A Family Tree
Creating and Supporting Families Since 1975

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

In our work with prospective adoptive parents, we have most often come across the following questions. We encourage you to also read and answer the questions in the Pre-Adoption Homework document. Additional detailed information about AFT's various programs and services may be found in this General Information Packet.

If you have further questions or concerns, please contact us during our office hours (Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) at (808) 589-2367 or Hello@AFamilyTree.org

How do I know if adoption is right for me?

Most prospective adoptive parents come to adoption after a period of careful thought and discussion with immediate family and friends. Some adopt because they cannot conceive children, while others decide to add to their families because they believe in adoption. While adoption works for many families and can be a wonderful way to grow your family, it isn't for everyone. It is important to consider many factors when making the decision about adoption, such as your motivation and ability to manage the uncertainties generally associated with adoption, such as:

- Unforeseen physical or mental health challenges with the child;
- Lack of information about the child's background and/or current situation;
- Lengthy waits and/or unanticipated expenses;
- Issues related to the child's cultural or racial heritage, especially when different from yours.

LOTS TO THINK ABOUT...

Families best suited for adoption are those who are:

- Open and embracing of racial and cultural differences;
- Comfortable with the unknown and unexpected;
- Able and willing to take on many different types of challenges;
- Patient and trusting in the adoption process;
- Able to identify their own expectations of parenting and of their future child, and are willing to work to minimize those;
- Able to commit to another human being regardless of the challenges.

We encourage you to review the questions on the Pre-Adoption Homework document. You may also want to seek the assistance of a professional counselor or therapist to process some of these questions and to help you decide whether or not adoption is right for your family.

What if I am still trying to become pregnant?

Many families come to adoption after trying to conceive and give birth to a child. Due to the emotional, financial, and physical commitment involved in the process of adopting a child, AFT strongly encourages families to work through the emotional process of not giving birth to a child prior to deciding on adoption.

I WOULD LIKE TO ADOPT – WHERE DO I START?

You are in the right place! One thing we encourage prospective adoptive parents to do is to learn about the different ways they can grow their family through adoption. Some find internet research helpful, while others prefer speaking with adoption professionals, like AFT, about the process. As you begin to learn about adoption, you might find yourself feeling more comfortable with either inter-country or domestic adoption, or adopting from a specific country or region. U.S. adoption practices have changed drastically in the last 50 years, and the rules and requirements for inter-country adoption also vary widely. We encourage you to contact AFT to explore the options that offer the best fit for you.

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What is the difference between using an adoption agency versus an attorney for a domestic adoption?

While adoption can be viewed as a transfer of legal rights and responsibilities, we know that adoption affects each member of the adoption triad (birth parents, adoptive parents, and the child) in different ways throughout the lifespan. Licensed adoption agencies can walk you through the adoption journey from start to finish, knowing the ins and outs of the process. Adoption attorneys are familiar with laws and are able to assist with the paperwork process and court hearings. They may not be trained to provide counseling to an expectant parent regarding her emotions or the challenges she faces as she make an adoption plan.

With our professional experience in the administrative aspects of adoption, paperwork is second nature to us. We can provide counseling before, during, and after placement to all members of the adoption triad.

The most prominent benefits to working with a licensed adoption agency:

- Licensed child placing agencies are required to follow strict rules and regulations;
- Licensed agencies are authorized to carry out the placement and adoption of a child
- We welcome the requirement of always putting the best interest of the child first;
- Knowing the psychological and emotional aspects of the adoption process our team can best support all members of the adoption triad.
- Nonprofit adoption agencies are regularly reviewed, adhere to the highest ethical guidelines, and maintain financial transparency.
- The sole purpose of an adoption agency is to provide comprehensive services that meet your needs now and for years to come. We see adoption as a life-long journey, not a one time transaction.

How do I choose an agency?

We encourage families to carefully research the agency they hope to use. Some of the things to consider are:

- How long the agency has been working in adoption;
- Whether the agency is accredited and licensed by the state and other governing bodies;
- Staff qualification and training;
- Accessibility through e-mail, phone, and in-person or remote meetings;
- References from families who have worked with the agency in the past

The National Council For Adoption is a great resource with different articles surrounding adoption but also to utilize to find an adoption agency or attorney. Their directory can be found on the home page. Picking a placing agency is not restricted to Hawaii. You can join an agency in another state.

It is important for prospective adoptive parents to trust that their agency is advocating for them and their future family. Only you can know if an agency in your geographical area or one across the ocean will work for you. If you are in Hawaii, we encourage you to schedule an appointment with AFT staff to learn more about our experience and role in your adoption process.

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What if I work with a facilitator or consultant?

Clients can work with a facilitator or consultant if they choose to. However, because they are not licensed entities, you will still need a placing agency or attorney to complete your adoption for you.

Does A Family Tree have children ready to be adopted?

Because adoption from Hawaii is very infrequent, A Family Tree does not currently place children from Hawaii. AFT's current primary service is home study services. Please feel free to talk to staff if you have questions regarding adoption from Hawaii.

What if I have already the identified the baby I'd like to adopt?

If you and the child's legal guardians/parents are living in Hawaii, AFT can provide you with the required home study report and then support you in working with an adoption attorney to assist with the legal process. If you and the prospective adoptive child are living in different states, you will likely need a home study prior to bringing the child across the state lines into Hawaii. If the child is living in a different country, a placing agency with a program for that country will be needed. Regardless of how you adopt your child, you will need a home study prior to adopting any child, or prior to receiving U.S. immigration approval to bring the child into the United States.

I HAVE BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN. WILL THIS AFFECT MY APPLICATION?

In general, having biological children should not affect your adoption process or eligibility. (Of course child birth order, parenting issues, and the mental health of all your children is a different topic which AFT will address with you at the appropriate time.) However, some agencies and countries may have specific requirements for prospective adoptive parents regarding the number of children already in the home, or may give "preference" to families who do not have any children in the home. Please discuss this with your AFT Team member during your initial Intake session.

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I would like to adopt, but would only like to adopt a child within a specific age range, of a specific sex, with specific medical conditions, or of a specific race or ethnic background.

Thank you for considering adoption as a way to grow your family. Please know that AFT's mission is to support all vulnerable children, regardless of where in the world they are, and to find appropriate families for them. While we believe that it is important for all families to be aware of, and sensitive to, their personal boundaries and reasons for wanting to adopt a child who meets their criteria, it is also important to be flexible and open-minded throughout the process. In general, families with very specific desires in their child request may wait longer to parent than families who are more open. Please discuss your child request with your AFT team member.

Do you write home studies for foster to adoption?

Currently, A Family Tree has suspended foster to adoption. Please talk to an AFT team member to discuss this in more detail and for updates

What is the difference between inter-country and domestic adoption?

Inter-country adoption (ICA) involves children from one country being adopted by parent(s) in another country. Children coming to the United States for the purpose of adoption must meet the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) definition of an orphan. This requirement ensures that only those children most in need of a permanent family shall be adopted, and seeks to protect the rights of the child and her biological family. The Hague Adoption Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption was drafted in late May 1993 to establish international standards of practices for inter-country adoptions. These standards are considered best practices, and seek to protect the rights of everyone in adoption. Prospective adoptive parents in the U.S. are able to adopt from both Hague and non-Hague countries, and in most cases, must submit a dossier of required personal documents to a government body in the sending country prior to receiving a child referral. Children adopted through inter-country adoption most often are institutionalized prior to being adopted. It is important for any prospective adoptive parent considering inter-country adoption to be aware of the potential issues that may arise in this type of adoption.

Domestic adoption involves children adopted from birth parents or guardians to families in the same country. In all legal domestic adoptions, the process is finalized in a appropriate family court. If a child crosses state lines for the purpose of adoption, the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) agreement requires approval between the two states prior to the child crossing state lines, and the adopting family must have an approved and valid home study.

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A little bit more about Inter-Country and Domestic Adoption

Here are a few more considerations about adopting internationally versus domestically:

Inter-Country Adoption (ICA)

- Most likely the child needing a permanent family has been institutionalized for a number of years. Many waiting children are older, have medical, developmental, and or psychologically relevant needs that will need serious attention, support, and on-going consideration;
- Pre-natal, genetic, birth family, and basic historical data on your child will not likely be available, or accurate;
- Long-term adoption related trauma issues may need addressing;
- Children placed from a vastly different culture, into a family of dissimilar cultural background will need support in exploring their heritage, identity, and reasons for having been adopted into a family which does not share their birth culture;
- Children awaiting adoption will greatly benefit from a permanent, loving family;
- Some children requiring medical attention will not survive or may have considerable challenges in the long run, if not adopted internationally;
- The process generally takes a number of years and requires international travel and extensive paperwork;
- Inter-Country adoptions must be managed by licensed, approved child placing organizations (adoption agencies)

Domestic Adoption

- Adoption in the United States is typically completed at birth through private domestic adoption processes, or through the foster care system where older children, and sibling groups await families.
- Pre-natal care records, genetic and family history information may be available.
- Open adoptions tend to be more common, meaning more information and or contact with your child's birth family is likely.
- The process can take a few months to a few years, and requires less paperwork than an ICA.
- Domestic adoptions can be conducted by "facilitators", attorneys, for profit companies, or licensed, non-profit approved agencies.

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How long will the process take?

The adoption process varies from a few months to a few years. It is rare that an **inter country adoption** would be completed in less than one year due to the various local, federal, and international approval processes involved in each case. **Domestic adoptions** typically take less than nine months once you are matched with a birth mother. In some cases of domestic adoption, your child may be in your home for some of this time while you are awaiting your court hearing to finalize the adoption. AFT encourages prospective families to review this General Information Packet or speak with an AFT Team Member for up-to-date information.

I am single. Can I adopt?

Yes! AFT works with single men and women. AFT understands that family comes in all shapes and sizes. As a single applicant, the home study process is the same as a couple adopting. Please speak with an AFT team member to learn more details.

We are in a same-sex relationship. Can we adopt?

Yes! AFT works with same-sex couples. Please feel free to speak with an AFT team member to discuss in more detail if needed.

We are a military family, can we complete services with you?

We are happy to work with military families and have helped many wonderful service members over the years. In some cases a military family may transfer to Hawaii having already completed a home study elsewhere, and may or may not have already completed an adoption related to that HS. The process for military families transferring to Hawaii is no different. A HS will need to be updated if an adoption is underway and the child has not yet been placed. In the event a child has been placed and post adoption or post placement services are on-going, we will be able to assist with those visits and reports.

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WHY DO SOME COUNTRIES HAVE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS?

When given the responsibility for the care and placement of a child, one may think of some parental qualities that would be most appropriate for that particular child. The qualities that make one a "good parent" are strongly influenced by culture and personal beliefs. Countries (from governmental bodies to orphanage staff) have similar notions of what constitutes an appropriate family for a child. For example, some believe that it would be best to have a minimum or maximum age difference between the parent and child; others believe that health and resources are important. We understand that each prospective adoptive family is unique and has different strengths that may make up for not meeting these qualifications. However, due to the overwhelming number of prospective adoptive applicants from around the world, countries create general eligibility requirements for adoption.

How do most families afford adoption?

Most adoptions involve service fees and related expenses averaging between $20,000 and $55,000. Many prospective families save funds before being able to adopt; others receive help from friends or family. There are several grant opportunities as well. A great resource to look into grants is the National Council for Adoption. Many families use social media for crowd-source funding. AFT does not encourage prospective families to take out second mortgages or borrow funds from credit cards. Due to the timing and length of the adoption process, fees may be assessed at various intervals, and most families are able to budget accordingly. There are also tax credit opportunities as well. This should be thoroughly researched to better understand it.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

Prospective parents are encouraged to plan carefully before commencing an adoption. If you are considering withdrawing from the process, your AFT caseworker can assist you in your decision making. AFT does not encourage anyone who is uncertain about adoption or parenting to remain in the process. We support families who wish to withdraw from the adoption process. In most cases, original documents may be returned to clients if the documents are in the possession of AFT. Fee refunds are outlined in the AFT Adoption Service Agreement. Most funds are nonrefundable, and are billed accordingly to avoid financial risk to adopting parents. Couples facing relationship challenges are encouraged to proceed with adoption only after attending counseling. It is not uncommon for parents to experience serious emotional stress, confusion, and regret shortly after adopting a child. This stress can be addressed by the professionals at AFT and usually dissipates with support.

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WHAT IS A HOME STUDY?

A home study is a document written by a social worker, which determines your eligibility (and likely approves you) to adopt a specific number of children, of a specific age from a specific country. The home study should also outline the extent to which you are approved to adopt a child or children with needs. Each agency, country or state may have requirements regarding the home study. In general, the home study discusses many areas of your life, including your childhood, employment, health, relationships, finances and motivation to adopt. The home study process includes paperwork; multiple meetings with the social worker, including at least one visit to your home; and adoptive parent training classes. This evaluative process by the social worker is designed to be self-reflective, thought-provoking, and educational, and encourages much emotional exploration. The social worker's role is to thoroughly evaluate family's emotional and physical commitment and ability at the time of application, even though the child may not be joining the family for a few more months or even years in rare cases.

What are post placement reports and are they required?

After the placement of the child, many countries and agencies seek to learn about the child's transition into their new family, over a specific length of time. These follow-up reports provide authorities with assurance that they have made the appropriate decision in placing the child with you. As such, these reports also support the data that adoption works and is usually in a child's best interest. Attorneys may utilize these reports during your court hearing as evidence that the placement is going well. Agencies overseas may feel reassured about the placement and may be more likely to place with a family in the U.S. in the future.

For all these reasons, it is very important to comply with these post adoption requirements. Not doing so may jeopardize many future adoptions.

Families are encouraged to see the post placement/post adoption process not as a tedious obligation, but rather as a way of giving back, and of ensuring that future families will be able to benefit from adopting a child, just as you did.

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