



Family and *facs*
Children's Services

ADOPTION UNIT

Relinquishing a Child for Adoption

Information on placing a child up for Adoption



Northern Territory Government
Department of Health and Community Services

What is adoption?

Adoption is a legal and social process that provides a child with new legal parents. It ends the legal relationships between a child and their birth parents and establishes a new legal relationship with the adoptive parents.

In the Northern Territory:

- Family and Children's Services, Adoption Unit, part of the Department of Health and Community Services, arrange adoptions. Only people who have been assessed and found suitable are approved as prospective adoptive parents;
- private adoption arrangements are illegal;
- adoptions are legally binding under Orders made by the Local Court of the Northern Territory.

Alternatives to adoption

Alternatives that do not sever the link between a child and parent include:

- the child's temporary placement with relatives, friends, or departmental foster carers;
- long term placement with relatives or friends through a residency order pursuant to the Family Law Act (formerly a guardianship or custody order).

Age of child at relinquishment

While a child can be relinquished for adoption at any age, the following are important considerations in regard to the best interests of the child:

- minimising the trauma associated with relinquishment from birth parents;

- assisting the child to form bonds with the adoptive parents.

These are best achieved if the child is relinquished at a young age.

What steps are taken if I decide to relinquish?

An authorised person usually the Adoption Practitioner, will provide counselling and discuss with you the effects of an adoption order and the alternatives to adoption.

The counsellor will discuss issues of consent pertaining to both birth parents as, if named, the other birth parent's consent is also required.

If the child is older, they will require preparation. Departmental workers are available to assist with the preparation. If all parties agree it may be possible for there to be ongoing contact between the adoptive family and the relinquishing parent(s).

The Statement by Relinquishing Parent(s) in Respect to Adoption needs to be completed and this records the relinquishing parents' wishes in relation to the adoption.

On this statement, relinquishing parents are able to indicate:

The ethnic or cultural background that they wish the child to be raised in;

- religious up-bringing of the child;
- participation in the selection of adoptive parents through the perusal of non-identifying information;
- Whether the relinquishing parent wishes to be advised of the application for the adoption order and the date and time of the hearing of the application;

- whether the relinquishing parent wishes to have access to the child, or receive information in regard to the child after the adoption has been finalised. Access and information exchange is dependent on agreements reached by both parties.

Parental rights and responsibilities remain unchanged until a consent document is signed.

If a person is pregnant or the parent of a newborn child, the following applies:-

- consent cannot be signed until the child is thirty days old;
- a consenting parent is required to undergo counselling by an approved person at least seven days prior to signing a consent for the adoption of a child;
- the birth parent(s) will determine the amount of contact with the child prior to signing the consent. Some parents choose to care for the child during this period, others prefer to limit contact with the child. If a decision is made to limit contact with the child, please discuss this issue with the hospital social worker and the adoption practitioner to enable placement options for the care of the child to be determined;
- the birth parent(s) completes the child's birth registration. The name chosen will remain the child's legal name until an Adoption Order is finalised in the Local Court.

The consent to adoption places the child under the Guardianship of the Minister for Health and Community Services. The child is placed in alternate care until the period or revocation of consent has ended. Access with the child may be arranged through the department

Withdrawal of consent

Consent to adopt can be revoked up to thirty days after the signing of the consent. Withdrawal of consent must be in writing. The Adoption Practitioner can assist with the withdrawal of consent if requested.

The child is not placed with prospective adoptive parents until the revocation period has expired.

Placement of the child

A panel, consisting of senior departmental officers, meets to determine the most appropriate adoptive parents for the child. Considerations are based on the needs of the child and relinquishing parent(s) wishes contained in the "*Statement by Relinquishing Parent(s) in Respect to Adoption*".

A child is placed with adoptive parents for approximately twelve months before an Adoption Order is made,

When the department is satisfied that the child has settled into their new family, the family is informed that they may proceed to finalise the adoption. The Local Court then determines whether an Adoption Order is granted.

Once an Adoption Order is finalised the adoptive parents become the child's legal parents.

Counselling

Once the decision is made to relinquish a child, the parent(s) may need assistance to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, relief and guilt.

The Adoption Practitioner is available to provide limited counselling and/or a referral to community-based counselling services.

Adoption information

After an Adoption Order has been made:

- relinquishing parent(s) may apply through the department to obtain identifying information in regard to the child and their adoptive parents
- the adoptive parents and the child may also apply for identifying information in regard to the birth parent(s)

Prior to the release of any information, an authorised person, generally the Adoption Practitioner will provide counselling.

Adoptive parents are advised to tell their children about their adoption from an early age. Information about birth parents is valuable in assisting children to develop positive feelings of self worth when considering their origins. A relinquishing parent may wish to provide this information at the time of consent or in a letter format to be provided to the child at a later date.

Many adoptees are curious about their background and often birth parents want to know information about the child that they relinquished. A number of adoptees and birth parents make contact at some time during their lives but other prefer not to have contact.

The Adoption Practitioner is available to provide assistance at any time during the process

For further information

The Adoption Practitioner is available to discuss adoption with you. The Adoption Unit (part of Family and Children's Services) is located in Casuarina Plaza, Corner of Trower Rd and Vanderlin Drive, Wanguri.

Adoption Practitioner

Family and Children's Services

PO Box 40596

CASUARINA NT 0811

Phone: (08) 8922 7077

Fax: (08) 8922 7480

E-mail adoption@nt.gov.au

Website: www.health.nt.gov.au

Alternatively a Social Worker at the Royal Darwin Hospital may be available to discuss adoption issues.

Other sources of information

- Hospital Social Workers
- Community Care Social Worker and other staff
- Family Planning Association
- Staff at your local Family and Children's Services Office
- Aboriginal Medical Services
- Oakley House