

# fiom:

## Giving up a child for adoption

Information for women/parents considering giving  
up their child for adoption



This booklet describes situations and emotions of people who have been through the same experience. The information provided offers recognition, comfort and perspective. The characters mentioned in the stories are fictional and can therefore not be used to trace or identify a certain person.

The persons depicted in this booklet are not related to the content.

## Colophon

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# Introduction

**Are you pregnant and you don't have any possibilities to take care of the child yourself? If abortion is not an option, you can consider giving your child up for adoption.**

Your child will have other parents and you give up your rights. This is a difficult and life-changing decision. To come to this decision you have to think about a lot of things. Fortunately, you will not have to make the final decision until three months after the delivery of your baby. Fiom helps you make a choice and guides you through the steps that have to be taken. Please contact us as soon as possible if you think about giving up your child. Please do not wait until after the delivery! You need time to reflect on the situation and to take care of things. This brochure provides you with information about giving your child up for adoption and all the things that have to be arranged. It can help you make an informed decision. The brochure may also be useful for your partner or other people involved.

## Who is this brochure for?

This brochure is for anyone wanting to know more about giving up a child for adoption. For example when

- you are pregnant and you think you won't be able to take care of your child;
- you know somebody having a baby who may not be able to take care of it.

## What's in this brochure?

In this brochure, you can read about what giving your child up for adoption means and how it works. It mentions the parties involved and which steps must be taken. Other options in case of an unwanted pregnancy are discussed, as well as what Fiom can do for you.

**Marja:** "I hope she grows up in a stable situation, with a father and a mother. I could not give her that. I wanted to go to parties, finish school, all the things that teenagers do. I would still not be ready for it. Even if I would become pregnant now, I would not know what I'd do. I still feel a child should be brought up by a mother and a father."

# What does giving up your child for adoption mean?

If you give up your child for adoption, all legal ties between you and your child will be cut off. Your child will legally become the child of the adoptive parents, including all the rights and duties that go with this. You no longer have any control over your child and he or she will receive the

adoptive parents' last name. Giving up your child for adoption has huge consequences. It is not a decision to take lightly. That is why a reflection period of three months after the birth is in place. A Fiom counsellor will guide you through this life-changing event.

# How does giving up a child for adoption work?

## During pregnancy

When you register with Fiom during the pregnancy, we will schedule an appointment with a counsellor as soon as possible. This counsellor will assess the situation together with you and provide you with information about adoption and its alternatives. If you have a partner, he will be involved in the decision-making process, if possible.

This counsellor helps you focus on your emotions and thoughts. He or she can tell you exactly how the process of giving up your child for adoption works. Information is available about the pros and cons for you and your baby and about any other other solutions. After one or two meetings, some women will know for sure they are not going to

give up their child for adoption. Once the shock of finding out they are pregnant has subsided, they manage to find options for taking care of their child after all. Others keep thinking for a long time about giving up their child for adoption. You don't have to decide anything during your pregnancy. The decision will have to be made three months after giving birth. If you continue to consider adoption, Fiom will inform the Child Care and Protection Board of your intention a few weeks before the birth.

## A three-month reflection period

If you think about giving up your baby, the child will first go to a temporary foster family after he or she is born. You will have the time to get yourself

together and think about the situation. If possible, the child's birth father can be involved in this.<sup>1</sup>

During the three-month reflection period, you are allowed to see your baby if you want. You will also have some conversations with a Fiom counsellor in this period. You can go to these meetings together or alone.

Sometimes it is clear that you want to give up your child and sometimes you are not sure yet. While your child is staying with the temporary foster family, you have time to think about your intention to give up your baby for adoption. The Fiom counsellor will help you consider the following questions:

- How does it feel that you may decide to definitively hand over the care for your child to someone else?
- Is it different now that the baby is born?
- Have you looked at all the other available options?

You can only make a conscious choice when you know all the available options and have considered them.<sup>2</sup> About three months after giving birth you will decide (either together or alone) if you really want to give up your child for adoption. If you decide during the reflection period that you want to take care of the baby yourself, the Child Care and Protection Board will be informed of your decision. If they agree, you and your child will be reunited as soon as possible.

## Once you've chosen adoption

If you decided after the three-month reflection period to give up your child for adoption, the baby will be transferred to the adoptive parents as soon as possible. Together with you, the Fiom counsellor will go through your wishes and preferences as far as an adoptive family is concerned. For example, the parents' age, their religion, ethnic origins, and whether the family has or doesn't have any other children.

When the adoptive parents have taken care of your child for one year, they can apply for an official adoption. The court will take care of this. During this time, the judge will want to hear from you if you still support your decision. At the time the judge pronounces the adoption, your child will be at least one year and three months old. You relinquish the rights to your child and the adoptive parents officially become the parents. Your statutory ties with your child will be broken: the child will receive the adoptive parents' last name and will be integrated into their family.

You no longer have a right to your child. What happens if you change your mind and want your child back before the adoption is officially pronounced? The Child Care and Protection Board will assess your situation and write a recommendation

to the Court about what is the best option. The judge will decide. The child's best interests will be the focal point in the judge's decision.

## If you are under 18

Giving up your baby is a life-changing decision. As a minor, it is not likely that you will be able to oversee all future consequences. The organizations involved in the adoption procedure, have therefore agreed that a minor parent is, in principle, not allowed to give up a child for adoption. If you are not able to take care of your child yourself, the baby will be placed in a foster family. This will give the parent(s) the opportunity to keep in touch with the child and possibly reconsider their decision.

## If you aren't a Dutch citizen

Aren't you a Dutch citizen? The procedure for giving up your baby will roughly be the same for you as for Dutch women. The difference is that your child will not automatically be adopted in the Netherlands, even though you may want this. The Child Care and Protection Board will investigate, in consultation with other facilities, the options in your country of origin. The results of this investigation may take a while, which leads to a longer uncertain situation for you. Meanwhile, the child will be placed in a foster family and you will still have

legal ties with your child.

If you come from a country where you are at risk, it can be decided not to involve your country. Nobody wants to put you, your child or your family in danger.

## Information about your child

When you give up your child for adoption, you renounce all your rights. However, you may still want to keep in touch with your child. The Fiom counsellor can inform you of the options for this. An agreement can be made with the adoptive parents for them to keep you up-to-date every year by means of a letter and/or pictures. This way of keeping in touch can be arranged by Fiom and can continue as long as both parties want to. The adoptive parents' cooperation is needed for this, as they become the legal parents after the adoption and therefore they make the decisions. In some cases, mothers who have given up their child for adoption can continue to see their child after it has been adopted. But if you already know during your pregnancy that you want to keep seeing your child, it would be better to make a different choice.

<sup>1</sup> Due to the legibility and because the child's birth father is often not in the picture, we speak of 'the woman' rather than 'the parents'. See also an explanation under the heading 'The birth father'.

<sup>2</sup> Over two-thirds of the women who report to Fiom with an intention to give up their baby for adoption, eventually do not give up their child. They choose to place the child in a foster family or take care of it themselves.

# Foster family as an alternative to giving up your child

If you are unable to take care of your child and adoption is a step too far, then a foster family may be an option for you. There are two types of foster families:

- A temporary foster family. This is a foster family who temporarily take care of your child until you can take over again.
- A permanent foster family. This family will, in principle, take care of your child until he/she becomes an adult. If you want to, your family or other people in your network could qualify as foster parents.

Women often choose a permanent foster care placement if they do not have any options to raise the child themselves, but still want to keep in touch with their child. In recent years, women are increasingly choosing this option.

## What does a permanent placement in a foster family look like?

Your child will be raised by a foster family it can stay with until it becomes of age. You as a mother, and your partner as a father (if he is in the picture) can keep contact with the child, as long as this goes well for

everyone involved. An advantage of this system is that you can keep track of your child's development, you can build a relationship with him or her and you do not have to feel the hurt of a final separation. What can be an advantage for your child, is that it will grow up in a stable environment and also gets to know you as a part of the family he or she originates from. There are some disadvantages as well. For example, you do not know in advance how the contact will go. You may find it difficult to only see your child occasionally. Or your child may have problems with the situation. Based on that, the visiting scheme will be adjusted in the child's best interests.

Fiom will be ready to tell you more about placing the child in a foster family as an alternative for adoption and can find out together with you what best suits you and your situation.

## Secrecy

Is it important to you to keep your pregnancy, the delivery and the adoption a secret from the people around you? You can discuss this with the Fiom counsellor. If the importance of keeping it a secret is obvious, Fiom will do everything within its power to keep your personal details confidential and prevent them from being disclosed to third parties. This confidentiality will ensure that mail about the heel prick screening, for example, will not be sent to your home address. In addition, the counsellor can ask the [Child Care and Protection Board](#), as well as the Court to send their letters about the adoption procedure to Fiom. Fiom will keep you updated on any

mail messages. It is important to know that Fiom has to respect the Dutch Personal Data Protection Act. This means the Fiom counsellor has a confidentiality obligation and will not forward your details to third parties without your permission. Is the secrecy actually of vital importance? You should indicate this clearly, so that Fiom can take action as soon as possible.

**Atina:** "People judge me all the time. And do you know what they say? 'You got rid of your children so you can go to parties.' But they fail to think about the underlying reason. They do not ask about my damaged past and the fact don't want my children to be exposed to this."



# The birth father

Generally, the child's biological father also has a voice when it comes to making a decision and we increasingly see birth fathers who are involved. Still, this is not always possible. Sometimes, a woman does not want the birth father to know about the pregnancy. There may be violence or danger or the woman is not carrying her partner's child, but someone else's. Whether the birth father is involved or not is an

important subject to discuss during the three-month reflection period. It will always be assessed which decision serves what purpose and what the best procedure would be. The rights and obligations of the birth father depend on the situation. If you want to know more about the options in your case, please contact Fiom.

# Contact in the future

Mothers who have given up their child for adoption may want to find out how their child is doing and whether it has ended up in a nice home. Children who were given up and adopted may have questions or want to know about where they come from.

As a mother giving up her child, you can start to search for your child when he or she has become of age. From the age of 16, the child may start looking

for you. Fiom can guide you in this. Is a dangerous situation to be expected during your pregnancy? Then, the required secrecy will be taken into account. The adoptive parents and your child are informed of the situation. In case of a search, the parties involved know they have to act very carefully. A search may possibly be cancelled because of the risks.

# Why do women give up their child?

**There are many different conditions in which and reasons why women have given up their child for abortion in recent years. Below you will find some examples of the things that can play a role.**

Most women have to deal with a combination of the following aspects:

- age (too young or too old);
- no social network (few friends or family members who can help);
- practical deficiencies (no income, no accommodation, etc.);
- troubled childhood (death of a parent, abuse, incest);
- a compromised home situation (for example: a sick parent or partner, domestic violence);
- pregnant after being raped;
- violent and traumatic experiences (in case of refugees, for example);
- religion and culture (can lead to insecurity, shame, disgrace, fear of damaging the family honour);
- drug or alcohol addiction;
- staying illegally in the Netherlands;
- working as a prostitute;
- psychiatric problems;
- mental disability;
- discovering the pregnancy too late (sometimes even moments before giving birth);
- no commitment from birth father;
- fear for the birth father (for example due to violence on his part);
- the child's father is someone other than the current partner;
- the child is handicapped;
- financial obligations towards children in country of origin (for example for women from Eastern Europe);
- women who already have children and are struggling to care for them;
- a child does not fit in future plans (for example finish school first);
- no desire to have a child or feeling no connection with the child.

Many women who give their child up for adoption think they are not capable of taking care of their child and that the child will have a better life with the adoptive parents.

**Jamila** is sixteen years old and is staying at an asylum seekers' centre. She was raped in her country of origin and got pregnant. Her situation is insecure. She does not know yet if she can stay in the Netherlands. The most important reason for her to give up her baby is her fear that she may never be able to love him.

# Different emotions

**You can experience many different emotions if you are considering giving up a child for adoption. You can have feelings of doubt, sadness, shame, helplessness, but there may be relief at the same time. You may have difficulty understanding all these feelings, especially when they contradict each other. Still, these are normal emotions associated with the situation.**

## Doubt

Some women continue having doubts for a long time. But having doubts does not mean you cannot make a choice. You may think you've made the best decision, but you did it with a heavy heart. Perhaps your mind fully understands your decision, but your feelings say something different. In the back of your mind you may be thinking: 'What if...? Or you keep fantasising about what it would have been like if you had chosen differently.

## Sadness

Hardly anyone gives up his or her child without problems, without sorrow. It is a choice you had rather not made. You'd rather not have been pregnant at all and it hurts you to have to make this decision. Some people say it like this: 'No matter what, it's your own child, your flesh and blood, and you're letting it go to be raised by someone else.'

Realizing your child no longer belongs to you can evoke many emotions. The birth created a bond between you and your child; you're its biological parent. Giving your child up for adoption may

create a sense of loss, because you are not raising your child yourself.

## Shame/guilt

Many women suffer from feelings of shame or guilt. They are ashamed they got pregnant and feel guilty towards their baby or the people around them. This is why some people do not tell the most important people in their lives about the pregnancy. You may have the feeling you've become isolated, because you find it hard to talk to other people about it. If nobody knows about you giving your child up for adoption, this may be very difficult for you.

## Fear

You may find yourself in a threatening situation and, to you, there is no other way out than giving the child up for adoption. Perhaps you are faced with violence or with the threat of honour crimes. You may be scared of being judged or banned. Fear may linger long after you've made your decision, because you are afraid your secret will be revealed after all.

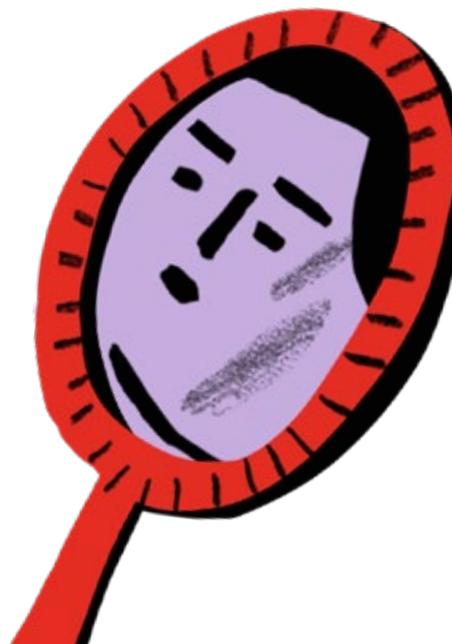
## Relief

You may feel relieved, because your decision is the best one for your child. There are women who do not feel a connection with their child and have little emotions. They are relieved to be able to go on with their lives without a child.

During the meetings with Fiom, before and after the birth, a great deal of attention will be paid to these feelings.

**Carolien:** "How I felt? I felt sad, guilty, empty and lonely. When the outside world does not know what you are going through, you are keeping up appearances. This makes you tuck away your emotions yourself. But then, when you are by yourself, it hits you twice as hard. I experienced that a lot."

**Jacintha** is twenty-three years old and pregnant. Her mother died when she was thirteen years old. Her father could not cope with her death and started drinking. He often showed violent behaviour and hit Jacintha. She left home when she was seventeen years old and no longer has contact with her father. She is on her own. The child's father wants nothing to do with it. Jacintha is afraid she cannot be a good mother and thinks adoption will be the best thing for her child. She wants it to grow up in a stable and loving environment.



**Fiom counsellor:** “It all starts with a registration. Most of the time, the woman was referred to Fiom by someone else, a GP or a midwife, for example. But usually she makes the phone call herself. At that moment, we are going to find a counsellor who can contact her straight away. The most important thing for me is to talk to her myself first. I can discuss some things in advance by telephone: the term of the pregnancy and when she is due. I will briefly talk her through the situation and schedule an appointment for an interview as soon as possible.”

“I prefer to have a conversation with the mother and biological father together. After all, it’s his child as well. But this is not always possible. He may not know, it may be dangerous if he knew or he does not want anything to do with it. In these cases, I will talk alone with the mother. I like to discuss the considerations that lead to the intention of giving up the child for adoption. And the way it feels: what’s it like for you, what emotions do you have? I talk about her background too, the situation in the family, current and past relationships. I will be explaining the entire procedure. And I will talk about what it means to make an informed decision. What does this mean to the person in question, when does someone think she’s made an informed decision? What is that really? And what will it be like for her in the future? What does and doesn’t she know about adoption? I give them loads of information,

also about the alternative options. I tell them about other women who have given up their child for adoption, how they look back on it and what my experiences at Fiom are.”

“We offer assistance to the mother and represent her interests in the contacts with other facilities. For example, we talk about the wishes of the mother (and of the biological father, if present) during labour and afterwards. Who do they want to be there? Would they like to give the child a keepsake? Do they want to take pictures or hold the baby? We will forward this information to the hospital.”

“Our assistance is not mandatory, but I notice in my work that most mothers who give up their baby, want to do the right thing and they therefore appreciate our help. They want to make sure everything is well taken care of. They are completely open in their conversations with Fiom and with the Child Care and Protection Board as well. I personally see this as providing care to the unborn child. I love this part of my job. The mother is not just turning to us for help for herself, but also because she is able to influence the future of her baby.”

A decision to give up your child for adoption is a life-changing one. After the decision, Fiom continues to offer followup care to the parents giving up the child or, if necessary, appropriate guidance in the mother’s vicinity.

## What about the future?

Fiom does not only guide women who are about to give up their child for adoption, but also those who have already done so in the past. In their work, the Fiom counsellors have seen the consequences for the women who gave up a child. Many of them grieve for a long time for the loss of their child. They feel hurt when they think back to the time when they gave up their child. If there is not yet contact with their child, the most important questions they struggle with is: is he or she doing alright? Did he/she end up with nice parents? Was it a good decision after all?

Feelings of guilt can also play a role: will he/she blame me? These women keep it a secret for years because they are afraid they will be judged. This can make them feel lonely. Giving up their child is a huge loss, which is often suffered in silence. This may result in depression, low self-esteem and physical symptoms. Fiom offers these mothers who gave up their child the option to talk about this important event in their lives and, if they want to, Fiom can get them in touch with people who have been through the same.

Not everybody experiences the adoption as a traumatic event. Some women are relieved that their child has a good home. They go on with their lives without too much trouble. They did not find the separation with their child hard to bear or they have accepted the pain.

**Uzuri** from Afghanistan is a Shiite and her boyfriend is a Sunni. They cannot be together because of their religious backgrounds. One day, Uzuri finds out she is pregnant. The couple want to take care of their child together. But nobody can know about their relationship or the pregnancy. There would be horrible consequences if people knew. With pain in their hearts, they decide to give up their baby. In the meantime, a marriage was arranged for Uzuri with another man and her husband does not know about the child’s existence.

# The most important steps of the procedure

**Not only Fiom, but also the Child Care and Protection Board and a Youth Welfare office are involved in the procedure in which you give up your child for adoption. In addition, contact will be made with the foster care organization and the family that will take on your child for the first few months. The Court will be arranging parental authority issues.**

## Step 1: Before the delivery

- Upon your registration, we will make an appointment with a Fiom counsellor as soon as possible. This counsellor will review the situation together with you and provide you with information about adoption and possible alternatives. He or she will also tell you straight away that you will have a three-month reflection period before taking a final decision
- Are you actually considering giving up your child for adoption? Fiom will preregister your intention with the Child Care and Protection Board.

## Step 2: After the delivery

- If, after you've delivered the baby, you still think giving up your child for adoption is the best thing to do, Fiom will forward the news of your baby's birth to the Child Care and Protection Board.
- As you will not be taking care of your child yourself, the Board will ask the Court to arrange parental authority for your child. In most of the cases the judge will transfer the authority to a guardian from a Youth Welfare office.
- Your child will then go to a temporary foster family for a period of three months.
- In these three months, you will have the time to think about what you want. You can visit your child if you want, in consultation with Fiom and the guardian.
- Fiom will help and support you and the father as well, if he is involved.

### Conclusion

If you have any questions after reading the information in this brochure, get in touch with us via telephone **+0031 (0)88 1264900**. You can reach us on working days between **9.00 am. and 5.00 pm.** Or have a look at our website: [fio.nl](http://fio.nl) (in Dutch only). We are there to give you the information you need.

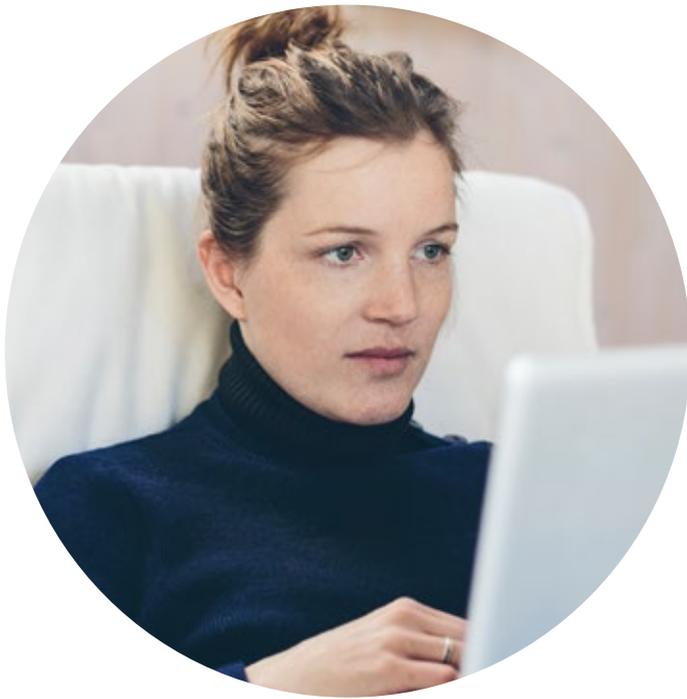
### Step 3: Three months after the delivery

- If you finally decide at the end of the three months to give up your child for adoption, your child will be transferred from the temporary foster family to the people who want to adopt the child: the prospective adoptive parents. Fiom will present a statement for you to sign, a declaration in which you relinquish the rights to your child.
- If you want your child to go to a foster family, it will go to permanent foster parents.
- If you decide to take care of the baby yourself after all, the Child Care and Protection Board will be informed of your decision. If they agree, you and your child will be reunited as quickly as possible.

### Step 4: A year and three months after the delivery

- When the prospective adoptive parents have taken care of the child for one year, they can apply for an official adoption with the Court. If the judge agrees, they become the legal parents and the child will receive their last name. You will be informed and they will ask for your opinion.
- If you change your mind in the year before the adoption and you want your child back, the Child Care and Protection Board will start an investigation. They will write a recommendation and send it to the Court, considering the best option. The child's best interests will be the focal point in the judge's decision.





## Who we are

Fiom offers specialist help in case of unwanted pregnancies and for questions about ancestry.

Fiom promotes the freedom of choice for women who are faced with an unwanted pregnancy, so they can make an informed decision that suits their life, values and future. In addition, Fiom wants to offer people the option to find their biological family and information about their ancestry, because everybody has the right to know where they come from.

Our website offers knowledge about unwanted pregnancies and provides information on questions about ancestry. Are you personally dealing with these subjects? We do not only provide you with information, but we offer online counselling as well, or you can make an appointment for a personal conversation. For professionals, there is an option for consultation and training.

By subscribing to the [Fiom newsletter](#), you can stay up-to-date about current developments in the field of unwanted pregnancies and questions about ancestry, as well as about Fiom activities, like conferences.

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**because you are not alone**