

Preface

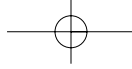
It is our belief that the people whose contributions make an adoption possible must understand that the success of that adoption depends on their ability to work together as a team. Members of that team include the child, the birth parents, and the adoptive parents, as well as representatives of the legal system, the social services system, and the medical and behavioral health systems. Professionals involved in an adoption placement may include social workers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, educators, court personnel, and human services personnel. These laypeople and professionals come together to develop a comprehensive plan to ensure that the adoption will be a success. Each member of the team is important; collectively, they fulfill a variety of functions. They promote coordination between agencies, ensure that the interests and rights of all concerned parties are addressed, and identify problems in coordination or communication between individuals and agencies.

Multidisciplinary teams are not a new concept. It is not sufficient for each professional to perform his or her own professional activity. All professional members of the team work cooperatively to deliver coordinated and integrated services to each member of the adoption triad (child, birth parents, and adoptive family). Thus, professionals need to worry less about professional boundaries and more about making sure that the needs of all members of the adoptive triad are addressed. A sense of interdependence and shared purpose ensures a successful adoption and results in a stronger family.

Each section of this book is important for every reader. For instance, regardless of whether or not you are a lawyer, be sure to read the section that provides information on legal issues; likewise, even if you are not a doctor, you should read the section on medical issues. This is especially important for professionals, because understanding the work done by one's colleagues on the adoption team supports one's work as a member of that team. Likewise, it is important for birth and adoptive parents to have this knowledge because it can help them recognize the professionals who are available as resources during the adoption process.

In general, adoption of children in the United States is not regulated by federal law; rather, it is governed by state laws. Regulations, procedures, and professionals involved in adoption vary from state to state. This reference book provides information about all aspects of adoption, whether it is private or public, domestic or intercountry. Although other reference books





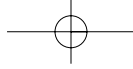
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have been written regarding adoption, to date, no comprehensive guide has brought together information relevant to so many professional disciplines. This text provides both a wide range of information about adoption and a developmental perspective on basic medical and behavioral health information to educate parents, professionals, and students about issues relevant to children who were or will be adopted or who have experienced foster care. It will also help readers understand the different types of adoptions and the professionals who are involved in the process, the laws regarding adoption in their state and other states, and the requirements to adopt children from other countries. Because it provides information on the legal, educational, medical, behavioral, and developmental aspects of adoption, social workers, teachers and students of social work, lawyers, and educators who work with children will also find the information in this book useful.

For prospective adoptive parents, the experience of adopting a child can be both wonderful and intense. For the adoption professional whose work involves bringing a child who needs a loving home together with a family who wants to care for a child, the experience is both challenging and rewarding. It is imperative to recognize that for the birth mother or birth parents, this is a difficult and painful decision. The adoption process can seem overwhelming for birth parents and prospective adoptive parents, as they must sort through the procedural aspects while managing a wide array of emotions. Well-informed professionals in the fields of social work, psychology, law, and medicine can guide and support parents and children throughout the process.

Prospective adoptive parents, birth parents, and professionals can all use the information in this book to understand their rights and responsibilities when making an adoption plan for a child, considering adoption as an option to create or expand a family, or ensuring that a spouse or partner has the right to bear legal responsibility for a child. Furthermore, prospective adoptive parents can use this book to prepare for all the stages of the adoption journey, from selecting a professional with whom to work and undergoing a home study through bringing the child home and living as a family for a lifetime. Choosing adoption as a way to create or expand a family requires thoughtful consideration of the options available and the type of family one wants to create, as well as the leap of faith that is necessary for parenting, regardless of how children come into one's family. People who consider adoption often have an array of concerns. This book is meant to be a resource about the various aspects of adoption and to provide information about what is currently known regarding outcomes for members of the adoption triad.

In the United States, there were 513,000 children in foster care in 2005 (Adoption and Foster Care Reporting and Analysis System, 2007). Approximately 20 percent, or 101,000 of these children, are legally free for adoption. More than 20,000 children from other countries have been adopted into the

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United States each year since 2002. Thousands more children are adopted through private domestic adoptions each year. A few of these children have only been waiting days; others have been waiting years. All of them share the need for a caring and committed family who can give them a chance at the future they deserve.

Adopting a child is a rewarding yet demanding undertaking. Prospective adoptive parents must maintain a positive attitude and be willing to take the time to understand the difficulties to be faced and to make a firm commitment to the welfare of their child. With any legal or professional undertaking, corruption and fraud can occur. Unfortunately, adoption is no different; members of the adoption triad do not always experience the process of adoption within the guidelines of the legal requirements, state laws, and appropriate and ethical professional practice for child adoption identified in this book. Parties engaged in the adoption process—both those making adoption plans for children they are unable to parent and those seeking to parent children through legal adoption—should be aware that they may encounter unscrupulous people, including licensed professionals, during the process. Being an informed consumer of professional adoption services is vital to a successful adoption experience. Thus it is critical that expectant parents and adoptive parents understand their rights, the applicable state and federal laws, and the standards for professional practice regarding child adoption. Making an adoption plan or creating a family through adoption is one of the most important decisions a person can make. It is strongly advised that members of the adoption triad work with licensed and well-informed professionals throughout the process and take advantage of their expertise. Attempting an adoption with little or no professional help can lead to an unlawful adoption process, inappropriate and illegal exchanges of monies or gifts, excessive and unnecessary expenses, and, most of all, avoidable emotional anguish.

