

# The Fundamentals

Of Embryo Donation  
and Adoption



## Why Embryo Donation and Adoption?

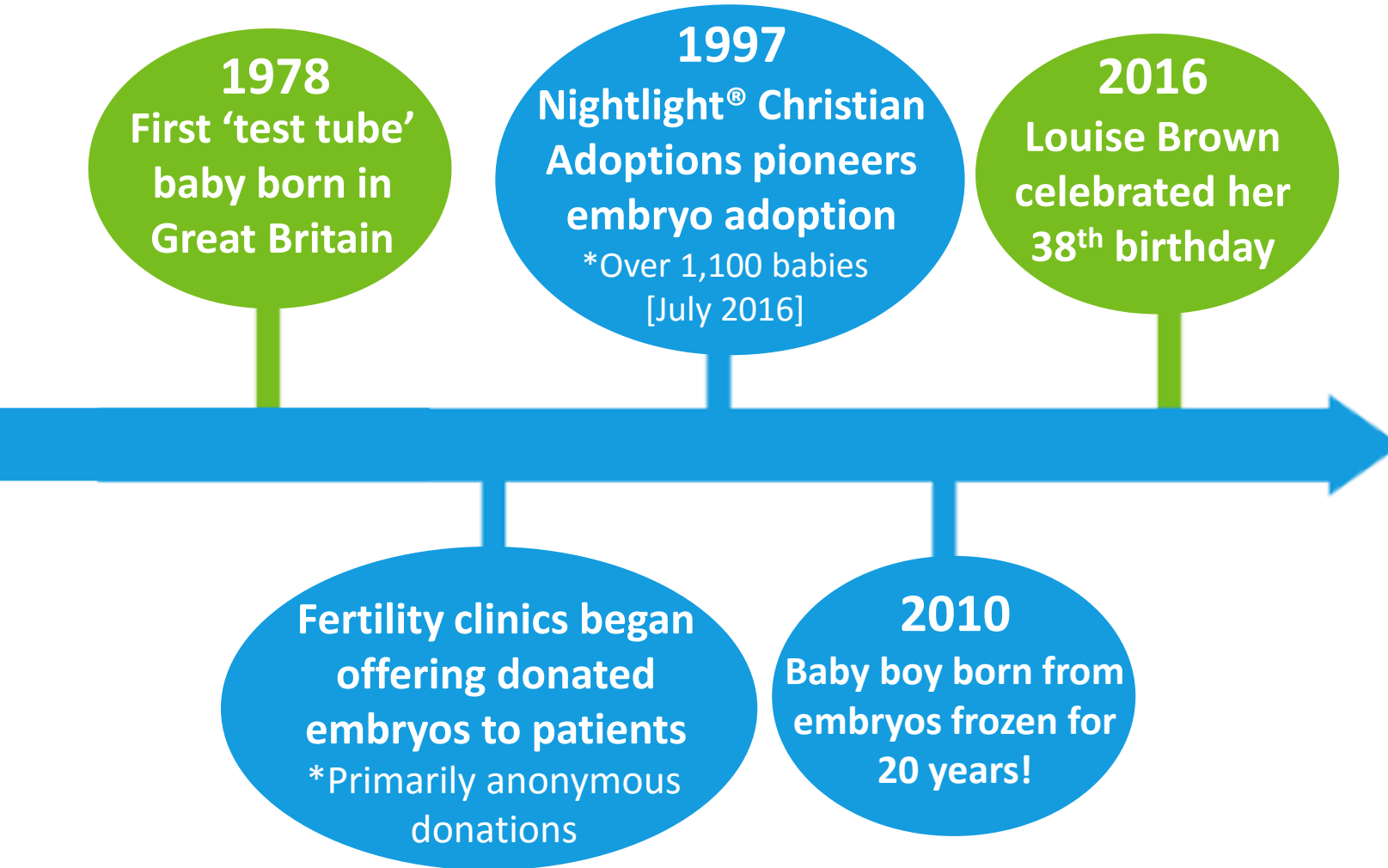
- Historically adoption has been the primary alternative for family building
- Impact of medical science on reproductive health
- Medical science now offers Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)



# Why Embryo Donation and Adoption?

- Today ART tends to be the first alternative pursued by couples facing infertility
- Frequently during IVF treatments more embryos are created than are eventually used
- This has caused an ever-increasing number of embryos in frozen storage. In 2011 documented as over 600,000 But now estimated at 1,000,000!

# History of Embryo Donation and Adoption




**\*Hannah the 1<sup>st</sup> Snowflake Baby**

**Born December 1998**



# HOW MANY BABIES HAVE BEEN BORN BY EMBRYO DONATION & ADOPTION??



Since the 1990's it is estimated that over 7,000 babies have been born into the loving arms of their family from donated frozen embryos



# Meet the Donor Parents

## EMBRYOS ARE CREATED WITH LOVE

for a family who struggled  
with infertility



## How are Embryos Frozen and Stored?

- After the fresh IVF cycle, remaining embryos are frozen
- The embryos are generally frozen between one to six days of development
- Using best practices, only one to three embryos are stored in each cane [a.k.a. straw]
- Canes are labeled with indelible ink for administrative tracking



# Embryos in Storage

## Short-term Storage



- Couple who had them created has not completed their family
- Embryos usually stored at clinic

## Long-term storage



- Some clinics provide long-term storage
- Cryobank: Company specializing in long-term storage
- Verify long-term storage facility policies *before* transferring embryos



**Once they have completed their family,  
they may still have embryos in storage**  
Many are not prepared for this outcome, making them  
feel surprised, overwhelmed, and unsure of what to do  
with their remaining embryos



# Faced with a Choice

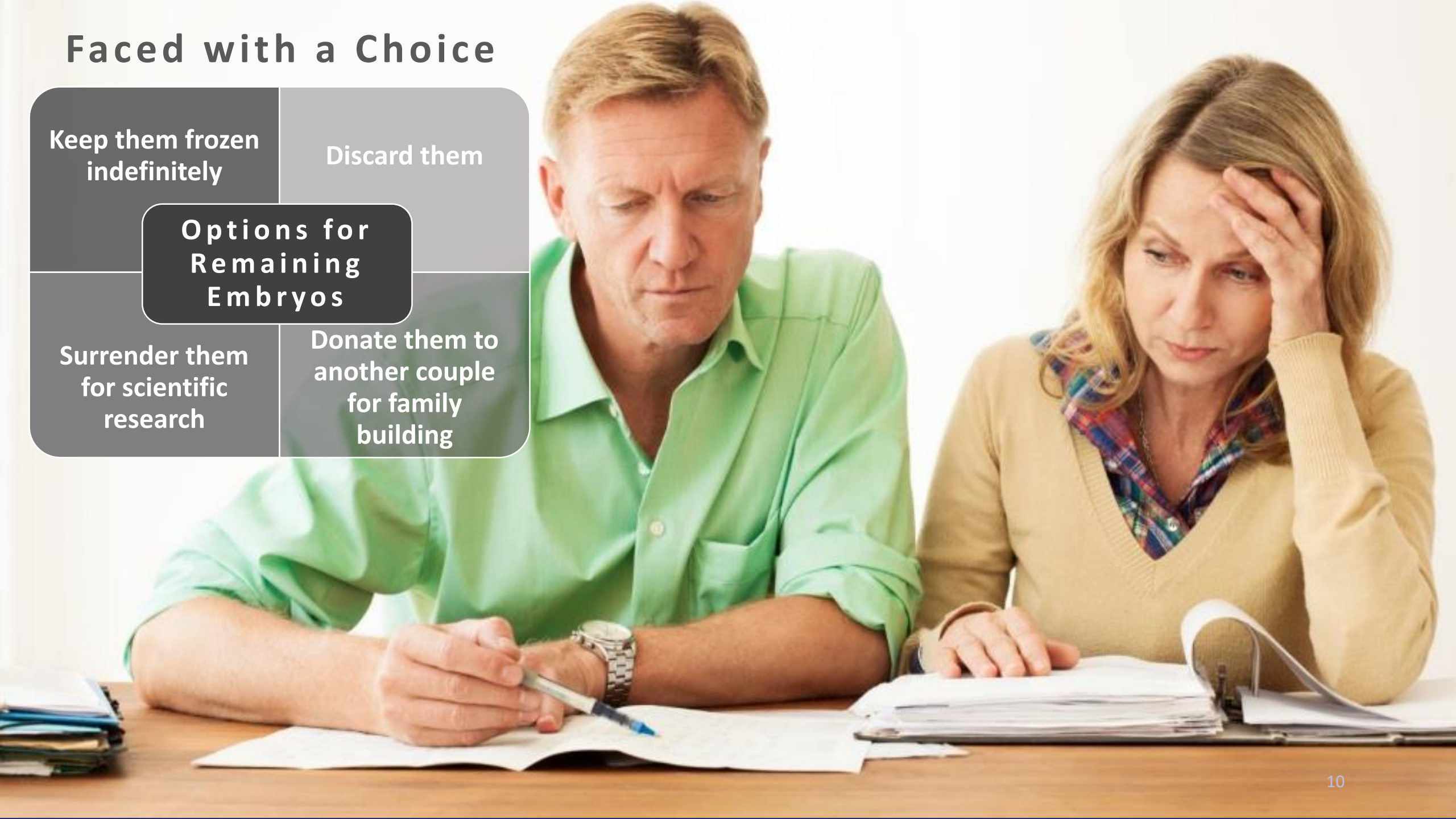
Keep them frozen indefinitely

Discard them

Options for Remaining Embryos

Surrender them for scientific research

Donate them to another couple for family building



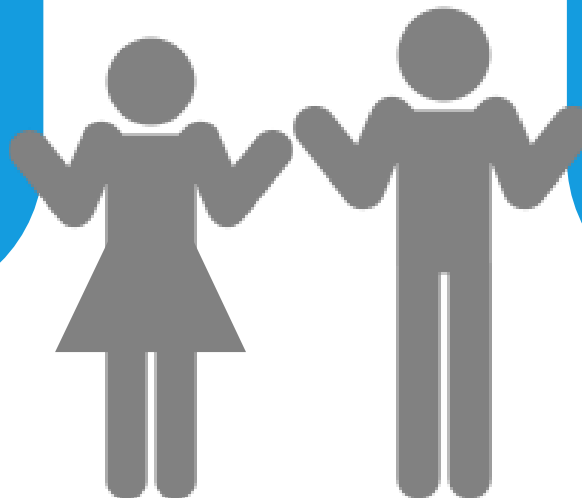
# The Impact of these Choices

## Keep Frozen Indefinitely

- Not deciding is sometimes an easier choice
- Continued annual payment of storage fees
- Embryos may eventually become abandoned
- May leave a difficult decision to others in the event of divorce or death

## Discard Them

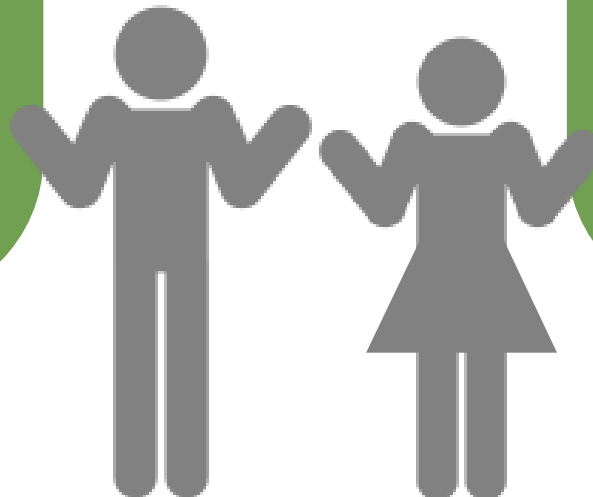
- Discontinues obligation for storage
- Quick and simple closure to the process
- Some may choose to have a special ceremony
- Destroys the embryo



# The Impact of these Choices

## Surrender to Science

- May provide hope for disease cures [to date, no successful treatments have been developed]
- Couples may have the sense that they've made a difference
- Destroys the embryo



## Donate to Another Family

- Life-affirming way to resolve a challenging dilemma
- Source of hope to another person/couple
- Donor's children are genetically related to any children born from donated embryos

## Terminology: Why 'Donation'?

'Donation' is used in the sense of 'giving a gift', it offers an emotional separation and is often a preferred term by donors.

Fertility clinic donation programs receive anonymously donated embryos; these embryos are given to waiting patients of the clinic at the doctor's discretion.



# How Can I Donate My Embryos?

## Privately

- Donor and adopter find one another directly either through personal relationships or online services
- Onus for following necessary legal, medical and social procedures are the responsibility of the donor and recipient
- Some agencies will facilitate a match for a reduced fee

## Through a fertility clinic's embryo donation program

- Quick and simple way to donate
- Clinic assumes responsibility for assigning embryos to recipients – may give genetically related embryos to multiple recipients
- No future tracking for sibling relationship control or medical emergencies



A young child with blonde hair, wearing a light-colored shirt and green pants, is walking on a paved path. The child is holding the hand of an adult whose legs and dark pants are visible on the right side of the frame. The background is a bright, sunlit outdoor area with green grass and trees, suggesting a park or a walkway. The lighting is warm, indicating it might be late afternoon or early morning.

## Why Donate Embryos Through an Embryo Adoption Agency?

You select the recipient of your embryos from a pool of potential adopting families. You are encouraged to pursue an open relationship with the adopting family and are allowed to determine the desired level of future communication with them

An agency gives peace of mind by assuring you that the adopting family has been:

- evaluated for any health issues that may affect their ability to parent
- screened for any criminal/child abuse issues
- educated concerning potential issues of parenting a non-genetically related child

# The Process for Embryo Donation

**Determine if you are interested in designated or anonymous donation**

**Determine which program(s) will meet your criteria**

**Choose a clinic or an agency**



# Checklist for Embryo Donation

## Through an Adoption Agency

- Complete testing required to donate embryos
- Complete a family profile
- Complete donor requirements for the adoptive family
- Review profiles for adoptive families provided by agency during matching process

## Through a Fertility Clinic Donation Program

- Complete testing required to donate embryos
- Clinic physician assigns donated embryos (possibly to multiple recipients)

*Note: Most clinics do not provide for designated donations*

Each clinic process for a designated donation would be unique to the clinic

A dark blue silhouette of a doctor wearing a white stethoscope, standing behind a stack of five grey bags. A large blue speech bubble originates from the doctor's head, containing the main text of the infographic.

# 60,000

EMBRYOS MAY BE MADE AVAILABLE  
FOR REPRODUCTION

- It is estimated that **1 million embryos** are in frozen storage in the United States
- Research studies have shown that about **6%** belong to people who would consider donating them to another family
- Adoption agencies help donors select a recipient family

# Terminology: Why 'Adoption'?

- Makes more emotional sense to the families involved since the **end result is a child**
- Explains both legally and socially the transfer of parental rights (managed by property law)
- Describes and explains to the child how they came into the family. Children are adopted not 'donated'.
- Manages social/emotional aspects resulting from a medical procedure



A photograph of a pregnant woman and a man walking together in a park. The woman is on the left, wearing a white long-sleeved top and a white skirt, smiling and looking up at the man. The man is on the right, wearing a light blue short-sleeved button-down shirt and tan pants, smiling and looking down at the woman. They are walking on a path with trees and greenery in the background.

## AN EMBRYO ADOPTION...

- Uses best practices of a domestic adoption plan to protect all parties, especially the child
- Allows the adopting couple to experience pregnancy and childbirth
- Simply begins the adoption process nine months earlier than 'normal'

# Open versus Closed Adoption

Designated vs. Anonymous

Open or Designated

- Choose the adoptive parents
- Know the outcome of their transfer
- Possibility for ongoing communication
- Possibly see pictures or even talk with or meet your genetic child
- Safeguard your family by knowing your relatives
- Allow your children the opportunity to meet their siblings

- Matching done for you, with no need for your input
- May never know outcome of their transfer
- No communication with the recipient family
- Uncertain if genetically related children exist outside your family

Closed or Anonymous

## WHAT DOES 'OPEN' ADOPTION REALLY LOOK LIKE FOR ME?

- Determined by **mutual agreement between the families**
- Protects families in the event of future contact between (kids) and provides information to children regarding their origins
- **Some mechanism of communication is encouraged** (in the event of future medical needs).
- Direct communication and be established through letters, emails, and phone calls OR the agency can act as an intermediary
- Agency maintains files regarding the two families in case of a medical emergency





**MEET THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS**

## WHO ADOPTS EMBRYOS?

- ✓ Couples and singles who are searching for infertility solutions
- ✓ May not be able to afford IVF or other ART treatments
- ✓ May not want to use or bear the expense of purchasing 'donor' eggs and/or sperm
- ✓ Many have already attempted their own IVF unsuccessfully
- ✓ Couples who are pursuing a second+ adoption and want to experience pregnancy
- ✓ Families interested in helping the donor provide a life-choice for their remaining embryos





## WHAT QUALIFICATIONS MUST BE MET?

- Provide written confirmation from physician stating no contraindications to pregnancy (some agencies allow surrogacy)
- Meet agency guidelines for participation in their program
- Many qualifications are unique to the agency the family is working with
- They will complete a home study


# EMBRYO ADOPTION

## THE LEAST EXPENSIVE FORM OF ADOPTION

When comparing costs for embryo adoption, be sure to include:

- Matching Fees
- Counseling for donor and adopting families
- Embryo transportation costs
- Medical testing
- Legal fees
- Travel costs (if necessary)
- Medical procedure (Frozen Embryo Transfer [FET])



A young man and woman are walking together in a grassy field. The man is wearing a red and blue plaid shirt and light blue jeans. The woman is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and brown boots. They are holding hands and looking at each other. A dog is visible in the background, partially obscured by the text box.

## HOW DOES THE PROCESS BEGIN?

- ✓ Schedule an appointment with your physician to verify ability to carry a pregnancy
- ✓ Determine interest in anonymous or open adoption
- ✓ Examine programs to determine best fit for your personal criteria
- ✓ Verify that the experienced agency or clinic has current/reliable access to donated embryos



HOW DO WE FIND AN EMBRYO  
ADOPTION PROVIDER?

You can find information  
about all providers at  
[www.EmbryoAdoption.org](http://www.EmbryoAdoption.org)

# Why the Home Study?

## Education

Prepares adopter for the needs of a child who is not genetically related

Helps build important parenting skills

Helps couples have healthy children, and healthy families

Prepares parents to share about the children's genetic origins

## Evaluation

Determines preparedness to parent through adoption

Evaluates for health issues that may affect ability to care for and raise a child

Screening for any criminal and child abuse issues



## **MAKING A MATCH**

- 1. Programs differ regarding who makes the initial matching choice – the donor or the adopter.**
- 2. Family profiles of the donor and adopter are often used to introduce the families to one another – families are often separated by great geographic distances.**
- 3. Adopter often receives detailed family medical histories from the donor and as much information as possible regarding an egg/sperm donor used.**
- 4. Both parties must agree to the match.**

## THE LEGAL PROCESS

Embryos are considered property, not people, in the United States and embryo adoption governed by property law.

- Ownership is transferred by legal contract.
- The Embryos will be owned by adopting families before their Frozen Embryo Transfer. Meaning the donor family has already relinquished their parental rights.
- By law the adopting mother is legally the child's mother at birth, and her legal husband is the father.





# How do the Embryos Travel?

**Embryology reports & infectious disease test results are sent to your fertility doctor**

Doctor reviews this before contracts are finalized



**If requested by your clinic, the donor family will undergo additional bloodwork**

The agency will arrange for this with the donor, this is often needed to meet the FDA requirements



**Approval by your doctor for clinic to receive embryos**



**Embryos transported from the donor family's storage facility to your fertility clinic**

There are some instances where the embryos do not require transportation





## THE FROZEN EMBRYO TRANSFER

**A Frozen Embryo Transfer (FET):** the procedure used to place the donated embryos into a womb

- You will meet with your doctor prior to the FET
- A medical cycle or natural cycle may be an option

## How are Frozen Embryos Thawed?

Embryos are thawed and brought to room temperature

Takes 1-2 minutes

Careful dilution of the cryo-protectant fluid

\*This is critical to successful thawing



## How Are Frozen Embryos Thawed?

Each clinic has a unique survival rate for thawing embryos. Thawing success ranges between 50 – 85%

Clinics are generally protective of their embryo creation, transfer, storage and thawing methods

Embryos that do not survive the thaw were likely injured during the process of freezing

## **HOW LONG BEFORE A SUCCESSFUL PREGNANCY IS KNOWN?**

Usually within two weeks of the Frozen  
Embryo Transfer!!!



A doctor with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a white lab coat, is seated at a table and gesturing with her right hand while speaking to a young couple. The woman, with long dark hair and a pink scarf, looks concerned. The man, with a beard and wearing a blue checkered shirt, looks on attentively. The background shows a white wall with some medical posters, including one with the number '5'.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE PREGNANCY TEST IS NEGATIVE?

- Current pregnancy transfer success rate is 47.2%
- If pregnancy is not achieved from first FET a determination to do a second FET can be made
- Depending on how many embryos were donated, there may be remaining frozen embryos for a second transfer
- If no embryos remain, the agency may make a match with a second donor family or the family re-enters the clinic waiting list

## AFTER THE BIRTH

*“I cannot imagine loving her more if she was our biological child... I can't imagine not giving her a chance at life.”*

- Doug Grindle, Embryo Adoptive Father

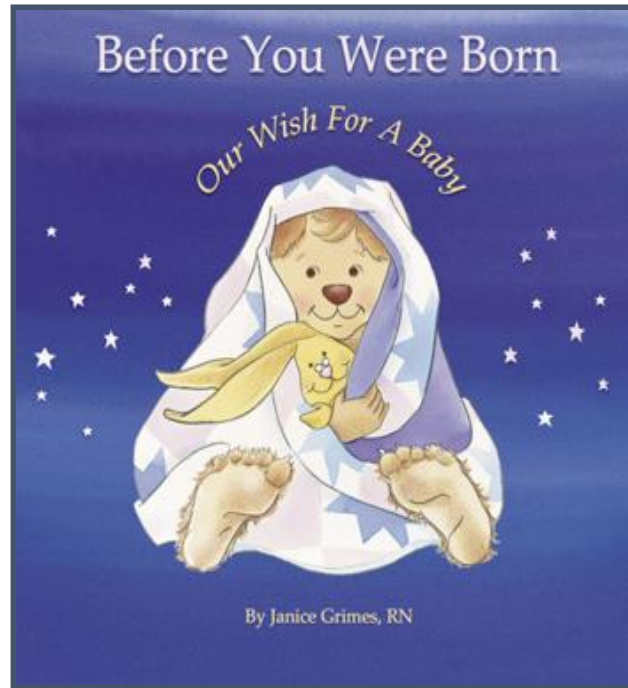


## Post Placement Reports

- ✓ Often, the first post placement report is completed by a social worker six weeks after the birth
- ✓ Additional reports may be required at 3, 6, and 9 months post-birth by the adopter and are mailed to the agency
- ✓ Annual post placement reports may be required

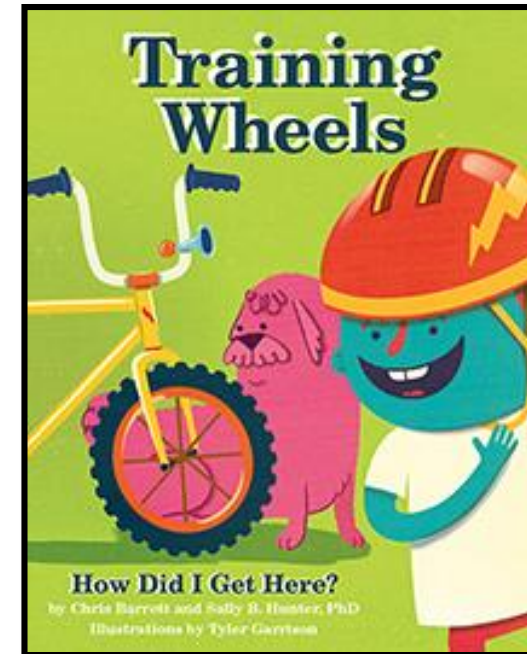


# HOW WILL WE TELL OUR CHILDREN THEIR SPECIAL STORY?



## **Our Wish For A Baby**

By Janice Grimes, RN



## **Training Wheels: How did I get Here?**

By Chris Barrett  
& Sally B. Hunter, PhD.





## WHAT IF THERE ARE REMAINING EMBRYOS AFTER OUR BABY IS BORN?

If you have not completed your family building and you wish to use the remaining embryos for future FETs, you may do so when the time is right for your family. If your family is complete and embryos remain, **historically legal rights to the remaining embryos return to the donor family by written agreement.**