

Private Domestic Adoption

What is the adoption process, and what are the costs?

Private adoptions account for 20% of domestic adoptions.

There are three types of domestic adoption: kinship, public, or private. Kinship adoptions occur among blood relatives. Public adoptions are done through the foster care system. Private adoptions are done through private businesses and are usually infant adoptions ([Children's Bureau 2022](#)). Among private domestic adoptions, sixty to seventy percent of adoptive parents were matched with a birth mother within a year ([Adoptive Families 2018](#)). Current wait times may be longer due to COVID-19 (Gift of Hope Adoption, personal communication). In 2020, there were 95,306 domestic adoptions:

- 60% public
- 20% step-parents
- 20% private (not including step-parents; [NCFA 2022](#)).

The adoption process is well-regulated in MO.

Private domestic adoptions are usually carried out by an adoption agency or an adoption attorney. The first step for prospective adopters is a home study which includes documentation, in-home visit, and home inspection ([RsMO 453.070](#)). Once the home study has been



Research Highlights

There were about 20,000 private domestic adoptions in 2020.

A juvenile court must approve an adoption.

In private domestic adoption, adoptive families pay for all expenses related to the adoption.

completed, if the adoptive parents do not already know the birth mother, a profile of the adoptive family is created. The birth mother selects the adoptive family from their profile. Before adoptive parents take physical custody of a child, a written [report](#) regarding the child (e.g., family medical history, details about siblings) and the home study report must be filed with the juvenile division of the county court ([RsMO 453.026](#)).

In MO, the birth mother must wait at least two days after the birth to terminate parental rights and consent to the adoption. The birth father must also terminate parental rights and consent to the adoption ([RsMO 453.030](#)).

To be considered the birth father, the man's name needs to be on the birth certificate, they need to be married to the birth mother, have acted as a prospective father (e.g., providing financial support, attending doctor's appointments), or filed for paternity in court within 15 days of the infant's birth. If he meets any of these categories, his consent is needed for the adoption ([RsMO 453.030](#)). However, if the birth father is unknown, consent is not needed ([RsMO 453.040](#)).

Next both parties attend juvenile court of transfer of custody, consent to terminate parental rights, and the petition for adoption is submitted (RsMO 453.030). Before the adoption is finalized, adoptive families must complete a few more steps.

- After 6 months, a postplacement assessment to ensure child welfare is conducted (RsMO 453.077).
- Adoptive parents must meet the unique legal considerations for Native American children and those born in other states (RsMO 210.565; 453.500).
- Adoptive parents must account for all money spent on the adoption (RsMO 453.075).

At the finalization hearing, adoptive parents are given the decree of adoption. The finalization hearing is also the last moment a post adoption contact agreement (PACA) between birth parents and adoptive parents can be filed and approved by the court (RsMO 453.077, 453.080). A PACA is an agreement between the birth parents and adoptive parents on the amount of contact (letters, phone call, visits) that he birth parents and child will have. A PACA is enforced by the court (RsMO 453.015).

Private adoptions are expensive.

Nationally, the average cost of private domestic adoptions from 2010 to 2021 was about \$33,000 (Hanlon 2022). Adoptive families are responsible for all costs related to adoption. According to RsMO 453.075, adoptive families may pay for

- medical expenses relating to the birth and the infant
- counseling for the birth parent or child
- preplacement and placement assessments
- legal expenses, court costs, and travel of the birth parents related to the adoption
- living expenses (food, gas, rent, clothing) of the birth parents and child
- other expenses the court deems reasonable

Table 1. Results from self-reported survey data of 1,061 U.S. adoptions finalized in 2016 and 2017. Table from [Adoptive Families 2018](#)

	Agency	Adoption Attorney
home study fee	\$2,433	\$2,152
document preparation and authentication	\$595	\$465
adoption agency application and program fees	\$18,826	\$4,429
adoption consultant fees	\$2,637	\$2,252
attorney fees	\$4,435	\$13,780
advertising/ networking	\$2,067	\$1,005
birth family counseling	\$1,345	\$873
birth mother expenses	\$3,411	\$5,604
foster/ interim care	\$282	\$107
travel expenses	\$2,263	\$1,998
post-placement expenses	\$2,076	\$989
all other expenses	\$2,869	\$4,266
average total	\$43,239	\$37,829

The average amount spent by adoptive families is found in **Table 1**. These averages compare a 2-year period, rather than a 10-year period as described earlier. As such, the numbers may vary. All payments must be accounted to the court (RsMO 453.075). Payments to the birth parents for things outside of this scope are defined as child trafficking (RsMO 568.175).

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