



There are plenty of "How to Adopt" books which cover how to pick an agency, what a home study is, and affording adoption. There are also plenty of books which discuss "Adoptive Parenting" with topics such as attachment, answering questions from your child and maintaining your child's heritage. But I don't know of any books that focus on what to do while "Waiting to Adopt." This stage between completing all of your adoption paperwork and when you receive your new child can be a very difficult time. It's hard to just "wait" and not be antsy for your life to be turned upside down once you have your new child in your arms.

Most people are surprised when they reach this "Waiting to Adopt" stage because their busy life suddenly comes to a screeching stop. Probably for months they have been researching agencies, collecting paperwork for their home study, meeting with their social worker, following up with their referral letters and many other tasks. Then once everything is complete, there is nothing left for them to do but wait. And wait. And wait. Couples usually feel a need to be doing "something" like they have been but they don't know what to do at this point. Everything is out of their hands until an adoption situation arises.

What Should We Be Doing?

I believe this "Waiting to Adopt" stage is when people should seek out support the most. Some people stop attending my Adoption Support Group during this time because they feel that they have nothing new to report. However, if they do attend during this time they always have plenty to say. For example, they want to hear tips

on how to stay busy, what prepping they can do for a child, and how to answer the constant question of "Heard anything yet?"

With domestic adoptions, this stage is trying because you don't know how long it will last. The phone could ring any minute with news of a potential adoption. Or it may not ring for months and months. Should you put your life on hold? Should you live as if you did prior to choosing to adopt? How do you get excited for something that you know will happen but don't know when?

There are plenty of things the waiting couple can do to stay busy and prepare them for their new child. Reading adoption stories, taking parenting classes, registering, preparing a child's room, having baby showers, helping others and spending time as a couple are all suggestions I try to pass along to prospective adoptive parents.

Reading Adoption Stories

Reading personal accounts of adoption is extremely helpful at this stage. Odds are that the prospective adoptive parent's reading material previously consisted of informational books like "Questions to ask an Adoption Agency." But now is when people's personal adoption journeys are going to make the biggest impact. These stories will include the emotions involved with the entire adoption process.

Up to this point, the focus has been on the practical side of adoption. Now that the focus is not on practicality, you can begin to examine the emotional side. There are many unpredictable emotions involved with adoption. Possibly they won't catch you off-guard if you've read about a similar situation.

The best book I have read involving the emotions of the adoption process is "The Kid" by Dan Savage. When he explains what he and his partner felt in the hospital

after their potential daughter was born was spot on. In detail he describes how they wanted to give the baby back to the Birthmother because they felt as if they were stealing from her. I wish I would have read this prior to my first adoption so I would have known that the emotions I felt were normal under those circumstances.

Parenting Classes

This ?Waiting to Adopt? stage is a wonderful time to start acting like a true expectant parent. Think about what a couple expecting through pregnancy would be doing while waiting for their child. Granted you don't need Lamaze lessons, but the other topics covered in Lamaze class would be helpful.

Search your town's hospitals or adoption agencies to see if any of them offer Adoptive Parenting classes. Essentially, they are Lamaze classes minus the child birthing. In my classes, Paul and I learned how to change diapers, bathe a child, and how to handle normal childhood illnesses. I was very grateful that we took these classes for the information and to be around other expectant adoptive parents.

One topic included in parenting classes is how to choose a pediatrician. This is something that a prospective adoptive parent should not delay. Your pediatrician can be extremely helpful to you during your adoption journey by giving medical insight on potential adoption situations.

If it's not included in your Adoptive Parenting classes, then you should seek out infant and child CPR. Odds are you don't want a class full of pregnant women, so I recommend you ask hospitals if they have private CPR training. If you explain how you are going to be adoptive parents, some hospitals may even send a nurse to your house to teach you CPR and basic child care.

Registering

Stepping into a baby store can make some prospective adoptive parents cringe, especially if they come from the world of infertility. But the time between paperwork and being matched with a potential adoption situation is when you will have the most time to find inner strength and go register at baby stores for items.

You don't need to tell anyone that you are registering. There is no need to be collecting baby items at your house for an undetermined length of time. You can figure out the absolute basics you would need, such as bottles, diapers and a few outfits, and ask people to buy you those only for now.

Paul and I went to a Babies 'R' Us as soon as we turned in our final piece of adoption paperwork. We wanted to make sure that we picked out the stuff we really wanted. If we had waited and then rushed through creating our registry last minute, I am sure we would have regretted some of our selections. I am glad that we took the time in researching which car seat we wanted, 'test driving' strollers around the store, and selecting the perfect nursery theme. Luckily we did this right away as we were only waiting three weeks before being selected by potential Birth Parents. After that we were preoccupied with the specific adoption situation so researching features on high chairs wasn't high on my priority list.

Preparing a Room

This is a great time to start preparing your new child's room. This could mean clearing out a room and leaving it bare until you have your child in your house. Or it can mean painting, setting up furniture, and placing nick knacks on shelves. You and your partner need to decide what would make the two of you comfortable. If your wait takes much longer than you anticipated, will seeing your decorated room cause an emotional breakdown? Or will it lift your spirits as you know that your child will eventually be in there?

To Shower or Not?

One event that happens for many expectant parents is a baby shower. Does that mean that you should have one? What's the etiquette for adoptions? This topic comes up frequently in my Adoption Support Meetings. Family and friends of prospective adoptive parents want to throw a baby shower to show how supportive and excited they are with the upcoming adoption. But the prospective adoptive parents aren't sure what to do and are afraid of upsetting their loved ones.

With the adoptive parents I know most didn't have a shower prior to their adoption. Instead they had a "Welcome" shower once their child was home. Parents like this because the child was at their shower for everyone to meet. We did this with our first son and I am so grateful we did. I enjoyed receiving gifts specifically for my son and not for our potential baby.

I know people who had baby showers prior to adopting and never regretted their decision. Their showers made the "waiting" time easier for them because they had something to look forward to. Plus, after receiving their gifts they spent plenty of time putting everything in its appropriate place.

Giving Back

Whether or not they realize it, the "Waiting to Adopt" couple has a wealth of knowledge about adoption. A great way to help pass time during this waiting stage is to help others who are beginning their adoption journey.

Attending local support groups or being involved in online adoption forums would be a wonderful way to assist others. Remember how overwhelming the adoption paperwork was at first? Remember how all the terms used in adoption, such as

dossier and interstate compact, sounded like jargon in the beginning? Wouldn't it make you feel better if you could use this knowledge to make someone else's adoption easier?

At my Adoption Support Groups, I love it when someone new to adoption asks a question and someone who is "waiting" answers it. It is obvious to me that the new person appreciates all of the extra help. Plus, it's apparent that the "waiting" person is grateful that their adoption research can help others.

Couple Time

Even though it sounds like a cliché, one thing that prospective adoptive couples should do during the "Waiting to Adopt" stage is enjoy their couple time. When a potential adoption situation does arise, it will feel as if they are back on the adoption roller coaster once again. Emotionally, there will be difficult times and potentially hard choices to make.

This "Waiting" time is when the roller coaster has stopped and when you should enjoy being a couple. Do things that will be hard to do once you do have a child, like eating in a fancy restaurant, finishing projects around the house or sleeping in on weekends. Keep your life as simple and carefree as possible because it will once again become hectic when you get the call regarding a potential adoption situation.

The "Waiting to Adopt" stage is not an easy one to maneuver but as you can tell there are plenty of things to keep you busy. Even though there is not a stack of adoption forms to fill out or official papers to collect, you can still be active as a potential adoptive parent. Soon enough your new child will be with you and this "waiting" stage will be a distant memory.

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