



SNOWFLAKES[®] EMBRYO ADOPTION PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions by Genetic Families

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GENERAL QUESTIONS

What services does Nightlight[®] Christian Adoptions (Nightlight) offer?

Nightlight is licensed to provide the following services:

- Domestic and International Home studies
- Domestic Adoptions: Agency, Identified (Modified) or Interstate Adoptions
- Adoption Service Provider for Independent Adoptions.
- International Adoptions: Programs in Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Taiwan, and Ukraine
- Snowflakes[®] Embryo Adoption Program
- Birthparent counseling services

Is Nightlight a non-profit agency?

Yes, Nightlight is a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency. Fees paid by adoptive parents as well as any fundraising efforts throughout the year cover agency expenses.

What is your licensure information?

Nightlight Christian Adoptions has been licensed by the California State Department of Social Services since 1959. Nightlight's Home study and counseling services are available to families within Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Ventura Counties.

What if we are not Christians; will you still work with us to find a family for our embryos?

The "Christian" in our name explains who we are; it does not necessarily describe who our clients are. We work with families from all religious backgrounds. We need all types of families to meet the various adopting and genetic parents' criteria.

How is "embryo adoption" through Nightlight different from "embryo donation" that clinics offer?

"Embryo donation" is a program fertility clinics offer. Although some programs may vary, embryo donation differs from adoption in that the receiving family does not have a home study prepared, the donor families are anonymous, and there is no contact between the families before or after birth, even through an intermediary.

Snowflakes goes beyond the embryo donation provided by fertility clinics by offering the safeguards and education available in a traditional adoption. A homestudy is prepared on the adopting family that includes screening and education. The placing family is able to select an adopting family (as opposed to the doctor in a clinic making the selection of a family), they will know if a child(ren) is/are born from the adopted embryos. The placing family may also delegate this responsibility to Nightlight, a licensed adoption agency. Our program recognizes the importance of counseling all parties involved. Most importantly, at Nightlight we recognize the personhood of embryos and we treat them as precious pre-born children.

Why would we choose embryo adoption instead of donation?

Snowflakes provides the same safeguards that the traditional adoption process offers. You will know that the family you have chosen to parent your pre-born child(ren) has been screened for a criminal history and child abuse record, as well as received education about how to parent an adoptee. You have the peace of mind of having handpicked a family to raise your genetic child. You also have the opportunity to have contact with your adopting family to whatever extent you both are comfortable.

Why would adopting parents choose embryo adoption instead of donation?

The adopting family has a chance to have a relationship with their child's genetic family. Whether they exchange pictures and letters, have telephone conversations, or choose to meet you, the adopting family will know that they have access to information about their child's history. The agency is available to facilitate communication between the families. The agency is also available to educate and work with both families about how to talk to their child(ren) about their unique conception and adoption-related issues.

Why would adopting parents choose embryo adoption instead of traditional adoption of a newborn?

The most obvious difference between an embryo adoption and a traditional domestic adoption is the pregnancy experience. Adoptive moms are able to experience the joys (and challenges!) of pregnancy and labor. They also have the peace of mind of knowing what their child was exposed to during pregnancy.

Although an embryo adoption allows more control in some ways, it provides less in other ways. They cannot choose the gender of the child as they might in an international or older child adoption, and they cannot change their mind and choose not to accept the baby for whatever reason after he or she is born. In addition, because up to three embryos are implanted at once, they might have twins or triplets. Embryo adoption can also be more difficult emotionally than traditional adoption, since there is no guarantee that in the end they will have a child.

How many embryo adoptions has Nightlight completed?

To date Nightlight has matched 393 genetic families (with approx. 2600 embryos) with 270 adopting families. There are 203 Snowflakes children and 13 adopting families are currently expecting 16 babies.

Are there any other Agencies that offer Embryo Adoption?

As embryo adoption has become more well-known, other agencies have begun programs similar to Snowflakes. As these programs are relatively new, please visit www.embryooption.org to get the latest information.

Does Nightlight encourage the creation and freezing of embryos?

No, we are trying to provide a loving option to the families of the 500,000 (estimated) embryos frozen in clinics throughout the United States.

Does the age of the embryos (date frozen) affect our ability to place them for adoption?

No, there have been no definitive studies proving how long embryos can stay frozen and remain viable. We have had successful pregnancies with embryos frozen for 10 years. We believe each embryo, no matter its age, is a precious life that should be given the opportunity to grow.

If we used Donor Egg or Sperm in the creation of our embryos can we place them through Snowflakes?

Yes, we just need to obtain copies of your donor profile, egg donor consent and donor infectious disease screen results. We will provide a copy of the donor profile to the adopting family along with the family health history that you provide. We need a copy of the egg donor consent to verify that you have the legal authority to place the embryos for adoption with another couple and they are not specifically for your use only. The infectious disease results are part of the FDA requirements for the adopting family's clinic to accept the embryos into their facility.

Does Snowflakes handle out-of-state embryo adoptions?

Yes. We can work with families living in any state. We partner with many experienced agencies throughout the United States.

Can you work with us if we live in, or our embryos are stored in, another country?

This is handled on a case-by-case basis. We have worked with genetic families living in Canada and Australia; however we encourage you to contact our office and speak to someone in the Snowflakes Program to discuss your specific situation.

We are just beginning IVF – if we have remaining embryos, will you work with us?

Yes. Please contact our office to discuss preliminary medical testing to ensure an efficient adoption.

Our clinic wants to know exactly what we would want done with our frozen embryos if we were to die before we were able to transfer all of our embryos. Can we indicate that we want our embryos to go to Nightlight, ONLY in the case of our deaths?

Yes. We will need you to fill out the questionnaire, provide us with a Family Profile and establish what your criteria are for an adopting family. You will need to sign documents for our files stating that it is your wish for us to place your embryos for adoption in the event of your death. You will need to incorporate your wishes into your will and make our questionnaire an attachment so that the executor can make sure your wishes are fulfilled. You will also need to notify your clinic and have subsequent infectious disease tests performed as well as sign any documents they require to release your embryos to our agency. Please contact our office for additional information.

THE LEGALITY OF EMBRYO ADOPTION

Is there legal precedence for the adoption of frozen embryos?

No. Currently there are no states with laws governing embryo adoption. Nightlight uses the same steps and similar forms to those used in traditional adoption. It is our hope that instead of creating a new set of laws, the current laws for adoption will simply be expanded to include embryos.

What are the legal issues with embryo adoption?

The adoption agreement and relinquishment forms are legal contracts between the two families. As there are no laws regarding adoption of embryos, we have created the contract to match the current position of the courts that the embryos are property. The contract covers the transfer of property and also includes additional adoption language. These legal forms are signed and executed *prior* to the embryos being shipped to the adoptive parents' clinic and *before* the embryos are implanted in the adoptive mother.

Isn't this just surrogacy?

No. In surrogacy, an agreement is made for a woman to carry a pregnancy for the benefit of the intended parents. In our program the genetic parents relinquish all rights to the child prior to implantation. The child that the adoptive mother carries is the child that the adoptive couple will parent.

Are there any states that place restrictions on the shipping of embryos?

Yes. **New York** does not allow embryos to be shipped *into* the state; this is due to their strict human tissue laws. If your embryos are stored in NY, we are able to ship them to a clinic in any other state for the adoptive family.

PROGRAM FEES

Are there any costs for us to place our embryos for adoption?

There are no agency or program fees for you to place your embryos for adoption. You only need to continue storage for your embryos throughout the adoption process.

Are we reimbursed any of our costs for our infertility treatment?

No. Adopting families do not pick up any costs prior to being matched with you. In a traditional domestic adoption, only expenses directly related to the pregnancy may be covered. Therefore, in the case of an embryo adoption, the only costs covered are fees directly associated with the placement: labwork, transportation preparation fees, medical records fees or shipping fees.

Does the adopting family help with any of the storage fees?

No. Once a match is made, the embryos are shipped to the adopting family's clinic at the adopting family's expense.

THE EMBRYO ADOPTION PROCESS

What are the steps involved in placing my embryos for adoption?

1. **Application Phase-**
 - a) Fill out the Embryo Genetic Parent Questionnaire including all medical health history
 - b) Sign the Authorization for Release of Health Information and Decision to place embryos letter
 - c) Obtain copies of all sperm donor and/or egg donor profiles and contracts (contracts are for egg donors only)
 - d) Create a Family Profile - Create a family profile including pictures of you and your children (baby pictures are fine), a 'Dear Adoptive Family' letter, and a short autobiography (instructions are included in the application packet).
 - e) Send the paperwork listed above to Nightlight Christian Adoptions
2. **Pre-Matching Interview** – Once we receive all your application materials, our social worker will contact you to discuss the criteria you have for the prospective adoptive family as any desired future contact.
3. **Matching Phase** – You will receive a profile of an adoptive family that meets your preferences. You let us know if you would like to place your embryos with them. Once you've selected a family, we will send your Family Profile and medical health history to them. If they agree to adopt the embryos, we have a match!
4. **Contract Phase** – You will receive an Embryo Relinquishment document and an Embryo Adoption Agreement to be signed and notarized designating the placement of your embryos with the family you have selected.
5. **Travel coordination (and possible blood testing)** - We will send the embryology reports and infectious disease test results to the adoptive mother's doctor. The doctor will let us know whether or not additional labs are needed before the embryos can be accepted into the new facility. We will contact you to facilitate additional blood testing if necessary.
6. **Fill out an embryo release form** to allow your clinic to release your embryos for travel.
7. **Transport of your embryos is scheduled by Nightlight.**
8. **Post-Adoption** - In accordance with your wishes, we will contact you with any information regarding the outcome of the frozen embryo transfer and/or birth and development of the child(ren).

What are the current requirements for blood testing?

You must agree to do any blood testing required by the adopting parents' doctor. If you had blood testing done for infectious diseases when your in-vitro fertilization occurred, but have not had blood testing done at least six months after that date, it's possible you will be asked to have your blood drawn and tested again. Anonymous egg and sperm donors are not required to

have updated testing. They were already screened as an anonymous donor and are therefore already considered “eligible donors.” You were likely screened as a “sexually intimate partner” and therefore did not have all the required tests.

The current FDA mandated blood tests include:

1. HIV 1 and 2
2. HTLV I/II
3. Hepatitis B surface antigen
4. Hepatitis B Core Antibody (IgG/IgM)
5. Hepatitis C Antibody
6. RPR (Syphilis)
7. CMV IgG/IgM
8. Gonorrhea/Chlamydia culture
9. Blood typing.
10. Rh factor

If your IVF was done on or after May 25, 2005, you may also be asked to fill out a Donor Risk Assessment Questionnaire and have a Donor Physical Evaluation. This is due to a change in the FDA donor assessment protocol.

Why do we need to provide a Family Profile?

Your family profile allows the adoptive family to get to know a little bit about you, just as their profile allowed you to get to know them. Depending upon the relationship you maintain with your adoptive family it will also be something they can share with any children born as part of the story of their adoption and birth.

How long after we let you know that we want to place our embryos through your agency will we be matched with an adopting family? Generally between 4-9 months. You must have all your application paperwork turned in before we can seek a match.

How long before the embryos are moved from our clinic?

After a match is found, generally 1-2 months of paperwork, subsequent blood testing, and shipping coordination are required before the embryos can travel.

Is there a way for us to expedite the process?

Yes. You could choose to have the agency select the family who will adopt your embryos for you; however, you would still need to complete all the application paperwork and the pre-matching interview. You can also significantly speed up the process by completing all your paperwork in a timely manner and keeping your criteria open.

THE ADOPTING FAMILY

What are the basic requirements for an adopting family?

The agency requires that the adopting family must have completed a Home Study. This study is the same home study used to evaluate and educate adopting parents in traditional Domestic adoptions. The adopting mother must also be able to carry a child to term. (Additional eligibility requirements are listed on the enclosed form.)

Can single parents adopt through Snowflakes?

On the application we ask if you are open to placing with a single mom. We will work with single moms, however in our experience we have had few families open to placing embryos with a single mom.

Can couples who do not have an infertility diagnosis adopt embryos?

Yes, however you will decide to place your embryos with a family who is looking to expand their family through embryo adoption whether or not they have experienced infertility. The number of existing children in the adoptive family may or may not be a factor you consider during the selection process.

What is a Home Study?

The mandatory home study adoptive families must complete is required by the state for all adoptions and is an evaluation and education tool to help us determine the adoptive family’s preparedness to parent through adoption. It typically consists of 80% education and 20% screening. There are three parts to the homestudy including: **paperwork** (fingerprinting, references, medical evaluations, etc.); **education** (through the social worker, CPR/First Aid classes, adoption classes, books, etc.) and **interviews with a social worker**. The most important component is the educational portion as families explore their attitudes, plans and feelings regarding adoption and how they will explain their child’s unique conception and birth.

THE MATCHING PROCESS

How are we matched with an adopting family?

Both you and prospective adopting parents provide Nightlight with information about yourselves and indicate the characteristics that are important to you in a family. You will indicate your preferences regarding the age, religion, income, work plans, prior marriages, and race of the adopting family, as well as your preferred level of future contact. When we have an adopting family on file that matches your criteria, their Family Profile is sent to you for consideration/selection. If you select the adopting family, then your Family Profile and medical health history is sent to them for consideration/selection. If they accept, you have been matched.

Does this type of adoption have to be open adoption?

Open adoption simply means the child's records are not sealed from him or her. By providing a family profile and medical health history, this adoption is considered an open adoption. Any contact between the families and/or children (including no contact, agency mediated, or direct contact) is arranged by mutual agreement.

As you explore your thoughts on communication with the adoptive family and the children born from this adoption, our social workers are available to answer any questions or discuss concerns you may have. You may also choose to be connected with families who have placed embryos and are willing to talk with other families about their experiences. If you are interested in this, please contact our office.

What if we would prefer an alternate arrangement? Would you still be able to help us place our embryos for adoption?

We will do our best to accommodate your wishes. We would still need you to provide our office with all the necessary paperwork to place your embryos for adoption. Please contact our office for more information.

May adoptive families be on a traditional adoption list AND work with embryo adoption?

Once an adoptive family is ready to be matched with a placing family, we require that they work with only one adoption program. At that point the family needs to be ready to commit to the embryos (or birthparents) they are matched with.

How is embryo adoption different from traditional adoption concerning risk?

Genetic parents differ from a "typical" traditional birthparent in several ways. A woman placing her born child for adoption may be unprepared for the emotions she will feel upon her child's birth and may choose to parent her baby. In an embryo adoption the genetic parents are typically older, have a family, understand the demands of parenting a child or children and fully understand that they cannot emotionally and/or financially add additional children to their family. Most genetic families have had time to contemplate their options while their embryos are in storage.

What if we decide that we cannot place our embryos for adoption?

If you have doubts about placing your embryos, please just contact our office immediately and we will place your file on hold. Once you are matched, you will sign a relinquishment which transfers your ownership rights of the embryos to the adoptive parents before they travel to the adoptive family's clinic. You have three business days from the date you sign the relinquishment in which to notify the agency that you no longer wish to place your embryos.

Approximately how long does it take to get matched and to get to the travel stage?

- **About 6-12 months.**
- Application paperwork usually takes **1-2 months** to complete and submit
- Matching usually takes **3-6 months** depending on the adopting families who are currently in the program, what your criteria are for adopting parents, and your background. Fewer criteria open the door for more potential matches!
- Legal document notarization and embryo travel coordination usually takes between **1-4 months**.
- In total, placement of your embryos will probably occur **5-12 months** after you submit your application. Each adoption is unique!

How many embryos will the Adoptive Family be matched with in total?

The number of embryos you have will determine the number of embryos a family receives. The adopting family adopts all of your embryos. If the adoptive family does not become pregnant with the embryos they adopt from you, they have the opportunity to be matched with up to two additional genetic families.

Can the Adoptive Family specify the gender of their adopted embryo(s)?

No. Each of the embryos in our program are equally important and therefore we do not require that they undergo the genetic testing necessary to determine the sex of the embryo. Just like in other pregnancies, families will be “surprised” with the sex of the baby.

Will Snowflakes work with us if we have only one or two frozen embryos?

Yes! Every embryo is a life that deserves a chance.

SHIPPING OF THE EMBRYOS

Do we ship the embryos to your facility?

No. We are **not** a storage facility; we are only an adoption agency.

When are the embryos shipped?

Nightlight coordinates with your clinic and the adoptive family's clinic to schedule transportation of the embryos. Embryos are shipped to the adopting family's clinic after families are matched, after the adoption agreement and relinquishments are signed, and after we have made sure that all the requirements of the clinic, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and of the state into which they are being transferred have been met.

How are the embryos shipped?

The embryos will be shipped via Federal Express in a dry shipper. A dry shipper is a tank cooled with liquid Nitrogen to -196 degrees Celsius that keeps the embryos safe while traveling.

FROZEN EMBRYO TRANSFER (FET)

How many embryos may be transferred per cycle?

We require that our families limit the number of embryos transferred to the number that they are willing to carry to term in the event that all the embryos attach. Generally, we encourage families to transfer no more than three embryos.

If an Adoptive family becomes pregnant with multiples, may they selectively reduce the pregnancy?

We specifically require that our adopting families agree not to selectively reduce the number of fetuses that have begun developing. For this reason we recommend not transferring more than three embryos at a time. If our prohibition against selective reduction at any stage, for any reason, makes you uncomfortable, Snowflakes may not be right for you.

What is the success rate for thawing and viability of embryos?

Through Snowflakes, 2227 embryos have been thawed for transfer of which 55% (1225) were viable. However, the success rate for frozen embryo transfer varies by each clinic. The national average overall thaw success rate is 51%. With better freezing and thawing techniques, this percentage is likely to increase.

What is the likelihood of a multiple pregnancy with frozen embryo transfer?

Our understanding is that multiple births are much rarer with frozen embryo cycles than with “fresh” embryo transfers. But this is in no way a guarantee that families will not have multiples. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the Snowflakes moms who have achieved a pregnancy have carried multiples.

What is the success rate of pregnancies among Snowflakes families who have had embryo transfers?

To date, our families have completed 474 transfers resulting in a pregnancy success rate of 43%.

As of May 2009, 203 children have been born [153 families (including 26 families with sibling pregnancies): 37 sets of twins, 6 sets of triplets], and 13 more moms are due with 16 babies (including 1 set of twins and 1 set of triplets).

There are always families with recent transfers awaiting pregnancy test results and more families scheduling transfers.

POST ADOPTION and BIRTH

Will we be notified of the outcome of our Adoptive Family's transfer attempts?

Yes. Unless you have indicated to our office otherwise we will contact you to tell you the outcome of the adoptive family's embryo transfer as soon as we have information for you.

If pregnancy is achieved will we be notified when the baby is born?

Yes. Unless you have indicated to our office otherwise, once we have heard from the adoptive parents we will notify you of the baby's birth.

What kind of contact will we have with the Adoptive Family after the child(ren) are born?

You may choose to correspond through the agency or directly to each other. During your pre-matching interview with the social worker you will indicate what type of contact arrangement you would like with the adopting family and we will match you accordingly. Many of our families communicate through e-mail. As your relationship grows you may choose to expand the arrangement you initially had with the family. You may also choose not to maintain contact with the adoptive family but leave the door open for genetic siblings to contact each other when they are older.

What if pregnancy is achieved and there are still embryos remaining?

All embryos will be released to the adoptive family in a relinquishment and they will initially have one year in which to thaw and transfer as many embryos as are needed. If more time is needed, we will request that you sign another relinquishment for a specified length of time. If the adoptive family decides that they are unable to keep the embryos for use at a later date, the responsibility for the embryos reverts back to you, and you will be responsible for deciding how you wish to use your embryos, whether for yourself, or placing them with another family.

What if a pregnancy is not achieved?

If an adoptive family does not become pregnant after thawing and/or implantation of all the embryos adopted, they have the opportunity to be matched with up to two additional families. If none of those adoptions result in a child, the adoptive family can choose to do a Re-Match through Snowflakes and have the opportunity to be matched with additional genetic families. They could also choose to use their homestudy to pursue a domestic or international adoption.

How many post adoption reports are required after the birth of the child(ren)?

We require that adoptive families complete one post adoption report when their child is six weeks old through their home study agency. In addition, we require that they provide us with pictures and updates of the child(ren) three additional times during the first year and once a year thereafter. This correspondence should be separate from the information they share with you and serves as our way of knowing how the family is doing. It can help us provide the adoptive family with any additional services or referrals as necessary.

ADDITIONAL ADOPTION RESOURCES

Child Welfare Information Gateway, <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>, is a great resource for families in any stage of the adoption process as it provides publications and links on many adoption topics.

Focus On The Family, has been a supporter of our program since July 1999, www.family.org.

Hannah's Prayer, a Christian support network for couples facing "fertility challenges", www.hannah.org

SART - Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology an affiliate organization of ASRM, <http://www.sart.com/home.html>

ASRM - American Society for Reproductive Medicine - www.asrm.org

Resolve - a national organization for the education and support of infertility www.resolve.org

Tapestry Books, www.tapestrybooks.com, devoted to selling books on adoption.

Adoptive Families Magazine, www.adoptivefamilies.org.

Adopting For Tomorrow, Source For Adoption, Foster Care & Parenting - www.adoptingtomorrow.com

If your question is not answered and you would like it added to the list, please e-mail Snowflakes at info@nightlight.org.