



“We’re Adopting!”: Announcing Your Decision to Adopt

Real families share the when, what, and how of sharing their decisions to adopt with friends and family. **BY COLLEEN CALVANI**

After making the life-changing decision to grow your family through adoption, how and when do you share the news? Whom to tell first? When do you let friends and coworkers know that you are expecting a child... in a month, or maybe next year? How do you share painful details, or answer prying or inappropriate questions? What if your family is “against” adoption?

Adoptive Families talked with moms and dads whose experiences announcing their adoption decisions were as varied as the makeup of the families themselves. One lesson emerged again and again: This is your family’s decision; those you tell can get on board or not.

The Supportive Family

Even if you’re sure your family will receive your news enthusiastically, your announcement should involve more than updating your Facebook status.

◆ **Put it in writing.** Many families tell grandparents-to-be in person or on the phone, but inform the rest of their relatives and friends in writing. [See “Dear Friends and Family,” below, to read full sample letters.] Sending a letter or an e-mail lets everyone in your circle feel that they’ve learned the news at the same time, and gives them time to formulate a response. You can also use your letter to head off negative reactions by dispelling lingering stereotypes and out-of-date information.

◆ **Teach positive adoption language.** Worried about a relative asking why your child’s “real” mother “gave her up”? Supply a list of appropriate adoption terms, such as “birth mother,” “unable to parent,” and so on.

◆ **Decide what you’re ready to share about infertility.** If infertility played a part in your decision to adopt, set boundaries for what is appropriate to ask about. For example:

“Feel free to ask me about my infertility treatments, but please don’t ask me about my miscarriage. It is still too painful to discuss.”

◆ **Let family in on disappointments along the way.** If your family is supportive about your decision to adopt, let them support you through the process. “Having to tell friends and family that a match did not work out” was painful, says one waiting mom. At the same time, “I can share my grief over losing that child, instead of trying to shoulder the burden alone.”

◆ **Get creative.** One family that was adopting their second child from South Korea let their son make the announcement at a family gathering. He wore a T-shirt with the Hangul character for “older brother” printed on the front and the words, “I’m a big brother!” on the back. His

mom says, “It was his first official duty as a big brother, and it made him feel special.”

The Skeptical Family

Chances are, you’ll have to deal with some outspoken nay-sayers who make comments like, “How could you love a child who is not your own? Why would you want to do that, when you already have two biological daughters?” If you are nervous about the reactions you might get from your announcement, how should you proceed?

◆ **Be direct in requesting support.** One adoptive mom responded to her mother’s negative reaction by saying: “We have given this a lot of thought, and we are doing what we feel is best for our family. It was not an easy decision to make, and we would really appreciate your supporting us in this.” Her mother eventually came around.

◆ **Normalize the process.** “If skeptical family members see that you are preparing for a real child, they start to think, “This might work,” says one adoptive mom who prepared a gender-neutral nursery and began buying the essential items on every expectant mom’s list.

◆ **Explain the steps and players involved.** Many of the questions people ask about adoption will be driven by a lack of understanding about the process, so if you’re the first in your extended family to adopt, you’ll field a lot of questions. Explaining how it works can satisfy much of that curiosity.

◆ **Formulate a stock response.** During the wait, friends and family may frequently ask, “Are you still adopting?” One adoptive mother shares her standard response: “Yes, we are still adopting, but we don’t have any news to share. Our child may not have been born yet, or is not yet ready to come home. Until he or she is, we’ll wait.”

The Unsupportive Family

If you’re afraid your family won’t be able to overcome their prejudices and concerns about adoption, take this advice from families who have “been there.”

◆ **Set boundaries.** You might say, “We are considering adoption for our family. Knowing how you feel about adoption, I am telling you now, so that you will have time to get used to the idea, and to learn as much as you can about what the process involves.”

SAMPLE LETTER 1 FOR FAMILIES ADOPTING DOMESTICALLY

“Dear Friends and Family”

Many of you know that we have struggled with infertility for years, and have faced many complications along the way. After all that heartbreak, we’re happy to announce that we’ve decided to adopt a baby. We may continue trying to have a biological baby, but we’d like to give my body time to rest before undergoing in-vitro fertilization.

We’ve completed our homestudy, and all the paperwork, and are waiting for an expectant mother to choose us to be her baby’s family. We’ll most likely bring our baby home from the hospital (although we’ll have to stay in the baby’s birth state for up to two weeks while paperwork between our two states is finalized).

Our adoption will be semi-open, at the very least, meaning that the expectant mother will choose us, and we’ll keep in touch through e-mail, letters, and photos after placement. We hope that knowing that her baby is happy, healthy, and loved will reinforce the good decision that she made.

We know that adoption may feel a little scary, especially if you don’t know much about it. We’ve enclosed a list that explains some of the terminology that is now used. You can, of course, find a lot of information about adoption on the Internet—but you may also encounter those who don’t support adoption.

The waiting period is a lot like a pregnancy, except that we have no idea how long it will last. We could be chosen next week, or it could take several years for the right match with a prospective birth mother. In the meantime, your support will mean a lot to us. We’re excited about starting our family, and hope you’ll welcome our baby with open arms when he or she finally arrives!

◆ **Make it clear that the decision is up to you.** One mom recommends planning a conversation with the skeptics. She gave her in-laws a written list of points about what adoption means and why she and her husband had chosen to adopt. The most important line? “This isn’t about you. It’s about us, OUR family.”

◆ **Put your child and family first.** Even the most reluctant relatives tend to come around after they meet your child. But if a family member remains disapproving of your adoption, you may need to give her an ultimatum. “Say that you won’t let your child be treated differently from other children in the family. If she doesn’t change the way she acts, she can’t be part of your lives,” says Ronny Diamond, a former social worker with the Post-Adoption Resource Center at Spence-Chapin, in New York City. “Your first responsibility is to protect your child.”

◆ **Find your own support network.** Just as adoption is about love, not genes, creating a surrogate family of friends and other adoptive parents will be invaluable.

SAMPLE LETTER 2 FOR FAMILIES ADOPTING DOMESTICALLY

“Dear Friends and Family”

We’d like to announce that we are very excited to be starting the adoption process. After three years of infertility, including surgeries, expensive treatments, and a very sad miscarriage, we are happy to be moving on to something that will have a positive ending.

We are happy to share this with everyone now because we finally have happy news to share. If you have any questions about our infertility and/or the adoption process, please feel free to ask! If you have any “advice,” please carefully consider sharing that. No, we will NOT get pregnant now that we are adopting. It has not been easy to see friends and family get pregnant easily and go on to give birth, especially those babies due around what would have been our due dates. I hope everyone can understand that at least a little. Please just share your happiness with us.

Our homestudy is scheduled for this Friday. It is the second step in the adoption process. (The first was sending in a big check with the application.) If anyone has any great pictures of us that they think would look good in our ‘dear prospective birth mother’ profile, please send them to us!

SAMPLE LETTER FOR FAMILIES ADOPTING INTERNATIONALLY

“Dear Friends and Family”

We want to share some very exciting news: we will be adopting a child from _____!

Why write a letter? We chose to share this news in a letter to give you some time to digest it. We’re also sure that you will have some questions. We hope to answer several of them right here. If you have any others, please ask!

Why are we adopting? This is not a sudden decision. Many of you know that we have been struggling with infertility for some time now. We have been discussing adoption for several months, and have determined that it is the way for us to have the family we desire. We have put a lot of thought and research into this decision, and now we need your support.

Why _____? We have discussed several different countries, as well as domestic adoption, but feel that _____ is the right choice for us. We ultimately chose this country because we both liked the standard of medical care children receive [we’ve both studied and appreciated the culture; _____’s ancestry can be traced back to this country or region; the process seemed like the most clear-cut and efficient one to us; etc.]. After we decided on _____, we both felt such peace about our decision, and know it’s where our child will be born. We have given much thought to the fact that we’ll become a multicultural family. We’ve already decided that we’d like to preserve part of our child’s _____ name, and we will celebrate his/her _____ culture as he/she grows. We hope you look forward to learning about it, too.

How does the process work? The adoption process will take time. Right now we are working on our homestudy. We’ve been meeting with a social worker who will complete a report on our family. After the homestudy is complete, our agency will send the package (called a “dossier”) to _____. We chose our adoption agency because it’s been placing children for decades [it’s local; we got a good feeling from our first informational meeting; a friend used this agency, etc.]. After the dossier is sent to _____, we should receive our “referral,” which will include information about our child and a photo, in about 12 months [six months; two years; etc.]. Roughly three months later, we’ll travel to _____ to meet our child and bring him/her home. The trip will last about one week. The timeline of the adoption process can always change, due to unforeseen circumstances in either country. We appreciate your support and understanding along the way, and we promise we’ll keep you updated!