



Considering adoption for your child

What are the choices? Finding out about adoption Information and help



If you have just found out that you are pregnant and are unsure about parenting your baby, there are a number of options available to you.

You may be considering whether you would be able to look after the baby yourself, perhaps with the help of your partner or family. You may also be considering a family member caring for your baby or whether you wish to terminate your pregnancy. Adoption is another possibility.

It will help you to decide if you can discuss the situation with the baby's father, and with your own family, but it is also useful to talk things over with someone who is not directly involved to get advice about your options.

There are organisations that can help. You'll find the details at the end of this booklet. If you are unsure of your feelings, many of these organisations provide a counselling service. Counselling may help you work out how you feel and what to do.

If you are considering terminating your pregnancy, this is also a decision that may have lifelong emotional and physical implications. Therefore you should contact your doctor as soon as possible to discuss what is involved with this procedure. You do not need to have made up your mind about what is best to do – your doctor will discuss the options with you even if you choose to continue your pregnancy.

What exactly is adoption?

Adoption is a way of providing a child with new legal parents. Adoption transfers the legal rights and responsibilities of parenthood from the child's birth parents to their adoptive parents.

Who can arrange an adoption in Western Australia?

Adoptions are arranged by Adoption Services at the Department of Communities and are made legally binding by the Family Court of Western Australia. Once granted an adoption order is final and cannot be reversed.

How do I find out about adoption?

It is a good idea to get advice as soon as possible. We employ social workers and other professionals who will be able to provide you with information. You do not have to proceed with adoption if you change your mind. There is no assumption that if you contact us you will proceed with an adoption.

How is an adoption arranged?

If you decide that adoption is right for your baby, your adoptions worker will ask you for some personal information about yourself, your family and your family's health. They will also need to know about the father of your child and, if this is possible, talk to him. It is important to people who have been adopted to know as much as possible about their birth parents. It helps if both parents can meet with the adoption worker and provide this information, so that in the future your child can learn about you both. All this information will be treated as confidential, but the expectation is that it will be recorded and passed on to the



adoptive family so that they can share it with your child as he or she grows up.

Although preparations for the adoption can begin before your child is born, nothing will be arranged until after the birth. You will be completely free to change your mind in the first few months after your baby is born.

What happens after my baby is born?

It is useful if the hospital at which the baby is born knows that you are considering adoption for your child. Before you leave hospital, you should meet with a worker from Adoption Services to make arrangements if you are thinking about placing your child for adoption.

When you leave hospital, your baby can go home with you, or we can arrange a pre-adoption foster carer to look after your baby while you consider your options. You and your adoptions worker will come up with an agreed plan.

Can I visit my child in pre-adoptive foster care?

Placing your baby in pre-adoptive foster care, is a temporary arrangement while you consider your options. You and your family are welcome to visit your baby as much as you wish. It is important to consider the effect that a period of separation may have on your relationship with your child, therefore your visits with your baby will be encouraged. You are still your child's legal guardian until you formally consent to adoption.

Will my family be told about the baby?

Under the current Adoption Legislation (law) in Western Australia, your privacy and confidentiality is maintained. You decide who you tell about the birth of your baby. However, with your permission, Adoption Services will want to be able to explore the possibility of the child being cared for by you, the baby's father, or within your families. It can also be reassuring for your child, as he or she grows up, to know that their grandparents and other relatives know of their existence. Should your son or daughter make contact with you or other birth family members when they are older, it will also be much easier for everyone if your family already know about the child.

What if I am under 18 years old?

If you are under 18 years of age at the time that you are ready to sign your consent to the adoption, Adoption Services will have to contact your parents or legal guardians to tell them of the proposed adoption. For the adoption to proceed, your parents/ legal guardians will have to provide their written agreement for the adoption to proceed. You will also have contact with a person called a Child Representative who is someone that will ensure that your views about what you think should happen are expressed and documented. They also make sure that your best interests are being protected and that you are not being subjected to pressure or harassment about your decision to adopt or not.

What do I have to do before signing my consent to the adoption?

By law you, and where possible the birth father, have to receive both oral and written information about adoption from your adoptions worker before you can sign your consent. You are also offered counselling on adoption issues – which you can receive from either your adoptions worker or an independent counsellor. Counselling will be offered to you – however it is your choice whether you wish to attend.

When can I sign my consent to the adoption?

Everybody involved in adoption recognises that it is a serious step for a birth mother and father to take, and one that must be thought through. Birth mothers and fathers, regardless of their situation, just after the birth of a baby may feel frightened, ashamed or guilty about their feelings. They may also experience feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, uncertainty and feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for a baby.

The law in Western Australia recognises that a decision as important as placing your child for adoption, is particularly difficult because it is made at a time in your life when you are most vulnerable. The time just after the birth of a baby is very challenging – whether you are caring for your baby or if your child is in pre-adoptive foster care. Pregnancy and childbirth is a time that women and men are more likely to be affected by anxiety and depressive problems than at any other time in their lives, which affects decision making.

Your adoptions worker will provide you with information about adoption, and offer to arrange counselling for you to explore your thoughts and

feelings about your decision. Once you feel clear about what you want to do and if it is to proceed with adoption, then you will be asked to sign your consent to the adoption. You cannot sign your consent until the baby is at least four weeks old.

Must the father of the baby give his permission for the adoption to proceed?

If you sign your consent to the adoption of your baby, by law the birth father has to be contacted and his views and wishes sought. The baby's father may not agree with your adoption plans, and may want to bring up the child. If you and he are unable to agree he can apply to the Family Court of Western Australia for permission to do this and the court will have to decide whether it thinks adoption or a life with the father is likely to be best for the child in the long term. If the birth father is unknown or does not respond to the contact your adoptions worker makes with him, the court makes the final decision about whether the adoption can proceed.

Who will adopt my baby?

All approved adoptive parents have been thoroughly screened and assessed and approved by an independent committee. There are many prospective parents on the available list to choose from.

Some prospective adoptive families may be couples, same sex couples, or single adopters. Your adoptions worker will want to hear your views about what sort of family you think would be best for your baby.

Can I help choose the adoptive family for my child?

Yes. You will discuss with your adoptions worker the kind of family you want your child to grow up in. You might have strong feelings about religion, cultural background or interests of the adoptive parents. You may also have views about whether you want your child placed in a family that lives in the city or the country, that have other children or no other children.

Your adoptions worker will use the information you provide to select a few approved prospective adoptive families, and you will be presented with profiles written by each family, introducing themselves to you, including a photograph. You then choose the family that you would like us to approach to adopt your child.

Can I see my child again or find out about them? What is open adoption?

Yes, you can. In Western Australia adoption is open, which means that you can have ongoing contact and information exchange with your child and their adoptive family. There is recognition that all parties to an adoption can benefit from adoption by being open and involving some level of contact and/or exchanging information.

You can choose an adoptive family that agrees to the level of contact and/or information exchange that you request, as long as this is also in your child's best interests. Some birth parents have regular meetings with their child and their adoptive family, or some choose to have no contact at all. Some birth parents have contact with their child that involves their own parents (grandparents) or other members of their extended family. It can also include other children you may have in the future. It really is up to you to discuss with your adoptions worker how much contact and information exchange you would like, and this is then negotiated with the adoptive family and recorded in the Adoption Plan.

What is an Adoption Plan?

An Adoption Plan is a legal document that records and formalises the agreed amount of contact and information exchange that you and the adoptive parents and child will have with each other. The Adoption Plan must be agreed to by you and the adoptive family before your child can be placed with them. Some birth parents have regular meetings with their child and adoptive family, as well as exchanging letters, emails and photographs. Other birth parents choose not to have contact or exchange information.

Many birth parents and children who have been adopted want information about each other – whether this is meeting regularly, or exchanging information such as letters and photographs. Some birth parents find it difficult to commit to an open Adoption Plan when their child is first placed for adoption as it is often a difficult and emotional time. In these cases provision can be made in the Adoption Plan for the adoptive family to write letters and send photographs to be held at Adoption Services for you to collect at a later date. If you are not comfortable having meetings with your child and their adoptive family initially, you can ask to include in the Adoption Plan a request for meetings to commence in the future when you feel ready.

You can meet the adoptive parents to negotiate the Adoption Plan, and you can talk to them about what your hopes are for the child's future. An application can also be made to the Family Court in the future to vary the Adoption Plan if there is a change in circumstances. Adoption Services staff will need to be involved to mediate changes to an Adoption Plan.

When will my baby be placed with their adoptive family?

Your child cannot be placed with their adoptive family until all the legal requirements to place them have been met. Your child will be at least four months old before this can occur, however children are usually older as birth parents need time to explore all their options before making such a life-long decision.

Once your baby is placed with an adoptive family, there is a supervision period of six months. An adoptions worker will visit your child monthly in their new adoptive home. Adoption Services will provide a report to the court at the end of the six month period, and if the court is satisfied that all is well, then an Adoption Order will be granted.

What if I change my mind before the Adoption Order is granted?

When you sign your consent to an adoption, you have 28 days in which to change your mind and revoke your consent. If you change your mind before the revocation period ends, you are entitled to ask for the immediate return of your baby to you. The baby would normally be returned to you, unless there are special circumstances that would make your adoptions worker worried about your ability to care for your child.

If you asked for the return of your baby after the revocation period had expired, you would not automatically have your baby returned to you at this stage, as the court would have to be convinced that it is in the child's best interests to be returned to you. Once an adoptive family has been selected and they have commenced visiting the child, it is not usually considered to be a good idea to move the child again. If you want your child back, you should tell your adoptions worker immediately and get legal advice. You should then apply to the court who will appoint a Child Representative to make recommendations about all the circumstances of your situation. The Court would make the final decision.

Can my child find out information about me?

Yes. In Western Australia all adoptions are open, which means all parties to an adoption have the right to apply for identifying information about the other parties to an adoption. For a number of years now, people who have been adopted in Western Australia have been able to access information about their origins.

Can I keep the adoption a secret?

As they grow up, most people who have been adopted are curious to know something about their background.

The adoptive family may apply to obtain a copy of the original birth certificate, and your name will be on it. Adoption is open in Western Australia, and the adoptive parents are expected to provide information to the child about their birth family from an early age. People who have been adopted can also apply to obtain their original birth certificate and court documents about their adoption. They can also apply for more detailed information about their birth and adoption from Adoption Services. People who have been adopted are curious about their origins. Some people are satisfied with fuller knowledge obtained from file records, while others want to try and trace their birth parents or other family members.

Does adoption turn out well?

Research shows that the vast majority of adoptions turn out happily and that children who have been adopted do well in life. Sometimes there are problems, just as there are in other families. When things do go wrong, it is hard to know whether it is due to adoption or to some other reason. The details of some organisations that can assist all parties to an adoption with advice and help, are listed at the end of this booklet.

Making the decision

The decision that you make about your baby's future is important and you should not rush into it. Get all the advice you can before making up your mind. If, after considering all the possibilities, you decide on adoption, you may feel that you are abandoning your baby. Although it is a difficult decision to make, it can be a responsible, protective and caring one.

Contact us

Adoption Services, Department of Communities

5 Newman Court Fremantle WA 6160
Postal address: Locked Bag 5000 Fremantle WA 6959
Telephone: 1800 182 178 and ask to speak to the local Adoptions Duty Officer, Adoption Services.
Email: adoptions@communities.wa.gov.au

Website: www.wa.gov.au

Crisis Care, Department of Communities

24 hour telephone service.
Telephone: (08) 9223 1111
Country free call: 1800 177 008

Unplanned pregnancy – considering adoption for your child

Adoption Research and Counselling Service

Experienced counsellors who can help you explore all your options. They can assist you in making sense of adoption for you and your child, now and in the future.
301 Railway Parade, Maylands WA 6051
Telephone: (08) 9370 4914

Unplanned pregnancy – general help

Sexual Health Quarters, Perth (formerly Family Planning WA)

Ph: 9227 6177
<https://shq.org.au>

Goldfields Women's Health Care Centre (Kalgoorlie)

Ph: 9021 8266
www.gwhcc.org.au

Desert Blue Connect (Geraldton)

Ph: 9964 2742
www.desertblueconnect.org.au

South West Women's Health and Information Centre (Bunbury)

Ph: 9791 3350
<https://swwhic.com.au>

Sources of information and help

- Your doctor
- The social worker at the hospital
- Your local Department of Communities office. Locations are listed on the website at www.communities.wa.gov.au

