

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—six 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 were, 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.

How does the Snowflakes Program work?

I. Required Medical Screening

Snowflakes requires all adoptive mothers to provide a completed form, signed by a physician, confirming that the mother does not have any contraindications to pregnancy (meaning there is no increased risk to herself or a baby if she were to carry a pregnancy full term). If the physician determines that the adoptive mother is unable to carry a pregnancy without contraindications, Snowflakes does allow families to secure the services of a gestational carrier.

II. An Adoption Home Study

All adopting families working with the Snowflakes Program must complete a pre-adoptive assessment (often referred to as an adoption 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 home study process includes the completion of criminal background checks, a physical examination of both parents, a financial review, embryo adoption education, reference letters, and at least one home visit.

III. Matching

Snowflakes matches adoptive families with placing families (embryo donors) who fit the criteria of both families to the best of our ability. The matching process begins with the placing family, and family profiles are used to educate both families about one another. Both families mutually agree upon all matches.

Snowflakes is also in communication with the adopting family's fertility clinic, chosen from our referral clinic list, regarding embryology reports and results of infectious disease screening.

IV. Contracts

After a match has been agreed upon, Snowflakes will provide a legal contract to finalize the adoption. A communication arrangement is also written into the agreement. Snowflakes allows you to choose the initial level of contact you will have with the placing family, with flexibility for the future. Open relationships are encouraged for the benefit of all: placing families, adoptive families, and the children involved. *Anonymous placements are not offered through the program.*

V. Referral Fertility Clinics and Embryo Transport

Snowflakes arranges for the transportation of embryos to our referral fertility clinics. We have found working with an established set of fertility clinics helps our families move more quickly toward their ultimate motivation for choosing embryo adoption: adding a baby to their family. In addition, it provides more safety for the embryos, as we have worked with these clinics regularly for embryo shipments. Adoptive families will need to select a fertility clinic from Snowflakes' list of referral clinics for the frozen embryo transfer (FET). Snowflakes will not contact these clinics on your behalf to set up an appointment, but will provide you with a point-of-contact at each location to connect with. A Snowflakes Inquiry Specialist will help you identify which referral fertility clinics would be the best option for your family.

Am I eligible to adopt embryos through Snowflakes?

All applicants are screened via an application and an adoption home study to ensure they fit both the state and Nightlight Christian Adoptions requirements for adoptive families. This pre-adoption assessment also helps prepare families for the unique manner in which they are growing their family and provides opportunity for education.

Here are the standard eligibility requirements:

PHYSICAL:	All adoptive mothers must provide a signed form by a physician, confirming that she is 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 viable embryos 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 make a decision regarding 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 applicants. We accept applications from families where the adoptive mother is below the age of 45, and the adoptive father is below the age of 50. Applicants must give evidence of good health, which will be verified by a physical exam during the home study process.
MARRIAGE:	Couples must be legally married for at least 2 years. Single women who are <i>truly single</i> (not in a relationship) are eligible to apply for the program; placing families 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 or arrests should be reported to Nightlight, regardless of the time that has passed since the crime occurred, and even if the charge did not result in a conviction. Please speak with your Snowflakes Inquiry Specialist about your particular situation.
DRUG/ALCOHOL USE*:	Applicants should be free of substance abuse (alcohol, prescription medications, illicit drugs) for 5 years. <i>Active marijuana or THC use by adoptive families is prohibited, regardless of whether it is legal in their state of residence.</i> Applicants must have five years of sobriety from active marijuana/THC use.
FINANCES*:	Applicants must be able to demonstrate financial stability, which will be verified during the home study process.
OPEN ADOPTION:	Snowflakes is a mutual-matching program; <u>we do not have anonymous or closed placements available.</u> 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 adoption 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 policy is designed to provide adequate time for attachment and bonding with the child before another child is brought into the family. <i>Concurrent participation in more than one adoption program is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.</i> Additionally, applicants must end all fertility treatments and go on hold from any other embryo donation lists prior to joining the Snowflakes Program.

*Please speak with an inquiry specialist for specific requirements regarding cancer diagnosis, bankruptcy within the past five years, or medical marijuana use.

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 embryo donors. Only minimal medical information will be provided and there usually is no contact between the donor and recipient families before or after birth. The fertility clinic is only required to keep medical records for seven years. Clinics do not give additional medical information on the embryo donors, even in the event of a medical emergency. Embryos are donated directly to the fertility clinic program and the program staff determines who will receive the embryos. If the donor has a large number of embryos, the program staff will likely divide the embryos among multiple patients waiting for donor embryos. This may result in full genetic siblings living in several different families.

Snowflakes allows adoptive families to access important information about the placing family, which can help answer your child's questions about their origins and biological background. No matter what type of communication level you choose, you will know that you have access to information about your child's history. Dependent on what placing and adoptive families agree upon, Snowflakes refers to a facilitated communication service or the parties can have direct communication with one another. Snowflakes will not split embryo sets under 12, which enables adoptive families to have children who are genetic siblings of one another.

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

The placing family usually wants to select an adoptive family and know the outcome of the transfer. Since Snowflakes is committed to educating adoptive parents on the importance of talking to their children about their adoption story, many placing parents 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 do adoptive families benefit by choosing embryo adoption instead of traditional adoption of a newborn?

With embryo adoption, the adoptive moms can experience the joys (and challenges!) of pregnancy and childbirth. Adoptive families also have peace of mind of knowing they are in control of the prenatal environment. They will not have the risk of the expectant mother changing her mind about the adoption placement. In all 50 states, the woman who gives birth to the child is legally his mother and her husband, if she is married, is the legal father.

Although an embryo adoption allows more control in some ways, it provides less in others. 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 infant 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.

May adoptive families continue to participate in other adoption services or fertility treatments?

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 embryo donation programs or waiting lists.** Our hope is for you to be fully prepared, focused, and available to commit to the placing family with whom we are actively working to match you.

Concurrent participation in other adoption programs is determined on a case-by-case basis. Please speak with a Snowflakes Inquiry Specialist about your particular situation.

Are the embryos pre-genetically tested?

If the placing family has had the embryos pre-genetically tested, those test results will be passed along to your reproductive endocrinologist along with other embryology reports when considering the match. **The Snowflakes Program does not allow adopting families to test embryos after the adoption is complete.** While some medical professionals might offer or even advise PGD/PGT-A testing on your adopted embryos, there is not enough evidence that it is an [accurate predictor](#) of pregnancy success or failure. If there is a known medical 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?

Snowflakes requires adoptive families to be fully committed to the placing family and their adopted embryos. **We ask all potential adoptive families make a final decision concerning their own remaining frozen embryos before applying to the Snowflakes Program.** Your options may include:

1. Completing an FET with your embryo(s)
2. Donating your remaining embryos through the Snowflakes Program
3. [Sacred Heart Guardians and Shelter](#): For embryos that are “nonviable,” this organization offers the option to have a burial service, giving them the dignity and respect they deserve.

Financial Considerations

What is the total cost of embryo adoption through Snowflakes?

Below is a breakdown of what fees should be expected when pursuing embryo adoption through Snowflakes. Please note: everybody’s adoption journey is different; there may be more or less fees associated with your adoption than what is listed down below.

Nightlight Application Fee	\$600. <i>Due upon application submission.</i>
Snowflakes Program Fee	\$8,500. <i>Due on an incremental payment schedule.</i>
Home study/family evaluation	\$1,500-\$3,000. <i>Dependent on where you live and the type of family evaluation you choose to complete.</i>
Fertility clinic/FET fees	\$4,000-\$10,000. <i>Determined by referral fertility clinic.</i>
Total estimated fees:	\$15,000-\$22,000

Is the FET covered by medical insurance?

Snowflakes strongly encourages you to contact your health insurance provider and find out what specific fertility benefits you may have under your plan. If your plan includes fertility treatment benefits, some of the expenses such as medications, hormone treatments, and the FET may be covered.

Is there any financial assistance available for embryo adoption?

Snowflakes advises the following adoption assistance programs:

- **Adoption Bridge:** A crowd-funding website where families can post their adoption journey, upload pictures and videos, and give updates to keep people informed. All donations from friends and family are tax-deductible and funds raised are sent to Nightlight to apply towards your adoption fees.
- **Employee Benefits:** Many companies will offer some type of adoption or infertility assistance. Some do specifically have embryo adoption benefits. Speak to your HR representative to learn more.

- **Adoption grants, scholarships, and other forms of financial assistance:** Snowflakes provides 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 an adoption resource specialist on staff who is able to work directly with your family to help you explore funding opportunities for both your adoption fees and medical fees.

Snowflakes looks forward to assisting you on your embryo adoption journey! If you have any questions with the above information, please contact our offices at **970-578-9700** or email info@snowflakes.org to speak with a Snowflakes Adopting Parent Inquiry Specialist.