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"I knew that my friends would understand that I had to take care of myself ... I had to respect my limits."



Connections



Coping With The Adoption Wait



Leon and Mary Hope adopted their two children domestically through open adoption.



When Luzma and her husband Jeff walked into Adoption Connection's domestic orientation they already felt defeated. Having spent the last ten years trying to conceive they now struggled to decide what to do next. "We were very intimidated," says Luzma

about the orientation. "There were so many successful and stable families who wanted babies." Yet after attending five other workshops (at different agencies/programs) they decided on pursuing an open domestic adoption using the services of Adoption Connection.

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Creating Happy New Families.

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Adoption Connection is a full-service, licensed adoption agency and non-sectarian program affiliated with Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

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The Adoption Assistance Program

What is the Adoption Assistance Program?

The Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) is a federal and state program run separately through each California county's Social Services Department. Initially set up to help families adopt children out of the foster care system, the program's purpose was to offer financial assistance to adoptive families to make it possible for more children to be adopted. In the recent past AAP has been broadened to include children who are adopted through licensed private agencies such as Adoption Connection.

When do children qualify?

Newborn open adoptions, where adopting parents and birthmothers match before birth, do not lend themselves easily to the AAP requirements. However, there are some cases where a family may meet the criteria.

The most important and often most ambiguous criteria is, "Was this child at risk of becoming a dependent of the court (*i.e.* – taken into foster care)?" For newborn adoptions this means that the birthparent(s) were unable to parent (because of drug use, mental illness, age, poverty) and at least some of the following criteria were met: there was no pre-natal care, the child is a member of a sibling group that should remain together, the birthfather is unknown, the child has a medical/physical disability or the child is eligible for SSI.

Are there different types of AAP?

Yes, there are two kinds of AAP – *deferred*, which means you have no special medical needs now but may in the future and *initial*, which means that there are current pressing financial needs, usually due to medical costs. Deferred is generally appropriate when the birthmother's mental health history, lack of pre-natal care or drug use may affect a child in the future, but is unknown at the time of placement.

How does a family go about applying, and when?

Once the child is placed with the adoptive family and birthparent rights have been terminated Adoption Connection will send the adoptive family a letter describing AAP. If a family would like to apply, then forms will be sent and the agency will initiate the application.

Are there any restrictions?

Children adopted internationally or through independent domestic adoptions are not eligible. Also, AAP must be approved before an adoption can be finalized. This can sometimes delay the finalization.

Recent Arrival



■ **Myles Brown Nordstrum**

Born 7/17/2006.

Workshops

You do not have to be a client of Adoption Connection to take advantage of our great workshops! Here are a few:

Adoption Connection Domestic Orientation
Preparing for Domestic Adoption
Adoption Connection International Orientation
Preparing for International Adoption
Creating a Lifebook
Infant and Child CPR
Finding the Words
Talking to Your Child About Adoption
Birthmother Relationships
Transracial Adoptive Parenting Workshop
Newborn Care for Adoptive Parents (0-3 months)

Our current workshop calendar can be found at:
www.adoptionconnection.org/workshops.asp.

Why do some families get approved while others do not?

Every California County can legally make its own determination about who qualifies for AAP and who does not. The only over-arching criteria for all counties is a child who gets SSI because of a medical or developmental disability. Those children can get AAP regardless of the county.

What are some things to consider?

AAP takes time and paperwork. Adoptive parents whose situation meets the criteria of a child who might have entered the foster care system – *i.e.*, adverse parental background, other children in foster care, a CPS referral at birth (among others) – but who is currently healthy – should consider applying for *deferred* AAP.

If your child has a medical problem at birth, you may be eligible for SSI. Any medical condition that is a result of drug use, lack of prenatal care, family history, etc., on the part of the birthmother may be eligible for *initial* AAP. Again, every county assesses eligibility differently and there are no guarantees of assistance. If a family is turned down, there is an appeals process.

If you have specific questions about the AAP program, contact Randie Bencanann, LCSW at Adoption Connection or your county's Department of Social Services.

The Hague Treaty and Intercountry Adoption



The Hague Treaty is a multinational agreement created over the last several years by the international adoption community to ensure that adoption procedures serve the best interests of the children.

This important agreement standardizes practices to prevent child abduction and trafficking, makes certain birthparent rights are terminated according to law, and provides more protections for adopting parents.

Currently, 70 countries have signed the Treaty although many (including the U.S.) have not fully ratified or implemented it. The U.S. State Department has been designated as the central authority for our international adoption procedures and they plan to implement the Treaty sometime in 2007. What does the Treaty mean for families hoping to adopt internationally? If the country you are adopting from has ratified the Treaty, their standards and ours must be in compliance. You may still adopt from a country that has not signed the Treaty, however, their practices will not be held to the stricter standards.

An important Hague Treaty requirement is that child-placing agencies must become accredited. Since Adoption Connection provides only homestudy and post-adoption services, we are *not* required to become Hague accredited. Adoption Connection will continue to provide international homestudy services and partner with child-placing agencies, just as we have done in the past.

For detailed information about the Hague Treaty, please see the U.S. State Department website at http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/adoption_485.html.

Recent Arrival



■ Emanuel and Daniel Cox with proud brother Alex

The twins arrived home from Guatemala on 10/24/2006.

“We felt it was a sure shot,” says Luzma about open adoption. “We didn’t know when or how it would happen, but that it would.”

Marie and her husband Mohandas decided to pursue an international adoption. They liked the idea that there were set timelines and the length of the waiting period was more reliable than in domestic adoption. Marie stated, “Basically we knew that when we filled out all the necessary paperwork that we would get a referral and adopt.” But their process wasn’t a smooth one. They initially planned to adopt from Russia and completed their dossier and C.I.S. clearance when they changed their plan and decided to go to China instead. “We had to update and re-do many of our forms because we switched countries mid-stream.”

For all families who decide to adopt there are highs and lows throughout the journey. Prospective parents will experience excitement that a child will finally join their family. Perhaps they will feel relief that their days of medical intervention and weekly doctor’s appointments are now a thing of the past. There will also be feelings of loss and anger as hurdles to parenting continue to present themselves in the form of paperwork to complete, social worker interviews to schedule and fingerprint clearances to obtain. For many it can feel that their lives continue to be placed under a microscope.

What families don’t know when they are busy working on their dossier or writing a *Dear Birthmother* letter is that soon they will be waiting. Adoptive mom Inez Jackson sums it up. “Everything I did or wanted to do, everything I thought or didn’t want to

think, and everywhere I went or didn’t go reminded me that our lives were in ‘limbo.’”

Take Care of Yourself, Really.

During the wait feelings of loss for the biological child can surface and it can happen when you least expect it. Randie Bencanann, Adoption Connection Co-director, states, “Don’t be afraid to say no to social obligations that you think may trigger frustration or loss.” Marie Spark decided to do just that when she was waiting for a referral from China, forgoing baby showers and putting off buying baby gifts to friends during that time. “I knew that my friends would understand that I had to take care of myself... I had to respect my limits. I knew that once I had a referral I could send the gifts.”

Taking care of yourself can also mean doing things that can bring you pleasure and some respite from the wait’s anxiety, if for just a few hours. In Marie’s case she went to the gym and hired a personal trainer to get in shape. Paula Baker took up dancing again in the year before her son joined her and her husband. “My intention was to release stress, but the unintended result was that it reminded me that my body is a source of joy. Although I never could get it to stay pregnant I could make it learn new dance steps. I could watch it grow strong and coordinated, I could work it hard and feel that good, healthy tiredness afterward,” says Paula.

Do things to rejuvenate your mind and body. Pamper yourself with mini-vacations away from home, or a nice meal with loved ones. Take that

trip you've been meaning to take, or that class you won't have time for as a parent with a young child. Spend time with your family and pets. Don't put your life on hold.

Journaling for You and Your Child-to-Be.

Although Luzma was in school and tried to keep herself busy with her classes she spent many days feeling hopeless and frustrated as the months went by. "I would look at the Adoption Connection Web site every day and wonder why other families were getting matched? Was it because they have a cat or a big

house? It didn't seem fair... Why not us?" To get her feelings out Luzma wrote in her journal, something she recommends to others. "I feared that it would never happen, but you just take it day by day." Now that they have adopted their son things are very different. "Reading my journal from that time I can see that I was in a lot of pain."

Waiting is also hard when a family travels to pick up their child from a foreign country. Liz Varner and her husband planned ahead and purchased photo books before their trip. It was a great idea that kept them busy while they spent over a month in Kazakhstan. "We would create more of her story each day," says Liz. They ended up with three books, a story of their daughter's adoption, a photo album of the city where she was born, and an album that has photographs and notes of their daughter's caretakers, doctors and nurses.

Bill Gunn also kept up a journal and it helped immensely during the period when he and his partner were matched with their son's birthmother. "There is so much that you are thinking about, it is very cathartic to write it down... all the worries and stress that you have," said Bill. He also found it a good way to communicate with their birthmother, the doctor and his partner. "It took discipline but was well worth it." Now that they have adopted they have kept his writing in a safe place so that they can offer it to their son when he is older. "We thought it would be neat for Zach to read it so that he would know what we were thinking and how excited we were when we waited for his arrival."

Continued next page

2006 Statistics

Last year Adoption Connection completed **209 international and domestic homestudies.**

Adoption Connection has welcomed home **34 children through international adoption** (countries include, but not limited to, Ethiopia, China and Kazakhstan) and completed **121 domestic infant adoptions.**

Recent Arrival



■ **Marisa Hope Kelly** Born 1/09/2006.

How to support friends or family members who are in the wait?

- Listen.
- Empathize with their pain and feelings of worry or hopelessness.
- Don't quiz them on how the adoption process works. (They will volunteer the information if they want to.)
- Show compassion if they shy away from social events that they would otherwise enjoy.
- Ask what you can do to help, but don't push.
- Be flexible and understanding (emotions can change from day to day).
- Refrain from anecdotal advice.

Reach Out for Support, But Be Discriminating.

Mary Hope McQuiston and her husband Leon adopted their children through domestic adoption. Mary Hope made a concerted effort to be choosy about whom she spent her time with. "I consciously stayed away from people who tended to take withdrawals from my emotional tank and focused instead on those who made deposits," says Mary Hope. Those people were a few close friends, and couples she and Leon met while attending their Preparing for Adoption workshop at Adoption Connection. Additionally she joined an online community where she found a network of families who were experiencing the same frustrations and asking many of the same questions she and Leon were.

Online support groups and chat rooms can be very helpful to gain insight from others who have already been through the process, but they can also create stress. Marie says that although she found support about her Chinese adoption helpful she also found some chat participants had misleading news or shared information that was incorrect. She says, "There are a lot of people on those sites that are desperate and obsessed with their adoption... It can suck you in and it can get you feeling irrational and out of control." Know when too much web time is enough. Is it helping you or draining your energy?

So, How Is Your Adoption Going?

Those six words can ignite strong emotional reactions when the

waiting is making you feel vulnerable or depressed. Although questioning is never intended to hurt or pry it can feel like that when you have no answer besides, "I'm just waiting."

When friends asked Marie she would refer them to her Web site she had set up through www.babyjellybeans.com, a baby Web site. Referring inquirers to the site meant she didn't need to tell her story repeatedly. On her page she explained how international adoption worked and gave updates about her adoption. She was also able to inject humor and her excitement to parent. "Instead of going into a long explanation I just referred them to our site. And now that our daughter is here it's a great document of our journey to find her."

Get Ready

Some people feel like they can't prepare at all for a child because it will "jinx" the process, and it is understandable not to want baby things scattered around the house. But many families told us it was helpful for them to have bought a few important items, like a car seat or stroller, and paint their future child's room a color they could live with while it is still a home office or guest room. Even if the image of a child in your home seems impossible or far off make some steps to get ready anyway.

Take a baby care workshop or other class that will help when it happens. Mohandas studied Chinese in his spare time. Not only did he enjoy it (he has a background in linguistics) and learned basic characters and phrases, it came in very handy navigating in China.

Be aware that false leads and unintended setbacks may bring up strong emotions. Mary Hope and Leon had numerous leads with birthmothers who changed their mind, or just disappeared. One in particular looked very promising until the birthmother decided to parent after they had been in touch for several weeks. Mary Hope says, “I expected the wait to be hard but was really unprepared for the emotional highs and lows of the various leads that came our way. The sense of loss really took me by surprise.”

Stay Involved

Read those adoption books that your friend gave you. Go to workshops your adoption professional recommends. Krista Carleson benefited from the adoption workshops she attended because she says it helped her stay connected to the reality that a baby would be coming soon and, “since I adopted my son I have less time and financial resources for adoption events, so getting a good handle on things before he was born helped.”

What other adoption-related activities would be helpful in occupying your time will depend on what feels right for you personally, and the type of adoption journey. Staying up on current practices and changing foreign requirements will be important for international placements. Cindy Levin, Adoption Connection’s International Coordinator, advises families to “keep track of expiration dates to make sure fingerprint and other clearances don’t lapse. Travel to pick up your child can be delayed if paperwork isn’t current.”

Families in the domestic process should keep in contact with their professionals too. And many benefit from additional outreach, for example posting the *Dear Birthmother* letter on different Web sites, mailing it out to acquaintances and friends, and investigating other resources that may help locate a birthmother. “Some families have the idea that ‘out of sight’ is out of mind,” says Lynne Fingerman, Adoption Connection Co-director, “but staying away from the agency or trying not to think about the adoption won’t work. It will just cause more fear and resentment that it is taking a long time.”

Remember that your feelings each day will change. One day you will have faith in the process and will be daydreaming about your future with a child to love and cherish, while the next you may doubt every decision you have made and feel that that a child will never join your family or that for some reason you weren’t meant to be a parent. This is normal.

Families waiting will continue to feel of deep yearning for their future child and wish that the adoption process was shorter and more controllable. Hopefully with the right mix of resilience and support they can endure it, because it will come to an end and the next phase of your life will begin. Like all adoptive parents Luzma reflects on her waiting days. “I look back on my life before Nicholas and it is like a dream. So much has changed now that I’m a parent.”

Recent Arrival



■ Theo Thomas Laber

(Born 10/21/2006) has a snuggle with big sister Elizabeth.



SAVE THE DATE: Our picnic is getting bigger and better every year! Please mark your calendar for this year's **Adoption Connection Annual Family Picnic**: Saturday, September 29, 2007 from 11:00am-3:00pm at Julius Kahn Park in the beautiful San Francisco Presidio. (Ola brought daughter Isabella home from Ethiopia on 4/06/2006.)

What's New?

Adoption Connection has recently moved our office. Please make a note that we are now located at 2150 Post Street, just across the street from our previous building.



Adoption Connection recently finished work on a first film: **The Adoption Decision: Birthmothers Tell Their Stories**. This documentary explores the complex emotional choice adoption can be for birth mothers and their families. We have already received great reviews and clinics, social service centers and

hospitals are using it to educate staff as well as women who come in to learn about their choices. In 2007 we will be working on a new film focusing on adoptive families.

Micky Duxbury, MFT has just published a book about open adoption and relationships with birth families. **Making Room in our Hearts: Keeping Family Ties through Open Adoption** is an intimate look at how adoption relationships evolve and change over time. It is a must-have for any family touched by open adoption. To order go to: <http://www.routledgejournalhealth.com/duxbury>.

■ **Scott with daughter Ryca** Born 9/16/2006.



We believe that in an adoption, **everyone gains** when given a chance to learn about one another. **Committed to education, counseling and support**, our goal is to empower both birth and adoptive parents before and after the birth to create the adoption that works best for everyone involved. **Adoption Connection** welcomes couples and individuals of all ages, religions, and ethnic background or sexual orientation.

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