of these and other terms and forms, please log onto the USCIS Glossary and Terms at <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/appen.htm#b>

V. SELECTING AN AGENCY



When seeking to adopt either a child from the U.S. or a child from abroad, we recommend that you use a reputable adoption agency that is experienced with the type of adoption for which you are searching. Although service quality can vary, adoption agencies are regulated by state governments.

First, obtain a list of “Adoption Agencies Approved to Provide Adoption Services in New Jersey” from the Department of Human Services Office of Licensing. To obtain the listing, call 1.877.667.9845 or contact the NJ•ARCH Warm Line.

Check with the Office of Licensing to see if there are complaints on file and if so, how they have been resolved. If possible, talk to members of adoptive parent support groups local to the agency to check the agency’s reputation. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau local to the adoption agency you are considering. Log onto www.bbb.org to obtain the local Bureau in your area to inquire if complaints have been lodged against the agency.

New Jersey agencies are required to provide itemized lists of expenses and fees. Keep in mind that some costs, such as travel costs, cannot be predicted in detail. If you are using an out-of-state agency for placement, ask if they conduct their own home studies and request the same financial information.

If possible, attend orientation meetings at all agencies that interest you, while continuing to ask other adoptive parents about their experiences. Consider not only the range of services the agencies offer, but also the client satisfaction level with the agency, and your level of confidence and comfort with the agency staff. Then choose the agency that best meets your needs. Most agencies do not allow applicants to work with more than one agency at a time.

Once you have arranged to work with an agency, the agency will assign a social worker. The social worker will discuss your preferences, provide information on domestic and source countries, and explain the agency’s policies and procedures.

At this point, you may be required to pay the first installment of the adoption agency fees. Some

agencies will prorate their charges according to your income. You should avoid programs where you are required to pay all the fees in advance. Most programs have a fee payment system, which allows payment as services are rendered. Find out what fees are refundable if you withdraw from the adoption process or the agency withdraws its services after a service agreement is signed.

Non-agency intercountry adoptions are rarely regulated and pose many risks, including involvement in the black market, loss of confidentiality, infringements upon the child's rights to privacy and permanency, failure to meet the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) guidelines required for immigration, inadequate health information, incomplete or flawed legal processing, insufficient counseling, and outright fraud. *Regardless of the involvement of an adoption agency or other processing assistance, you are ultimately responsible, financially and legally, for any commitments you make.*

There are hundreds of licensed private agencies that arrange both domestic and intercountry adoptions; public social service agencies primarily handle special needs and older child adoptions and do not process intercountry placements.

If you are interested in an intercountry adoption, you can shorten the agency selection process by checking out which source countries have stable political situations and well-established adoption processing mechanisms in place with governmental oversight. The U.S. State Department's web site, <http://travel.state.gov/adopt.html>, can be a starting point for identifying those countries since it provides a country-by-country guide to adoption processing in more than 60 countries.

Once you have narrowed down the countries from which you would like to adopt, you can contact agencies working in the particular country or countries. For example, if you want to adopt a child from China, we would recommend using the New Jersey Office of Licensing list and contacting the agencies that work with China adoptions.

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of working with a large, national agency (which may have larger numbers of children to place and longer waiting lists of applicants) versus working with a smaller, local agency (which may have fewer children to place but shorter waiting lists). It is vitally important to select an experienced, licensed private agency and/or attorney.

VI. THE HOME STUDY



Most adoptive applicants find the idea of a home study frightening. The reality is that the home study is a time to learn if adoption is the best plan for you, to prepare you for raising an adopted child or children, and to acquaint you with the specific issues that adoptive families face.

New Jersey has specific regulations for home studies, which can only be performed by licensed adoption agencies. The basic requirements for prospective adoptive parents are that they be 18 years of age or older and at least ten years older than the child to be adopted. They should have the capacity to meet a child's physical and emotional needs. Applicants are asked to disclose any history of child abuse or neglect and any criminal record excluding minor traffic violations. Criminal history and child abuse records will be requested from the appropriate state and federal authorities.

New Jersey requires a minimum of three face-to-face meetings with an agency social worker on separate days to conduct joint and individual interviews. Some of these may be group meetings. At least one interview is held in the candidates' home. All members of the household must be interviewed.

The documentation required includes job and personal references, proof of income, medical reports, fingerprint and child abuse checks, verification of birth, marriage and divorce, if applicable.

Many agencies ask applicants to prepare autobiographies or personal statements including experiences growing up, relationships with parents and siblings, academic and employment history, a description of the courtship and marriage (or partnership) if applicable, attitudes toward adoption, recognition of racial and ethnic differences, hobbies, personality, strengths and weaknesses. Applicants are also asked to reflect on how their parents handled discipline and their own ideas about acceptable and unacceptable means of discipline. The extended family's and neighbor's attitudes toward adoption are addressed.

Many applicants see the autobiography as a chore, but it is an excellent way to reflect on attitudes and family history as well as prepare for the changes involved in becoming a family. It

forms a basis for discussion with the social worker regarding parenting and adoption issues. It is helpful to be as open as possible during the process.

The last meeting is usually a home visit. The social worker wants to be sure that the home is a safe place to raise a child or children. It is not necessary to own one's home, just to provide a safe environment and adequate space. All homes must have a smoke detector on every level and a fire extinguisher in the kitchen. The social worker will discuss safety issues, child proofing certain areas and overall appearance of the home.

In addition, for parents who will continue to work outside the home, necessary childcare arrangements will be discussed. During the course of the study, the worker will discuss with the applicants the kind of children they can accept including age range, racial or ethnic background, gender, sibling groups, and physical, social, emotional, or developmental disabilities. If this is an international adoption, the home study provider and/or the placing agency will cover issues of travel, country requirements and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) regulations.

The home study and approval process is not designed to deny people the opportunity to adopt. Rather, the process is designed for the agency to get to know the applicants and to educate them about adoption so an appropriate placement can be made.

VII. SURVIVING THE WAIT



Whether you are adopting from the U.S. or another country, the time you need to wait for your child to come home can be long and sometimes stressful. Once all your paper work is submitted, there is little you can do to help move the process along; essentially, you have very little control over when your child may arrive, and this can be frustrating.⁵

The following are some constructive tips that may have a beneficial impact in preparing you for your child or children coming home.

For a more detailed listing of ideas, please visit our NJ•ARCH website and search for the “*Surviving the Wait: Ideas in How to Prepare for Your Adoptive Child’s Arrival*” article.

Read and Network:

- Join a local adoption support group or one within your adoption agency. Find a mentoring program such as NJ•ARCH’s Buddy Mentoring Program.
- Develop and maintain contacts with other families who are adopting domestically or internationally.

Make your House Safe:

- Purchase gates, outlet covers, move medicines high and/or store in a locked box, etc..
- If you are planning home renovations or moving, try to complete it before your child comes home.

Papers and Files:

- Organize your personal papers and files. Review your personal finances. If possible, reduce outstanding debts.
- Learn about the IRS Adoption Tax Rebate (www.irs.gov).
- Prepare or update your Will, Health Proxy (Living Will), Power of Attorney, Trust, and name Guardians for your child. Once your child comes home, include your new adopted child as (a) beneficiary.

Health Care Preparation:

- Talk to your doctor and tell him/her about your adoption plans. Ask advice about vitamins/ energy and diet for travel.
- If needed, get vaccinations in preparation for overseas travel. Refer to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.
- If you are adopting internationally, research and find a developmental pediatrician who has experience with international adoptive children. Contact NJ•ARCH to find a pediatrician in your area or contact the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse Web site at <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov> to view a list of medical professionals who specialize in developmental evaluations of children adopted from overseas. We recommend that you use a specialist to review any medical information prior to accepting your overseas referral.
- Find and interview local pediatricians that you will use once your child comes home.
- Research your health insurance plan(s), dental insurance plan(s), and prescription plan(s). Be sure the new pediatrician you select is in your plan.

Employer Preparation:

- Talk to your employer about the time you will need to take off when your child arrives.
- Research the Family and Medical Leave Act, at www.dol.gov/esa/programs/whd/state/fmla.
- Research child care opportunities if both partners decide to continue working.

Child Development:

- Read about child development. Contact the NJ•ARCH Warm Line or log onto our website to view the books and articles available from the lending library.
- Take advantage of your social or case worker's expertise in adoption and parenting.
- If you are adopting an infant, consider taking a class at your local hospital on infant care.
- If you are adopting a school age or pre-school handicapped child, contact your local school system to learn about the schools and any special services for which your child may be eligible for.
- If you are pursuing an international adoption, read about your child's country, watch movies from/about that country, visit museum exhibits. Try to gain an appreciation of your child's heritage.
- Once a child has been selected for your family, find out as much as you can about his/her birth family, medical care, living conditions, and other placements, if applicable.

Baby/ Child's Room:

- If you know the gender, begin to ask your friends what furniture and clothes they have which you might be able to borrow and/or purchase.
- Research and select baby/child products.
- If you are adopting internationally, be prepared to purchase lots of little items/toys from that country.

Misc.:

- Consider purchasing a good camera and camcorder. Learn how to use them.
- If you have a partner, take advantage of this wait time; take a trip; take time out just for the two of you.
- Think about the design of adoption/arrival announcements.
- Keep a file of significant papers and photos; these could be part of a “Life” or “Adoption” Book.
- Begin to explore your feelings about birth families and their parenting decisions so that you are comfortable talking to your child about issues related to his or her birth family.
- Keep an adoption journal; this can be an excellent vehicle to express your feelings about your wait.

If you already have a biological or adopted child or children, we recommend doing the above

PLUS:

- Spend lots of quality times with him/ her (e.g.: special dinners/ vacations/ time together).
- If you were planning to move your child(ren)’s room, try to complete the move before the baby/child arrives.
- Communicate openly and frequently about the pending adoption.
- Read to your child. There are lots of books out there that discuss these topics with your child.
- Decide whether you want your child(ren) traveling with you to pick up your new adopted child. Traveling (especially overseas) could be a wonderful experience for your family. On the other hand, if you leave your child(ren) at home with a relative or responsible person, you would have an opportunity to begin your relationship with your new child without interruption. You will need to decide what is best for you and your family.

There are many excellent resources (people, support groups, books, and websites) available to help you during your journey. Take advantage of them!

⁵ Tips from two adoptive parents who are board members of NJ’s Concerned Parents For Adoption (CPFA) and wisdom from Laura Stevens, M.S.W., Ph.D., Wide Horizons For Children. For more information on CPFA, and/ or Wide Horizons For Children, visit their websites at www.cpfan.org and www.whfc.org.

VIII. YOUR CHILD COMES HOME



DOMESTIC ADOPTION

Pregnancy gives prospective parents nearly nine months to plan and prepare for the impending changes in their lives. Adoptive parents may wait many months or even years for a child and then have two weeks or less to welcome a child into their home.

Adoptive parents should choose a pediatrician before their child comes home. Begin with referrals from friends and family. Ask other adoptive parents. Meet with the doctor to ascertain if you can work together. You will be asking many questions about health issues as your child grows. Does the doctor have a “calling hour”? Are your concerns treated with respect? Bring your child in as soon as possible after placement to evaluate development, general health and to ensure that immunizations are on schedule.

Don't be surprised if you have moments of sadness and/or anxiety. Even adoptive parents can experience “post-partum” blues. The 24-hour responsibility of caring for a young child can be daunting even if it's something you've been waiting for years to do. And, birthparents and adoptive parents alike sometimes wonder what they have gotten themselves into. Allow family members and friends to help you.

Be prepared for intrusive questions. Remember your child's history is his/hers to share. Some people are truly interested, have a relative who is considering adoption, and would like some information about the process. Other people are just plain nose, wanting to know about birth parents, your infertility situation, how much you “paid” for your child. Over time you will develop the ability to respond to the sincere questions and pleasantly reject the inappropriate ones. Remember, even before your child can speak, he or she can react to your tone of voice and demeanor. Try not to be too reactive.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

After your child has arrived, make an appointment with your physician for a general evaluation. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that the physical include hemoglobin/

hematocrit and red blood cell indices, urinalysis, blood lead level, vision and hearing testing, dental examination, and screening for hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, syphilis, tuberculosis, and intestinal parasites. For example, the International Adoption Clinic at the University of Minnesota (612.624.1164) has a complete list of recommended screenings for children placed for adoption from abroad.⁶

SECURING U.S. CITIZENSHIP FOR YOUR CHILD

Effective January 2004, the USC/IS implemented a new process in order to streamline the production of Certificates of Citizenship for certain children adopted abroad. Streamlined processes have been developed for newly entering IR-3 children who are automatically U.S. Citizens when they arrive. These newly entering IR-3 children will receive Certificates of Citizenship within 45 days of their arrival instead of receiving a Permanent Resident Card and then filing the N-600 for a Certificate. For more information, visit the US Citizenship and Immigration Website at www.uscis.gov.

If the adoption has been finalized in the foreign country, and the child has been issued an IR-3 visa, citizenship starts when the child legally enters the United States. If the child has been issued an IR-4 visa, which requires parents to adopt or readopt the child in the United States, citizenship starts on the day the adoption is finalized in the United States.

Parents wishing to obtain documentation of their child's citizenship may apply for a U.S. passport from the Department of State or may obtain a Certificate of Citizenship from USCIS. To apply for the Certificate of Citizenship for the child, parents must file USCIS Form N-643 along with a filing fee and required supporting documentation.

⁶ National Adoption Information Clearing House, http://www.naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_devev.cfm

IX. POST PLACEMENT SERVICES AND FINALIZING YOUR ADOPTION



DOMESTIC ADOPTION

If this is a domestic adoption, your agency is required to provide post-placement services. New Jersey requires a social work home visit within two weeks of your child's placement. Follow up visits are scheduled at 60-day intervals until six months when they change to 90-day intervals until your court date. These visits are designed to ease the transition of the child into your family and to answer questions you may have on child development or adoption issues. Most new parents find them very helpful.

Once the child has been in your home for approximately six months and all has gone well, the adoption most likely will move to finalization. Your agency may recommend an attorney or you can contact the New Jersey State Bar Association for the names of attorneys in your area who specialize in adoption.

In some counties there is no wait for a court date and others have long backlogs. Your attorney can advise you on this. Usually the adoption hearing is held in the judge's chambers where the judge reviews the surrender documents, home study, post placement reports and the agency's recommendation. At that time the judge will issue an adoption decree and a new birth certificate will be ordered. It will show the child's name and your name(s) and the child's actual place of birth. Be sure to bring your camera to get a picture of your new family with the judge.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

If you have adopted internationally the State of New Jersey permits re-adoption. Each county has different requirements. Most families re-adopt in order to obtain a New Jersey birth certificate and to ensure that the adoption is covered by state law. Contact your County Surrogate's Office or your attorney for more information.

Many adoption agencies, based on requirements of placing countries, mandate post-placement services for client families for a set amount of time ranging from six months to three or more years after the child has been placed. These services provide counseling for the new family, ease the child's adjustment to the new home, and supply parents with information and referrals. Your

agency may ask you to furnish photographs, written reports, and medical reports to send to your child's country of origin. As part of post-placement, many agencies have organized support groups for new adoptive parents. If your agency does not have such a group, it may be able to refer you to one in your community.

X. DOWN THE ROAD



Adoption is a life-long journey. While you are joyful that your child has come home, the way your family was formed sometimes presents challenges. As we all pass through various stages in our lives, adoptions can complicate transitions for children, their siblings and parents.

Membership in a support group, ongoing contacts with other adoptive families and keeping up to date on adoption issues as well as general child development can be helpful as you navigate these times as a family. NJ•ARCH can be a resource with its lending library, warm line and resource list. NJ•ARCH has created another booklet that may be helpful in the next stages of your adoption journey, *Now That You're a Family: A Guide to Adoption Issues and Services*. Call 877-4-ARCHNJ, or e-mail warmline@njarch.org or visit our website www.njarch.org, to request a copy.

Keep in mind the most meaningful parts of life occur during the journey, not at the destination. Enjoy the trip.