
Important Definitions

Signs of Decision to Parent

- ❖ A mother considering adoption nurses her baby after the birth, takes the child home for a while or presents as very detached from the process.

Last Minute

- ❖ A mother calls The Cradle for the first time after giving birth and is considering adoption.

Post Placement Meeting

- ❖ Cradle staff, adoptive parents and birth parents meet to discuss the progress of their open relationship.

Change of Heart (old terminology) Parenting Plan (new terminology)

- ❖ The expectant parent(s) choose a family but makes the decision to parent, rather than make an adoption plan. This can occur before or after a match meeting.

Openness Agreement

- ❖ A written, good faith contract outlining the commitment of the ongoing relationship between the birth family and the adoptive family

Direct Placement With Legal Risk

- ❖ Occurs when the baby goes directly from the hospital to the adoptive parents' home before the parents sign a surrender. Also referred to as a Legal Risk Placement.

Entrustment Ceremony

- ❖ A time, typically on the day of placement, when members of the birth and adoptive families, make their commitment to the child and their ongoing relationship. A time to honor the transition of the child from one family to another.

Fears of Expectant Parents

- ❖ Will my child be safe?
- ❖ Will my child be loved?
- ❖ What will the adoptive parents tell my child about me?
- ❖ Will my child wonder, or hate me?
- ❖ How do I explain my adoption plan to my family and friends? What if they don't support me?
- ❖ Am I being selfish because I have plans for my future and I'm not ready to be a parent?
- ❖ What if the adoptive parents divorce or die?
- ❖ What if I can't get pregnant again?
- ❖ Will I regret my decision and live in pain the rest of my life?
- ❖ How will I talk about my child to my future spouse and other children I have later in life?
- ❖ Will I lose the relationship with the birthfather (birthmother) if I place our baby for adoption?
- ❖ Will the adoptive parents promise to stay in touch and disappear after placement?
- ❖ Will I be reminded of the pain of my decision every time I see my child with the adoptive parents?
- ❖ What will it be like when I hear my child call the adoptive parents "mommy or daddy?"
- ❖ Will I seem pushy if I call or ask for visits?
- ❖ How will I explain the birthfather's lack of involvement to my child?

Match Meeting Tips

1. Look at the expectant parents when speaking.

- The counselor will be asking you questions, respond to the expectant parents.
- Address the expectant parents equally, if both are present.

2. Both prospective adoptive parents need to speak during the meeting.

- If only one of you speaks it may appear to the expectant parents only one of you is interested in adopting.

3. Bring a small gift for the expectant parents.

- A plant or baked goods is an option.
- If the expectant parents have other children, a coloring book or small toy for the other children.

4. Look at the expectant mother's face, not her stomach.

5. Bring current pictures of family and friends.

- This is only necessary if your profile is a year or older.

6. Never assume the expectant parent is going to place the child for adoption.

- Use phrases like “if you make a plan of adoption.....” and “if you place your child with us...”

7. Make a plan at the end of the meeting.

- Will you meet again on your own?
- Will you invite them over to your home?
- Be prepared to share your full names and contact information.

8. Make sure the relationship you establish before placement is one that you will continue after placement.

- For example, calling the expectant parents daily or seeing them a few times a week during the pregnancy may not be the relationship you want to have after placement.

9. Keep your infertility story short.

- You do not have to tell the expectant parents all the medical details.

10. Express interest in the expectant parents.

- Don't wait for the counselors to ask the questions.
- Be sensitive and understanding if emotions run high.
- If the expectant father is not present, let the counselors take the lead on asking question about his involvement.

Match Meetings

First Match Meeting: Beginning the Relationship

It takes great courage for expectant parents and adoptive parents to agree to meet and begin to get to know each other. Neither of you would be doing this if it were not for your desire to nurture and love this child in the very best way possible. We suggest you think of this meeting a little like a “blind date.” Both of you are nervous and excited. You want to find out enough about each other to see whether you’d like to proceed in building a relationship.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS: Be prepared to discuss the following questions in any way you are comfortable.

- How did the two of you meet? Why were you attracted to each other?
- How do you like to spend your free time? (hobbies, interests)
- Are you employed? What do you do?
- Can you say something about the area where you live? (city, suburb)
- Do you have other children? Do you hope to adopt other children in the future?
- Does religion play a part in your life? If so, how?
- Talk about your extended family. Are they nearby? How do you think they will be involved?
- Is there someone in your family that has concerns about adoption or open adoption? What do you say to them?
- How did you decide to build your family through adoption? (Infertility)
- Why did you choose The Cradle?
- What is it about an open adoption that appeals to you? Why is it important?
- What is your plan for childcare?
- How would you discipline the child?
- What are your educational values?
- How did you hear about this birth parent?
- What were your thoughts and feelings about being selected?

EXPECTANT PARENTS: Be prepared to discuss the following questions in any way you are comfortable.

- Talk about what you are currently doing? (school, job, parenting other children)
- Say something about where and with whom you are living.
- Share about your family, parents, siblings, children, other important relatives or friends.
- What do you like to do in your free time? What are your goals for the future?
- Does religion play a part in your life? If so, how?
- When did you first learn you were pregnant? What were your thoughts? Whom did you tell?
- How did you come to consider adoption? Did you think about parenting?
- Is the father aware of this pregnancy? Is he planning to be involved?
- Can you say something about the father? What is he like? How did you meet?
- Is there anyone close to you that disagrees with an adoption plan?
- How have you been feeling during this pregnancy? Have you received prenatal care?
- Why did you choose The Cradle?
- What attracted you to this family? Why did you choose them?
- What are your thoughts and hopes about an open adoption?

ADOPTIVE AND EXPECTANT PARENTS

- What are your hopes and goals for this child?
- What are important qualities in being parents and expectant parents?
- Will you share full names and phone numbers with the idea that you will talk and/or meet between match meetings?

During the time between the first and second match meetings, write down any questions you want to ask each other. It is important to ask any questions that come to mind.

Second Match Meeting: Developing your Plan

The purpose of this second meeting is to discuss as fully as possible plans for the birth, hospital, placement and post-placement experiences. It is important to realize that plans made at this time can change for any number of reasons. Your Cradle counselor will be there for you throughout this process.

HOSPITAL EXPERIENCE

- Will adoptive parents be notified when labor starts? Who will tell them? How?
- What role will the adoptive parents play at the hospital? (delivery room, feeding, changing)
- How much direct baby care will the birth parents want to have? (contact, feeding, changing)
- Who will keep hospital mementos? (footprints, bracelet, hat, birth notice)
- Who will order hospital pictures?

NAMING THE BABY

- Expectant parents and adoptive parents choose the name together (i.e. adoptive parents give expectant parents a list of names they like and expectant parents pick one)
- Birth parents choose a name and adoptive parents use name as first or middle
- Birth and adoptive parents choose different names. Name chosen by birth parents is used at the hospital and put on original birth certificate.

PLACING THE BABY

Direct Placement — baby goes directly from hospital to adoptive parents. May be appropriate when:

- Communication & trust between expectant parents and adoptive parents is good
- Expectant parents are not ambivalent
- Adoptive parents feel comfortable & agree
- Date of signing surrenders is set
- Important to discuss who will be there and how expectant parents imagine it will go

Nursery — baby goes to Cradle nursery. May be appropriate when:

- There is legal or emotional uncertainty
- Important to discuss who will visit nursery and when
- Important to discuss approximate length of time baby will be in nursery
- How will expectant parents and adoptive parents communicate

PARENTING — baby is parented by expectant parents - “Change of Heart”

- How and when will adoptive parents be told?

OPENNESS

- Read and discuss all parts of the Openness Agreement
- Discuss expectations of expectant parents and adoptive parents
- Specifically discuss: letters, pictures, visits, phone calls, texts, Facebook/social networking
- Who will initiate what?
- Discuss a phone call from adoptive parents when baby is first home.
- How will extended family be involved?
- Discuss difficulty of first contact after placement (for adoptive parents/birth parents)
- How will each communicate problems or difficulties?
- What will help this adoption be successful?

LOSS FOR ADOPTIVE AND BIRTH PARENTS

- Discuss your biggest fears
- Talk about the shift of power/attention/responsibility in the adoption experience. Who takes the lead and when?

THE FUTURE

- Talk about an Entrustment Ceremony, a Baptism or Bris, a Dedication. Who will be invited?
- What name will the child and the adoptive parents call the birth parents?
- How will the adoptive parents tell the child about his/her adoption?
- If contact is lost, discuss process for reestablishing it. Cradle available for follow-up.

Discussing Sexual Assault or Rape at a Match Meeting

Talking about the tough stuff:

It takes great courage for expectant parents and adoptive parents to agree to meet and begin to get to know each other. It also requires a great deal of strength and sensitivity to talk about the difficult parts of our stories. If rape or sexual assault is a part of the expectant parent's story, it is important to talk about it in an open and compassionate way with the prospective adoptive parents of the child.

You may be wondering, "Why do we have to talk about this painful topic?" It may seem easier to avoid the circumstances around conception all together; to pretend it didn't happen. You may feel that this will protect yourself or the child. In fact, we have learned that adopted children need to learn the truth about their adoption story, even the difficult parts. In an open, compassionate and developmentally appropriate way, children can learn about the circumstances in their birth parents' lives that brought them to make a loving plan of adoption for them.

This said, be assured we are not asking you to talk about the painful details of a sexual assault experience. Instead, we would like to begin to establish a relationship built on safety and trust where the difficult parts of the child's story can be discussed over time. The counselors will talk before the match meeting occurs about how it will be best to discuss this topic

The following are some suggestions for how this part of your story can be discussed at a match meeting.

EXPECTANT PARENTS

Be prepared to discuss the following questions in any way you are comfortable. Your counselor will assist you in talking about these difficult topics in the meeting.

- ❖ What would you want your child to know about the circumstances around conception?
- ❖ What concerns do you have about your child knowing this part of their story?
- ❖ How would you like your child to learn about this part of their story?
- ❖ Would you want to be involved in sharing this part of their story with your child?
- ❖ Did you know the expectant father before conception occurred?
- ❖ Have you seen the expectant father since?
- ❖ Did you take any legal action against the expectant father?
- ❖ Have you received any support since this difficult experience?
- ❖ Do you think you might feel more comfortable talking about some of these questions as you get to know the prospective adoptive parents better?
- ❖ If you did know the expectant father before conception occurred, what would you want your child to know about him? Although it may be difficult to think about, are there any positive aspects you could share?
- ❖ Would you want to write your child a letter to share this part of their story?

ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Be prepared to discuss the following questions in any way you are comfortable.

- ❖ What questions do you think your child might have about this part of their story?
- ❖ How do you plan to tell your child about this part of their story?
- ❖ How might the expectant mother be helpful to you in addressing your child's questions?
- ❖ How might you help the expectant mother feel more comfortable with sharing this difficult part of her story in the future?

THE FUTURE

- ❖ What questions or issues do you want to talk about in the future as your relationship develops?
- ❖ How might the Cradle's counselors or Post Adoption Department help you talk about these questions?

Tips for Adoptive Parents When Visiting at the Hospital

Prior to the delivery

- ❖ Don't assume the expectant parent(s) want you at the hospital. Call and ask when/if you may arrive, even if this was decided at the match meeting, ask again.
- ❖ Don't do anything you are not comfortable with or will be emotionally risky, like being in the delivery room which could make a parenting plan more difficult.
- ❖ If you are in the delivery room, don't leave when the baby does. Your attention should be just as much with the mother as with the baby.
- ❖ Continually check in with the mother on what she needs and if needed, advocate for her with hospital staff.

After the delivery

- ❖ If visiting after the birth, keep your visit to an hour.
- ❖ Let parents have their time with the baby. Giving a mother time and space with the baby is a good thing.
- ❖ Bring a small gift for the mother. This could be flowers, food or a magazine.

Acknowledge the parents prior to visiting the baby

- ❖ Ask how the mother is feeling. Expect her to be emotional and possibly in pain.
- ❖ If you are not present at the birth, ask about the delivery.
- ❖ Be empathetic to both parents and other family members who may be present.

The parents have not surrendered their parental rights. They are responsible for decisions for the baby

- ❖ Always direct hospital staff to the parents for medical decisions.
- ❖ Only hold and/or visit the baby if given permission by the parents.
- ❖ Do not give permission to your extended family members to visit with the baby in the hospital.
- ❖ Use appropriate language, such as, "if you make an adoption plan..." not "when you sign..." and do not refer to the baby as "your baby."

Realize the parents' first concern is the health of their child, not making an adoption plan

- ❖ The parent(s) may not want to address the adoption if there are health concerns with the baby.
- ❖ Don't assume the parents will want to follow plans made during match meetings. They need to connect their head and heart now that the baby has arrived.

Follow all hospital rules and policies

- ❖ Some hospitals may not be adoption friendly.
- ❖ A Cradle counselor will be present at the hospital to see the mother following the delivery.
- ❖ If there will be a direct placement, the Expectant Parent Counselor and the Adoptive Parent Counselor will be present on the day of placement and will communicate with hospital staff.

Please use appropriate behavior in the presence of the parents and at the hospital in general

- ❖ Do not drink alcohol or celebrate at the hospital.
- ❖ Do not breastfeed in front of the mother.

Do not give your insurance information to the hospital. Do not put your last name(s) on the birth certificate under any circumstances. We understand you may have to provide identification to visit, but you should not provide information that will result in you receiving billing. It is very difficult to change if this happens. Your fiscal responsibility begins the day of placement, not before. If you have any questions, please contact your adoption counselor

Entrustment Ceremony Outline

What is an Entrustment Ceremony?

An Entrustment Ceremony is a special way to recognize your child's transition from his/her birth family to the adoptive family. It is a time for the birth parents to entrust the adoptive parents with the care of the baby. The Entrustment Ceremony is a personal event to honor the sacred trust between birth parents and adoptive parents. It is the start to your child's adoption story and a way to honor the significance of this special day. For birth parents, this day can help you express your hopes for your child's future, as well as your own feelings of loss. For adoptive parents, an Entrustment Ceremony can mark your commitment as parents, and provide you with the blessings of the birth family as you begin parenting. This is a day to celebrate this child, affirm your commitments, and honor your unique roles in this relationship.

The following are some suggestions for how to think about and plan an Entrustment Ceremony. It can be discussed at a match meeting or as adoptive parents and birth parents build their relationship.

Things to consider when creating an Entrustment Ceremony:

Be prepared to use the following questions as you design a way to honor your child. Your counselor will assist you in talking about these topics and/or provide you with examples.

- Who will take the lead in planning and creating the ceremony?
- When will the ceremony occur?
- Where will the ceremony take place?
- Who will be invited?
- Will it be a formal ritual or a casual gathering?
- Will there be a script?
- What mementos can the participants take away from the day (i.e. gifts, pictures)?
- How will the story of the child's name be honored and recognized?
- What role will cultural practices have in the ceremony?
- How will the Entrustment Ceremony be explained to the child?
- Will a poem, reading, or meaningful passage be shared?
- Will symbols, such as candles, yarn weavings or food, be used to mark the joining of the families?
- Would participants like to include a spiritual component in the ceremony?
- Will music, such as a meaningful song, be played?
- Who will bring a camera to memorialize the ceremony?
- How will the adoptive parents' joy be balanced with the birthparents' sorrow?
- How will the ceremony look different if it takes place in a hospital, The Cradle, a place of worship, or a private home?