

Answers to Adoption Questions

1) General Adoption Information

For general questions regarding how to adopt a child: start the process, costs, time and/or chances for placement:

The Adoption Exchange has a free, monthly class called Adoption Options.

Wasatch Front: 801-265-0444 or ks@adoptex.org

Four-hour class includes:

- different ways to adopt a child: domestic, international, foster care – what are the pros and cons
- agencies or attorneys that do each kind of adoption
- adoption process such as home studies, matching, placement, court finalization, and risks to consider
- birth parent and adoption issues
- fees and what may be included
- tax credits and employee benefits to help with adoption costs

Child Welfare Gateway Website addresses the topics listed above at

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/>

Information on adoption and related issues at www.utdcfsadopt.org

Utah's licensed adoption agencies at http://www.hslic.utah.gov/db_search.asp

2) Stepparent Adoption

If you are thinking about adopting a step child, you need legal counsel regarding your adoption plans from a family law attorney. Costs vary, depending on the ease or complication of the adoption process. Many attorneys provide a brief, free consultation to help you determine if you want to hire them.

You may educate yourself by reading adoption law Utah statute Title 78B Section 6 Particular Proceedings. You can find Utah statute at www.le.state.ut.us.

You may want to consider the following as you think about a stepparent adoption:

1. Is the biological father or mother willing to sign a "voluntary relinquishment of his or her parental rights"? If he or she is, a stepparent adoption is a fairly uncomplicated process (fees vary depending on the attorney's fees for work and filing the petition).
2. If the biological father or mother is not willing, you want to think about some other things.
 - a.) Was your wife married to your stepchild's father at any time? If so, you would need the biological father's "voluntary relinquishment of parental rights" or there will need to be grounds to terminate his parental rights to free your stepchild for adoption.
 - b.) If the biological father was not married to your wife there are many factors to determine if he has paternity rights. You will want to hire a knowledgeable attorney to assure legal requirements are followed.
 - c.) Is the biological father a resident of Utah or was he a resident at the time your stepchild was born? Adoption laws vary from state-to-state. If the biological father was

or is a resident of another state, different laws may apply. Again, you need to hire a knowledgeable attorney to assure legal requirements are followed.

Besides the biological father issues, to pursue a stepparent adoption, you need to get a clearance from the Bureau of Criminal Investigations through the Department of Public Safety and a clearance from the Child Abuse Registry through the Division of Child and Family Services. These requirements assure that you have not been convicted of child abuse or other violent crimes.

3) Searching for Birth Families

If you are 18 or older, you may try the following:

- Adoption records are sealed by Utah courts. You may petition the courts to grant access
- If you were adopted through an adoption agency, you may request your non-identifying information about your birth family. You can ask the agency if they can provide you with any non-identifying information they can legally release. Several adoption agencies have services to accommodate such requests.
- If you were born in Utah, there is a Mutual-Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry that was set up to help adult adoptees and birth families find each other if both parties so desire. To get more information or register with the Mutual-Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry, call (801) 538-6363 or write the Bureau of Vital Records, 288 North 1460 West, P.O. Box 141012, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-1012. They will send you a registration form. Cost is \$25.
- If you were not born in Utah, contact the Health Department Bureau of Vital Records in the state in which you were born to ask about mutual exchange adoption registries or open adoption records.
- The International Soudex Reunion Registry in Carson City, Nevada has helped many people who are searching for their adopted (adult) children or adoptees searching for birth families. They are a non-profit organization. Their Website is <http://www.isrr.net/> and their phone number is (775) 882-7755.