Dear Friend,

You recently contacted Adoptions Together to find out more information about adoption. We’re sharing this handbook with you to answer some of the questions you might have about the adoption process. If you’re thinking about making an adoption plan with Adoptions Together, one of our specially-trained counselors will be assigned to help you through this process. This resource handbook won’t be your only source of information and support, but we hope that it will serve as a helpful guide you can refer back to at any time.

This handbook has information that will be important if you choose to make an adoption plan in the Maryland, Virginia or Washington, DC area. It also includes information about adoption in general, who we are, how we choose adoptive families, and your legal rights as birth parents. We explain the legal documents you will need to sign as well as their importance. Your counselor will go through all of this with you before asking you to sign anything. You can also contact the Agency later if you have any questions. An attorney may also help you to understand your rights. Together, we want to help you make the decision that is right for you and your baby, whatever that decision may be.

Considering an adoption plan for your child involves trust from all three parties involved in the adoption: the birth family, the adoptive family and the child. We call these three parties the adoption triad. We consider the trust you place in us as an agency very important. Please know that we will do everything we can to honor that trust!

Best Wishes,

The Domestic Infant Adoption Team

Every Child, Every Family, Every Step of the Way

ADOPTIONS TOGETHER
We Understand...

• An unplanned pregnancy can be difficult. It can change your life and turn your world upside down.
• You may wonder how you will support yourself and a baby.
• You want to make the best decision, but don’t know where to begin.

No one should have to face this alone...

Adoption is a choice that makes it possible for your child to have all of his or her needs met at a time when you may be unable to provide those things yourself.

We Can Provide:

• Answers to your questions to help you decide whether adoption is right for you.
• A counselor who will support you as you make plans for yourself and your baby.
• Referrals to medical and legal assistance.
• Help in emergencies.
• Personal appointments with you in our office, your home or a place of your choice.

Together, we will work toward what’s best for you and your child.

We can help you understand your choices and create a plan that is right for you. If you choose adoption, we will be here for you every step of the way. Our staff is here to help you—our services do not end after your baby is placed for adoption.

You May...

• Plan your adoption to fit your needs and what you feel is best for your baby.
• Choose the best parents for your baby from our waiting families, all of whom have had complete background checks.
• Ask us to select parents for your baby based on your preferences.
• Meet the adoptive parents before and after you give birth.
• Plan ongoing contact with the adoptive family.
• Receive photos and letters about your baby as he or she grows.
• Reach us at any time for support.

www.adoptionstogether.org
“Working with Adoptions Together made me feel like I was in charge of my future. I see how well my beautiful baby is doing in the letters and pictures the family sends me.”

-Faith, 26-year-old birth mother

“I’m not giving up or giving away my baby. I’m being the best mother I can be now... and that’s to plan adoption.”

-Charise, 15-year-old birth mother
Pregnancy Counseling

“I really appreciate everything that you have done for me and my baby and I will never forget it. I pray that we can keep in touch because you really helped me through some hard times.”

-Jane

Why Choose Adoptions Together?

- We offer free counseling to help with your decision.
- We are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week all year round.
- Our waiting families have been fully investigated and are home-study approved.
- We will ensure that adoptive families send letters and pictures as your child grows.
- We can help if you advocate for a more open adoption that involves in-person visits.
- We provide post-adoption support services for as long as you need us.
- We can assist with basic living expenses during your pregnancy and shortly after birth.

The decision to place a child for adoption is never easy...

Each expectant parent has his or her own reasons to explore adoption as an option:

- You may feel you are not financially capable of supporting a child.
- You may feel you are not emotionally ready for the demands of raising a child.
- You may have little or no support from family members.
- You and your partner may not be ready to parent a child together.
- You may feel unprepared or unable to parent another child at this time- and that is okay.

The important thing is that you are asking these questions. That concern shows that you care a great deal not only about your baby’s health and wellness, but about your own well-being.

Ultimately, you are the only person who will know for certain if you are prepared to become a parent. If you want more information about adoption, the counselors at Adoptions Together can help you develop a plan. You can make an educated decision that is the best fit for you and your child.
Choosing an Agency Over a Private Adoption

As a mother who wants to place her child for adoption, you have a number of options. You may choose a private adoption if you have someone specific in mind who you feel would be an excellent parent.

While it may seem beneficial to know the adoptive parents and be able to retain close contact if you are able to do so, the downside to private adoption is that the adoptive parents are not required to undergo counseling or complete their home study before this type of adoption takes place.

When placing your child for adoption through Adoptions Together, waiting adoptive parents have all completed their home study (a background check that helps them prepare to adopt a baby). They have undergone criminal history and background checks, as well as child abuse clearances. Each adoptive family has been educated on the complexity of adoption and is fully prepared for your child to join their family.

Unlike private adoption where you receive no post-adoption support, our services don’t stop when you relinquish your parental rights. We are available to provide all the counseling and support you need in the years to come. With private adoption, there is no guarantee that you will obtain an open adoption in which you can maintain contact with your child. Adoptions Together ensures that adoptive parents continue to send letters and pictures as your child grows- and we work hard to make sure you receive them.

The Benefit of Local Adoptive Parents

While it may seem beneficial to look across the United States for adoptive parents, as that can give you a larger pool to select from, it is much more beneficial to search locally. Searching locally allows you to meet and personally know the adoptive parents. Should meetings be agreed on in an open adoption, a local adoptive family makes it easier for these meetings to take place. Also, open adoption agreements are legally enforceable in Maryland, Washington, DC and Virginia, so you can be confident that your visits will occur.

The Adoption Process and Temporary Foster Care

Several options are available to you after you have had your baby to help finalize the adoption and provide interim care. If you are ready to do so, the baby can go home from the hospital with the adoptive family you have selected. If you are still not quite ready, the baby can go home with one of our temporary families. These families can stay in touch with you to let you know how your baby is doing, and you can visit your baby while we help you settle on your plan.

You should never feel like you’re alone in the decision making process. We have a vast array of resources and support to help you decide what’s best for you and your baby.

www.adoptionstogether.org
Adoption 101

What is Adoption?

Adoption is the “legal transfer of parental rights from biological parents to adoptive parents.” Adoption has been around for hundreds of years. It ensures that children can be cared for when their biological parents cannot care for them or aren’t ready to care for them. Did you know that more than 130,000 children are adopted each year in the United States? Adoption has changed a lot over the years. It used to be considered a “secret” and birth parents were made to feel ashamed of their decision. But today, it has become more open and honest and the process is healthier for all involved. Adoption is no longer something to hide from others.

Open Adoption

More and more birth parents and adoptive families are choosing to share information with one another before, during and after the adoption process. This kind of adoption is known as open adoption. Studies show that it is a good thing for children to know how they joined their families and to understand more about their birth families and how they made their decisions. However, open adoption is not a requirement. Birth parents can also choose to have a completely confidential adoption.

Openness Agreement

An openness agreement is a contract that outlines how much and what kind of contact you will have with the adoptive family. We ask that the adoptive family send letters and pictures at least once per year using a convenient online system that connects them directly to their birth parents. Some birth parents need time after an adoption and don’t want to see pictures or hear updates about the child. We understand. We want our birth parents to know that we will continue to save all updates from adoptive families. If you change your mind at any time, we will have information about your child waiting for you. Some families are very open with each other and phone, email and visit regularly. Some choose not to share information and that’s okay, too. We’ll work with you and the adoptive family to find ways that are comfortable for you both.

What is an Adoption Agency?

Adoption agencies must be licensed by the state and must meet certain standards to transfer physical custody of children from birth parents to adoptive parents and to help arrange the transfer of legal and physical custody. Adoption agencies handle all aspects of adoption including home study services for adoptive parents; counseling for birth parents; placement services for children in need of adoption; post-placement counseling and support; and making the adoption legal and final. Adoption agencies work to make sure adoptions are done legally and correctly. You may also have a lawyer work with you if you choose. Birth parents who are minors, or those whose mental or emotional states may be compromised must have an attorney. You may ask to see an agency’s license at any time. Adoptions together is licensed in Maryland, Washington, DC and Virginia.

www.adoptionstogether.org
About Adoptions Together

More than just a name...

Adoptions Together is more than just our name. It’s how we do adoptions.

We believe that birth parents, adoptive parents and agency staff working together make the best choices for children.

You are part of our team and play a very important role:

1. You need to be willing to learn about adoption, the legal and emotional processes, and how adoption will effect you and your child.
2. You will make all the decisions about how you want your adoption to be handled. We’ll ask you to help us choose the family that adopts your child.

At Adoptions Together, we believe that the best adoptions are built on two kinds of trust. First, there’s the trust that adoptive parents will take very good care of their adopted children. Second, there’s the trust that you will have made the right decision for your child. We value the trust that you give us to guide and support you as we work together to build loving, supportive families for our children.

We believe in these values:

• Birth parents should be informed about the risks and benefits of adoption for themselves and their children.
• Birth parents should decide whether their children should be placed for adoption.
• Birth parents should have the opportunity to receive ongoing information about the children they placed for adoption.
• Birth parents have the right to choose the family that adopts their child.
• Birth parents of minority races should have the opportunity to place their child with a family of their own race.

We know that you will have many questions about adoption as you begin this process. Working with someone you trust and feel comfortable with will make all the difference in your experience.

Our counselors are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Call us at 301.439.2900 or click the button to send us a text message or email.

Contact a Counselor

www.adoptionstogether.org
Adoption Fact vs. Fiction

Myths About Adoption

There are many negative stereotypes about adopted children, birth parents and adoptive parents. Television and news channels like to sensationalize adoption stories. Their main goal is to entertain, so they rarely show a balanced view of the story. They also focus on negative adoption stories. For example:

• Adopted children are depicted as depressed and sad. They are often shown as troublemakers (Problem Child movies) or scarred by separation from their birth families. The search to be reunited with their birth families is a common theme.
• Adoptive parents are often depicted as having a hard time bonding with their adopted children and being uncaring or abusive.
• Shows make it seem like birth parents don’t give much thought to making an adoption decision and then return to stalk the adoptive families that have adopted their children.

Highly sensationalized dramas as seen on Lifetime TV have made us believe that adoption is unstable and that birth parents can come back at any time to take their children.

While there are sometimes unusual situations, research tells us that adopted children are typically well-adjusted and not any more troubled than other children.

Studies of birth parents who planned out their adoptions are also very positive about how they are doing years after the adoption. On many wellness indicators (with the exception of social support), most birth parents' lives are rated as improved by choosing adoption when they are not ready to parent.

Studies also show that adoptive parents are the least abusive of any family type. They account for less than one percent of any parent that abuses children. This may be due to the many types of background checks that occur before an adoption takes place. Adoptions Together only approves families who we feel are prepared to adopt and ready to meet all the challenges of parenthood.
Making an Adoption Plan

How Expectant Parents Plan Adoption for their Baby

It’s very important for you to choose a plan that you feel will be most beneficial to you and your baby. At Adoptions Together, we can help you explore all of your options to plan the best decision for you and your child. In the end, it is your decision.

You will have your own adoption counselor. She will meet with you and walk you through the process and options available to you. We can provide counseling for you and the birth father, as well as other family members important in your life.

At Adoptions Together, we will not pressure you to make an adoption plan. If you realize that adoption is not the best option for you, we will help you make a choice that is in your best interest.

Your counselor can meet with you whenever it is best for you. In addition to emotional support, we can offer you with things you might need throughout your pregnancy like resources for food, clothing and other basic needs.

We can also assist you with costs related to transportation to medical appointments, help applying for medical assistance, and legal resources if you need them. Contact us to discuss how we can help you with basic needs during your pregnancy.

Your Counselor Can Help You With:

• Selecting an adoptive family. You can look at photo albums and read letters from prospective adoptive families that share your hopes and dreams. Or your Adoptions Together counselor can help you select a family.
• Deciding on the level of contact you want with the adoptive family before, during and after your baby is born (phone calls, visits, letters and picture updates).
• Reading stories about other birth mothers and birth fathers who have gone through the adoption process.
• Preparing for your hospital stay and what will happen when you go into labor. We will be there for you during this time.

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Making an Adoption Plan

Will There Be a Family for My Baby if He Has Special Needs?

Many women worry that there won’t be a family who wants to adopt their baby. Please know that the race, health or medical background of your child does not matter. We have never been unable to find a home for a child. There is always a family waiting for every baby who needs a home!

If the situation is right for you and your baby, we place children with families of other races or cultures. These adoptive families have taken classes and have proven to us that they can parent a child of a different race, culture or ethnicity. Your preferences regarding the kind of family you would like for your child will also be very important in finding the right family for your baby.

What are My Legal Rights?

There are a number of legal papers and forms that are necessary for you (and the birth father if possible) to review and sign. Your counselor will go over all these forms with you. If you sign adoption papers, you will be given copies of those papers filed in the court. If you are under 18 in Maryland, the law states you must have your own lawyer, which we can provide for you. If you are over 18, you do not need an attorney, although you can still have one.

What About the Father of the Baby?

The father of the baby has parental rights in Maryland, D.C. and Virginia. This means that we have to notify him that he has been named as a father. He has the right to consent or object to the adoption. If he can’t be located, we have to prove that we have done all we could to find him. The Family Court Judge will approve the adoption if we show that we have tried to locate and notify the father.
The Right Adoptive Family

How Does Adoptions Together Make Sure Adoptive Parents are Ready for Their New Child?

Why do people want to adopt? Individuals and couples choose adoption for many reasons. Most just want to love a child and raise a family. Some adoptive parents have gone through infertility and can’t become pregnant. Other families have both adoptive and biological children. They all have the same thing in common: they very much want to be parents!

We take a lot of care in deciding whom to accept as adoptive parents for a child. Before adoptive families become part of our program, they have to obtain FBI fingerprint clearances, State Police clearances, and Child Protective Services (child abuse) clearances. They have a home study conducted by a licensed social worker. They provide the social worker with medical and financial information. The social worker will visit the house and make sure there is room for a child and that it is a safe place. We ask for references and meet with the references and ask a lot of questions. If the couple has children, we will talk to them as well as to one of their school counselors or teachers. We try to conduct a very thorough, thoughtful examination of the family and their home.

During the home study the social worker will determine the type of child the family will be approved to adopt. This will include: age, sex, number of children, race (including approval for transracial adoptions), and approval for specific special medical needs. If the family is approved for children with special needs, the home study will include the family’s health care plan (with a letter from the insurance provider stating that the infant can be covered by insurance), and the support and professional services the family has lined up.

The home study will also explore the family’s understanding of how a child will affect the family and how the child will become part of the family. Finally, the home study will ask the adoptive parents to think about possible adoption issues the child may face, their understanding of open adoption, and what discipline they plan on using with the child. Our Agency does not permit spanking or any kind of corporal punishment to be given to adoptive children.

Here are some typical questions asked during a home study interview:

- What age, sex or race of child are they open to adopting?
- What are their reasons for adopting and how did they decide to adopt?
- If they are adopting transracially or transculturally, how can they be sure that their child’s heritage and culture will be respected?
- What values do they want to teach their child?

www.adoptionstogether.org
The Right Adoptive Family

How Does Adoptions Together Make Sure Adoptive Parents are Ready for Their New Child?

• How will they discipline their child?
• If they are married, where and when did they meet, and what made them attracted to each other?
• We gather information such as: birth dates and locations, background information on parents and siblings, their hobbies and interests, what their childhood was like, and how the family generally deals with stressful situations.
• We ask them if they have ever been arrested, and if they have ever been involved with drugs or alcohol. If so, they must also explain how they combated the problem. If a parent has a criminal or drug history, the agency reviews it thoroughly to determine if the problem has been resolved and if the parent is appropriate to adopt a child.
• We also learn more about the family's religious beliefs, childcare plans, and financial situation.

Some families don’t meet our standards. In that case, we don’t approve them to be adoptive parents.

Adoptive Parent Training Requirements

We require that all adoptive families attend a pre-adoption class where they learn information on adoption and infant care. After the adoption, they will take a second class about being parents, the importance of having support, and the reactions of family, friends and strangers, especially in transracial adoptions. The family will eventually take over 10 hours of specific training.

We offer a transracial adoption seminar which is a two-part class for parents who are interested in a transracial adoption. This class helps families understand the responsibilities of raising children of another race and culture.

Choosing an Adoptive Family

There are many things to think about while you are choosing an adoptive family. Even if you don’t want to pick out a family, you can talk with your counselor about what’s important to you so that we can do the best job matching your child with a family.

Some important questions to consider:

In an adoptive family, do you have a preference regarding: religion, race, married, single or same sex couples?

Would you like to view a photo album that the adoptive parents have prepared? Would you like to meet the adoptive family before or after delivery? With or without the baby present? Would you like to receive letters and photos on an annual basis? Would you like to write a letter to the baby that the adoptive family will share at an appropriate age? Do you want us to share a picture of you with the adoptive family? Many children want a picture of their birth parents (they are curious about whom they look like) so we ask you to consider this carefully.

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The Right Adoptive Family

Choosing an Adoptive Family

Documents You Can Review When Selecting Adoptive Parents

When you are thinking about which people you would like to have adopt your child, Adoptions Together will offer you some documents to look at to help you decide. Those will include:

- “Dear Birth Parent” Letters that you can view online:
  This letter introduces the adoptive family to you. They share information about their family, their lifestyle, and their home. Most are written from the heart and directed right to you. There is no identifying information in the letters.

- Birth Parent Albums that you can view online:
  These photo albums are put together by the prospective parents and are their own personal way of sharing with you the things that are important to them. The albums may have pictures of their home, photos of the adoptive couple, their children, extended family members, friends, pets, vacation and special places they have visited. Each album will have a different personality. You will generally have the chance to look at several albums to consider each family fairly.

Interim Care Families

In some cases, interim care families provide care for babies between their stay in the hospital and their placement in their permanent home. While a child is with an interim family, the baby receives all the medical care that is needed, as well as lots of love from every family member.

If a baby needs to stay in the hospital for an extended time, our interim care families will stay at the hospital with the baby. Then when a baby is ready to leave, he or she will typically spend a few days more with the interim care family. These families have gone through the same screening process as adoptive parents, including home studies.

Legal Steps to Finalizing Adoptions

At Adoptions Together, adoptions are completed through voluntary termination of parental rights that ensures you make an informed decision to relinquish (give up) all rights and responsibilities to your child before the adoption is completed.

In adoptions arranged by Adoptions Together, the adoptive family will be visited for 6-9 months after the baby has been placed in their home. We will consent to the adoption and its finalization in the courts when we are convinced that the baby is being well cared for and the family has adjusted to the child and wants to proceed with the adoption.

www.adoptionstogether.org
What Happens After My Baby is Born?

Will I Get to See My Baby at the Hospital?

You are in charge of how much contact you want to have with your baby in the hospital. Some mothers choose to spend a short time with the baby, while others choose to spend every minute with the baby while in the hospital. Still others want to have no contact at all—the choice is completely yours.

What about me after the baby leaves? How will I feel?

Our services won’t end after your adoption plan is made. Please know that we are here for you for as long as you need us! We can connect you with other birthparents, so you can share your feelings with others who have been through the adoption experience. It’s normal to feel sadness and many other emotions after the adoption. And it’s also very important to stay in touch with your adoption counselor and allow her to help you through this time. She can provide you with information and services and be there for you when you need her the most.

You may go through many emotions at this time. Every birth parent and situation is different; and not every birth parent will experience the same feelings in the same way. Most women who choose adoption have good days and bad days. Adoption counselors like those at Adoptions Together can assist you in working through your emotions and feelings of loss and together develop an adoption plan where you are in control. Most birthparents are then able to feel good about their decision to provide their child a life with adoptive parents.

You can receive photos and letter updates during this time if you have chosen to stay in contact. Your counselor can explain when these contacts will happen. We keep copies of any agreed upon contact or meeting agreements. We will also help to arrange these meetings and attend them if you and the family want us there.

It is also important that you keep us informed of any change in your contact information so that we can continue to send your updates. If you should decide to revoke your consent (want to take back the baby), Adoptions Together will still help you locate parenting resources. Again, the agency is interested in helping you make the right decision for you and your baby.

Thank you for trusting Adoptions Together to help you during a difficult time.

www.adoptionstogether.org
Completing Paperwork for Your Adoption

If you move forward with an agency adoption, this is a list of paperwork you will be asked to complete and sign.

Agency Paperwork for Maryland Washington, DC and Virginia

**Social and Medical History of Birthmother and Birthfather**
This is a detailed medical history. We will share this information with the adoptive parents so that they will understand the child's unique medical history.

**Authority for Placement**
This form, signed by you, gives Adoptions Together permission to place your child with an interim care and/or adoptive family and gives us your approval for medical care for the baby, if needed, while the child is in our supervision.

**Affidavit Regarding Marital Status/Recorded Statement of Natural Mother**
Your current marital status is an important legal matter. Your husband may be the legal father of your child even if he is not the biological father. If you are married, we need the name of the man you are legally married to, the date of marriage, physical description of your husband, and other children you have had in the relationship. We will also record a statement from you with the same information. This document, called Recorded Statement of Natural Mother, is used to show the Court we have no way of contacting the natural father and informing him of his rights. Instead, we will use a legal publication to notify him that his parental rights are being terminated.

**Medical Reimbursement Clarification**
Maryland, D.C. and Virginia laws state that Adoptions Together can reimburse you and your health care insurance company for “reasonable and customary charges” incurred for hospital, medical, and legal services related labor and delivery. Please forward bills related to your pregnancy, delivery and adoption plan to Adoptions Together as soon as you receive them. If hospital bills don’t get paid, the hospital will contact collection agencies and that will affect your credit report. If you revoke your consent (change your mind about the adoption) however, we will let the hospital know how to forward the bills to your address since they will become your responsibility when your child is returned to your care. Bills must be turned in to us within a year of your child’s birth.

**Medical Information Release**
In this form, you give permission to the hospital to release to Adoptions Together all your medical, psychological, psychiatric or other health information. Again, we request this information to be aware of the health status of the baby. In addition, by signing this form, you give us permission to request an HIV test on your behalf. Your baby may be at risk if you are HIV positive, and with treatment, the baby’s risk can be reduced. Even if the baby has the HIV virus, we will still be able to find a loving adoptive family.

**Medical Information Release for Your Child**
This is the same form as the medical information release form for you except that this one is for your child. These forms, as well as those with your medical summary, will be given to the adoptive family after we remove your last name and any other identifying information to protect your privacy.
Completing Paperwork for Your Adoption

If you move forward with an agency adoption, this is a list of paperwork you will be asked to complete and sign.

Agency Paperwork for Maryland Washington, DC and Virginia

Instructions for Receiving Letters and Pictures after the adoption
Adoptions Together asks that adoptive families agree to send letters and pictures to the agency until the child turns 18. Updates are managed electronically, so we ask for your email address to keep in touch. Or if you prefer, we will hold them in your file until you contact us. If your email address changes, please let us know so that we can keep updating you, if desired.

Maryland Adoption Paperwork

Maryland Mutual Consent Registry and Adoption Search Services/Consent to Release Information from a Birth Mother (the Birth Father will also receive this form)
You can sign this form if you wish to give permission to the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Social Services, and the adoption agency to release background history and a letter of introduction to your birth child at the age of 21.

Maryland Consent to Guardianship with the Right to Consent to Adoption
This is the legal form that is filed in the Court that terminates your parental rights and decides a few issues, which you will discuss with your counselor beforehand. Such as: Would you like to have an attorney? Would you like to have counseling from Adoptions Together? Would you like to receive notice of the legal process?
Guidelines about the adoption process are also reviewed. Adoptions Together will handle reasonable and customary charges or fees for medical and legal expenses. In Maryland, however, there is a law stating that you can’t receive any payments. The consent form also describes the access to birth and adoption records that you and your child will have in the future.
The major part of this form is your Consent for Guardianship to an adoption agency. When you sign this form, you give up all parental rights, duties, and obligations that you have to your child as his/her biological parent. It explains how and when you may revoke (take back) consent and therefore have your rights reinstated. The other part of the form explains that once you have signed the form, the adoption proceedings will go forward unless you revoke your consent within 30 days from the date of signature. You will receive a copy of this form.

Maryland Affidavit of Paternity/Taped Statement about the child’s father
In Maryland, birth fathers have the same legal rights as birth mothers. This form asks for all the information you know about the birth father, such as physical characteristics contact information, and whether he is aware of the pregnancy and plan for adoption. You may not have any information about the father and if so, you will be asked to state this clearly. In that case, we will also tape record a guided statement from you about your relationship with the birth father and this will become a part of the court filing process.

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Completing Paperwork for Your Adoption

If you move forward with an agency adoption, this is a list of paperwork you will be asked to complete and sign.

Maryland Adoption Paperwork

**Waiver of Right to Proceed under Laws of the District of Columbia or Maryland**
This is a Maryland or D.C. only form. This form verifies that you are the birthparent of the child and that you understand your rights as a birthparent. It explains when you are allowed to terminate your parental rights and how many days you have to change your mind. If you are a resident of the District of Columbia or deliver in a D.C. hospital, we will ask you whether you wish to proceed under District of Columbia's adoption law or waive (give up) this right and proceed under Maryland laws. We will advise you to proceed in Maryland because you will have 30 days to revoke (take back) your parental rights, while in D.C. the time limit is only two weeks.

**Post Placement Contact Agreement**
In Maryland, if you and the adoptive family agree to an exchange of pictures at certain times, annual visits or visits at some future time, then this is written up as a contract that both of you sign. It is filed in Court and ensures that you will be able to see your child once a year if that is what you and the family have agreed to. This post placement contact agreement is in force no matter where the family lives.

Virginia Adoption Paperwork

**Virginia Entrustment Agreement**
The Entrustment is a binding agreement between the birth parent(s) and the agency. It allows for the parent(s) to voluntarily relinquish their parental rights and gives the agency the authority to place the child for adoption with another family. By signing this form, you voluntarily relinquish parental rights and give the agency permission for the baby to be placed with a family approved by our agency. You also give Adoptions Together permission to obtain any necessary medical assistance that your baby may need, including medical or operative care. Several originals of this form will be needed and this form must be notarized.

**Virginia Putative Father Registry**
Effective July 1, 2007, Virginia enacted a Putative Father Registry. A putative father is a man you have identified as the birth father. The Department of Social Service in Richmond maintains a database where any unmarried father may register during the birth mother's pregnancy or up to 10 days after the birth is indicating his interest in knowing if his child is being placed for adoption. If he registers, he will have the same rights as married fathers of children, those that have established paternity through a court and those that have acknowledged paternity by a joint affidavit of the birth parents. The Putative Father Registry protects the birth father who is interested in the child by providing him a centralized place he can register. He completes an online form and mails it to Richmond. Lack of knowledge of the pregnancy does not excuse failure to register.
Completing Paperwork for Your Adoption

If you move forward with an agency adoption, this is a list of paperwork you will be asked to complete and sign.

Virginia Adoption Paperwork (continued)...

If the father of your child can be identified, then Adoptions Together will send him written notice to his last known address informing him of your adoption plan and letting him know about the Putative father registry. If he does not take action within 10 days from the date of mailing, his rights will be terminated by the court. No newspaper advertising or other methods of contacting the birth father will be required.

Rights and Procedures for Revoking Your Consent

Revocation Period in Maryland: 30 days
Once you have signed the Maryland form consenting to guardianship with the right to consent to adoption, you still have the right, within a thirty-day period, to revoke (take back) your consent. This form reviews the rules and procedures of how you can legally revoke. To revoke, you will need to write the Court and state your name, child’s date of birth, and your revocation of consent. It can simply say: "I do not want the adoption." If this revocation is received during the time frame indicated on the Consent form, within 30 days after you sign your Consent, you will have your parental rights reinstated and the baby will be returned to your care. You need to be prepared to take custody within 8 hours of your revocation. Please note that you will need a car seat to have your child returned to you.

Revocation Period in Virginia: 7—10 days
The Virginia Entrustment can be revoked by either parent until 1) the child has reached ten days of age and/or 2) seven days have passed since the date of signing the Entrustment agreement. To revoke, you would be required to give written notice to the Virginia office of Adoptions Together within these timelines. We will then make immediate arrangements to return your child to you (please note that you will need a car seat to take the child home from the office).

Finalizing Adoption in Maryland

For an adoption to become final in Maryland, the Court needs to terminate the parental rights of the child’s biological parents and appoint Adoptions Together the child’s legal guardian for a temporary period.

Adoptions Together will ask the Circuit Court to appoint us as the child’s “Legal Guardian with the Right to Consent to Adoption.” Your consent is attached to the petition as proof that you understand and intend to place your child for adoption.
Completing Paperwork for Your Adoption

If you move forward with an agency adoption, this is a list of paperwork you will be asked to complete and sign.

Finalizing Adoption in Maryland (continued)...

Before you give consent you will be offered adoption counseling and advised in writing about how you may revoke (take back) your consent. If you are under 18, or unable to make this decision on your own, an attorney will be assigned to represent you. The agency pays the attorney’s fees. Even if you revoke your consent, the attorney will still assist you.

In order for Adoptions Together to become the legal guardian of the child, both birth parents’ consents are needed. If you know the father, you must name him in the Affidavit of Paternity. It is very important for you to be truthful about the identity of the birth father so that the legal proceedings can continue without a problem. If a birth father refuses to give consent, the Court will issue a Show Cause Order. This notifies the non-consenting parent that a legal proceeding will terminate his rights to parent his child. He has 30 days, if served in Maryland (60 days if notified outside of Maryland) to notify the court if he objects to the adoption.

Adoptions Together must make a good faith effort to locate the missing or unidentified birth father. The Show Cause Order will then be published in a local newspaper which circulates in the area of the birthfather’s last known address. If he does not respond within 30 days, then his parental rights expire. If the order is published in a general, wide-circulation newspaper, then the birth father has 60 days to respond.

At an appropriate time during this process, the child is placed with the adoptive parents, and Adoptions Together supervises the placement for 6 to 9 months. Follow up visits from the social worker are required during this period, usually at 2, 4, and 6 months after the baby is placed in the home. Reports are written after each visit, detailing the child’s health, progress and family’s bonding and attachment. The social worker assists the new family with finding appropriate resources in the community, if needed, and tips on caring for a young infant.

Once Adoptions Together decides that the adoptive parents will provide appropriate care for the child, the adoptive parents will file a Petition for Adoption. It can take from 6—12 months for an adoption to be finalized.

A short hearing is held at the court and the adoptive parents and child must appear. The court then enters the Final Decree of Adoption. This ends Adoption Together’s guardianship and establishes the adoptive parents as the legal parents. A new birth certificate is issued with the adoptive parents listed as parents of the baby.
Completing Paperwork for Your Adoption

If you move forward with an agency adoption, this is a list of paperwork you will be asked to complete and sign.

Finalizing Adoption in Virginia

If you make an adoption plan for your child through our agency, an attorney will present the signed Entrustment Agreement to the courts and the judge will appoint the agency as the child’s legal guardian. We will also place the child with interim foster care parents and/or in an adoptive home.

Before you sign an Entrustment, you will be offered adoption counseling and advised in writing about how you may revoke (take back) your consent. If you are under 18, or unable to make this decision on your own, an attorney will be assigned to represent you. The agency pays the attorney’s fees; and even if you revoke your consent, the attorney will still assist you.

A search of the Putative Father Registry, housed in Richmond, Virginia, will be made by the Department of Social Services staff. They will determine whether any man has indicated that he believes he is the father of your child and has an interest in parenting the child. If you can identify your child’s birth father we will also send him notice of this registry and share that he can choose to register during your pregnancy or for up to 10 days after the birth of the child. Otherwise, his rights will be terminated without further notice.

The attorney files a Petition for Adoption in the court and about 6 months after the placement of the child, the attorney will present paperwork to the courts, asking their approval of the adoption. Some cases will require that the birthmother or birthfather appear in court before the judge to verify that they have voluntarily made an adoption plan for the child. We will provide you counsel and assist you throughout this process.

At an appropriate time during this process, the child is placed with the adoptive parents, and Adoptions Together supervises the placement for 6 months or more. Follow-up visits from the experienced social worker are required during this period, usually at 2, 4, and 6 months after the baby is placed in the home. Reports are written after each visit, detailing the child’s health, progress and family’s bonding and attachment. The social worker assists the new family with finding appropriate resources in the community, if needed, and tips on caring for a young infant. A final comprehensive report is prepared and the social worker makes a recommendation about the finalization of the adoption after visiting and speaking with the family many times over the preceding 6 months. This report is given to the attorney who will provide it to the Circuit Court judge.

The attorney will appear in court on behalf of the adoptive parents, sharing the Putative Father Registry results, the legally signed Entrustment and the supervisory report on the baby. If the judge accepts the adoption pleading, a Final Decree will be issued by the Circuit Court with a new birth certificate issued from Richmond.
Contact Us
Phone: 301.439.2900 | Email: pregnancyinquiry@adoptionstogether.org

Next Steps:

Meet Our Waiting Families

Contact a Counselor