

# DOMESTIC ADOPTION

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## POLICIES & PROCEDURES

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lifeline  
children's services



## OVERVIEW OF LIFELINE'S DOMESTIC ADOPTION PROGRAM

Lifeline provides comprehensive adoption services, domestically and internationally. These services include but are not limited to: counseling of expectant parents, home study services for prospective adoptive couples, post placement services, and reports to the court. In the past ten years, the face of domestic adoption has changed dramatically. Adoptions are not done today as they were when Lifeline had its first adoption in 1981. The role of the expectant parents, the social and spiritual climate, legal issues, and health issues have changed how adoptions take place as well as the services offered to the expectant parents and the prospective adoptive parents.

### THE HISTORY OF OPENNESS IN DOMESTIC ADOPTION

Prior to 1980, most adoptions were “closed”. That is, the identities of the birth parents and the prospective adoptive parents were usually kept confidential from one another. In fact, many birth parents were given little information about their children, sometimes not even knowing the sex of the child they had or whether or not the child had been placed for adoption. In the 1980's, however, this orientation towards closed information began to change.

As fewer women who faced a crisis pregnancy considered adoption a viable alternative, many adoption agencies began to include the birth mother in the decision making process. Confidentiality remained the norm, but allowing her participation in the process became a common practice. Helping choose the family that would adopt her child seemed to benefit the mother, giving her more peace following the adoption. Updates on the child also seemed to help the birth mother be more confident in her decision and would reassure her in the months following the placement that a right decision had been made.

In the last few years, requests from birth mothers to meet the adopting family have increased. Some birth mothers are asking for more contact and updates concerning the child in the months and years following the adoption. There is a broad range of openness possibilities. Openness might include meeting the birth mother without confidentiality being broken or agreeing to an ongoing relationship between the adoptive parents and the birth mother.

### LIFELINE'S PREGNANCY COUNSELING MINISTRY

Lifeline is an expectant parent centered agency. When a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy contacts us, we strive to do everything that we can to meet her spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. Ultimately, our goal is for every expectant parent to hear about the transforming love of Jesus and experience that love firsthand through our staff and our adoptive families. Lifeline ministers to each of our expectant families holistically and does not coerce them into making an adoption plan. We want expectant parents to compare and contrast what their lives will look like if they parent or if they make an adoption plan. Just as each expectant parent is a unique individual, the specific needs for services vary as well. Lifeline provides free professional counseling regarding an adoption plan, and can also help set up proper medical care, provide transportation to appointments, assist in finding shelter, work through budgeting and other life skills, and connect expectant parents with independent legal counsel if needed. We understand the benefit of community and know it is important to empower expectant parents in making community connections with a local church and available resources. We provide services for both expectant mothers and fathers.

Lifeline equips and discipled prospective adoptive families to be able to minister to birth parents by providing education, resources, and counseling regarding birth parent issues so that they are prepared to respond positively to the needs of birth parents and help them to see Christ throughout their adoption experience. Most of the women Lifeline works with are considering placing their unborn child; however sometimes we have women considering placing their older child. There is not a typical expectant parent. They come from all races, socioeconomic status, age, social history, etc. However, many times there is history of other difficult circumstances in their life such as mental health history, substance abuse, unstable relationships and support systems and other social factors. This is an incredible opportunity for a prospective adoptive couple to minister to this expectant parent while understanding that the child to be placed in their home may have prenatal trauma from substance use or stressful pregnancy.

Lifeline has minimum contact and correspondence requirements for every adoptive couple. We ask that families be willing to meet our minimum requirements: one pre-birth meeting with Expectant Parents and one annual visit with birthparent and child (facilitated and evaluated in conjunction with LCS and both parties for best interest of child). We also require that you provide correspondence in the form of an update letter and pictures: one update immediately post placement, quarterly for the 1st year, every six months to age 5, and annually from age 6- 13. We are asking all families to be open to a direct email relationship with birth parents, if birth parents desire this. Lifeline will be copied on all correspondence for at least the first 2 years. If birth parent does not desire a direct email relationship, all correspondence will be sent to Lifeline and then passed on to birth parents. While these are our minimum requirements, many birth mothers desire even more openness. One family may be willing to share only first names, while another family may be willing to go through labor and delivery with the birth mother. The more flexible a prospective adoptive family is, the more possibilities there are for placements.

## **INTERESTED IN ADOPTION NETWORKING?**

Lifeline's pregnancy counseling ministry has a huge focus on outreach. We believe that the more hospitals and pregnancy resource centers that know about us, the more women we can serve and share the Gospel with. We encourage you to do your own form of ethical outreach through adoption networking and let your community, friends, and family know that you are prospective adoptive parents. When networking, make sure to point to Lifeline, rather than your personal contact information. Here are some ideas of ways to network:

- Announce your adoption plans on your personal social media or via a mass email with information about your plans to adopt
- Create a public social media account, blog, or website for your adoption
- Share about Lifeline's services online and in your community
- Join online adoption communities and message boards
- Share about your adoption with personal and professional contacts
- Connect Lifeline staff to your network circles such as OBGYNs, nurses, doctors, pregnancy resource centers, homeless shelters, school counselors, etc.

If your family connects with or is approached by a woman considering adoption, here is an ethical way to proceed:

- Share that your primary concern is the expectant parent's well-being and that you would like to help connect them to support and resources that can assist in considering and making an adoption plan.
- Share that you are working with a reputable agency with a focus and commitment for caring for expectant parents by providing them with counseling & support that allow them to explore their options.
- You may also share that Lifeline will gather information about their desires for a family for the child, including post adoption communication.
- If she knows she wants to make an adoption plan with your family; we do not want to disrupt that plan. However, you may share that she will have the opportunity to view other adoptive parent profiles if she desires as she isn't under any obligation to choose adoption or a specific family.
- Next steps would include connecting them with a pregnancy counselor at Lifeline. They can contact us through a contact form on our website or calling 1-800-875-5595. Another option would be for you to offer to connect them with a Lifeline representative or ask their permission to pass their contact along to Lifeline for us to reach out to them.
- Offer them links to your online adoption profile or adoption website.

Other helpful tips:

- Talk to your Domestic Specialists about ways you plan to network or ideas you have for networking. We want to help you!
- Make sure to keep the information you share during networking non-identifying. We encourage using first names only and refraining from using last names, phone numbers, addresses, or other identifying information

## **NETWORKING VS. SOLICITATION**

While we network and promote Lifeline in the community, we do not solicit expectant moms. It is illegal and unethical for adoptive families to advertise via publication, internet or social media to solicit expectant moms and can jeopardize your adoption plans. Adoptive families are permitted to network in the community and let friends and family know they are adopting. If through these connections you are connected to an expectant mother desiring to learn more about adoption or make an adoption, you may refer them to Lifeline for services.

Examples of Solicitation:

- Posting on a public website, social media, newspaper or public means of communicating about your plans to adopt a way that encourages a response from a potential expectant parent. For example, posting a letter starting with “Dear expectant parent....” Or “Are you considering adoption?”
- Offering financial assistance of any kind in order to encourage an expectant parent to choose adopti on or consider your family for an adoption placement
- Sending your profile to pregnancy centers or other public facilities to solicit a potential expectant parent

## **OUR PRAYER FOR YOU**

Proverbs 16:3 offers much hope for the Christian. We are told that if we commit our works to the Lord that our plans will be blessed. As an agency, we believe God is sovereign and has a specific plan for every person’s life. In that regard, we believe the Lord will direct your path in the way you should go, if you seek and commit your ways to Him. Pray for the Lord to give you a compassionate heart for birthparents whether or not they choose to place with your family. Pray that the Lord will teach you more about Himself during the waiting times. Pray that the Lord will strengthen your marriage through the adoption journey. Pray that the Lord will send you the right child at the right time. Please know that as a ministry, we are looking forward to partnering with you to further His Kingdom through adoption.

1. **PARENTING ABILITY:** The prospective adoptive parents (APs) must give evidence of a mutual desire and love for children. They must be able to provide for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of the child being adopted. APs should have the ability and desire to minister to their child's birth family.
2. **HEALTH:** Applicants must be in good physical and mental health as determined by a doctor's examination. They must be able to physically and emotionally undertake the responsibility of parenthood. They must pass the medical examination required by the sending and receiving state of their placement.
3. **CITIZENSHIP:** At least one spouse must be a United States citizen.
4. **FINANCIAL STABILITY:** The applicants must have sufficient income to meet any expenses incurred by adding another family member. They must also be able to make reasonable provision for future financial stability. Medical insurance coverage is required.
5. **HOUSING:** The applicants' home must provide adequate space and living conditions necessary to promote the health and well-being of the family members. Ownership is not required.
6. **WORKING PARENTS:** If both parents work outside the home, one of the parents should be able to remain at home with the child for a reasonable amount of time following the placement. (The exact length of time can be discussed with a social worker at the time of the home study. A general rule we suggest is that one parent takes six to eight weeks, usually the allotted amount of maternity leave provided by most companies. FMLA standards require adoptive parents the same amount of leave.) This is to provide for the nurturing and security of the child, while he/she assimilates into the home. When the parent returns to work, there must be a plan for responsible childcare so that the security of the child can be sustained.
7. **PRIOR HISTORY OF FELONY CONVICTIONS:** Criminal background checks will be conducted for each adult member of the family. Any criminal history in your past should be addressed with your social worker prior to moving forward. All prior legal convictions should be disclosed with the agency representative before starting your home study.
8. **MARRIAGE:** A husband and wife should be married at least three years prior to filing an application. APs should show evidence of health and stability in their marriage.
9. **TRAINING:** Have sufficient training/education to meet the needs of the child and ministry to the birth family. Attend Lifeline's Rooted in Love Conference in Birmingham, AL.
10. **BIRTH FAMILY MINISTRY:** Lifeline desires to work with families who see this adoption as not only a ministry to the child, but also an opportunity to minister to the birth family and therefore willingly desire a relationship with the birth family. We ask all families to agree to our minimum correspondence requirements of an annual visit with the birth parents in the town where the birthparents reside, direct communication with the birth parents, pictures and letters to Lifeline and the birthparents at annual and semiannual milestones, and a pre-birth meeting with the child's birth parents.
11. **FAITH:** We ask families to affirm our [Statement of Faith](#).

The purpose of the home study is to prepare and assess your family for domestic adoption. A home study consists of several face-to-face interviews where we get to know your family and spend time in education and preparation for the adoption process. Topics of discussion include your motivation to adopt, your childhood, your current marriage and family dynamics, parenting philosophies, etc. We will collect supporting documentation including medical forms, background clearances, birth and marriage certificates, etc. There is also an emphasis on adoption education, and we will spend time discussing your understanding of various topics such as transracial adoption, birth parent ministry, attachment parenting, and more.

As mentioned above, a part of the home study process is gathering supporting documents. You will find forms in this manual, your state supplement, and Lifeline Education Portal (LEP) that you will need to complete as a part of your process. There will also be additional documents that you need to provide. Your Family Portal has a list of required documents for your process and a place for you to upload the completed documents. There are specific documents required prior to each interview as outlined in your Family Portal. As you complete required documents, please save the completed documents as **PDFs** and upload them to your portal. Save copies for your own records.

Once your home study is approved, the home study must be kept twelve months current. There are also ICPC (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children) requirements that must be twelve months current in order to be shown to out-of-state expectant parents. ICPC is the process that governs the placement of a child born in one state with adoptive parents who reside in a different state. Additionally, there may be state requirements that must be twelve months current in order to be shown to in-state expectant parents. The requirements that must be twelve months current for ICPC include:

- Medicals for all Household Members
- FBI Clearances
- State Clearances
- Child Abuse and Neglect Clearances
- References

You must keep all expiring documents current. If documents expire, you will not be able to be shown until the documents are current.



## **MATCHING, PLACEMENT, & POST PLACEMENT SERVICES**

### **PROFILE BOOK**

Prospective adoptive couples work with Lifeline to create an online profile and profile book. This gives them access to expectant parents searching for a family online, on their phone, or through physical books. These avenues help expectant parents learn more about their family and what their child's life would be like if adopted by them. Family profiles who meet the expectant parents' desires are shown to expectant parent(s) once permission has been granted by the adoptive family. Families are encouraged to wait to develop their profile until after they have attended the Rooted in Love conference and completed most of the home study process. You can begin gathering pictures and information, but you will receive more information regarding putting together a profile later in the process.

### **MATCHING**

Lifeline uses a mutual selection process for matching. In most cases, expectant parents choose the adoptive couple for their child. However, the prospective adoptive couples have an opportunity to choose if they wish for their profile to be shown to the expectant parent. If there is an overwhelming amount of "yes" responses from families, Lifeline may need to narrow the profiles we present to expectant parents; either based on expectant parent preferences or our longest waiting families.

The Pregnancy Counselor does her best to gather as much information as possible regarding each expectant parent's medical and social history. This information is provided to the adoptive parents in the form of a non-identifying information summary with the understanding that there are no guarantees in regards to knowing the full mental, emotional, or physical health history of any birth family. This information summary also includes the expectant parents' desires for pre and post adoption correspondence and any other desires of the expectant parents. The prospective adoptive family has the option to decide if they would like their profile shown to the expectant parent based on the information provided. Typically, these information summaries are provided to adoptive families in the third trimester of the pregnancy.

Expectant parents review the profiles prepared by the prospective adoptive couples and choose a family for their child based on these profiles. There are times they may ask further questions or request meetings with multiple families before deciding.

Lifeline cannot give families any time frame during which they may be selected nor guarantee you that your profile will be selected. Families should prepare emotionally for a 2-3 year wait time yet prepare financially for a match immediately after home study approval.

When selected by an expectant parent, the prospective adoptive couple will often have the opportunity to meet with the expectant parent prior to the birth of the child if desired by the expectant parent. This is often a time for each party to learn more about each other and talk further about expectations and/or boundaries.

## **PLACEMENT**

Placement for adoption shall be made in accordance with sound child-placement practices for children whose custody has been permanently removed from the birth parents. There is often a period of time following a birth parent signing consents/relinquishments to an adoption in which they can withdraw their consent. This time period is typically dependent on the state in which the birth parent resides. During this time period, you may accept placement of a child prior to the expiration of the withdrawal period. In these cases, the adoptive parents will agree in writing to an "at risk" placement.

If a prospective family accepts placement of a child outside of their state of residence, the prospective couple must remain in the state in which the birth parent resides until they have received ICPC clearance. This can take approximately 2-3 weeks. Lifeline will assist families with this process.

## **FINALIZATION**

Adoptive families will need an attorney to finalize their adoption. Lifeline encourages families to utilize attorneys in each state in which we have a relationship. These attorneys are experts in adoption law and have often provided consultation to Lifeline on the case throughout our relationship with the birth parent. Attorneys will assist families in filing their adoption petition. These petitions will need to be filed as soon as possible after placement of the child, typically at least 30 days after placement of the child unless instructed otherwise by the attorney and and/or extended by the court.

Before the adoption can be finalized, the prospective family will receive post placement visits, typically at least 2 prior to finalization, but dependent on each state's minimum standards. These visits are a time for the family and their social worker to check in with each other. The social worker will provide further education to the family. Information from these post placement visits will be used for the final recommendation of Lifeline to the court through the court post placement report. For our clients who live in a state where Lifeline does not have an office, your home study and post placement services must be completed by a licensed agency in your state. All other services may be provided by Lifeline.



## TEXAS INQUIRY ORIENTATION

The following information is required for Texas residents by Texas regulations.

### **SERVICES AVAILABLE**

Lifeline provides the following services: pregnancy counseling to birth parents who inquire, including options counseling; placement services to birth parents who choose adoption; home studies and process support to prospective adoptive parents, both domestically and internationally; post-placement services and post adoption services to the adoption triad. Professional counseling services are available within the states of Alabama and Georgia.

### **FEE POLICIES AND PAYMENT PROCEDURES**

Fees are not charged to clients receiving pregnancy counseling. Prospective adoptive parent fees are generally paid as clients move through the process and are not paid until services are rendered. Fees paid for services rendered are non-refundable. Payments may be made by check or paid online with applicable credit card surcharges. Fees are considered delinquent after 30 days.

### **AGENCY REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES**

Please use [THIS LINK](#) to review Lifeline's adoptive parent qualifications, policies and procedures.

### **LEGAL PROCEDURES/LEGAL COUNSEL**

Adoptive parents have the right to independent legal counsel. IR/H-3 visas: For families who will finalize abroad, the domestication of the adoption is highly recommended by Lifeline. To do so, contact a local attorney, who will file the necessary documents in the appropriate venue. Parents will retain the attorney directly and will be responsible for the attorney's fees and court costs. Domestic and IR/H-4 visas (families who will not finalize abroad must finalize in the US in their state of residence): Families will need to contact a local attorney, who will file the necessary documents in the appropriate venue. Parents will retain the attorney directly and will be responsible for the attorney's fees and court costs. If the adoptive parents were given custody while in-country by the Central Adoption Authority or appropriate local authority, then all that is necessary from Lifeline is a signed copy of the required post placement reports. If Lifeline was given custody by the Central Adoption Authority or local authority, then Lifeline must provide official written consent to the adoption.

## **ADOPTION REGISTRIES**

Lifeline has a program designed to reunite domestic adoptees and birth families. International adoptees should contact Lifeline and request information on adoption registries available at that time from his or her country of origin. The Texas Vital Statistics Unit (VSU) Voluntary Central Adoption Registry (CAR) is part of a voluntary mutual consent registry system mandated during the State of Texas' 68th Legislative Session in 1983. It enables a domestic adult adoptee, birth parent, or sibling to place his or her name on the registry and to locate other family members who are also registered. There are private, online registries available through a web search.

## **CLIENT APPEAL PROCESS**

As a client, you have the right to appeal agency actions and decisions that affect you, be aware of the appeal procedures and how to report agency violations of minimum standards to the state licensing department. The appeal process protocol includes the opportunity for the client to submit a written appeal and to receive a review of the appeal by designated staff and the Texas Agency Administrator, when appropriate.

## **REPORTING**

The following are available for review upon your request: the rules of Texas Administrative Code Chapter 749, Minimum Standards for Child Placing Agencies, Lifeline Children's Services' state compliance status reports and agency policies. To report agency violations of state minimum standards, contact: The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services - Statewide Intake at 1-800-252-5400. The Intercountry Adoption Accreditation and Maintenance Entity may also be contacted. To report complaints on Social Workers, contact: The Texas State Board of Social Work Examiners, Complaints Management and Investigative Section, P.O. Box 141369, Austin, Texas 78714-1369 or call 1-800-942-5540.



# DOMESTIC ADOPTION FEES

**TOTAL LIFELINE ADOPTION FEES: \$37,500 (\$37,200 for 2<sup>nd</sup> adoption) plus annual update fees.**

*TERMS OF PAYMENT, paid directly to Lifeline Children's Services, Inc. All fees are paid in full at the time they are due and are non-refundable. Agency fee D is transferrable to another expectant parent match if the match does not result in placement.*

<b><u>FEES:</u></b>	<b><u>PAYMENT DUE DATE:</u></b>	<b><u>AMOUNT:</u></b>
Application Fee	Due with application	\$300.00 <i>(Waived for 2<sup>nd</sup> adoption)</i>
Agency Fee A	Due before orientation interview	\$3,000.00
Agency Fee B	Due before 3 <sup>rd</sup> home study visit	\$3,500.00
Agency Fee C	Due when Profile is submitted	\$6,700.00
Agency Fee D	Due when matched with an expectant parent	\$7,000.00
Placement Fee	Due at placement	\$17,000.00
Annual Home Study Update Fee	Due at time of Home Study Update	\$750.00 per update <i>(as needed)</i>

*Additional payments are paid to third party providers for home study background checks/education and to Lifeline on an as needed basis for updates and amendments to the home study.*

<b><u>ADDITIONAL FEES:</u></b>	<b><u>AMOUNT:</u></b>
State Police Clearance Letter	Varies by state
Criminal Background Check	Varies by state
Additional Background Check Fee	Variable <i>(if matched with a birth mother in another state)</i>
Medical Exam	Variable <i>(paid directly to health care provider)</i>
Prepare/Enrich Relationship Assessment	\$35.00 <i>(per couple)</i>
Consultations <i>(if additional consultations are needed)</i>	Variable <i>(paid directly to consultation provider)</i>
Home study Amendment Fee without visit	\$250.00 per amendment <i>(as needed)</i>
Home study Amendment Fee with visit	\$500.00 per amendment
Home study Amendment Fee for relocation to new state	\$500.00 <i>(as needed)</i>
Post Placement fees for a TX or WY finalization	\$750.00
Post Placement fees for a FL placement	\$500.00

*In addition to Lifeline's fees, there are other fees that will be paid directly to each provider. These cannot be itemized until the adoption.*

- Travel and Lodging expenses, for ICPC (if applicable)
- Attorney's Fee
- Court Costs
- Child's Birth Certificate(s)

## EXPLANATION OF FEES

Lifeline is a licensed, non-profit adoption ministry, committed to excellence and integrity in everything we do, and dedicated to full-service help to both the adoptive couple and birth parents. It is our aim at Lifeline to provide you with the best service during your adoption process while keeping costs as affordable as possible. An adoption typically costs Lifeline over \$50,000. We rely on fundraising and donors to cover the costs not covered by adoption fees. We have detailed below everything that each adoption fee covers. Certain fees include administrative overhead, this includes cost to maintain state licensure, overhead, domestic program development, and online portal access to manage paperwork and process.

**Application Fee:** This fee includes review of the application at the time of submission.

**Agency Fee A:** This fee includes, but is not limited to, administrative costs, home study assessment, and adoptive parent education.

**Agency Fee B:** The fee includes, but is not limited to, administrative costs, completion of home study assessment, and adoptive parent education.

**Agency Fee C:** This fee includes, but is not limited to, matching services, marketing and outreach to expectant parents, adoptive parent education, and expectant parent support and expenses.

**Agency Fee D:** This fee includes, but is not limited to, matching services, outreach to expectant parents, placement preparation for family and expectant parent, and developing a post adoption agreement.

**Placement Fee:** This fee includes, but is not limited to, post placement visits, expectant mother support and expenses, placement preparation, and lifetime post placement support for you and the birth parents.

Lifeline asks that couples be financially ready to adopt while also recognizing that it is costly. We will provide you with information on grants and we strongly encourage families to apply for as many as they can. Please note most grants require a copy of an approved home study in order to apply.

Effective 1998, a federal adoption tax credit became available to reimburse adoption expenses. The adoption tax credit was made permanent in 2012. Please consult your CPA regarding the current status of the adoption tax credit and whether your family qualifies.

Lifeline minimizes upfront costs and allows most fees to be transferred to other birth mother matches until an adoption takes place. Questions regarding fees or other policies can be addressed to your social worker.

## DOMESTIC ON-HOLD POLICY

If special circumstances require AP to temporarily suspend the adoption process, including, but not limited to financial difficulty or moving, Lifeline will apply one hundred percent (100%) of AP's previously paid agency fees to the reactivated adoption process, provided the adoption process is reactivated within one (1) year of the suspension.

If the AP shows pattern of inactivity or unresponsiveness for more than sixty (60) days, Lifeline may place the AP on hold. Lifeline will apply one hundred percent (100%) of AP's previously paid agency fees to the reactivated adoption process, provided the adoption process is reactivated within one (1) year of the suspension.

The AP's notice of temporary suspension and desire to go on-hold must be communicated to Lifeline in writing. After the expiration of one (1) year from the date of said notice, the AP may not reactivate their adoption process. Subsequently, after the expiration of one (1) year, the AP's file will be closed, and services will be automatically terminated.

If the AP chooses to reactivate, notice of the AP's desire to reactivate must be communicated to Lifeline in writing. AP will be assessed an administrative reactivation fee of \$500.00, in addition to all remaining fees. At the time of reactivation, Lifeline will reassess the AP for program requirements.

Lifeline will also assess if additional fees including, but not limited to, home study update, new home study, and reactivation evaluations, are necessary. If more than six (6) months have elapsed since the temporary suspension, AP will be required to comply with all fees at their current rates at the time the adoption process is reactivated. AP may not remain on hold beyond one (1) year, and an AP's file will be determined terminated upon the expiration of said time.

If a family becomes pregnant during the adoption process, their file will be placed on hold. The on-hold terms outlined above will apply, but the on-hold period will be extended to up to two (2) years. Families should notify Lifeline Children's Services *as soon as possible* after pregnancy is confirmed so that the appropriate timing for placing the file on hold can be determined.

\*Families in North Carolina, South Dakota, and Wyoming will have to keep their home study updated during hold period in order to remain in compliance with state adoption laws.

### **DOMESTIC REFUND POLICY**

Each fee collected at specified intervals/ sections during the adoption process is non-refundable once any service begins for that interval/ section. Each fee for specified intervals/ sections shall be due prior to work performed on that section. Client acknowledges that Lifeline is compensated for ongoing services and is not compensated based on whether or not a successful adoption is completed. Client understands and acknowledges that payments to Lifeline compensate Lifeline for work performed, including Lifeline time and resources, therefore all fees are non-refundable should AP not progress in the adoption process for any reason.

Should an adoption fail to finalize after matching due to legal challenges or impediments, Client's matching fee may be transferrable to other birthmother matches.

### **CHARITABLE DONATIONS AND PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT**

Lifeline prohibits the giving of preferential treatment to Lifeline board members, contributors, volunteers, employees, agents, consultants, or independent contractors with respect to the placement of children for adoption. In order to prevent preferential treatment, Lifeline does not conduct home studies for board members and employees. Additionally, Lifeline does not accept any unusual or out of the ordinary charitable contributions from prospective adoptive parents while in any part of the adoption process in which a determination of child's placement or an assessment of the prospective adoptive parents by Lifeline staff is made. For any family residing in Alabama, donations are not accepted until the finalization of the adoption.

**We have read, understand and agree to the guidelines set forth above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Father Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Father Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

**N/A UNTIL APPLICATION ACCEPTANCE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Mother Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Mother Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature



# STATEMENT OF RISKS IN DOMESTIC ADOPTION WAIVER OF LIABILITY

## INTRODUCTION

As prospective adoptive parents, you are about to embark upon an exciting experience. Adoption can be a very emotional process, and it is sometimes difficult to remember all the details and information we have provided to you concerning the adoption. Because of this, we have found it helpful to put some of this information in writing so you can refer to it from time to time throughout the adoption process. This is important information and it is important for us to know you have it, so we will ask you to sign a copy of this statement for our files.

## **BY SIGNING THIS WAIVER, YOU ARE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT YOU UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING:**

Adoption placements have certain risks, which may or may not be known at the time of placement or may never be known by us. The purpose of this statement is to set forth several, but not all, of the significant risks associated with entering into an adoption plan. You, as potential adoptive parents, are urged to review this document, and all documents we ask you to sign, with an attorney or anyone else you choose. Also, we want to emphasize that the adoption process is completely voluntary. You should not feel pressured nor are you obligated or required to continue any adoption plan at any time up until the Court finalization of the adoption.

The amount of information available to us varies from placement to placement. As a result, certain risks may become known to us and/or become significant to the placement. You understand that as significant, material information becomes known to us, it will be disclosed to you so that you can review it and possibly re-evaluate your participation in this proposed adoption placement. You also understand and acknowledge that not all information will be known to us or knowable by us, and it is possible that all of the information, both known and unknown, may create risks and have an effect on the future health, social and/or emotional development of the child.

## MEDICAL RISKS

We cannot predict an adoptive child's mental or physical development, emotional and/or personality characteristics, health, medical problems, learning disabilities, intellectual ability, hyperactivity, attention deficits, appearance or inherited characteristics.

Information provided by or through us may be incorrect because any social, medical or family history has been provided by birth parents or sources beyond our control. We ask each birth mother and, when possible, each birth father to complete a Social and Medical History Form which will be given to you. We will also make our best efforts to help you obtain hospital records, pre-natal records and/or a hospital discharge summary for the child and/or birth parents.

You understand and acknowledge that the medical and social information given to us by the birth parents or by hospitals or doctors and passed on to you may be incomplete or erroneous. It is even possible that the birth parents may intentionally give incorrect information. You should consult with a pediatrician, OB-GYN or appropriate medical specialist to review such information or provide you with an opinion regarding this information, or absence of such information, before accepting physical placement of any child.

We do not assume any duty to independently verify the information given to us by birth parents or other sources nor will we make an independent investigation into the birth parents background and health or social situation other than through interviews and conversations. You agree not to expect or rely upon us to verify or investigate the truth of information provided to us by the birth parent or third parties at the time of placement or in the future.

## LEGAL RISKS

In any adoption there may be legal risks. We strongly recommend that you consult with an attorney regarding any specific adoption plan you are considering. There are many possible risks, some of which are discussed below.

At any time prior to the Consent to Adoption becoming irrevocable or a court ordered termination of parental rights, the birth parents can change their minds and elect to parent the child themselves. The birth parents could leave town or otherwise disappear prior to the birth or placement of the child or choose other adoptive parents. The laws defining whether or when birth parents can revoke their consents to adoption or terminate an adoption plan vary from state to state.

In cases involving the placement of a child, the placement will usually take place prior to the expiration of the biological parents' withdrawal period or a termination of the biological parents' rights. This situation is considered a legal risk placement. Legal risk status is resolved when the appropriate Consent to Adoption becomes legally irrevocable or if parental rights have been terminated by court order. When you accept a legal risk placement, you take the child understanding the possibility that the birth parent may revoke his or her consent to adoption within the time legally allowed, and that the birth parents' rights to the child may supersede your legal rights, even if the child has lived in your home for a lengthy period of time. You may be required to return the child to a birth parent or to an adoption agency. In the event of a birth parent's lawful demand for the return of the child, you agree to return the child to a place identified by us on a date and time requested by us. If you fail to comply with our request for return, you agree to pay us for our time and legal fees to enforce any court orders for return of the child to us or to the birth parent.

Disruption of an adoption plan, before or after placement, is rare, but almost always results in emotional turmoil and financial loss to you. Your financial losses may include (but are not limited to) all costs and fees paid and owing to us, birth parents' legal fees, travel costs, living expenses, and payments made for hospital/medical and birth-related costs. The birth parents will not be obligated to go through with the adoption just because you have paid birth-related expenses to the birth mother or on her behalf. Applicable law specifically prohibits you or anyone else from demanding repayment of expenses if the birth parent changes his/her mind. You understand and agree that we will not pursue the birth parent or otherwise harass the birth parent to complete an unwanted adoption plan or repay any of the funds we or you may have paid to, or on behalf of, the birth parent.

Neither a Contract nor Domestic Home Study guarantee the placement of a child into your home. A Contract Home Study will only meet requirements of the State in which it is completed. If you accept a placement outside of the State in which you reside, your placing agency will be responsible for communicating and/or requesting any additional requirements from that State.

Post Adoption Contact Agreements (PACA) are written agreements between the adoptive parents and the birth parents that describe the kind of contact and communication they will have as the child grows up. In some states, contact agreements are filed with the court and are legally enforceable. This means that adoptive parents are legally required to follow through with the sort of contact they agreed upon unless the court decides it is not in the child's best interest. In states where this is legally enforceable an attorney is needed to write the agreement, and additional fees will apply for this service.

## LEGAL FEES

As noted in the Starter Kit, legal fees incurred as part of the adoption process are the AP's responsibility and are primarily paid by AP directly to the attorney providing services. AP shall be responsible to pay all such legal fees that occur, even if adoption efforts do not result in placement or finalization. Finally, your cost for legal fees for an uncontested adoption will likely be \$4,000 to \$10,000 (but could be more), and fees for contested adoptions cannot be estimated. Such fees are determined by third party attorneys, not Lifeline.

N/A UNTIL APPLICATION  
ACCEPTANCE

## **BIRTH PARENTS**

If AP's adoption study is written and approved, and upon satisfaction of all other conditions precedent, Lifeline will make reasonable efforts to match AP with an expectant parent making an adoption plan and will make reasonable efforts to obtain all available medical, psychological, and historical records concerning the referred child. All information obtained by Lifeline regarding the referred child, including available photographs and the results of any HIV and AIDS test, will be provided to AP. Lifeline will not conduct any medical assessment, evaluation, testing, or screening of any child and does not have the opportunity to observe, test, or evaluate a child, and must rely upon third parties to provide information about the child.

Lifeline will provide to AP any information obtained from such third parties, but it is possible that such third parties (a) may not be aware of medical, developmental or behavioral issues of a child; (b) may overlook or fail to note signs or symptoms or to provide a child's relevant history (c) may unknowingly or carelessly provide erroneous information; (d) may not be able to provide information or observations about medical, developmental, or behavioral issues that become apparent only after the child's placement with AP and/or (e) may not be aware of aspects of a child's history that have not been disclosed prior to placement (and which may be disclosed by the child only after placement).

Match, placement, acceptance of a child by AP, and/or execution of a Referral Acceptance do not guarantee that an adoption will be finalized.

AP agrees to maintain the confidentiality of all information regarding a referred child, including photographs, provided to AP until after placement day and after any withdrawal time has passed, including refraining from posting any such confidential information or photographs on social media, chat groups, newsletters, and blogs.

Determining the rights a birth father may or may not have is very complex. A biological father who is married to the birth mother has the same rights as the birth mother. His consent to the adoption (or court-ordered termination of his parental rights) is required. For other men who are (or say they are) the birth father, the specific facts in a particular situation will determine their legal rights, if any.

We strongly recommend that you consult with an attorney about the legal rights, if any, of a birth father in a specific situation.

It is possible that a birth father will refuse to consent to the adoption or take legal action to disrupt the adoption plan. If this occurs, it is possible that the child may have to be removed from your home and returned to a birth parent or to us.

## **INTERSTATE COMPACT FOR THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN (ICPC)**

If you and the birth parents are in different states, then you will need to comply with the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC). This law, effective in every state, says that you will not be permitted to bring the child to your home state until you get approval from the Compact Administrators in both states. In order to obtain ICPC approval to travel outside the state of the child's birth with the child, you must have a completed home study and obtain the other legal documents required by both states. Specific requirements for approval, and the length of time to review, vary from state to state.

It is illegal to return to your home state with the child before the Compact Administrators in both the "sending state" (state of child's birth or residence) and "receiving state" (your home state) approve the placement. You should be prepared to stay in the sending state waiting for ICPC approval for 14 days after the birth, but the period may be more or less, depending on the details of your case. Failure to comply with ICPC requirements may jeopardize your adoption.

If AP is required to travel to the state in which the adoptee was born, or the state in which the adoptee resides (“Sending state”) to take custody and accept adoptive placement of a child, AP may be required to travel to the Sending State multiple times. If AP is required, or elects, to travel to the Sending State for adoption-related purposes, AP is solely responsible for paying all costs and assuming all risks of any and all travel and travel activities of AP and the referred child, including but not limited to those costs and risks associated with airfare, accommodations, meals, and transportation.

## **MATCHING AND PLACEMENT IN A STATE WHERE LIFELINE IS NOT LICENSED**

You acknowledge that there are increased risks and unknowns you will face when participating in Lifeline’s 50 state pregnancy counseling initiative. To be engaged in this initiative means that you will be shown to expectant parents in states where Lifeline isn’t licensed. Lifeline will be relying on partnerships with licensed child placing agencies and/or adoption attorneys in each state to navigate the state law, as Lifeline will have very limited experience in these states where they are not licensed.

You further acknowledge that if matched with an expectant parent in a state where Lifeline is not licensed, Lifeline will have limited familiarity with the area and limited ground support during hospital time.

In addition, you understand that maintaining confidentiality is more difficult in these cases because relinquishments may be directly from the birth parent to the adoptive parent and will include both parties' first and last names.

Lastly, you understand that participation in Lifeline's 50 state initiative means that you will not know which state you will be finalizing the adoption in until after you are matched. It is possible for the adoption to be finalized in either the expectant mother’s state or the adoptive parent’s state, which could impact legal risk with two states’ involvement as well as legal fees, if an attorney is needed in both states.

## **INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT (ICWA)**

Any time you are planning to adopt a child who is a member or is eligible for membership in an Indian tribe, you must comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). ICWA is a federal law that must be complied with, regardless of state law, when Indian-heritage children are adopted.

Each tribe has its own criteria for membership, so even if a birth parent is not an official member, the tribe may decide they are eligible for membership. Even if the birth parents do not want the tribe to be involved, ICWA requires notification to the tribe and gives the tribe the right to intervene in the adoption.

We cannot guarantee that ICWA does or does not apply in a particular case. We will ask the birth parents if they have any Indian or Native American ancestry. We will rely upon the statements of the birth parents and assume no duty to verify or investigate the truth of the birth parents' statements regarding Indian heritage. If the parents do have Indian ancestry, then your attorney or you will need to notify the Bureau of Indian Affairs and/or a specific tribe to see what action they intend to take. The tribe can seek to intervene if the child is eligible for membership and demand to have the child placed in the home of another member of the tribe. You may be required by law to give up the child to a representative of the tribe or to person or persons identified by a state or tribal court. The tribe may decide not to intervene, so the adoption can proceed as planned. If ICWA applies, even if the tribe does not oppose adoption by you, the adoption will be more complicated and require additional paperwork.

## **ADOPTION ASSISTANCE/SUBSIDY**

Adoption assistance/subsidies may or may not be available for children who meet certain criteria established by law. Such children may include sibling groups, older children, children with problematic medical conditions, those prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol, children manifesting or at risk for developing learning disabilities, emotional or behavioral problems, or other criteria. There are Federal and state laws addressing the rules, regulations and criteria for a child's eligibility for adoption assistance/subsidy.

**N/A UNTIL APPLICATION  
ACCEPTANCE**

You understand that we make no guarantee or promise that your child will qualify for assistance/subsidy under state or Federal law. If we make an assistance/subsidy application, we do not guarantee or promise that your child will qualify for subsidy, Medicaid or any federal, state or local governmental financial assistance program. The decision to grant assistance for a specific child is determined solely by the state and/or federal government.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

We understand that confidentiality is often important to you and to birth parents, and we will not intentionally exchange identifying information about you to the birth parents and about the birth parents to you unless you and the birth parents agree otherwise. In working with you, however, it is often necessary to coordinate with physicians, social workers, court officials and others. During this process, information about you will be shared on a "need to know" basis. You hereby release and authorize us to release non-identifying information about you with others and with birth parents. This authorization does not permit us to release identifying information about you to the birth parents.

You understand that during the course of the adoption, your identity and that of the birth parents may become known to numerous persons and institutions, including but not limited to medical providers, hospitals, courts, social workers, and to the birth parents' counsel. We cannot control the actions of these persons and institutions. We also advise you that, in some instances, subsequent to adoptive placement, the birthparents may request a meeting with you or identifying information about you even if you prefer confidentiality and/or anonymity. We encourage cooperation between you and the birth parents and encourage you to reach an agreement with the birth parents about what information is exchanged.

Information about you may be obtained by a birth parent through accidental disclosure by us, or through many other sources such as motor vehicle registration, internet resources, and birth parent advocacy groups. You also understand that there are legal methods of tracing a child placed for adoption through adoption registries, vital statistic records, school and medical records, and the work of confidential intermediaries. Further, when your adoptive child becomes an adult, it is likely that your child will have access to the identities of the birth parents. For all of these reasons, we cannot and do not guarantee life-long confidentiality.

## **DIRECT CORRESPONDENCE WITH BIRTHPARENTS**

You understand that you have chosen to pursue an open-adoption and have agreed to having a direct email relationship with your child's birth parents if they desire this type of openness. You commit to follow through with your promises to the birth family regarding correspondence and face-to-face contact.

You understand that by sending and receiving correspondence via email and phone with the birth parents, there is a higher likelihood you will release identifying information and contact information on yourselves and your child and that under these circumstances, Lifeline Children's Services cannot offer any shelter or anonymity.

You acknowledge your understanding that email accounts and social media sites, such as Facebook or Instagram, have risks and are traceable through shared friendships. You acknowledge that in this electronic age, anonymity is, in many ways, obsolete. You hereby release and agree to hold harmless Lifeline Children's Services from all complaints, grievances, and claims of any kind arising from direct correspondence between the birthparents and you.

## **ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL RISKS**

There are other financial risks involved in the adoption process, such as travel and lodging costs. For example, Adoptive Parents (AP) may need to travel multiple times to the state where the adoptee was born or resides, and are responsible for all associated costs, including airfare, accommodations, meals, and transportation.

## ON-HOLD POLICY

If special circumstances require AP to temporarily suspend the adoption process, including, but not limited to financial difficulty or moving, Lifeline will apply one hundred percent (100%) of AP's previously paid agency fees to the reactivated adoption process, provided the adoption process is reactivated within one (1) year of the suspension.

If the AP shows pattern of inactivity or unresponsiveness for more than sixty (60) days, Lifeline may place the AP on hold. Lifeline will apply one hundred percent (100%) of AP's previously paid agency fees to the reactivated adoption process, provided the adoption process is reactivated within one (1) year of the suspension.

The AP's notice of temporary suspension and desire to go on-hold must be communicated to Lifeline in writing. After the expiration of one (1) year from the date of said notice, the AP may not reactivate their adoption process. Subsequently, after the expiration of one (1) year, the AP's file will be closed, and services will be automatically terminated.

If the AP chooses to reactivate, notice of the AP's desire to reactivate must be communicated to Lifeline in writing. AP will be assessed an administrative reactivation fee of \$500.00, in addition to all remaining fees. At the time of reactivation, Lifeline will reassess the AP for program requirements.

Lifeline will also assess if additional fees including, but not limited to, home study update, new home study, and reactivation evaluations, are necessary. If more than six (6) months have elapsed since the temporary suspension, AP will be required to comply with all fees at their current rates at the time the adoption process is reactivated. AP may not remain on hold beyond one (1) year, and an AP's file will be determined terminated upon the expiration of said time.

If a family becomes pregnant during the adoption process, their file will be placed on hold. The on-hold terms outlined above will apply, but the on-hold period will be extended to up to two (2) years. Families should notify Lifeline Children's Services *as soon as possible* after pregnancy is confirmed so that the appropriate timing for placing the file on hold can be determined.

\*Families in North Carolina, South Dakota, and Wyoming will have to keep their home study updated during hold period in order to remain in compliance with state adoption laws.

## REFUND POLICY

Each fee collected at specified intervals/ sections during the adoption process is non-refundable once any service begins for that interval/ section. Each fee for specified intervals/ sections shall be due prior to work performed on that section. You acknowledge that Lifeline is compensated for ongoing services and is not compensated based on whether or not a successful adoption is completed. You understand and acknowledge that payments to Lifeline compensate Lifeline for work performed, including Lifeline time and resources, therefore all fees are non-refundable should AP not progress in the adoption process for any reason. Should an adoption fail to finalize after matching due to legal challenges or impediments, your matching fee may be transferrable to other birthmother matches.

By signing below, you acknowledge that **you have read the above risk statement and understand its contents. You also acknowledge that you have read and agree with the “Domestic Adoption Services Contract,” the terms of which (including, but not limited to, its provisions regarding limitations of liability, disclaimers/releases, indemnity, Lifeline’s Grievance Procedure, and Dispute Resolution) are included herein by reference**, and that you are making the decision to proceed with the process to adopt, despite potential risks and unknown factors, and that you are voluntarily and knowingly accepting the risks referenced within these documents and have discussed all of the above items with Lifeline to your satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Father Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Father Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

**N/A UNTIL APPLICATION ACCEPTANCE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Mother Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prospective Mother Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature