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Becoming an Adoptive Parent: Insight for Birth Parents

Prospective Adoptive Parents start the adoption process by attending an individual adoption consultation. Next, they submit an application, which is reviewed, and a determination is made as to whether they are eligible to adopt. Eligible applicants then begin the **Home Study** process. The process begins with the completion of a lengthy questionnaire that addresses different aspects of the background and lifestyle of the applicants. Along with the questionnaire applicants are required to submit legal documentation verifying information provided. Upon receipt of the questionnaire and supporting documentation, the Casework Supervisor reviews the information to ensure the accuracy of all reporting. At this point a caseworker is assigned and begins conducting the study.

The **Home Study** process consists of 3 components. They are as follows:

Meetings - At least one meeting is conducted in the home of applicants. The caseworker will interview all household members and inspect the home to ensure that it is free of any health or safety hazards. Individual and joint interviews will also be conducted with applicants. Topics covered in this process are the applicants motivation to adopt, i.e. what brought the family to want to adopt, their social history and family of origin, the marriage relationship, religion, parenting styles and proposed means of discipline, attitudes toward adoption, finances and the home, preference of child they are hoping to adopt, and medical information i.e. are there any health issues that would preclude them from adopting. Personal and professional references are gathered and verified. Applicants are also required to select guardians for their future child if, in the unlikely event, the couple encounters an accident or premature death. The applicants' readiness to adopt is assessed and recommendations for further education and/or counseling may be made.

Clearances - Every member of the household over the age of 18 must complete a Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) fingerprint background check and Child Abuse Registry Information (CARI) name check.

Educational Course - Applicants are **required** to attend Family Options' Educational Course prior to home study approval. All families will also learn ways to talk openly with their children about their adoption and to celebrate adoption in their homes. For new applicants, a 3-hour Educational Course, *Ready, Get Set, Grow*. *Ready, Get Set, Grow* is an opportunity for prospective adoptive parents to learn about the history of the adoption process, understanding the members of the adoption triad, openness in adoption, and preparing for a match meeting.

For applicants adopting a child outside of their race, a 2 ½ hour Education Course, *Family Diversity* helps the family understand the issues and experiences of race and culture. This workshop allows the family to learn tools to navigate and support the trans-racial adoptive experience for themselves and their child.

Once all the Home Study criteria is met, a written home study will be compiled by the caseworker and submitted to the Casework Supervisor for review. The Casework Supervisor will review the Home Study for content and accuracy.

After clearances have been received, the educational requirements are met and the Casework Supervisor has reviewed the home study, prospective adoptive parents are notified that their home study is complete and if approval is granted. Upon home study approval, prospective adoptive parents are given guidelines on how to develop a portfolio that will allow birth parents to get a feel for who they are.

Placements

The agency will contact the adoptive family as soon as a birth family indicates interest in them. In most cases the next step is an in-person meeting between the birth parents and adoptive parents. If the adoptive family is selected and they commit to the placement, they will begin to receive regular updates about the pregnancy and medical information as it becomes available. There will be contact through the agency between adoptive and birth parents throughout the remainder of the pregnancy. Shortly after baby is born, a previously agreed upon contact agreement will take effect. The contact agreement outlines the type and frequency of contact between families. A Family Options reunion event is scheduled annually.

Supervision

Upon placement, Family Options will supervise the adoptive family for a minimum of six months for New Jersey placements. While there may be more frequent phone contact, the supervisory visits will consist of bi-monthly meetings in the home of the adoptive family. During these visits the caseworker assesses the development of the child, his or her physical and emotional well-being, the family's adjustment and bonding, as well as any other pertinent information. The caseworker then submits his or her findings to the Casework Supervisor and makes recommendations accordingly.

Finalization

Upon completion of a successful supervisory period, Family Options will consent to finalization of the adoption and forward the paperwork necessary for finalization to the court. Shortly thereafter, a new birth certificate is issued with the names of the adoptive parents. While not a requirement, many families continue contact with the agency, as well as, with the birth family.