

# LFCS ADOPTION

## *Informational Inquiry*



The First Step Toward Your  
Forever Family

# Why Choose LFCS?



## How is LFCS Unique?

Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri (LFCS) is not just an adoption agency; we serve entire families. Our mission is through Christ's love, we empower children and families to overcome challenges today, so they can build a better tomorrow. Our effective, evidenced-based, and accessible services confront public crises in order to make generations of children and families across Missouri safer and stronger together. LFCS is a statewide social services agency providing mental health, parenting, foster care, adoption, child development, and community prevention services—reaching out to more than 38,000 people last year alone. These programs are available in multiple offices across the state including, but not limited to, St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, Columbia, and Springfield.

Because LFCS offers such a wide breadth of programs, we can serve each families' unique needs. Women who receive our crisis pregnancy and parenting services are not pressured to make an adoption plan. However, women who desire to make an adoption plan are given the opportunity to select a home study approved adoptive family through our agency's adoption program with support throughout the process. This approach allows LFCS to utilize funding from our state and federal partners to meet the needs of an expectant mother during her pregnancy, rather than rely solely on adoptive family resources. An added benefit is cost savings that we extend to our adoptive families, making adoption an affordable option.

## Why Choose LFCS for Your Adoption?

Adoption agencies vary in how they serve adoptive families and birth parents. Here are a few ways we are unique:

- LFCS adoptive parents are assigned an adoption caseworker who is committed to their adoption journey.
- LFCS has multiple sites across Missouri providing adoption services.
- LFCS expectant parents have their own caseworker, committed to their unique needs.
- LFCS maintains low, standardized birth parent expenses.
- LFCS provides customized referrals to trustworthy attorneys and financial assistance.
- LFCS offers adoption training opportunities and ongoing support.

## Who LFCS Serves:

LFCS can serve prospective adoptive families who at the time of application are:

- Between 25 – 45 years of age
- Legally married for a minimum of 2 years if adopting as a couple
- At least one parent is a US Citizen and MO Resident
- Applicant has no child under the age of 1 year old
- If there is a history of a serious physical or mental health condition, the applicant(s) have a good health standing for 3 years based on a physician's assessment
- Applicant must have steady employment and adequate income to support the family

# How We're Different

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## A Social Services Approach

LFCS is more than an adoption agency. Because we focus on empowering children and families to overcome challenges today so they can build a better tomorrow, LFCS staff provide our clients with the tools they need to reach their goals. In addition to adoption services, we provide crisis pregnancy services, birth parent counseling, foster care licensing, counseling, and many other services to support children and families. Expectant parents and adoptive parents who come to LFCS have their own caseworkers focused on their unique needs. While we have a team approach in our adoption program, each client is supported individually.

## Matching Late in Pregnancy

Many agencies match expectant mothers to adoptive families as soon as they come to the agency to make an adoption plan. Women might make their plan after just learning of their pregnancy, often at a point of confusion and desperation. LFCS, on the other hand, matches much later in the pregnancy, after women have had many opportunities to make sure placement is truly in their best interest and the baby's. Women generally have an opportunity to hear baby's heartbeat, see baby on a sonogram, learn baby's gender, and connect to their growing baby before they are matched with an adoptive family. This reduces the risk of change-of-heart situations. When expectant parents are matched through LFCS, their best interests have been met throughout their journey and they continue to be supported, regardless of the adoption or parenting plan they choose.

## Low, Standardized Birth Parent Expenses

Because LFCS is a social services agency, there are funding sources to support expectant mothers during their pregnancy and after they deliver, rather than relying solely on adoption fees or costly birth parent expenses paid by adoptive families. In other agencies that match early in pregnancy, adoptive families may be expected to begin providing financial support to the expectant mother after matching, often for several months of the pregnancy. These expenses can be very high and are often lost if an expectant mother has a change-of-heart.

## No Lost Fees

At LFCS, your adoption fees and paid birth parent expenses are not lost in the event of a failed adoption situation. In the event you experience the loss of an adoption situation, you would be placed on the matching list to try again.



# Types of Adoption at LFCS

## Domestic Agency Adoption

Domestic Agency Adoption is the most common form of adoption at LFCS. We match birth parents making an adoption plan through our Pregnancy, Parenting and Adoption Services (PPAS) to waiting couples who have been unable to grow their family through pregnancy. In our Domestic Agency Adoption Program, we are with you throughout the process, from the home study to the adoption finalization (and beyond, if needed). This type of adoption requires an application and approved home study before viewing matching situations. There are fees to the agency to cover the work LFCS will complete on your behalf throughout your adoption journey.



## Independent/Other Agency Adoption

Some individuals/couples connect with an expectant mother outside of an agency. With these independent connections, families typically navigate the matching, hospital, placement, and openness without a social worker. Some families may find managing this on their own stressful. LFCS can provide support in these circumstances for an additional fee. We often serve adoptive families who make private connections by completing their home study evaluation and required post-placement supervision in order to complete the adoption process. These services are also available to families who have connected to an out-of-town adoption agency or adoption broker/attorney.



## Embryo Adoption

Adoption caseworkers at LFCS may help couples interested in adopting embryos which were created by the In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) process in a hospital or infertility clinic. Often, more embryos are created than a couple will use, and many couples choose to donate their unused embryos to couples wishing to adopt. Contact LFCS for more information regarding this process.



## Intercountry Adoption

Sometimes referred to as international adoption, intercountry adoption is the process of adopting a child from a country outside the United States. LFCS is not a child placing agency for intercountry adoptions, but we can complete the required home study and, in some cases, the post-placement supervision required by the placing agency.

## Foster Care

LFCS also works with foster families in some areas of the state. Workers in the foster licensing unit recruit, train and manage foster families. The goal of foster care is to provide a safe, temporary home setting for children who have been placed in the custody of the State of Missouri. The goal of foster care is first and foremost the reunification of children with their birth family after the original issue of abuse/neglect has been remedied. The greatest need in Missouri is for families willing to foster sibling groups, older teens, or children with special needs.



# The Adoption Process

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The adoption process involves multiple steps, starting with the application. The next step, the home study, typically takes two to three months. Once a home study has been approved, the adoptive family can be added to the match list. Couples wait an average of 12-18 months to be matched with their baby. LFCS is with you throughout the adoption process, both to manage your case and to support you.

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## Map of the Adoption Process



# Adoption Fees

LFCS works to keep adoption costs as affordable as possible by using a sliding scale to determine your agency fees. An adoption caseworker can speak with you regarding specific expenses you can expect in your case. In general, the costs you can expect during your adoption process include:

- Application fee of \$200
- Agency fees, which include:
  - Home study
  - Support provided to birth parents
  - Support to you throughout the matching process
  - Support at the hospital and at court appearances
  - Birth parent expenses
  - Post-placement supervision
  - Ongoing support following adoption finalization
  - Overall program expenses
  - Please Note:** Agency fees do **not** include education, travel/lodging, medical or legal expenses.
- Educational expenses for webinars; approximately \$200
- Profile albums: cost varies
- Fingerprint background checks; approximately \$43 per person
- Legal expenses; approximately \$3,000 to \$5,000 in a typical case.

LFCS SLIDING SCALE FEE SCHEDULE	
HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVEL	FEE
\$50,000	\$20,500
\$50,001 - \$60,000	\$22,000
\$60,001 - \$70,000	\$23,500
\$70,001 - \$80,000	\$25,000
\$80,001 - \$90,000	\$26,500
\$90,000 - \$100,000	\$28,000
\$100,001 - \$110,000	\$29,500
\$110,001 - \$120,000	\$31,000
\$120,001 - \$130,000	\$32,500
\$130,001 - \$140,000	\$34,000
\$140,001 - \$150,000	\$35,500
\$150,001 - and above	\$37,000

**Please Note:**

Many families apply for grants to cover a portion of their expenses. Your Adoption Social Worker will provide you with information on grant-funding organizations once you are added to the match list.



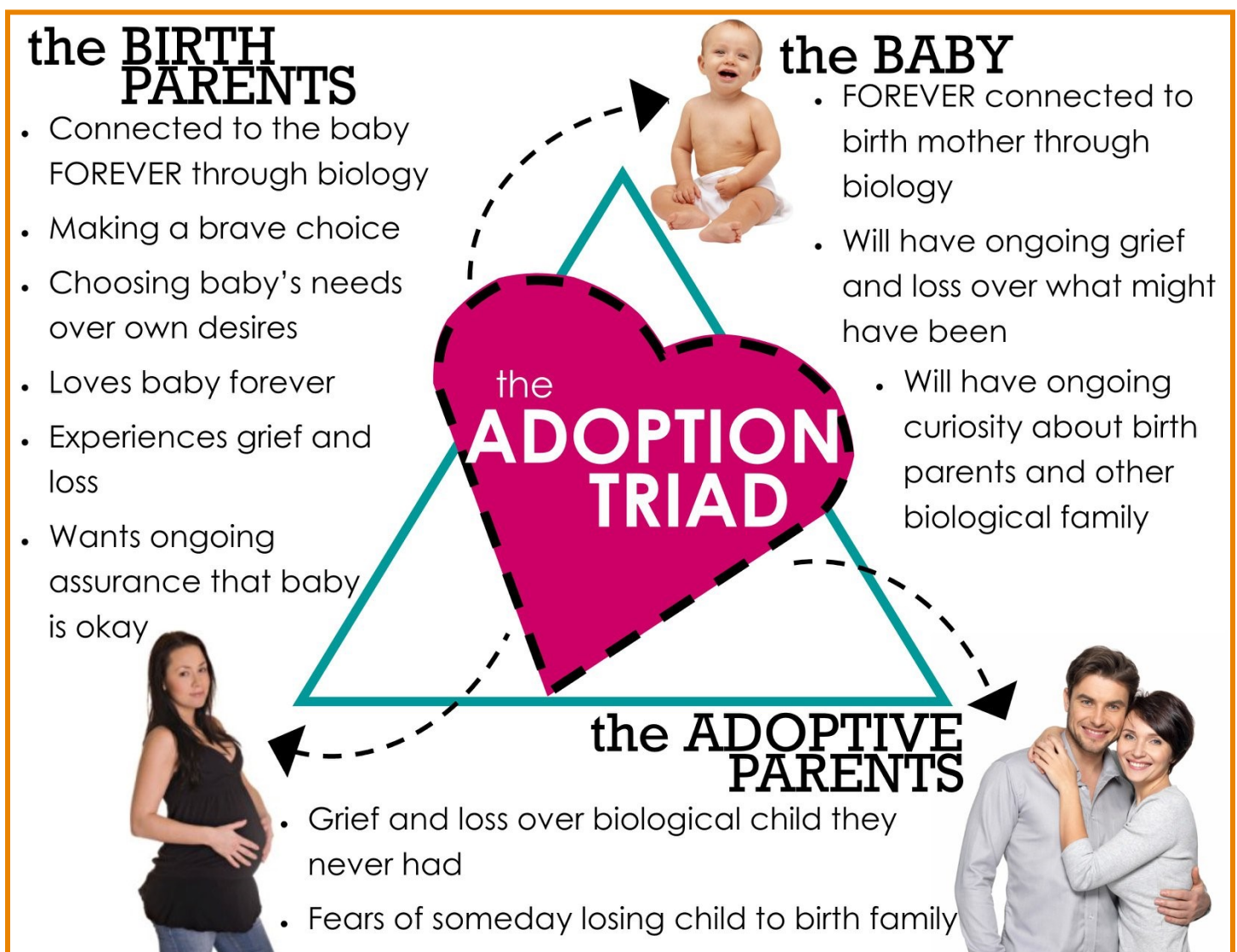
# Openness and the Adoption Constellation

There are three equal parties in the Adoption Triad or Constellation, as shown in the infographic below. Each party in the adoption relationship is important and research supports openness as being in the best interest of everyone involved.

LFCS requires openness on the following minimum basis:

- Update letter and photo during the first week of placement.
- Update letters and photos each month for the first six months (although many families extend this to the first full year).
- Update letters and photos each year until the child turns 18.

Your adoption caseworker will help you manage openness, often in conjunction with the birth mother's caseworker.



# Frequently Asked Questions

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## What is the adoption process like?

### *The typical process prior to being matched:*

- ❑ After inquiring and having an informational appointment with someone from our adoption program, you will submit an application along with the \$200 application fee.
- ❑ Complete your home study evaluation.
- ❑ Create your family profile album using instructions provided by your adoption caseworker.
- ❑ Expectant parent(s) make an adoption plan with the help of their caseworker and a matching profile is created to describe the details in the expected child's background.
- ❑ If the matching profile aligns with your preferences, you decide if you want to pursue the matching situation by having your profile album presented to the expectant parent(s).
- ❑ Expectant parent(s) then view your family profile album, along with other interested families, and makes a selection.

### *The typical process after being matched:*

- ❑ At the time of baby's birth, both the adoption caseworker and birth parent caseworker facilitate the placement at the hospital.
- ❑ Sometime after baby is at least 48-hours old, the birth parent(s) formally terminate their parental rights with the assistance of an attorney.
- ❑ Attend your first court appearance, called a Transfer of Custody hearing.
- ❑ The adoption caseworker makes a minimum of three visits over the next six months for court required post-placement supervision.
- ❑ Following all post-placement supervision, your adoption is finalized at the second court appearance, the Adoption Finalization hearing.

## How long does the adoption process take?

The home study process usually takes 2-3 months to complete. Once approved and added to the match list, couples wait an average of 12-18 months to be successfully matched.

## Are adoptions open or closed at LFCS?

Research shows that everyone in the adoption triad (adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees) benefit from openness in adoption. Openness varies from somewhat-closed (where the birth family chooses not to receive updates) to semi-open (mediated openness between all parties in the adoption) to inclusive (with direct contact and more frequent visits). Openness often changes as families build a relationship with their child's birth family. LFCS can help manage openness, regardless of what the agreed-upon openness arrangement looks like.

## Why do most expectant/birth parents make an adoption plan?

Expectant parents come to LFCS for many reasons. Sometimes, they are young and unprepared to parent a child. Other times, they are married, with several young children in the home already and no additional resources for another child. Some expectant parents have mental health or addiction challenges. Others simply do not wish to become parents. The common denominator for all of our expectant parents is the loving and courageous sacrifice they are making for their baby.



# Frequently Asked Questions

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## Can I choose a baby's gender, race, or other characteristics?

During the home study process, adoptive parents are approved to adopt children based on the characteristics they feel equipped to parent. We do not approve families based on a specific gender, but we do take into consideration a couple's ability to support a child's age, racial/ethnic heritage, and health/mental health background. Additionally, the decision-making power is in the hands of each adoptive couple as they review information in each matching situation.

There are no guarantees about perfect babies, regardless of the way families come together. Most babies or young children placed for adoption through LFCS have one or more factors in the background that will require extra support as the child grows, such as poor prenatal nutrition, prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol, hereditary mental health challenges, learning disabilities, medical needs, and trauma. These challenges are in addition to the attachment, identity, and cultural needs an adoptive family will support throughout the child's lifetime. Hopeful adoptive families will receive additional education on supporting a child's needs both now and in the future.

## Can I just adopt a baby by becoming a foster parent?

While babies and toddlers do enter foster care, they are most often part of a sibling group. The goal of foster care is the temporary care of children while birth parents overcome something harmful in their lives. The first, best goal for children is almost always reunification with their biological parents.

## How do I find an attorney?

LFCS has experience in most areas of Missouri and will recommend attorneys who work in those jurisdictions. We have a slate of adoption attorneys who are knowledgeable about the adoption laws in Missouri and experienced in their local courtrooms.

## Can I use my own attorney?

We do not recommend using your own attorney unless he or she is listed with the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys. In our experience, most people end up having a longer and more costly adoption journey when using attorneys who do not have previous adoption experience. Check here for a list of attorneys: [http://www.adoptionattorneys.com/aaaa\\_directory](http://www.adoptionattorneys.com/aaaa_directory).

## How much does the legal part of an adoption process cost?

Each adoption is unique and the costs vary widely based on a number of factors:

- Jurisdiction
- Attorney per-hour billing fees
- Legal risk in the case

In general, we find most adoptions cost from \$3,000—5,000 in legal expenses, including your attorney, filing fees, the birth parent attorneys, and guardian ad litem fees.

## Can birth parents take kids away after the adoption?

Birth parents either consent to have their rights terminated, using the Consent to Termination of Parental Rights and Adoption form they sign with their attorney, or their rights are terminated by the Court. The cases of adoptions being overturned are extremely rare and usually involve circumstances far outside the norm.

## Do I have to tell my child about his or her birth family?

Research supports openness with a child regarding their adoption and birth family. Children grieve the loss of their first family, even if they never meet in person. Most children are left wondering why they were rejected or curious about birth family members who look or act like themselves. Adoption can leave a “hole” in their identity development if adoptive parents do not adequately meet their needs for information and access as they grow older.

**Adoption is designed to provide a family for a child,  
not to provide a child for a family.**

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## Resources

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Adoption: The Long View podcast

<https://lavenderluz.com/podcast-2/>

Creating a Family podcast

<https://creatingafamily.org/category/radio-show/>

Adoptive Families Magazine — a very helpful subscription with many great articles

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

Brave Love — a support for birth families and others in the adoption triad

<https://www.bravelove.org/>

### Books

- ❑ *10 Adoption Essentials: What You Need to Know...* by Russell Elkins
- ❑ *Adoption Unfiltered: Revelations from Adoptees, Birth Parents, and Allies* by Lori Holden, Sara Easterly, and Kelsey Vander Ranyard
- ❑ *Friday's Rain: Revealing what grief washes away* by Brooke Mardell
- ❑ *I'm Fine: A Pursuit of Baby* by Tiffany Graham
- ❑ *Peace in the Process: How Adoption...* by Kristin Hill Taylor
- ❑ *Road Map Through Your Loved One's Adoption* by LFCS of Missouri
- ❑ *The Open Adoption Book* by Bruce Rappaport
- ❑ *The Open-Hearted Way to an Open Adoption* by Lori Holden
- ❑ *To Have and Not to Hold* by Lorri Antosz Benson

### What Others Say About LFCS:

*"I always felt support and understanding from our adoption social worker and I never questioned where her heart was." — Trevor*

*"One of the best things was the care and support we knew our child's birth mother was also getting. Knowing that she was being seen, valued, and cared for by LFCS gave us such peace through the whole process." — Kathryn*

# Glossary of Adoption Terms

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Your Adoption Social Worker may use terms that are new to you. Here is a comprehensive overview of common words you may hear throughout your adoption journey.

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**Adoption Plan** — the plan an expectant mother makes to place her child for adoption. In most cases, this occurs prior to delivery, but occasionally happens after the baby is born.

**Adoption Triad** — the three equal parties in an adoption relationship: the adopted child, the birth family, and the adoptive family.

**After-Delivery** — when the adoption plan is made after the baby is born.

**Birth Father** — the biological father of the baby placed for adoption. He may or may not be the Legal Birth Father.

**Birth Mother** — the biological mother of baby placed for adoption.

**Birth Parent Expense(s)** — the expenses a birth family incurs while pregnant and recovering from birth. These expenses usually involve things like rent, utilities, and transportation to appointments. Birth Parent Expenses are covered within the agency fees.

**Change of Heart** — when an Expectant Mother or Birth Mother changes her mind about her adoption plan before signing her Consent to TPR/Adoption. Change of Heart can happen at any time during pregnancy, matching, the hospital, or after placement.

**Consent to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) and Adoption** — a form from the state of MO that is signed by the Birth Mother (and sometimes Birth Father) after the baby is 48-hours old with their attorney(s). The consent is signed prior to the Transfer of Custody Hearing.

**Expectant Mother** — a woman who is pregnant and considering making an adoption plan.

**Finalization Hearing** — the final of two hearings during the adoption process in which the adoptee is considered a full, legal member of the adoptive family, just as if he or she were born to the adoptive parents.

**Legal Risk** — the risk that exists for an adoption plan to be disrupted.

**Legal Risk Placement** — an adoptive placement in which Termination of Parental Rights has not been completed prior to placement with the pre-adoptive family.

**Matching** — bringing an expectant mother (and sometimes father) together with an adoptive couple.

**Matching Situation** — when an expectant mother makes an adoption plan which is then presented to potential adoptive families for consideration.

**Openness** — the level of contact between a birth family and adoptive family.

**Placing Agency** — an agency which is licensed to place children for adoption.

**PPAS** — an acronym for the Pregnancy, Parenting and Adoption Services program at LFCS, which serves both women who plan to parent and those making an adoption plan.

**Post-Placement** — (also known as Post-Placement Supervision) a period of six months when an adoptive family is supervised by a social worker or agency. This includes home visits every other month until finalization occurs and results in a report that is submitted by the attorney as a recommendation that adoption is in the child's best interest.

**Transfer of Custody Hearing** — the first of two hearings during the adoption process when legal and lawful custody transfers to the adoptive parents. It also "starts the clock" on the six-month period known as post-placement, which is required in the state of Missouri before an adoption can be finalized.



Visit us online at [lfcsmo.org](http://lfcsmo.org) or contact our Statewide Intake office to schedule an appointment and learn more.

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