



# Adoption Policies and Procedures

## Adoption Policies and Procedures Index

The policies contained within this manual were approved by the Bethany for Children & Families Board of Directors on September 21, 1998.

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**Citations for Standard 14: Adoption can be found in the book/source of origin-Operations Manual or State law. Internet site:**

- IA.State.Us
- IL.State.Us

**INTRODUCTION AND PHILOSOPHY**

In 1956, Bethany for Children & Families established an adoption program, as the result of a community needs survey conducted with assistance from the Child Welfare League of America. Bethany for Children & Families closely adheres to the standards as set forth by this national organization. The staff should become familiar with these standards. (See Child Welfare League of America Standards for Adoptive Services, revised 1988.)

Bethany for Children & Families is licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to receive and place children for adoption. The staff must be knowledgeable of the Department's licensing requirements. (See Section F.) The Department of Children and Family Services conducts a bi-annual review in order to assure its compliance with these requirements.

In 1968, upon the approval from the Bethany for Children & Families Board of Directors, Bethany for Children & Families was authorized to enter into an agreement with the State of Iowa for the purposes of placing children in Iowa adoptive homes. The Iowa Department of Human Services has accepted the Illinois requirements for licensing adoptive homes. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and the Iowa Department of

Human Services have signed an interstate compact agreement. (See Section 107.3.) Procedures as set forth in this agreement must be adhered to by Bethany for Children & Families, *including provisions related to medical and adoption assistance.*

In addition to placing infants in Illinois and Iowa, Bethany for Children & Families has also developed a program to place special needs children, as defined in Section 103.8.

**DEFINITION OF ADOPTIVE SERVICES – 101.1**

Services are defined as a social service for children who cannot be reared by their birthparents and who need and can benefit from new and permanent family ties established through legal adoption and provided by an organized social service agency through voluntary or public auspices.

Adoption is a method provided by law to establish the legal relationship of parent and child between persons who are not so related by birth with the same mutual rights and obligations that exist between children and their birthparents.

**PURPOSE OF ADOPTION SERVICES - 101.2**

The primary purpose of the agency's adoptive program is to enable children who would not otherwise have a home of their own and who can benefit by family life to become members of a family, which can give them the love, care, protection, nurturing, and opportunities essential for healthy growth and development.

*An orderly adoption process will begin after custody has clearly been established according to one of the following situations: Bethany, DHS, or DCFS has custody of a child because the birth parents' rights have been terminated; the birth parents and Bethany, DHS, or DCFS agree that adoption is in the child's best interest; or another organization or individual has legal custody of the child and they decide adoption is the best decision for the child and they refer for adoption services.*

The placement of children for adoption should have as its main objective the well being of the child. The needs of the child should be the primary determinant of the total service, with full recognition of the interdependent needs and interests of the birthparents and adoptive parents.

Adoptive services should not be for the purpose of finding children for families, nor should it be expected to provide help for many of the problems associated with childlessness.

To accomplish these objectives requires certain skills and expertise on the part of the agency's staff. Adoption should be considered for any child who is deprived of the care of his or her birth family, who is or can be legally free for adoption, and who has the capacity to form relationships within a family unit. The opportunity to have a permanent family of his or her own should not be denied by reason of race, religion, nationality, residence, or handicap that do not preclude the child's living in a family or community. Immediate availability of a home for a child should not be the basis for determining whether adoption is a suitable plan for the child. It is the responsibility of Bethany for Children & Families staff to protect the rights of not only the child, but the birthparents and adoptive parents.

### **PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES - 101.3**

Adoption is a specialized service that requires the coordination and utilization of knowledge and experience of the social worker and that of consultants from allied professions such as medicine, psychology, psychiatry, genetics, anthropology, sociology, law, and religion.

*Bethany collaborates monthly with the Department of Human Services, as well as, other private agencies to assess community services and to plan recruitment activities. During these meetings, Special Needs children, is the focus of the recruitment activities.*

The kinds of services performed and the knowledge and skills required in adoption are primarily those of social work. The competence to perform a social welfare service is acquired through professional education and experience in social work. *The Adoption Specialist will receive a minimum of ten training hours annually to assist in keeping these skills updated.* Social work methods and skills developed in the practice of social work are particularly adapted to help biological parents arrive at a decision about relinquishing their parental rights and responsibilities, to determine the needs of the child, to evaluate and develop the capacity of

adoptive applicant(s) to meet the needs of an adopted child, to select a suitable family for a particular child, and to help all concerned to understand and meet the problems confronting them in becoming a family.

The contributions of various specialists are essential in arriving at decisions regarding the suitability of an adoption for a child, approval of a family, and the selection of a family for a particular child. The social work staff has the responsibility of coordinating all the findings and recommendations and using them in making its final decision. Staff will have caseloads of a reasonable size, which enable them to perform their functions.

### **ADOPTION POLICIES**

Bethany for Children & Families has developed policies to guide the decision-making processes in order to best meet the individual needs of children and families, without regard to race, religion, or national origin.

#### **INFERTILITY - 102.1**

The absence of a detectable organic or physiological cause of the inability to conceive will not in and of itself preclude consideration of an applicant for the placement of a child. However, a report may be desirable in some situations as an aid in understanding the reasons for infertility.

#### **RELIGION - 102.2**

As a non-sectarian agency, Bethany for Children & Families' services are open to all faiths. Church membership or lack of a religious affiliation will not be a requirement for acceptance of an applicant.

Opportunities for religious or spiritual and ethical development of the child will be discussed during the adoptive study. Couples should be informed of adoptive services available through sectarian social services in the area of their residency.

The family selected for a child should be one in which the child will have an opportunity for religious or spiritual and ethical development; religious preferences alone should not be the basis for the selection of a family for a child unless the biological parents have so stipulated.

#### **CITIZENSHIP - 102.3**

Citizenship or lack of it will not affect the intake application. However, there should be reasonable assurance that the family plans to reside in this country through the adoptive process.

#### **AGE - 102.4**

The licensing regulations of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services require that the minimum age for adoptive applicant(s) shall be 25 years of age. The licensing regulations of the Iowa Department of Human Services require that the minimum age for adoptive applicant(s) shall be 18 years of age. Bethany for Children & Families policy requires applicant(s) be at least 21 years of age.

Chronological age alone should not be the determining factor for the selection of adoptive applicant(s). Physical condition and life expectancy of the applicant(s) should be taken into consideration to protect the child against a repeated, foreseeable loss of parents through death or incapacitating illness. In addition, it is important for applicant(s) to be physically and emotionally capable of meeting the needs of children as they grow and develop.

#### **MARITAL STATUS - 102.5**

When applicant(s) are married, the husband and wife should be living together and have been married at least two years.

In the event of a homosexual couple, one individual of the union is the designated parent.

Single parents (unmarried, widowed, or divorced) are considered in accordance with their ability to meet the needs of available children and not merely on the basis of their marital status.

#### **EMPLOYMENT - 102.6**

Adoptive parents from two-parent families in which both work outside of the home should not be excluded from consideration as adoptive parents. Bethany for Children & Families and the prospective adoptive parents should evaluate the suitability of a plan to provide secure, responsible childcare adequate to the individual child's needs. Bethany for Children & Families strongly

encourages adoptive parents to arrange some leave from employment at the time of placement, perhaps in conjunction with the Family Medical Leave Act. This is based upon the agency's commitment to the bonding process between parent(s) and child, and the belief that this process may be enhanced by parent(s) and child initially spending more time together.

If the discontinuation of employment or a leave from employment is deemed necessary to assure the child's adjustment in the home, it is expected that the priority will center on the child's best interest.

#### **GEOGRAPHICAL - 102.7**

For the Infant Adoption Program and Special Needs Program, Illinois applicant(s) must reside in Rock Island County, Henry County, and Mercer County. Iowa (DHS) Special Needs Adoption Program applicant(s) must reside in Scott County, Muscatine County, Cedar County, or Clinton County. Exception to this policy is at the discretion of the Supervisor of Adoption.

Exceptions are made for families in counties adjacent to Scott County for whom other adoption services are not available.

Consideration in adoptive placement should be given to whether the family selected should live in a locality different from the residence of the birthparents in order to maintain confidentiality, and/or if it is in the best interests of the child.

#### **INCOME - 102.8**

There are no specific financial requirements other than a sufficient income to provide the child with a reasonable opportunity for financial security. Although the Iowa Department of Human Services and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services may provide a financial subsidy for the child until he or she turns 18 years of age, to better meet their specific special needs, it is still expected that the family's income is adequate to meet their needs.

#### **HOUSING - 102.9**

There are no specific housing requirements other than minimum standards for licensing.

## **MATCHING - 102.10**

Matching of the family and child is based on an appraisal of the capacity of the adoptive parents to meet the individual needs of the child as well as the capacity of the child to benefit from placement with a family and to bring them the satisfaction of parenthood. In most instances, similarities and background and/or characteristics should not be a primary consideration in the selection of a family. The ability of the adoptive parents to accept the child as he or she is and may later develop, regardless of how the child may differ from them, is of greater importance than similarity of the physical and mental characteristics. The matching process can take into account the birthparents rights to express a desire to have a continuity of identity with regard to ethnic, racial, religious and cultural environments. *When a child is old enough to express a desire in regards to an adoptive placement, their opinions will be taken into account. Consideration of former caretakers will also be assessed for the adoptive placement.* This aspect is balanced with insuring that a placement would not be delayed as a result, or is not consistent with applicable law.

In the Infant Program, the birth parent(s) have the opportunity to choose the adoptive family for their child. This is done through viewing non-identifying photo albums and reading a letter prepared by the adoptive parents. They may also interview the family if requested, again while maintaining confidentiality.

When it is in the child's best interest, Bethany may override the birth parent(s) decision in regards to placement. An example may be the chosen pre-adoptive family may have received another placement or due to extenuating circumstances.

If the birth parent(s) do not wish to choose the adoptive family, a family will be chosen based upon the information the birth parent(s) provide. This decision will be made by the Adoption Placement Committee. This committee will consist of the Adoption Program Supervisor, an Adoption Specialist and at least one other Supervisor in the Bethany agency. If the birth parent(s) do not provide any information, then a family will be chosen based upon the adoptive family who has been on the waiting list for the most amount of time and does not currently have any children.

In the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program, the matching decision is ultimately made by the Department of Human Services.

Another important area of consideration is the birthparents' requests for openness options and how that matches with an adoptive couple's degree of comfort and willingness to commit to that level of openness. In some cases, the combination of the child's age and strength of connection to birth parents and extended family make continued contact after adoptive placement a viable and beneficial option for the child. Acknowledging this, the agency has a responsibility to assist all parties in understanding roles and taking a proactive approach to stem potential difficulties with issues of ambiguity and boundaries. Adoptive parents must agree to a plan for continued contact prior to the time the adoption occurs.

## **EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND - 102.11**

Educational achievement of the child's (birth) biological family, whether limited or advanced, is not a reliable index of the potential development of the child and should not determine the selection of a family. The family selected for a child should be one in which the child shall have the opportunity to develop his or her own capacity. It is important that the adoptive family does not have unrealistic expectations of the child's capacity for educational achievement.

## **PHYSICAL AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS - 102.12**

Physical resemblance between the adoptive parents and the child or biological parent(s) should not be a determining factor in the selection of a home. In the case of older children, similarity in personality characteristics may help to facilitate both the integration of the child into the family and the child's identification with the family. More importantly, however, is the ability of the adoptive parents to accept differences.

## **INFORMATION SHARED WITH ADOPTIVE PARENTS - 102.13**

It is important to provide adoptive parents with non-identifying background information about the child and the biological parents with the expectation that this information will be shared with the child. The

willingness of the agency to provide this information may well avert future problems associated with the child and self-identity. (See the appendices for Bethany for Children & Families' Policy on Post-Adoption Services.) The agency must also be forthright in sharing all known medical background information since this may impact the adoptee's future health.

In the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program, all of the Information regarding the child or children's birthparents that is kept in the Department of Human Services' case files and is relevant to the child is shared with the perspective adoptive parents in a confidential manner.

#### **INFORMATION ON THE CHILD - 102.14**

Pertinent facts are selected from information concerning the child. These facts include:

##### ***Birth Information***

Date and time of birth, term of pregnancy, type of delivery, type of cry, birth weight, length, blood type, apgar rating, progress in newborn nursery, feeding and sleeping habits, date of discharge, formula, if a boy if he was circumcised, any difficulties, and condition of discharge.

##### ***Developmental History***

Early development, particularly indications of the way the child has taken hold of life such as local motor development, feeding experiences, eliminating, the child's way of responding to people, sensitivities, likes and dislikes, special aptitudes and interests, preferred method of being cared for, and any other relevant information concerning the child.

##### ***Medical Data***

Immunizations, illnesses, and the medical history of the birthparents will be provided to the adoptive parents.

In the adoption of children other than infants, all available information is provided to the adoptive parents regarding the child's life experiences prior to the adoption. If possible, this should include a life story book and a letter(s) to the child from the significant persons in his or her life such as biological parents and the social worker who has

been involved with the child.

All children served through the Iowa Department of Human Services Special Needs contract will have a Background Report and medical form completed. (See outline in appendices.)

#### **PLACEMENT POLICY - 102.15**

Bethany for Children & Families' policy is to place children in *suitable* adoptive homes as soon as they are available for adoption. Availability will depend upon a combination of factors and circumstances including legal, medical, social, emotional, etc. A child will be placed in an adoptive home when the child is legally free for adoption or when there is reasonable assurance that the child will be legally freed for adoption as long as the adoptive family is accepting of the legal risk. A physician's statement that the child has been examined is required. A child will be placed when there is evidence that the child has been prepared for adoptive placement. All placement decisions are based on reducing to a minimum the number of separations, losses, and attachments that a child experiences. *The availability or unavailability of an adoptive home does not dictate placement decisions that would not be in the child's best interest.* When a move is necessary, it should be conducted sensitively to the implications of the child's social history and to the need to reduce the negative impact as much as possible.

All children who have not been placed will be reviewed monthly by the Supervisor of Adoption Services and the assigned worker. *However, in the case of an infant child, these reviews will be weekly. These children will be placed in a foster home temporarily, until a suitable adoptive home is found. Foster homes will be utilized instead of an institutional facility as deemed appropriate for the child.* Foster parents of the child are encouraged to participate in the placement reviews. In the infant adoption program, where the arrangement is planned and all parties know that the placement is temporary, the foster parents do not need to be a part of the review.

#### **MEDICAL CONSENT - 102.16**

While an infant is in foster care awaiting adoptive placement based on the signing of adoptive surrenders/Release of Custody, or the termination of parental rights in Iowa; the Voluntary Placement

Agreement and Medical Consent form signed by birthparents authorizes Bethany for Children & Families to provide medical treatment for the child.

The adoptive surrenders in Illinois authorize the President of Bethany for Children & Families to consent to medical treatment for the child. At the time of placement or before, the worker should explain to the adoptive family that should the child need more than routine medical treatment, the consent of Bethany for Children & Families is required.

In Iowa, at the Termination of Parental Rights hearing, the judge may grant the adoptive family the right to consent to medical treatment. In other instances, the Iowa code gives the agency the power to consent to medical treatment beyond routine medical care.

When the child is under the guardianship of the State of Iowa Department of Human Services or the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, all medical consents are signed by a representative of these state agencies.

### **PREPARATION FOR PLACEMENT (PRE-PLACEMENT VISITS) - 102.17**

The number and location of pre-placement visits with adoptive parent(s), the duration of the preparation and the timing of the placement should be determined by the particular needs of both the child and the adoptive parent(s).

Generally speaking, infants will be placed at the time when the family is introduced to the child. Pre-placement visits are essential in those situations where the child has developed relationships and may suffer traumatic effects from being suddenly placed in a new environment; there will be an opportunity for the child to gradually become acquainted with the adoptive family. The social worker with whom the child has a relationship should be actively involved in the placement process to provide continuity during the time of transition to the adoptive family.

### **PREPARATION/PARTICIPATION OF THE CHILD IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS - 102.18**

When the child is old enough to comprehend and have a part of the decision that adoption is best for him or her, the social worker should both plan and

work directly with him or her. Prior to placement, all children will be provided with a comprehensive assessment including a medical and dental examination, an evaluation of the developmental history, individual needs, and probable capacity to benefit from adoption. When appropriate, each child is provided with a psychological evaluation.

The child should know that his or her birthparent(s) cannot continue to care for him or her and he or she must have reasonably worked through this prior to permanent placement. The child should have a life book to assist in remembering his/her childhood. There should be reasonable assurance that the child has the capacity to develop meaningful relationships with parenting figures. The child should not be asked to choose his or her adoptive parents; however, there should be indications through the placement process that the child is reasonably comfortable with the prospective adoptive family.

It should be explained to the child that the state will decide if the family is suitable for him or her and that when doing so, it will take his or her feelings into consideration. If the adoptive parents do not wish to go ahead with placement, the child should be told that the state agency decided that the family was not appropriate.

No placement should be undertaken for the sake of expediency and ignore the feelings of either the adoptive parents or the child. Preparation may involve a gradual process through a series of pre-placement visits. It may be advisable to involve other professionals in this process.

### **PLACEMENT OUTSIDE OF AREA -102.19**

Families approved for placement that move outside of our area will remain on our waiting list. However, they will no longer remain on our waiting list if they do not reside in Iowa or Illinois. These families should have assurances from an agency approved by Bethany for Children & Families of receiving post-placement services. The cost of these services will be the responsibility of the adoptive family who is awaiting placement of a child as defined in Section 102.35.

Bethany for Children & Families will consider providing post-placement services to families that move to an area where no agency is available to provide these services, provided any additional

expenses would be paid by the adoptive family. Such arrangements shall be mutually agreed on in writing prior to implementation. In addition, all families, with the exception of those involved in the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program, will be assessed the regular adoptive fee. Bethany for Children & Families will maintain the responsibility of monitoring the placement through an agreement with the agency providing post-placement services to the child and the family.

Legal responsibility for the child will remain with the President of Bethany for Children & Families until the adoption is finalized. Bethany for Children & Families will conform to legal processes of the State in which the child has been placed and will provide the necessary documentation for the legal consummation of adoption.

### **POST-PLACEMENT SERVICES – 102.20**

Post-placement services are a vital part of the adoption process. These services include a protective role in retaining legal custody of the child until the adoption is legally finalized and assisting adoptive parents and the child in adjusting to one another. Bethany for Children & Families' post-placement services are designed to support the adoptive parents in their parental role and to respect their rights and dignity as clients of Bethany for Children & Families. *Referrals are made to an adoption support group for adoptive families to increase their support system.*

Bethany for Children & Families has the responsibility for submitting a court report necessary to legally finalize the adoption. The court report provides justification for recommending that the adoption be finalized.

It shall be the responsibility of Bethany for Children & Families to work with adoptive parents to provide assistance when medical insurance will not cover the expenses of medical treatment. However, in those instances where other resources are not available to adoptive parents, it shall be the responsibility of Bethany for Children & Families to either provide this assistance or locate existing resources for this purpose.

### **POST-PLACEMENT VISITS –102.21**

The number of post-placement visits will largely depend upon whether the child is an infant, an

older child, a child with medical or other special needs, or whether the adoptive parents are faced with unanticipated problems. Early post-placement contact should convey both the agency's support of the adoptive parents and its readiness to help. Visits, preferably within the first two weeks, are helpful in establishing the supportive relationship. A minimum of three visits will be made.

The timing of the visits should be mutually agreed upon by the adoptive family and the agency's worker. The worker may be encouraged by the family to drop in; however, this should be avoided rather than run the risk of conveying mistrust in the ability of the adoptive parents. Arranging such visits in advance is common courtesy to the rights and privacy of adoptive families.

While state licensing procedures indicate the number of visits that are to be made following placement, they should not be construed as limiting the frequency of post-placement visits. The agency shall establish goals for the frequency of visits in accordance with needs as determined by the case plan.

The Iowa Department of Human Services Special Needs Adoption Contract specifies the minimum number and frequency of post-placement visits to children and families served under this contract.

### **CONTENT OF POST-PLACEMENT SERVICES - 102.22**

Services should be provided in relationship to the individual needs of each adoptive child, particularly the older child, handicapped, or minority child. The adoptive child may have needs over and above those of other children because of the social and emotional implications of adoption.

The social worker should be able to evaluate the development of infants and older children. When the worker and/or adoptive parents have questions concerning the child's development, consultation services should be provided.

Adoptive parents may need caseworker help with feelings that may reoccur after placement concerning their infertility, biological parents, illegitimacy, unknown hereditary factors, and explaining adoption to the child, family, and friends.

Special skills are necessary in helping the older

child and/or his or her adoptive parents. Many older children referred for adoption have been subject to inadequate care, emotional deprivation, and rejection by their birthparents and/or foster parents. The child may feel that his or her birthparents did not want him or her and may be at risk of disruption because the child is part of a sibling group placed together, has experienced multiple previous placements, has a history of abuse and neglect, or is emotionally disturbed. Often the feeling carries a dual burden of guilt and low self-esteem, which may impede his or her ability to trust adults and belief that he or she can be loved. The adoptive parents may need help in developing parental skills required to cope with the individual needs of their child.

Awareness of and sensitivity to these concerns on the part of the adoptive worker is essential. The worker can provide a source of strength and reassurance to the adoptive parents during this period as well as to the child. The worker's ability to mobilize resources and to use innovative techniques may well provide the difference between a successful placement or disruption in the child's life. The agency does remain available to the adoptee or family members beyond the finalization to assist with arranging for or facilitating counseling from the agency referral to a community provider, based on specific need.

In addition, counseling services are available upon request by anyone involved in the adoption process. Counseling is also provided, if requested, for families of an open adoption where Bethany for Children & Families serves as the intermediary.

#### **DURATION OF POST-PLACEMENT SERVICES – 102.23**

The period between placement of the child and legal finalization of adoption will be determined jointly by the agency and the family in each situation.

The post-placement period should not go on indefinitely. In each situation a plan should be established to determine the length of time needed to complete services. A minimum amount of time of post-placement services will be six months as required by both Iowa and Illinois law, except in unusual circumstances when the Court may be petitioned to waive the requirement.

#### **REMOVAL OF CHILD - 102.24**

Removal of a child for legal adoption will be considered only if circumstances impair his or her security in the family and jeopardize his or her physical and emotional development. Generally the decision to remove the child should be arrived at through mutual agreement; however, the agency may act unilaterally if it is deemed in the best interests of the child. While the agency has legal responsibility in determining such decisions, the family can initiate legal action to prevent such removal, if they feel the agency is acting in an arbitrary and capricious manner. Therefore, the agency will need to document its position in the event this situation would occur.

Removal should be initiated in an orderly and reasonable manner, keeping in mind the importance of considering the feelings of both the child and his or her adoptive parents.

Serious illness or death of one of the adoptive parents will not be considered sufficient justification for the removal of a child. Such circumstances will be evaluated in conjunction with other aspects and future implications in continuing the placement.

If an adoption disrupts, Bethany for Children & Families will provide counseling services or a referral for counseling for all clients who wish to receive it.

#### **INTERAGENCY ADOPTION - 102.25**

Bethany for Children & Families works cooperatively with other public and private adoption agencies in providing adoption services when the needs of the child require placement beyond an area generally served by the agency. *This other agency or individual is either licensed or legally credentialed according to applicable state or provincial licensing regulations.*

A plan outlining case responsibilities as well as the reasons for the goal of placement must be established prior to the placement of the child. The agency shall have written verification of the legal status for all children accepted for care and services, as well as social history and medical data in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the plan. The agency, with legal guardianship of the child, maintains primary responsibilities for the child and identifies the family resource that best meets the needs of the child.

## **POLICY ON INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS – 102.26**

Bethany for Children & Families may consider requests for placement of children from international adoption agencies, provided:

- 1) Recognition of the fact that Bethany for Children & Families' caseload and intake of infant and special needs adoption is its first priority.
- 2) The requesting agency is recognized by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services or the Iowa Department of Human Services.
- 3) The requesting agency will assume all responsibilities for the child in the event that placement must be terminated.
- 4) Bethany for Children & Families must receive assurances from the placing agency that it has established placement practices, which are compatible to the intent and purpose of the agency's adoption program.

## **ADOPTIVE LISTING SERVICE - 102.27**

Bethany for Children & Families works cooperatively with the Adoption Information Center of Illinois, located in Chicago. The agency is subject to the procedures, which govern this organization when, registering children in need of placement as well as potential adoptive family resources. Bethany for Children & Families maintains one copy of the Child and Family listing service books.

The families who are approved as Special Needs Adoption parents through the Scott County program, not only work with Scott County, but may also view the Iowa's Waiting Children's Photo Listing book to see if there is a waiting child for whom they could provide a stable and accepting home.

## **INTERSTATE COMPACT – 102.28**

Bethany for Children & Families is subject to Interstate Compact regulations which are included in the Illinois Revised Statute 1979, Chapter 23, Paragraph 2601, which provides that no staff member shall violate the law while performing

assigned duties, and no staff member shall be a party to subverting the law in any way. All staff is expected to have a working knowledge of, and to comply with, the provisions of the Interstate Compact in the placement of children, and with official Illinois Department of Children and Family Services policy and Iowa Department of Human Services policy concerning all interstate placements of children.

No out-of-state placement of a child shall be made by the agency without the prior approval of the Administrator of the Interstate Compact of the receiving state, either Iowa or Illinois. Requests for such approval shall be routed through the Interstate Compact office of the sending state and the response from the proper official of the receiving state will be transmitted through the sending state's Interstate Compact office to Bethany for Children & Families.

Due to the complex nature of this procedure, it is advisable that whenever questions arise they be clarified with the Supervisor of Adoption Services and/or the Illinois or Iowa Interstate Compact Administrator.

## **LEGAL ASPECTS OF ADOPTION – 102.29**

It is the responsibility of the Court to ensure that all aspects of the law have been followed and to protect the best interests of the child in adoption. The placement of children in an adoptive home is a child welfare function and therefore the responsibility is delegated to social agencies.

Bethany for Children & Families must operate within the framework of the law to protect the rights and interests of all parties involved in adoption. This framework includes laws governing the adoption procedure and related laws affecting the relinquishment and termination of parental rights, termination of custody, and guardianship of children, and regulations of child placement services, which have the force of law. The staff must be reasonably acquainted with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Regulation 402, Minimum Standards for Licensed Foster Homes, which is the legal basis for licensing adoptive homes and the Illinois adoptive statute. Workers should also become familiar with the Code of the State of Iowa, Part 614 as amended and laws relating to termination of parental rights as well as adoption proceedings.

## **RELINQUISHMENT OF CHILD AND TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS – 102.30**

Under Illinois law, a child is relinquished for adoption when the biological and/or legal parents voluntarily sign Surrenders with a licensed child placement agency or when the Court terminates parental rights through the Illinois Adoption Act or the Juvenile Court Act.

Agency voluntary surrenders are legally binding and establish a contract between the biological and/or legal parents and the agency, which permits the agency to place the child for adoption. If Bethany for Children & Families is unable to place the child in a reasonable amount of time (generally considered to be 90 days), the voluntary surrenders may be subject to challenge. Therefore, it may be advisable in these instances to initiate a petition through Juvenile Court proceedings in order to obtain a Court decree terminating parental rights. Such procedures may deter a challenge to the agency's right to maintain custody of the child.

In situations where doubt exists as to whether the biological and/or legal parents fully comprehend their legal rights, it is advisable to obtain surrenders only after consultation with the Supervisor of Adoptions and/or the agency's legal counsel. No surrender is valid when taken within 72 hours of the birth of the child. When a surrender is taken after the 72-hour period, both the worker and the client will note the time and initial the document. (Refer to Family Services Manual on Pregnancy Support Services for further instructions.) Signatures on surrenders should always be witnessed by two agency staff members.

Under Iowa law, a child is relinquished for adoption when the biological and/or legal parents voluntarily sign a Release of Custody with a licensed child placement agency and the Court terminates parental rights through the Iowa Juvenile Code. The Release of Custody is not to be signed less than 72 hours after the birth of the child. Also to be signed at that time are the Affidavit from the mother stating the name and last known address of the birthfather, and an Affidavit from the mother and from the father stating whether he or she wishes his or her identity disclosed to the infant when their child reaches twenty-one years of age. The birthparents have 96 hours to revoke the Release of Custody. Signatures should always be witnessed

by two individuals who are familiar with the case.

If parental rights are terminated involuntarily by the Juvenile Court, the agency to which guardianship/custody is given refers the child to Bethany for Children & Families for adoptive placement.

## **TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION – 102.31.**

Bethany for Children & Families has long established the philosophy that the child's best interest is first served. Therefore, we find homes for children. In order to fulfill this responsibility, we have attempted to avoid polarization and approach all aspects of placement objectively and are in accord with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1998.

In making decisions about placing a child, whether in an adoptive or foster setting, a public or private agency must be guided by considerations of what is in the best interest of the child in question. The agency must also ensure that its decisions comply with statutory requirements. When it comes to the attention of a public agency that particular prospective parents have negative attitudes that relate to their capacity to nurture a particular child, the agency may take those attitudes into consideration in determining whether a placement with that family would be in the best interest of the child in question.

The consideration of the ability of prospective parents to meet the needs of a particular child should take place in the framework of the general placement decision, in which the strengths and weaknesses of prospective parents to meet all of a child's needs are weighed so as to provide for the child's best interest, and prospective parents are provided the information they need to assess realistically their capacity to parent a particular child.

## **STATEMENT OF CLIENT RIGHTS AND CLIENT GRIEVANCE POLICY - 102.32**

Please reference the appendices for Bethany for Children & Families' Statement of Client Rights and Client Grievance Policy.

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WITH HUMAN IMMUNO-DEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV) - 102.33**

Please reference the appendices for Bethany for

Children & Families' Disease Control Policy and the Confidentiality Policy.

### **LICENSING - 102.34**

Bethany for Children & Families is licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and the Iowa Department of Human Services to receive and place children. See the section on Licensing Standards for Child Welfare Agencies; and the section on Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes. This regulation not only applies to foster family care, but adoptive homes.

Failure to comply with these licensing regulations may jeopardize the agency's adoptive program, which is reviewed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services licensing representative on a bi-annual basis and the Iowa Department of Human Services Inspections and Appeals on an annual basis.

### **INFANT ADOPTION FEE POLICY - 102.35**

It is the policy of Bethany for Children & Families to have an Infant Adoption fee that meets the costs incurred by the agency in providing this service to all individuals or couples pursuing Infant adoptions with the agency.

Services covered within this fee are:

- the home study
- the licensing study
- post-placement visit(s)
- document preparation
- reports of findings
- court appearances
- counseling
- case management
- foster care

Not covered in these fees are medical expenses incurred by Bethany for Children & Families for the care of the infant and fees incurred from an interstate compact, which may be covered by the adoptive parent(s).

The legal costs for terminating parental rights and finalizing an adoption are the responsibility of the adoptive parents.

Foreign adoption fees will be established as needed.

Adoptive parent(s) who can afford the agency's

adoption fee are asked to pay the placement fee at the time of placement.

Adoptive parents who have difficulty affording the standardized fee are offered the option of financing their balance through Bethany for Children & Families at 0% interest for up to twelve months. Repayment is made in accord with the family's ability to repay the agency.

### **POLICY ON POST-ADOPTION SERVICES - 102.36**

Please reference the appendices for Bethany for Children & Families' Policy on Post Adoption Services.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY - 102.37**

Please reference the appendices for Bethany for Children & Families' Confidentiality Policy.

### **RECORDS RETENTION POLICY - 102.38**

Please reference the appendices for Bethany for Children & Families' Records Retention Policy.

### **POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR ADDING ADOPTIVE PARENTS TO THE AGENCY MAILING LIST FOR FUND DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC RELATIONS – 102.39**

Please reference the appendices for Bethany for Children and Families' Policy and Procedure for Adding Adoptive Parents to the Agency Mailing List for Fund Development and Public Relations.

### **ADOPTION AND THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT – 102.40**

No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from consideration as an adoptive placement, or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of Bethany for Children & Families.

The Americans with Disabilities Act provides federal civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities, guaranteeing them equal opportunity to participate in and to benefit from services provided by public and private adoption agencies. A key provision of the ADA is the prohibition against imposing or applying eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out individuals with disabilities unless the criteria can be shown to be necessary

for the service, in this instance, the adoptive placement of a child.

Categorical rejection of individuals as prospective adoptive parents on such bases as blindness, deafness, HIV infection, or history of drug use and treatment violates the ADA and is unacceptable in the practice of social service delivery in this agency.

## **INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT – 102.41**

Bethany for Children & Families has long established the philosophy that the child's best interest is first served. Therefore, we find homes for children. In order to fulfill this responsibility, we have attempted to avoid polarization and approach all aspects of placement objectively and in accord with the Indian Child Welfare Act.

### *Procedures for Identification and ICWA Collaboration:*

All persons exploring the option to place their child voluntarily for adoption are required to complete a form to determine Native American heritage. If the client indicates Native American heritage, Bethany complies with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and ensures all legal steps are pursued and completed prior to the termination of parental rights. The agency is familiar with ICWA laws and the appropriate means of contacting tribes as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs if necessary.

## **PROCEDURES FOR ADOPTION**

### **103.1**

#### **A. INTAKE**

Bethany for Children & Families has developed flexible intake procedures in order to meet the individual needs of children and families, without regard to race, religion, or national origin. These procedures are subject to changes and modifications depending upon various sociological conditions within our society and community. Procedures may be altered or revised through the following processes:

1. Bethany for Children & Families Administrative Policies and Procedures
2. Child Welfare League of America Standards for Adoptive Services
3. Illinois Administrative Code, Part 402
4. Illinois Adoption Act

5. Iowa Adoption Statute
6. Multiethnic Placement Act
7. The Adoption and Safe Family Act of 1997
8. The Indian Child Welfare Act

## **B. CRITERIA FOR ADOPTION**

Bethany for Children & Families believes in *screening in* rather than *screening out* prospective adoptive parents.

During the initial inquiry, it is important for the intake worker to ascertain the level at which the family is entering their request for a child. If in the judgment of the intake worker there is sufficient reason to believe that the request is of an unreasonable nature, or their motivation for adoption is inappropriate, this should be discussed with the applicant(s). This may serve to avoid future misunderstandings and may provide an opportunity for the applicant(s) to re-evaluate their request.

When clients insist upon filing an application or request that their names be added to our waiting list, they may do so unless they are prohibited by a policy of Bethany for Children & Families and/or Illinois and Iowa administrative rule and procedures.

This should not be construed as indicating that Bethany for Children & Families is under any obligation to complete an adoptive study, or place a child for adoption if in our judgment it would appear to counter-indicate sound professional adoption practices. Such decisions are arrived at in concert with the policies and practices of Bethany for Children & Families.

## **C. INQUIRIES VIA LETTERS**

Adoption requests received by letter will generally be referred to the Supervisor of Adoption Services. Responses to these inquiries will be based upon the current adoption trends and policies of this agency.

## **D. INQUIRIES VIA TELEPHONE**

Telephone inquiries will be referred to a designated intake worker. Prospective applicant(s) should be informed of the current trends in adoption. An Application Form is completed by the intake worker, and applicant(s) are told they will be invited by letter to an informational meeting. Applicant(s) are under no obligation or commitment to the agency at

the time their names are placed on our informational meeting waiting list.

The applicant(s) should be encouraged to contact other agencies regarding their adoptive services. Workers should not encourage or promote independent placements as a viable alternative to agency placement. If the applicant(s) appear to be intent upon pursuing this matter, the worker should inform them of the risks involved. All applicant(s) should be informed that there are many children with special needs available for adoption through adoptive listing services. When an applicant expresses an interest in receiving additional information on this subject, an interview may be scheduled.

#### **E. INQUIRIES VIA INTERVIEWS -OFFICE**

Most adoptive inquiries are received either by letter or telephone. However, occasionally an applicant may request a personal interview. Some applicant(s) may feel more secure if they can present their request in person. Staff should recognize the nature of this need and accommodate applicant(s) whenever possible.

Families interested in receiving additional information on special needs children should be afforded this opportunity. It is permissible to review descriptions of special needs children with the potential applicant(s). However, it should be pointed out that while a child appears to be available at this point, the child might not be available in the future.

#### **F. INQUIRIES VIA GROUP MEETING**

An informational group meeting may be held with prospective adoptive applicant(s). This procedure may be waived in those situations where the applicant is interested in adopting a special needs child, as an individual interview will be scheduled following intake.

Areas which are generally covered during this meeting are a brief history of Bethany for Children & Families and its services, presentation on the adoptive study process, placement procedures, legal aspects, fees, etc.

#### **APPLICATION FORM PROCEDURE - 103.7**

At the time of an adoption inquiry, an Application Form is completed as accurately as possible. The information on this form is the only record on the family until additional forms are required.

After completing Application Form, submit it to the Supervisor of Adoption Services. If additional space is required to complete this information, you may write on the back of this form or dictate a summary to be attached.

#### **CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS - 103.8**

Special Needs Children are those children whose unique special adoption needs make them more difficult to place in families. Not long ago, children with special needs were considered "unadoptable" and spent formative years in institutions, foster homes, and group homes. Today, increasing numbers of people have adopted children with special needs.

Who is the child with special needs? He or she is a child with very normal, unspecial needs for love, nurturance, fun, stability, and self respect. He/she must often seek these fundamentals of life under difficult or unusual circumstances, or he or she is sometimes unable to find them at all.

A special needs child very often requires parents other than those who gave him or her birth because not all people are equipped to provide for the special needs the child requires to grow to his or her full and unique potential as a human being. Not all adults, however well meaning, are able to help these special needs children to grow.

Parenting a special needs child requires *dedicated and committed advocates* who have the capacity to give of themselves - people who will go that "extra mile" for their child. Those people who choose to adopt children with special needs discover that in giving love and nurturance to a child with special needs, they receive the reward of knowing that they have made a real difference in the life of a child who now has the stability, consistency, home, and parents that every child needs and deserves.

Children with special needs, by definition, encompass the following kinds of children:

1) Healthy Caucasian children over the age of

eight.

Children who because of neglect, abuse, family disruption, or who are perceived as "troublesome" are available for adoption. Although physically healthy, by virtue of the fact that these children are available for adoption, they carry emotional scars. The depth of scarring is dependent on each child's individual and unique circumstances. Special parenting efforts center around helping the older child whom comes with his or her unique past and life experiences, to settle in and become an integral part of an adoptive family. Often, these children have difficulty trusting others. Acceptance of and openness to that which a child has experienced are essential ingredients in choosing to adopt these particular children.

## 2) Sibling groups.

Sibling groups are composed of brothers and sisters. Usually one child of the group is over the age of eight years. The more children in the group, the more difficult it is to find a family. Special parenting efforts center on giving each individual child the opportunity to develop and grow, as well as the dynamics of adopting older children. Bethany for Children & Families is committed to the importance of placing siblings together unless this is clearly not in the children's best interest.

## 3) Children with mild, moderate or severe problems.

- Children with medical problems which might require major surgery or living with a life-long condition. Such children might include children with spinal bifida, diabetes, heart condition, and children who are sight or hearing impaired.
- Children with developmental problems which delay or impair their ability to function intellectually. Specialized educational services and educational opportunities will be required as the child grows to his or her potential. Such children include children with Downs Syndrome, brain-damaged, and trainable and educably retarded children.
- Children with emotional problems which have damaged their ability to love and to care for themselves and others. Usually ongoing psychological treatment is necessary.

## 4) Multi-ethnic children or bi-racial children.

Multi-ethnic children, and children with a mix of multi-ethnic and Caucasian heritage or bi-racial children, are available for adoption. There is a strong trust by child welfare workers and agencies to find minority and bi-racial families for these children, who will instill and preserve the child's heritage. Families who adopt a child from a different race are provided training regarding the importance of understanding and encouraging the child's heritage.

Bethany for Children & Families supports and is dedicated and committed to facilitating special needs placements. We work with families and individuals to:

- a. Clarify whether special needs adoption is appropriate by providing a no cost, no-obligation interview designed to educate potential families on special needs adoption.
- b. Complete a home study.
- c. *Provides assistance, including post-legal adoptive services, to the adoptive parents and children.*
- d. Obtain a subsidy if at all possible from the State of Illinois or the State of Iowa for a special needs child, which can help to defray both regular and specialized expenses incurred in childcare and legal fees.

All children for whom a placement is not found are reviewed at least monthly by the Adoption Services Supervisor and the Adoption Specialist.

## **The Study Process for Applicant(s) Who Are Considering the Adoption of a Child (ren) Other than Infants:**

If the family is still interested after the informational meeting and seem appropriate to adopt a special needs child, they will attend up to six weeks of adoption preparation classes to help them to be better prepared to parent a special needs child and understand the separation, grief, loss, and abuse these children may ultimately deal with for the majority of their lives. After completing the preparation classes, several home study interviews are held with the family to discuss their background, child rearing practices, and many

other facets of their lives. A criminal background check and a child abuse registry check are also completed during this time period. After the home study is completed, the family becomes a "waiting family" until an appropriate match with a child becomes available. If the family has come to the conclusion with the assistance of their worker and the knowledge they gained through classes that they can deal with and accept many special needs, the wait will be shorter. And visa versa if the family wishes to parent a younger child (ren), the wait will ultimately be lengthier because there are more parents who choose to parent a child with fewer special needs.

### **ADOPTION SUBSIDIES -103.9**

Bethany for Children & Families does not have a subsidized adoption program, but will assist the family in obtaining an adoption subsidy when appropriate. Adoption subsidies are generally under the auspices of the Department of Children and Family Services or the Iowa Department of Human Services for children who are under their guardianship.

Subsidies are available for one or more of the following: Medical Care, Legal Services, Daily Care, and Tutoring or other special services. Continuation of subsidies is reviewed by the Department of Children and Family Services or the Iowa Department of Human Services on a periodic basis, generally described as an annual audit (every two years in the State of Iowa).

### **ADOPTIVE STUDY - 103.10**

The agency's adoptive services begin with a study that involves a determination as to the capabilities of adoptive applicant(s) to meet the needs of a child and what kind of child can both benefit from the home and bring the satisfaction of parenthood.

The study should be conducted in such a manner that it begins to prepare the applicant for adoption and helps the applicant to anticipate the special needs of an adopted child and the difficulties inherent in adoptive parenthood. Applicant(s) are taught about the options available for openness so they can decide their comfort level. The study should bring about growth in both attitudes and expectations due to an increased understanding of adoption and the kind of children who are available and birthparents involved. In this way, applicant(s)

begin to give evidence of their own flexibility and capacity to grow and develop as adoptive parents.

At the same time that the adoptive study is being conducted, adoption applicant(s) in Illinois also apply to be licensed as foster parents and are subject to the same licensing requirements as foster care applicant(s), including fingerprinting. Iowa adoption applicant(s) are not required to be licensed, but must go through a child abuse registry check and criminal background check by name and social security number only. *Bethany for Children & Families requires all Illinois adoptive families to receive a full foster home license, as this provides additional placement options opposed to an adopt only license.*

### **METHOD OF STUDY - 103.11**

The study process consists of individual interviews with the prospective adoption couple as well as group meetings with other couples. Adoptive applicant(s) and the social worker exchange factual information and discuss emotional factors involved in adoption. Evaluation is made of their attitudes and feelings regarding teen parents, unmarried parents, and children born out of wedlock. Applicant(s) are also given an opportunity to evaluate their motivations in requesting an adoptive child. The group meetings provide an educational component.

The process helps to establish a relationship with the adoptive applicant(s) that will make it possible for them to feel free to exchange ideas and feelings, and continue to look upon the agency as a resource in the future.

### **ADOPTIVE SERVICE PLAN - 103.12**

The following outline is to serve as a guide for service planning and delivery in the adoption programs at Bethany for Children & Families. Where this is appropriate, the client (including those who are minors), the client's parent, or the client's guardian will fully participate in service plan development and review. The client will retain the maximum amount of individual responsibility in this process that is appropriate for their individual case situation. All changes in the service plan are reviewed with the client or with the participation of the client and the client's parent or legal guardian. When the client is a minor and this is appropriate to the client's needs, clients or the parents/legal

guardians of clients who are not able to fully participate in the service planning (such as the very young or mentally impaired client) are fully informed in advance of the benefits and risks which may be involved in a plan of service or treatment. In service planning and service delivery, the agency recognizes that what is selected should be the most appropriate to meet the individual client's needs and that more restrictive or intrusive alternatives are selected only when other forms of care have not been found to be appropriate.

### **SERVICE PLANNING OUTLINE**

Precipitating factors as to the adoptive family's request for adoptive services

Initial Impressions

Assessment of Need for Agency Services:

- Motivation to adopt
- Capacity for parenthood
- Attitudes regarding single parents and children
- Type of child interested in
- Ability to work with agency

Services Provided:

- Counseling
- Education and support services
- Referral and follow-up to existing community resources
- Post-adoption services

Length of Service:

State goals and short and long term objective

Fees charged and arrangement for payment

### **ADOPTION FORMS FOR INFANT ADOPTION - SPECIAL NEEDS ADOPTION PROGRAMS - 103.13**

Samples of the following forms are found in the Appendices:

#### **Application Form**

Adoption applicant(s) are asked to complete an Adoption Application form prior to beginning the adoption study process. This form includes sections

on personal data, education, military service, employment history, marital history, family history, home, financial information, medical information including fertility information, and a list of character references. Although the form is different for the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program, the basic information, which the applicant(s) is asked, is generally the same.

#### **Homework Outline**

Applicant(s) are asked to write their life story and discuss in writing their attitudes toward adoption and parenting, using these questions as a guide.

With the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program, a large amount of homework is completed by the applicant(s). This homework is designed to educate the families on many of the needs of the children they may parent. These include separation and loss issues, grief issues, short and long term affects of abuse, the family's self-evaluation in parenting special needs children, etc. We also ask the applicant(s) to complete an autobiography (form is attached) to write their life story, education, occupation, personalities, child-rearing practices, marriage, religion, community, health, and placement preference for a child or children.

#### **Other Forms**

Persons involved in the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program are also asked to complete various other forms, which are attached. These forms have various purposes including self-examination in parenting and understanding the family members better.

#### **Medical Form**

The white form entitled Medical Report is to be completed on adults, while the yellow form entitled Certificate of Child Health Examination is to be completed on children residing within the home. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Licensing Act requires that:

Prior to licensing, the foster parents shall furnish the supervising agency with the medical report on each member of the household, including foster parents, their children, other persons residing in the foster home, and other persons assisting in child care. Persons employed in foster homes in other than a child

care capacity, may be required to have physical examinations if the supervising agency deems it necessary. See Licensing Requirements of Illinois. The Act refers to the term "foster parents" as an all-inclusive description and is applicable to adoptive parents.

The medical report shall provide significant findings of the physician and a general statement from the physician as to the individual's physical and mental health. Medical re-examination may be required at the discretion of the physician or supervising agency.

These forms require the signature of the family's physician and should be completed as thoroughly and accurately as possible. Supporting medical statements are not required unless, in the opinion of the family's physician, or the caseworker's judgment, they are deemed to be necessary. The worker may want to initiate further clarification of medical reports if unusual circumstances exist. Such clarification should be in the form of medical reports or in a letter from the physician. If problems exist in receiving such communication in this format, the worker should dictate verbal report received from the physician and includes this material with the medical forms. As a further protection to the agency, the worker may verify in writing the doctor's verbal report.

## **INFANT AND ILLINOIS SPECIAL NEEDS ADOPTION FORMS**

See Appendices for state-specific forms.

## **GUIDELINES TO AN ADOPTIVE STUDY - 103.14 (a-n)**

The following outline is a guide to be used in the social study process. It is a guide to content not the order in which pertinent facts and observations will be accumulated. Each topical criterion is followed by the related content and method of study. The individual family situation will determine the areas of special emphasis and the extent of information sought during the study. The total process should be concerned with motivation, both verbalized and unconscious, and the capacity for parenting.

The guide presents criteria, which shall be met before a home may be approved as an adoptive home. The outline is applicable to adoptive studies requested by other agencies.

## **PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH - 103.14(a)**

The medical history and current physical examination should provide evidence of good physical health and the absence of mental illnesses or serious emotional or psychosomatic symptoms.

Adults who are emotionally mature will generally have the capacity to grow into parenthood as they experience a relationship with the child, and are likely to be able to give the care he or she needs. Some of the characteristics to be considered in evaluating emotional maturity are the capacity to give and receive love; the ability to assume responsibilities for the care, guidance, and protection of another person; reasonable emotional stability, flexibility, and the ability to change in relation to the needs of others; capacity for relationship; self-respect; an ability to cope with problems, disappointments, and frustrations; and an ability to accept normal hazards and risks.

There should be medical evidence that the applicant(s) have reasonable health and life expectancy so that the child's security in having parents is unlikely to be cut short before the child matures. Couples where one or both mates are physically handicapped may be considered, provided that they meet the above health requirements and are emotionally well adjusted to the handicap.

In situations where there is concern as to the presence of the above, the worker may request consultation from medical or psychological services.

## **HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD - 103.14(b)**

The home and neighborhood should provide adequate space and living conditions necessary to promote health, safety, well being, and self-respect of the family. In describing the house, the following items should be included:

- 1) Furnishings adequate to meet licensing standards.
- 2) Home free from obvious safety hazards.
- 3) Standards of housekeeping and general

upkeep.

- 4) Observations on the furnishings, books, pets, etc., which may give clues to the social and cultural standards and quality of family life.
- 5) Description of the provisions that have been made or will be made for the care of the child.
- 6) Notes on the general cultural and social characteristics of the neighborhood and community in relation to the aspirations and standards of the adoptive family.
- 7) Brief description of the educational, medical, cultural, and commercial resources available and the extent to which these are utilized by the applicant(s).

Families who depend upon non-city sources for their water must have their well water tested by the Department of Public Health. Kits for this purpose are available through Bethany or the Health Department. The family sends a sample of their water to the Department of Public Health for results. The family should be alerted to the possibility that the test results may indicate their well is polluted or have a high nitrogen content, which may be considered hazardous to young children. When this occurs, the family will receive instructions from the Department of Public Health on counteractive measures (this usually involves boiling the water). The family must sign an agreement with the agency to the effect that they will comply with the recommendations of the Department of Public Health. See Section 110 for a sample copy of this agreement.

#### **RELIGIOUS LIFE - 103.14(c)**

Bethany for Children & Families does not require formal church affiliation or membership as a prerequisite to adopt. However, opportunities for religious or spiritual development should receive full consideration.

Applicant(s) who are of a different religious faith should be in agreement as to how an adoptive child will be reared and should have resolved any conflicts about religion. It is important to evaluate in each situation what their religious faith means to them, particularly the difference in religious faith, and how this difference may affect the rearing and development of the child.

When prospective adoptive parents are identified with a religion, clergy of that faith may be consulted in order to secure an evaluation of religious factors.

#### **INCOME - 103.14(d)**

There shall be reliable income and financial management which meets the family's individual needs and which can accommodate the care of the child with reasonable security against emergencies. Home ownership or a minimum bank account is not required.

The applicant(s) will be asked to verify their income by the completion of the financial information section of the adoption application form. For the Scott County Special Needs program there is a financial form to be completed (attached). (See Section 103.2 of this manual.) The use of income, division of responsibilities for financial planning and expenditures, and anticipated modifications after adoption of the child should be explored. The management of income should be considered more important than the amount earned.

Consideration shall be given to supplementing incomes to families that have the essential qualifications to meet the needs of children, particularly those children for whom there are insufficient homes. The supplementing of adoptive applicant's income is possible through the adoption subsidy program developed by the Department of Children and Family Services and the Iowa Department of Human Services. Familiarization with this program is important as a possible resource for our adoptive applicant(s).

#### **FAMILY RELATIONSHIP - 103.14(e)**

A determination should be made of the applicant's emotional independence from their parents and other family members, and their objectivity about earlier experiences and relationships. Their ability to appreciate and enjoy each other's company, share goals and interests and to develop compatible roles as marriage partners will be assessed.

This information may be obtained through written responses to questions and observation of the relationships and interviews with each applicant. Topics to be discussed will be:

- 1) Childhood experiences.
- 2) Family constellation.
- 3) Experiences and relationship with other family members.
- 4) Applicant's ability to invest in relationships.
- 5) Help they expect from their families.
- 6) Attitude of each parent toward the other's family.

Applicant(s) will be interviewed about: The history of their relationship with each other, incidents about their present life together, their shared independent activities and interests, how major decisions about family matters are made, and future plans.

Ascertain the history of their own sex instruction, early relationship with the opposite sex, their family's attitude, and their own present ideas about providing sex information, their attitudes towards illegitimacy, and toward neglectful or inadequate parents.

Regarding previous marriages, interview material with an applicant who was previously married should be concerned with the history of the relationship, the reasons for its termination, and their present attitude towards it. If there were children, ascertain who cares for them, provisions for support, and present attitude towards it. With the other applicant, interview material is related to understanding of the previous marriage, and the attitude towards it.

For any adoptive placement in which the applicant(s) may have children by birth or adoption, the worker should ascertain that they have the capacity and real desire to extend parenthood to another child and to work out any problems that might occur as a result of introducing another child into the family. The worker should observe the nature and quality of the relationship between parents and children and involve the children in a discussion regarding adoption and their feelings about it. The worker should also observe through written homework and home study interviews the applicant's ability to parent a child or children with special needs.

#### **ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHILDREN - 103.14(f)**

Applicant(s) must have a basic love for children and be able to have a relationship and enjoy a child. This could be evidenced by experience with children of relatives and friends, children born to them, and/or other children. They should have the capacity for feeling satisfaction from contributing to the development of the child and for allowing the child to develop and grow in his or her own way and at his or her own pace. They should have the ability to deal with developmental problems, and have sensitivity, understanding of and tolerance for children's difficulties. They should be flexible about their specifications and expectations for a child and capable of accepting a child for who he or she is and what may develop. This is especially true of parenting a child with challenging special needs.

An important factor to consider in this process is the parent's own experiences as a child. These experiences will often give insight as to how their future attitudes as parents will be or have been molded.

#### **VOCATIONAL ADJUSTMENT - 103.14(g)**

There should be stability of employment in an occupation consistent with the applicant's interests and abilities, which enable them to provide adequately for the child.

The interview with the applicant(s) should include discussion about their educational background or particular vocational choice, specific employment history, future plans and prospects, length of present employment, hours of work, and effect upon family life. Also topics such as work adjustments including satisfactions and frustrations, and relationships with workers and employer should be discussed with applicant(s) in order to receive a better understanding of this area.

In general, the applicant(s) is expected to be able to give continuously to the child placed with them, particularly during the post-placement period prior to legal consummation of the adoption. If both are employed, the interview should cover the above items. Our present policy (see Section 102.2(f) of Employment) provides for an alternative plan to be approved by Bethany for Children & Families following its evaluation for appropriateness in providing for the well-being of the child. One of the adoptive parents taking a temporary leave from work is strongly encouraged.

The worker should review with the applicant(s) their order of priorities. There should be sufficient flexibility to allow for modification of any plan in conjunction with the care of the child that will be in the child's best interest.

### **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS - 103.14(h)**

There must be evidence that the applicant(s) enjoys people and has durable friendships, the capacity to make new friends, and an appreciation and respect for the differences in others.

This data may be obtained through interviews with both applicant(s) concerning recreational activities, hobbies, individual and mutual friends, their characteristics and the history of these friendships, and participation in civic or social organizations. Much of this information can be obtained through written references.

### **MOTIVATION - 103.14(i)**

Motivation is an important area of consideration in evaluating the capacity for adoptive parenthood. A decision to adopt should be based on emotionally healthy needs, such as the desire to have a more nearly complete life, to accept parental responsibilities, to contribute to the development of another human being, and/or to love and be loved. Applicant(s) have a variety of motives of which they may or may not be conscious. Any reason for wishing to adopt must be evaluated in light of the total personality and maturity of the individual. Adoption as a means of strengthening an unstable marriage, acquiring an heir, or as treatment of emotional or mental illness, including grief over the death of a child, should be disapproved. During the course of the study, the worker must be satisfied that the motivation for adoption is healthy before proceeding with the conclusion of the study. In some instances the worker may wish to involve psychiatric consultation or psychological services, including a request that the couple be seen by a psychiatrist or a psychologist for further evaluation.

### **CHILDLESSNESS - 103.14(j)**

Applicant(s), for whom infertility has been a factor, may be able to use help to understand and cope with their feelings about their inability to conceive. Furthermore, they should have arrived at a mutual decision to adopt. Feelings about unmarried parents, and children born out of wedlock, inherited

traits, and parents who relinquish their children should also be taken into consideration as these reactions may affect their feelings toward the child. It is important to know whether they would be able to help the child understand adoption or if they will have a need to deny the fact that they have adopted a child. Feelings about childlessness are generally not completely resolved prior to adoptive placement, or perhaps even later, and should not necessarily counter-indicate approval. The couple should have the opportunity to continue counseling in order to resolve feelings regarding this subject.

### **MARITAL RELATIONSHIP - 103.14(k)**

The marriage should be one that can continue successfully without a child. The emotional climate should be satisfying for the parent as well as the child. Each partner should have respect for the other. Where there is infertility, it is important to find out what affect it may have on their feelings about themselves and each other such as doubts about masculinity or femininity, or feelings of guilt towards the spouse.

It is important that the marriage be one of mutual respect and genuine caring for each other, and involve a mutual commitment to making the marriage last. Each couple will develop their own methods of problem solving and patterns of communication.

### **OPTIONS FOR OPENNESS - 103.14(l)**

Each adoption is tailored to meet the needs of the people involved. All adoptive parents are asked to provide pictures of their child and letters to the birthparents at 3, 6, 9 and 12 months of age, and yearly thereafter until the child is 18. Adoptive applicant(s) are educated as to the importance of the sharing of pictures and letters during the home study. Other options for openness include:

- Receiving letters, cards, or gifts from the birthparents.
- A one-time phone conversation between adoptive parents and birthparents.
- A one-time meeting between adoptive parents and birthparents held at the agency with exchange of only first names, which can be scheduled for either before or after the child's birth depending on the birthparents' request and

the adoptive parents' agreement with this.

- Full disclosure of identifying information with continuing contact.

Birthparents make requests as to their desire for certain options for openness. Adoptive parents must agree to those options before a placement is made. If they decide they are uncomfortable with the request and cannot agree, an alternate family is selected. Support is provided to all parties in the development of any relationships and in dealing with potential problems associated with role confusion or ambiguity. Any decisions to plan for open adoption are based on the best interests of the child.

### **REFERENCES - 103.14(m)**

Applicant(s) should be the primary source of information. References may be used to learn about the standing of the family in the community and to obtain opinions from those who have observed the applicant(s) in situations, which give an indication of their capacity for parenthood. Applicant(s) should suggest the references and alert them to this fact.

A minimum of three references are contacted, which include three non-family members of the applicant(s) choice, and *may include additional* references that the adoption specialist comes up with. These reference letters are not shared with the applicant(s) and their identities are kept confidential. If references prefer to respond by phone rather than in writing, documentation of the reference will be placed in dictation. A summary of the reference letters is included in the final written home study.

If a family who wishes to adopt a child has a child attending school, the child's teacher may be a valuable resource in helping to develop a total picture of the family's functioning.

In some instances, a reference may provide negative information on the family. It is important to evaluate the nature of this information in respect to its objectivity and relevance in evaluating the parenting potential of the applicant(s).

### **EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION - 103.14(n)**

The evaluation of the family, made jointly by the worker and the Supervisor of Adoption Services on completion of the study, should be an overall assessment of the personalities of the applicant(s) and their ability to responsibly meet the needs of children. This would include support education, character development, a happy and secure family life, love, understanding, guidance, and companionship. Additionally, the degree of openness a couple is comfortable with and can accept in their adoption is assessed. Weakness in one area may be balanced by strength in other significant areas of personality or relationship.

It is important to determine the nature of the biases of our adoptive applicant(s). This may be noted during a discussion of the origins of our children, particularly if a couple may have strong feelings of condemnation toward unmarried couples or birthparents who abuse and/or neglect their children. In this event, the worker should recognize the distinct possibility that the rejection of the child may occur. Applicant(s) will be asked to consider different options for contact with their adopted child's birthparents and helped to explore what kind and how much continued contact they are comfortable with and can accept.

It is difficult to know what kind of parent's people will be before they have the opportunity of actually becoming parents. However, experience has shown that the way they have dealt with previous life situations, and the way in which they get along with their own family, particularly attitude towards their parents, brothers and sisters, their marriage, their work adjustment, their relationship with friends, their activities in the community, and the satisfaction they have experienced, have a bearing on the couple's capacity to meet the needs of an adopted child.

The applicant(s) should be aware of the fact that the agency cannot guarantee the potential of a child. The worker should thoroughly explore with the couple their feelings regarding a child who is handicapped, who has experienced incest, etc. As a part of the evaluation, the worker should explore with the couple their feelings regarding pressing social issues. This may often give a diagnostic impression of the flexibility or rigidity of the applicant(s), which may be present in other areas of the study. This will aid the worker in making a final decision regarding the couple's acceptance as

adoptive parents.

The recommendation regarding age and sex of the child for applicant(s) and the specific help that is anticipated they will need during the post-placement period should be noted and recorded. In those situations where the worker has determined that the family will need ongoing assistance in order to modify or correct an area of concern, the worker should develop a plan for ongoing services to the family prior to and after placement of the child. Such areas should be explained to the family during the adoption process. It is highly recommended that families be given information on available resources, which will enable or assist them to overcome parenting deficiencies. Throughout this process, the family's worker can play a vital role in enabling the parents to obtain that degree of parenting skills, which will make it possible for them to fulfill their objectives.

*In the event that a family is deemed inappropriate as an adoptive placement, depending on the state of residency, the following procedures will be observed:*

*In Illinois, it will be explained that Bethany will not recommend adoption approval for the family. In regards to infant adoption, Bethany will explain to the family that they may appeal Bethany as stated in Policy 104.01 and seek another agency. If the family is applying for special needs adoption, this family can appeal to Bethany and to DCFS as stated in **Rule 337**.*

*In Iowa, it will be explained that Bethany will not approve the family for an adoption placement. Again, the options will be explained and include seeking another agency, appealing Bethany and/or the DHS as in Rule 441 IAC 200.13(600) and 441 Chapter 7.*

### **PRE-PLACEMENT VISITS - 103.14(o)**

The adoptive family shall be contacted quarterly by the worker as they await placement of a child. The purpose of the pre-placement contact is to provide an ongoing relationship between the agency and the adoptive family. Pre-placement contacts to the family should convey the agency's support of the adoptive parents and the agency's readiness to assist the family in whatever needs or concerns are identified.

The quarterly contacts shall include the following areas of discussion:

- 1) Inform the family of the current placement rate and program services.
- 2) Discussion of the family's feelings regarding the wait and their commitment to adoption.
- 3) Discussion of the family selection process and birthparent participation in the process.
- 4) Discussion of ongoing post-adoption services available to the child, adoptive family, and birthfamily.
- 5) Worker's assessment of family needs/concerns and recommendations as to how to meet these needs.

Visits should be mutually arranged between the family and the worker, so as to include both adoptive parents in the visit.

The content of the visit shall be dictated by the worker in the adoptive family file after each visit occurs, noting particularly specific family needs and concerns and recommendations to resolve the identified needs of concerns.

### **PLACEMENT/POST-PLACEMENT - 103.15**

A family will be selected for a child from among those families who have been approved for adoptive placement. Bethany for Children & Families will seek to provide an array of placement opportunities so children will have an opportunity for a placement appropriate to the child's needs. Suitability should be appraised both in terms of the capacity and interest of the adoptive parents to meet the individual needs of the particular child and in the capacity of the child to benefit by placement with them and to bring them the satisfaction of parenthood.

The selection of the family should involve a team approach, which includes the child's worker, the family's worker, and the Supervisor of Adoption Services. Birthparents are given the opportunity to choose the family who will adopt their child. Non-identifying information profiles and "Dear Birthmother" letters written by each prospective adoptive family are shared with the birthparents if they choose to make this decision. Their choices of

family will be honored. If birthparents prefer not to make this decision, a family will be chosen taking into consideration knowledge about the child, the prospective adoptive parents, and wishes of the birthparent.

In regard to the Scott County Special Needs Adoption program, a family is selected for a specific waiting child by the Department of Human Services case manager who has responsibility for that child. The family's home study is forwarded to the DHS case manager by the Bethany for Children & Families Adoption Specialist. The DHS will decide which family is the best match for the child. This may involve an interview between the DHS case manager and the prospective adoptive family to help the worker come to a decision. The Adoption Specialist also continues to be a source of information about the family for the DHS worker.

### **INFORMATION ON BIRTHPARENT (S) - 103.16**

Adoptive parents are given available information needed in understanding the biological parent(s) and their reasons for placement of the child for adoption. This will also assist them in dealing later with the child's curiosity and interest concerning his or her birthparent(s). This information may include: Age at the time of birth of the child, nationality, religious background, description of the parent(s) (hair, eyes, height, usual weight, bone structure), positive general overall impression, education, unusual grades, any particular accomplishments, future vocational or education plans, work history, general health, hobbies, interests, activities, etc., and information on the biological grandparents such as a general description of their parents, and particular information of an outstanding nature, and any inheritable medical problems are included in this summary.

In Special Needs Adoption, consideration is given to the merits of continuing contact between the birth parents or other family members and the adoptive child when it seems appropriate due to the age of the child, the strength of family ties, and the capacity of the parents to maintain a healthy ongoing relationship. In those instances where this ongoing contact may occur, support is provided to the parties in the development of relationships and in dealing with potential problems associated with role confusion or ambiguity and how to effectively deal with circumstances that may arise in the future.

### **REASON FOR RELINQUISHMENT AND TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS - 103.17**

Adoptive parents need an understanding of the motivation for relinquishment in order to understand their child's questions regarding this subject. Relinquishment of the child should be explained as a positive step taken for the child's interest, not a rejection by the birthparent(s). It is important for the adopted child to know that his birthparent(s) were concerned about him or her and acted responsibly in planning for his or her future.

In Special Needs Adoption, parental rights are usually terminated involuntarily by the Court. In this instance, information will be provided to the adoptive parents and to the child, if appropriate, regarding the reasons for the termination of parental rights. The reasons should be presented in as positive, yet accurate manner as is possible.

### **PROVIDING WRITTEN BACKGROUND MATERIAL TO ADOPTIVE PARENTS - 103.18**

Information developed in Section 106.2 may serve as a guide to providing adoptive parents with important data on the child and his or her birth family. Adoptive parents should be encouraged to share this information with the child as a part of helping the child to develop a better understanding of his identity and heritage. Form 106.31 is completed and given to the adoptive parents on the day of placement.

Additional medical or other non-identifying information of a familial or hereditary nature will be provided to adoptive parents after the legalization when such information is deemed essential to the welfare of the child and is not prohibited by law.

### **LEGAL RISK PLACEMENTS - 103.19**

When Bethany for Children & Families makes a legal risk placement of a child in an adoptive home,

- The determination that adoptive placement is the best plan for this child precedes any placement;
- The prospective adoptive parents are thoroughly informed that the risks are substantial and that confidentiality regarding the identities of both birthparents and adoptive

parents may be impossible to maintain;

- The specific legal risks are explained to the prospective adoptive parents, and they are offered legal consultation if desired;
- A written agreement is made between Bethany for Children & Families and the adoptive parents stating the mutual intent that adoption take place, if legal matters are resolved through the use of the Legal Risk Agreement form;
- Monthly reimbursement for the care of the child, plus medical and clothing allowances, is available if needed at least until legal matters are resolved;
- Intensive supportive counseling is provided by the agency before, during, and after placement of the child in the adoptive parent's home, if requested;
- Diligent efforts are made to remove the legal barriers which necessitate the legal risk placement;
- That such a placement will reduce to the minimum the number of separations, losses, and attachments which a child will experience;
- The Bethany for Children & Families Special Needs Adoption case manager thoroughly explores the adoptive family's feelings regarding the legal risk and how this will impact them emotionally if the child were to return to his or her birthparent(s). It is the adoption case manager's responsibility to assess where the family is at in this process.

### **INVESTIGATIVE REPORT - 103.20**

The investigative report should include a written statement of facts together with written recommendations regarding the desirability of the proposed adoption. In Illinois, this report must accompany the waiver of appearance and consent form. In Iowa, the waiver of appearance and consent forms are filed with the adoption petition. In regard to the Scott County Special Needs Adoption Program, after the petition has been filed, Bethany for Children & Families will complete a "post Placement Visit," at which time a variety of information is gathered regarding the family and the child. After this has been completed, a "Post

Placement Report" is written and submitted to the Court for the finalization hearing. The investigative report is submitted after the petition is filed. This report is of a confidential nature and is only to be shared with the presiding judge.

### **Paternity Determination- 103.21**

In the case that the birth mother is unsure regarding the identity of the birth father, a paternity test may be administered. The birth parent(s) is responsible for the associated fee.

### **The Hearing/Speech Impaired-103.22**

The agency utilizes the services of Illinois Telecommunications Relay Center, 1.800.526.0844 and Relay Iowa, 1.800.735.2943, translation services for the hearing/speech impaired.