



TAPESTRY

Adoption & Foster Care Ministry

Making the Wait Worthwhile

Helpful Ideas As You Wait

I. **Preparing Friends and Family**

It is a wonderful blessing to share your adoption journey with your family and friends, but getting friends and family “on board” and bringing them along on the journey can sometimes make your journey a bit challenging. This is why it is important to first educate yourself so that you can then effectively educate others. As well intentioned as they may be, you are almost certain to hear many insensitive, and sometimes unbelievable, comments from those who are closest to you.

Here are just a few things that can help you prepare your friends and family to travel the adoption journey with you.

1. Make your decision first

- Let your family and friends know about your decision to adopt once you have made your decision, rather than asking for everyone’s opinion as to what they think about you adopting. When you share your decision to adopt with your family and friends remember that they are generally going to follow your lead in terms of how you feel about your decision and the path that you have chosen. If you are excited and can’t wait to get started then chances are that they will probably be excited also. If you seem hesitant, uncertain or fearful, they are likely to feel and react the same way.

2. Help your family and friends deal with their fears and concerns

- It is important that you deal with your own personal fears and misconceptions about adoption so that you can know what to say to others when they share their feelings and fears. Please know that it is completely normal and okay for you and your friends and family to have concerns and fears. Some common fears include:

- Is adoption just long-term care? Is it permanent?
 - How can you bond with a child that is not biologically connected to you?
 - How long will it take?
 - How much will it cost and where will you get the money?
 - What about differences involving race and culture?
 - What about “open” adoption? Will the child be confused having “two sets of parents”?
 - What if the adoption doesn’t work out?
- Help your friends and family dispel the myths and their misperceptions about adoption. It is possible that you will hear some typical myths from friends and family when you announce that you are adopting. A few of these myths include:
 - Just wait you will get pregnant as soon as you adopt
 - Adoption costs way too much for you
 - All children who are adopted have problems

See *[Questions and Comments from Family and Friends](http://tapestry.irvingbible.org/index.php?id=1576)* at <http://tapestry.irvingbible.org/index.php?id=1576> for more examples and ways you can address these myths and issues with your family and friends.

3. Keep family and friends updated

- When you bring your friends and family along on the journey you are inviting many questions. Those who have not adopted or do not know much about the adoption process may not realize that you may go weeks, if not months, without hearing any news. Some people may ask you if you have heard anything every time they talk to you. Let’s be fair, from their perspective if they don’t ask questions they are afraid you might see them as not caring, but if they ask too many questions you may get frustrated and see them as being too nosy. You may want to share with them that the adoption process can be unpredictable and that you will be more than happy to share appropriate updates with them as you receive them. You may also want to consider creating a blog. Many people find this to be a fun and great way to keep family and friends up-to-speed on everything that’s happening.

See *[Adoption & Foster Care Blogging Tips](http://tapestry.irvingbible.org/index.php?id=1583#c7376)* on the Tapestry website at <http://tapestry.irvingbible.org/index.php?id=1583#c7376> for some great advice on how to create and manage an effective adoption blog.

4. Privacy – Be the guardian of your child’s story

- It is important to remember that you are the guardian of your child’s story and that you have a responsibility to keep certain facts about your child and his/her birthmother private. Your child’s information belongs to them exclusively. It is normal to want to share every detail about your child’s birthmother and her “situation” with others because you may be excited. But consider this important question when deciding what is appropriate to share with others: *Would I want my child to find out this information from someone other than myself or my spouse?* If the answer is “yes,” you wouldn’t mind if my child found out this information from someone other than you or your spouse, then it is okay to share that information. If the answer is “no,” you would not like for your child to find out this information from someone other than your or your spouse, then you should keep that information private until the appropriate time.

See [A Few Things to Consider When Telling Your Child’s Story](http://tapestry.irvingbible.org/index.php?id=1583#c7376) at <http://tapestry.irvingbible.org/index.php?id=1583#c7376> for more helpful thoughts on this subject.

- Be sure to share this important privacy concept with your friends and family early on in the process. Explain to them that you will not share every detail of your child’s situation or that of his/her birthparents’ situation with them – not because you don’t want them to know – but simply because you are respecting the privacy of your child and his/her story as well as his/her birthparents.
- It is important to never ‘tear down’ your child’s birthparents in front of your child or to others – regardless of the facts and circumstances. This does not build you up as a better parent and it does nothing positive for your child. While an honest telling of your child’s history is important in the right way and at the right time, ‘tearing down’ your child’s birthparents can often serve to ‘tear down’ a part of who your child understands himself or herself to be.

5. Correct Adoption Language

- It is important to educate yourself on positive or respectful adoption language. For example:
 - “She placed her baby for adoption” or “She made an adoption plan for her baby” instead of “She gave her baby up for adoption.”

- “This is Amy’s son, Miles, who was adopted.” Instead of “this is Amy’s adopted son, Miles.” Your child’s adoption is just a part of their story – it is not what defines them as a person.

See *Speaking Positively: Using Respectful Adoption Language* by Patricia Irwin Johnston at www.perspectivespress.com/pjpal.html.

- Once you have educated yourself then begin to educate others. Sometimes you may need to correct others about their adoption language very inconspicuously. For example: When someone says to you, “Did you get to meet his real mother?” You can respond by saying, “Yes, we did get to meet his birthmother.” Typically, the person you are talking to will catch the difference and begin using the correct words. Remember, you don’t have to be rude to be effective.

II. Making Your Adoption Agency Relationship Work Well

Listed below are a couple of key ingredients to help make your relationship with an adoption agency (or other adoption professionals) work well.

1. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

There is nothing more important than effective communication in making your relationship with your adoption agency work well. Questions to ask your agency to foster better communication:

- Who will be my primary contact when I have questions or need assistance?
- What is the best way for me to contact that person? (phone, email, in person)
- How often can I expect to hear from this person? How often do they expect to hear from me?
- How long will it generally take for them to respond to my calls/emails?

2. Expectations, Expectations, Expectations

Your relationship with your agency is a give and take. You have expectations of your agency and they have expectations of you. Just a few examples of these expectations are:

- How to best communicate (mode, frequency, etc.)
- Wait times (and changes in expected wait times)
- Costs and expenses
- Notification of changes in the adoption process

It is very important to clearly establish the proper expectations with your agency early on in the adoption process in order to avoid as much frustration as possible.

3. Flexibility, Flexibility, Flexibility

One of the keys to a successful relationship with your agency is the understanding that there are many situations that are out of your control and out of the control of your agency – especially in international adoption. For example:

- Changes in in-country government procedures
- Implementation of new international laws and treaties
- In-country bureaucratic “slow downs”
- Accreditation changes
- Local holidays
- Political unrest
- Unique circumstances in your case

It is critical to remember that flexibility with your agency is a two way street. With that said, flexibility has its limits. Always be willing to ask questions and seek quality and responsive service and to demand that your agency act ethically in every way.

III. Naming Younger Children

How should we choose our child’s name? Should we keep part of the name they were given at birth or the name chosen by our child’s birthparents? What about choosing a name that is part of their culture/heritage or the name I have always dreamed of choosing for my child?

These could very well be questions that you find yourself asking and there is definitely plenty of information and opinions out there related to this topic. Therefore, it may be worthwhile and fun for your family to think about this and decide what is best before you bring your child home. Each family and adoption situation comes with its own unique and special circumstances. Only your family can decide what is “right” for you and your child. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, although there certainly are some things to consider particularly as children get older. So enjoy researching all the different name options and buy as many naming books as you would like. Make naming your child an exciting time for your family and something to look forward to discussing while you wait.

Below are links related to naming as it pertains to adoption. Keep in mind that there is no “right” answer that applies to all situations.

- What's In A Name? – from *Adoptive Families*
<http://adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=709>
- The Name Game – from *Adoptive Families*
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=201>
- Naming Madison – from *Adoptive Families*
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/hot-topic.php>
- Share your story – What's in a name? – from *Adoptive Families*
(Responses to the article "Naming Madison")
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1442>
- Considerations for Naming Your Trans-Racially or Inter-Culturally Adopted Child
<http://library.adoption.com/blended-families/considerations-for-naming-your-trans-racially-or-inter-culturally-adopted-child/article/510/1.html>
- Adoption is a Family Affair! by Patricia Irwin Johnston (See specifically the chapter entitled *Home At Last*, discussing the idea of "naming as claiming")

IV. Choosing a Pediatrician

For several reasons interviewing pediatricians can be a productive way to spend some of your "waiting" time. First, it is helpful because your pediatrician may serve as a valuable person to speak with when you receive a referral or after you have accepted a referral. Giving your pediatrician a medical history to review prior to your child's arrival will allow them to prepare and have a plan in place prior to your first doctor visit. It is also nice to already feel comfortable and have a relationship with the pediatrician you have chosen.

Adoptive parents should take time to find a pediatrician who is sensitive to adoption and one who has experience working with children who were adopted. Finding a pediatrician with a positive attitude toward adoption and one who is willing to work with you on matters that specifically relate to your adoption situation is important. The physicians' knowledge of adoption, attitude towards adoption and his or her attitude toward your specific referral will likely be evident after spending some time discussing these topics with him or her.

In addition, if you plan to adopt a child internationally it is beneficial to find a pediatrician who is familiar with the full battery of testing that needs to be completed once your child has arrived home. If you use an international adoption doctor to review your referral, they will most likely provide you with a list of recommended tests to take to your pediatrician. This information can also be found in your physician's Red Book, the

report from the Committee on Infectious Diseases, and from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

See the special section, Adoption Medicine, on the *Adoptive Families* magazine website at <http://adoptivefamilies.com/medical> for more information on post-arrival medical evaluations and other adoption medicine topics.

V. Thinking Through Accepting a Referral

After being presented with a referral, you may find yourself ready to say “yes” right away. However, for some, a referral may raise questions, concerns, fears or simply the desire to conduct further research. Whether due to a particular medical condition or diagnosis, a family history of mental illness or the fact that the birthmother engaged in high-risk behaviors during the pregnancy, it is important to take the necessary time before accepting a referral in order to be sure that you can provide the best medical care and can be the best loving family for this child. After you have gathered as much information as possible you may also want to seek out medical professionals who are able to answer questions specific to your situation. After all, you do not want to feel that you have made a decision based on a lack of knowledge and/or fear.

Below we have provided some basic steps to help you as you think through whether to accept a referral.

Step One:

Pray

We believe that God is the ultimate professional and absolute best counselor in the field of adoption. Taking your fears, questions and uncertainties to Him is a crucial step. We most certainly recommend that you spend time praying about your referral, while at the same time being careful to guard your heart, realizing that it is okay to keep your referral information private. In other words, you do not have to share every detail of your referral with everyone who asks.

Step Two:

Gather Information, Research, and Conduct Your Own Assessment

Make sure that you have gathered all available information from your agency. If you are adopting internationally, this may mean that you have relatively little medical information to go on. Those adopting domestically may have more medical information and and/or medical history on the child and his/her birthparents. Every adoption situation is different and therefore the information you receive will be specific to your case. If there is something you would like to know, don't be afraid to ask your agency in the case that

it may be available. All of this information will be helpful as you pursue research on your own and seek the help of medical professionals and other experienced adoptive parents. Gathering information and researching the situation surrounding your referral will not only educate you on the type of professional you may need to work with, but it will also give you important information so that you can provide the best care for your child if you accept the referral.

For more information see the Pre-Adoption Medical Assessment and Developmental Indicators Chart (www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=1040) from *Adoptive Families* magazine. This article provides helpful tips on understanding what referral information you may receive on a child and how to go about assessing the information you have been given. This article also includes a developmental indicators chart which may be very helpful in understanding typical developmental milestones.

Step Three:

Speak with Medical Professionals if Needed

It may be that you need to seek advice from an experienced medical professional or experienced adoptive families in order to better understand the needs surrounding your referral. This information will not only help you make an educated decision, but will also provide you with valuable information in raising your child and providing the best care for him/her.

Your pediatrician or family physician is a great starting place. Keep in mind that it is always beneficial to speak with someone who has experience in the area of adoption. If needed, your pediatrician can refer you to a professional with specific medical expertise related to your referral situation.

For more information see the American Pediatrics Section on Adoption and Foster Care (www.aap.org/sections/adoption). The member physicians of this section of the American Academy of Pediatrics have specific adoption and foster care experience.

In addition, listed below are a few references for international adoption physicians. These professionals can provide pre-adoption counseling, review of referral information and some will provide consultation during travel. Check with each professional to find out what services are provided. There are certainly many more doctors who specialize in international adoption and this list is simply to give you a place to start in finding a physician that meets your needs. These physicians will use all the information you have provided in an effort to help you make an educated decision. They may also suggest more questions that you can ask your agency in order to gain further information.

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<http://www.adoptmed.org/>

Dr. Bledsoe and Dr. Davies will review your medical information and consult with you by phone when you travel. Dr. Bledsoe is an adoptive parent herself and has completed a great deal of research on fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and internationally adopted children. Approximately 50% of their clients are adopted internationally. Dr. Bledsoe and Dr. Davies also provide consultation to families adopting domestically.

Dana E. Johnson, M.D.

International Adoption Clinic
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN
Phone: 612-626-2928

Jerri Ann Jenista, MD

Adoption/Medical News
Ann Arbor, MI
Phone: 734-668-9492

International Adoption Medicine at Children's Medical Center

Dallas, Texas
Phone: 214-456-6788
<http://www.childrens.com/specialties/template.cfm?groupid=105&pageid=503>

North Texas International Adoption Clinic at the Child Study Center– Ft. Worth, Texas

Ft. Worth, Texas
Phone: 817-390-2929
www.ntiac.org

Texas Children's Health Center for International Adoption – Houston, TX

6621 Fannin Street, CC 1570
Houston, TX 77030
Phone: 832-822-1038
Toll free: 1-866-824-5437
www.texaschildrens.org/CareCenters/InternationalAdoption/Default.aspx

Step Four:

Move Forward with Hope

Keep in mind that after you have gathered information, researched, talked with the appropriate professionals and come to a decision, there will most likely still be uncertainties. That's okay. However, we hope that these resources and ideas will assist you in your effort to make an educated decision regarding your referral as you trust God in all things and move forward with a hope-filled faith.

This resource was compiled and prepared by Amy Monroe and Kristin Violi who are leaders for Tapestry, a ministry for adoptive and foster families. Find out more about Tapestry at www.tapestry.irvingbible.org.

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