

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED BY BIRTHPARENTS

Do the services of Open Adoption & Family Services (OA&FS) cost me anything?

No, all services are provided to birthparents at no charge.

Can I call OA&FS, even if I haven't decided to plan an adoption?

Yes, at OA&FS we believe that you know what's best for you and your pregnancy. Our counselors will assist you in reviewing your options, so you can make the choice that's right for you. If you decide not to plan an adoption, we will refer you to resources and organizations that can further assist you.

How much control do I have in this whole process?

You have as much control as you want. If you plan an adoption, you choose the adoptive family. You determine the level of openness you desire. You determine who will attend the birth and when your child will be placed. We will empower you to make your vision of the adoption a reality.

How do I choose an adoptive family?

We maintain a large pool of prospective adoptive parents from which you can choose an adoptive family. Some birthparents wish to consider families outside of our pool as well. You and your counselor will discuss what qualities are important to you as you choose parents for your child. We believe you know what is best for your child, and we empower you to make a choice that feels right to you.

How much will I know about the adoptive family?

As you are choosing adoptive parents, you will have the opportunity to read the Family Profile of the families you're interested in learning more about. These profiles include the Adoption Homestudy report, autobiographies, color photos and more. These materials describe their home, relationship, family background, career history, religious views, values, parenting philosophies, as well as results of background checks. Once you review the profiles, you will choose a family and your counselor will facilitate your initial meeting. If you choose to move forward with them, you begin developing a relationship and will learn more about each other.

What will the adoptive family learn about me?

The adoptive parents want to know as much about you as possible. With your permission, we will provide them with a description of you, your personal interests, your medical history, your prenatal history, and any other information that's important to you. We will not disclose any identifying information without your written permission (such as your last name, address or phone number).

Does OA&FS ever work with families who live outside of Oregon and Washington?

Approximately 10% of the families in our pool of prospective adoptive families live outside of Oregon and Washington. Despite the geographical distance, these families are very committed to developing and maintaining a genuine open adoption relationship with ongoing visits.

What happens after I choose a family and we meet?

After your first meeting with the adoptive parents, each of you will decide if you want to move forward with an adoption plan together. You will continue to meet and develop your relationship. Your counselor will continue to provide support and guidance as you are building your open adoption relationship and preparing for the placement. Prior to the birth, your counselor will facilitate discussions between you and the adoptive parents so you can decide on the terms of your Open Adoption Agreement, which outlines the on-going contact between you, your child and the adoptive family. You will also create a birth and adoption plan by discussing the following:

- Who will be present at the birth?
- What do you want your time in the hospital to look like?
- What role or level of presence do you want the adoptive parents to have at the hospital?
- When do you want to sign your adoption consents?
- What other issues are important to you and the adoptive family?

Can I name my baby, and will the adoptive parents keep the name I pick?

Yes, you may name the baby. The name you choose will be on the original birth certificate, which eventually becomes sealed. The adoptive family will also name the baby, and this is the name that will appear on the birth certificate that is issued once the adoption is finalized. Sometimes birth and adoptive parents choose the same name or combine names. Naming the baby will be part of what you discuss prior to placement.

Will I be able to see my baby in the hospital? Will my family, friends and the birthfather be able to see my baby?

Yes, you can spend as much or as little time as you would like with the baby. You will determine who else sees the baby. Your counselor will help you create a plan for your time in the hospital.

Will I receive help with my expenses?

Because we want you to have health and living expenses addressed beyond the pregnancy, we will assist you in looking at long term resources that may be available to you, such as health care coverage. Once you decide to plan an adoption, the adoptive family you choose can assist you with pregnancy-related expenses such as medical costs, clothing, room and board, and lost wages that are not covered by other available resources. Your counselor will assist you in looking at your pregnancy-related expenses and insuring that your needs are met.

Does the birthfather need to be involved?

We believe children benefit from contact with both of their birthparents. Access to both birthmother and birthfather contributes to an adopted child's identity and sense of security. However, we understand that the circumstances of each pregnancy are unique and it may not be possible to involve the birthfather. The birthfather can receive counseling and meet the adoptive parents separately and independent from the birthmother, if that feels more comfortable.

Does the birthfather need to consent to the adoption?

It is always preferable to obtain birthfather consent, and sometimes a necessity. Your counselor will learn more about the circumstances around your pregnancy and the birthfather. Depending on a number of factors, including the laws of the state where your adoption will be finalized, your counselor will discuss required steps regarding the birthfather.

When do I sign the adoption consents?

In **Oregon**, you cannot sign the Consent to Adoption and Certificate of Irrevocability, the permanent and legally binding documents that relinquish your parental rights, until after the baby is born. After the birth, you will decide the best time to sign these documents. We prefer that you do not sign them until at least 24 hours after the birth. In **Washington**, you may sign the documents prior to or after the birth. They are not legally binding until they are filed in court at least 48 hours after your baby's birth or after you sign them – whichever comes last.

Will I get to see my child after the placement?

Yes, you may continue to see your child throughout the child's life. Together you and the adoptive parents will create an agreement for ongoing contact and a relationship that is supportive of the child's ongoing needs.

Is ongoing contact good for my baby?

Research about children in closed adoptions has revealed that these children are troubled by unanswered questions and unknowns. Open adoption allows the child direct access to information about his history and answers to his questions. This allows for the healthy development of the child's identity and self-esteem.

What if I change my mind?

No binding decision can be made until after your baby is born. In **Oregon**, once you sign the Consent to Adoption and Certificate of Irrevocability (and only you will decide when that will be), you cannot revoke your consent, unless you can prove in a court of law you signed the documents under conditions of fraud or duress. In **Washington**, the signed documents are declared legally binding after they are filed in court, which occurs at least 48 hours after the birth. OA&FS will always support your right to change your mind before the decision is legally binding.

How soon after the baby is born can he/she be placed with the adoptive parents?

The baby may go home with his/her adoptive family as soon as you have signed the papers relinquishing your parental rights. The hospital must also indicate that the baby is medically ready to leave.

After the adoption is completed, will I need to have any further contact with OA&FS?

You don't have to maintain contact with us, but post-placement counseling may help you through the grieving process. It is also helpful to get support and guidance as you continue building your open adoption relationship. You are invited and welcome to all of our Open Adoption Community events, including the summer picnic, the holiday party, the Lifegivers retreat, and open adoption workshops. We also encourage you to stay in touch with us about the changes that occur in your life: new address, marriage, other children, education, etc.

Why would I choose OA&FS instead of finding adoptive parents from the newspaper or Internet?

We work with families who have carefully prepared for an open adoption and are specifically looking for a long-term relationship with the baby's birth family. At OA&FS you will have access to unlimited adoption counseling before, during and after placement of your baby. Our counselors are experts in open adoption and are available to assist you in creating and maintaining a healthy open adoption. It's reassuring to know that if an issue ever arises, even years later, we're available to assist you.

What if I already know someone I'd like to adopt my baby?

You do not have to choose a family through our program. We will work with you and the family you select. We will insure that the family has taken the steps necessary to adopt, such as completing a homestudy. Your counselor will provide the same services to you and the family you have chosen than we would if you had chosen a family from our pool of prospective adoptive parents.

If I have more than one child, can the children be placed together?

Absolutely. Many of our families are open to adopting more than one child. And we believe in keeping siblings together whenever possible.

What do I do next?

Call us 24/7 to make an appointment with a counselor. If transportation is a problem, we'll come to you. We'll be discreet when returning your call.