

Agency Policies

Appendix A



Adoptions of Indiana seeks to identify and meet the needs of adoptees and birth and adoptive families through compassionate and comprehensive adoption services.

Adoption Eligibility:

Adoptions of Indiana seeks to be child-centered and to advance the welfare of children throughout the adoption placement process. Therefore, the agency will employ the following adoptive parent eligibility criteria.

Age: *Adoptions of Indiana's* minimum age for adoptive parents is twenty-five. There is no maximum age for our domestic program, however birth parents consider age as a factor when selecting prospective adoptive parents. Foreign countries may have a maximum age requirement that is specific to each particular country.

Singles: Single persons may apply to *Adoptions of Indiana's* domestic program. Single persons adopting domestically typically have a longer wait time before placement than married couples. There are a few countries that are open to single parent families; however the majority of those countries are open only to heterosexual single persons.

Couples: *Adoptions of Indiana* requires that heterosexual and same gender couples show proof of marriage or civil union. This provides the child the highest degree of legal protection as it relates to custody, insurance, inheritance, and other similar matters.

As part of the assessment process, for any couple, *Adoptions of Indiana* requires couples to be married for a minimum of two years. *Adoptions of Indiana* considers both length of time together and quality of the relationship.

Criminal History: Indiana law prohibits persons with felony convictions or substantiated abuse or neglect charges related to the health and safety of children to adopt. *Adoptions of Indiana* will assess criminal history and consider if persons with lesser criminal histories have been rehabilitated, and whether it would be in a child's best interest for placement to occur.

Adoptions of Indiana believes in redemption and rehabilitation, however, the agency reserves the right to deny applications of persons who have any misdemeanor convictions, abuse alcohol or other substances, have been accused of abuse or neglect, have legally lost custody of their children or have unpaid child support claims.

Medical Conditions: *Adoptions of Indiana* supports parents with medical histories in the adoption process. The agency does however reserve the right to delay or deny applications of persons who have a significant medical condition/illness that would interfere with their ability to parent.

In addition, applicants for international adoption must also satisfy the eligibility requirements of each country of interest.

Pregnancy & Child Spacing:

Adoptions of Indiana believes that every child should be prepared for and deserves a minimum of nine months as the newest member of the family before a subsequent child joins the family. It is *Adoptions of*

Indiana's belief that it is important for families to prepare emotionally for adoption and it is not possible if the family is actively pursuing pregnancy while preparing to adopt. While *Adoptions of Indiana* may accept registration and provide adoption preparation and education for clients who are pursuing infertility treatment, it is *Adoptions of Indiana's* expectation that infertility treatment will cease prior to completion of the adoptive home study and becoming active in the agency's networking program.

Adoptions of Indiana expects that clients will inform their Adoption Specialist no later than six months prior to their anticipated delivery date if they become pregnant while in the adoption process. The family's case will be put on hold, and the clients will be withdrawn upon the birth of the child, with no refund of fees paid to date. It is the policy of *Adoptions of Indiana's* that after a birth or adoptive placement, there is a minimum of 6 months prior to the clients beginning a new adoptive home study process with the agency. The current fee structure at the time of return will be in effect.

Adoptions of Indiana requires that the placement of a child(ren) in an adoptive home provide a minimum of nine months age range between the adopted child and the other children in the home, and recommends that the age of the child being placed be under the age of the youngest child currently in the home. The purpose of this is to preserve birth order, to assure differential grade placements in their schooling, and minimize comparison and competition between siblings.

It is the belief of *Adoptions of Indiana* that each child deserves to have their parent's primary attention in the early months after joining the family. Unlike parenting twins who have the same genetic and birth history and are at similar developmental stages, unrelated children are likely to have very different temperaments, abilities, and needs. Therefore, when adopting more than one child, it is the policy of *Adoptions of Indiana* that only biologically related siblings may be adopted at one time.

The decision to place a child with a family not meeting the child spacing policy will be made according to the professional judgment of the agency staff.

Gender:

It is the intention of *Adoptions of Indiana* to provide child-centered adoption services and therefore the agency is *finding families for children*. Since the majority of children in the domestic program have not been born at the time of matching, gender preferences may not be requested in the domestic program.

Families adopting internationally will be required to follow the policies of the International Placing Agency and country of origin.

Adopting Transracially or Transculturally:

There are many issues for clients to consider when deciding whether to adopt a child of a different race or culture. *Adoptions of Indiana* requires that clients choosing to adopt outside their race or culture participate in additional education to prepare and support the adoptive family.

It is the belief of *Adoptions of Indiana* that the joys and challenges of adopting a child who is biracial are the same as a child of a completely different race than their adoptive parents. A biracial child has the same needs for loving, accepting parents who can help them develop a positive identity and cultural confidence and competence, as does a child of a completely different race than the adoptive parents. Therefore, it is the policy of *Adoptions of Indiana* that clients, other than inter-racial couples, may decide which race(s) of children they are open to adopting, inclusive of biracial children, but may not choose to only be open to children who are biracial.

Adoption Education:

Adoptions of Indiana strongly believes that our greatest gift to our clients is to prepare, educate, and support their family through the adoption process and while they are parenting their children. All families working with *Adoptions of Indiana* are required to participate in Adoption Education by way of consultation, group workshops, literature, and appropriate on-line educational tools. These educational offerings are tailored to your specific adoption plan. We seek to inspire adoptive parents to become life-long learners so that they will feel confident and competent as they teach their children about adoption and deal with adoption related issues.

We recommend that Clients complete the essential pre-adoption workshops early in the home study process. Clients are required to complete all the essential pre-adoption education workshops prior to the finalization of their child's adoption.

Adoptions of Indiana offers post-adoption education, support groups and adoption related events for the family. Our desire is to build trust and rapport with clients so that the family will know they have an adoption resource as they are parenting their children.

Openness in Adoption:

Adoptions of Indiana seeks to be child-centered in our adoption practice by placing the best interest, safety and well-being of children first. *Adoptions of Indiana* believes that communicative openness is in the best interest of children and seeks to prepare, educate and support adoptive families in this process. Communicative openness reflects the general attitudes, beliefs, expectations, emotions and behavioral inclination that people bring to adoption. It includes among other things: the willingness on the part of the individual to explore the meaning of adoption in their life, to share that meaning with the adoptee and others as appropriate, to explore adoption related issues in the context of family life, to acknowledge and support the adoptee's dual connection to their birth and adoptive families, and to acknowledge the inherent differences associated with adoptive and non-adoptive family life.

Adoptions of Indiana believes the best way to honor our children is to treat their birth families with genuine compassion, honor, and respect. To that end, *Adoptions of Indiana* expects adoptive parents to provide generous updates by way of letters and photos to their child's birth family at regular intervals to be decided by the birth and adoptive family. At a minimum, the following schedule for updates will be used: within the first week of placement, at 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12 months, biannually from 1-5 and annually from 5-18 years. *Adoptions of Indiana* encourages adoptive parents to remain open to the possibility of further openness as their relationship with the birth family develops. Openness is for the benefit of the adoptee and therefore decisions should be child-centered. Contact with birth families may take different forms and degrees potentially including telephone, email, texts, mail and face to face contact. The spectrum of openness depends on the individual circumstances of each case.

Medical Care and Insurance Coverage:

Adoptions of Indiana will place children only into adoptive families with parents who agree to seek medical attention when necessary for the child. In addition, parents must agree not to withhold medical treatment for the child against the advice of medical personnel. Adoptive parents are required to have adequate health insurance for all family members and coverage for the adoptee from birth.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics “the science is overwhelming that vaccines are safe and effective.” They, and their “67,000 members, urges parents to make the decision to immunize. Pediatricians strongly recommend timely vaccinations because of what we know to be true: Vaccines are simply the best way to protect our children from these viruses and bacteria that can cause real and devastating harm.” *Adoptions of Indiana* requires our adoptive parents to follow AAP recommendations on vaccines for their children. This will protect their children and those who are too young or immune compromised from being exposed to these serious viruses and bacteria.

Financial Stability:

Adoptions of Indiana will assess a prospective adoptive family’s financial stability during the adoptive home study. There is no specific income required, however the social worker will be evaluating income vs. debt and the family’s budget to assess stability in the area of finance. This is often an area that is uncomfortable to discuss. We ask that families be open and honest about their income and financial responsibilities so the social worker can be accurate in their reporting.

Given that the adoption process can be financially expensive, discussions of how the family will cover the costs involved as well as having adequate health and life insurance available will be part of the adoptive home study. If the family has experienced a bankruptcy it must be disclosed in the adoptive home study. *Adoptions of Indiana* requires 4 years of post-bankruptcy financial stability prior to an adoption.

Duty of Candor:

Adoptions of Indiana takes non-disclosure of any arrest, conviction, or any other adverse criminal history, whether in the United States or abroad, even if the record of the arrest, conviction or other adverse criminal history has been expunged, sealed, pardoned, or the subject of any other amelioration very seriously. In addition, the agency requires the disclosure of any medical (including mental health) or other legal issues.

The agency understands and acknowledges clients may be apprehensive to disclose such incidents, but a criminal record, including an expunged record, will almost certainly be discovered through required state and FBI background checks. Medical issues can be discovered through required forms and physicals from the client’s doctor. Legal issues, possibly related to law suits or bankruptcies, can impact a family’s ability to complete an adoption. If these issues are not disclosed to the agency by the clients, it can result in mistrust between the agency and client.

Disclosure of incidents can save time by allowing the agency to direct prospective clients away from programs and countries who may not be accepting of even seemingly minor criminal, legal or medical issues. Disclosure allows the agency to inform clients about additional documentation that may be required to provide to the court or cooperating agency, or in the case of international adoptions, to the USCIS or the source country. This can save valuable time for the client and the agency.

In the event that a prospective adoptive parent, immediate family member, or resident of the home is arrested, convicted of a crime, or accused of child abuse or neglect, during the adoption process, such incidents or issues must be disclosed to the agency within 48 hours. If prospective adoptive parents or an immediate family member is diagnosed with a significant medical issue, has a change in employment or financial status or becomes involved in a law suit, clients must inform the agency within one week.

Adoptions of Indiana requires disclosure of any prior home study, including any unfavorable or denied home study, conducted by another adoption provider in Indiana or any other jurisdiction.

This duty of candor is an ongoing duty, and continues while and until the adoption is finalized. The client and any additional adult member of the household must notify the agency of any new event or information that might warrant submission of an amended or updated adoptive home study. **If a client fails to properly disclose information or in any way places the agency or its programs at risk, Adoptions of Indiana reserves the right to terminate the adoption process without providing any refund.**

The ultimate determination to either terminate, hold, or continue the case will be made by the administration of the agency after a review is completed in each case, taking into consideration the circumstances that are cause for concern regarding the best interest of the child and/or family. Several issues will be considered, to include, but not limited to: severity of the incident, length of time that has passed since the incident happened, circumstances surrounding the incident, rehabilitation, prognosis, and lifestyle changes.

In the event that the agency terminates the case, the client must agree to fully cooperate with the agency to ensure that any child referred to the prospective adoptive family is allowed the opportunity to be adopted by another prospective family.

Post Placement Supervision:

Adoptions of Indiana will monitor the post-placement/post-adoption period of placement to ensure the placement remains in the best interests of the child until the adoption is finalized or until international requirements are met. The purpose of post-placement supervision is to provide a resource to the family and to report findings to the Court or other official entity. The agency will make at least the number of home visits required by the State of Indiana, as well as the sending State, or foreign country. If the child is residing in another state, the agency will ensure the post-placement supervisory visits are provided by a qualified provider in the child's state of residence and meet the guidelines of the other state.

Disruption Policy:

In the event of a disruption of adoption proceedings prior to, or dissolution after, the issuance of a final adoption decree by a judicial authority in the United States, *Adoptions of Indiana* will attempt to arrange for supportive and placement services for the child(ren) and the client when possible. The clients party to the disruption or dissolution shall assume full financial and logistical responsibility for any such services incurred in meeting the child(ren)'s needs. These expenses include, but are not limited to, counseling, child placement and legal services, medical, foster or respite care, and psycho-social, medical and educational evaluations of the child(ren), whether or not these services lead to a new and/or final adoptive placement. Note: Department of Child Services does not routinely take custody of children in cases of disruption or dissolution.

In the event of a possible disruption of adoption or dissolution of the adoption after the finalization of an adoption, or should adoptive parents come to the realization that their adoption may be facing difficulties or challenges that the Clients may not be equipped to deal with, the clients agree and affirm that they will make

all reasonable efforts in their power to seek professional help in dealing with the issues they are facing, whether the challenge is (but not limited to) medical, psycho-social or behavioral issues. Should *Adoptions of Indiana* be called upon to help arrange services as stated in the previous paragraph, *Adoptions of Indiana* will require documentation and reports that sufficient professional help was obtained and treatment plans were followed so that *Adoptions of Indiana* can provide assistance in locating or directing alternative placement.

Prohibition on Child-buying:

Adoptions of Indiana prohibits its employees and agents from giving money or other consideration, directly or indirectly, to a child's parent(s), other individual(s), or an entity as payment for the child or as an inducement to release a child for adoption. If permitted or required by the child's country of origin, or the state where the child resides, *Adoptions of Indiana* may remit reasonable payments for activities related to the adoption proceedings, pre-birth and birth medical costs, the care of the child, the care of the birth mother while pregnant and immediately following the birth of the child, or the provision of the child's welfare and child protection services generally. Permitted or required contributions shall not be remitted as payment for the child or as an inducement to release the child.

Indiana law allows for a maximum of \$4,000 to be provided to an expectant/birth mother to assist her with living expenses or lost wages. The law is clear that this cannot be an inducement to proceed with an adoption, but is provided to make her life a little easier. She does not have to repay the monies if she chooses to parent the child after birth. Financial assistance may be given during the second trimester through 6 weeks post birth. Any monies provided should be sent through the agency and itemized for the court.

Adoptions of Indiana believes strongly that any coercion, inducement, or fraud associated with the consent to adoption is illegal and will not have any business relationship with any person, business, or agency that has been involved in this adoption abuse.

If a staff member becomes aware that this type of adoption abuse they must report the facts of the situation to the Executive Director who will review the information and notify relevant parties.

Safeguard Data:

Adoptions of Indiana shall limit the use of and safeguard personal data gathered or transmitted in connection with an adoption as described below:

Safe, Lawful Archive—*Adoptions of Indiana* shall retain or archive adoption records in a safe, secure, and retrievable manner for the period of time required by applicable State law.

Non-Identifying Information—*Adoptions of Indiana* shall make readily available to the adoptee and the adoptive parent(s) upon request all non-identifying information in its custody about the adoptee's health history or background.

Limited Use of Personal Data—*Adoptions of Indiana* shall ensure that personal data gathered or transmitted in connection with the adoption is used only for the purposes for which the information was gathered and safeguards sensitive individual information.

Confidentiality—*Adoptions of Indiana* shall protect the confidentiality of both the birth and adoptive families in an adoption. The agency, nor its representatives, shall disclose identifying information. If the birth and adoptive families choose to disclose this information to one another, it shall not be through agency representatives. If a breach of confidentiality occurs it is the responsibility of *Adoptions of Indiana* to contact the affected parties to alert them to the disclosure. The agency sees this as a serious violation of policy and

procedure and consequences will occur.

Plan to Transfer Record Custody if Shut Down—*Adoptions of Indiana* will comply with applicable State law for transferring custody of adoption records that are subject to retention or archival requirements to an appropriate custodian, and ensuring the accessibility of those adoption records, in the event that *Adoptions of Indiana* ceases to provide or is no longer permitted to provide adoption services.
