



Understanding Infant Adoption 7

Massachusetts Adoption Guide for Healthcare Providers & Staff

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Disclaimer: This resource guide is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. It is not a substitute for consultation with hospital legal counsel or a licensed adoption attorney. Adoption laws and procedures vary by jurisdiction and are subject to change. Healthcare providers and staff are strongly encouraged to seek professional legal guidance to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Introduction to Adoption

What is Adoption?

Adoption is a legal process where biological parents (also referred to herein as “placing parents” or “birth parents” relinquish their parental rights to their child, allowing the child to be placed in the care of adoptive parents. However, adoption is more than just a legal agreement; it is a life-altering experience that reflects a commitment to a child's love, care, and well-being.

Healthcare providers should have a basic understanding of the three main types of adoption to offer informed support for their patients:

- **Private Adoption:** This is a direct arrangement between birth parents and adoptive parents, often through a licensed adoption agency or attorney. In a private adoption, the birth parents have voluntarily relinquished their parental rights to the child, and the child is placed directly into the legal and physical custody of the adoptive parents. Most private adoptions are “open adoptions,” meaning there will be ongoing contact between the birth parents and adoptive parents. Private adoption is the most common type of adoption that healthcare providers encounter when working in mother-baby and neonatal units.
- **Adoption from Foster Care:** This occurs when a child in state foster care is legally available for adoption after a court has terminated the parental rights of the birth parents. Foster care adoptions often involve older children. Every state has laws and regulations governing foster care and adoption, which are managed by the state's public child welfare agency. If the child is placed for adoption in another state, compliance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is required.

- **Intercountry Adoption:** The process by which a child born in one country is adopted by a family in another country. The State Department serves as the oversight authority for intercountry adoption in the United States.

For expectant mothers, the adoption journey is filled with complex emotions and culminates in a life-changing decision. The private adoption process allows mothers to create an adoption plan at any point during their pregnancy or after giving birth. In this journey, healthcare providers play a crucial role, providing neutral care and support, facilitating fully informed decision-making, and making ethical referrals to adoption providers. Your role in this process is integral in ensuring the well-being of all patients considering this option.

Important Terminology

The biological parent signs adoption consent or relinquishment, authorizing the court to terminate her parental rights:

- Before adoption consents are signed, refer to the biological parent as an **“expectant parent”** or **“parent”**
- A parent making an adoption plan for their child is called a **“placing parent”**
- After adoption consents are signed, refer to the biological parent as a **“birth parent.”**

Support for Patients Considering Adoption

Expectant parents should have access to a variety of support resources from the moment they begin considering adoption through the completion of the process and beyond. Below is a summary of some of the available services and providers that patients can access to find appropriate support.

Pregnancy Options Counseling

Many non-profit organizations in Massachusetts offer pregnancy options counseling for expectant mothers. The purpose of this counseling is to help women consider their available options during pregnancy. It is important to note that not all pregnancy centers provide the same services. For instance, some pregnancy resource centers do not offer information or referrals for abortion. However, most centers typically provide services such as pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, maternity clothes, parenting assistance, resource referrals, parenting classes, and counseling. Generally, these organizations do not charge fees unless they also operate a licensed medical clinic on site.

Ethical & Effective Referrals

Empowering patients in their decision-making process is key. When making a referral to an adoption provider, it's important to present at least three options. This allows the patient to understand the range of services available and choose the one that best suits her needs. See the Understanding Infant Adoption curriculum handouts [Questions for Healthcare Practitioners to Ask Adoption Agencies and/or Attorneys](#) and [Questions for Patients to Ask Adoption Agencies and/or Attorneys](#) for suggestions.

Choosing an Adoption Provider

The internet is full of adoption providers offering help to expectant parents, but not all of these entities have your patients' best interests at heart. It's essential to understand the different types of adoption professionals available:

- **Licensed Adoption Agencies:** Adoption agencies are licensed by the state to provide adoption services to expectant/birth parents and adoptive families. These services can include social work, home studies, adoption education, pregnancy counseling, adoption matching, and post-placement care. Agencies work to ensure that social and emotional challenges are addressed through social work and counseling, while also ensuring compliance with adoption rules and regulations.

- **Licensed Adoption Attorneys:** Attorneys play a vital role in the adoption process. Ideally, the adoptive parents should have their own attorney, and the expectant or birth parents should be represented by a separate attorney. This ensures that everyone's rights are protected and that there are no conflicts of interest. Attorneys in Massachusetts are licensed by the Massachusetts State Bar Association.
- **Unlicensed Adoption Intermediaries:** Some adoption providers are not licensed to offer adoption services. Unlicensed adoption intermediaries are also referred to as “advertisers,” “matchmakers,” “brokers,” or “marketers.” They solicit expectant and adoptive parents for their services through online ads and other marketing tactics and collect substantial matching fees from hopeful adoptive parents. Working with an unlicensed adoption provider can complicate the process for expectant mothers trying to find suitable adoptive parents for their children and can prevent them from getting adequate support and guidance. It is very appropriate to ask an agency to see a copy of their state-issued child-placing agency license.

More than half of the states in the U.S. have laws prohibiting the use of unlicensed adoption intermediaries, but such laws are frequently overlooked. In Massachusetts, only a licensed child-placing agency may place a minor for adoption or engage in the business of placing a minor for adoption. See [Massachusetts Adoption Laws](#), below, for further information.

- **Out-of-State Adoption Providers:** With the increasing use of the Internet in the adoption process, patients may choose to work with adoption providers located outside of Massachusetts. It's crucial to ensure these out-of-state providers are licensed to provide adoption services and that they work cooperatively with a Massachusetts-licensed adoption agency and attorney to ensure that the placing parents receive local support before, during, and after adoption. This not only ensures legal compliance but also the safety and well-being of the patient and the child.

Choosing Prospective Adoptive Parents

The process of selecting adoptive parents requires careful consideration. Expectant parents often have a specific vision of the type of family they wish to find for their child. A Massachusetts-licensed child-placing agency or attorney can assist expectant parents in identifying potential adoptive families that align with their desired characteristics. Once the expectant parent has reviewed profiles of suitable prospective adoptive parents, she should have the opportunity to meet with them in person whenever possible before making a final decision.

Expectant parents should create a list of questions to ask prospective adoptive parents to ensure they find the right family for their child. However, compiling this list can be overwhelming. See the handout [Questions for Patients to Ask Adoption Agencies and/or Attorneys](#) for suggestions.

Support After Adoption

Birth parents often experience grief and a range of intense emotional and psychological effects after placing a child for adoption. It is important to provide them with mental health support during this time. Support following adoption can take various forms, including individual counseling, group therapy, and support groups.

Massachusetts Adoption Laws

Adoption is a complex legal process. Violating state laws can jeopardize the safety of all parties involved, as well as the child's permanency. Below are frequently asked questions regarding Massachusetts's adoption laws.

Does Massachusetts allow independent (non-agency) adoptions?

Yes. Massachusetts does allow independent (non-agency) adoptions, often referred to as "private" or "independent" adoptions. In these cases, the adoption is arranged directly between the birth parents and the adoptive parents, typically with the assistance of an attorney rather than a licensed adoption agency.

Does Massachusetts allow unlicensed adoption facilitators?

No. Massachusetts does not permit unlicensed adoption facilitators. Only licensed child placement agencies may facilitate the placement of a child for adoption. [Mass. Gen. Laws 15D § 6\(c\)](#)

Does Massachusetts require that placing parents have separate legal representation?

The laws in Massachusetts do not address this issue.

Are adoptive parents allowed to pay an expectant mother's living expenses?

No. However, the adoption agency may assist parents in meeting their physical and material needs, such as family support, health insurance, public support, and/or other sources designated to pay for medical care, living expenses, and transportation. Expectant parents shall neither benefit nor suffer financially as a result of their pregnancy. Expectant parents shall assume responsibility, in accordance with their ability to pay, for their own living, medical, and transportation expenses throughout their pregnancy. [606 CMR 5.05\(4\)\(b\)](#)

When can the placing parent sign the adoption consent or relinquishment?

Placing parents are allowed to sign adoption consents four days after the birth of the child. [Mass. Gen. Laws 210 § 2 \(2023\)](#)

Can placing parents who have consented to an adoption change their mind and revoke their consent?

No, she cannot. Consents signed in accordance with the law are final and irrevocable after they are signed. [Mass. Gen. Laws 210 § 2 \(2023\)](#)

Are post-adoption contact agreements legally binding in Massachusetts?

Yes. [Mass. Gen. Laws. 210§ 6C, 6D \(2024\)](#)

What legal rights do birth fathers have in a Massachusetts adoption?

In all states, including Massachusetts, birth fathers' legal rights in adoption depend on various factors, such as their legal relationship with the child's mother and their actions before and after being notified of the adoption proceedings. Birth fathers who wish to understand and enforce their legal rights should consult with a Massachusetts adoption attorney for guidance.

What to do when you suspect a violation in your hospital?

If you witness violations of Massachusetts law in your hospital or healthcare clinic, you should immediately file a report. Where you file the report will depend on the type of entity or individual who has committed the offense. If you are witnessing repeated offenses, alert your healthcare administration office.

Type of Entity	Where to Report	Contact Information
Licensed Adoption Agency	Department of Early Education and Care, Residential and Placement Unit	(617) 988-6600
Licensed Attorney	Office of Bar Counsel	https://www.massbbo.org/s/who-we-are-obc-acap (617) 728-8750

Type of Entity	Where to Report	Contact Information
Unlicensed Adoption Facilitator Unlicensed Adoption Advertising	Department of Early Education and Care, Residential and Placement Unit	(617) 988-6600

Child Protection in Massachusetts

Child Protective Services Referrals

Among the mandated reporters in Massachusetts are physicians, medical interns, hospital personnel, medical examiners, psychologists, emergency medical technicians, dentists, nurses, chiropractors, podiatrists, optometrists, osteopaths, allied mental health and human services professionals, drug and alcoholism counselors, psychiatrists, or clinical social workers. [Mass. Gen. Laws 119 § 21](#)

Child Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Definitions in Massachusetts

For the purpose of reporting child abuse or neglect, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18. [Mass. Gen. Laws 119 § 21](#)

Per the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families:

- **Abuse** is defined by the non-accidental commission of any act by a caregiver which cause or creates a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse of a child, or the victimization of a child through sexual exploitation or human trafficking.
- **Neglect** is defined as failure by a caregiver, either deliberately or through negligence or inability, to take those actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care, including malnutrition or failure to thrive
- **Substance exposed newborn** is defined as a newborn who was exposed to alcohol or other drugs ingested by the mother in utero, whether or not this exposure is detected at birth through a drug screen or withdrawal symptoms.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/definitions-of-abuse-and-neglect>

Massachusetts Department of Children and Families Contact Information

Mandated reporters must immediately call the DCF area office that serves the city or town where the child lives to report child abuse or neglect. Learn more about mandated reporter responsibilities at <https://dhs.Massachusetts.gov/child-protective-services/reporting-suspected-child-abuse-or-neglect/mandated-reporters/>.

- Mandated reporters must immediately call the DCF area office that serves the city or town where the child lives to report child abuse or neglect: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-children-families/locations>
- Nights, weekends, and holidays please call the Child-at-Risk Hotline: (800) 792-5200.

After calling, mandated reporters must submit a written report within 48 hours.

Safe Haven/Safe Surrender Laws and Process

Safe Haven/Safe Surrender laws are designed to prevent the abandonment and endangerment of infants by providing a safe and legal way for parents to relinquish unharmed newborns. These laws allow parents to safely surrender their infant directly to a designated provider, while generally protecting them from criminal liability and prosecution. Additionally, these laws ensure that the relinquishing parent can remain anonymous. It is important to note that Safe Haven/Safe Surrender laws are intended for use in extreme circumstances and are not a substitute for the resources provided in the public child welfare system or private adoption processes.

- **For Immediate Assistance:** Call or text the 24/7 Safe Haven Crisis Helpline at 1-888-510-BABY (2229)

What are the age restrictions for a Safe Haven/Safe Surrender relinquishment in Massachusetts?

Any newborn infant 7 days of age or less may be voluntarily relinquished. [Mass. Gen. Laws 119 § 39 1/2](#)

Who can relinquish the infant under Safe Haven/Safe Surrender laws?

The child may be relinquished by his or her parent. [Mass. Gen. Laws 119 § 39 1/2](#)

Who are the designated Safe Haven/Safe Surrender providers?

The infant may be delivered to any 'designated facility,' including a hospital, police department, or manned fire station. [Mass. Gen. Laws 119 § 39 1/2](#)

Putative Father Registry

A putative father is a person who claims to be the father of a child and wants to establish paternity. The purpose of a registry is to allow an unmarried father of a born or unborn child to register his name so he will be notified before the child is placed for adoption. The father does not have to be listed on the birth certificate to register.

Massachusetts has established a registry per [Mass. Gen. Laws 210 § 4A](#). The state registry is managed by the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/registry-of-vital-records-and-statistics>.

To learn more about placement on the registry, contact: Massachusetts Parental Claim Registrar, Office of General Counsel; 600 Washington St Fl 6; Boston MA 02111-1744; (617) 748-2020.

Massachusetts Adoption Service Providers

Licensed Private Adoption Agencies

In Massachusetts, adoption agencies are licensed by the state Department of Early Education & Care. The following state-licensed agencies focus on domestic infant adoption with counseling and/or services available for expectant parents. Some agencies are licensed in multiple states.

Contact ascc@adoptioncouncil.org with any additions, corrections, or updates.

- **Adoption Resources Program**
1430 Main St
Waltham, MA 02451
Phone: (800) 533-4346
info@adoptionresources.org
<https://www.adoptionresources.org/>

- **Adoptions with Love**
246 Walnut St
Newtonville, MA 02460
Phone: (800) 722-7731
info@awlonline.org
<https://adoptionswithlove.org/>
- **Alliance for Children**
292 Reservoir St
Needham, MA 02494
Phone: (781) 444-7148
info@allforchildren.org
<https://www.allforchildrenadoption.org/>
- **Ascentria Care Alliance**
11 Shattuck St
Worcester, MA 01605
Phone: (774) 243-3100
Contact Form: <https://www.ascentria.org/contact/>
<https://www.ascentria.org/service/adoption/>
- **Bright Futures Adoption Center**
971 Main St
Lancaster, MA 01523
Phone: (978) 263-5400
Fax: (978) 266-1909
kcheyney@rfkcommunity.org
<https://brightfuturesadoption.org/>
- **A Full Circle Adoptions**
8 Bridge St
Northampton, MA 01060
Phone: (413) 587-0007
Team@fullcircleadoptions.org
<https://fullcircleadoptions.org/>

Licensed Adoption Attorneys

This listing reflects the current Massachusetts fellows of the [Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys](#) and may not be representative of all attorneys in the state working in the field of adoption law. Some attorneys hold licensure in more than one state.

Contact ascc@adoptioncouncil.org with any additions, corrections, or updates.

- **Laurie Goldheim**
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<http://www.wmblawfirm.com/>

Resources

- [Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys](#)
- [AdoptChange](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway: State, Territory, and Tribal Resources](#)
- [Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care](#)
- [Massachusetts Legislature: General Laws](#)
- [Massachusetts Office of Bar Council](#)

About the Adoption-Sensitive Clinical Care Project

It is critical that expectant parents who may wish to place a child for adoption have access to appropriately trained staff and comprehensive supports throughout the adoption process. The federally-funded Adoption-Sensitive Clinical Care Project and the Understanding Infant Adoption curriculum are being administered by [National Council For Adoption \(NCFA\)](#), [The Adoption & Foster Care Clinic](#), [Spaulding for Children](#), and [University of Washington School of Social Work](#) for the project period 2024-2026.

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