

Accelerating Domestic Adoption—How to Take Control of the Process

By Nicole Witt, The Adoption Consultancy

Summary: *This article discusses two key areas in which pre-adoptive parents can proactively manage their domestic adoption process. Included are tips for accelerating the timeframe and connecting with the right birth mother.*

Most couples pursue domestic adoption after years of grueling infertility treatments. Throughout the infertility roller coaster, many have experienced the frustration of believing they have no control over the process or the outcome. Those feelings are often carried over into their adoption journey. Adoption is a whole new area that can seem overwhelming to learn about and even more uncontrollable than infertility treatments. However, this perception is inaccurate. Most pre-adoptive parents don't realize that they actually can exert significant control over the domestic adoption process, especially over the amount of time that the entire process takes.

There are two main arenas in which you can proactively manage the process – your profile and your openness. Let's begin with the personal profile. The profile is a combination of what's often called a "Dear Birth Mother" letter and a mini-scrapbook containing pictures of your life. Since the profile is often the only information source that the birth mother considers in selecting the adoptive parents, it's critical that it works hard for you. The key goals are to communicate enough about yourself so that the birth mother feels like she knows you a little bit and to communicate what the baby's life would be like with you. You need to create a profile that is not only going to be effective in communicating these key points, but that is also going to be more memorable than everyone else's. The methods of achieving these goals are too voluminous to cover in this article, but are worth spending time and effort researching in order to ensure that you develop a stellar profile which will enable you to get selected by the right birth mother as quickly as possible.

However, an outstanding profile won't get you anywhere if no one sees it. The second key element to the profile is making sure that it gets enough visibility. In other words, you want it to be reviewed by as many prospective birth mothers as possible. There are many ways to accomplish this goal. One of the most effective ways is by signing up with multiple adoption attorneys and agencies. Most pre-adoptive parents believe that they can only sign up with one agency or attorney. Not true! Most sources (agencies or attorneys) will allow you to also sign up with others. And there are many reputable sources that have low or no upfront fees, so budget needn't be a constraint. Also, if you work with an adoption consultant, they may have negotiated some discounted upfront fees on your behalf which can often more than offset the consultant's fee.

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That brings us to the other key arena – openness. This also has two separate elements to it: openness to your relationship with the birth parents and openness to the child you wish to adopt. Regarding the relationship with the birth parents, many pre-adoptive parents are fearful of the term "open adoption." But this can mean many things, not merely fully open or fully closed. Openness offers a whole continuum of possibilities and you need to determine the point where you're as open as possible without sacrificing your personal comfort zone. Most adopters find that they're comfortable with the typical "semi-open" situation which involves pre-birth contact with the birth mother and post-birth follow up via letters and pictures, but no exchange of identifying information. For those adopters who are able to take it one step further and be open to, say, an annual phone call moderated by the agency – they've just increased the number of potential birth mothers who may be interested in them. Or maybe phone calls make you uncomfortable, but you're willing to send pictures every month rather than twice a year. Again, look to expand your boundaries as much as possible — but don't get pressured into a situation that's not right for your family.

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Next is openness regarding the child. Of course, this includes the racial make-up of the child that will fit into your life. Again, you must be completely honest about what you're comfortable with. Not being open to a particular ethnicity does not necessarily make you prejudiced. But if you think you're only open to a Caucasian child, for example, make sure you've completely considered all your options. Are you or your spouse dark-skinned? If so, would a child who is 25% Hispanic be a good fit? What about a child that's 50% American Indian or 75% African American? You can get this specific in your request, so be sure to think carefully about what may work for your family before you close yourself off to any options.

Another element included in "openness to the child" is the consideration of the child's unique circumstances. It's wise to contemplate your comfort level with various scenarios such as the child being a result of rape or having a birth parent that's incarcerated. Although it can be disconcerting to think about some of these possibilities, keep in mind that these situations are fairly uncommon. Also, reflect on the potential medical conditions that you may be open to. Perhaps you're accepting of a family history of diabetes but not of cancer, for instance. No family is perfect, so it often helps to think of your own family's social and medical history in order to put things in perspective.

You also need to consider drug and alcohol usage on behalf of the birth parents. Again, you can get very specific about

what you are or are not willing to accept. Statistically speaking, babies who are placed for adoption are equally healthy to all other babies. So opening your options does not mean that you're going to adopt a child that doesn't thrive, it just means that you're willing to consider a variety of situations. Instead of saying "no alcohol or drugs," perhaps you would be comfortable with a birth mother who smokes a couple of cigarettes per day and had a few drinks before she discovered she was pregnant. Many pre-adoptive couples surprise themselves to discover that they're accepting of even more than that. It's critical to do your research on various substances so you can base your personal decisions on facts, not myths. Again, you must be true to yourself and to the child by not pressuring yourself to accept a situation that is outside of your limits. However, the more open you can be, the more likely that you'll be matched with the right birth mother sooner.

In summary, you definitely can exert some control over the domestic adoption process. You can proactively take steps and make decisions that are likely to significantly accelerate your journey. But remember to never get pressured into accepting a situation that's not right for you and your family. If it's not right for you, it's not in the best interest of the baby. Although the process may get frustrating at times, always remember that you're not just looking for any birth mother, but for the right birth mother. She and your future child are out there and you will find each other. ♦