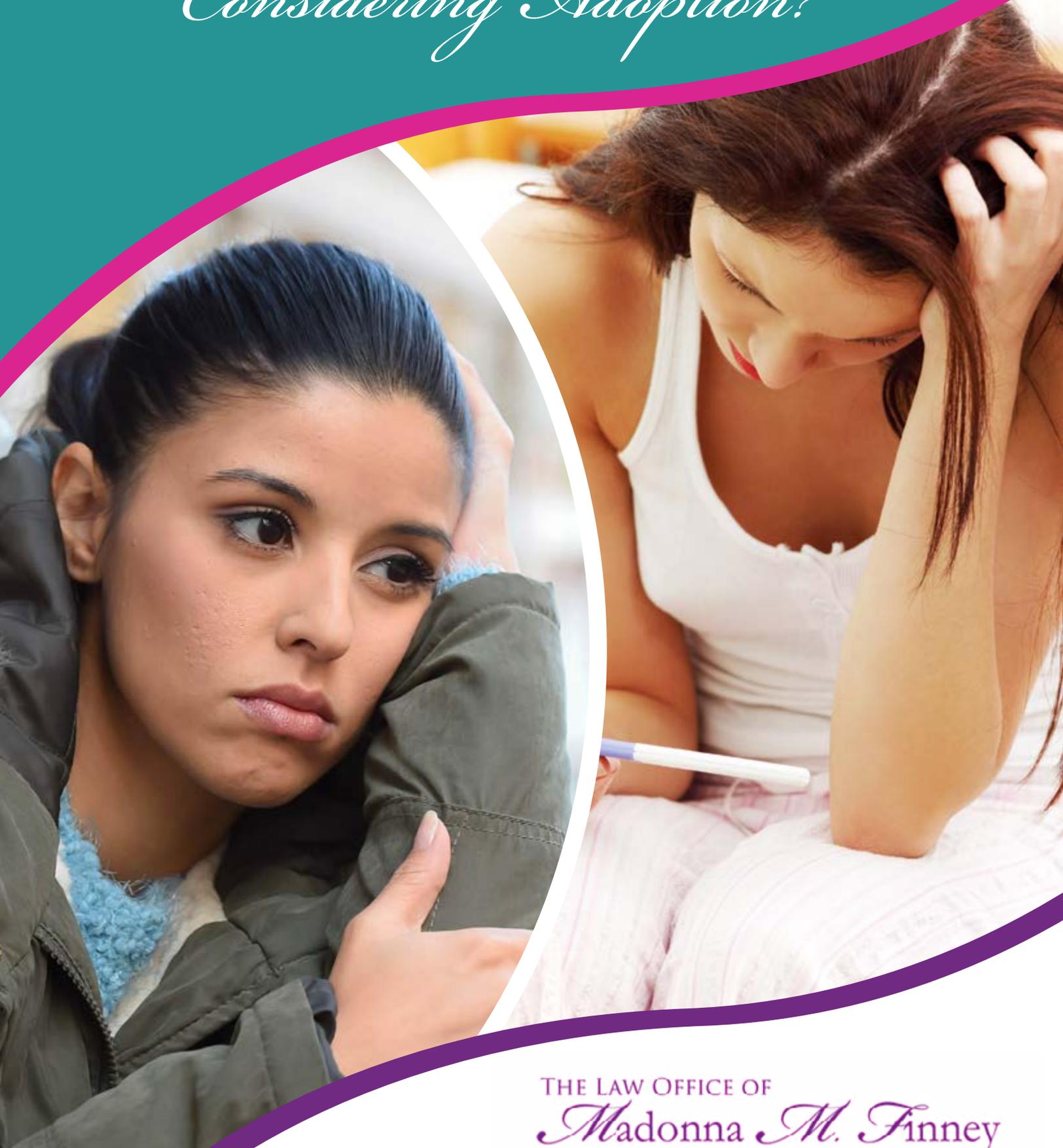


*Pregnant and  
Considering Adoption?*



THE LAW OFFICE OF  
*Madonna M. Finney*



# *What Is Adoption?*

Adoption is a legal process, where birth parents allow another to take over all parental responsibilities for their child, giving up their rights as parents.

Before making your choice, it's important to understand exactly what adoption means. Adoption is a permanent, legally binding process that takes place when a woman — or set of parents — decides not to parent and chooses to allow another family to raise their baby. After the adoption is finalized, the birthparents are no longer the legal parents of the baby and no longer have legal parental rights.

In Florida, adoptions may occur as a private placement through an attorney or as an agency placement. In private placement adoptions, both prospective adoptive parents and birth parents seek out an adoption attorney in hopes of finding a match. Through family profiles and personal biographies

presented by the attorney or social worker, birth parents typically select a family. While it is not required that birth parents make the selection, in most cases, birth parents have input into this selection either by providing a list of criteria for a possible adoptive family, reviewing profiles and information about families, or in some cases meeting the families, if they so desire.

While some agencies may place a child in foster care, we use direct placement, without need for foster care. Your child can be placed directly from the hospital with the adoptive family. Our attorney and social work staff are experienced and have worked in adoption for many years. We are happy to speak with you regarding adoption as an option for you and your child and answer your questions. There is no fee for birth parents to make a plan or ask questions, and your call is confidential. Please feel free to call and speak with Marilu or Madonna.

### **IS CHOOSING ADOPTION SELFISH?**

No. Choosing adoption may be one of the most selfless acts, the least selfish and one in which you will know your child grows up in the home you are not able to provide right now. You may not be able to care for your child at this time in your life, but you can find the family able to do so, a family you select. We have many available families, not just the families listed on the web site. When you speak with our Adoption Coordinator, she will help you, she will find out what type of family you believe is best for your child.

### **I FEEL LIKE I'M THE ONLY PERSON TO GO THROUGH THIS SITUATION.**

You're not. 3 out of 5 people are touched by adoption in some way or another. Even if you don't have someone in your family who was adopted, you probably know someone who has placed a child for adoption, who has adopted a child or who has someone in their family adopted.

### **WHAT IS OPEN ADOPTION?**

The contact or relationship between the adoptive parents and biological or birth parents is often referred to as "openness" in an adoption. The term "open adoption" does not have one specific meaning, but includes many forms of contact and relationships that birth and adoptive families choose to have with one another. We work with many different types of adoption, including open adoptions, closed adoptions and many variations in-between. You may select the type of adoption that works best for you and your child and how much openness you want. Please feel free to discuss your desires with Marilu or Madonna.

Open adoption may refer to:

- + Adoptive and birth parents who choose to meet on a first-name basis for one meeting before the birth of the child, but decide to have no further contact.
- + Adoptive and birth parents who choose to have some form of an on-going relationship throughout the term of pregnancy and may maintain that contact throughout the labor and delivery process and immediately after birth, before the baby goes home from the hospital.
- + Adoptive and birth parents who choose to have some form of an on-going contact whether through cards, letters, email, blogs, web sites, telephone and/or photographs.
- + Adoptive and birth parents who choose to have on-going, in person contact.

### **WHEN MAY I MAKE PLANS FOR ADOPTION?**

In Florida, the actual consent for the adoption of your child may only be signed after the child's birth. However, you may make plans for adoption at any point in your pregnancy, including selecting an adoptive family. The right time to make an adoption plan is when you're ready.

We can work with you when you find out you're pregnant, any time during your pregnancy, at the hospital, after delivery or even when you've taken your child home and have been parenting. Please feel free to call us at 888-883-6830, at any point, to discuss the option of adoption.

### **WHO MAY I SPEAK WITH ABOUT THIS DECISION?**

If you'd like to speak with a professional about your situation and the adoption options available, call us anytime, toll-free at (888) 883-6830 or (850) 577-3077. Ask for Marilu or Madonna. Our telephones are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. After hours, our answering service will help connect you to us. Please stay on the line as they assist you, it may take a moment to give us your call. We are caring, experienced professionals who will listen. We would be happy to speak with you about adoption, share information about families looking to adopt a child, discuss types of assistance available to you and answer your questions. We can assure you receive a full range of professional services including counseling and medical care. Your call is confidential and without charge and your call doesn't obligate you to place your child for adoption.

### **SHOULD I PLACE MY CHILD FOR ADOPTION?**

The decision to place a child for adoption is a difficult one only you can answer. We can't answer this question for you, no one can. We will provide you information to help make this decision, and we are willing to offer you caring support and make arrangements for you to receive counseling.

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**WHY DO SOME PEOPLE SAY THEY ARE GIVING UP A BABY FOR ADOPTION AND OTHER PEOPLE SAY THEY ARE PLACING A BABY FOR ADOPTION?**

Different people use different terms. Is there a difference between saying “give up a baby for adoption,” “put up a baby for adoption” and “place a baby for adoption”? If you’re facing an unplanned pregnancy or believe now is not the time for you to parent a child, perhaps you are considering adoption and using one of these terms to search for information.

We generally use the term “place a baby” instead of “give up a baby” because we believe you are not giving up, you are making a plan. But we believe you should use the terms you are comfortable with, just like you should make the type of adoption plan you are comfortable with, if adoption is what is right for you and your baby. No one can make that decision for you, but we can help you make an adoption plan whether you just found out you’re pregnant or just gave birth.



# Choosing A Family

## **MAY I SELECT THE FAMILY TO ADOPT MY CHILD?**

Yes. In private adoption you may discuss your individual desires for an adoptive family with us and we will present families who meet the qualities and characteristics you're looking for. These desires may include religious preference, race, age, the existence of children already in the family or other factors which you believe are important in your selection of a family. We will provide you with family profiles to help you make the decision that's right for you and your child. You may also have your individual questions regarding a particular family answered and, in most cases, you may speak with or meet with the families as you desire, so that you may feel assured this is the right family for you and your child.

Please discuss your desires with Marilu or Madonna.

## **HOW WILL I KNOW AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY WILL TAKE GOOD CARE OF MY CHILD?**

Because you may choose them, meet them and get to know them, you may feel assured of a family's love for your child. Prospective Adoptive parents must also complete an extensive screening process before they are approved to adopt. This process includes visits to their home, interviews, providing references, criminal background investigations, assurances of financial ability to care for a child, the review of medical and financial information, and counseling and education to prepare them for adoption. All adoptive parents must be approved by the court in which they adopt and by our firm. You may also have the opportunity to select the family, speak with them, ask them questions and meet in person, so that you may feel assured of your decision.

# Birth Mother Benefits

## **WHAT TYPE OF HELP IS AVAILABLE?**

Florida law permits the adoptive family to assist you with needed living and medical expenses, including:

- + Housing
- + Utilities
- + Groceries
- + Toiletries
- + Clothing
- + Transportation
- + Mobile phone and service
- + Medical care and medication
- + Counseling

## **DO I HAVE TO PAY LEGAL FEES OR EXPENSES TO PUT UP MY CHILD FOR ADOPTION?**

No. Our services to place a child are without charge to birth parents.

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## *Process/Adoption Plan*

### **DO I HAVE TO PROVIDE PERSONAL INFORMATION TO THE ADOPTION ATTORNEY?**

It's important that birth parents provide full medical history concerning themselves and their family as is reasonably possible. This information will help medical professionals caring for your child as he or she grows up and will also help us find the right family for your child. Other, non medical information, is also helpful for adoptive families to have as your child grows up. We will respect your privacy, but asking for medical and social history is required by law and will help your child later in life.

#### **DOES MY FAMILY HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT THE ADOPTION?**

No. Generally the only people that must know about a decision to place a child for adoption are the birth mother's legal husband, and if there is no such person, any father who has registered with Florida's Putative Father Registry or who has initiated legal proceedings to be declared the father or to establish custody or visitation. Any identified birth father must be provided a Notice of Intended Adoption Plan, a legal notice of the adoption.

#### **WHAT IF I AM UNDER THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN?**

A birth parent under the age of eighteen has the power to consent to the adoption of their child without their parents' consent or knowledge. It's not required that your parents or family members be contacted. However, if you are under 14, your consent must be witnessed by a parent, guardian or a court appointed guardian ad litem. We will be happy to work with you to share the information with your parents if you are afraid or unsure what to do, but we will also respect your privacy. Please call us at 888-883-6830 to discuss your concerns.

#### **DO I HAVE TO GO TO COURT?**

In most cases, no. Only in very limited instances would your presence in court be requested.

#### **WHAT IF MY CHILD ISN'T A NEWBORN? IS IT TOO LATE TO PUT UP MY BABY FOR ADOPTION?**

No, it isn't too late. Not only newborns are placed for adoption. Sometimes women don't think about adoption until after they've given birth. It may take time to realize you can't provide everything your child needs or that you aren't ready to parent. You might be wondering if it's too late to give up your baby for adoption. No, it isn't. There are many loving, caring families looking to adopt toddlers and young children. If you just gave birth, just came home from the hospital or have a baby, a toddler or young child you are considering placing for adoption, please call us at 888-883-6830.

#### **DO I HAVE TO LIVE IN FLORIDA TO WORK WITH YOU?**

No, you do not. We will work with other adoption professionals in your state to meet your needs. You may also relocate to Florida if you choose.

#### **WHERE IN FLORIDA DO YOU WORK?**

We work with birth families all over Florida looking to give up their baby for adoption and we have social workers who are in your area or can travel to you, wherever you are. We work with birth mothers from Pensacola, Milton, Ft. Walton Beach and Crestview, to DeFuniak Springs, Chipley, Marianna, Blountstown, Wewahitchka, Hosford, Lynnhaven and Panama City, to Pt. St. Joe, Apalachicola, Eastpoint, Sumatra and Carrabelle, to Crawfordville, Tallahassee, Madison, Perry, to Cross City, Chiefland, Williston, Gainesville, Belleview, Dunellon and Ocala, from Orlando to Miami to Key West and in between.

#### **WHAT IF I HAVE A CHILD IN THE CUSTODY OF THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? MAY THEY ALSO BE PLACED FOR ADOPTION?**

If your child has been removed from your care by DCF, they should notify you of your right to make a private adoption plan prior to the time parental rights are terminated. Perhaps you know you aren't able to parent right now, that you aren't able to comply with your case plan, but you don't want your child to remain in foster care or you don't want DCF to handle the adoption of your child. You can make a private adoption plan, you can participate in the selection of the family to adopt your child and know that your child will be in a loving permanent home, and not in foster care. If you have a child removed from your care and you're interested in learning more about private placement, call us now at 888-883-6830.

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# *What Happens at the Hospital*

## **MAY I SEE THE BABY AFTER BIRTH?**

Yes. You decide how much contact you would like to have with your baby and if you would like anyone else to see the baby prior to the adoption. You are the person to decide how much contact you would like the adoptive family to have. We will help you make a plan for the hospital that meets your individual needs.

## **WHEN WOULD I SIGN THE PAPERS FOR ADOPTION?**

After the birth of your child, typically before release from the hospital and after 48 hours have passed from birth, legal papers can be signed. In some circumstances the paperwork may be signed earlier than 48 hours after birth, but only after you receive a medical discharge from the hospital. Fathers may sign the consent for adoption at any time after birth or Affidavits of Non Paternity at any time.



**AFTER I SIGN THE PAPERS MAY I CHANGE MY MIND?**

Generally, no. In Florida, once the consent for adoption of a baby is signed, the consent is binding and irrevocable unless obtained by fraud or duress. This is one reason to carefully consider your decision before birth.

**DOES MY BABY HAVE TO BE PLACED IN FOSTER CARE?**

No. In private placement adoption there is no requirement for foster care. We will arrange for placement of your child with the adoptive family directly upon discharge from the hospital. If you desire, in most cases, the adoptive family can be present at delivery and can have contact with you and your child immediately after birth and you can be present for the placement with the family, if you so choose. You can even be the person to hand your child to the adoptive family.

**MAY I RECEIVE PHOTOGRAPHS AND INFORMATION ABOUT MY CHILD AFTER THE ADOPTION?**

Yes. Many adoptive and birth families choose to share information about the child during some part of the child's life. Typically, adoptive parents will send photographs with short letters updating birth parents on the progress of the child for some period of time during the child's early years, if requested. Some families provide the information via a website, email, blog, telephone or text. Please speak with Marilu about your desires so that we can assist you with identifying a family to meet those needs.

**MAY MY CHILD FIND ME WHEN HE OR SHE GROWS UP?**

Yes, if you want them to. Florida has an Adoption Reunion Registry. You can register your information with the Registry and you may also provide the information directly to the adoptive family so they may share it with your child.

Information about Florida's Adoption Reunion Registry may be obtained by calling (800) 96-ADOPT. We will provide you with an Application Form if you would like.

**HOW SHOULD I EXPLAIN TO MY OTHER CHILDREN THAT THE BABY I AM PREGNANT WITH IS BEING PLACED FOR ADOPTION?**

We suggest being as truthful as possible while keeping your response age appropriate. We believe children are looking for simple answers and the reassurance that you, as their mother, are okay with this plan and that nothing in their world will change.

Some birth moms have chosen to tell their children that they are placing this baby with a family that cannot have children. It can also be helpful to involve the child in the adoption plan and perhaps giving him or her the chance to meet the adoptive family. Others have reassured their children by telling them that they will receive pictures and updates after the child is placed with the family. Allowing the child to send a special gift home with the child being placed for adoption can make them feel included in the process.

Also depending on the degree of openness in the adoption, some families agree to visits and other forms of communication like Skype and Face time. A mother knows her child best, so you will know what the best way will be to answer your child's questions about adoption.

**WILL MY CHILD UNDERSTAND WHY I PLACED HIM OR HER FOR ADOPTION?**

While no one can answer this question for you with certainty, today it's much more common for adoptive families to discuss with the child that they are adopted and the reasons they were placed for adoption. Adoption is no longer a secret.

Some birth parents write a letter to their child explaining their decision and reasons for choosing adoption, or they prepare a small memory book or similar keepsake for their child. Many adoptive parents choose to share this information by keeping it in a special place or including it in a life book or baby book. Information like this can often help a child understand the situation as they grow up.

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### **ARE YOU PREGNANT AND CONSIDERING ADOPTION?**

We are a small law firm of all women offering adoption services with care, concern and a personal touch. Madonna and Marilu have worked together over 19 years assisting women making adoption plans. Madonna is a Board Certified Adoption Lawyer and Marilu is the Adoption Coordinator. We are available to speak with you, free of charge, and provide information concerning placing a child for adoption. You may call us anytime, toll-free at (888) 883-6830 or at (850) 577-3077. Ask for Marilu or Madonna. Our telephones are answered 24 hours a day. After hours, our answering service will assist in connecting you with us. Please remain on the line.

We will give you information you need to make the decisions that are right for you and your child and to ensure your child is raised in a loving, safe and secure home. We can discuss ensuring you're provided quality medical care and counseling, and needed assistance with living expenses, transportation and clothing. If you don't have a telephone, we can provide you with a phone to communicate with us. We are available to assist in making the adoption plan that is right for you. For more information, please call (888) 883-6830 and speak with Marilu or Madonna.

### **WHY WORK WITH THE LAW OFFICE OF MADONNA FINNEY?**

Florida law requires an "Adoption Entity," an attorney or agency, is used to complete your adoption. We believe it is not the title "Attorney" or "Agency" that makes the difference in your adoption plan, but how

you are treated, who you are working with, and their expertise and qualifications. Ms. Finney was one of the first attorneys in Florida to become Board Certified, an expert, in Adoption Law. She understands the adoption laws and has placed hundreds of children for adoption. Our Adoption Coordinator, Marilu, has worked as a social worker for over 25 years and has helped hundreds of women make successful adoption plans. We work together with experienced, knowledgeable social workers to provide a full range of adoption services so that you may experience the best possible outcome.

We can help you explore adoption as an option, answering your questions and providing you information to assist in formulating the plan that is right for you and your baby.

We generally have fewer restrictions for adoptive parents than some agencies, giving you a larger selection of prospective adoptive families. However, just like agencies, our adoptive families must have the same type of homestudy and be thoroughly investigated and screened. We don't pick the family to adopt your child. We believe YOU are the person best suited to select the right adoptive family for your child.

We understand that your pregnancy may not be what you had planned at this time. You do have options and one loving option to consider is adoption. Adoption is a selfless act of love, which may place the needs of your baby above your own. You are not alone, you may call us any time at (888) 883-6830 to discuss the options and birth mother benefits available.

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Offices in Tallahassee, Franklin County and Pensacola.

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