

# Start The Adoption Process Today: How To Find An Adoption Agency

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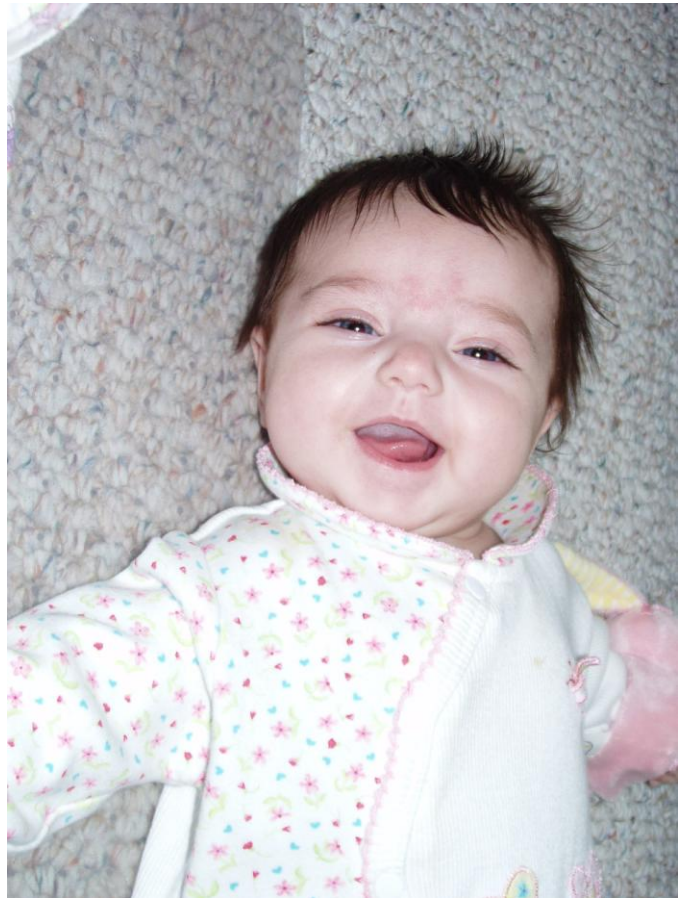
By: Dina Baird

## **This Leap of Faith Doesn't Have To Be A Blind Leap.**

Adoption begins with an open heart and a leap of faith. Finding an adoption agency is the first step in the adoption process. This beginning is a step where you have control in your journey to becoming a parent. This guide will help you pick your adoption agency. Follow the steps in this guide and you will begin the adoption process and find the adoption agency that will help bring you and your child together.

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## OUR STORY

My husband and I had our son after a year of not preventing a pregnancy. We hadn't really started actively trying yet through tracking my ovulation process, but I was hoping and we were not using any birth control methods. After a year, I ended up pregnant with our son Sam, who is now six. I decided to use an IUD to prevent an unwanted pregnancy too soon and nine months later had the IUD removed. A couple of months later, I found myself pregnant. I was thirty-three years old, Sam was just shy of a year old and I felt a little panicked about having another baby so soon. I had kept my job and was working from home but was really enjoying a fantastic career and having a lot of one-on-one time with Sam.

However, despite my panic, I found myself feeling disappointed when I miscarried at seven weeks. I ended up in the unfortunate situation of having three miscarriages in trying to have our second child. I really wanted a second child, so despite my ability to get pregnant and my concurrent inability to carry a child, I endured infertility treatments and two artificial insemination cycles that did not work. We finally decided to stop the madness and start the process of adoption. One year after I had begun fertility treatments, we found our adoption agency. The honest truth is, I may have skipped all of those fertility treatments and went straight to the adoption process had I known more about how adoption worked and how to get started.

**INTRODUCTION:** After years of trying to have a second child my husband and I were ready to adopt. Despite the fact that I have known several people that had successfully adopted through several different adoption agencies, I found myself struggling with where to start. How did I finally pick the agency my husband and I ended up working with? I picked up the phone and subconsciously went through the process described here.

We have been blessed with a beautiful daughter that came to us just eight months after we met with our adoptive parent counselor at the agency and filled out the applications. She is undoubtedly our child, the child that was meant to be our daughter. Yet, when I look back on the past six years of hoping to have a second child, I wonder what would have helped me start the adoption process sooner. That soul searching has led me to develop this five step process that will help you as future parents start the process as soon as your hearts are ready. It is designed to be a logical process that begins with picking five semi-random agencies and leads you to the agency that will be the one that facilitates your adoption process. This process is easy to follow and can be implemented in as little as two weeks if you have the time on your hands to focus on the process; Five weeks is a reasonable time period to expect to find your agency if you allow for a week for each of the five agencies on your list.

**Goal:** Pick an adoption agency to get your adoption started.

***Physical characteristic of the process:***

You will need a phone book, access to the internet and access to friends, co-workers etc. Plan on one legal size file folder and five regular sized 10X11 sub-files for your information gathering. A notebook to take notes and a pen to write with should do the trick.

***What you need to prepare:*** You have endured months of infertility issues and loss of time with what one of my adoption counselor calls “baby longing”. There is nothing left to sacrifice. You are prepared to do this. Quit worrying so much, quit letting fear rule your heart and begin. “Adoption is the beginning of a love story” is the mantra of our adoption agency and it’s absolutely true. The reward of the greatest love is just around the corner for you.

***Why you need an agency:*** You don’t have a specific child in mind that you want to adopt. In this case, you should use an adoption attorney. If you do not know a birth parent who wants to give up their child for adoption, finding an adoption agency is the start of the adoption process. Using an agency for adoption is a legal requirement in some states as well.

***Background:*** The adoption process is a spiritual and legal process. Babies are not ordered from a factory. Adoption requires that a birth mother pick your agency, go through with the decision to adopt, pick you as birth parents and relinquish their parental rights. It requires that you go through the legal steps of the training requirements in your state, pass a background check, complete a home study certification and go to court to finalize the permanent adoption of your child. It sounds daunting and impossible and it feels like anything can go wrong at any minute. As

much as adoption is a legal process it is reliant on divine intervention. Bring your faith, your love, your patience and complete this process and the miracle of adoption will become reality for you.

***Requirements:*** You must make the decision to adopt a baby or child and be able to pass a legal background check. You also have to be home study certified. Many parents are afraid of the “home study” process but honestly, adoption agencies and the states you are adopting from are not looking for perfect parents. They are looking for law abiding citizens’ that will not harm their children. You don’t have to have the best house in the neighborhood with the intention to send your children to private schools.

Each state has rules around who they will allow adopt and each agency has requirements as well. Many of these requirements have to do with age, marital status and health. While the rules in your state may be lenient, rules at different agencies vary. The basic requirements for both your state and the agencies are easy to find out in the beginning, so the best way to deal with issues here, is to learn your state’s requirements and talk to the agencies on your list.

A note on background checks: Arrests, even without convictions will be issues you will have to deal with in this process. Anything that shows up on your record will be scrutinized and should be revealed to the agencies on your list as soon as possible

***Time:*** Narrowing down your list of five to one or to your next five (more on that later) will realistically take anywhere from two weeks to five, depending on your time commitment to the task and your desire to get done. Five weeks is a realistic expectation for you to follow these steps and be headed toward holding your precious child in your arms.

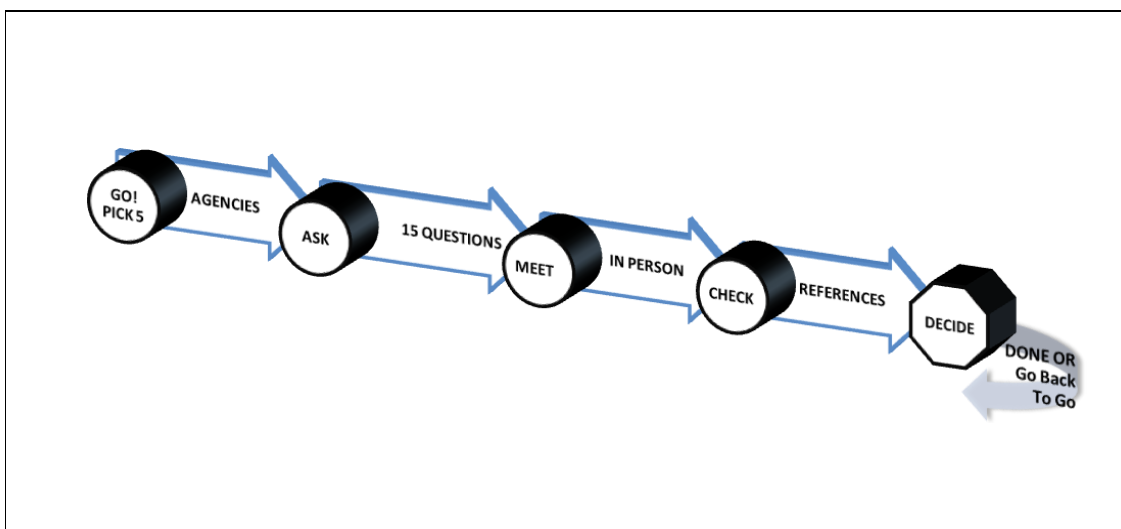
## PROCESS:

This process is a five step elimination process. In Step I, you pick five agencies. This part of the process should not take you any longer than a week. Steps II and III of this process are the most time consuming. In Step II, you take a list of questions I've provided to you and go to each agency on your list to find the answers. You find as many answers as you can to these questions on-line and through phone interviews. In Step III, you meet with the agencies on your list that have not been eliminated and get answers to any remaining questions and additional ones that have come up. Step IV is where you get references from birth parents who have adopted through this agency. This is really the step in which you've narrowed down your list and you are ready to pick if you haven't already picked. Your conversation with at least two different families who have recently adopted through this agency will help you either

solidify your decision or make one. You will hear about the great experience they had and have the opportunity to ask about any difficulties they experienced. At Step V, you have eliminated all but one agency, have eliminated all agencies or have a couple to choose from. It is at this point that you start the process over with five more agencies, go with the agency that is left or pick an agency from the ones that are left. It is really through Steps II and III in this process that you will educate yourself on what you need from an agency and the adoption process that will enable you to make the decision in Step IV. If you are in the situation where you have eliminated all the agencies on your list, it will be relatively easy to assemble a new list and go through this process very quickly to pick your agency the second time around because you will have figured out the criteria that is important to you in your adoption. The five steps can be summarized as follows in Figure 1:

- Go! Pick Five Agencies
- Ask: Get Answers to Fifteen Pre-Written Questions
- Meet: With The Agencies In Person
- Check: References From At Least Two Other Couples Who Have Adopted
- Decide: Pick Your Agency or Start The Process Over

Figure 1



**Step I: Go! Pick Five Agencies.** Pick five agencies to start with. Two of these should be agencies focused on domestic adoption, two on international and the third one can be based on where you think you are leaning towards or foster care.

How do you pick? Start with word of mouth references from people you know or acquaintances who have adopted. Word of mouth can be co-workers, clients, members of your extracurricular groups and churches. In your list of these original five agencies, include as many word-of-mouth agencies as you can in the five. How do you choose the rest? You can go to your phone book or do an internet search. I know this sounds counter intuitive, but don't spend a lot of time trying to pick five agencies. Why?

The steps I'm outlining will help you narrow down what you are looking for in an agency and if these first five agencies do not meet your criteria when you are done, you will fairly quickly learn your criteria for an agency and therefore be able to narrow down your selection. You may need to start this process over again after you go through it once but twice will likely be the maximum.

*"There was the one that my co-worker used to adopt his child from Russia and the one that another co-worker used to adopt her baby from Korea. There was a big Christian one that I kept seeing advertised everywhere beginning with a magazine in my fertility Dr's office."*

Chances are you've been thinking about adoption for awhile and you already have your list of five agencies in your head but you haven't put them in list format yet. I had been carrying around several adoption agencies in my head for over a year.



**WARNING: YOU MAY SPEND TOO MUCH TIME PICKING YOUR 5 AGENCIES. Just pick them. This part of the process shouldn't take more than 10 minutes by the time you are reading this, but try to get it done within a week if you are struggling with this initial step.**

Figure 2

### 15 Questions Pocket Guide

1. Number of adoptions per year.
2. Average wait time for parents to receive a child after they sign the initial paper work or complete training. Note: A range will typically be provided.
3. Amount of training required and process for completing training.
4. Cost of adoption with detailed fee schedule and explanation.
5. Relinquishment process of birth parent giving up their parental rights.
  - a. How long does it take?
  - b. How long is the wait time between the placement of the child with you and the legal relinquishment of the child?
  - c. Who do they relinquish their rights too? You? The agency? The state?
  - d. After they sign the papers how long does it take for the relinquishment to be fully legal? What is the process for this?
6. How many birth parents have changed their mind?
7. How long has the adoption agency been in business?
8. Will any travel be required in this process of adoption? If international, the likely answer is yes.
9. Support provided to your family post-adoption.
10. Do they specialize in open or closed adoption? Do they recommend one over the other?
11. How much of the legal process do they support with their fees? Will they take you all the way through the adoption process making it legal or will you need to hire an attorney for the final steps?
12. Does their adoption process include the home study certification process?
13. Average age of children they place with adoptive parents: infants or older?
14. Do you have any special requirements that the adoption agency will accommodate? Single parent, gay parent, or legal history. This could be an agency decision, a state legal requirement or based on the recommendation of the social worker who does your home study.
15. In the event that the birth mother changes her mind, you say no to a placement or for other unforeseen circumstances what fees are forfeited and at what step do you start the process again or where are you on the list of adoptive parents?

**Step II: Ask. Get Answers To These 15 Questions.** - Find out the following from each of your five agencies through on-line research and calling to request information. Complete this check-list to the left, Figure 2, for each of the five agencies you have picked.



**WARNING: Failure to provide any answers to these questions should result with non-forthcoming agencies crossed off your list. In the unlikely event that all five of your agencies are crossed off, go back to Step I and start over.**

### ***Step III: Meet. With The Agencies***

***In Person.*** Meet with the adoption agency. Meet with the person who will be training you and the main person(s) that will facilitate your adoption. Get answers to any of the questions above that you have not been able to find in your on-line and phone interview process. Get answers to the new questions that have come up.

***Step IV: Check. References.*** Meet with or speak with at least two families/parents who have adopted within the past year through this agency if this is not a word of mouth referral. If it is a word of mouth referral, make sure you have spoken to the adoptive parents yourself.

***Step V: Decide. End Process or Start Over.*** Congratulations! You have officially started the process of your adoption and you have your agency picked or are ready to pick the agency you will

use. If you have eliminated your entire list, congratulations are still in order because you know exactly what criteria you are after to add 5 new agencies to your list to start the process over again. If you have two or more agencies left on your list, make sure all of your questions have been answered. If not, go back to step 2 again and get your answers. If an agency refuses to answer any questions left, remember to eliminate them! Now, if all the questions have been answered and you have more than one left on your list, choose the agency based on the following criteria:

- Average time it takes to have a child placed with you
- Cost
- Number of birth parents who have changed their mind
- Go with your gut

#### **RESOURCES:**

There are many additional resources that can help you through your adoption process. Here are just a couple I recommend:

Adoptive Families: They have a website and put out an annual adoption guide that will answer many of your questions about adoption.

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com>. Get the annual Adoption Guide. It's a magazine that they produce every year that is extremely helpful.

Google your state and "adoption agency". I.E. <http://www.google.com>. Type your state name, followed by the words "adoption agencies" into the search bar and you should find some great lists of adoption agencies.

***WARNING:*** You are essentially making this decision based on cost, time and least emotional risk. My "go with your gut" ending can only be applied if you have seriously eliminated agencies based on the questioning and criteria in the previous four steps. I acknowledge that a large part of your decision may be based on a less logical factor of connecting on an emotional level to the people at the agency that will be facilitating your adoption. I think this is a huge part of picking the right agency, but I also think that the emotion behind an adoption can cloud decision making. That's why for this process, I have focused on the logic of the decision making to assure that you are mitigating your risks. You will naturally eliminate an agency that doesn't feel right to you; even if they answer the fifteen questions and have great references. The go with your gut decision, should apply at the very end of this process and only at the end. Making a gut decision before you find the facts, can lead to bad decision making. It is essential that you follow this part of the process as the last step in your decision making.