

# The Search for A Surrogate

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Needless to say you are reading this because you have exhausted all hope of carrying your own baby and have decided to explore the possibility of surrogacy. It is a daunting task, searching for a woman who is going to carry the most priceless human being to you and your family. Just the thought of releasing control over to a person who you may not even have met under normal circumstances is a terrifying thought. But doing your research and talking to people who have been through the surrogacy process before, will help calm your fears and assist you in this roller coaster ride of completing your family.

If you are seriously considering the surrogacy route I am going to assume that you have talked to your infertility clinic about all your options. Do you need an egg and a carrier or do you just need a carrier? This question helps you to define if you need a Traditional surrogate or Gestational carrier. If you are not comfortable with a Traditional Surrogate because of the biological link she will share with your child, then you can do what many others have done before you and choose an Egg Donor and a Gestational Surrogate.

The next thing that you need to consider is what your clinic finds acceptable regarding the health of a surrogate. They will have a list of guidelines and I seriously suggest that you stick by this list to garner the best results. Some of the recommendations might be:

- Age (over 21)
- BMI (Body Mass Index) under 30
- No Smoking
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Previous uncomplicated births
- Less than 3 C-sections
- No STDs
- Has passed a psychological evaluation
- Reliable
- Mature
- Dependable

Each clinic has its own guidelines so it's important that you know what their expectations are. This way you don't waste your time or the time of the women you are interviewing.

I would like to note here that you can hire a Surrogacy Agency. There are several in each 'Surrogacy Friendly' state such as Florida, Texas, and California. The agency would be the one doing all of the interviewing for you, including background checks. If you choose not to use an agency then make sure that you know exactly what you need to make this process run as smoothly as possible, including an attorney who specializes in Surrogacy Agreements to provide you with a solid contract. (Even if you are using a friend or family member, it is always important to have a signed agreement. Most clinics insist on a signed contract for their records anyway BEFORE they move forward with any medical procedures.)

If you are starting your search for a surrogate by asking friends or family members, remember your list of guidelines from the clinic. Just because you trust your cousin with carrying your baby, if she is a smoker and weighs 250 pounds she may not be the most suitable candidate. You have to think of the health of your baby (or babies, as twins are often a side effect of IVF).

The problem with searching for a surrogate within your circle of family and friends is that everyone knows your business. Some people are comfortable with this and have no problem with sharing every facet of the surrogacy experience. Others, however, are more private. Making it known to family and friends that you are looking for a woman to help you with your family building 'project' will open the door to personal and sometimes invasive questions. There is also the fact that after the baby is born you will be interacting with your (past) surrogate on a more personal level than you would someone you find through an agency, a law office or classified ad.

If you have decide to go out on your own and find a surrogate say, through the Internet, then you need to make a list of your own needs (fits the clinic guidelines, will agree to selectively reduce, will travel, has health insurance), wants (location, race, religion, etc) and desires (i.e. a stay at home mom, working mom, married, no small children...). You can form your own 'application' around the issues that mean the most to you. If you feel uncomfortable with an application so to speak, then a phone interview asking all of the questions that you need answered is essential. Don't forget that the women looking for Intended Parents to help are interviewing YOU too! A good match will "click" fairly easily but that doesn't mean ignoring yellow or red flags.

Once you find a potential candidate, (if previously unknown) an initial face to face meeting is a must. If she is married or has a partner, that person also needs to be involved with the meeting. This is where you really see with your own eyes who you are considering to help you with your plans. Is she (and her partner) what you expected from the phone conversations, e-mails and photos? Does she look healthy, act maturely and responsibly? Do you have a "good feeling" about her and her family? (There is something to be said for gut instinct, and if you do not feel comfortable after sharing a meal or a lengthy face to face discussion, you need to take that into consideration and perhaps go back to the drawing board.)

Working with a friend or family member might be easier when it comes to assessing their attitude regarding a surrogacy, judging their commitment to you and the process and their level of responsibility. You, after all, know this person and they may have volunteered to help you out of the goodness of their heart. They have seen your pain and know the joys of parenthood through their own children. What needs to happen in the case of accepting the help of a family member or friend (or anyone for that matter) is that they know that there will be a contract that they need to abide by. That the clinic will have some expectations that will need to be fulfilled such as taking a MMPI2, completing classes on administering shots and other medications, regular appointments and testing that will have to be done during a certain time in their cycle, etc. Being a surrogate is a huge commitment and it takes a lot of time and energy to comply with all the expectations. They also need to know that it's a lot of MONEY. Once starting on this journey it is important to remain dedicated to the process. There may be some disappointments and the schedule may be different than what was first expected, however, once the medical and psychological evaluations are completed and the contracts are done and signed, money has been spent and the commitment to move forward is just as important, now more than ever.

The surrogacy selection process can be confusing and daunting. It is very common to feel overwhelmed even if you are using an agency because of all the steps that you need to walk through before you even have a signed contract. An agency can take away some of the stress by reassuring you that their surrogate mothers have completed lengthy applications, had criminal background checks and may have been through the surrogacy process before. When you meet a surrogate through an agency, usually that woman already knows and agrees with your 'wish' list. She may agree with selective reduction, to travel for the birth, to a certain base fee, have health insurance in place, be a stay at home mom, and understand the enormity of your situation. If you decide to find a woman on your own to carry a baby for you, you can be assured that you will have to talk to several if not dozens of women until you find the one you feel is a perfect match. It can be done however it takes a lot of time and emotional energy. If you are not sure that you want to tell your painful infertility story over and over again and listen to women telling you how perfect their pregnancies were then an agency might be for you.

Most women who want to become surrogates, either Traditional or Gestational, through a clinic or independently, a family member or friend, have a personal reason for wanting to help the Intended Parents succeed in building their family. Surrogates have big hearts and have had healthy pregnancies and love helping others in this very unique way. Just remember that the surrogate you choose, is also choosing you! It's a two way street where everyone wants to be successful!



Sharon LaMothe is the Co-Founder of Infertility Answers, Inc. <http://infertilityanswers.org/>, the Creator of Surrogacy 101 (the blog), [http://infertilityanswers.typepad.com/surrogacy\\_101/](http://infertilityanswers.typepad.com/surrogacy_101/) and <http://surrogacy101.blogspot.com> Owner of LaMothe Services, LLC <http://lamotheservices.com/> and past Co-Owner of Surrogacy Consultants of Florida, LLC for over 5 years. Sharon is also a Co-Founder of Egg Donor & Surrogacy Professional Association (EDSPA) and currently holds the Surrogacy Chair, Member of the OBGYN.net Women's Health Forum and serves on the Parents Via Egg Donation Advisory Boards. Sharon has also been a Gestational Surrogate, giving birth to twin girls in March of 2000 for a Florida couple, and in January 2005, gave birth to girl/boy twins for a same sex New York couple. Sharon's educational background includes a Social Service major which encompassed classes in Crisis Identification and Intervention, Interviewing and Counseling, Communication in Groups and Organizations. Sharon is married with two children and resides in Seattle, WA.