Guide to Newborn Adoption

The information in this packet explains the process of newborn adoption. It includes general information, as well as specifics about the Family Focus’s newborn adoption program, called the Direct Placement Program (DPP). If you have any questions that are not answered here, you can email them to Cristina (ffascristina@gmail.com) or Sandra (ffassandy@aol.com). If you would like to apply for a homestudy, call our offices at 718-224-1919.

Newborn Adoption Timeline

There are eight distinct periods of time involved in the placement of a newborn for adoption. Below is the list of these time periods, followed by FAQs for each.

1. Homestudy
2. Searching
3. Matching
4. Placement
5. Supervision
6. Adoption Covenants (Family Focus only)
7. Finalization
8. Beyond Finalization

FAQs

1. Homestudy:

What is a Homestudy? The Homestudy is a report that is written to describe an adoption applicant family. It contains both concrete information and subjective descriptions and assessments of a family’s motivation and readiness to adopt. The information is gathered by a combination of application paperwork and face-to-face interviews by a caseworker, and includes the following:

a. General information about applicant(s), such as physical description, age, marital status, school history, family, hobbies, etc.
b. A description and assessment of the applicant(s) home, neighborhood, and nearby resources such as schools, hospitals, recreation, etc.
c. Fingerprint clearance through NY or New Jersey State and the FBI. There are several criminal “hits” that are automatic disqualifiers; other items may require a worker to write a “safety assessment” in order to approve you for adoption.
d. NY State Central Register Database or NJ CARI clearance. These databases contain a history of anyone who has been accused and indicated for child abuse.
e. Health Examinations. An applicant must have a physical completed, and have a positive recommendation from their physician regarding the applicant being physically and mentally able to care for a child.
f. Financial disclosure, listing all income and assets, and financial liabilities (bills, debt).
g. Backup resource, who will step in should you lose the ability to care for your child.
h. Discussions about adoption: motivation, parenting style, experience with children, etc.
Why do I need a Homestudy? A Homestudy is required for any adoption. An agency or attorney must review your Homestudy before they can consider placing a child with you, and a version is given to the court when you are finalizing an adoption to show a judge that you have been qualified to adopt, through paperwork, interviews and clearances.

How long does a Homestudy take? New York State requires that a Homestudy be completed within four months of application, depending on the family’s timely submission of paperwork. Other agencies or private social workers would have to quote you how long their process takes. Family Focus updates Homestudies every year; other agencies may do updates less frequently.

Can I tell you how I want my Homestudy written? At Family Focus, your Homestudy is written following a tried-and-true template created by our agency. It is comprehensive and complete, so you will not have the opportunity to dictate how it is written. However, it includes much of your personal input through your answers to written and interview questions. You will have the opportunity to review your Homestudy for changes or corrections before it is finalized. Other agencies or social workers may have different standards and procedures.

What is the fee for a Homestudy? Family Focus charges a fee of $2,035* ($1,875 plus $160 non-refundable application fee). After that, you may update your study each year at the year’s current update fee. Updates require your caseworker to visit your home each time. Included in this fee, you also may have a profile on our website for as long as your Homestudy is active, and you are placed on our waiting list for matching, should a birthmother contact us. Other agencies and private social workers charge different fees, so you would have to inquire of them directly. (*2018 fees, subject to change.)

Who gets to see my Homestudy? Your Homestudy is written by your caseworker, and then reviewed by the Caseworker Supervisor and the Associate Director of the agency before being sent to you for your review. It is then kept confidentially in our offices. You may share your Homestudy with whomever you wish once it is completed, such as adoption attorneys or other agencies. Family Focus provides you with several notarized originals, plus an electronic version. If we handle the finalization of your adoption, a version will also be sent to the court. It is NOT shown to birthfamilies of newborns, or other families.

Is my Homestudy good at other agencies? It depends. Some agencies will accept a Homestudy written by another agency or a social worker, and allow you to be part of their adoption program. Some will require that they write your Homestudy themselves, and still others may accept your Homestudy, but require that you do some paperwork and have at least one caseworker visit so that they can write their own addendum.

2. Searching:

How do I search for a baby? In actuality you are usually searching for a birthfamily or a birthmother who is pregnant, and is considering adoption as a plan for her baby. These days, the internet has changed the way matches are made, and it is likely that it is the birthmother doing the searching for a family to adopt her baby. There are various websites, including our own, where families may list their profiles in the hopes of being seen and selected by a birthmother. Families may also choose to have their own websites, attend adoption support groups, and advertise in print… one family recently posted their desire to adopt on a billboard! Family Focus gives our families an action plan of things they can try in order to make themselves more visible to birthmothers.
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There are many agencies nationwide and in New York that specialize in newborn adoption, as well as private adoption attorneys. Some agencies and adoption attorneys have connections where they are more likely to have access to birthmothers or newborns. Their methods and success records are something that you would have to inquire about yourself. We always urge families to do plenty of investigation before deciding what is best for them.

Do birthmothers come to agencies to place their babies for adoption? As stated above, birthmothers are now searching online for adoptive families, and they have an incredible array of choices among family profile sites and adoption agencies. From time to time a birthmother may contact an adoption agency like ours, either by referral or by finding us in the phone listings or online, but such instances have become less and less frequent. In recent years Family Focus has had a decreasing number of birthmother calls, and seen an average of about one placement per year this way. When a birthmother does come to us to make an adoption plan, we offer her the choice of our approved families to consider for placement of her baby.

What about babies who are already born? If a baby is born in a hospital, and the birthmother then decides that she can’t or does not want to keep her baby, a hospital social worker should inform her of her options, which may include foster care or adoption. If the birthmother chooses adoption, then the social worker should have a list of agencies to give to her. Family Focus has reached out to many hospitals in New York to get placed on those lists. If a decision is not made, and/or the birthmother leaves the hospital without the baby, that baby will usually go directly into foster care. Once a newborn is in foster care, that baby becomes part of the social services system and can’t be directly placed for adoption by an agency.

What about foundlings and orphans? If a newborn is found and the birthparents can’t be identified, that baby goes into foster care. The same is true if a newborn is orphaned and no appropriate family members can be located to care for the baby.

How long does it take to find a baby? There is no good way of giving an estimate as to how long it will take to make a match. Some factors that go into the length of time are:

a. How open a family is with regard to race. Most newborns that our agency has placed are African-American, Latino, or mixed-race. Sometimes, the race of the birthmother is known, and that of the birthfather is not. The more open a family is in this regard, the more likely a match can be made.

b. How open a family is regarding prenatal care, and the possibility of in-utero drug or alcohol exposure. Because we can’t monitor a birthmother’s actions with certainty, families who want guarantees regarding prenatal care and drug exposure may not be able to find a match easily.

c. How much effort a family puts into making their desire to adopt public. Families who talk about adopting, post profiles, go to networking meetings, etc. may make it easier to be seen, and possibly chosen, by searching birthmothers. Families who wish to keep their desire to adopt a secret may be limiting their chances of finding a match.

d. Luck. Sometimes, being at the right agency at the right time, with a completed and approved Homestudy, ready to pay any placement fees, ready to say yes when that call comes... may result in a placement. Agencies never know when a birthmother is going to call. It’s important to be ready!

Can I post my profile on your website or be on your list of waiting families if you don’t do my Homestudy? Family Focus does not offer a matching service. Only families for whom we have written a Homestudy may be on our website profiles page and list of approved waiting families. It is included in the fee, and a family may keep their profile on our website for as long as their Homestudy is active or renewed with us.
3. **Matching:**

*What does it mean to be “matched” with a baby/birthfamily?*  Some families have certain preferences about what they will and will not accept in considering a baby for adoption. Since it is hard to know anything for sure about the yet-to-be-born baby, these preferences are usually based on the known birthparents, and may be about the issues of:

- Race
- Religion
- Possibility of in-utero exposure to drugs or alcohol
- Level of prenatal care
- Whether the birthfather is identified or known
- Requirement to honor child’s birth religion

A birthmother may want to know only that the agency or attorney that she is entrusting with her adoption plan has located a family that they, in turn, trust; or sometimes a birthfamily may also have certain criteria they want met with regard to the family whom they wish to adopt their baby. Some examples of issues a birthfamily may have are preferences about:

- Race
- Religion
- Single vs. couple
- Single woman vs. single man
- Straight vs. gay
- Financial status
- Existing children or experience with children

When there are preferences on one or both sides, these must be considered when determining if a particular family is a good match for a particular baby, and every attempt should be made to meet as many as possible. Ultimately, the birthmother has the final say, except in those rare occasions when she leaves the decision entirely to the agency.

*What is a conditional surrender?*  In the case where a birthfamily is voluntarily signing surrenders (see Placement section), they are permitted to ask for certain conditions which must be honored by the adopting family, such as annual photographs, exchange of letters, etc. If there are conditions on the surrender(s), the adopting family must agree to honor them, or they will not be considered a match for this particular baby.

*How am I presented to birthparents?*  At Family Focus, a birthfamily is given “Dear Birthmother” letters from our approved and waiting family list that meet their criteria. These letters are an opportunity for families to express to a birthmother why they wish to adopt her baby. The letters are usually accompanied by one family photo or a simple collage of photos. We ask birthmothers to choose three, and place them in order of preference. Some birthparents may wish to meet an adopting family, and others may not. Other agencies may have different methods of presenting families, so be sure to ask.

*What is “open adoption”?*  This phrase refers to an adoption where any previously agreed upon level of communication between a birthparent and adopting family takes place. It could mean as little as occasional conversations by phone or text between the parties, or as much as a birthmother remaining in close contact, and even visiting the child. Again, this is an agreement made before placement, so it is part of determining if a family and a baby are a possible match. An agency must honor the birthparents’ wishes regarding how open an adoption will be.
4. Placement:

**How does a baby become “adoptable?”** Whether newborn or older, any child may be adopted after one of two things has happened:

a. **A birthfamily surrenders the child:** This means that the birthparents voluntarily sign papers that state they are giving up their legal claim to a child, and any rights that go with that claim. This makes the child legally an orphan, and therefore “freed” to be adopted. The surrenders can be done in court in front of a judge (judicial surrender), in which case they are immediately permanent; or privately (extrajudicial), in which case the birthparent has thirty days to change his or her mind. In an agency adoption, the baby is surrendered to the agency, which becomes responsible for monitoring the baby’s progress and health, and the success of the placement until finalization. Family Focus makes every attempt to use extrajudicial surrenders. Having a baby is a monumental event, and after surrendering their rights, sometimes birthparents have second thoughts or completely change their minds. Family Focus believes that it is in everyone's best interest that birthparents have the ability to consider their decision carefully during the time allowed by New York State law. Family Focus also always has an independent attorney at the surrender, counseling and representing the birthparent(s).

b. **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR):** This is when a judge has determined that a child will not stay with or return to a birthparent – permanently – and that the birthparent’s rights are to be ended. If both birthparents’ rights have been terminated, the child goes into foster care, and adoption can only happen by a family first becoming foster parents.

c. Sometimes a birthmother will sign a surrender, but a birthfather either is not named, denies paternity, or does not respond to attempts to contact or include him. In this case, as part of the adoption proceedings, any birthfather rights may be terminated by a judge on the grounds of abandonment.

**What are the fees for the actual placement?** There are several possibilities for how you are required to pay fees for adoption:

- a. At Family Focus, the fee for the Homestudy will already have been paid before you can be considered for matching. The second fee is for the actual placement, and covers the following services as needed: counseling birthparents (retroactive), preparing and taking the surrender(s), monthly supervision of the placement until finalization, the Adoption Covenant ceremony, and finalization paperwork preparation (some services are described in the next sections). The total of the placement fees is as much as $18-19,000 or more, which will be discussed with you if the possibility for a placement occurs, and an accounting of all fees you pay are reported to the court.

- b. Some agencies ask for all of their fees up front, and keep any fees related to placement in escrow until they are needed.

- c. You may have purchased your Homestudy from one agency or a private social worker, but may be matched and/or have your supervision and finalization handled by another agency or an adoption attorney. This means you will have to figure out your total fees, and to whom they are paid.

- d. If you are matched with a birthmother in another state, the counseling and surrender are done by an agency providing services to her, so the placement fees are divided between your agency and the birthmother’s agency.

**Are there any other fees or costs?** In addition to fees for your actual Homestudy and placement, there are a few additional fees and costs you must prepare for once a placement is planned:

- a. Birthmothers are entitled to a certain amount of support, if needed, including but not limited to some rent, medical bills and medication, food, car service, translation services, etc. These are usually discussed ahead of time so a family knows what may be necessary. At Family Focus, these expenses are paid by the adopting family through the agency, and are non-refundable. Estimates range from $1,000-6,000 or more.
b. The adopting family pays the birthparent(s) attorney’s fees for the surrender (estimated at $1,000-2,000). Family Focus also acts as the pass-through for these fees.

c. The adopting family must hire their own attorney to represent them at the finalization; the fee depends on your own choice of attorney, and is paid directly to the attorney.

d. If the birthmother lives in another state, the family must travel to where the birthmother is for placement, and will have to stay in that state until they are permitted to return home with the baby. The cost of this depends on your choice of accommodations, food, etc. and required length of stay.

e. If the placement occurs in another state, additional paperwork is required for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), which must approve moving a child across state lines. There may be additional fees for this paperwork – Family Focus currently charges $1,250.

**How does the actual placement happen?** Newborn adoption placement can happen in one of two ways:

a. Some birthmothers wish to be part of the placement of their baby with the adopting family. They may even hand the baby to the family, and perhaps pose for photos. This may happen in the hospital, or at an agency office.

b. Some birthmothers do not want to be part of the placement. They will leave the hospital upon discharge without the baby, and a representative from an agency will pick up the baby from the hospital and do the placement in their office or another appropriate location.

**Can the birthfamily change their mind(s)?** In New York, a birthparent has thirty days to revoke a surrender in an agency adoption, or forty-five days in a private non-agency adoption. If there are no extenuating circumstances, the law says that a baby goes back to the birthparent(s). Sometimes the birthfamily and adopting family are willing and able to come up with a mutually agreeable arrangement, such as a more open adoption. If the agency or attorney feels that it would not be in the baby’s best interest to go back to the birthfamily, and some other agreement is not reached, a court hearing may be needed to determine what the baby’s best interest is. At Family Focus, if a placement falls through, all unused portions of the placement fee are refunded to the adopting family. In other states, the laws about waiting time after a surrender differ. We recommend that no big announcements, parties, home renovations, etc. occur based on the placement until after the thirty or forty-five days have passed.

**Who provides medical coverage for the baby until finalization and beyond?** At Family Focus, you are given a letter that you will need in order to put the baby on your medical insurance, which also gives you permission to consent to medical care for the baby. After finalization, your baby’s insurance coverage will continue to be your responsibility. If you adopt through an agency, they can also help you to apply for adoption subsidy if there are any special medical needs that come up. Other agencies and attorneys may have a different way to handle this, so you should check with them well in advance of any placement.

5. **Supervision:**

**What is supervision, and how often does it occur?** Between placement and finalization, an agency representative or social worker must meet with you face-to-face to make sure that the baby is safe and healthy, and that you are parenting appropriately and successfully. They will also begin reviewing paperwork that will be required for finalization. At Family Focus, we usually visit within a few days of placement, and then monthly. The supervising individual writes reports that go into the adopting family’s file and are part of the finalization paperwork that go to court.

**After thirty days, is the baby mine?** The baby is not legally yours until finalization in court. Until that time, custody of the child legally belongs to whoever took the surrender. Make sure you are clear on your agency or attorney’s policy regarding any medical decisions, and clearance to travel with the baby.
6. **Adoption Covenants:**

*What are Family Focus Adoption Covenants?* Family Focus believes that adoption does not occur at the banging of the judge’s gavel – that is finalization. Adoption is that discrete moment in time when a family claims a child as their own. This is why this agency has created a ceremony in which an adopting family signs Adoption Covenants affirming that they are making a child theirs in their hearts, in their heads, and in their lives as if the child were born to them. The adopting parent or parents sign individual Adoption Covenants, after which a representative signs an Adoption Covenant on behalf of the baby which states that they are acknowledging the promises of the family, and accepting them as the baby’s forever family. This ceremony is scheduled only after the thirty-day waiting period has passed, and family and friends are welcome to attend.

*Are Covenants legally binding?* The Family Focus Covenants have no legal standing. They are acknowledgement of the adoption decision that a family has made, and are what the agency considers to be the true adoption. Signed original Adoption Covenants are included in the finalization packet that is sent to the court, however, and many attorneys and judges have commented on how meaningful and powerful they are.

7. **Finalization:**

*What is finalization?* Finalization of an adoption is when a judge declares that a child now belongs to his or her new parent(s) legally, as if born to them. The finalization is recognized universally.

*When can we finalize our adoption?* In New York, a baby must live in the home with a family for three months in an agency adoption or forty-five days in a non-agency adoption, before finalization paperwork can be filed with the court through an attorney.

*Where do we finalize our adoption?* The finalization usually takes place in the Family or Surrogate’s court in the family’s own county. A change of venue can be filed for by an attorney if there is a reason.

*Where do I get an attorney?* The adoption attorney is entirely your choice. Family Focus has a list of some attorneys with whom we have worked in the past, but we can’t make any recommendations. You can find adoption attorneys in phone directories, or by web search at such websites as The American Academy of Adoption Attorneys.

*What must I do to prepare for finalization?* You must hire an attorney, if you are not already working with one, to file adoption paperwork in the court, which is called an adoption “petition.” Your agency and/or attorney will let you know what paperwork you must complete or update. Your Homestudy is redone as an up-to-date “Affidavit of Investigation,” and your health exams and criminal/child abuse clearances may have to be updated (if you have an agency, they should assist you with this). The court also requires some original “raised seal” documents, such as your birth certificate(s) and marriage certificate if applicable.

Once the attorney has submitted all necessary paperwork, the court schedules the finalization date.
8. **Beyond finalization:**

*What happens after finalization?*  After you have finalized your baby’s adoption, the baby is yours in the eyes of the law. You obtain all rights and responsibilities for the baby as if he or she was born to your family. This is a good time to make or update a will, get a social security number, and name a guardian for the baby.

*Do I have to stay in contact with my adoption agency or attorney?*  You are not required to stay in contact with anyone related to your adoption, as their job is done upon finalization (with the exception of surrender conditions). However, most agencies, Family Focus included, remain available to adoptive families for post-adoption support services.

*What help might I need from an agency?*  When a child is adopted through an agency, the family is entitled to apply for adoption subsidy assistance through that agency should any unforeseen birth-related or genetic medical needs develop. If an adoption is handled by an attorney, subsidy is not an option, and all unforeseen expenses are up to the family through their own resources, insurance, etc.

*Does my agency or attorney help manage things between me and the birthfamily?*  Family Focus offers to act as a “buffer” between an adoptive family and a birthfamily in the case where photos, letters and/or medical information are to be exchanged without revealing either’s identity, by stripping off identifying information and forwarding items in our own envelopes. You would have to ask any other agency or attorney if they are willing and able to provide this service. You may not need this service if you and the birthfamily obtain dedicated email addresses for this exchange.

*What about the birth certificate?*  At or after the finalization, you should be given an Order of Adoption and other paperwork that shows that the child’s last name has been changed to your last name. At the finalization your attorney gives the Adoption Clerk a form requesting a new birth certificate. The court sends that request to the place where the baby’s original birth certificate was produced, and you will eventually receive an amended birth certificate with your name(s) as parent(s). This can take months, and you can check with your attorney to see what the progress is.

*Do I have to tell my child that he/she is adopted?*  Every agency is different. However, Family Focus will not approve a family unless they agree that they will inform their child/ren that they are adopted once they are verbal (between 3-4 years of age). During the Covenant ceremony, Family Focus presents the family with a letter, written directly to the child by an agency representative, to be given to that child when appropriate. It contains many details about how their adoption occurred, including physical descriptions of the birthparents if known, the reason they expressed for placing the baby for adoption, and even the weather on the day of placement. It acknowledges the mixed feelings this knowledge might bring up, but reassures the child that the adoptive family is THEIR TRUE FOREVER FAMILY.
Attachments

Included in this information packet, you will find the following documents specific to Family Focus Adoption Services:

1. **Birthmother Brochure**: This is our latest brochure that we give to birthmothers who are considering adoption. We also give these to hospitals and clinics to distribute to pregnant women who may use their facilities for services. They are available in English, Spanish and Chinese.

2. **Why Family Focus?** This fact sheet is given to hospitals and clinics so that they will consider our services when discussing options with an expectant mother.

3. **Sample of Covenants**

4. **Sample of adoption letter to a child**

5. **Sample of Dear Birthmother letter**

6. **Action Plan**: A list of Family Focus’s suggestions about ways that you can make your adoption wishes known, and make yourself more visible to birthmothers or others who can help you find a baby.

If you have any additional questions, you can email Cristina (ffascristina@gmail.com) or Sandra (ffassandy@aol.com).

If you are ready to apply for a newborn adoption Homestudy, call our offices at 718-224-1919.

Please also visit our website at www.familyfocusadoption.com to learn more about our agency.
Why should I contact an agency for help if I am considering adoption, and when should I call for information?

At any time during her pregnancy an expectant mother or a new parent, just thinking about the possibility of adoption for her baby or young child, deserves to get good, accurate information to help her (and other involved family members) make the choice that is right for her situation. A Family Focus adoption specialist is able to meet with you in our office or at another location of your choice to explain the adoption process, and to answer any other questions that you may have. Feel free to bring other involved family members or friends.

Does it take a long time to find a family and make a placement?

No. Family Focus always has good families that are already approved and on a waiting list. We can find a permanent adoptive family for your baby very quickly.

Can I name my baby?

Yes. As the birth parent, you have the right to give your baby a name, using the paper that the hospital gives you. You must fill out that paper before you sign a surrender, because the name that you give the baby must match the name on the surrender papers that you sign. If you choose not to name the baby, your surrender papers will call the baby “Baby Girl” or “Baby Boy,” with your last name, and the adopting family will then choose a first name for the baby.

Can I send along a special present from me?

Yes. In addition we urge you to write a letter to your baby, for the adoptive family to give to him or her later on.
How Do I Know That My Baby Will Be Safe?

The families approved by our adoption agency are cleared for criminal and child abuse history, and have to submit their medicals, references, and tax papers, to show that they are qualified to adopt, and that your baby will be in a good home. It takes four months for our agency to complete a study of a family. Every family who wants to adopt has to take classes on adoption and on how to be good adoptive parents.

Will the adopting family tell my baby about me?

Yes. We have books for the adopting family to help them tell the baby about you later on. We don’t use your last name, and we never give your address or phone number, but we do talk to the adoptive family about your health, and your background. That information is used by the adopting family later on to answer your child’s questions.

Do I have choices about a family for my baby?

Yes. We can give you information, in writing, about more than one family. You can also view our waiting families and their profiles on our website to help you choose. All of our families also write a “Dear Birthmother” letter and provide pictures.

For a private consultation by phone or in-person call:
(917) 941-8640

Confidential emails may be sent to:
ffas@familyfocusadoption.org

*Family Focus has Spanish speaking staff.*
(and can provide interpreters for many other languages)
Why Family Focus?

• **COUNSELING WITHOUT PRESSURE**
  We encourage birth mothers/families to make their own informed decisions.

• **WE PROVIDE BIRTH MOTHER/FAMILY COUNSELING**
  We will meet with the birth mother in the hospital if she so desires.

• **NO INTERIM PLACEMENT**
  Babies are placed directly with our families, so bonding may begin.

• **PERSONAL SERVICE TO BIRTH MOTHER/FAMILY**
  We recognize and address the unique needs of each birth mother/family.

• **PERSONAL SERVICE TO ADOPTIVE FAMILIES**
  Families are supported from placement through finalization.

• **LETTER TO THE BABY**
  A personal letter is written to each baby describing their birth mother/family, as well as the circumstances of their birth and placement.

• **ADOPTION COVENANTS**
  Families sign Adoption Covenants written by Family Focus at a special ceremony.

• **CONTINUED CONTACT AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE**
  We will provide confidential exchange of pictures and letters if desired. We are here to support adoptive and birth families after finalization if needed.

• **24/7 AVAILABILITY FOR BIRTH MOTHERS**

Family Focus Adoption Services
(866) 855-1919
www.familyfocusadoption.org
ADPTION COVENANT  
December 1, 2013

Just two months ago, Family Focus Adoption Services offered to my wife Laura and myself the opportunity to become the parents of the baby whom we have named Myles. We were told at that time that although Myles could be placed with us immediately, the law would not allow us to adopt him until at least thirty days had gone by. Those thirty days are now safely over.

Therefore, this afternoon, I witness and make public to the agency, to my family, and specifically to Laura, that I have made a decision to become Myles's father. This decision of mine, made visible and tangible by my signing this document this afternoon, is a permanent, unconditional, and irrevocable decision. It is a covenant that I make with Myles, independent of any other relationships that I have, and specifically independent of Laura's decision about becoming Myles's mother. I am making Myles my son in my life, in my head, and in my heart, in exactly the same way that Jake is my son, and as though each were born to me. I will respond to Myles, respect him, and love him, as his father forever.

Because my relationship with Myles is forever, I can, and do, promise that I will never allow anyone, including myself or Myles, to interfere with my commitment to Myles's good. I recognize that Myles will eventually, and quite appropriately, have a curiosity about his birth family. I promise to respond to his future questions as honestly and as fully as I am able. Further, I promise to abide by the agreements that our family has made with Myles's birth family about future contacts.

My signature on this paper, in front of Myles and all of these Witnesses, is my vow of all that I have promised here. And finally, I wish to say that I am proud to become - this afternoon - Myles's father. In shared celebration, I ask Laura to be my witness.

______________________________
Chris Smith

Witnessed by:

______________________________
Laura Smith
ADOPITION COVENANT
December 1, 2013

Just two months ago, Family Focus Adoption Services offered to my husband Chris and myself the opportunity to become the parents of the baby whom we have named Myles. We were told at that time that although Myles could be placed with us immediately, the law would not allow us to adopt him until at least thirty days had gone by. Those thirty days are now safely over.

Therefore, this afternoon, I witness and make public to the agency, to my family, and specifically to Chris, that I have made a decision to become Myles's mother. This decision of mine, made visible and tangible by my signing this document this afternoon, is a permanent, unconditional, and irrevocable decision. It is a covenant that I make with Myles, independent of any other relationships that I have, and specifically independent of Chris's decision about becoming Myles's father. I am making Myles my son in my life, in my head, and in my heart, in exactly the same way that Jake is my son, and as though each were born to me. I will respond to Myles, respect him, and love him, as his mother forever.

Because my relationship with Myles is forever, I can, and do, promise that I will never allow anyone, including myself or Myles, to interfere with my commitment to Myles's good. I recognize that Myles will eventually, and quite appropriately, have a curiosity about his birth family. I promise to respond to his future questions as honestly and as fully as I am able. Further, I promise to abide by the agreements that our family has made with Myles's birth family about future contacts.

My signature on this paper, in front of Myles and all of these Witnesses, is my vow of all that I have promised here. And finally, I wish to say that I am proud to become - this afternoon - Myles's mother. In shared celebration, I ask Chris to be my witness.

________________________
Laura Smith

Witnessed by:

________________________
Chris Smith
ADOPTION COVENANT
December 1, 2013

I, Lisa Binder, represent the administrators of Family Focus Adoption Services this afternoon. Myles is a baby entrusted by our agency to the care of Laura and Chris Smith just about two months ago. The mandated thirty day waiting period is now long over, and we have made the final decision to allow baby Myles to be adopted by Laura and Chris today. We have investigated the ability of this family to parent, and the motivation behind their decision to adopt, and have given this adoptive placement significant administrative time and careful thought.

We proceed this afternoon because we believe that Laura and Chris Smith are the right family for Myles. We believe Laura and Chris's individual and separate promises to always respect Myles, to always love him, and to always respond to him as their son. We trust each of their guarantees to be Myles’s parents forevermore. We have confidence in each of them when they say that Myles will be to them as Jake is, and as a birth child would be. We trust their promises to always respond as fully and as honestly as they are able to any questions Myles may eventually have about his birth family, and to abide by the agreements made with Myles's birth family about future contact.

Given this belief, given this confidence, and given this trust, we have no doubt that Myles will be kept forevermore safe and protected as a full and valued member of the Smith family.

Therefore, as of this moment, Laura is to be referred to always and everywhere as Myles's mother, and Chris is to be referred to always and everywhere as Myles’s father. Today, Myles will officially take on Smith as his new last name. Henceforth, he is to be known as Myles Joseph Smith.

With my signature, witnessed below, this adoption becomes official, to be finalized in court as speedily as possible.

Family Focus Administrator

Witnessed by:

___________________________
Catherine Holmes
GRANDPARENTS’ AFFIRMATION
December 1, 2013

We, Joan Smith, Joseph Jones and Tina Jones, proudly watched Laura and Chris as they adopted Myles this afternoon. We are happy for all three of them, and we are honored to have been invited to this ceremony.

We understand the importance and the significance of the Covenants that have just been signed here. We also recognize that as an immediate result of these Covenants we are now permanently and irrevocably grandparents to Myles.

Signing this Affirmation is not what makes us Myles's grandparents. It was the Covenants that did that. However, signing this Affirmation is what gives witness to Myles, to the rest of our family, to all of our friends, and to the whole world for that matter, that we embrace this wonderful and forevermore truth: that Myles is now our grandson.

As his grandparents, and we trust on behalf of all of the relatives on both sides of the family, we are delighted and honored to officially and publicly welcome into the family Myles Joseph Smith.

Affirmed by:

________________________
Joan Smith

________________________
Joseph Jones

________________________
Tina Jones

Witnessed by:

________________________
Family Focus Administrator
December 1, 2013

Dear Myles:

I am writing this letter to you because I am the person at Family Focus Adoption Services who was the most responsible for helping your parents adopt you, and I thought that you would like to know some details about how your adoption happened.

I first heard about you just one month before you were born, when the lawyer for your parents called to ask if our agency could help with an adoption of a baby that was to be born in Connecticut the next month (you!) and be adopted by a married couple in New York (your parents!). Your birth parents and your adoptive parents found each other on the internet. I said that my agency knew how to do an adoption between New York and New Jersey, and agreed to help. Your mother called me right afterward and I told her that in the month until you were born there was a lot to do.

Making sure that a family who wants to adopt is the right family to adopt a baby is a very serious matter. Your parents had already adopted one child, your brother Jake, and we did their reports, so they knew our agency. Our job was to make sure that they were still good adoptive parents. We went to their house, and they had to give us lots of paperwork about themselves. We had to check into their finances and their health. We had a special social worker write a new report about them, and everything was fine. They were ready for you.

The next step was waiting for you to be born, and then to do the paperwork so that you could be adopted. The day you were born, I got the telephone call about you from the social worker counselor at the agency in Connecticut that was helping your birth parents, and I spoke to your birth mother later that afternoon. I explained to her that I would be coming to her in Connecticut for her and your birth father to sign papers, and that I would also make sure that a Connecticut lawyer would come and talk with them, so that two of us would be explaining about adoption to them. It is really important that birth parents understand all about adoption before any papers are signed allowing a baby to go to a new family.
Meanwhile, your birth parents signed papers so that you were allowed to leave the hospital to go to your new parents for a day before the papers were signed.

On the day that you were three days old, I came to the Connecticut agency office and met with your birth parents and the lawyer that was helping them. After the lawyer talked to your birth parents, I talked to them again, the way that I already had done on the telephone before, about how serious adoption is. Both of your birth parents said that they really understood and were ready to sign the papers. We sat down together, and I first I asked them questions about themselves and their families, which is what adoption agencies do. Both of them filled out information papers, and I gave those papers to your parents later on, to learn about your birth family, and to show you when you are older.

Your birth mother was a thoughtful, nice-looking, twenty year old woman who was very serious about doing the right thing. Your birth father was a good-looking twenty-six year old man who was also very serious. While they signed the papers, both of their faces were sad, but they both told me that they were clear about what they wanted for you. They felt that they were not ready to raise a child, and wanted a family that would love you and be able to take care of you the way good parents do. Your birth parents very carefully read and signed all of the papers allowing you to be adopted.

After the papers were signed, your birth parents left together. I drove a few miles to the motel where you and your new parents and your new brother Jake were staying. I brought papers for your mom and dad to sign making your placement official. I saw you for the first time - and you were a beautiful and alert baby. Your new parents said that you were a very good baby from the first minute they held you, eating and sleeping just the way you were supposed to. After I left, you and your new family had to stay in Connecticut for a few more days while I did even more paperwork so that you could move to New York to your new house. Before I left, your new parents promised that they would take very good care of you. I made them promise to call the agency every few days, to tell us how you were doing as a new family. It is probably many years later when you are reading this letter, and I don't know how much you and your parents have talked about the day they met you and started to take care of you, but I'll bet they remember all about it.

As the person from the adoption agency who allowed you and your adoptive parents to be together as a forever family, I believed that I was not only doing what
your birth parents wanted, but also doing what was right for you. It was a very happy moment for your adoptive parents, to have you in their arms for the first time. At the same time, though, everyone involved in your adoption acknowledged your birth parents' pain as they arranged for you to move on to your new life --- making a very difficult decision to give you the best life they possibly could.

Your adoptive parents took you home for the thirty days required by law before the next step. During those thirty days your birth parents had the legal right to change their minds. Our agency had told them that they had that right, when they signed the surrender papers, but they stayed with their decision for you to be adopted. As a result, we allowed your adoptive parents to take the next step, which was signing your Adoption Covenants, making you their child forever and they have now been your parents for all of these years.

I am giving this letter to your adoptive parents while you are still a baby, for them to show you when you are old enough to understand about adoption. I felt sad as much as happy while I was writing it, and I wouldn't be surprised if you feel sad as well as happy reading it all these years later. I wish you and your family a happy life together, doing all the good things that families do. I am glad that I was a part of making you all a family!

Sincerely,

Lisa Binder
Assistant Director
December 1, 2013

Dear Michael:

I am writing this letter to you because I am the person at Family Focus Adoption Services who was most responsible for helping your parents adopt you, and I thought that you would like to know some details about how your adoption happened.

I first heard about you about two weeks before you were born, when your birth mother called the agency to ask if we could help with an adoption of a baby that was to be born the next month (you!). It was New Year's Eve, and she got our answering machine message with an emergency number to call. I was the person whose telephone number was on the answering machine for emergencies so I spoke with your birth mother that night. We had a long conversation and she asked me many questions about how adoption worked at our agency. In particular she wanted to know how we select families to be sure that they would be good adoptive parents. She also wanted to know if she could meet a family. I answered all of her questions, and agreed that if she wanted to go forward with our agency, we would introduce her to a family the following weekend. I had a particular family in mind, and said that I would call them to see if they were interested, and that I would call her again.

When I thought about a good family to adopt, I thought of your parents, who were already part of our agency and approved for adoption. I called them, and they were very interested in meeting your birth mother. Making sure that a family who wants to adopt is the right family to adopt a baby is a very serious matter for an adoption agency. Our job was to make sure that your parents were good people to be adoptive parents. In order to be approved for adoption, they had given us lots of paperwork about themselves. We had checked into their finances and their health. We had done a special social worker report about them, and everything was fine. They were ready for you, and the following weekend they did meet not only your birth mother, but your birth father too. Everyone seemed happy with everyone at that meeting. (I had a social worker named Deanne there too.)
The next step was waiting for you to be born, and then doing the paperwork so that you could be adopted. The day you were born, which was a Tuesday, I got the telephone call about you from your birth mother, and I spoke to your birth mother several times that day. She asked your parents to come to the hospital to see her, and meet her parents. They did visit on Wednesday, the day after you were born. My social worker, Deanne, went too. Everyone told me later that is was a very pleasant visit.

On Thursday, the day that you were two days old, I went to the hospital with all of the paperwork for your birth mother and birth father to sign so that you could be adopted. I also made arrangements for your birth mother and birth father to have a lawyer there too. The lawyer, Deanne, and I went to your birth mother's hospital room, and there was a social worker there from the hospital too. Your birth father waited downstairs, and he did his paperwork separately. Your birth mother had her parents there, your birth grandparents, plus a cousin and another social worker that was helping her, and you were there in a little plastic rolling hospital crib. It was a big room, but it was very crowded. You were a very cute baby, and you were held a lot. After the hospital social worker and the lawyer talked to your birth mother, I talked to her again, the way that I already had done before many times on the telephone, about how serious adoption is. Your birth mother said that she really understood and was ready to sign the papers. We sat down together, and first I asked her to fill out a form about herself and her family, which is what adoption agencies do. She filled out information papers for me, and I gave those papers to your parents later on, to learn about your birth family, and to show you when you are older.

Your birth mother was a thoughtful and attractive twenty-three year old woman who was very serious about doing the right thing. She was a small woman with long beautiful hair. Your birth father was a big part of her life, and he was a good-looking thoughtful young man. Together they had two other children, two-year-old twins, who were in foster care because they could not take care of them. While your birth mother signed the papers, her face was sad, but she told me that she was clear about what she wanted for you. She had tears in her eyes part of the time, but when I said that she could stop for a while, she said that she wanted to do this right thing for you. She explained that she was not able to care for a child right now, and she wanted a family that would love you and be able to take care of you the way good parents do. Your birth mother very carefully read and signed all of the papers allowing you to be adopted. The lawyer who was there for her was her witness, and made sure that every single paper was explained to her.
After the papers were signed, your birth mother asked your adoptive parents to come upstairs, so that she could talk to them. The lawyer went downstairs to sit with your birth father, and have him sign his papers. I went downstairs while he was signing, and I saw that he was also very serious and careful. He said that making sure you had a good family was the right thing for him to do. When I went back upstairs, your birth mother had given you to your adoptive parents to hold. She showed them several items she wanted them to have for you, including a pair of baby sneakers that had been her older son's when he was a baby. Your parents promised to keep them always.

Then your birth mother and her family left, and a nurse from the hospital came in to go over details with your new parents about taking care of a new baby. Then I had your parents sign papers for me, to make the adoptive placement official, so that they were allowed to take you home. Your parents had a special infant car seat in their car, and Deanne and I went downstairs with you and your parents, to help get you into your car seat. Your parents were very excited and happy to have you with them.

Before they left, your new parents promised that they would take very good care of you. I made them promise to stay in touch with the agency every few days, to tell us how you were doing as a new family. It is probably many years later when you are reading this letter, and I don't know how much you and your parents have talked about the day they met you and started to take care of you, but I'll bet they remember all about it.

As the person from the adoption agency who allowed you and your adoptive parents to be together as a forever family, I believed that I was not only doing what your birth mother and birth father wanted, but also doing what was right for you. It was a very happy moment for your adoptive parents, to have you in their arms. At the same time, though, everyone involved in your adoption acknowledged your birth parents' pain as they arranged for you to move on to your new life – making a very difficult decision to give you the best life they possibly could.

Your adoptive parents took you home for the thirty days required by law before the next step. During those thirty days your birth mother had the legal right to change her mind. Our agency had told her that she had that right, when she signed the surrender papers. At one point several weeks later, she did call and say that she wanted you in her life, although your birth father did not call. She even went to court to ask a judge if she could have you back. It turned out that because your birth parents had two children who were in foster care, you would have had to
live in foster care too, in a different place. When your birth mother found out that information, she changed her mind back, and said to the judge, in front of me and Deanne and your parents and a bunch of lawyers, that she absolutely wanted you to be adopted by your parents. The judge agreed, and as a result, we allowed your adoptive parents to take the next step, which was signing your Adoption Covenants, making you their child forever… and they have now been your parents for all of these years.

I am giving this letter to your adoptive parents while you are still a baby, for them to show you when you are old enough to understand about adoption. I felt sad as much as happy while I was writing it, and I wouldn't be surprised if you feel sad as well as happy reading it all these years later. I wish you and your family a happy life together, doing all the good things that families do. I am glad that I was a part of making you all a family!

Sincerely,

Lisa Binder
Assistant Director
Dear "Birth Mother,"

Your decision to have your baby adopted must be a challenging one for you. Taking the time to select the right parents for your baby is a very loving act. We feel that love, family, compassion and patience are the ingredients that we could provide as parents. We hope that we may be able to share these traits with your son or daughter one day.

We were both raised in homes where family was the most important thing. Time spent together as a family was part of our upbringing. Barbeques, pool parties, and holiday gatherings were a part of our lives growing up – and continue to be a part of our family structure today. It is something that we wish to share with our child one day. It isn't just Jack and I that wish to embrace our family with an adopted child - our entire family is looking forward to a new family member.

Jack is a schoolteacher and I work in a program that helps young adults. Patience is a part of our jobs and a skill we need as parents raising a son or daughter. We live in a quiet Long Island neighborhood where there are lots of children to play with. We have a large home with a big enclosed backyard and two small dogs, Midnight and Scrappy, who would love to have a playmate!

Each summer our family goes travelling and camping. We like to go fishing, and roast marshmallows around the campfire. It is a tradition we have had for many, many years and one that we would like to share with our adopted son or daughter.

We are excited about the opportunity to adopt a child. We hope that you will think of us if you choose adoption for your baby.

Thank you,

Susan and Jack
• Look at websites where birthparents can look at listings of prospective adoptive families. Some well-known ones are listed below. FAMILY FOCUS does not in any way endorse any of these. Every family should do their own research.

www.adopter.com (no discrimination for marital status, sexual orientation, or religion)

www.adoptiononline.com (no discrimination for marital status, sexual orientation, or religion)

www.mamabears.org (no discrimination for marital status, sexual orientation, or religion - open adoption
 - also related to adoptionopen.com and adoptingababy.org
 - discounted rates for listing on all 3 sites)

www.potentialparents.com (no discrimination for marital status, sexual orientation, or religion - open adoption)

www.parentprofiles.com (no singles or same-sex couples)

Here's a starter list of things that a waiting DPP family could do:

• Network, network, network - just as if you were starting a business! Tell everyone that you are looking to adopt a baby and would be happy to talk to birthparents even just considering adoption.

• Get a toll-free phone number for prospective birthmothers to call you on -- or if cost is prohibitive, use a non-identifying cell phone number.

• Print up business cards with your first names only, that phone number and e-mail address (open a new email address just for this use), and a brief statement about your adoption goal. An alternative would be a tasteful flyer.

• Give multiple business cards to your family, friends, doctors, dentist, clergy, business associates, lawyers, accountants, hairdresser, veterinarian, gym, high school nurses, and local colleges. Post in grocery stores, luncheonettes, libraries, churches, thrift shops, laundromats, local ambulance, fire and police depts., etc.
• Get out your address books, birthday and holiday card lists, and send a number of those business cards to all of those people, with a note or phone call asking them to distribute them widely in their local communities. It could be especially useful to send it to people in other parts of the country - like distant cousins and old college roommates. You never know when someone else's neighbor or granddaughter or manicurist or student might be looking for help.

• Take a number of FFAS DPP brochures (for birthparents) to attach to the business cards, or include when mailing cards away.

• Visit local pediatricians, obstetricians and Planned Parenthood offices to introduce yourself to their staff and leave FFAS brochures and some of your business cards. In addition to advocating for yourselves, you can use the opportunity to choose a likely pediatrician for your future child by finding out the experience and attitude of a pediatrician regarding adopted children. Do the same with lawyers, calling in advance to be sure at least a secretary is available to talk in person.

• If you are uncomfortable being so public about your adoption quest, you can do all of the above, but instead of using your own business cards, distribute Family Focus Adoption Services posters or brochures (especially about babies), and then submit a list of all the places/people whom you contacted to our office so that should we receive and phone calls from birthmothers through your efforts, we will know to connect them with your family.

• Join an adoption support group - like APC (the Adoptive Parents’ Committee, which has a number of chapters), or one of the smaller, local ones on the NYS Citizens’ Coalition for Children list, and go to meetings and conferences.

• Read several of the many books on the subject, and subscribe to Adoptive Families magazine. Tapestry.com and PerspectivesPress.com are good websites for books about finding birthmothers and adopting babies.

• Connect online with adoptive parents' support lists to learn how others formed their families.

• Many churches have prayer groups or lists. If this is something that you are comfortable with, ask everyone to put you on their various churches' lists, for help in forming a family.