



Understanding Infant Adoption 7

Missouri 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 Missouri 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 Missouri are licensed by the Missouri 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. The law in Missouri is unclear, but it appears to allow unlicensed adoption facilitators. See [Missouri 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 Missouri. It's crucial to ensure these out-of-state providers are licensed to provide adoption services and that they work cooperatively with a Missouri-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 Missouri-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.

Missouri 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 Missouri's adoption laws.

Does Missouri allow independent (non-agency) adoptions?

Yes. Missouri 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 Missouri allow unlicensed adoption facilitators?

The law in Missouri is unclear, but it appears to allow unlicensed adoption facilitators. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 453.014\(1\) \(2024\)](#)

However, Missouri does not regulate these entities or provide oversight. Anyone seeking adoption services should be strongly encouraged to work only with a licensed adoption professional.

Does Missouri require that placing parents have separate legal representation?

No. Missouri does not require separate legal representation; however, Missouri law states that a birth parent has the right to legal representation throughout the adoption process. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 453.030 \(2024\)](#)

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

Yes, adoptive parents are allowed to pay the expectant mother's medical expenses, legal expenses, counseling expenses, living expenses, and other expenses the court finds reasonable. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 453.075\(1\) \(2024\)](#)

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

Placing mothers are allowed to sign adoption consents no sooner than 48 hours after the child's birth. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 453.030 \(2024\)](#)

Can birth mothers who have consented to an adoption change their mind and revoke their consent?

No, Consents are irrevocable upon signing unless they can show that consent was not given voluntarily. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 453.030 \(2024\)](#)

Are post-adoption contact agreements legally binding in Missouri?

Yes. [Mo. Rev. Stat. §453.080\(4\) \(2024\)](#)

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

In all states, including Missouri, 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 Missouri adoption attorney for guidance.

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

If you witness violations of Missouri 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	Residential Licensing Manager, Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division	<u>Jennifer.b.richter@dss.mo.gov</u> (573) 522-8024
Licensed Adoption Attorney	Supreme Court of Missouri	<u>https://mochiefcounsel.org/filing-a-complaint/</u> (573) 635-7400

Child Protection in Missouri

Child Protective Services Referrals

Among mandated reporters in Missouri are physicians, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, podiatrists, residents, interns, nurses, hospital and clinic personnel, other health practitioners, social workers, and ministers. [Mo. Rev. Stat. §§ 210.115 \(2024\), 352.400 \(2022\), 573.215 \(2024\)](#)

To learn more about mandated reporting in Missouri, visit <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/keeping-kids-safe/mandated-reporters.htm>.

Child Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Definitions under Missouri Law

Under Missouri law, a child is any person, regardless of physical or mental condition, under 18 years of age.

- **Abuse** means any physical injury, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse inflicted on a child by other than accidental means by those responsible for the child's care, custody, and control; except for discipline administered in a reasonable manner. Also includes sex trafficking and other severe forms of trafficking.
- **Neglect** means failure to provide, by those responsible for the care, custody, and control of the child, proper or necessary support; education as required by law; nutrition; or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the child's well-being. Also includes sex trafficking and other severe forms of trafficking.

[Mo. Rev. Stat. § 210.110 \(2024\)](#)

Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Contact Information

To report concerns about child abuse, neglect or sexual abuse, contact the Missouri Department of Social Services. For immediate or life-threatening emergencies, call 911.

- **State Hotline:** (800) 392-3738
- **Online Portal:** <https://apps.dss.mo.gov/OnlineCanReporting/default.aspx>

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)

In Missouri, this program is referred to as **Safe Place for Newborns**. For more information, visit <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/keeping-kids-safe/safe-place-for-newborns.htm>.

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

A child reasonably believed to be no more than 45 days old. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 210.950 \(2024\)](#)

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

A biological parent or person acting on such parent's behalf. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 210.950 \(2024\)](#)

Who are the designated Safe Haven/Safe Surrender providers?

A newborn child may be relinquished safely to a newborn safety incubator or to an employee, agent, or member of the staff of any hospital, maternity home, or pregnancy resource center in a healthcare provider position or on duty in a nonmedical paid or volunteer position; a firefighter or emergency medical technician on duty in a paid position or on duty in a volunteer position; or a law enforcement officer. [Mo. Rev. Stat. § 210.950 \(2024\)](#)

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.

Missouri has a putative father registry. A digital brochure about the program is available at <https://health.mo.gov/data/vitalrecords/pdf/putativedads.pdf>. The registry is available at <https://health.mo.gov/data/vitalrecords/correcting.php#collapsePutative>.

Missouri Adoption Service Providers

Licensed Private Adoption Agencies

In Missouri, adoption agencies are licensed by the state Department of Social Services, Child Division. The following licensed agencies focus on domestic infant adoption with counseling and/or services available for expectant parents. Some agencies are licensed in multiple states.

* Denotes a for-profit agency.

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

- **Adoption & Beyond, Inc.**
16236 Metcalf Ave
Overland Park, KS 66085
Phone: (913) 381-6919
adopt@adoption-beyond.org
<https://adoption-beyond.org/>
- **Adoption Choices of Kansas & Missouri***
4435 Main St #920
Kansas City, MO 64111
Phone: (316) 391-4904
abryant@adoptionchoiceskansas.org
<https://www.adoptionchoicesofkansasmissouri.com/>
- **Adoption Option, Inc.**
8655 College Blvd
Overland Park, KS 66210
Phone: (913) 209-2640
Contact Form: <https://www.adoptionoptionkc.com/contact>
<https://www.adoptionoptionkc.com/>

- **American Adoptions**
14801 E 42nd St S
Independence, MO 64055
Phone: (913) 383-9804
Contact Form: https://www.americanadoptions.com/pregnant/free_info
<https://www.americanadoptions.com/>
- **Bringing Families Together***
7151 N Lindbergh Blvd
Hazelwood, MO 63042
Phone: (314) 731-3969
BFT.StLouis@gmail.com
<https://www.bringingfamieliestogether.com/>
- **Christian Family Services, Inc.**
7955 Big Bend Blvd
Webster Groves, MO 63119
Phone: (314) 968-2216
parents@cfserve.org
<https://www.stlcfs.org/>
- **Christian Family Services of the Midwest, Inc.**
10100 W 87th St Ste 111
Overland Park, KS 66212
Phone: (913) 383-3337
susan@cfskc.org
<https://adoptionsbycfs.com/>
- **A Gift of Hope Adoptions**
303 N Stadium Blvd Ste 200
Columbia, MO 65203
Phone: (888) 201-5672
<https://agiftofhopeadoptions.com/>
- **Gladney Center for Adoption**
Neosho, MO 64850
Phone: (417) 222-3014
Contact Form: <https://adoptionsbygladney.com/contact>
<https://adoptionsbygladney.com/>
- **Good Shepherd Children & Family Services**
1340 Partridge Ave
St. Louis, MO 63130
Phone: (314) 854-5700
info@gsstl.org
<https://goodshepherdstl.org/>

- **Lifeline Children's Services**
200 Missionary Ridge Ste 200
Birmingham, AL 35242
Phone: (205) 967-0811
missouri@lifelinechild.org
<https://lifelinechild.org/states/missouri/>
- **Lutheran Family and Children Services of Missouri**
9666 Olive Blvd Ste 400
St. Louis, MO 63132
Phone: (866) 326-5327
help@lfcs.org
<https://lfcsmo.org>
- **Nightlight Christian Adoptions**
10306 Business 21
Hillsboro, MO 63050
Phone: (636) 797-4100
Fax: (636) 789-4978
info@nightlight.org
<https://nightlight.org/missouri-domestic-adoption-program/>

Licensed Adoption Attorneys

This listing reflects the current Missouri 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.

- **Mary Beck**
2775 W Shag Bark Ct
Columbia, MO 65203
Phone: (573) 446-7554
Fax: (866) 632-1345
mary@marybecklaw.com
<https://marybecklaw.com/>
- **Michael J. Belfonte**
8901 N Farley Ave
Kansas City, MO 64157
Phone: (816) 842-3580
Fax: (816) 842-7875
Contact Form: <https://michaelbelfonte.com/contact/>
<https://michaelbelfonte.com/>
- **Taylor Goodale**
Union, MO
Phone/Fax: (636) 583-4541

- **Amy Rebecca Johnson**
 165 N Meramec Ave Ste 110
 St. Louis, MO 63105
 Phone: (314) 727-2266
 Fax: (314) 727-2101
 Contact Form: <https://www.pcblawfirm.com/contact-us/>
<https://www.pcblawfirm.com/>
- **Megan Monsour**
 1617 N Waterfront Pkwy #400
 Wichita, KS 67206
 Phone: (316) 267-2000
 Fax: (316) 631-1737
mmonsour@hinklaw.com
<https://www.hinklaw.com/>
- **Harry O'Rourke**
 231 S Bemiston Ave Ste 800
 Clayton, MO 63105
 Phone: (314) 863-8484
 Fax: (314) 863-5312
 Contact Form: <https://www.lawsmo.com/contact-harry-o-rourke.html>
<https://www.lawsmo.com/>
- **Karen Rosenberg**
 4520 Main St Ste 700
 Kansas City, MO 64111
 Phone: (816) 756-5800
 Fax: (816) 756-1999
krosenberg@knmlaw.com
<https://knmlaw.com/>
- **David Sims**
 202 S Wood St
 Neosho, MO 64850
 Phone: (417) 451-3883
 Fax: (417) 451-3885
david@simslawoffice.com
<https://simslawoffice.com/>
- **Allan F. Stewart**
 231 S Bemiston Ave Ste 800
 Clayton, MO 63105
 Phone: (314) 863-8484
 Fax: (314) 863-5312
 Contact Form: <https://www.lawsmo.com/our-attorneys/allan-stewart.html>
<https://www.lawsmo.com/>

- **Kay A. Van Pelt**
1524 E Primrose Ste A
Springfield, MO 65804
Phone: (417) 886-9080
Fax: (417) 886-8563
Contact Form: <https://vanpeltlaw.com/contact/>
<https://vanpeltlaw.com/>
- **Rachel J. White**
PO Box 358
Rolla, MO 65402
Phone: (573) 647-6264
Fax: (573) 426-3346
- **Joanna Beck Wilkinson**
5211 Westminster Pl
St. Louis, MO 63108
Phone: (573) 446-7554
Fax: (866) 632-1345
joanna@marybecklaw.com
<https://marybecklaw.com/>

Resources

- [Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys](#)
- [AdoptChange](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway: State, Territory, and Tribal Resources](#)
- [Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division](#)
- [Missouri Legislature: Revised Statutes](#)
- [Supreme Court of Missouri: Office of Chief Disciplinary 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.

The project is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award (award #90CO1147-01-00) totaling \$1,000,000 with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website, [Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#). This information is in the public domain.

