



Choosing An Attorney

If you have decided to adopt, you are going to need a (strong emphasis here) reputable adoption attorney to help you. An experienced adoption lawyer can answer your questions and address other concerns. You should get recommendations of attorneys from friends, relatives, and adoptive parent support groups and also see if the local Bar Association or the Better Business Bureau has ever received complaints about a specific attorney. Hire an attorney who is experienced in handling adoptions. Don't select an attorney just because he or she is a friend or on the recommendation of friends, unless they were satisfied with this attorney's fees and services for their own adoption. You don't want to pay an inexperienced attorney to learn on the job!

You might also want to discuss some of the following concerns with the lawyer:

Qualifications

- What is your experience, knowledge, competence? How long have you worked in adoption?
- How many nonrelative adoptions have you completed? How many this year? (20+ per year and several years of experience are desirable.) What percentage of your total practice is devoted to adoption?

Finances

- How do you bill? Is your fee an hourly rate, or do you charge a flat fee? (Keep in mind that ethical, experienced attorneys may have a higher hourly rate but charge less overall because they spend less time than a less-experienced attorney would.)
- Do you require a retainer fee in advance? If so, how much? What happens to my retainer fee if the birth mother changes her mind?

Working relationships

- Do you handle open adoptions, confidential adoptions or both? Do you have strong feelings about openness?
- Will your office keep me up-to-date and involved?
- When you are away from the office, is another knowledgeable staff member available?

Things to think about

- Does the lawyer answer your questions to your satisfaction?
- Does the lawyer or his staff return your phone calls promptly?

- Is the lawyer sensitive to your feelings?
- Is the lawyer well informed about adoption law?
- Is the lawyer well organized?
- Does the lawyer pressure you or make you feel uncomfortable with the decision-making process?
- Does the lawyer openly discuss the financial and emotional risks involved?
- Are the lawyer and support staff pleasant people who help you feel at ease and who will assist you graciously?

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