

AGENCY POLICIES & PROCEDURES FOR PROSPECTIVE BIRTH PARENTS

- Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is committed to providing quality services to any Prospective Birth Parents that come to the agency for the purpose of planning for their child.
- Services may include medical, social, and casework services regarding pregnancy options. Extensive counseling regarding alternatives to an adoption plan, such as parenting the child, maternal or paternal relatives taking custody or guardianship is also provided. Options and potential plans are explored with the Prospective Birth Parents.
- All services are provided with the recognition of each person's inherent dignity, integrity and right to privacy.
- Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is sensitive to the unique needs of Prospective Birth Parents, and will strive to address these needs.
- Confidentiality is of utmost importance. Unless otherwise agreed to, all information remains confidential.
- The adoption process is explained and reviewed in detail with all clients of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.
- Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides adoption services ethically to ensure that all adoptions take place in the best interests of children and to prevent the abduction, exploitation, sale or trafficking of children. The agency prohibits anyone from giving money as payment for a child or as inducement to release a child.
- Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is committed to treating all persons with respect, dignity, and compassion and welcomes all persons regardless of race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, age, nationality, or disability. Pursuant to 18 NYCRR 421.3 (d), Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. prohibits discrimination and harassment against applicants for adoption services on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, religion, or disability. Forever Families Through Adoption Inc. shall take reasonable steps to prevent such discrimination or harassment by staff and volunteers, promptly investigate incidents of discrimination and harassment, and take reasonable and appropriate corrective disciplinary action if such incidents occur.
- Clients are informed of the policies and procedures of the agency as set forth in this document.
- Each client has his/her own case file with records that are kept confidential.
- Sensitivity to the individual needs of each client of the agency is paramount.

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Prospective Birth Parents & Planning

The Prospective Birth Parents are active participants in the decision making process regarding the future of their child. Respecting the Prospective Birth Parents' decision is an important factor in the planning process and in determining what is in the best interest of the child.

Prospective Birth Parents have the right to be active participants in the planning for their child. An adoption plan necessitates the termination of parental rights of the Expectant/Birth Parent. Prospective Birth Parents are given the option of voluntarily surrendering their parental rights in court, which is irrevocable, or out-of-court which becomes irrevocable after (30) thirty days. Supportive and options counseling is offered at no cost to you.

Appointments with Prospective Birth Parents

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides Prospective Birth Parents with support by phone and/or by regular appointments, as needed. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. makes every effort to ensure that any appointment made with Prospective Birth Parents is kept. If an appointment needs to be rescheduled, the Prospective Birth Parents are notified within 24-48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting and it will be rescheduled.

When necessary and possible, a representative from Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will make a home visit at the convenience of the Prospective Birth Parents. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. maintains records/reports from all discussions performed whether by phone or in person meetings with Prospective Birth Parents. In addition, any correspondence received from or sent to the Prospective Birth Parents is kept in their designated file.

Referrals and Services

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. assists Prospective Birth Mothers in locating medical care and prenatal services to help ensure their health and the health of her unborn child. Should a referral need to be made to another agency or community service provider, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will:

- keep a record of why the referral was necessary
- record to whom the referral was made
- contact the referral and arrange for the referral to contact the birth parent(s)
- give the birth parent(s) information about the referral
- provide follow-up services

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. works with Prospective Birth Parents in selecting adoptive parents for their child. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides Prospective Birth Parents with Prospective Adoptive Parent information and support during the selection process. A counselor from Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will review with you the types of families available to you including but not limited to, with children, without children, married, single, same sex, local to you or out of state or country, open to open adoption and post contact/visits.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. arranges for payment of the Prospective Birth Mother's pregnancy related expenses when needed and as permitted by the state regulations. These payments are made through the Prospective Adoptive Parents' Client Expenses Account funds.

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Out-of-Wedlock Fathers

In New York State, under certain circumstances, an expectant mother may not be required to identify the biological father of the child. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will work with the Prospective Birth Mother to attempt to locate a Prospective Birth Father whose notice to or consent of the adoption may be required and notify him of any possible adoption plans concerning his child. If and when identified, the Prospective Birth Father may be given the option of taking responsibility for the child, participating in any adoption plans made for the child, and/or terminating his rights to the child.

Should contact be established with the Prospective Birth Father of the child, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will attempt to involve the Prospective Birth Father in the process of adoption, including the adoption plan and exchanging information with the Prospective Adoptive Parents.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. may also offer the Birth Father the option to accept or deny paternity to the prospective adoptive child. Should the Birth Father admit paternity, but is not able or willing to plan for the child, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will make efforts to obtain a voluntary surrender from the Birth Father regarding his rights to parent the child. Should the Birth Father be unwilling to surrender his rights to the child, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will continue to work with the Birth Father to take necessary steps to terminate his parental rights. Absent a legal risk affidavit signed by the Prospective Adoptive Parents, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will not place an out-of-wedlock child for adoption without the Birth Father's consent or surrender. Factors considered prior to the placement are if during the six month period prior to placement, the Birth Father: (1) offered a reasonable sum of money in connection with the Prospective Birth Mother's medical expenses relating to the pregnancy, (2) holds himself out as the father of the child, or (3) offers to or can provide adequate child support and housing. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will explore all possible options with the Birth Father.

Should the Prospective Birth Father altogether deny paternity to the out-of-wedlock child, he is asked to do so in writing by signing documents prepared by the agency's legal staff. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. explains that the signing of a document that terminates parental rights is irrevocable. Unless separately represented, an attorney from Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. may accompany the Prospective Birth Father to Court in order to execute the appropriate documents to relinquish his parental rights.

New York State Putative Father Registry

After the birth of the child and prior to finalization, if the child is born out-of-wedlock, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will complete and submit the required form to NYS Office of Children and Family Services requesting a search of the Putative Father Registry regarding the prospective adoptive child.

Counseling

Counseling is made available and encouraged to all Prospective Birth Parents. Upon request, additional services will be provided, including pre and post-placement counseling. Counseling services may be provided by an agency social worker, adoption counselor, or an outside resource to which a referral is made.

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Confidentiality

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. understands that confidentiality is often important to you and Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will not intentionally exchange identifying information about you to the prospective adoptive parents unless you and the adoptive parents agree otherwise. In working with you, however, it is often necessary to coordinate with physicians, social workers, attorneys, court officials and others. During this process, information about you will be shared on a "need to know" basis. You hereby authorize us to release non-identifying information about you with others as necessary.

You understand that during the course of the adoption, your identity and that of the adoptive parents may become known to numerous persons and institutions, including, but not limited to, medical providers, hospitals, courts, social workers, and to the adoptive parents' counsel. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. cannot control the actions of these persons and institutions. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. also advises you that, in some instances, subsequent to adoptive placement, the adoptive parents may request a meeting with you or identifying information about you, even if you prefer confidentiality and/or anonymity. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. encourages cooperation between you and the adoptive parents, and encourage you to reach an agreement with the adoptive parents about what information is exchanged.

Information about you may be obtained through accidental disclosure by us, or through many other sources. You should also understand that there are legal methods of seeking information through adoption registries, vital statistic records, medical records, and the work of confidential intermediaries. Further, when your child becomes an adult, your child may seek and have information about your identity. For all of these reasons, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. cannot and do not guarantee confidentiality now or in the future.

New York State Adoption and Medical Information Registry

If the child is born in and/or the adoption is filed in New York State, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides Birth Parent(s) with information about the NYS Health Department's Adoption and Medical Information Registry, as well as the form to complete. The Adoption Information Registry consent form is provided to the Birth Parent(s) at the time of execution of the surrender. This mutual consent registry allows for the exchange of non-identifying and identifying information depending on the age of the adoptee and whether the agreement is mutual.

New York State Open Birth Certificate Law

If the child is born in and/or the adoption is filed in New York State, an adoptee or his/her descendants may access the original birth certificate, with you identifying information, once the adoptee reaches the age of 18 years. While you may wish to keep your pregnancy and adoption plan confidential, this law allows access to the original birth certificate, which would then identify you.

Indian Child Welfare Act

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. makes every effort to determine whether a child is of Native American descent for Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) compliance. Prospective Birth Parents are asked whether there is any possibility that the child is of American Indian descent. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides services for Native American tribal members and/or potential tribal members.

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Pre-Placement and Post-Placement Contact

Prospective Adoptive Parents and Prospective Birth Parents may have supervised pre-placement communication. With the assistance of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc., communication may include:

1. Face-To-Face meeting with the Prospective Adoptive Parents ;
2. Telephone conversations;
3. Contact in writing through letters, photos and information about each party pre-and/or post-placement.

All of the above options will be arranged and supervised through Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.

Confidentiality is of utmost importance. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. makes every effort to ensure identifying information is not made available unless approved by the party whose information is to be released. All contact, correspondence, and meetings are recorded in detail and kept in the client's individual, confidential file.

Legal Services

Prospective Birth Parents are encouraged to and offered the opportunity to retain separate legal counsel at no cost to them. Should they choose to retain separate counsel, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. can assist the Prospective Birth Parents to locate an attorney in their area who has experience in adoption practice. Should Prospective Birth Parents choose not to retain separate counsel, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. may prepare the necessary legal documents for the Prospective Birth Parents.

The reasonable attorney fees provided to the Prospective Birth Parents are billed to the Prospective Adoptive Parents. Counsel for Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will accompany the Prospective Birth Parents and their attorney to Court if requested and appropriate.

Adoption Deception Notice

Prospective Birth Parents are permitted, in most instances, to receive financial assistance, in the form of living expenses, for court approved costs related to their pregnancy. Such living expenses may include such things as the reasonable cost of housing, utilities, food, maternity clothing, cell phone, and travel expenses. While it is permissible for you to receive this financial assistance, it is not allowable for you to do so from more than one resource at the same time. Should you be matched with Prospective Adoptive Parent(s) and receiving financial assistance from them through FFTA, you are not permitted to accept living expenses simultaneously from other Prospective Adoptive Parents and/or Adoption Service Providers. Nor is it permissible for you to hold yourself out as pregnant, and request and collect living expenses if you are not indeed pregnant. You understand that accepting living expenses when you are not pregnant or when you are accepting living expenses from more than one Prospective Adoptive Parent(s) may be grounds for criminal prosecution or a civil lawsuit.

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Complaint Resolution Process

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. wants to ensure that you are completely satisfied with the adoption process when you work with Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. As a prospective client, you are receiving this policy so that you are aware of the complaint procedures prior to retaining our services. If at any time throughout the process, you believe that any of the services or activities of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. raise an issue of compliance with applicable regulations, policies, laws, the Hague Convention, the UAA, the Intercountry Adoption Act (IAA) or the regulations implementing the IAA, you should communicate your concerns directly to the employee of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. with whom you have the complaint.

If, after your initial verbal communication, you are still not satisfied, please contact the Executive Director, Joy S. Goldstein. If still not resolved within five (5) business days, you must submit a written complaint, signed and dated, to the Executive Director and provide a copy to the President of the Board of Directors. The Executive Director will have thirty (30) days to respond in writing to your request. An expedited review in ten (10) days will be provided for complaints that are time-sensitive or involve allegations of fraud.

If you remain dissatisfied after receiving a response from the Executive Director, you may continue the process through Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s Board of Directors or with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Where applicable, you may also contact the U.S. Department of State and/or the New York State Office of Children and Family Services by filling out a complaint form or writing a letter that fully explains your complaint.

Submit copies of all letters and papers that explain your complaint to:

The Department of State
Attention U.S Central Authority
U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs,
Office of Children's Issues
Adoption Unit (SA-29)
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, New York 12144-2796
Phone: (518) 473-7793
Fax: (518) 486-7550

To submit a complaint, if applicable, you may also use the Hague Complaint Registry web site, <https://adoptionusca.state.gov/HCRWeb/Welcome>. You may submit the complaint electronically or print out the form and fax it to the US Central Authority at (202) – 736-9080. The forms may also be requested by calling the Department of State at (888) 407-4747. Please be advised that, as required by the State Department, in order to maintain compliance with The Hague Convention Regulations and the UAA, your complaint may only be filed with the Department of State after you have presented the problem to the agency.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. permits any birth parent, prospective adoptive parent, or adoptive parent, or adoptee to lodge a signed and dated complaint about any of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s services or activities (including its use of supervised providers) that he or she believes raises an issue of compliance with the Convention, the IAA, the UAA, the regulations implementing the IAA or UAA, or State Law directly with Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. advises such individuals of the additional procedures available to them if they are dissatisfied with Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s response to their complaint.

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Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. maintains a written record of each complaint received and the steps taken to investigate and respond to said complaint. This record is made available to the accrediting entity, IAAME, CEAS or the Secretary upon request.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides the accrediting entity, IAAME, CEAS, and the Secretary, on a semi-annual bases, a summary of all complaints received, if any, during the preceding six months (including the number of complaints received and how each complaint was resolved) and an assessment of any discernible patterns in complaints received against FFTA, along with information about what systemic changes, if any, were made or are planned by the agency in response to such patterns (if any exist).

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides any information about complaints received as may be requested by the accrediting entity, IAAME, CEAS, or the Secretary.

No person may be discouraged from, nor retaliated against in any way, for: voicing or filing a written complaint; expressing a grievance; providing information in writing or interviews to an accrediting entity on Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s performance; or questioning the conduct of or expressing an opinion about the performance of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. This topic is part of all employees' training.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. utilizes a quality improvement program in order to improve its adoption services as needed. The Executive Director and Senior Agency Counsel are responsible for this program, and they will review all complaints and Client Satisfaction Survey results with staff during scheduled Quality Improvement meetings in order to address any issues and to improve operations.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. looks forward to working with you and we encourage you to ask any questions or express any concerns you may have at any time.

I have received and reviewed this document.

Signature

Date: _____