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AGENCY POLICIES & PROCEDURES FOR HOME STUDY SERVICES

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is committed to providing quality services to all clients of the agency.

The staff of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. acts with sensitivity to effectively address the unique needs of Prospective Adoptive Parents and Prospective Birth Parents and all individuals with whom we work.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. does not give preferential treatment to anyone with respect to the placement of children for adoption.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. provides adoption services ethically to ensure that all adoptions take place in the best interests of children and preventing the abduction, exploitation, sale, or trafficking of children. The agency prohibits anyone from giving money to as payment for a child or as inducement to release a child.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is committed to treating all persons with respect, dignity, and compassion and welcomes all persons regardless of race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, age, nationality, or disability. Pursuant to 18 NYCRR 421.3 (d), Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. prohibits discrimination and harassment against applicants for adoption services on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, religion, or disability. Forever Families Through Adoption Inc. shall take reasonable steps to prevent such discrimination or harassment by staff and volunteers, promptly investigate incidents of discrimination and harassment, and take reasonable and appropriate corrective disciplinary action if such incidents occur.

The adoption home study process is explained and reviewed in detail with clients of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. The agency's adoption home study services and practices are fully disclosed to prospective clients, including eligibility/home study approval criteria and fees. Prospective Adoptive Parents are provided a Fee Agreement similar to the one they will be expected to sign.

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Prospective Adoptive Parents' Responsibilities

Required paperwork must be completed by Prospective Adoptive Parents in a timely manner and the appropriate fees must be submitted with the paperwork or when billed.

Prospective Adoptive Parents must retain the home study services of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. before work may commence. This includes the following:

- Initial overview of process and agency services via telephone, email, written materials or possibly free informational meetings;
- Attendance at the required orientation meeting, if applicable;
- The review and execution of the Fee Agreement, and submission of the Fee Agreement to the agency with the appropriate fee;
- The review, execution, and submission of the Adoption Application Form to the agency.

Prospective Adoptive Parents reserve the right to terminate the services of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. at any time as per the Fee Agreement.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is of utmost importance. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will not intentionally exchange identifying information about you unless you agree otherwise. In working with you, however, it is often necessary to coordinate with physicians, social workers, adoption counselors, attorneys; court officials and others service providers. During this process, information about you will be shared on a "need to know" basis. You hereby authorize us to release non-identifying information about you with others as necessary.

You understand that during the course of the adoption, your identity may become known to numerous persons and institutions, including, but not limited to, medical providers, hospitals, courts, social workers, adoption counselors, and other service providers. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. cannot control the actions of these persons and institutions.

Information about you may be obtained by accidental disclosure by us, or through many other sources. You should also understand that there are legal methods of tracing a child placed for adoption through adoption registries, vital statistic records, school and medical records, and the work of confidential intermediaries. Further, when your adoptive child becomes an adult, it is likely that your child will have access to the identities of the birth parents. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. cannot and does not guarantee confidentiality now or in the future.

Client Files

Each client has a case file. All correspondence regarding the Prospective Adoptive Parent's adoption home study is carefully recorded and kept in their confidential file. This includes:

- Agency documents completed by the client
- Notes of any telephone or in person contact with the client
- Legal documents pertaining to their case
- Notes by social worker/adoption counselor regarding counseling or home study services
- Home Studies
- All correspondence received or sent on the clients' behalf
- All documents or correspondence regarding a child

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Fee Agreement

The Fee Agreement is provided to Prospective Adoptive Parents. Work will not begin on the home study until this Agreement is read, understood, executed, and in the possession of an agency representative. The Fee Agreement is a binding legal agreement and Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. reserves the right to collect from the clients any earned unpaid fees to the agency. The Fee Agreement explains, in detail, all services provided by the agency and fees charged by the agency.

Adoption Application

All Prospective Adoptive Parents must complete the agency's Adoption Application Form provided prior to home study services being provided. Prospective Adoptive Parents must review the Application carefully and complete the Application in its entirety. Prospective Adoptive Parents are asked to return the Application, along with the Fee Agreement, and submit with payment to the agency, only after thorough review and completion when they are ready to proceed.

All Prospective Adoptive Parents must inform FFTA as soon as there are any changes in circumstances which might require FFTA to obtain any additional or updated documents or write an update/addendum to the home study report. Such as changes include those related to marital status, primary residence, employment, finances, medical situation, pregnancy, or adoption/matched with any other resource.

Client Expenses Account

Each client of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is required to deposit funds into the agency Client Expenses Account so that Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. is able to submit payment directly to outside providers, as authorized by the Prospective Adoptive Parents, when services are rendered in connection with their adoption home study. The Fee Agreement provides, in detail, the purpose of the Client Expenses Account, and a thorough review and discussion takes place at the orientation.

Home Study

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. ensures that the home study process fully complies with New York State regulations. The Prospective Adoptive Parents and/or any child or other household member will be interviewed by a social worker or adoption counselor at least once in their home to ensure that the Prospective Adoptive Parents are ready and able to adopt. During the home study the social worker or adoption counselor reviews the adoption process in detail to ensure the Prospective Adoptive Parents' full understanding. Discussions include reasons for adoption, the needs of children available for adoption, concerns or questions about the process, the psychological issues that surround adoption, the impact on the family, and characteristics of the applicants including age, health, marital status, fertility, family composition and other topics. In compliance with state and federal regulations, applicants are asked for references, medical reports, child abuse clearances, Staff Exclusion List and criminal history. New York State requires Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. to conduct criminal, child abuse, and Staff Exclusion List clearances on prospective adoptive parents, even when they have been pre-certified by a court or have had a home study completed by an outside agency or private social worker or adoption counselor. The home study preparer will complete a report in accordance with New York State law and Forever Families Through Adoption guidelines. The Prospective Adoptive Parents will have access to the written report prior to finalizing to offer any suggestions/comments or corrections. The Prospective Adoptive Parents will be required to provide written approval in order for the report to be finalized.

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An **Updated** Home Study visit and report will be required by Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. within twelve months of the initial or most recent updated report and continue on an annual basis through finalization. It is the Prospective Adoptive Parents responsibility to maintain current documents and a current Home Study at Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. Updated Home Study visit/reports will also be in the home of the Prospective Adoptive Parents and any other child/ren or residents of the home must also be present and interviewed again. All supporting documents must remain current for the pre-placement and updated visit/report. Any changes in circumstances which might require an addendum/update to the Home Study report must be reported to Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. Changes that are to be reported include, but are not limited to, changes in marital status, primary residence, persons living in the home, employment, finances, medical situation, pregnancy, or adoption elsewhere. This notification to the agency must be timely and information complete.

The post-placement home study(ies) will be conducted after the placement of a child. The same procedure is followed as the pre-placement report. Fees for home study services are charged to the Prospective/Adoptive Parents as set forth in the Fee Agreement.

Pursuant to section 372-e of the NYS Social Services Law, if your application is not acted upon by the completion of an adoption home study within six (6) months or if your application has been rejected for any reason, you may apply to NYS OCFS for a fair hearing. In order to seek a fair hearing, applicants should contact NYS OCFS, Special Hearings Bureau, 52 Washington St., Rensselaer, NY 12144, (518) 474-6022 or (800) 345-5437.

Adoption/Parent Training

Prospective Adoptive Parents are required by Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. to complete a minimum of ten (10) hours of adoption/parent training as suggested by NY State regulations and mandated by the Hague Adoption Convention and the Universal Accreditation Act ("UAA"). Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will also provide suggested courses and available resources for completing such training. The training may include attendance at conferences or workshops, on-line adoption courses, additional written materials, and counseling, and the specific issues related to the adoption of a particular child. Prospective Adoptive Parents are responsible for contracting with other training service providers directly and must provide certificates or other proof of course attendance and completion in order for Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. to approve and ensure that the Prospective Adoptive Parents have received the appropriate adoption/parent training. Infant CPR and discipline training courses are required. Additionally, Prospective Adoptive Parents are required to read and accept Forever Families Through Adoption's Discipline and Corporal Punishment Policy.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. will provide written information to Prospective Adoptive Parents regarding baby safety as recommended by OCFS. This information includes Sleep Safety, Play Safety, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS), and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

Complaint Resolution Process

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. wants to ensure that you are completely satisfied with the adoption process when you work with Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. As a prospective client, you are receiving this policy so that you are aware of the complaint procedures prior to retaining our services. If at any time throughout the process, you believe that any of the services or activities of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. raise an issue of compliance with applicable regulations, policies, laws, the Hague Convention, the UAA, the Intercountry Adoption Act (IAA) or the regulations implementing the IAA, you should communicate your concerns directly to the employee of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. with whom you have the complaint.

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If, after your initial verbal communication, you are still not satisfied, please contact the Executive Director, Joy S. Goldstein. If still not resolved within five (5) business days, you must submit a written complaint, signed and dated, to the Executive Director and provide a copy to the President of the Board of Directors. The Executive Director will have thirty (30) days to respond in writing to your request. An expedited review in ten (10) days will be provided for complaints that are time-sensitive or involve allegations of fraud.

If you remain dissatisfied after receiving a response from the Executive Director, you may continue the process through Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s Board of Directors or with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Where applicable, you may also contact the U.S. Department of State and/or the New York State Office of Children and Family Services by filling out a complaint form or writing a letter that fully explains your complaint.

Submit copies of all letters and papers that explain your complaint to:

The Department of State
Attention U.S Central Authority
U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs,
Office of Children's Issues
Adoption Unit (SA-29)
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, New York 12144-2796
Phone: (518) 473-7793
Fax: (518) 486-7550

To submit a complaint, if applicable, you may also use the Hague Complaint Registry web site, <https://adoptionusca.state.gov/HCRWeb/Welcome>. You may submit the complaint electronically or print out the form and fax it to the US Central Authority at (202) – 736-9080. The forms may also be requested by calling the Department of State at (888) 407-4747.

Please be advised that, as required by the State Department, in order to maintain compliance with The Hague Convention Regulations and the UAA, your complaint may only be filed with the Department of State after you have presented the problem to the agency.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. permits any birth parent, prospective adoptive parent, or adoptive parent, or adoptee to lodge a signed and dated complaint about any of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s services or activities (including its use of supervised providers) that he or she believes raises an issue of compliance with the Convention, the IAA, the UAA, the regulations implementing the IAA or UAA, or State Law directly with Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.. Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. advises such individuals of the additional procedures available to them if they are dissatisfied with Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s response to their complaint.

No person may be discouraged from, nor retaliated against in any way, for: voicing or filing a written complaint; expressing a grievance; providing information in writing or interviews to an accrediting entity on Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.'s performance; or questioning the conduct of or expressing an opinion about the performance of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. This topic is part of all employees' training.

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Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. utilizes a quality improvement program in order to improve its adoption services as needed. The Executive Director and Senior Agency Counsel are responsible for this program, and they will review all complaints and Client Satisfaction Survey results with staff during scheduled Quality improvement meetings in order to address any issues and to improve operations.

Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. looks forward to working with you and we encourage you to ask any questions or express any concerns you may have at any time.

We have received and reviewed this document and intend to proceed with the services provided by Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.

Adoptive Parent

Date

Adoptive Parent

Date