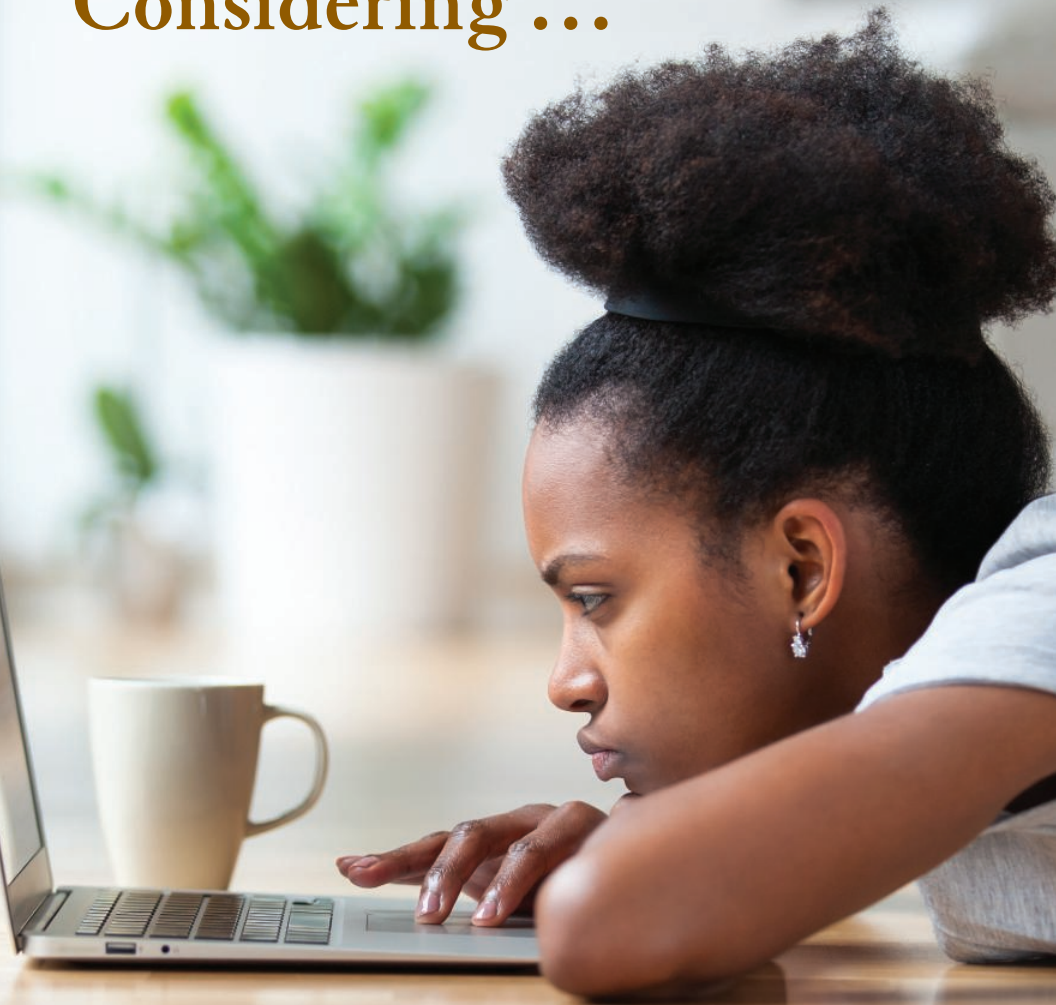


Considering ...



...placing your child for adoption?

SERVICES FOR

African American • Latino • Asian

Biracial/Multiracial • and other children of color



pact

Adoption is a lifelong Pact

Pact is a non-profit organization that serves children of color and their families. We counsel parents who are expecting a baby (or recently had a baby) and are considering adoption. If they choose adoption, we can connect them with families who are truly prepared to parent a child of color. Pact focuses on families who specifically want to adopt children of color, the overwhelming number of whom are themselves people of color, and who are committed to open adoption.

What does Pact stand for?

Pact means “a solemn agreement; to be of one mind; a covenant.” Our goal is for each adopted child to come to understand the *pact* made by his or her adoptive parent(s) and first/birth parents out of love for their child.

You know what is best for your life. If you're not sure, we can help you find your own answers.

At Pact, we know that if you are thinking about adoption, you were probably not planning to be in this situation. Unplanned pregnancies are just that — not planned — and we are here to help you make the best decision for your life, in line with your values and dreams. Pact believes that pregnant women (and their partners) should have choices when facing an unplanned pregnancy, and that **women of color who are considering adoption are too often denied access to the pregnancy options available to their white counterparts.**

In the early months of a pregnancy, there are three options to consider:

- keeping the child to be raised by you or by another family member;
- terminating the pregnancy (abortion); or
- placing the child to be raised by an adoptive family.

We will help you explore the pros and cons of *each* of the options available to you. We understand that there are no easy answers when you are trying to decide whether you are ready and able to parent the child you are expecting.

Judgment-free, pressure-free counseling is provided free-of-charge, whether or not you decide to pursue adoption.

We work with you to help you determine whether adoption is the best option for you and your child. If you decide to pursue an adoption plan, we can connect you with loving families who are ready to parent African American, Latino, Asian, and multiracial children.

We will help you think through all of the decisions that come with pregnancy, choosing an adoptive family, labor and delivery, and an ongoing relationship with your child and their adoptive parent(s). **Whether you decide to place or parent your baby yourself, Pact will support you in whatever way you decide is right for you and your baby.** For parents who chose to place their children in adoption, we provide follow-up services to ease the post-placement transition.

You have some big decisions to make. You may feel as if you don't have options — but you do. At Pact, we offer you information about all your choices and you make the decisions.

Whatever your decision, you will be in charge.

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Pact can help you...

...make parenting choices

First, we will help you consider ways of keeping your family intact. Is there someone who could help you parent? Are there resources you haven't thought of or don't know about? If you choose adoption, you need to understand that it will be a difficult path. Adoption is a permanent choice which cannot be undone later. You will need to be prepared for the journey.

...take care of yourself

We can help you understand whether you can get financial help with costs related to your pregnancy. We will help you secure appropriate medical care, counseling, emotional support, legal advice, housing and anything else necessary to meet your needs and relieve your stress.



...choose an adoptive family

If you decide to place your baby for adoption, you will have choices to make. What kind of family are you looking for? What qualities matter most? Introductions to adoptive parents are based on the match between their needs and expectations and yours.

...find your own answers

How will you respond to other people's opinions if you choose to place your baby for adoption? How will your child feel about you later? What if you change your mind?

...understand more about adoption

Adoptions work best when everyone can consider the feelings of the other people involved — most importantly, the child. What will your child need? What is going through the minds of prospective adoptive parents? How will the way you plan the adoption now make a difference later?

...anticipate grief and loss

How will you let go of your baby? Anticipating your grief in advance will help you prepare. Placing a child for adoption is difficult no matter how right it is for you and your child. There are no short cuts, but planning and talking about it helps.

...move forward in your life

What kind of ongoing contact do you want with your child? What are your goals and plans? How will you feel in five years? Ten? We can connect you with ongoing professional and peer support as you learn how to live with this new identity.

...find community

Pact's First/Birth Family Circle is for first/birth family members who have placed a child of color for adoption, or whose child was in foster care and is now adopted. This group provides a space for sharing your experiences, insights, and camaraderie with other first/birth family members, online and in person.

People who place a child for adoption find that there are highs and lows after placement. They may have intense sadness after placement, and this may continue in waves throughout their lives. The grief that comes from adoption is complicated. There is a lifelong loss, but it is not a death. Even when parents know they made the choice that was best for their child by placing them for adoption, and even when their child is happy and thriving, there can still be a deep feeling of loss — for you and for your child.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are adoptive parents like?

The majority, though not all, of the adoptive parents waiting to adopt through Pact are college-educated, over 35, financially stable, in good health, and have not been able to have biological children.

Will anyone want to adopt my baby?

Yes! Choosing the right family to adopt your baby will depend on your requirements. Many people want to adopt and no two are alike. There are couples — and singles. Some are the same race as your baby — others adopt across racial lines. Some do not yet have any children — others have kids already. Some want to have a lot of contact with you — others won't. The more flexible you are, the larger the pool of families from which you will be able to choose. If you have an extreme financial need, medical or legal problems, or if you have special requirements unique to your situation, it may take longer to find the family that feels right for you. If you are unable to find the right family within our available network, Pact will help you look outside of our families until you find the right match.

Choosing the right family to adopt your baby will depend on your requirements.

How do I know who will be good parents?

Adoptive parents must be approved by a state-required home study and must undergo a criminal record search. Some do this before you choose them and others afterwards. Adoptive parents who are working with Pact get counseling and education to make sure they are ready to be the best parents possible. In a Pact adoption, we believe in full disclosure of all information about both sets of parents to each other. You will usually be able to talk with them and meet them so you can decide for yourself. There are never guarantees in life, but we will give you tools to make an informed choice and opportunities to get your questions about the family answered.

How much does it cost?

All adoption services are free to birth parents. Adoptive parents pay fees to professionals and in some states, they may also assist with specific expenses related to the pregnancy of the birth parents.

Adoptive parents may pay for counseling, medical costs, legal costs, transportation, and living expenses related to your pregnancy. You are entitled to ask the professionals with whom you work about the fees they charge adoptive parents. Pact charges adoptive parents a single fee for all services, on a sliding scale based on their income.



Can I meet the family?

You are in charge of what happens. We want you to consider the advantages of meeting the family beforehand, but it is not required. We strongly encourage expectant parents to wait until they are in their last trimester to choose a family. We believe that choosing a family earlier than that can put unnecessary pressure on expectant parents to place a child, even if they have doubts, out of loyalty to the pre-adoptive parents.

Can I see my baby?

We hope that you will want to see your baby. You will always be an important person to your child. We believe that children do best when connections with their birth family members are maintained, but you will ultimately be in charge of your own choices.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my child hate me if I chose adoption?

Your child will want to understand why. He or she will want to know that you acted in his or her best interest. The most important information will be the knowledge that you worked very hard to make the right decision, that you considered his or her needs before your own.

What if I change my mind?

This will almost certainly be the hardest decision you will ever make. Since you will be deciding not only for yourself but for your baby and the adoptive parents, we will ask you to be as sure as you can possibly be that adoption is the right plan before you select an adoptive family. Nevertheless, you will retain the legal right to change your mind and reclaim custody without explanation until you sign the consent to the adoption after the birth of your

baby. Once you sign the consent forms, you have some period of time (depending on which state you live in) before your signature will be considered irrevocable. You will continue to have the right to a legal hearing of the matter even after this period has passed. We will always help you to get the specific information you need if you want to explore these options.

What if my child has already been born?

Sometimes mothers and fathers think about adoption after the child is born. Maybe you did not realize you were going to have a baby, or your life has gone through major changes you weren't expecting. Pact can work quickly to help make sure your baby's needs are met while you have the time you need to learn about adoption and whether it is right for you and your baby.



What kinds of papers will I have to fill out?

There are a number of things we will ask you to complete along the way. Not everything has to be done all at once.

In the beginning we will ask you to complete a few questionnaires with your background information, family history, medical history, etc. We will ask you to sign:

1. A contract to work with Pact on your adoption plan
2. A release that allows Pact to communicate with other care providers
3. A paternity form that states who the expectant father is, or provides as much information as you can

If you decide to continue with an adoption plan, we will later ask you to sign:

1. A form reflecting your intent to place your child for adoption with a particular adoptive family (this form is not legally binding)
2. A form you will sign at the hospital to give the adoptive parents the right to make medical decisions for the child while he or she is in their custody

After the baby is born if you do decide to relinquish your rights to parent, you will sign:

1. A consent or relinquishment form you will sign after the birth of your baby
2. A memo of understanding form, which Pact will help you design, regarding agreements about ongoing contact

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Who does Pact work with?

Some pregnant women or couples contact us directly. Others come through referrals from agencies or private adoption professionals. In all cases, one or both of the parents is a person of color. We work with pregnant women and expectant parents from all states. 20% of the expectant parents we work with are teens; 80% are under the age of 30; 90% are experiencing economic stress. Many feel isolated and unsupported. Sometimes, Pact is their sole source of emotional support. Pact embraces them at a major turning point in their lives.

All of the pre-adoptive parents we work with specifically want to adopt a child of color. In almost all these families, at least one of the prospective parents is a person of color who will share some or all of the child's racial identity.

Pact supports and encourages open adoption.

An open adoption means there is direct contact between the adopting family and the first/birth family. This term includes a wide range of variations. The birth and adoptive families may speak only once before the placement of the child and have no further contact, or they may engage in extensive contact throughout their lifetimes. "Contact" can range from an annual exchange of letters and pictures to regular phone calls or in-person visits.

In a **closed adoption** (sometimes called confidential), no identifying information passes between the birth and adoptive family. Related terms that are sometimes used include "**semi-open adoption**," which usually means that the adoptive and birth parents meet and exchange non-identifying information and maintain contact through a third party; and "**cooperative adoption**," in which the birth and adoptive parents agree to remain in close and ongoing contact and where the birth parents agree to play an active role in the child's life. Some adoption professionals prefer particular styles of interaction between families and will only facilitate adoptions that conform to their ideas.

What we know is that closed adoption has not worked ideally for adopted people.

Many adoptees have grown up feeling they didn't fit, feeling something was missing, feeling confused about where they came from and feeling it would be a betrayal of their adoptive parents and family, *whom they love*, to ask questions or seek information about their birth family. Open adoption developed as an answer to these haunting questions. Open adoption is not co-parenting; open adoption embodies honest acceptance of the truth in adoption — each adopted person has two families and each family is central to who they are.

Some expectant parents anticipate that they will be better able to manage their feelings of grief and guilt if they close off their emotions towards their child — as if the birth and placement never happened. But having made such a difficult decision, it can be comforting and validating to be able to see the outcomes of that choice. First/birth parents understanding that they have an important role in the life of their child, and have the answers to some of their son's or daughter's questions that no one else holds, can go a long way towards helping them find peace with the decision they made.



What Pact Believes

Pact believes that pregnant women (and their partners) should have *choices* when facing an unplanned pregnancy. We believe that expectant parents have the right to choose the family who will adopt their baby. Women and men of color deserve the same choices, control, and respect as others who choose adoption. Expectant parents often seek out Pact because they want their child to grow up in a family that reflects the child's racial identity.

- Every child has a right to a family.
- Preserving families should be explored and encouraged first.
- Children have immediate needs that can't be secondary to adult needs.
- Adoption can be a positive reproductive choice when done ethically.
- When adoption placement happens, the child is our primary client.
- Adoption is not a one-time event; it is a lifetime journey.
- Not everyone should adopt.
- Adoption matters.
- An open adoption with direct contact between families serves adopted children best.
- Race matters.
- Racism affects all of us.
- Same-race placements are less complicated for children than transracial placements.
- Transracial families can serve children if parents create meaningful connections to their child's heritage communities.
- It is not true that "love is enough" — adoptive parents need knowledge, understanding, and commitment to support their child's identity.

Who We Are

Pact is a national non-profit that has been involved in promoting ethical, anti-racist adoption practices for over 25 years. Our staff is racially diverse and has not only professional training but direct personal experience with adoption.

Susan Dusza Guerra Leksander, LMFT

First/Birth Family Specialist



Susan is a first mother who placed her child for adoption in 2001. She is also a transracially adopted Latina woman who understands adoption from the adoptee's perspective. She is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who has been working with all members of the adoption triad since 2008.

Katie Stickles-Wynen, MSW

Adoption Specialist and LGBTQ Advocate



Katie Stickles-Wynen is a transracial, international adoptee from Colombia, and she has worked with members of the adoption triad since 2006. As an adoptee and a social worker, Katie is committed to supporting and advocating for expectant parents as they consider all the options available to them and is always willing to share from an adoptee perspective.

Malaika Parker

Family of Color Specialist



Malaika Parker works with Pact's adoptive parents of color (and their partners) to design resources and opportunities that serve same-race adoptive families. As an African American adoptive parent, she educates Pact's pre-adoptive parents about the importance of ethical adoption practice and openness with first/birth family members.

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Adoption Glossary

Pregnant — A woman is carrying an embryo or fetus in her body.

Expectant Mother — A woman who is pregnant, planning to continue the pregnancy, and exploring her options. Thinking about or planning for adoption does not impact her legal rights to parent her child once born.

Expectant Father — A man who has impregnated a woman; she is planning to continue the pregnancy. He may have legal rights to parent the child even if the expectant mother is thinking about or planning for adoption.

Family Preservation — Empowering expectant parents by connecting them with resources they need to raise their child and keep their family together.

Relinquishment — A legal process where mothers and fathers sign court documents that end their rights to be a parent to their child.

***First / Birth Mother** — A woman who gave birth to a child and relinquishes her rights to be that child's parent, or whose rights have been terminated.

***First / Birth Father** — A man who is the biological father of an adopted child and relinquishes his rights to be that child's parent, or whose rights have been terminated.

Adoptee / Adopted — A child or adult whose first/birth parents are no longer their legal parents, who has other parent(s) as their legal parents.

Adoptive Parent(s) — An adult who becomes the new legal parent of a child.

Open Adoption — The adopted child has ongoing knowledge of, access to, and a meaningful relationship with their first/birth family.

Contact Agreement — Available in some states, including California, this is a legal document that describes the kind of open relationship the first/birth parents and adoptive parents have agreed to.

Same-Race Adoption — An adopted child shares the racial identity of at least one of their adoptive parents.

Transracial Adoption — An adopted child does not share the racial identity of either of their adoptive parents.

* Why First or Birth? People who have placed a child for adoption use both terms to describe themselves. "First parent" is a new term that acknowledges the parent's role as more than biological or giving birth. "Birth parent" is the more common term. Either one is fine to use.

For Professionals

What is Pact?

Pact is a non-profit organization that serves children of color and their families. We counsel parents who are expecting a baby (or recently had a baby) and are considering adoption. If they choose adoption, we can connect them with families who are truly prepared to parent a child of color. Pact focuses on families who specifically want to adopt children of color, the overwhelming majority of whom are people of color themselves, and who are committed to open adoption. We advocate for honesty and authenticity in matters of race and adoption.

Adoption...It's Complicated!

Pact's First/Birth Parent Educators deliver trainings to service providers such as social workers, options counselors, nurses, and therapists, who work with expectant and first/birth parents. These professionals learn directly from Educators who have placed children for adoption about how to provide appropriate and compassionate services in an empowering, respectful, and culturally sensitive manner. Contact aic@pactadopt.org for more information or to schedule a training.

Adoption...It's Complicated!

RAISING AWARENESS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS



- Does your organization provide counseling to women facing unplanned pregnancies?
- Is adoption one of the options you discuss with them?
- Do you feel confident about how to support women and families considering adoption? Or those whose children have already been placed into adoption or foster care?
- Would it benefit the clients you serve if your staff deepened their knowledge of the complex topic of adoption?

The only program of its kind, **Adoption...It's Complicated!** draws on both firsthand, personal experiences, and the latest research, to help service providers discuss adoption with honesty, balance, and compassion.



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Pact, an adoption alliance

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