

Agency Policies & Procedures for Expectant/Birth Parents

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will make every attempt to provide quality services as quickly as possible for any birth parent(s) that come to the agency for the purpose of planning for their child. These services are to include medical, social, and casework services that include discussions of alternatives to adoption, such as parenting the child, foster care, maternal or paternal relatives taking custody, guardianship or adopting the child, therefore exploring all options with the birth parents.

- ❑ The best interest of the child must always be in mind and be the major consideration when making decisions regarding plans and services.
- ❑ Each case will have its own file.
- ❑ *Birth Parents & Planning*

The birth parents must be active participants in the decision making process regarding the future of their child.

Respecting the birth parents' decision is the most important factor of the planning process, but must be examined in light of what is in the best interest of the child.

Should an adoption plan be chosen as the best option, the birth parent(s) has a right to be an active participant in the plan. Birth parents will be given the option of either surrendering their rights in court, which becomes irrevocable immediately or out-of-court which becomes final after (30) thirty days. Birth parents will be further advised if they revoke that with an out-of-court consent the judge determines through a hearing what is in the best interest of the child and it does not mean that they will automatically get their child back. If the birth parent's rights were previously terminated and they are no longer considered a party to the decision, counseling will be offered.

- ❑ *Confidentiality*

Explain that all information will remain confidential unless otherwise stated. Confidentiality, integrity, and the dignity of the birth parent and all clients of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. are of utmost importance.

□ *Appointments with Birth Parents*

Make sure that any appointment that is made with a birth parent(s) is kept. If an appointment needs to be canceled, the birth parent(s) must be notified within 24-48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

If an appointment is canceled, it must be rescheduled.

Should it be necessary, a representative from Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will be assigned to make a home visit at the convenience of the birth parent(s) when possible.

After each meeting, contact, or home visit with a birth parent(s), a record/report shall be kept of what was discussed and it must be in detail. In addition, any correspondence received from the birth parent(s) or sent to the birth parent(s) will be kept in a file designated to that birth parent(s).

□ *Referrals*

Should a referral need to be made to another agency or community service:

- keep a record of why the referral was necessary
- record who the referral is to
- contact the referral and arrange for the referral to contact the birth parent(s); it is the referrals responsibility to contact the birth parent
- follow-up with the referral
- make sure to give the birth parent(s) information about the referral.

□ *Out-of-Wedlock Fathers (see 18 NYCRR 421.5)*

Should a birth father be identified, it is the Agency's responsibility to attempt to locate the birth father and notify him of any possible adoption plans concerning his child.

The birth father needs to be located as quickly as possible so that he may have the option of either taking responsibility for the child, participating in any adoption plans made for the child, or terminating his rights to the child.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will take every step possible to identify the birth father of an out-of-wedlock child. In addition, the relationship between the birth parents will also be examined by an agency representative. Should the birth father of the child be identified, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will attempt to contact him. Should contact be established with the birth father of the child, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will attempt to involve the birth father in the process of adoption, including the adoption plan and exchanging information with the adoptive parents.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will also give the birth father the option to accept or deny paternity to the child who is being placed for adoption. Should the birth father admit paternity, and is not able to plan for the child, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will attempt to go about obtaining a voluntary surrender of the birth father's rights to the child, and only if it is the best interest of the child. Should the birth father be unwilling to surrender his rights to the child,

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will continue to attempt to obtain a voluntary surrender or take the steps which are necessary to terminate parental rights, should it be in the best interest of the child. Absent a legal risk affidavit signed by the adoptive parent(s), Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will not place an out-of-wedlock child without the birth father's consent, surrender, or termination of parental rights. Factors to be considered prior to the placement are if during the six month period prior to placement, the birth father: (1) offered a reasonable sum of money in connection with the birth mother's medical expenses relating to the pregnancy, (2) holds himself out as the father of the child, or (3) offers or can provide adequate child support. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will speak with the birth father to explore any options that he may want to explore, such as alternatives to adoption, such as foster care, if he so desires.

Should the birth father altogether deny paternity to the out-of-wedlock child, he will be asked to do so in writing in documents prepared by the legal staff of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will explain and stress the fact that the signing of a document that terminates parental rights is irrevocable. Unless separately represented, an attorney from Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will accompany the birth father to Court in order to execute the appropriate documents to relinquish his parental rights.

□ *Counseling*

Counseling will be made available to any birth parent that requests or feels the need to utilize this service.

This service will be provided by an agency social worker. If the service is not available, an appropriate referral must be made.

See Referral section above for referral procedures.

□ *Pre-Placement and Post-Placement Contact*

Unless the adoptive parents and birth parents are communicating on their own, there are three options to use the services of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.:

- 1) Face-To-Face meeting with the Adoptive Parents - This first visit should include an agency social worker serving as a mediator. The social worker will then write a report on the meeting to be included in the file.
- 2) Telephone Meeting with the Adoptive Parents - This could also include an agency social worker that will serve as a mediator. The social worker will then write a report on the conversation and include it in the file.
- 3) Contact in Writing - Through brochures and information about each party (pre-placement) or letters (post-placement).

All of the above must be arranged through Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.

Confidentiality is very important. No identifying information will be available unless approved by the party whose information is to be released.

All contact, correspondence, and meetings must be carefully recorded in detail and kept in the file.

□ *Legal Services*

Birth parents will be offered the opportunity of retaining separate legal counsel. If they choose not to retain separate counsel, Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will prepare all necessary legal documents for the birth parents regarding surrenders, termination of rights, and any other legal matters that may arise.

Any services provided to the birth parents will be billed to the adoptive parents that they are working with.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s attorney will accompany the birth parents to Court if necessary.

- Sensitivity to the individual needs of each client of the agency is paramount.