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The Life-changing Decisions in Adoption

... and parents were born to bring the children home.

WENDY SALINGER, *Folly River*

The decision about which child to choose is almost too big for humans to make, and that's one reason decisions around adoption are so hard. If you reach this point in the process, though, you have probably chosen to build your family through adoption. That's already a huge decision. Let yourself sit with it for a while, as long as you need to, and celebrate your commitment to becoming a parent. That little respite will nurture and strengthen you for all the decisions to come.

Chapter 2 of *Labor of the Heart: A Parent's Guide* is designed to help you with them. There are five major considerations in choosing the type of adoption. First, think about your child's age, ethnicity, and health status. You will also need to consider whether you could be comfortable having a relationship with your child's biological family. Finally, decide how long you think you can stand to wait. Each major decision section has three parts: one for the heart, one for the brain, and one for practical considerations.

Decisions about bringing any child except a newborn into your family are foreign territory in human evolution. We're hard-wired with sex hormones that whisper or scream the simple message: "Have sex. Make babies." We can make decisions about sexual activity and contraception. That decision is really about whether to become pregnant, or how to become pregnant, and to have a baby or child. It's not a decision about our child's ethnicity, age, or, usually, health. Adoption, though, presents us with just

those choices. It means we have to think about issues that wouldn't come up in the decision to get pregnant and to have an infant. While we think about the choices we face in the process of adoption, we're feeling our way through a bramble of thorny issues, while wearing short sleeves. Ultimately, we're loving our child-to-be.

Each of those choices will involve your brain and some practical issues. This chapter's section designed to help you with the brain part contains information that you need, which comes from peer-reviewed, published papers in medicine, psychology and social work. The age divisions are based generally on those used by researchers, but—as in many adoption issues, there's always a “but”—there are no absolute age limits on any of the research reported here. Also, as you read, keep in mind that studies generalizing to all adopted children might not apply to your child. This might be good or bad, depending on the findings.

The parts of this chapter designed to help you with practical issues tell you why each decision in the process is important and what implications your choices can have. Your decisions about your child's age, ethnicity, and health will determine which adoption agencies you will work with, and whether you choose domestic or international adoption. Once you have answers to the questions in this chapter, you will be in an excellent position to decide on the best agency for your family. You will also be ready to respond to questionable “sales pitches” for adoptable children who might not be right for you and your family. And speaking of sales, a word about money. Adoption can be expensive, but prices vary widely—from state governments paying you to parent a child from foster care, to many thousands of dollars in domestic adoption. But even in private U.S. adoptions, there are different types of adoption to fit many budgets.

The myth or story you created in the exercises at the end of Chapter 1 in *Labor of the Heart: A Parent's Guide* will help guide you through this stage of the process. Different families, of course, come to their children through different decision routes that start at different points of the family compass. The stories from different adoptive families show some of those different possibilities.

Regardless of where you start creating or adding to your

family, you do not have to do this alone. It's better for you and your child-to-come if you don't. Use your adoption doula or doulas as much as possible to help you. Also remember the wise words of adoptive mom Maureen, "There's no rule book." The good news is you can't do it wrong, but you will find it much easier with the help of others who've gone before you.

Turn to the following page to view the
"Adoption Decisions: Using Your Heart and Brain"
Chart

Adoption Decisions: Using Your Heart and Brain

Adoption Decision	Heart Part	Brain Part	Practical Considerations
<p>Age: What age do you want your child to be on arrival? What age child can you parent?</p>	<p>You long for baby love, toddler cuddles, or soccer games with an older child.</p>	<p>The younger the child at adoption, the best chance they have for growing up healthy. Older children might come with attachment issues or other behavioral or emotional problems.</p>	<p>Older children are waiting for adoption in the United States and abroad; U.S. infants are placed through private agencies and attorneys; international infants are more easily available.</p>
<p>Ethnicity: Can you parent a child of a different race?</p>	<p>Any child can fill your heart—or do you need a child who looks like you?</p>	<p>Having a mixed-race family is a life-long challenge; different ethnic mixes present different issues in different communities.</p>	<p>More non-white children are available for adoption.</p>
<p>Health: Are you willing to care for a child with medical problems?</p>	<p>Your heart goes out to children who need extra physical care.</p>	<p>Many conditions are treatable or manageable with love and advanced medicine.</p>	<p>“Special needs” aren’t always serious medical or developmental issues, but sometimes they are. Do you have the resources to take care of a child with special needs?</p>
<p>Relationship with birth family: What kind of relationship do you want with your child’s birth family?</p>	<p>You would welcome a relationship with birth parents—or you would feel threatened by competition for your child?</p>	<p>It’s important for a child to know as much as possible about her birth family if she wants to.</p>	<p>Some domestic adoptions require openness, but some international ones lack information about birth families.</p>
<p>The wait: How long can you wait until your child comes home?</p>	<p>Do you, like most parents-to-be, feel that you want a child NOW? Or can you wait for years?</p>	<p>Only you can decide how long to wait, and how important this factor is for your family.</p>	<p>Progress in the adoption process often moves at a snail’s pace, unless you are adopting older children from the United States who are already eligible for adoption.</p>