

Catholic Social Services: A Values-Based Adoption Program Information Packet



Mission Statement

Pregnancy Support and Adoption Services supports the tradition of family life by focusing its efforts on the vulnerability of children and the promotion of loving, safe, and permanent families through advocacy, education and support services.

Catholic Social Services, Pregnancy Support and Adoption Services
3710 East 20th Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99508
Website: www.cssalaska.org

Adoption Services Coordinator: Verla LeBaron, MSW
Phone: (907) 222-7373 Fax: (907) 258-1091 Email: vlebaron@cssalaska.org

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Thank you for your inquiry into Catholic Social Services' (CSS) Pregnancy Support and Adoption Services. CSS is a state licensed child placement agency that has been providing adoption services in Alaska since 1967. Pregnancy Support and Adoption Services is a values-based, professional program that operates on the premise that every child deserves a permanent, loving home in which s/he will be nurtured into his/her full potential. All policies, practices, and decisions of the program are therefore made with the well being of the child as a first priority.

The enclosed information packet briefly outlines the process of our adoption program in order to help you, the adoptive family, better understand what is expected of you and the adoption agency. Adoption is both a joy and a responsibility; Catholic Social Services offers a wide range of services to help you better understand the social and emotional adjustments pertaining to adoption. Let's start by addressing some of the most commonly asked questions:

How do we adopt through CSS?

Your first step is to read the following information. You may then call the Adoption Coordinator to clarify any additional questions you have about our program. Included in the packet is an intake form. By returning this form, you indicate your interest in possibly working with CSS and your name will be added to our mailing list for notification of workshops.

The next step is to attend a weekend Adoption Workshop. This is a required step for everyone adopting through CSS, but also provides valuable information about the issues of adoption in general. Anyone interested in adopting is encouraged to attend the workshop even if they are not sure that CSS is the right agency for them.

After attending the workshop, the next step is to complete and submit the application packet which indicates that you have selected CSS as your adoption agency. You are now ready to move on to the home study which CSS will conduct. A completed, positive home study is required to be accepted into the program.

The Adoption Coordinator works with you as the adoption process moves forward and supports your family after placement has occurred. If you are a first-time parent, you will need to attend an infant care class.

How long will it take?

We only wish we could tell you how long your wait will be. Unfortunately, this is not possible, as there are many factors involved that are not under our control. The application process and home study generally takes from three to six months. After that, the length of time before a child is placed with you depends upon the gender and ethnicity of the child you wish to adopt, the number of children available for adoption, and, primarily, on the birth parent's preferences for their child. Currently, we estimate a one or two-year wait; however, this is only an estimate. It could take less time, or it could take more time.

What does openness in adoption mean?

Openness in adoption means that the birth parents and adoptive parents have information about each other, either directly or through Catholic Social Services. Another aspect of open adoption is that the birth mother chooses the parents for her child. An initial meeting between the birth family and the selected adoptive family is facilitated by staff in order to meet and to decide what kind of contact they would like to have. The birth parents and the adoptive family determine the nature of their relationship; it only works if all parties are comfortable with the expectations and boundaries of the relationship. CSS helps the families facilitate the relationship and supports them as they discuss the level of contact with which they are comfortable in their relationship. CSS is also available in the future for assistance for clarifying or changing the boundaries and expectations of the relationship.

Do we have to go through the same process if we have adopted before?

If you have adopted through our program before, the process is similar to the first time. Many families who have adopted apply to CSS for a second or third adoption and we are happy to work with you. If you have adopted through another agency or a private adoption, we will discuss with you whether your attendance at the Adoption Workshop will be required.

How much will it cost?

CSS makes every effort to keep fees low so that adoption is affordable for everyone. Following is a current breakdown of our fees (subject to change):

<u>Service:</u>	<u>Fee:</u>	<u>Due by:</u>
Application Fee	\$100	Due upon application submission.
Educational Workshop	\$400	Due upon workshop registration.
Home Study	\$1,450	\$725 due at the beginning of the home study; \$725 due upon completion of the home study.
Case Management Fee	\$1,000	Due upon portfolio submission.
Base Placement Fee	\$6,000	Due after relinquishment.
Final Placement Fee	\$1,000-7,000	Due after relinquishment. Based upon 5% of family gross annual income.
Total	<hr/> \$9,950-15,950	

An Overview of the Adoption Process

- 1. Intake Form:** The Intake Form provides CSS with general information about your family. There is no fee to submit the Intake Form. When we receive the form, you are automatically placed on our mailing list to notify you of our next adoption workshop dates. If you wish to meet with the Adoption Coordinator to further discuss the program, you can call to set up an appointment.
- 2. Adoption Workshop:** Applicants are required to participate in an educational workshop prior to finalization of their application. The workshop on adoption issues is offered by the agency three times a year. We have found that a weekend format accommodates most people's schedules. Those applicants who are interested in adopting through CSS are required to attend the workshop, but attending does not obligate you to apply through CSS.
- 3. Application:** After attending the Adoption Workshop, if you decide to pursue adoption through Catholic Social Services, you may request the application packet and begin the application process. The application process consists of background checks and fingerprints, medical and financial reports, a home study and references. This is to ensure that your home will be a safe environment, both physically and emotionally, for a child. You may also be given literature on a variety of adoption issues to read at this time.
- 4. Adoption Home Study:** The adoption home study enables the Adoption Coordinator to get to know you better and helps you consider all that is involved in adopting a child. The home study writer meets with you by appointment for two home visits and for individual interviews. The interviews will discuss your family background, your motivation for adoption, the type of child you can best parent through adoption, and the type of home life you can offer the child. An exploration of the emotional and social adjustments that everyone will experience and whether or not it would be beneficial for a child to be placed in your family will also be included in the home study. We are particularly interested in knowing about your ability to parent an adopted child and about the attitude of your relatives and friends towards adoption. Each home study is subject to staff review and approval. Throughout the home study, it is important to remember that the goal of CSS is to find the right family for each child.

NOTE: If you live outside of the Anchorage area, talk to the Adoption Coordinator to make arrangements on how to complete your home study.

- 5. Portfolio:** Once your application documents are completed and the home study has been accepted, you will receive a Portfolio packet and you will create your family's portfolio. Your portfolio, following CSS guidelines, includes photographs and information about your family that is presented to the birth parent(s) during the selection process. When you turn in your portfolio, you will be asked to identify your preferences of situations in the birth family history that are acceptable or unacceptable to you. This is the appropriate time to express any ambivalence about accepting the risk of a particular situation.

6. **Presentation to a Birth Family:** At CSS, the birth parent(s) choose the family whom they would like to parent their child. CSS has minimal control or influence over the particular family selected. If you are selected, we will notify you and provide you with as much information as is available about the birth parent(s) and child prior to placement.
7. **Meetings Between Adoptive Family and Birth Parent(s):** After selection has occurred, the birth parent(s) and the adoptive family have an opportunity to meet and begin to form a relationship with each other. This meeting is held at the CSS offices and is facilitated by the Adoption Coordinator and the Pregnancy Support Counselor. This meeting is an essential ingredient in the birth parent(s)' "giving the adoptive parents permission" to parent the child and to add to the adoptive couple's sense of entitlement as parents. This is the point where expectations and boundaries in the relationship are discussed and initially developed. The families involved decide if they want subsequent meetings, with or without CSS staff's active involvement. This can help solidify the boundaries of the relationship between the birth parent(s) and adoptive couple.
8. **Relinquishment of Parental Rights:** A few days after the birth of the child, the birth parent(s) will decide if they wish to sign a relinquishment to CSS. Once they sign, they have ten more days to "reconsider" their adoption plan. If, during the ten days, they choose to parent their child, they may do so with no legal repercussions or obligations to the adoptive family. If they choose to proceed with their adoption plan, their legal rights to their child will expire on the eleventh day after having signed relinquishment and legal guardianship of the child is transferred to CSS.
9. **Placement:** At the end of the relinquishment period you will be asked to sign the CSS Adoption Home Agreement and pay the placement fee and/or other charges as outlined in your financial contract. Special arrangements for payment, when necessary, are contracted at this time. The Adoption Home Agreement stipulates that CSS is placing the child with you for the purpose of adoption, with guardianship and legal control remaining with CSS until the adoption is finalized. You agree to assume the normal parental responsibilities for the care of the child, including the expense of support, medical care, education, etc. It is recommended that you obtain a lawyer at this point for the legal phase of the adoption.

The medical history of the birth family is shared with the adoption family and updated as additional information is collected. However, not all medical conditions can be known before birth. As with a birth child, if medical problems develop after placement, you as the parents, carry the responsibility for providing necessary care for your child utilizing the help of CSS as well as other appropriate services in the community.

10. **Post Placement Supervision:** After the child has been placed in your home, CSS provides post placement services for a minimum of six months. There are always questions and adjustments of varying degrees in the early days of placement; we stand ready to provide help and support.

A minimum of three visits are scheduled between your family and the adoption coordinator during this time, two of which take place in your home. These visits provide CSS and, ultimately, the court with evidence that your family is adjusting “normally” to the adoption and that the child is being parented and nurtured in a healthy manner.

- 11. CSS’ Release and Adoption Finalization:** When you and the Adoption Coordinator agree that the family/child relationship is successfully established, the Adoption Coordinator will recommend that the adoption be finalized and CSS will issue the legal Consent to Adopt to the court. You will then proceed, with the assistance of your lawyer, through the steps required by the State of Alaska for legal adoption of your child. Until the adoption is finalized in court, the child remains in the legal guardianship of CSS. After finalization, a copy of the adoption decree must be sent to our office in order to close our file and seal your record.
- 12. On-going Contact:** CSS provides on-going services and support to our birth families, adopted persons, and adoptive families. During the adoption process birth parent(s) and adoptive families determine what kind of on-going contact they will have with each other, whether direct or through the agency. Each adoption plan is tailored to the specific needs of the individuals involved. CSS continues to be available to all parties to provide support.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible for our program, an adoptive family must satisfy the requirements of the State of Alaska, as well as those of CSS. Adoptive couples need to understand that meeting these minimal standards does not guarantee placement of a child. Children frequently come from a variety of circumstances and we are looking for families who are capable of understanding the uniqueness of a child not only when s/he is a baby, but as s/he grows into adolescence and adulthood as well.

CSS requires that first-time parents attend an infant parenting class, similar to those offered at most local hospitals. If you are unable to find an infant parenting class in your area, CSS will assist you in meeting the requirement. In addition to having a warm and mature love for children and the ability and flexibility to accept, love, and parent a child that is not born to them, we use the following guidelines in seeking out the best family for each child:

Age: CSS will not eliminate applicants solely on the basis of age. Age will be a factor in evaluating the applicant’s suitability for adoption on a case by case basis. For those families wishing to adopt older children or those with special needs, an understanding of age appropriate development, the specific needs of the child, and the transition time necessary for the child, will need to be demonstrated.

Relationships: CSS requires that the adoptive couple be in a stable, committed relationship for at least three years and married for at least one year.

Other Children in the Family: Generally, CSS does not place a child who is older than the oldest child in the home, whether by birth or adoption. Exceptions are made when such a placement would not be harmful to any of the family members. If there are foster children in the home, this will be discussed with the family to understand how adoption will affect them and the adopted child.

Experience has shown us that it is wise to have a minimum of one year between the arrivals of each child in the family in order for everyone to have enough time to adjust to the changes in the family. CSS will not consider a second adoption until the legal adoption of the first child has reached its one-year anniversary. If an adoptive mother becomes pregnant during the adoption process, CSS needs to be notified so that the file can be removed from the active status. The same holds true if you adopt from another source.

Health: Adoptive couples should be in good physical and emotional health, without problems that would prevent normal parenting, employment and life span. This will be evidenced by a current medical examination for both parents. CSS requires a recommendation from qualified personnel if special medical circumstances exist.

Finances: CSS looks for a history of employment stability, steady income, and sound money management, including a savings plan, in their adoptive couples. There should be sufficient income to provide reasonable security and to meet the needs of the child until s/he is eighteen years old. There should be no major debt that would prevent the adoptive couple from adequately providing for the child. We recommend life insurance and medical insurance covering pre-existing conditions and that this insurance covers the child upon placement.

There should be sufficient savings at the time of the application to cover the immediate costs of adoption or a definite budget plan to have these finances at hand when the application process is complete. Adoption costs include the workshop, home study, portfolio fee and placement fee plus any other applicable charges e.g., transportation, medical, legal fees, etc.

Working Parents: CSS recommends that, if possible, one parent stay home with the child for at least the first eight weeks following placement. Our concern is for the parent as well as for the child. New parenthood requires a lifestyle adjustment and this time is necessary for parents to find a balance among the many roles that they have in their lives.

Single Applicants: We are pleased to receive adoption inquiries from single persons who have the ability to meet the child's needs. Most birth parent(s) we work with, however, request that their child be placed with married couples and we are obligated to honor their requests.

Religion/Spirituality: As a private agency concerned with spiritual values, we look for couples that are loyal to the teaching of their chosen faith.

Length of Residence: Adoptive couples should be prepared to remain in Alaska for at least enough time to complete the adoption process. This process includes completion of the application, placement, six-month post placement period, and legal finalization.

Confidentiality

CSS is a professional organization that regards your right to privacy very seriously. We make every attempt to maintain and ensure confidentiality for all of our clients. However, clients may authorize CSS to release specific information to others involved in the adoption, e.g., birth parent(s), your attorney. During the adoption process, you will have the opportunity to determine who will have access to your information and the opportunity to revoke authorization as well.

Please be aware that CSS is required by law to break confidentiality and report to proper authorities the following circumstances:

- Child abuse (physical and sexual) and/or neglect and elder abuse;
- Client report of intent to harm his/her self or others;
- A court order requesting that records be released to the court.

International Adoptions

Catholic Social Services is a “domestic adoption agency,” meaning that the adoptions we facilitate are within Alaska. Catholic Social Services does, however, act as an agent for international agencies requiring state-licensed adoption services. This means that we are able to conduct your home study or home study update, as well as the post placement services for your international adoption(s). If you are considering adopting a child from another country we will be able to assist you with referrals for international adoption agencies.

Congratulations!!!

You made it through the first phase of adoption, the Information Packet! Hopefully, you are not too overwhelmed. Remember, adoption is about paperwork, process, patience, and, ultimately, parenthood. Accepting the realities of adopting a child and exploring your identity as a family – those are the challenges of adoption. Our Adoption Coordinator will help your family understand the unique aspects of adoption, both social and legal. CSS looks forward to working with you and assisting you in this life-changing journey.

INTAKE FORM

Please complete this form and return to the Adoption Program. You will be notified of the next Adoption Workshop.

Date _____

Name _____ DOB/Age _____

Name _____ DOB/Age _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

E-mail address _____

Occupation/Employer (His) _____ (Hers) _____

Work Phone (His) _____ (Hers) _____

Length of Employment (His) _____ (Hers) _____

Marital Status: Single _____ Living together _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Widowed _____

Date of Marriage _____ Place _____

Children:

Name _____ DOB _____ Adopted? _____

Name _____ DOB _____ Adopted? _____

Religion/Spirituality:

Religious Preference _____ Church _____

What aspects of adoption would you like to learn more about?

How did you become aware of Catholic Social Services' Adoption Program?

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