Couple using Internet to broaden adoption search

By LAURIE SMITH ANDERSON
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"Hi. Our names are Johnny and Lucille and we've been married for five years...Although we are both healthy, we are unable to conceive a child and realize that being parents is more important to us than becoming pregnant..."

Thus, Johnny and Lucille Manela introduce themselves — via the Internet — to pregnant women looking to place their babies through adoption. In this information and computer age, the Manelas decided to avail themselves of the latest technology to broaden and, hopefully, speed their search for a baby. Their Web page includes a profile, as well as pictures of them, their dog, Higgins, and their house.

The Manelas were one of three couples to attend a recent class, sponsored by Baton Rouge General Health Center, that specifically targets adopting couples.

Adoption can be a very emotional process for couples, said medical social worker Jennifer Mittica. "Many have been through years of infertility treatments; some have lost babies. There's also a loss of privacy and there may be fears and feelings of blame, guilt, inadequacy. And now there's this indefinite waiting period..."

Meeting with other adopting couples can help ease those feelings, Mittica said. That was one reason BRGHC sponsored the class, which will be offered on a regular basis several times a year.

"These couples don't need to be in a class with pregnant women talking about childbirth, constantly reminded of an experience they missed. They have needs of their own and that's what we try to address in our class," she said.

For example, adopting couples must decide

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whether they want to work through an agency and then look at how they view "open adoption," or maintaining an ongoing relationship with the child's birth mother.

In discussing adoption, Mittica urged the use of "positive adoption language" to be more sensitive to the feelings of the parties involved. Use "parent," not "adoptive parent," she said. Use "birth parent," not "real parent." Say a child "was adopted" instead of "is adopted."

After they adopt a baby, many couples are surprised to experience "post adoption depression syndrome," the social worker said. Though different from postpartum syndrome, which is caused by hormonal fluctuations, the slump adopting parents may experience is no less real, she said.

"There's been so much stress and so many expectations that the experience can be overwhelming. Add to that lack of sleep, increased responsibilities and fears about unresolved birth parent issues and it's not really surprising," Mittica said.

Adopting couples just need to give themselves time to bond with their babies and build a sense of "entitlement" — that the child is theirs to parent.

And, finally, adopting couples should discuss when and how to tell their children that they are adopted. In the past, many families elected to keep the adoption a secret and the children never knew of or met their birth parents.

Today, that's rare, Mittica said. "Most parents tell their children about adoption little by little, explaining it in stages and answering their questions as they get older."

The Manelas said they plan to tell their child about his or her adoption and hope to maintain an open relationship with the birth mother.

Having been through several years of infertility treatments, they feel very comfortable with their decision to adopt.

"We have a lot of support and encouragement from friends, family and our church. The waiting and not knowing aren't easy, but we're ready to go forward," Lucille Manela said.

The couple decided not to set up a nursery until the baby comes because the empty room would be a daily visual reminder of their anxious anticipation.

She is the registrar of the LSU Law School and has an undergraduate degree in preschool education. He works as a commercial design consultant and teaches Sunday school to 4-year-olds.

"Our hope is to share our lives, love and faith with the child God provides," the Manelas say on their Web page. "We pray you (the birth mother) will be able to make your decision with confidence and peace knowing that you have made the best choice for yourself and your child."

The Manelas' Web page is located at their agency’s Web site, which is: www.bethany.org/
Click on "waiting families," then "Louisiana," then "Johnny and Lucille" to read their profile.