



Understanding Infant Adoption 7

Vermont 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 Vermont 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 Vermont are licensed by the Vermont 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 Vermont, Only Vermont-licensed adoption agencies are authorized to place a child for adoption. See [Vermont 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 Vermont. It's crucial to ensure these out-of-state providers are licensed to provide adoption services and that they work cooperatively with a Vermont-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 Vermont-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.

Vermont 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 Vermont's adoption laws.

Does Vermont allow independent (non-agency) adoptions?

Yes. Vermont 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 Vermont allow unlicensed adoption facilitators?

No. Only Vermont-licensed adoption agencies are authorized to place a child for adoption. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 15A § 2-101 \(2024\)](#)

Does Vermont require that placing parents have separate legal representation?

No, unless the placing parent is a minor. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. § 2-405\(c\) \(2024\)](#)

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

Yes. Adoptive parents are allowed to pay a birth mother's medical expenses, counseling services, living expenses for a "reasonable time" before delivery and up to six weeks postpartum, costs of ascertaining required information, legal expenses, and travel expenses. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 15A § 7-103\(a\) \(2024\)](#)

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

A parent may not execute a consent or a relinquishment sooner than 36 hours after the minor is born. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 15A §§ 2-404\(a,d\)](#)

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

Yes, A parent who executes a consent or relinquishment may revoke the consent or relinquishment within 21 days after the consent or relinquishment is executed by filing a notice with the court in which it was executed. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 15A §§ 2-404\(a,d\)](#)

Are post-adoption contact agreements legally binding in Vermont?

No, except when the child is being adopted from foster care or by a stepparent. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 33 § 5124 \(2020\)](#), [15A V.S.A. § 9-9](#), [15A V.S.A. § 4-112](#)

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

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

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

If you witness violations of Vermont 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 Social and Rehabilitation Services, Division of Social Services, Foster and Group Care Licensing Unit | (802) 735-3731 https://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/contact/main |
| Licensed Adoption Attorney | Vermont Judiciary | https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/about-vermont-judiciary/filing-complaint |
| Unlicensed Adoption Advertising | Local law enforcement | |

Child Protection in Vermont

Child Protective Services Referrals

Among mandated reporters in Vermont are all healthcare providers, including physicians, surgeons, osteopaths, chiropractors, physician assistants, resident physicians, interns, hospital administrators, nurses, medical examiners, emergency medical personnel, dentists, psychologists, and pharmacists; mental health professionals; and social workers. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 33 § 4913 \(a\) \(2024\)](#)

Child Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Definitions under Vermont Law

Under Vermont law, a child is any person under the age of 18. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 1 § 173 \(2024\)](#)

- **Abused or neglected child** means a child whose physical health, psychological growth and development, or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of their parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. An 'abused or neglected child' also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person and a child who has died as a result of abuse or neglect. [Vt. Stat. Ann. Tit. 33 § 4912\(1\) \(2024\)](#)
- **Harm** can occur by failure to supply the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care. As used in this subchapter, 'adequate health care' includes any medical or nonmedical remedial health care permitted or authorized under State law. [Vt. Stat. Ann. Tit. 33 § 4912\(6\) \(2024\)](#)
- **Risk of harm** means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm by other than accidental means, and that harm would be likely to cause physical injury or sexual abuse. [Vt. Stat. Ann. Tit. 33 § 4912\(14\) \(2024\)](#)

Vermont Department for Children and Families Contact Information

If a child is in immediate danger, dial 911 or the local police first. Then, call to make a report. To report concerns about child abuse, neglect or sexual abuse, contact the state Department for Children and Families.

- **DCF Central Intake Hotline:** (800) 649-5285

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 Vermont?

An child or not more than 30 days of age may be voluntarily relinquished. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 13 § 1303\(b\)\(1\) \(2024\)](#)

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

A person may legally relinquish an infant. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 13 § 1303\(b\) \(2024\)](#)

Who are the designated Safe Haven/Safe Surrender providers?

The child may be delivered to any of the following: an employee, staff member, or volunteer at a healthcare facility; an employee, staff member, or volunteer at a fire station, police station, place of worship, or an entity that is licensed or authorized in this State to place minors for adoption; or a 911 emergency responder at a

location where the responder and the person have agreed to transfer the child. [Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 13 § 1303\(b\)\(1\) \(2024\)](#)

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.

Vermont does not have a Putative Father Registry. Information about establishing parentage in Vermont is available at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/services/child-support/parentage>.

Vermont Adoption Service Providers

Private Adoption Agencies

In Vermont, adoption agencies are licensed by the state Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division. The following licensed agencies focus on domestic infant adoption with counseling and/or services available for expectant parents. A listing of state-licensed adoption agencies is available online through the Vermont Consortium for Adoption & Guardianship, <https://vtadoption.org/licensed-vermont-adoption-agencies.html>. Some agencies are licensed in multiple states.

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

- **Friends in Adoption**
212 Main St
Poultney, VT 05764
Phone: (800) 982-3678
info@friendsinadoption.org
<http://www.friendsinadoption.org/>
- **LUND**
Hoehl Family Building
50 Joy Dr
South Burlington, VT
Phone: (802) 864-7467
<https://lundvt.org/>
- **Wide Horizons for Children**
375 Totten Pond Rd Ste 400
Waltham, MA 02451
Phone: (781) 894-5330
Contact Form: <https://whfc.org/contact/>
<https://www.whfc.org/>

Licensed Adoption Attorneys

This listing reflects the current Vermont 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.

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<https://tarnellihugheslaw.com>

Resources

- [Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys](#)
- [AdoptChange](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway: State, Territory, and Tribal Resources](#)
- [Vermont Agency of Human Services: Department for Children and Families](#)
- [Vermont Judiciary](#)
- [Vermont Legislature: Statutes](#)

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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