



Adoption
Network



Pregnancy & Adoption Planning Guide

Find out if adoption is the right path for you.

www.AdoptionNetwork.com

| 1-800-367-2367



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Birth Mother Support

Making decisions about an unplanned pregnancy is not easy. Knowing you have support is an important factor while considering your options. You are not alone. It might be difficult at first to share your decision with the people in your life. Seek out friends, support groups, Birth Parents, or understanding counselors in order to have a safe place to communicate feelings, ask questions, and explore options.

Who should you talk to?

SUPPORT SYSTEM

One of your first steps should include talking to the baby's father and to your family about the pregnancy to learn if they are willing to help. Let them in on what you're thinking. Feeling supported and having a network of understanding friends outside of your family is very important as well. It's good to have another person you can talk to about what you're learning and what questions you still have. If you cannot turn to the baby's father, family or friends, contact Adoption Network for support. We will always provide you with personal and confidential assistance, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

ADOPTION PROFESSIONAL

An adoption professional will be understanding and will work closely with an Expectant Mother to explore reasons for adoption and alternative options. Adoption Network is committed to providing help for Expectant Mothers and assisting you in making the right choice for you, whether or not that choice ends up being adoption. We are here to provide support and resources. Make a list of questions you want answered and talk to one of our Adoption Advisors in a safe and non-judgmental environment. Talking to an Adoption Advisor in no way promises that you will place your child through us. Ask your questions without holding back. This is your child and your decision.

BIRTH MOTHERS

Find someone who has made the choice you are contemplating. Ask her questions about her experience while keeping in mind that everyone's story is different. She made the best decision she could make at that time with that set of circumstances. Adoption Network can help you connect with a Birth Mother, and we also have videos and blogs from our Birth Mothers who have shared their stories and experiences with adoption.



**You are not
alone.**

SUPPORT GROUPS

Talking to others who are making or have made an unplanned pregnancy decision may be helpful. You can learn how they considered their options, who helped them and how they are dealing with their decision. Once you've made your plan, they will be able to support you in a way that your family and friends can't. Adoption Network can connect you to groups for pregnant girls and women, those in the process of adoption, those who have completed an adoption, as well as groups for teen parents and abortion recovery.

COUNSELING CENTERS

There are all sorts of centers, including those that offer unplanned pregnancy counseling and assistance in finding a professional to help with specific services. The counselor may be associated with an adoption agency or professional, abortion clinic or parenting center. At a counseling center, you can ask questions without the fear of judgement. Many times women who volunteer at these centers have experienced an unplanned pregnancy. You may be able to speak to someone who's had an abortion or placed her child with an Adoptive Family. Their objective should be to help you sort through the options without guiding you in any direction. Adoption Network can help you find a counselor who specializes in adoption during or after your adoption journey.

Making an adoption plan, deciding to parent, or planning an abortion is a momentous decision. Take the time to consider your options, build your support network, and get counseling to be sure you are making the right choice for you.



Pregnancy Options

Finding yourself unexpectedly pregnant without a solid plan for raising a child can be scary, frustrating and lead to feelings of hopelessness. It is important to know support is available, and we at Adoption Network are available to answer your questions and provide the support and resources you need. Take time during your pregnancy to think things through. Whatever you choose to do—develop an adoption plan, parent, or arrange an abortion—the decision is yours. Examine the consequences, find the right people to help you and make your plan.

ADOPTION

If you are unable to parent, placing your child for adoption is an option. You deserve to have someone by your side who is concerned with your best interests and to ensure your voice is heard and your wishes are met. Adoption Network will be there to support you and provide you with no-cost services, education, and resources.

What does adoption cost?

Birth Parents are not responsible for legal fees or agency fees. Financial assistance for some medical and living expenses may be available in accordance with state law. Adoptive Parents are responsible for covering these costs.

Adoption choices:

When considering adoption, there are many choices you will be asked to make—from choosing an Adoptive Family to deciding how much contact you want after placement. Adoption Network will get to know you and learn what is important to you in a family. We will then provide you with profiles of Waiting Families who are available to you. All of our families waiting to adopt must meet their state's home study requirements prior to adopting, so you can feel assured that a warm, secure and loving home will be provided for your child. Our Adoption Advisors will discuss with you the different forms of communication that you can have with the adoptive family and find one that makes you most comfortable. Like any other choice, it's important that you do your research in order to make the best decision.

Impact of adoption:

Adoption affects everyone differently. Love, loss, guilt, and resolution are common themes. Birth Parents should seek out friends, support groups, or understanding counselors in order to have a safe place to communicate their feelings. We have resources to help you through this.

PARENTING

Parenting means you are responsible for a baby 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Many women experience a big change in their lives when becoming a parent. Many women still choose parenthood and continue to live their lives with the added expense and challenges of raising a child.

Consider:

- Is the baby's father willing and available to help provide care?
- How will you afford to take care of your baby?
- How will you provide for your baby's medical care?
- Will you be able to continue your schooling or maintain a job?
- Who will provide child care when you're away?
- Consider how your social life will change with a baby to take care of.

What does it take to raise a child?

Parenting will be the most demanding job you will ever have in your life. You must think about your baby's food, sleep and wake-time schedule. You must arrange childcare while you work to support your child(ren). You

must also anticipate changing your lifestyle and giving up freedoms that are not longer possible when caring for a child. It is a daily sacrifice of time, energy and resources to love and raise a child full time.

A word about teen parents—

- Only 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma before age 22.[2]
- Daughters of teen mothers are more likely to become teen mothers themselves. [3]
- Nearly 80% of teen fathers do not marry the mother. [4]
- On average, absent teen fathers pay less than \$800 per year in child support.[5]
- 78% of children born to unmarried teen mothers without a high school diploma live in poverty. [6]



Many women experience a big change in their lives when becoming a parent.



Abortion is not just a medical procedure, but an emotional one as well.

ABORTION

If you know you are not ready to parent and it's early enough, abortion is an option. Abortion is the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy, most often performed during the first 28 weeks of pregnancy.

What does an abortion cost?

An abortion costs up to \$1500 in the first trimester, depending on the abortion method. [7]

Abortion side effects:

Abortion side effects may include: bleeding, abdominal pain, cramping, nausea, vomiting, and headache. Sometimes side effects can be serious or fatal. Abortion is not just a medical procedure, but an emotional one as well.

- Many women report feelings of anger, regret, guilt or sadness after abortion.
- Some women request post-abortion counseling to deal with the emotional and psychological effects of terminating their pregnancy.

While others may pressure you or provide advice, you should be allowed to think through your options and make the final decision. Adoption Network offers a safe and non-judgmental environment to talk about pregnancy, parenting, adoption, and abortion. Our adoption professionals will go over what the adoption process would look like for you in your current situation and state, as well as whether an adoption plan is the best option for you. No matter what you decide, you need to be the one who is okay with the decision that was made at the end of the day.

[1] "Expenditures on Children by Families | Center for Nutrition ..." 2014. 9 Feb. 2016 <<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/ExpendituresonChildrenbyFamilies>>

[2] "Diploma Attainment Among Teen Mothers - Child Trends." 2013. 9 Feb. 2016 <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/child_trends-2010_01_22_FS_diplomaattainment.pdf>

[3] "Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social ..." 2008. 9 Feb. 2016 <<http://www.amazon.com/Kids-Having-Economic-Consequences-Pregnancy/dp/0877667454>>

[4] "Teenage Births: Outcomes for Young Parents and their ..." 2009. 9 Feb. 2016 <http://www.scaany.org/documents/teen_pregnancy_dec08.pdf>

[5] "Teen Pregnancy Prevention." 2013. 9 Feb. 2016 <<http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/teen-pregnancy-prevention.aspx>>

[6] "The 2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book - The Annie E. Casey ..." 2014. 9 Feb. 2016 <<http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-2007-kids-count-data-book/>>

[7] "Abortion - Planned Parenthood." 2015. 12 Feb. 2016 <<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion>>

A photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, smiling warmly at a young child. The child is looking back at the woman and has their hands raised near their face. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Choosing Adoption

For Expectant Parents considering adoption, an adoption professional is the place to start. Some of these are local, while others, like Adoption Network, work with families throughout the USA. Adoption Network will work closely with Expectant Parents to ensure they feel safe and happy with their adoption plan. Our role is to advise and support Expectant Parents through the process of pregnancy, birth, placement, and beyond.

Most of us feel better knowing what to expect. Here's a general idea of what happens when you sign up with Adoption Network:

PAPERWORK

When you select Adoption Network as your adoption professional, you and one of our Adoption Advisors will complete some paperwork. This usually includes personal information, health history, proof of pregnancy, and family selection criteria. This paperwork provides us with information to get to know you and help you find the right Adoptive Family for your baby. It also allows the child to have the information later on.

LIVING EXPENSES

Adoption Network will help you apply for any public assistance or insurance benefits which you are entitled to during your pregnancy. Depending on your state, adoption may also cover reasonable living expenses. Additionally, we provide safe and secure housing assistance, should you need it, as allowed by state law. Expenses are paid directly to the provider, like a landlord or utility company. The adoption judge will review expenses paid to you before the adoption is finalized so careful records are kept. Our Adoption Advisor will help you calculate expenses and comply with adoption laws.

ADOPTION ADVISOR

Our Adoption Advisor is here to help you through the adoption process and offer emotional support. They are generally available by phone, text or email. Your Adoption Advisor will help you with everything from doctor appointments and finding support in your area, to coordinating living expenses and communicating with the Adoptive Family. Adoption Advisors are available as often or as little as you like.

MENTORING

Adoption Network can connect you with a Birth Mother who is years beyond placement. She is here to talk to you and listen. She can help you understand what feelings to expect during your pregnancy and after your baby is placed in their new adoptive home. It helps to talk to someone who knows exactly what it feels like to place a child for adoption. Many mentors and mentees develop lasting friendships.

SELECT AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY

Selecting an Adoptive Family for your baby is one of the most significant decisions you will make. Begin by thinking about the type of parent or home you would like for your child. Maybe it is one similar to how you were raised. Maybe it is the type of home in which you wish you had grown up. Talk to your Adoption Advisor about the kind of family you hope will adopt your baby; then you'll be shown Adoptive Family profiles based on what you discussed. Our Adoptive Families have to undergo rigorous screening processes so you can feel comfortable knowing that each profile is a loving potential family, who are emotionally and financially able to give your child a great life. You may not find everything you want in one family, but by knowing what is important to you, you have a starting point. Your Adoption Advisor will reach out to the family and coordinate an introduction. Our Adoption Advisor will help you with these conversations if you don't know what to say or ask. It is important that you are entirely happy with the choice.

DETERMINE LEVEL OF CONTACT

The degree of "openness" in the adoption will be based on your comfort level, and that of the Adoptive Parents. This may include the sending of photos and letters, or meetings with your child. Maintaining contact allows you to know how your child is doing and reassures

you that you made the right choice. Consider what seems right for you now and be prepared to adjust your level of contact over the years, and as you and your child's lives evolve.

MAKE A BIRTH PLAN

Making a birth plan, and the many decisions that go along with it, is not always easy. There are additional factors to consider when your birth plan includes adoption. Do you want Adoptive Parents in the labor room? Who do you want to take care of the baby during your hospital stay? Who will be your support during recovery and relinquishment? We are here to help you through these times.

Creating a plan with your Adoption Advisor will help you and everyone to know what to expect. Our Advisor can help guide you, but will not make decisions for you. No one, including any professional or family member, should pressure you into making a decision. They can, however, help you sort through your feelings and help you get answers.

Making an adoption plan, and the many decisions that go along with it, is not always easy. We can help.

Call 1-800-367-2367



Choosing A Family

Selecting an Adoptive Family for your baby is one of the most significant decisions you will make. Begin by thinking about the type of parent or home you would like for your child. Maybe it is one similar to how you were raised. Maybe it is the type of home in which you wish you had grown up. You may not find everything you want in one family, but by knowing what is important to you, you have a starting point.

Selection criteria:

- Do you want a home with a mom and dad, a same-sex family or a single parent?
- Are you looking for a parent who is funny, smart, successful, playful, social, outgoing, shy, or athletic?
- Is it important to you that a parent be at home raising your child? Is it okay for both parents to be working?
- If parents are working, how long will they take off when the baby first arrives? What sort of childcare are they planning—a babysitter, live in au pair, nanny, other family members or an out-of-the-home option?
- Are you looking for a home in a big or small city, a suburb of a city, or in a rural community? Are you hoping they will live near a beach, a lake, or the mountains? Do you want them to live near you or across the country?
- Do you want your child to be the first in the family, have siblings or be an only child?
- Is it important to you that there is an extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins?
- What sort of life are you hoping for your child? Are there certain hobbies or interests you want your child to try or be exposed to—things like music lessons or sports? Some families take a lot of vacations or travel frequently. Some are homebodies and visit local parks, museums, theater and recreational venues. Is their religion important to you?
- How will they discipline?
- What kind of post-placement contact is important to you? Do you not want any contact? Do you want pictures and written updates? Do you want the opportunity for visits?

GETTING TO KNOW A PROSPECTIVE FAMILY

Getting to know a prospective family is an important part of your selection process. You can talk to them over the phone, video chat, or you may have the opportunity to meet them in person before you decide to place your child in their home. Then, if you choose them—you can continue to talk or meet during the pregnancy. You should also be discussing what kind of post-placement contact you are looking for.

FINAL DECISIONS

- You have the right to choose a family, this includes seeing profiles and talking to several families before making a decision.
- You have the right to take time to make a decision.
- You have the right to an unpressured decision making process.
- You have the right to counseling if you have questions or are struggling with making an adoption plan or choosing a family

You need to feel comfortable that this is the right family. This is a big decision that will affect both your life and your child's. It is important for you to take the time you need to make an informed decision.

**Meeting Adoptive Parents prior to selecting is not always an option.*

**You need to feel
Comfortable that this
Is the right family.**





Telling Others

TELLING THE BABY'S FATHER:

Perhaps you aren't sure how to talk about your choice with the baby's father. Maybe you've broken up or you're not sure who the father is. There could be reasons why you might not want to contact the father of the baby while you're considering adoption.

There have been cases of biological fathers contesting an adoption after the child has been placed for adoption, causing a lot of pain for all parties involved. Birth Mothers take a big risk when deciding on adoption without telling the Birth Father. Doing the right thing now and informing everyone involved can save a lot of trouble and misfortunes down the road.

Some fathers are supportive of the decision to place even when they're out of the picture. Having his support during the process can be very helpful.

Here is a guide to talking to the father of your child about adoption in a way that makes him feel part of the decision making process:

- First, don't be too hard on yourself. It isn't your fault; it takes two to get pregnant.
- Choose a time when you can be alone with your baby's father, or a time when you can talk to him in privacy on the phone. Tell him you took a pregnancy test and it came out positive.
- Resist the urge to fight or place blame. Tell him how you feel, but also listen to his thoughts too. He'll likely be much more receptive if you show him you are considering his feelings.
- He may not want any involvement or he may want to support you on your adoption journey. Approach the conversation free of expectations.
- Talk about your options honestly. Remember, nobody can force you to have an abortion, place a baby with an adoptive family, or parent a child.
- Make sure he understands why you've chosen adoption, that he feels you've made him part of the decision-making process, and that you expect him to support your choice as best he can.

TELLING FAMILY & FRIENDS

Talking about an adoption is truly a personal decision. Many women hide an unplanned pregnancy or an adoption, sometimes for years, choosing to spare their family members from the loss and avoid the risk of being rejected by the ones closest to them. However, family and friends may offer a great deal of support, which is important for Expectant Mothers. Understandably, circumstances don't always allow for it. Only you know your unique situation.

If you do decide to ask your family and friends for support with this decision, here are some tips for approaching loved ones:

- Talking with an adoption professional first can help guide your conversation.
- Your Adoption Advisor can help you tell your family.
- Find a time when you can sit and talk comfortably and privately.
- Be completely honest. This conversation is an opportunity to demonstrate your level of maturity, and show that you are capable of making a well thought-out decision for yourself and your child.

Family and friends may offer a great deal of support.

- Prepare yourself for their reaction; they might be angry or shocked. Let them process any emotion that comes up.
- Once calm has been reestablished, tell them you are considering adoption and the reasons why—financial pressure, your age, you're just not ready. Whatever the reason, remember, it's an important enough reason to you, and this is your decision.
- And finally, ask them for their support.

Your family and friends may not know much about adoption. Their exposure may only be what they have seen on TV or read in the media. This information is often sensationalized and not the reality of adoption. You may find yourself educating them or learning about adoption together.

Hopefully your parents and friends will be supportive of the decision you make. Adoption is a positive, responsible decision for the long run. The truth is, all parents want their children to be happy and successful. (That's why you're considering adoption.) And letting them in helps the people who love you understand you better too.





Adoption Choices

There are many adoption choices you will be asked to make during your pregnancy. Once you start your adoption plan, you will need to choose an Adoptive Family, decide how much contact you want with them during your pregnancy and if you want to maintain contact after you place your child into his/her new home.

Some adoptions are open, some are closed, and some are somewhere in between. Some Birth Parents find peace of mind knowing that they can visit, talk to, or see photos of the child they placed with the Adoptive Family. Others find it easier to move forward with their lives by abstaining from contact with the child or the Adoptive Parents. You should discuss your options with your adoption professional and figure out which adoption arrangement would work best for you.

OPEN ADOPTION

Most adoptions these days are open, which means that children grow up knowing who their Birth Parents are and maintain a connection with them. You will have the opportunity to talk to the Adoptive Family during your pregnancy and after placement. Open Adoption allows you to receive photos and written updates about your child, or even

perhaps have visits. Receiving updates about your child may reduce or eliminate feelings of regret and depression. While Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents will agree on the type of post-placement contact they are comfortable with, it needs to be noted that you or the Adoptive Parents may feel differently as the years progress, and the child may have his/her own wishes and needs for contact.

SEMI-OPEN ADOPTION

A semi-open relationship may involve limited phone calls, emails and texts, and possibly meeting before the birth of the baby and limited plans for contact after the placement of the child in the adoptive home. Birth and Adoptive Parents typically know one another's first names. There may be an agreement to send photos or letters regarding the child's progress and development through an adoption professional after placement. Contact reassures Birth and Adoptive Parents of the other's identity, as well as making it possible to ask questions or share information as the child grows.

CLOSED ADOPTION

In a closed adoption, your information is kept private. Any information between a Birth Parent and Adoptive Family is shared through a third party, such as an attorney or adoption professional like Adoption Network, until the child reaches legal age. Legal age is defined differently from state to state and is typically between 18-21 years of age. When the adopted child reaches legal age, in some states, records can be opened and contact can be made between a Birth Parent and their biological child.

Your comfort level in making an adoption plan for your child is paramount in deciding

if you will have personal contact during the pregnancy and after the placement. It will determine your ability to find out how your child is doing and be available to give information should questions arise over the years. It will provide your child with direct information to help them understand your decision and circumstances surrounding their adoption, as well as remove the mystery of who you are. Consider what seems right for you at this time and be prepared to adjust your level of contact over the years, as you and your child's lives evolve.

**Some adoptions are open,
some are closed, and some
are somewhere in between.**



**Consider what seems right for you at this time
and be prepared to adjust your level of contact
over the years as your lives evolve.**



Pregnancy Health

While considering your options, it's important to take care of yourself. Your body is experiencing some big changes. Your health and your baby's health are top priority.

CHOOSING A DOCTOR

Feeling comfortable about your healthcare provider will help you feel more at ease throughout your pregnancy and on delivery day. Who you choose might be based on what kind of delivery you want. If you plan to deliver in a hospital or birthing center you will select an obstetrician. If you want to deliver at home or have a water birth, you'll generally work with a midwife—although a midwife can practice in any setting. Another factor in your decision might rest on your insurance provider. Here are some considerations:

- If you have a private insurance, they can direct you to an OB/GYN in your area.
- You may be entitled to public assistance or insurance benefits during your pregnancy.
- If you have chosen adoption and you do not qualify for assistance, the Adopting Parents will cover your medical expenses.

STAYING HEALTHY DURING YOUR PREGNANCY

What you take into your body is what the baby receives for nourishment. It is important to eat right for your baby's growth and development. Healthy eating includes a well-balanced diet. This means eating a variety of foods and drinking plenty of water throughout the day.

Your diet should consist of:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Lean protein
- Whole grains
- Low-fat dairy products

You should also be taking a prenatal vitamin, providing extra iron and other vitamins and minerals specifically needed during pregnancy.

**This information is not a substitute for medical advice. Seek answers from a medical provider.*

Not only is it important to know what to eat, it is also important to know what to avoid or limit.

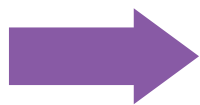
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Avoid



- Cigarettes
- Drugs
- Unpasteurized foods—soft cheeses such as brie, feta and blue cheese, unless clearly marked they have been pasteurized or made with pasteurized milk
- Raw fish—sushi, sashimi, raw oysters, scallops or clams.
- Fish that contain high levels of mercury—swordfish, shark, king mackerel, tilefish
- Undercooked meat can cause food poisoning—make sure meats are fully cooked

Limit



- Caffeine
- Artificial sweeteners
- Very salty or fatty foods





The goal is to keep up good health habits over the course of your pregnancy.

MORNING SICKNESS

Many pregnant women experience morning sickness. Morning sickness is a feeling of nausea caused by an increase of hormones in the body.

Symptoms of morning sickness may include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Food aversions
- Enhanced sense of smell
- Aversion to odors
- Fatigue

If you're experiencing morning sickness you might not feel like eating at all. However, it is important to eat to provide the nutrition your growing baby needs. Try eating foods in smaller amounts and avoid foods with strong odors which might trigger morning sickness.

Tricks to alleviate morning sickness:

- Eat small meals throughout the day
- Eat soda crackers before getting out of bed in the morning
- Eat well when you feel like eating to get the nutrients you need
- Try real ginger—ginger ale, ginger snaps, pickled ginger
- Drink water

Now, don't worry about doing everything perfectly. Don't panic if you give in to an occasional craving. There is a lot of conflicting information out there and choosing what and how to eat during pregnancy is a personal decision. The goal is to keep up good health habits over the course of your pregnancy.



Health Care & Physical Changes

Your baby starts to develop from the moment sperm fertilizes the egg and continues until delivery. A typical pregnancy is full-term at 40 weeks. Though pregnancy is a natural process, there is much to know and do to ensure a safe and healthy pregnancy.

HEALTH CARE

At the start of your pregnancy you will visit your healthcare provider about once a month. Your first prenatal visit will usually be about 8 weeks after your last missed period. This is generally your longest visit since your doctor or midwife will be gathering all the information needed to help you and your baby stay healthy throughout the duration of the pregnancy. Around month 6 you will schedule appointments every 2-3 weeks, and in the last month of pregnancy you will be seen once a week until delivery.

Questions to ask:

- What medications are safe?
- Who do I call in an emergency?
- What tests can I expect at each appointment? (blood, glucose, urine, ultrasound)
- Labor and delivery questions: when to go to the hospital, type of delivery, complications

When should I call my medical provider?

- Vaginal bleeding beyond spotting in the first trimester
- Intense abdominal pain
- Extreme vomiting to the point of dehydration
- Persistent severe headaches
- Excessive swelling
- Trauma to the abdomen
- You don't feel the baby moving
- You have a fever or flu symptoms
- Dizziness or fainting
- Depression or anxiety

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PHYSICAL CHANGES

Pregnancy is divided up into 3 time periods or trimesters about 3 months each. Here's what you can expect during each trimester:

First Trimester

Pregnancy triggers all kinds of physical and hormonal changes in your body. During your first trimester, you won't see many noticeable differences but you might feel some of them:

- Fatigue
- Mood swings
- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Bothered by certain foods and odors
- Frequent urination

Second Trimester

For many women, this is their favorite trimester of pregnancy. Morning sickness has usually subsided, and you might experience:

- Fluttering sensation as your baby moves
- Increase in energy
- Leg cramps
- Heartburn
- Constipation
- Difficulty sleeping in your usual position

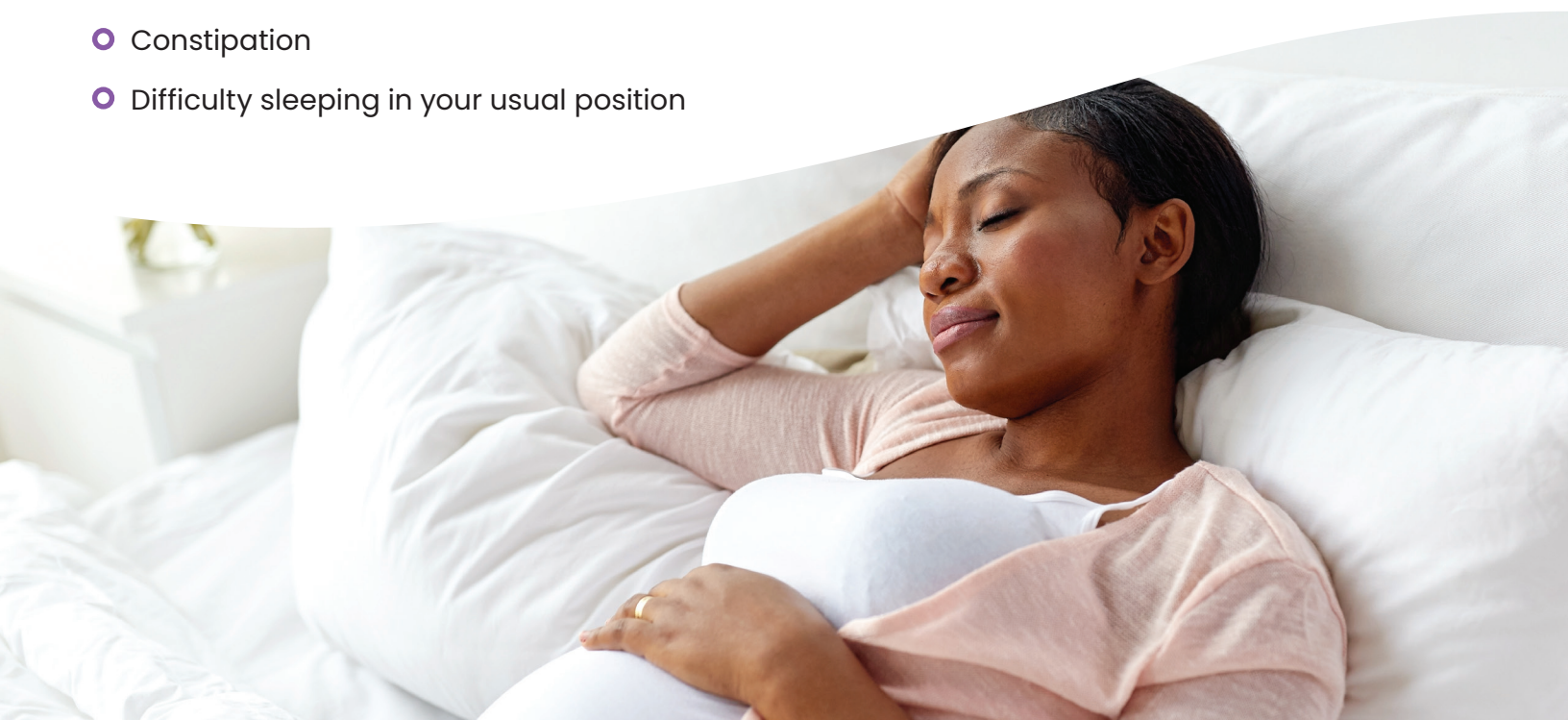
Third Trimester

You're almost there! The baby will move quite a bit at the beginning of this trimester with movement slowing down as delivery gets closer and there is less "wiggle" room. Some symptoms of the second trimester carry over into the third trimester as well as:

- Frequent urination
- Swelling
- Varicose veins
- Back pain

**This information is not a substitute for medical advice. Seek answers from a medical provider.*

With a better understanding of these 9 months, you will be prepared to take care of yourself and your unborn baby.





Preparing For Birth

As your due date approaches you will want to make decisions regarding the birth.

Where will you give birth?

HOSPITAL BIRTH

You might choose a hospital because that is where your doctor provides services. Medical intervention is available in a hospital setting. Some hospitals have created comfortable rooms just for giving birth.

Familiarize yourself with the hospital. Take a tour if one is offered. Learn the rules and policies the hospital has. This is your chance to ask questions:

- Ask how they handle adoption situations.
- Ask what they do to make adoption situations smoother.
- Ask to meet the social worker at the hospital.
- Ask if the nurses have had training on dealing with adoption.

If the hospital does not currently have provisions in place for adoption sensitivity, let your Adoption Advisor know so that she can send them information.

BIRTH CENTER

Freestanding birth centers have become more popular. Only healthy women with normal pregnancies should give birth in a birthing center. Often the birthing center is run by a midwife. As with a hospital birth, it is important to tour the facility before making a decision.

HOME BIRTH

Many women feel they have more control with a home birth and deliver healthy babies at home with a midwife.

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Your birth coach can be a family member, friend or a professional.

WATER BIRTH

Water births are typically done at home or in a birth center with a midwife present. Many moms feel a water birth creates a more soothing and relaxing laboring environment.

BIRTH COACH

A birth coach is there to support you through labor and delivery. Your birth coach can be a family member, friend or a professional. When selecting a birth coach you will want:

- Someone who can provide emotional support
- Someone who can support you and be positive
- Someone who is flexible
- Someone who will have good communication with you and the staff
- Someone who can handle the stress and environment of labor and delivery

LAMAZE CLASSES

Learn what to expect during labor and delivery in a Lamaze class. Lamaze teaches relaxation and coping techniques and can help women feel more confident about giving birth. Lamaze classes are often attended by couples. Some Expectant Mothers take a trusted friend or birth coach. There are many videos and instructional birthing materials you can find online for free if you decide Lamaze classes are not right for you.

While you may seek advice from family, friends and doctors, you are the one to make the decision about where to give birth. Choose what you are comfortable with and what you feel is best for you and your baby.

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Preparing For The Hospital

WHAT TO BRING

Prepare a bag to take with you while you're in labor so that you don't have to go through the house at the last minute trying to pack. Here are suggestions of things to bring with you:

- Change of clothes, including underwear
- Sports bra and ace bandage to bind your breasts to prevent milk from coming in
- Toiletries
- Music, if you wish
- Camera

Some Birth Mothers choose to bring an outfit, blanket or other gift for the baby to keep after placement as a reminder of her love and the bond they share.

PHOTOGRAPHER

You and your birth coach will be very busy during the birth of your baby. Some women choose to bring in a photographer to catch all the special moments on camera. Talk with the Adoptive Family about your wishes; they may want to hire a photographer for you. Many photographers specialize in birth photography and will stay in the background

to capture candid, intimate moments. You might also consider newborn pictures of the baby, pictures with you, and pictures with the Adoptive Family.

ADOPTIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Start thinking about what level of involvement you want the Adoptive Family to have.

- Do you want them there during the birth?
- Do you want them to cut the cord?
- Do you want them to have a hospital ID band for access to the nursery?
- Do you want them to come only after the baby is born?

It is important to remember that you have a voice, you get to choose, and you are in charge.

Hospital Stay

When preparing for the delivery of your baby, it is a good idea to think ahead about your hospital stay. There are additional factors to consider when your birth plan includes adoption. Creating a plan that considers these issues helps everyone know what to expect.

BREASTFEEDING

After the birth of your baby, the sudden drop in hormones triggers milk production. It is important to decide if you want to stop milk production, breastfeed, or pump during your hospital stay.

If you do not breastfeed or pump, your milk will dry up naturally within a week or so. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about your



decision. Ask questions about what to expect and how to relieve any discomfort.

You may wish to give your baby the health benefits of breastmilk or feel a warm closeness during your time together. Whatever your reasons, choosing to breastfeed is a personal decision and yours to make. Some Birth Mothers breastfeed while in the hospital and then allow their milk to dry up afterwards. Some continue to pump breastmilk for the Adoptive Family if they live in close proximity. Others pump after placement and donate it to a local milk bank. If you choose to breastfeed, the hospital can connect you with a lactation consultant for help getting started. If pumping is your choice, the hospital will provide equipment and training. Hospital grade pumps are available for rent after you leave the hospital.

Some worry breastfeeding will make it harder to relinquish their child when the time comes. Others find the bond helpful in healing. Placement will be difficult either way. Consider whether breastfeeding will make it harder or help you heal. Whatever you decide is best for you and your baby should be supported.

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SUPPORT

Consider having someone with you to provide emotional support during your hospital stay. Having a trusted friend or family member whose only concern is your well-being can improve the quality of your experience. Your support person should watch for signs of stress and step in if you're feeling overwhelmed, upset, or need some alone time with the baby. Some find it helpful to have a 'safe word' signaling your support person to ask someone to leave the room. Be honest about what you need and want. Your support person is there to back you up.

TIME WITH YOUR BABY

When do you want the Adoptive Parents to meet the baby? Do you want to change diapers, bathe and feed your baby or do you want the Adoptive Parents to look after those things? Would you prefer to have the hospital nursery take care of the baby? These are things to consider as you create a plan for your hospital stay. Whatever you decide, remember you have a voice. This is your opportunity to create memories and prepare for placement.

**This is your opportunity
to create memories and
prepare for placement.**

RELINQUISHMENT

The Birth Mother or the Birth Parents must voluntarily relinquish, or give up, their parental rights. Even when you know you're making the right decision for your baby, relinquishment can be hard. Preparing in advance for this part of the adoption process can help when the time comes to sign the papers. Often relinquishment papers may be signed in the hospital or at the agency after your release from the hospital. Read through the legal documents you will sign long before you go into labor to understand what you are agreeing to. Having someone present to provide emotional support when you sign the papers can also be very helpful. This could be your parents, a sibling or trusted friend, your social worker, or Adoption Advisor.

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LEAVING THE HOSPITAL

You will want to discuss with your Adoption Advisor who will take the baby upon discharge from the hospital. If relinquishment papers have been signed, do you want to leave the hospital first or would you prefer to have the Adoptive Parents leave with the baby first? Do you want to keep or share hospital memorabilia like wristbands and footprints? Deciding in advance will prevent misunderstandings.

Do you want to give the baby a gift or letter? Some Birth Parents will write a letter for the child to keep, explaining their decision and expressing their hopes and dreams for the child. They may choose to include pictures of themselves as babies or current photos. Others make handmade keepsakes or give other special mementos to the child.

Do you want to have a placement ceremony or celebration? A placement ceremony can be a small gathering to talk about reasons for choosing adoption or stating intentions. Some choose an informal celebration at a restaurant or park to get to know the Adoptive Family or exchange gifts.

Some Birth Mothers just want to place their baby and then go home. Think about what you feel comfortable with. Decide what works best for you and the Adoptive Family.

Don't be afraid to ask for what you want. Let the people around you know if you change your mind about anything in the plan.

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**A birth plan is a
tool to help you.**



Recovery

After you get home from the hospital, it is important to let yourself heal physically and emotionally. You will experience highs and lows as your body recovers and you adjust to life. Knowing what to expect can help you feel less stressed about the changes you'll experience and better able to focus on your recovery.

PHYSICAL CHANGES

- **Bleeding** - Postpartum bleeding lasts up to 2 weeks.
- **Soreness** - Vaginal discomfort may be worse if you've had an episiotomy or perineal tear. If you've had a cesarean section, you will experience abdominal pain around your incision.
- **Lactation** - Your body will begin to produce breast milk. If you are not pumping, your milk will dry up within 10 days.
- **Round Belly** - Your abdomen is still swollen and will take a few weeks for your uterus to return to its original size and shape.
- **Hormonal Changes** - You may feel weepy, develop acne, lose hair, or experience night sweats as hormones return to normal.

Give yourself time to heal. Ease back into your routine slowly. It takes 6 weeks to recover from a vaginal delivery and 12 weeks if you've had a cesarean section.

GRIEF

Even though you know you've made the right decision, be prepared to grieve. Grief is a natural reaction following placement. The grief experienced by a Birth Mother is complicated. Not only are you mourning the physical separation from your child, but also the loss of the parent/child relationship you might have had. The physical vacancy of the baby after delivery is a reminder that there is also a vacancy in your heart. Grief may be expressed as denial, sorrow, depression, anger, and guilt. Acceptance of the loss usually follows grief. This doesn't mean you will forget your child or never feel sad again. You will think about your child often. Triggers like holidays, milestones, a mother with a newborn baby, or a picture, may cause grief to resurface or intensify. Acceptance means integrating the loss into your life.

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COUNSELING

Central to healing is to seek counseling following placement. Adoption Network can help you get the counseling you need. Adoption counselors are equipped to handle unresolved feelings of grief that can follow placement.

Don't be afraid of the stigma of counseling. It's okay to not be okay. It's okay to get help and talk to someone. After all, you have experienced a traumatic event. Counselors and life coaches are trained to listen and help you work through your concerns in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

It is vital to find a professional that you are comfortable with. A counselor's credentials mean nothing if you don't feel you can be open and honest with them. Don't be afraid to ask for a consult with a couple of different therapists before you decide to commit to a therapeutic relationship.

SUPPORT

An understanding support system is also important as you adapt to your new life as a Birth Mother. Remember, you are not alone.

○ **Support Groups** – Validation from other women who have placed a child for adoption can make all the difference. Experienced members of a support group can offer a struggling Birth Parent suggestions for resources such as counselors and books. Search the internet for online support groups. Adoption Network can connect you to different support groups where you can feel safe to express your feelings. Know you can participate at whatever level you need and are most comfortable with.

○ **Mentors** – Some women also rely on Birth Mother mentors for help. Your mentor knows what you're feeling and can provide support in ways your family and friends can't. Adoption Network's mentors can connect you with support groups and other Birth Mothers who can help as well.

There are many ways to deal with loss and grief. Keeping a journal is a great outlet for expressing emotions and helping you remember details as memories fade. Exercise can release endorphins and clear your head. You may find comfort spending time with trusted family and friends.

Remember to be kind to yourself. You did everything you could to ensure your child has a bright future.

Integrating the adoption experience into your life takes time.

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Communicating With Adoptive Parents

The type of communication you will have with the Adoptive Parents will depend largely on the degree of openness in your adoption. If you choose to have contact with the Adoptive Family, now is the time to start building that relationship.

CLOSED ADOPTION

In a closed adoption, no contact takes place between the Birth Family and the Adoptive Family before or after placement. You may still choose the Adoptive Parents, but there will be no identifying information given other than the necessary background and medical information.

SEMI-OPEN ADOPTION

In semi-open adoptions, Adoptive and Birth Parents may have limited talks, and may even meet before the birth. Limited contact is planned after the adoption is finalized. Limited identifying information is shared. Written updates may be exchanged directly via email and text, or through a caseworker, agency or lawyer.

OPEN ADOPTION

Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents in open adoptions have direct contact and identifying information about each other. Today, many Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents desire and agree to open adoptions.

If you choose to have contact, it is a good idea to start building a relationship with the Adoptive Parents early in your adoption plan.

Since the majority of Birth Parents desire open adoption, here are some tips for communicating with Adoptive Parents.

OPEN AND HONEST COMMUNICATION

- You should be comfortable talking to the Adoptive Parents and know they will listen.
- Be clear about what you want. Don't assume they know how you feel.
- Keep promises. If you don't think you can keep a promise, don't make it.
- Be flexible. Sometimes the amount of contact and communication will fluctuate.
- Be yourself. Share your emotions—both happy and sad.



WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

- Phone calls, video chatting, emails and texts
- Exchanging letters, photos, keepsakes
- Online videos, blogs, social media

A word about online sharing—

To protect the privacy of all involved, clear guidelines for the types of information shared online should be discussed with the Adoptive Parents in advance.

It's a good idea to start building a relationship with the Adoptive Parents early in your adoption plan. Like all new relationships, it might feel awkward at first. The important thing is to keep the lines of communication open. Learn about one another on a personal level outside of your adoption arrangement. Talk about interests, hobbies, favorite foods, music and movies. Discuss your hopes, dreams, fears, and worries. Share the fun things and the hard things. Build a relationship that will last a lifetime.

Consider what seems right at the moment and be prepared to adjust the level of contact as your wishes and your child's needs change through the years.

**Build a relationship
that will last a lifetime.**