



# nightlight®

snowflakes® embryo adoption program

*...because every child deserves a loving family*

## Snowflakes® Embryo Adoption Program

***We get it. You are not alone.***

*A letter from a Snowflakes Adoptive Family*

Infertility was not on our radar when in the fall 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 didn't do much.

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 invitations. 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'll never forget that feeling.

The stats, however, say we're not alone. Far from it. One in 8 couples deal with infertility. That's over ten percent of couples. For many, IUI or IVF is the answer. But for couples with severe male-factor infertility, like us, we aren't considered good candidates for typical fertility treatments.

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

And we're happy to tell you that we now have a son. He's 14 months old now, a wonderful child who is so curious about the world, and keeps saying, "Dada!" even though we're trying to teach him, "Mama!" We are grateful that the ups and downs of parenting are ours to have, despite the odds.

And the ups and downs can be YOURS, too. We know it might not feel like it. It might feel crazy, sad, weird, scary, frustrating. It might feel like another rabbit hole that goes nowhere. We've been there. And we know Snowflakes can offer hope.

We don't feel alone anymore. Through infertility and embryo adoption, we've met so many amazing people—social workers, medical professionals, and families just like you. We're excited to raise our kids alongside other Snowflake babies, to raise awareness everywhere we go about embryo adoption, and to hear more stories of people conquering isolation with hope and community.

*Chris & Kari S.*



## How does the Snowflakes program work?

### I. Required Medical Screening

To be able to work with the Snowflakes program, the adopting mother must be medically approved to carry a pregnancy to full term and give birth to the child. You may receive this initial approval from a medical professional of your choice. If you are unable to carry a pregnancy, you may secure a gestational carrier through a licensed provider.

### II. The Home Study

All adopters working with the Snowflakes program *must* complete a home study. Snowflakes is able to provide a home study service called a [Snowflakes Family Evaluation \(SFE\)](#) which can be completed both nationwide and internationally. Your Snowflakes inquiry specialist will help you decide if it is more efficient to complete a traditional home study with an agency in your state or a Snowflakes Family Evaluation.

### III. Matching

The Snowflakes team matches adopters with placing parents (i.e. donor families) who fit the criteria both you and the placing family set. Once a potential placing family has been identified, your family profile will be sent to them for review. A family profile is an introduction to who you are as an adopter, and what it might look like for a child to grow up in your home. If you are chosen as a match with a placing family's embryos, you will be sent their family profile, which will include the following:

- Pictures
- An autobiography
- Three generations of health history
- An egg or sperm donor profile, if applicable
- Basic medical details for the set of embryos (number of embryos, age of the genetic mother when eggs were retrieved, etc.)

The doctor at one of our partner clinics will also review detailed embryology reports and infectious disease screening for the placing parents while you consider a family profile.



### IV. Contracts

When you agree to the match, Snowflakes will provide legal contracts which are signed by both parties, transferring legal and parental rights of the embryos from the placing to the adoptive family. You will also agree to some degree of contact between yourselves and the placing family.

Although Nightlight encourages open communication between placing and adoptive parents, the degree of contact will be mutually agreed upon by both parties. The embryos being relinquished are genetic siblings to the placing parents' other child or children; **it is important that a mechanism be maintained for potential future contact, even if direct contact is not desired.** Whether you want to get to know the family or you would like to maintain more privacy, Snowflakes allows you to choose your own level of contact, with flexibility for the future. Anonymous embryo adoption is not encouraged, or offered through the Snowflakes program.

## V. Fertility Clinics and Shipping Embryos

**Snowflakes exclusively ships embryos to our partner clinics** (over 30 clinics throughout the U.S.). We have found working with our partner clinics helps our adopters move quickly towards their ultimate reason for choosing embryo adoption: achieving pregnancy and childbirth. *Communicating with fertility clinics is the most time consuming aspect of the embryo adoption process.* Having partner clinics helps improve turn-around times. While you may be able to work with a local clinic for the medical preparation, you will need to work with a partner clinic for your Frozen Embryo Transfer (FET).

*\*Please contact your Snowflakes inquiry specialist to learn about the partner clinics that are closest to you.*

### ***Am I Eligible to Adopt Embryos Through Snowflakes?***

All adopters are screened to ensure they fit both the state and the Nightlight Christian Adoptions board of directors' qualifications for adoptive families. These qualifications are designed to benefit the child and adults involved in the adoption.

<b>PHYSICAL:</b>	An adopting mother <b>must be physically able to carry a pregnancy to term</b> as determined by her attending physician. Alternatively, a gestational carrier may be secured through a licensed provider.
<b>COMMITMENT TO THE EMBRYOS:</b>	The adopting parents must agree to <b>have all surviving thawed embryos transferred or re-frozen</b> . In addition, the adopting parents must agree to carry to term and give birth to all embryos transferred; that is, they must agree not to undertake any medical procedure to eliminate or reduce the number of embryos which have implanted or carried to term.
<b>*HEALTH AND AGE:</b>	Adopting applicants must give evidence of good health, which will be verified during the home study process by medical examinations. <b>The placing family's preferences determine the allowable age of adopting parents. Because of this we have an age cut off for adopting mothers at 45, and adopting fathers at 55.</b>
<b>MARRIAGE:</b>	<b>Snowflakes has a minimum marriage requirement of 2 years.</b> Single women are eligible to apply for the program, but the placing parents will determine if they feel comfortable placing with a single woman.
<b>*FINANCES:</b>	<b>Applicants must be able to provide a financially stable home</b> , which will be verified during the home study process. This is often demonstrated by a solid economic history and an ability to live within their means.
<b>OPEN ADOPTION:</b>	Snowflakes is a mutual-matching program; <b>we do not have anonymous placements available</b> . At a minimum, the placing family will be reviewing a family profile with information about the adoptive family, and will likely want to 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. Any further contact will be decided upon by the placing and adopter, through their preferences when being matched.
<b>ADDITION OF OTHER CHILDREN:</b>	<b>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.</b> This requirement 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 not allowed.</i> 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.*

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **How is “embryo adoption” through Nightlight different from “embryo donation” that clinics offer?**

Most clinic embryo donation programs will not provide any personal information about the donor family, only their medical background. There is no contact between the families before or after the birth, even through an intermediary. The clinic is only required to keep records of the donation for seven years and additional information about the donor family is typically not released, even in the event of a medical emergency. Embryos are donated directly to the clinic and the clinic determines who receives them. If a donor family has a large number of embryos, they may be split between multiple recipients. This means there could be fully related genetic siblings in several families, living within a reasonably close geographic proximity. Due to the popularity of at home DNA testing, anonymous donation is no longer feasible, however it does make searching for genetic family a significant emotional and financial burden for a child in the future.

Snowflakes allows you access to important information about the placing family which can help answer your child’s questions about their origins. You also 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. Snowflakes is available to facilitate communication between the families, and will educate you about how to talk to your child about their unique conception.



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

The placing families usually want to select 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 are not wanting to involve themselves in your parenting choices. They simply want to know that the child is doing well, living, and being loved.

### **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.

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 accept the baby for whatever reason after he or she is born. In addition, because some families will transfer up to three embryos, you might have twins or triplets.

## 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 move forward with the Snowflakes program **we require that you place on hold any Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) treatments, 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.

## Are the embryos pre-genetically tested?

No. We do not preform PGD/PGS testing on the embryos, nor do we allow for PGD/PGS testing to be performed 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.](#)*

## Financial Considerations

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

Snowflakes Program fee:	\$9,000. <i>Due on an incremental payment schedule.</i>
Home study fee:	\$1,500-3,000. <i>Dependent on the type of home study you choose.</i>
Fertility clinic/FET fees:	\$2,500-6,000. <i>Paid directly to your Snowflakes partner clinic.</i>
<b>Total estimated fees:</b>	<b>\$13,000-17,000</b>

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

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

### Does embryo adoption qualify for the Adoption Tax Credit?

The Hope for Children Act provides a tax credit of up to \$13,170 per adopted child for families with combined incomes of \$222,180 or less. Since embryo adoption is not specifically included, we advise you to contact your tax preparer or the Internal Revenue Service directly to find out what expenses may qualify. If you are located in Georgia, you are able to finalize your adoption in court, which may increase your likelihood of qualifying for the Adoption Tax Credit.

### 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, 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 counselor on staff who is able to work directly with your family to help you explore funding opportunities.