

20 Questions: A Girlfriend's Guide to Choosing an Agency

Needless to say, choosing an adoption agency is one of the biggest decisions you face, because you need to go where your child will be. My advice is to follow both your head and your heart. How?

First, your head. Research the agency by interviewing its counselors and asking to speak with both adoptive parents and firstparents they have served. Things to ask:

Ask the Agency

1. What's the shortest wait you've had? What made it so short?
2. What's the longest wait? Why do you think this couple had such a long wait? What did you do to help them?
3. What is a typical wait?
4. How many couples do you have actively waiting at one time?
5. How many placements did you have last year?
6. How do expectant parents find you? (What is the agency doing to be visible?)
7. What is your counseling approach for expectant parents? (No pushing -- only providing information and supporting.)
8. How often do expectant parents decide not to proceed with an adoption after being matched with adoptive parents?
9. At what stage of the pregnancy do you suggest expectant parents choose adoptive parents? (Many professionals suggest not entering a match until at least 7 months into the pregnancy. Expectant parents go through a lot of ups and downs, and you don't want to be riding that roller coaster for more than 2 months.)
10. Please explain your fee schedule. (A large portion -- up to 1/3 of the total -- should be due only after placement.)

Ask Adoptive Parents

11. How long was your wait?
12. What kind of grief counseling did the agency offer you? (Expect some support in healing from infertility so you are ready to parent whole-heartedly).
13. How active was your agency? (e.g. was there a stream of expectant parents looking at profiles?)

14. What kind of after-adoption support is available? (Look for an agency that provides post-adoption counseling or parenting classes as part of the supervision process -- very helpful).

15. What kind of relationship do you have now with your child's first family?

Ask First Parents

16. How did you come by your decision to make an adoption plan? (A good agency will let the expectant parents take the lead and not push them into ANY option. This is CRUCIAL to reducing the risk of expectant parents changing their minds. The decision HAS to be freely made, and I would run fast from an agency that puts pressure on expectant parents to "give up" a baby.)

17. To what degree did you feel supported by the agency?

18. If you had a friend who was pregnant and needed help deciding what to do, would you recommend this agency?

19. How did you hear about the agency? (You are trying to see how visible the agency is to people in unintended pregnancies.)

20. What kind of relationship do you have now with your child's adoptive family?

Look for healthy situations where both parties feel well-served and well-represented by an agency. A good agency will make the adoption process collaborative (with the child as the focus), rather than adversarial (where one side's loss is the other's gain).

After you gather the facts, let your heart weigh in on the decision. Sit quietly and find out what your intuition tells you. If you have a "feeling" about an agency, go with that feeling. Adoption -- like parenting -- is a very intuitive process. Adopting with your head and heart will prepare you to parent with your head and heart.

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