Steps to Take After Finding an Adoption Match

Congratulations on finding an adoption match. This is a significant milestone in your journey to grow your family. However, the legal steps that follow can feel complex and overwhelming. Understanding what to expect and how to prepare will help you move forward with confidence and clarity. This article provides practical guidance on the legal process after an adoption match, with a focus on identified adoption scenarios.

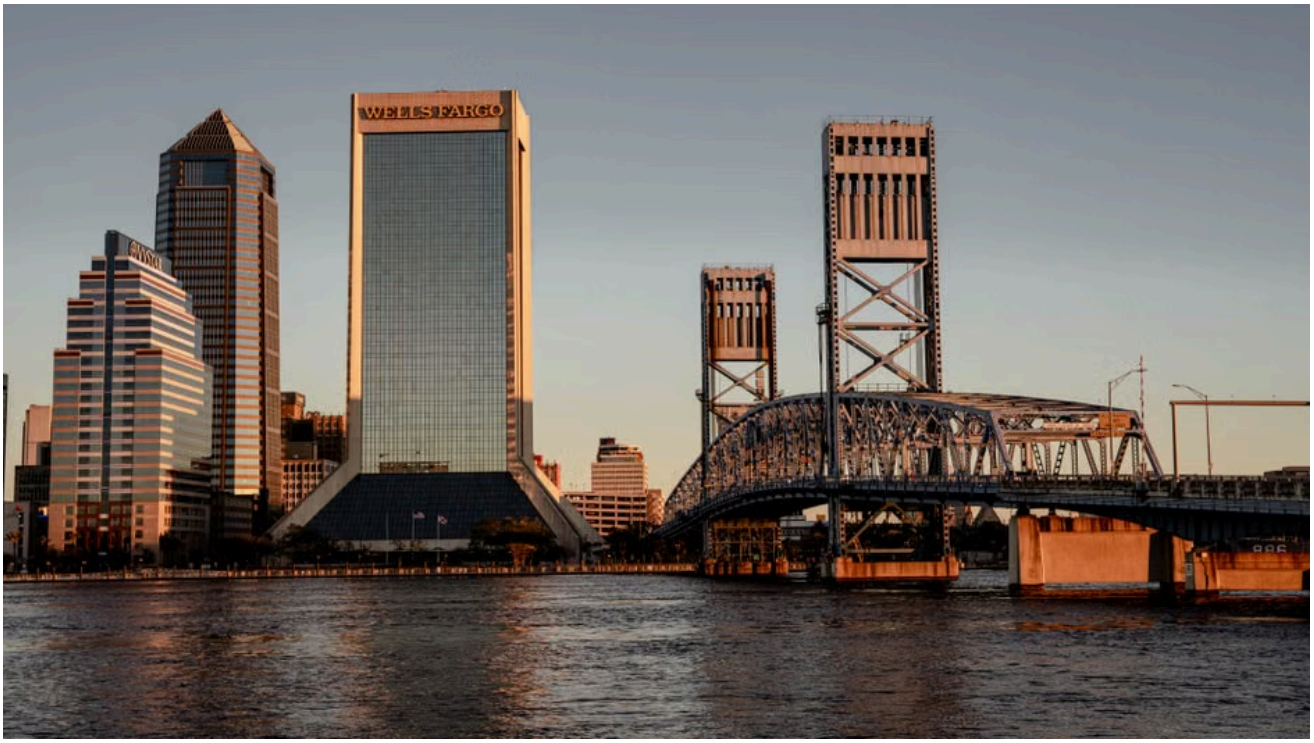
Understanding Identified Adoption

An identified adoption, sometimes called a known adoption, is one where the prospective adoptive parents find a birth parent or expectant parent on their own, rather than through an agency. This might happen through a mutual friend, a support group, or an online connection. While the emotional side of this match is deeply personal, the legal side requires careful attention. The goal is to ensure that all parties understand their rights and responsibilities, and that the adoption is handled according to state law.

Once you have a match, the first legal step is often to consult with an attorney who specializes in adoption law. In Florida, this attorney can help you navigate the specific requirements for identified adoptions. A Jacksonville Adoption Attorney can provide guidance tailored to your situation, from the initial match through finalization.

Step One: Legal Consultation and Risk Assessment

Before you proceed further, schedule a consultation with an adoption attorney. During this meeting, the attorney will review your match and assess potential legal risks. They will ask about how you met the expectant parent, whether any agency is involved, and what the current plan is for the adoption. This is also the time to discuss any financial arrangements, such as paying for the expectant parent's living expenses or medical costs. Florida law allows for certain payments, but they must be carefully documented to avoid any appearance of coercion or baby selling.



Your attorney will also explain the concept of consent and how it works in Florida. The birth parent must give voluntary and informed consent to the adoption. This consent cannot be given until after the baby is born, and it must be witnessed by a notary or two witnesses. Understanding this timeline helps you manage expectations and avoid legal pitfalls.

Step Two: Drafting the Adoption Plan

An adoption plan is a written document that outlines the agreement between the prospective adoptive parents and the expectant parent. This plan covers many details: how the hospital stay will be handled, what contact the birth parent wants after the adoption, and what expenses the adoptive parents will cover. While the plan is not a legally binding contract in the same way as a final adoption decree, it serves as a roadmap for the relationship and the process. Your attorney will help draft this plan to ensure it complies with Florida law and protects everyone's interests.

Be prepared for the plan to evolve. The expectant parent may change their mind about certain details, and that is their right. The key is to keep communication open and to document any changes in writing. Your attorney can advise on how to handle these adjustments without jeopardizing the adoption.

Step Three: Preparing for the Hospital Stay

The hospital is where many emotional and legal moments converge. The expectant parent will give birth, and the baby will be placed with you, but only after the birth parent signs the consent

forms. In Florida, consent cannot be signed until at least 48 hours after birth. This waiting period exists to give the birth parent time to make a fully informed decision. During this time, the hospital staff will typically ask about the baby's name and who will take the baby home. Your attorney can help you prepare a written plan for the hospital that addresses these questions ahead of time.

It is also wise to have a social worker or hospital liaison who understands adoption. They can help facilitate the placement and ensure that the birth parent's wishes are respected. Your attorney can coordinate with the hospital's legal department if needed. This step requires patience and flexibility, as the birth parent's emotions may shift after delivery.



Step Four: Filing the Adoption Petition

Once the baby is placed with you, the formal legal process begins. Your attorney will file a petition for adoption with the court in the county where you live. This petition asks the court to grant you legal custody and eventually finalize the adoption. Along with the petition, you will need to submit several documents: the consent forms signed by the birth parent, a home study report, and any other evidence required by the court. The home study is a report prepared by a licensed social worker that evaluates your fitness to adopt. If you have not already completed one, your attorney can help you find a qualified professional to do it.

The court will also require a background check on you and any other adults living in your home. This includes fingerprinting and a review of any criminal history. Make sure you have your

documents ready: identification, financial records, and references. Your attorney will guide you on what is needed and when.

Step Five: The Waiting Period and Finalization Hearing

After the petition is filed, there is a waiting period before the finalization hearing. In Florida, this waiting period is typically 30 to 90 days, during which the court reviews the case to ensure that everything is in order. The court may also appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the child's best interests. This person will interview you and the birth parent, and they will report back to the judge. Do not be alarmed by this; it is a routine part of the process designed to protect the child.

During this waiting period, focus on bonding with your child and maintaining contact with the birth parent as agreed. Your attorney will keep you updated on any court dates or additional requirements. The finalization hearing is the last legal step. At this hearing, the judge will review the case and, if everything is satisfactory, issue a final decree of adoption. This decree makes you the legal parent of the child, and the birth parent's rights are permanently terminated.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Even with careful planning, complications can arise. Here are a few common issues and how to handle them:



- Birth parent changes their mind: In Florida, the birth parent has the right to revoke consent up to 30 days after signing. After that, consent is irrevocable. Be prepared for this possibility and have a support system in place.
- Incomplete paperwork: Missing documents can delay the process. Keep a checklist and work closely with your attorney to ensure everything is filed on time.
- Communication breakdowns: Misunderstandings with the birth parent can lead to stress. Use clear, respectful communication and document all agreements in writing.
- Financial issues: If you are paying expenses for the expectant parent, keep detailed records. Any payments that are not properly documented could be questioned by the court.

Having an experienced legal guide makes a difference. A Jacksonville Adoption Attorney can help you avoid these pitfalls and keep the process on track.

Final Thoughts

Finding an adoption match is a hopeful moment. The legal steps that follow require patience, organization, and trust in your legal team. By understanding each stage and preparing in advance, you can focus on what matters most: welcoming a child into your family. Remember

that the law is there to protect everyone involved, especially the child. With the right guidance, identified adoption can be a smooth and rewarding process.