

How To Avoid an Adoption Scam

Q: I've been hearing about adoption scams involving birth mothers. What kinds of things should we know about as prospective parents?

A: First, you should know that scams are extremely rare. However, on the rare occasion that a scam occurs, what typically happens is that a genuinely pregnant woman will work with several prospective adoptive couples at the same time and ask all of these adoptive couples for her prenatal and/or living expenses. Another type of scam involves an alleged birth mother who is not actually pregnant, but attempts to exploit prospective adoptive parents for her living expenses.

Q: Is there anything we can do to protect ourselves from these scams?

A: Yes; there are several things prospective adoptive parents can do to avoid being scammed by an adoption agency, an adoption attorney or a birth mother:

- 1) Check out your resources very carefully and ask for references.
- 2) Ask a lot of questions. A good agency or attorney will welcome tough questions.
- 3) Consider involving a good attorney to protect your rights from the very beginning.
- 4) Make sure any agency you're working with is in good standing with the state's licensing division. You can also check with the Supreme Court of Ohio to make sure the attorney is licensed and has not been sanctioned (visit www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/AttySvcs/AttyReg/Public_AttorneyInformation.asp).
- 5) Try to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the birth mother.
- 6) Order a copy of the prenatal records. You should be aware faked ultrasounds may be purchased online. It is wise to ask your lawyer to order any birth parent medical records directly from the doctor rather than allowing the birth mother to order them.
- 7) You may ask the birth mother to submit to a drug screening, as well as a criminal background and employment check, but be careful. Most birth mothers are not criminals and do not want to be treated as such. A face-to-face meeting can prove invaluable, both for gauging the birth mother's character and mitigating any negative effects of the screening process.
- 8) Prospective adoptive parents also can learn about a birth parent through the Internet (e.g., by checking Facebook, MySpace and Twitter).
- 9) Make written notes about any conversations you have with a birth parent and save receipts for anything you pay for or buy for a birth mother. Also, provide this information to your attorney.

Q: What should we do if we realize we've been the victims of a scam?

A: Contact your attorney immediately, stop making any payments, stop payment on any outstanding checks and report the scam to the local authorities.

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This "Law You Can Use" column was provided by the Ohio State Bar Association. It was prepared

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Articles appearing in this column are intended to provide broad, general information about the law. Before applying this information to a specific legal problem, readers are urged to seek advice from an attorney.

