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ADOPTION

from the

HEART



Building Families
Through Adoption
Since 1947



Information for Birthparents

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making the **DECISION**

You are very special because you have chosen life for your child. This is a courageous, unselfish, and generous gift you can give as a mother.

We can help you explore what your life will be like if you parent or if you decide to make an adoption plan. We will support you and offer you guidance regardless of your decision.

Every woman who considers an adoption plan for her child has many questions that need to be answered. You are probably feeling many emotions right now as you weigh your options. Our goal is to assist you in making the decision that is right for you. We want you to find peace in the choice you make, and have confidence that you are making the right decision for you and your baby.

- ♥ We are available 24-hours a day
- ♥ Our support to you is confidential
- ♥ All services are free

Adoption is a major decision and we want you to be well informed before making your decision. This booklet will give you a brief overview of the adoption process and hopefully answer many of your questions.

birthparent **SERVICES**

Because each situation is different, we will adapt our services to meet your specific needs. We offer:

- ♥ Free and confidential services
- ♥ 24-hour support
- ♥ Birthparent counseling
- ♥ Educational information on pregnancy and childbirth
- ♥ Support before, during, and after adoption
- ♥ Referrals for medical assistance, clothing, housing, and food
- ♥ Initial baby supplies for parenting

OPEN *adoption*

Over the years, adoption has changed greatly. Although we will still arrange a confidential adoption at the request of a birthparent, we believe in “open adoption”. An open adoption is the loving act of birthparents choosing a waiting family to parent their child. There are different levels of open adoption involving the on-going exchange of information between the birthparents and the adoptive family, with the best interest of the child at heart. You can:

- ♥ Choose the family for your child
- ♥ Meet the family for your child
- ♥ Get to know the family before your child is born
- ♥ Receive on-going pictures and letters about your child
- ♥ Send gifts, pictures, and letters to your child
- ♥ Participate in visits and have phone calls if all parties agree

Open adoption brings you and the adoptive family together and allows you to build a positive relationship with one another which will allow for the on-going exchange of information. The level of openness will change and adjust over time, and will be based on the needs of your child. Some advantages of open adoption include:

- ♥ Giving birthparents the opportunity to express continuing love and concern for their child
- ♥ Allowing for early bonding between the child and the adoptive family
- ♥ The on-going exchange of social history and medical information

the legal **PROCESS**

Any decision you make now is tentative. A birth mother cannot sign the Final and Irrevocable Surrender until at least 72 hours after the baby is born. In signing the Final and Irrevocable Surrender, you voluntarily choose not to exercise your right as a parent. After the 72 hours have passed and you have signed the Final and Irrevocable Surrender, you cannot change your mind. Your decision is final.

Since the Supreme Court decision in 1971, birth fathers have the same right as birth mothers to decide to parent their child or make a plan of adoption. If the birth father is known and able to be contacted, he must be consulted about the plan of adoption. He can choose to be part of the adoption plan and receive his own updates and pictures.

Because identifying, locating, contacting, and dealing with the birth father can be very difficult and emotional, we are here to help you with the task.

If the birth father chooses, he can sign a Final and Irrevocable Surrender before the child is born but it does not become effective until 72 hours after the birth of the child. If the birth father does not revoke the Final and Irrevocable Surrender within the 72 hour period, the birth father cannot change his mind.

Another option is for the birth father to sign a Final and Irrevocable Waiver of Parental Rights of Putative or Legal Father which will terminate his rights upon signing. However, if a final judgment or order of adoption for the child is not entered, his parental rights remain intact.

If you choose, you and the birth father can sign the Final and Irrevocable Surrender together any time after the 72 hour period.

If the birth father is unknown, you will be required to sign an affidavit stating you do not know the birth father of your baby. Illinois has a process in place to terminate the parental rights of unknown birth fathers. A notice will be published in the newspaper to invite unknown birth fathers to come forward before a plan of adoption can be completed. Failure to respond to this notice after 30 days allows the court to terminate his rights as a parent.

There is also a Putative Father Registry in Illinois. If birth fathers wish to maintain their parental rights, they must add their name to the registry within 30 days of the child's birth. The registry is checked for possible birth fathers before a plan of adoption can be completed.

If the birth father is uncooperative, we follow legal steps to obtain a response from him regarding his intention to deny paternity, agree with the adoption plan, or exercise his right to be a parent. We would not advise you to sign your Final and Irrevocable Surrender until the intentions of the birth father are known, unless you agree to let him have custody of the child.

In most cases, you and the baby are released from the hospital before the 72 hours have passed. Some hospitals will allow the baby to stay for the 72 hour period after you are released. If not, the baby can go home with the chosen adoptive family, be placed in a "temporary baby home", or go home with you. It is best to use a "temporary baby home" if you are unsure about parenting or making an adoption plan.

If your baby stays in the hospital during the 72 hour period and you are released, you will sign a "Temporary Placement Agreement" which allows the hospital to release your baby to us allowing us to place your baby with the adoptive family or in a "temporary baby home". This form does not, in any way, terminate your parental rights. You still have all of your parental rights and can cancel this agreement at any time. Depending on the hospital, there may be additional forms for you to sign.

It will be necessary for you to complete a "Release of Information", so we can obtain the medical records of you and your baby from the hospital.

About 6 months later, the adoptive family goes to court for "adoption finalization". We testify and provide reports to the court recommending the adoption. If necessary, the child's legal name will be changed and at this time a new birth certificate is issued with the adoptive family listed as the parents.

the adoptive **PARENTS**

The State of Illinois requires the adoptive parents to complete a home study through a licensed child welfare agency. The home study process involves making sure that the family and the home is a safe place for a child.

Each family must be clear of criminal charges and have no history of child abuse and/or neglect. They must receive a physical clearance from their doctor. They also must complete training on adoption issues and how openness is important for the birthparents and the child.

We examine the quality and stability of the marriage, their attitude towards children, discipline, their relationships with friends and family, use of leisure time, religious practice, and economic stability.

Our goal is not to find "perfect people", but to have families who are emotionally stable, have good marriages, and have healthy attitudes about raising children. We look for those families with a sound reputation and a healthy understanding and attitude towards adoption.

CHOOSING *the adoptive family*

Determining which family will love and care for your child is an awesome responsibility. Most birthparents appreciate the opportunity to plan for their child's future by choosing the adoptive couple. There are various levels of involvement in the selection process. You choose how much you want to be involved.

All of the families will have some things in common. They all have approached the agency about adoption on their own and we have evaluated them to be appropriate for our adoption program. All families have approved home studies and we consider them to be highly qualified to provide a safe, secure, and loving home for any child.

You will be shown profile letters that each family has written about themselves and a picture of the family. The couples are given an outline and suggestions for presenting the information. We review and approve each profile and picture but do not insist upon the amount of information, how specific it is, or how personal or identifying. You are free to request more information and ask questions of the couples or about the information you have received.

MEETING *the adoptive family*

The experience of meeting each other allows for the beginning of a unique relationship and enables the convenient flow of vital information.

It is a truly exciting experience. There are countless variations for which the "match meeting" can occur. The only rule is that people treat each other with kindness and honesty.

The first meeting is often at the agency, but it can be anywhere agreed upon by you and the adoptive family. We are there to make introductions, provide support, and assist with asking questions.

You may want to request that the adoptive family bring a photo album to share with you. In case you are unsure what to ask them, we have included some questions to get you started:

- ♥ What led you to adoption and what has the experience been like for your family
- ♥ What level of openness are you comfortable with
- ♥ How will you discipline your child
- ♥ Will your child go to college

The adoptive family may have questions to ask you. We have included some of the questions you may be asked:

- ♥ Your reason for choosing adoption
- ♥ Your relationship with the birth father
- ♥ Any concerning medical history
- ♥ Why you chose them to meet or be the adoptive family for your child

formulating your adoption **PLAN**

This step may be the most difficult. Essentially, it is anticipating how the relationship between you and the adoptive family will be for the next 18 years or more. Specific details of the contract may not be as important as the attitudes established. It is important to develop a foundation of mutual respect, cooperation, and a positive attitude towards openness. To sustain such a cooperative attitude, everyone must make an effort.

Having openness does not mean “co-parenting.” Confusion about who is in charge can be confusing for a child. According to the law, the adoptive parents are the parents in every aspect. Any agreement made between you and the adoptive parents is a “moral agreement” and is not legally binding. This is why we advise all parties to agree to only what they are comfortable with and can commit to throughout the child’s life.

While it may be impossible to develop an 18 year plan, it is relatively simple to construct a plan for the first year. This first year then sets the tone for the years ahead. You and the adoptive family negotiate the understanding so that everyone is comfortable. As the years pass, the child may want more or less openness.

If you have a good relationship with the adoptive parents, it will be easy to adjust to the needs of the child. Some guidelines that give the relationship some structure are:

The best interests of the child must prevail

- ♥ Communication works best if it is honest and kind
- ♥ Always try to consider the other person’s perspective
- ♥ The arrangement is between you and the adoptive parents
- ♥ Always pre-arrange the involvement of others

We encourage you to participate in each step of the adoption experience, but we do understand if you do not feel comfortable with every level of openness. We do not want you to feel pressure into sharing information with an adoptive family if you are not comfortable doing so.

You may change your mind and want more openness than you originally wanted in the beginning. If this does happen, we can arrange for more contact with the adoptive family, if they agree to share more with you. Most birthparents want to know that an adoptive family would be willing to have a certain level of openness in case it is decided they may want it in the future.

In the Hospital

Your stay in the hospital will be a very special time and how you handle it is important. Planning for your stay will ensure you are in control. You make all the decisions about your contact and care of your child while in the hospital. We have a form called “Hospital Plan” that will help you start to think about some of the choices you will make while in the hospital. It includes such things as whether or not you intend to see, hold, and feed your baby.

A Gift to Your Baby

We encourage you to give a picture of yourself and/or write a letter to your child which can include things like how you feel about him or her, and why you chose to make an adoption plan. You could even write a letter to the adoptive parents.

You may want to provide a symbolic gift to your child, something that has special meaning to you.

We believe that letters, pictures, and small gifts demonstrate your love and concern for the child. They can ease a child’s mind as they begin to question why they were adopted, what their birthparents looked like, and whether or not they have any brothers or sisters.

During the first 6 months the child is with the adoptive family, we conduct visits and complete reports describing how the child is doing in the home. We also collect pictures during this time. You are entitled to these which most birthparents find reassuring. There are some who wish not to receive the reports and pictures. They will stay in your file until you are ready to have them. After the 6 month time period, updates and pictures will be sent to you or the agency depending upon your openness agreement.

taking care of **YOU**

Many birthparents experience a period of uncertainty after they have completed a plan of adoption. They may ask themselves:

- ♥ Did I do the right thing?
- ♥ Will my baby be okay?
- ♥ Will my baby remember me?
- ♥ What will my baby think of me later on?

Second guessing is normal. Any time someone has lost another person through death, divorce, a breakup, a move, or by adoption, there will be feelings of anger, depression, and regret. Remember, we are here for you now and as much as you need us to be in the future. We encourage you to stay in contact with us, and you to feel comfortable doing so.

As you experience this difficult time in your life, know that you are in our thoughts and prayers.

after adoption/future **CONTACT**

Adoption records are never destroyed. So, if you have decided not to exchange identifying information with the adoptive family or have a lot of openness, this means you can contact the agency at any time to have someone pull your records and make contact with the adoptive family. However, it is just as important for you to provide current contact information to the agency so we can find you at the request of the adoptive family and/or child.

According to our agency practice, when a child turns 21 years of age, he/she may approach us to request contact with birthparents. You are also able to contact the agency and request contact with the child. In both cases, no identifying information can be released about anyone without obtaining their permission. Fees may be charged for pulling records and searching for individuals who have not kept their contact information current.

adoption **REGISTRY**

The Illinois Department of Public Health operates the Adoption Registry for birthparents and adoptees (21 years of age and older) who wish to be reunited. The birthparent may register at any time. Adoptive parents can register an adopted child who is under the age of 21.

We will provide you with the information to register with the Illinois State Adoption Registry. We strongly encourage you to register. Once registration is received, a check is conducted to determine if the other party has registered. If so, the registry will provide you with information on how to reunite with one another. The Adoption Registry is independent of our agency.

about our **AGENCY**

Caritas Family Solutions has been providing services to the community since 1947. We are a licensed child welfare and family services agency meeting the social and emotional needs of persons of all backgrounds. We guide families, individuals, parents and caregivers towards creating a loving, stable environment for thousands in the 42 southernmost counties of Illinois.

Caritas services are based from office locations in Belleville, East Alton, Effingham, Carterville, and Mt. Vernon. Some of our programs include:

- ♥ Domestic and International Adoption
- ♥ Birthparent Services
- ♥ Community Integrated Living Arrangements (CILAs)
- ♥ Counseling
- ♥ Foster Care
- ♥ Assisted Living for low-income seniors
- ♥ Senior Employment Services
- ♥ St. John Bosco Children's Center