Snowflakes® Embryo Adoption Program

We get it. You are not alone.

A letter to you from a Snowflakes Adopting Family

Infertility was not on our radar when in the fall of 2016 we received confirmation: Chris had a low sperm count. We were stunned by the number—6 sperm, so specific!—and dismayed when months of treatment we unsuccessful.

The worst of it was the feeling of isolation. Around us, our friends seemed to get pregnant with ease and pop out babies, and while some were more comforting to us than others, we felt like pariahs. For Chris, there was the sense that this somehow made him less of a man, less worthy of being a dad or around fathers. For Kari, having a baby was all she had really wanted in life. The thought of never having a child was the death of a dream.
We cried at dinner parties. We declined baby shower invites. We became numb, the kind of numb that comes when you are terrified you may never again feel joy. The feeling of being completely alone was like suffocating under a great weight. We will never forget that feeling.

The statistics, however, say we are not alone. Far from it. One in 8 couples in the United States deal with infertility. That is over ten percent of couples! For many IUI or IVF is the answer. Couples with severe male-factor infertility (like us) are not usually considered good candidates for typical fertility treatments.

Doors kept shutting, one by one. Until we called the Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program. They sounded kind over the phone. They gave us the first 'yes' we had heard in months. They sounded hopeful.

We are happy to tell you that now we have two children because of our embryo adoption through Snowflakes. Children that are curious about the world. Children who are our privilege to love, cherish, and teach. The ups-and-downs of parenting can be YOURS, too. We know it might not feel like it right now. It might feel crazy, sad, weird, scary, frustrating. It might feel like another rabbit hole that leads to failure. We have been there. We know Snowflakes can offer hope.

We do not feel alone anymore. Through infertility and embryo adoption, we have met so many amazing people – social workers, medical professionals and families just like you. We are excited to raise our kids alongside other Snowflakes families, to raise awareness everywhere we go about embryo adoption, and to hear more stories of people conquering isolation and fear with hope and community.

Chris and Kari S.

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How does the Snowflakes program work?

I. *Required Medical Screening*

To be able to begin the Snowflakes program, the adopting mother must provide a letter completed by her physician confirming that an examination has taken place and that it is reasonable to believe she can carry a pregnancy to full-term and give birth to a child. If the physician determines that the adopting mother is unable to carry a pregnancy, the Snowflakes program will allow the use of a gestational carrier secured through a licensed provider.

II. *An Adoption Home Study*

All adopting families working with the Snowflakes program must complete a pre-adoptive assessment (often referred to as a "home study"). Snowflakes provides a lower-cost service, similar to a home study, called a Snowflakes Family Evaluation (SFE). SFE services are provided in all 50 states and internationally. The assessment and evaluation process includes the completion of many documents, a physical examination of both parents, a financial review, embryo adoption education, criminal background checks, and at least one home visit.

III. *Matching*

The Snowflakes team matches adopting families with placing parent families (donors) who fit the criteria both families request to the best of our ability. Many of our families express great appreciation regarding their final match selection. Family profiles are used to educate both the placing and adopting families about one another. The process begins with the placing family. The families involved mutually agree upon all matches.

The Snowflakes team is also in communication with the adopting family's partner fertility clinic of choice regarding embryology reports and results of infectious disease screening.

IV. *Contracts*

After a match has been agreed upon, Snowflakes will provide a contract to finalize the adoption. A mutually agreed upon future communications plan becomes a part of the contract. We realize that relationships are often established over time. Snowflakes allows you to choose the initial level of contact with flexibility for the future. Open relationships are encouraged in our program for the benefit of all: placing and adopting parents and children. Anonymous placements are not offered through the program.

V. *Partner Fertility Clinics and Embryo Transport*

Snowflakes arranges for the shipment of embryos to our partner clinics. We have found working with partner clinics helps our families move more quickly toward their ultimate motivation for choosing embryo adoption: achieving a pregnancy and childbirth. It also provides safety for the embryos being shipped. You will need to select a Snowflakes preferred partner clinic for your frozen embryo transfer and establish yourself as a patient at that clinic. A Snowflakes Inquiry Specialist will help you identify a clinic.

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Am I eligible to adopt embryos through Snowflakes?

All adopting families are screened via a family evaluation (or home study) to ensure they fit both the state and Nightlight Christian Adoptions Board of Directors' qualifications for adopting families. This evaluation is a process to prepare families through education. It also provides confidence to placing families that adopting families have completed a formal vetting process.

Here are the standard eligibility requirements:

PHYSICAL:	All adoptive mothers **must provide a signed form by a physician, confirming if she is *able or not able* to carry a pregnancy without contraindications.** If it is determined the adoptive mother is not able to carry a pregnancy to term, a gestational carrier may be secured through an outside licensed provider.
COMMITMENT TO THE EMBRYOS:	The adoptive parents must agree to have **all embryos that survived the thaw transferred or re-frozen**. Snowflakes does not allow adoptive families to selectively reduce nor terminate any pregnancies achieved, unless the life of the adoptive mother is at risk. In addition, if the adoptive family has their own remaining embryos from previous IVF cycles, they **must decide what to do with those embryos before applying to Snowflakes** (see page 5 for further details).
AGE & HEALTH*:	The placing families' preferences determine the maximum and minimum age for adoptive parents. **We accept applications from families where the prospective adoptive mother is *below* the age of 45, and the prospective adoptive father is *below* the age of 55.** Applicants must give evidence of good health, which will be verified by a physical exam during the family evaluation process.
MARRIAGE:	**Married couples must be married at least 2 years.** Single women who are *truly single* (not in a relationship) are eligible to apply for the program, but the placing parents will determine if they wish to match with a single woman.
CRIMINAL RECORD:	**All applicants should be free of any misdemeanors or felonies in the past 5 years.** Any and all misdemeanor or felony charges and arrests should be reported to Nightlight, regardless of the time that has passed since a crime occurred, and even if the charge did not result in a conviction. Please speak with your Snowflakes inquiry specialist about your particular situation.
FINANCES*:	**Applicants must be able to provide a financially stable home**, which will be verified during the family evaluation process.
OPEN ADOPTION:	Snowflakes is a mutual-matching program; ***we do not have anonymous or closed placements available.*** At a minimum, the placing family will be reviewing a family profile with information about the adoptive family, and will be updated about the birth of a child. All children who result from the adoption will be able to access their file at the age of 18.
ADDITION OF OTHER CHILDREN:	**The applicants' youngest or newest addition to their family must be in their home for at least nine months before they can pursue an embryo adoption through Snowflakes.** This requirement is designed to provide adequate time for attachment and bonding with the child before another child is brought into the family. ***Concurrent participation in more than one adoption program is prohibited.*** Additionally, clients must end all fertility treatments and go on hold from any other adoption or embryo donation lists prior to joining the Snowflakes Program.

*Please speak with an inquiry specialist for specific requirements regarding cancer diagnosis or bankruptcy within the past 5 years.

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Frequently Asked Questions

How is embryo adoption through Nightlight different from an embryo donation through a clinic?

Most clinic donation programs will not provide any personal information about the placing (donor) family. Only minimal medical information will be provided regarding the donor. There usually is no contact between the donor or recipient families before or after childbirth. The clinic is only required to keep medical records for 7 years. Clinics do not make additional medical information on the donor family, even in the event of a medical emergency. Embryos are donated directly to the clinic and the clinic staff determines who will receive the embryos. If the donor has a large number of embryos, the clinic staff will likely divide the embryos among multiple patients waiting for donor embryos. This may result in fully-related genetic siblings living in several different families. Due to the popularity of at-home DNA testing and social media, anonymous donation is not realistic.

Snowflakes allows you access to important information about the placing family, which can help answer your child's questions about their origins and biological background. You have the opportunity to communicate with your child's placing family. No matter what type of communication level you choose, you will know that you have access to information about your child's history. Snowflake refers to a facilitated communication service or families can have direct communication with one another. Snowflakes adopting families adopt the entire set of embryos the placing family has, enabling them to potentially give birth to children who are genetic siblings of one another.

Why would placing parents choose to have ongoing communication with an adoptive family?

The placing families usually want to select the family who will adopt their embryos and know the outcome of the transfer. Since Snowflakes is committed to educating adoptive parents on talking to their children about their adoption story, placing parents may want to remain available for questions that come up over time, or be able to provide medical updates. Placing families do not want to involve themselves in your parenting choices. They simply want to know that the child is loved, secure and happy.

How will we benefit by choosing embryo adoption instead of traditional adoption of a newborn?

With embryo adoption, the adoptive moms are able to experience the joys (and challenges!) of pregnancy and labor. You also have the peace of mind of knowing you are in control of the prenatal environment. You will not have the risk of the birth mother changing her mind about the adoption placement.

Although an embryo adoption allows more control in some ways, it provides less in other ways. For one, there is no guarantee the adoption will result in a pregnancy and live birth. You cannot choose the gender of the child as you might with domestic adoption, and you cannot change your mind and choose not to accept placement of the baby for whatever reason after he or she is born.

After we enter the Snowflakes program, may we continue to participate in other adoption or fertility services?

While we understand your desire to bring home a baby as soon as possible, once you determine to apply to the Snowflakes program, **we require that you place on hold any Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) treatments and participation in other adoption programs or fertility clinic waiting lists for donor embryos.** This is because our hope for you is to be fully prepared, focused, and available to commit to the placing family with whom we are actively working to match you.

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Are the embryos pre-genetically tested?

If the placing family has had the embryos tested, those test results will be passed along to your reproductive endocrinologist along with other embryology reports. The Snowflake program does not allow adopting families to test embryos after the adoption is complete. While some medical professionals might offer PGD/PGS testing on embryos, there is not enough evidence that it is an accurate predictor of pregnancy success or failure. If there is a known condition associated with the genetic family or siblings of the embryos, we will alert you of it while you consider a potential match. *In reference to Reprod Biol Endocrinol. 2016; 14(1): 54.*

I have embryos in frozen storage from a previous IVF cycle. Am I still able to apply?

We require our adoptive families to be solely committed to the placing family and their adopted embryos. **We ask that potential adoptive families make a final decision concerning their own remaining frozen embryos *before* applying to the Snowflakes program.** Your options may include completing an FET with your embryo(s), a compassionate transfer (check with your clinic regarding this option), or thawing your embryo(s). (Sacred Heart Guardians and Shelter can offer you the option to have a burial service for your embryos, giving them the dignity and respect they deserve.)

Financial Considerations

What should we expect the total cost of embryo adoption through Snowflakes to be?

Snowflakes Program fee (fixed cost)	$9,000. *Due on an incremental payment schedule.*
Home study/family evaluation fee (variable cost)	$1,500-3,000. *Dependent on where you live and the type of family evaluation you choose to complete.*
Fertility clinic/FET fees (variable cost)	$2,500-6,000. *Paid directly to, and determined by, your Snowflakes partner clinic.*
Total estimated fees:	**$13,000-17,000**

Is the frozen embryo transfer (FET) covered by medical insurance?

We strongly encourage you to contact your insurance provider and find out what specific expenses, if any, are covered. If your insurance covers infertility treatments, many of the expenses such as medications, hormone treatments, and the FET may be covered.

Is there any financial assistance available for embryo adoption?

We suggest you look into the following adoption assistance programs:

- **Adoption Bridge:** This is a crowd-funding website where you can tell your adoption story, post pictures and videos, and keep people informed about your adoption journey. All donations from your friends and family are tax-deductible and funds raised are sent to Nightlight towards your adoption process.
- **Employee Benefits:** many companies will offer some type of adoption or infertility assistance.
- **Adoption Grants, Loans and other forms of financial assistance:** We provide a detailed overview of these options on the funding page of our website, including a downloadable excel file that includes links to organizations that offer grants and loans for embryo adoption. The Snowflakes program also has a Financial Resource Specialist on staff who is able to work directly with your family to help you explore funding opportunities.

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