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ADOPTION

What you REALLY Need To Know



Hey friend- I'm Angela, a mom of 8 sweet kiddos who joined our family through both birth and adoption. We've adopted internationally and domestically and we've also done an embryo adoption. While we aren't experts, we do feel we have learned so many important lessons along the way. This guide is my way of sitting down and having coffee with you like a friend- and getting real and raw about the beauty and the heartbreak of adoption. What you can expect and resources that can help you along the way.

find me here too:

www.thisgatherednest.com
www.youtube.com/thebranifffamily

Grab your coffee

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

Let me take a moment to share with you what this guide will cover and what you can expect to learn. I want you to finish this guide feeling empowered to pursue adoption in an ethical way that respects all parties involved. I hope it gives you the tools you need to make informed decisions in your adoption journey.

Homestudy

Are they really going to look inside all your closets? How clean does your house need to be? Will you have to dig up papers long forgotten?

Domestic

Interested in adopting from the US through a private adoption? Does family size matter? How long is the process?

International

Are you thinking about adopting from another country? What countries are open? Timeframe? Older Children?

Funding

How will you pay for it? Will you have to sell everything you own to cover expenses? Can you get help with the fees?

Ethics

Don't skip this part. Arguably the most important topic in this entire E-book!

Open vs. Closed

Wondering whether you can handle an open adoption? What's it really like?

Special Needs

What does that even mean? What are you equipped and prepared for? Should you be open to any and all needs?

Transracial

How to prepare for raising a child that has a different ethnicity or culture than you do.

Talking to kids

When should you talk to your kids about adoption?

Resources

Are you ready to learn more? These resources will help you take the next steps if you feel adoption is the right path for your family.

Kids Books

List of books to read to your kids about adoption.

Parent Book List

A list of some of my favorite books about adoption, understanding trauma, and memoirs about adoption.

Homestudy

WILL THEY LOOK UNDER YOUR COUCH?

It's totally normal to feel anxious about what the home study phase of this process might look like. The most important thing to note here is that it will look very different depending on what state you live in. You will want to look up your own state laws and then look at the specifics for the agency/country you are adopting from.

First, let's clear up what a home study is and why it's so important. Essentially, the goal of the home study is to look into your ability to be an adoptive parent and make sure that you have a suitable home to raise a child. It helps your social worker get to know your family better AND they teach you more about the adoption process as well as giving you more tools and resources to parent a child brought into your home through adoption.

What to expect.

1. Multiple interviews with you and your spouse (as well as children in the home) that will cover everything from your reason for adopting to discussing your own childhood, previous marriages etc.
2. Looking at your financial records to ensure you meet the guidelines for the agency/country in which you hope to adopt from.
3. Background checks. Including but not limited to FBI clearances, child abuse registries, state clearances etc.
4. Medical Exams for everyone in the home. Each agency/country has different requirements and some do require a mental health check as well.
5. They will discuss what your wishes are regarding the child you hope to adopt. Age, ethnicity (are you open to transracial adoption) special needs etc.
6. They will be diving into most areas of your life. It may seem invasive but they are there to help you and make sure you are fully prepared for all that adoption involves.

This may sound daunting...and it can take weeks to months to complete. What I always like to remind people is that what we should all be keeping in mind is that the goal here is to find a family for a child, not a child for a family. This process is a crucial first step to ensuring adoptions are done ethically and with the CHILD as the most important party involved.

Domestic Adoption

PRIVATE ADOPTIONS IN THE US

For the sake of keeping this brief, I'm going to address some of the parameters that go into being eligible to adopt privately in the US. There are many roads you can take, including adopting from the foster care system. This will cover domestic infant adoption, as it's the most commonly asked about type of domestic adoption.

General Requirements

How do we get "chosen"?

In most domestic private adoption cases, the birth mother typically chooses the adopting parent(s) based on her own personal set of criteria and decides what she is comfortable with in regards to age of adoptive parents, number of children already in the home etc.

However, some agencies place a cut off on the adoptive parents by age, as well as number of children in the home currently. Be sure to ask the agencies you are considering about these requirements if you are over 40 or have children already.

Do you have to be married?

Marital Status is flexible for domestic adoption depending on the agency you choose. Married couples, singles and same sex couples are eligible to adopt domestically.

How long does it take?

Domestic adoption can take months to years for a placement.

How much information do you get about the child/health etc?

This will vary, but in many cases you will get the health history of the birth mom and maybe the birth father as well as medical information regarding the pregnancy if she was receiving medical care.

Will I have to travel?

If you adopt out of state you will have to travel anywhere from 1-3+ times. These visits *might* include meeting the expecting mom, being present for delivery, and returning for finalization.

How much will it cost?

This is a very tough question to answer. All things considered, it can cost anywhere from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars.

International Adoption

ADOPTING OUTSIDE THE US

International adoption has been on the steady decline for a number of years now. There is so much to consider when you are thinking of adopting a child from another country, this is meant to be a glimpse of what the requirements can be. The list of countries open to international adoption is ever changing, you can view a current list of which countries are open by visiting the US governments inter-country adoption website.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/Intercountry-Adoption-Country-Information.html>

General Requirements

How do we get "chosen"?

In some cases, you are matched with a child based on the criteria you've set forth in your home study and that your social worker has approved you for (age, special needs, sibling groups etc)

Some countries have waiting child lists that you can see and you can choose to adopt a child from that list. (These children are most often 2+ years old, sibling groups, have some mild to moderate special needs etc)

Do you have to be married? Age limits?

Marital Status for international adoption depends on the individual countries requirements. Some have requirements regarding length of marriage, divorces etc. Age limits are also based on each countries requirements.

Age of children?

Anywhere from 1 -16 years old. This very much depends on what you are open to and the length of court proceedings etc.

How long does it take?

International adoption can take anywhere from one to 3+ years for completion.

How much information do you get about the child/health etc?

Your agency and social worker will talk with you about your referral and you can request a physician review any available medical records. Detailed information may be harder to obtain with international adoption. Records can also be inaccurate. Adoption requires (in my opinion) that you expect the unexpected.

Some countries are still figuring out how best to keep records and they often have different standards and requirements than we are used to.

Will I have to travel?

Almost always. Anywhere from 1-3+ trips. Trips can be a week to many months. This is an opportunity to get to know your child's birth country and culture. You'll feel even more equipped to help them preserve it if you've experienced it yourself.

How much will it cost?

This will vary greatly depending on the travel required etc, however most international adoptions fall in the range of \$20,000 - \$50,000

Funding your Adoption

THE NOT SO FUN MONEY TALK

No one likes to talk about the money part. I think we all wish there was a way adoptions could be totally free (adopting out of the foster care system *is* virtually free). However, in private adoption, there are many people involved from attorneys to social works to agencies etc. The costs can add up quickly. We aren't here to debate those costs today, just give you some resources for funding your adoption since monopoly money isn't widely accepted. This list is by no means exhaustive, there are SO many ways families fund adoptions! Don't be afraid to google, read adoption blogs and think outside the box.

Grants + Loans

The ABBA Fund

Gift of Adoption

Show Hope

Lifesong for Orphans

Pathways for Little Feet

America's Christian Credit Union

* You can also check with your bank/credit union about home equity lines of credit and signature loans.

Fundraising

Adopt Together

Both Hands

Get Creative!

T-Shirts

Garage sales

Pancake breakfasts

Spaghetti Dinners

Car Wash

Photo-shoots

Handmade items

Puzzle Piece Fundraiser

Silent Auctions

Restaurant Fundraisers (Applebees, Chick-fil-a, pizza places etc often host these for families)

Tax Credit

This is something that has changed over the years, but there is an adoption tax credit available for many adoption situations that qualify. Talk to your tax advisor and check out the latest information by visiting the IRS website.

Ethics

THE MOST IMPORTANT PAGE IN THIS BOOK

Don't skip this part, okay?

What can you do to ensure an ethical adoption?

Adoption is hard. It's often a long process that is emotionally draining and it can also be financially draining. It's very easy to lose sight of what is important as you grow weary of waiting. Please remember, it is OUR responsibility as adoptive parents to ensure as best as we can that our children are adopted ethically.

What does that even mean? The truth is, children are stolen from their birth families and sold to orphanages in some cases. The desire for healthy infants for families to adopt has created a literal *market* for babies in many places. Birth mothers are promised help they never receive, told they can have open adoptions only to be totally shut out and forgotten about by agencies and adoptive families. This part of the adoption process has been the most difficult for me to come to grips with over the years. All agencies aren't bad, and all kids in international orphanages aren't stolen and traded on the black market - but - even ONE of these instances should be seen as too many. So, what can we, as adoptive parents do to avoid unknowingly participating in these kinds of things?

ASK QUESTIONS!!! Don't stop asking questions. **RESEARCH, RESEARCH and then RESEARCH** some more about every person, agency, or consultant you are handing money to. Read every review you can get your hands on about the places and people you hope to work with in this process. Did you know that in many countries you can hire independent private investigators to look into your child's file and history to ensure accuracy? Ask your agency how they support birth moms after placement has occurred? Do they have support groups? Counseling? How many repeat birth moms do they get? (if they have women coming back year after year to place a baby that's a problem)

There is SO much more to this than I could ever fit on this page, but what I hope you take away is a sense of responsibility for your adoption. You are the one who will have to answer the hard questions for your child one day. There are places and people listed in the resources section of this E-book to get your started in the conversation. The sooner you can get plugged in and listening, the better.

Open vs. Closed Adoption

IS ONE BETTER THAN THE OTHER

Thanks to many bad made for T.V. movies, people have a skewed idea of what an open adoption looks like. Let's take a moment to bust some myths and get you thinking about this from another perspective.

What are the differences?

Closed Adoption:

Generally means that you have no plan to continue contact after placing the child and that you do not share identifying characteristics with each other. This type of adoption was the only option for a very long time.

Semi-Open Adoption:

An adoption where some identifying characteristics are shared but still maintains elements of a closed adoption and a barrier to contact. Some contact usually occurs which might look like an adoptive family sending pictures or letters to the birth family, maybe through the agency or some type of private email account.

Open Adoption:

This usually involves continual, regular contact between the birth family and adoptive family. Full names are shared as well as other identifying information such as addresses, phone numbers, emails, social media pages, etc. Most cases still have a plan for what the communication will look like and how often. Some open adoptions plan regular visits as well.

Which one is right for you?

The truth is that most professionals in the adoption world will tell you that where possible and healthy, open adoption can be a beautiful thing. Children often can deal better with their trauma and general issues related to their adoption in open adoption situations. There are many birth moms and adoptive families who share their experiences with open adoption to aide in breaking the stigmas.

(see the resources section for more)

It's important to note that *most* international adoptions are closed adoptions. The US government requires a child to meet an "orphan status" in order to be adopted into the US from another country. You can read more about that on the US governments website.

Special Needs Adoption

IT'S NOT AS SCARY AS YOU MAY THINK!

When people hear "Special Needs" they often go to an extreme imagining what that may look like. Before you discount the idea of checking "yes" to some of those boxes on your paperwork, take some time to read the stories from families who've had experience with this type of adoption, and leave some space for your heart to consider what a beautiful blessing each child is, no matter what a piece of paper says.

What you need to know.

In terms of the adoption world, special needs can mean many different things. Children can be designated "SN" on their files due to their age (over 2 is often considered harder to place) if they are apart of a sibling group, and if they have even the slightest hint of something not "normal". I've seen children designated SN because of a large birth mark!

There are obviously many things to consider if you are open to this type of adoption.

- *Health Insurance

- *Financial Stability

- *Time constraints (being available to take a child to regular Dr. appointments etc)

However, I've found most families will tell you that you figure all that out. The vast majority of children needing to be adopted will fall into this "Special Needs" category. Whether it be something correctable like cleft palette, or more intense like a severe heart condition, these are the children that are often overlooked. Take some time to talk with parents who've walked this road before you say yes or no.

On a personal note, two of our children have come to us with what are considered "severe" special needs. Our family is better because of them and missing out on being their mom would have been the biggest mistake of my life. Don't let a diagnosis on a piece of paper define a child. Not everyone is meant to walk this road, but I think if this part is meant for you to hear, you'll know it.

Transracial Adoption

DON'T PRETEND IT DOESN'T MATTER

Love is Love

But, love isn't blind. We can not bury our heads in the sand and pretend this doesn't matter. Adopting transracially or cross culturally shouldn't be taken lightly. Many agencies and adoption professionals are becoming better educated on this facet of adoption, but again, as adoptive parents it's imperative we get really honest with ourselves and tackle this with open hearts and open minds.

Why it matters.

Once the baby is home or the airport homecoming party is over, there will be real issues that you and your child will have to face together. There are so many children in need of loving families and it's naive to believe that all can be/or should be adopted by families who share their skin color or cultural heritage. There is so much beauty that can be found in diversity, and families being built on love. But we also have to be prepared for what is almost certain to come our way as adoptive parents, and what will come our child's way as they navigate life being transracially adopted.

You and your child will automatically be seen as "not really family" by people you encounter throughout life. Strangers will ask in front of your child if "they're really yours?" "how much they cost?" "are they really brothers/sisters?" etc. It may sting for you, but for your child it will burn to have their place in the family called into question at the grocery store or the play ground.

There will be looks, stares, questions, and you may even be stopped by people that accuse you of wrong doing. There are so many people working tirelessly to educate - but there is such a long way to go. Be sure you are up to the task of battling this day in and day out, and that you feel ready to ask hard questions and call out problematic people and situations in your life for the sake of your child.

The last point I want to make is that while you may feel totally ready for this, don't gloss over how your family, friends, and community will handle it. Adoption in general but more often than not, transracial adoption will expose threads of discrimination and even racism that have been hiding waiting to be excavated in your family for years or generations. Talk to the people who will be in your child's life, ask how they really feel. You may not like what you hear, but at least you can decide from there if that is someone you are willing to cut from your life for the sake of your child. Maybe this all sounds dramatic to you, but after years in the world of adoption, I've learned that these issues are very real, and it's better to address them head on.

This is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this topic. Don't stop here, keep reading and talking with people, asking hard questions and preparing yourself for the road ahead.

Talking to your kids about adoption

WHEN SHOULD YOU START?

One of the most nerve wracking things for adoptive parent's to consider is actually talking to your kids about their adoption. When to start telling them? How much of their story to share? What's appropriate? What should I say? What shouldn't I say? These are all normal questions to have and totally valid concerns. Let's talk about it, the truth is, the worst thing you can do...is NOT talk about it.

3 things to Consider

1. Start as early as you can. The younger your child is when you begin to talk with them about their adoption, the better. There is no need to force the conversation or even to talk about it all day everyday, but little by little. Make sure that your child knows that you are comfortable having these talks and they can always come to you with questions.
2. Always be honest. Of course there will be details that need to be reserved for age appropriate times, but never lie to your child about their adoption. The truth always has a way of coming to the surface and your child needs to know they can trust you.
3. Model for them how to respond to questions. From friends, to family members, to cashiers... there are going to be lots of questions about your child's adoption and modeling for them what it looks like to protect their privacy and their story will help to show them that they own their story. They get to choose with whom and when they share it.

Resources

YOU CAN NEVER LEARN ENOUGH!

How does the saying go?
You can never be over dressed or over educated.

Well, the later is certainly true when it comes to adoption. Here are some of my favorite resources to help you dig in deeper and prepare for the lifelong journey of adoption. I'm so grateful for those who work so hard to provide these types of resources, they are invaluable for people who want to come into the adoption world with as much knowledge as possible.

Woven Together- <https://www.woven-together.com/>

Embrace Race:

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/topic/transracial-adoption>

Lifetime Healing Foundation:

<https://lifetimehealingadoption.com/>

AdoptWell:

<https://www.adoptwell.com>

Karyn Purvis:

<https://child.tcu.edu>

The Archibald Project:

<https://www.thearchibaldproject.com/>

Books For Kids

BEYOND A BEDTIME STORY...

Here are a few of my favorite children's books about adoption or being adopted to read to your child. Reading to my children is my absolute favorite way to spend quality time with them, and you can never do too much of it!

Children's Books

I Wished For You:

<https://amzn.to/32eAmNN>

God Gave Us You:

<https://amzn.to/2HTndAx>

I Love You like Crazy Cakes:

<https://amzn.to/2HIX4UE>

I've Loved You Since Forever:

<https://amzn.to/2SLrjRg>

A Mother For Choco:

<https://amzn.to/37JkJ21>

The Pea that was Me: (Embryo Adoption)

<https://amzn.to/2SIIdWkT>

I Became Your Mama:

<https://amzn.to/2vUimfi>

All Families Are Special:

<https://amzn.to/2HDIcbk>

Books For Adults

DEVOUR ALL THE INFO ALONG THIS JOURNEY

One thing is guaranteed in adoption, there will be waiting, likely lots of waiting. Take that time to devour all you can that will help prepare you for the journey ahead. Once your child is home and things are getting hard and messy, the time for reading and research may be limited. Here are a few books to help you prepare!

A Few Books to get you Started:

The Primal Wound:

<https://amzn.to/2SLd9je>

The Connected Child:

<https://amzn.to/2vU1pBH>

Adopting the Hurt Child:

<https://amzn.to/3bNFmx8>

The A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting:

<https://amzn.to/2T5q2nf>

The Body Keeps the Score:

<https://amzn.to/2HFP0nV>

Attaching in Adoption:

<https://amzn.to/2ukp9ic>

An Uncomplicated Life (Memoir)

<https://amzn.to/39Qio6L>

The Lucky Few (Memoir)

<https://amzn.to/2T6kgS2>

Videos I've Created

I'VE TALKED ABOUT ADOPTION A LOT OVER THE YEARS

When I began my Youtube Channel back in 2014 I had no idea that adoption would soon become my most asked about topic. Since then I have created tons of videos to share what I've learned over the years. I'll list a few of them below that I think may be helpful to you!

Cocooning/Bonding + Attachement:

<https://youtu.be/0ju9P-qWshQ>

5 Steps to Get Started:

<https://youtu.be/qw8orrguukA>

Q + A about Down Syndrome:

<https://youtu.be/m6-FauN4QzQ>

Adoption 101: How to support someone whose adopting

<https://youtu.be/MPlo8uVmWS0>

Adoption: What We Wish You Knew

<https://youtu.be/iEPx09xPuEg>

Embryo Adoption FAQ:

https://youtu.be/EFW1s6x_hbl



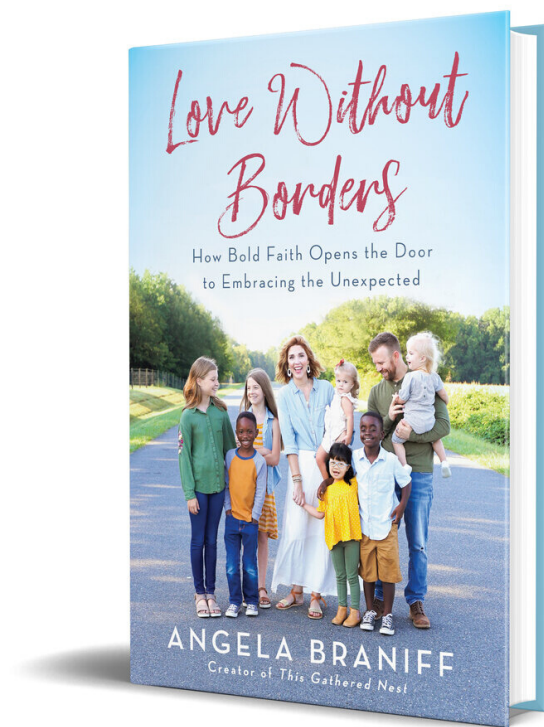
I know that all of this can feel so overwhelming and perhaps even a little daunting, but let me assure you, it is OH-SO-WORTH-IT!
My children are the bravest and most incredible human beings I've ever known. Being their mom is both a privilege and an honor. If this path of adoption is where you feel led to go, please press on. There are thousands of children who need a loving a family, and that family might be YOU!

With Love,
Angela

Come Say Hi!

www.thisgatherednest.com

www.instagram.com/thisgatherednest



LOVE WITHOUT BORDERS

Available Nationwide April 28th, 2020

If you'd like to know more about my story- the winding and unexpected roads that led us to adoption in all it's various forms, you can read all about it in my memoir- Love Without Borders

"Our stories have the power to change the lives of those who we tell them to. Love Without Borders is both a timely and timeless message, a story the world needs to hear."

—Heather Avis, author of *The Lucky Few* and *Scoot Over and Make Room*

"Honest, relatable, often sweetly hilarious, and always heartfelt, Angela's book is a delight in every way. From sharing 'a day in the life' to detailing the adoption process for her beautiful children, you will find this book is full of wisdom and inspiration."

—Jessica Honegger, founder of Noonday Collection and author of *Imperfect Courage*

"This book is a beautiful love story. About family. About marriage. About faith. About perseverance. About the steadfast, relentless pursuit of chasing your calling. Every single page was delightful."

—Susan Ramirez, CEO of National Angels

"From the very first chapter I was 'all in,' wanting to linger just a bit longer to finish. This book is like a good girlfriend inviting you over to stay awhile, get cozy, and be poured into with Angela's wisdom."

—Michelle McKinney, founder of Dreams Unleashed