

[CHINA ADOPTION ONLINE]

# ADOPTION AGENCY SURVEY RESULTS

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SEPTEMBER 2011  
GENERAL COMMENTS

# CHINA ADOPTION ONLINE

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## INTRODUCTION

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We asked adoptive families to name the most common weaknesses for adoption agencies. These answers are mostly general in nature; they typically do not have anything to do with observations about a specific agency. These are the most common complaints adoptive parents experience with their agencies *in general*. We surveyed over 250 adoptive families!

These comments will give adoptive families items to talk about and discuss with potential agencies. This may also help you in making a priority list about what components are most important to you in an agency.

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## CONTACT

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If you have comments, questions, or concerns about the contents of this report, please feel free to contact us.

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## GENERAL WEAKNESSES OF ADOPTION AGENCIES

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“Communication with their clients! Many agencies leave it up to the yahoo lists to educate and walk their clients through the adoption process.”

“Post placement support.”

“Not enough paperwork support.”

“Knowledge, communication, and travel. I wish that all agencies had guides IN China that they work with, not just typical tour guides. It would be nice to feel as if YOU were important to them, which I think Madison handled well, and nice to touch base in China and once home. I do expect for my agency to have the right answers, which is something that I have not seen from some agencies.”

“Not enough staff - or turnover in staff. Always seems like you talk to someone different.”

“Lack of communication and failure to acknowledge waiting parents as peers of equal intelligence to process the information as it is (good or bad).”

“Communication with their client families.”

“Post-adoption follow-up.”

“Making up rules that aren't the CCCWA rules!”

“Communication!”

“Poor communication, lack of paperwork support.”

“People skills. Waiting families tend to be emotionally needy and some agencies to a poor job at managing that.”

“Probably follow up and the ability to listen well to your needs, complaints, etc and not get defensive and not dismiss your concerns.”

“I haven't had a bad experience but it sounds like communication is huge for a lot of folks. Waiting parents like info IMMEDIATELY and I think a lot of families have a hard time getting that.”

“My agency always answered me with any questions that I had during the adoption within the same day I asked it....however, sometimes I felt that sometimes they were silent, but I guess no news was no news. They always emailed me or called with any info that we needed to know. I was not given a detailed itinerary when we left for China like others traveling had, but I liked that we didn't have to wait on a group to go. Every detail of our travel was handled so nicely...We had the best guides and accommodations throughout China.”



"Pre-placement: The lack of useful, viable information regarding the child's developmental and social skill levels. This area is lacking from the information sent from CCCWA and doesn't offer a true usable picture for assessment by IA professionals prior to adopting."

"Post Placement: Many offer little to no post placement service/support options to families. Attachment issues are a major issue for adoptive children and their families and more assistance and direction is necessary to navigate this delicate and sometimes difficult territory."

"Not treating their clients like true clients! I hear a lot about agencies telling their AP's what the rules are and how they have to do certain things...they need to get a clue! If they are going to charge the fees as a professional services firm then they need to act like it and treat the client as the customer and stop making up rules as they see fit. It isn't their job - their job is to facilitate the paperwork related to an adoption - period."

"Most of the workers have never adopted. The fees are high prices or inflated greatly especially for travel in China costs. They spend very little time informing of the next step and would prefer that you never call them or ask questions and just hand over money to them."

"It depends on your priorities, but communication and setting expectations seem to come up the most. Matching - obviously - can be perceived as an area of weakness (but IMO the weakness is with CCCWA's approach and not just with how agencies handle it)."

"Follow up once home!!"

"Communication/knowledge of process within China."

"Communication."

"Reading others posts about agencies it seems that everyone interprets China's rules differently. Some also don't seem to give the families the info they need to get their dossier done. This wasn't the case for GWCA, they were wonderful."

"I don't know. I do know that I would only choose an agency that truly has the child's best interest in mind. One who will go to bat for the client and the child.  
For me the issue is if they are out of state -- which is really not their fault. BUT they don't know all of the rules for each state."

"The biggest weakness is the agencies' inability to fully prepare first-time parents for the unique challenges of international adoption."

"Lack of knowledge of the process and/or lack of willingness to pass on what they do know."

"Communication, honesty, and follow through!!!"



“Delays during the paperwork process and updating families during the wait to receive a referral or information before travel (while waiting on LOA, TA, etc.). We adopted from Russia for our first adoption (Children's Hope International) and found the same to be true. Loved our rep in the St. Louis office, but she left soon after our adoption was completed. Our friends who had other reps didn't have the same luck we had.”

“One agency I worked with actually tried to scare you out of the adoption. Some of their employees were not very professional.”

“What they charge, not caring about what's going on, not knowing more than the family does about the process, not contacting CCAA if they should because they don't want to step on toes, not going above and beyond for a client or child.”

“The (often) inability to get more information about children for PAPs. Also, it seems from the questions I see in online forums that some agencies are either not well-informed about the process or don't communicate well with their clients.”

“I think that lack of communication is a huge turn off for families. Our first agency always came through for us, but sometimes there were questions or emails that were never answered. Families need a good, strong, dependable agency that they have a lot of faith in.”

“I think communication is the biggest weakness for most adoption agencies. That is why it is so great to find one that communicates so well!”

“Their paperwork is their weakness. Generally, it is written poorly (even the best agencies); while I haven't seen everyone's paperwork, I have found WASATCH to have probably the most outstanding paperwork as of Sept. 2011.”

“Not enough help!”

“The biggest area of weakness is not remembering/knowing what it is like to be on our side of things. They do it day in, day out and there seems to be a lack of compassion for the APs. I want to feel valued, that my situation, my child is valued. I'm not just a number with a checkbook. I want them to celebrate with me when we reach milestones and have genuine compassion when we hit snags. They need to take responsibility when they are wrong and be honest. Most importantly APs should never be ridiculed or treated like they are a PIA for asking questions they feel are important. Somebody at my agency actually complained about me in an email to another coworker (because I was asking too many questions and she wanted to make sure we had signed a contract with them) and inadvertently sent it to me. I was already knee deep in the process or I would have run away as fast as I could. As it was I was held emotionally hostage by their link to my child. That is a horrible feeling to have.”

“Consistency with answers to questions & knowledge of changing requirements.”

“Communication, communication!”



“Clarity in the paperwork process.”

“Communication.”

“Putting themselves in the day to day shoes of the prospective parents. We've never been through the process before, so we don't know what to do or what questions to ask until it's too late and mistakes/deadlines have been missed. They sure seem in a hurry to take our money though and are right on top of that.”

“The trip costs. At this point in a Chinese adoption, it feels like extortion. And someone, somewhere is making a huge profit on it.”

“Lack of knowledge and lack of caring....oh and price!! : )”

“I think the biggest area of weakness that our agency has is that we had to figure a lot of stuff out on our own. From paperwork to travel. Felt I knew more about the process than our agency did. I'm sure that it's because of our online community. There were times when our agency was asking me questions about the process!”

“Hmmm, not really sure other than understanding how hard it is for the parents waiting! But I know they work so very hard and have so many clients and in most cases do the best they can to get us answers, updates, etc. Their hands are tied a lot of times.”

“Not enough staff, price.”

“Lack of connections in China.”

“Lack of communication.”

“Agencies don't always work well together when you have to use one agency for your home study while you are using a different agency for the adoption. Our HS agency required one thing for adoption education and our placing agency required something totally different. In order to get the home study completed, we had to do what that agency told us to do (read certain books and discuss them with our social worker). But, our placing agency didn't want to accept what we had already done for our 10 hours. They then wanted us to get 10 more hours of online classes.”

“Losing sight of the children and focusing on their policies.”

“Communication. Most agencies rarely convey information in an accurate/timely manner. A lot is learned through groups/forums that should be learned from the agency.”

“Most agencies are so large that individual families get lost in the shuffle. Keeping the AP informed. For example: where they are on each step. With internet, we



hear from dozens of other parents from many agencies--I hate to hear of news from elsewhere before my own agency informs me. Had to call and ASK them to check for my LID. Had to ASK them to check my delayed LOA when I KNEW loads of LOA's were coming fast and the standard "1-4 months wait" answer was inaccurate."

"Being too vague on the steps required to complete an international adoption in regards to process, dossier, etc. especially when new rules are going into effect.  
Long wait for referrals and no ability to accurately predict the future of China adoptions."

"One BIG thing to me is to be able to directly call the agency with any questions we might have. With other agencies we had dealt with (BAAS in particular) you would try and call and you were automatically forwarded to a voice mail. That really turned us off. With Gladney, we call our social workers direct # and 90% of the time she answers. She has helped us every step of the way and genuinely seems to care. We couldn't be happier about our experience with Gladney."

"I can only speak of GWCA - they seemed totally \$\$\$ oriented & they were terrible about responding to ongoing problems unless you went above the head of those you had to deal with. A real pain."  
"Poor communication."

"Not being completely informed by CCAA."

"Being overwhelmed by work and not coordinating with other agencies for the sake of getting children adopted. Its big business and they get distracted by the \$\$\$."

"Timeliness, communication, realizing that although this is a job for them, adoption is a dream for most and incredibly personal so they must learn to show more compassion, effort and determination to move mountains."

"For many it is just a job; it's not compassion that drives them. With Madison it is a compassion to find homes for children, not just a job!"

"Communication, fees too high. Having their "own" rules!"

"1. Poor communication with their clients. 2. Afraid to deal with the CCAA when there is a problem. 3. Slow at matching from the shared list."

"From our experience, agencies are understaffed with knowledgeable, trained, and common sense individuals that will ask questions and go the extra mile."

"Not being proactive enough. Not enough empathy for the frustrations of their clients."

"They are at a loss for control in many areas. They must wait on a particular country to do things, and it is frustrating to the adoptive parents to not have a better timeline."



“Willingness to communicate effectively on a regular basis.”

“Impersonal, not returning calls/e-mails, and cost.”

“I don't have an answer to this question regarding international adoption. For domestic adoptions, I feel birth mother education and support tend to be a weak area for many agencies.”

“Honest communication with families. Even if they have made a mistake (which has happened countless times), I would prefer honesty instead of them trying blame someone else. I can always forgive and understand a mistake, but will never get past a lie.”

“Being transparent.”

“Children are just numbers.”

“Communication and not working hard enough to match waiting kids. Requiring families to be LID before looking for a match for them from the shared list.  
Lack of guided directions for families plowing through ridiculous amounts of paperwork. A handbook of directions should be developed.”

“Putting business, and money above the interests of the children. Slow wait lists, when so many children are just waiting.”

“They respond slowly and also many of them are not upfront on how soon they can match PAP's.”

“Communication, between CCAA and agency, and between agency and family.  
Having enough staff to meet all the needs of every family quickly. With the state of international adoption it is hard for agencies to be able to hire enough staff.”

“Keeping the families informed of the latest news/documents they need when it is needed. Our agency we used was understaffed and is no longer in business.”

“Slow to respond to questions, worry about "bottom line" finances, may not understand the process in China as well as they should, and not supportive/empathetic to clients as they should be.”

“Matching children too quickly to parents who are impatient and not prepared for the special needs and institutional trauma.”

“A lot of "rules" that don't benefit the child (i.e. your child adopted with us must be the youngest in the family by 9 months). Well, forget adding older kids with that agency! I don't want kids younger than my youngest, I want them older!”

“Communication!”

“Communication, or lack thereof. When we first started down the adoption path, we knew nothing. Our agency assumed we knew more than we did.”



"I'm not sure on this; I'm pretty certain that different agencies have different weaknesses. The two that we've experienced is #1 (not BAAS), a fear of "rocking the boat" and being much too timid to talk to the CCCWA on behalf of your case. #2 (BAAS), there was a lack of good, complete examples for how to fill out some of the forms. Thank goodness I had China Adoption Online! Not sure they'd be the best agency for a first-time adoptive family."

"Lack of communication."

"Many are not in it for the right reasons - I feel if they were, then they would transfer a file from their designated list if they had no families with their agency who were interested or had gone through the list of interested families and the child was still available. Many refuse to transfer a file even at this point, which to me says they are in it for the money and not for the children to find families."

"I'm not sure! Communication and rapport is important to me and there were some agencies that were off our short list based on the lack of this. Different PAP's need different things though and agencies aren't "one size". It was hard to compare things like costs b/c agencies do things differently. Some agencies I felt were less than transparent about things like cost and putting us in touch w/ other APs that had used that agency."

"Lack of communication and hiding the entire truth."

"Communication."

"All they care about is money."

"1. Blaming CCAA for problems. 2. Overselling the agency to prospective families (promising more than they can deliver). 3. Failure to listen to their families. 4. In a word or two, arrogance or hubris."

"Personal service to clients."

"Again, communication is key. The process needs to be THOROUGHLY explained in a well planned out way. The first agency I worked with gave me info in little bits and pieces. The second agency did not respond well to my emails and phone messages."

"Just the whole time frame - it is not at their mercy and sometimes the turnover in staff - experience does count in this business."

"The larger agencies tend to be very impersonal and can seem aggravated by questions of those that are new to the process."

"Staying on top of all the changes, addresses, requirements, etc."

"They are too eager to lock the youngest children with minor needs to their agency's list."



“Communication: lack of it once you sign on with them.”

“It seems so many people have to post on blogs and forums to get their questions answered which I think their agency should be answering. They shouldn't even have to ask, their agency should be anticipating their needs and questions.”

“Not responding to phone calls, e-mails, etc.”

“They are either all heart and no business sense...or all business and no heart. Madison is a perfect blend of both!”

“Lack of organization & contacts.”

“At the moment, figuring out the new rules. Otherwise answering emails. Although I am using CCAI for my home study and are very impressed with them. Also, 24 hour turnaround or sooner for emails.”

“Keeping people and records straight...and keeping up with current info!”

“Hmmm, that's a tough one! Such hard work, a lot of expenses, but i think it's all accounted for so that's a hard question to answer. I think most, at least the ones we have used, have been tremendous!!”

“Cost and not always being up front about wait times.”

“I think the biggest weakness, from listening to others, is the lack of communication between the adoption agency and the families. This is one of the reasons we love CCAI so very much! :)”

“Inability to predict the future. Which is not their fault. One family's perception of problems may not affect another family. It is hard to predict.”

“Communication and lack of flexibility.”

“The almighty dollar!”

“Communication!!”

“Not staying in touch with the families.”

“Communication.”

“I don't know about "most", but several of them get too wrapped up in the process. As a result, you can sometimes feel like you're just one more chip on the assembly line.”



“Understanding the anxiety of adoptive parents when they're waiting for all the approvals from various agencies.”

“I am working on my 4th adoption; with my third agency. The biggest area of weakness I believe is that they rely on the client to do more for themselves. They do not call or even e mail to check in or see how things are going; they expect you to do everything yourself. Where is the money going?”

“They are in this for the money so they are not compassionate. First thing they want is money. I don't mind paying, it is the attitude I don't like.”

“Categorizing every family in a one-fits-all category. I think policies should be set on a case by case basis.”

“Communication with clients.”

“Lack of follow-through or concerns for both the families and child's needs.”

“Communication with families.”

“Big agencies---follow rules by the letter, not as flexible. Often long waits. Biggest weakness of all---limited financial resources to do job well.”

“Communication throughout the process. The waiting is difficult at best.”

“Sometimes just checking in to tell you what is happening or not happening makes the process a little more bearable.”

“Lack of communication, making their own rules vs. just following the country's guidelines.”

“Probably paperwork, but without getting families together and filling it out with them it's really hard to not have some mistakes made.”

“Not knowing the families on a personal basis. For us, AHH is in Lexington, KY and we are in Louisiana. Just corresponding by email or the occasional phone call just didn't cut it for me.”

“Post adoption counseling/care.”

“#1) Dictating more rules than sending or receiving country requires. In general "playing God" as if their tilt is toward disapproval of adoptions. Distant #2) is fees are unreasonable to average working family. Distant #3) is not being upfront honest and transparent about process from application through travel. #4) Dictating travel rules that are actually only things that make it easier for the agency, not things that facilitate families getting to their children faster. And that none call you back when you are getting started. If this were our first adoption, I would be so very frustrated.”



“Many agencies lack communication. Costs are too much. Only a few reps in China and use outside guides that do not work for the agency.”

“Too many are ethically challenged. They are willing to overlook issues that don't reflect well on a program they want to enter. I actually saw one agency suggest conversion to Islam as a means to an Algerian adoption. They left out a LOT of important details about what that meant!”

“Being upfront and informative of the process and steps with their families along with realistic, instead of optimistic but not actualized, timeframes of those steps seems to be a difficult thing for many agencies.”

“Not getting updates... Concerns from families about kids waiting go unanswered.”

“With some agencies it is lack of hand holding. No matter who it is, people need, and like that for adoptions. One doesn't have to have it...it is just nice. It gives a sense of comfort. We have used several agencies in the past for adoption. Lifeline hands down beats out all of them.”

“Ability to match per clients' requested list of needs.”

“They can get too big and have a less personal touch. Long time to respond to questions. When you are already "playing the waiting game" a couple of days makes a difference when wanting an answer to a question.”

“Post-placement resources.”

“After TA to Gotcha day - that process was convoluted and confusing. I feel like I was being forced into activities and agendas that should not have concerned me.”

“Personal touch. Lack of communication. Keeping the adoptive families informed.”

“Communication at each step of process, especially if you get passed from one person to another as you move through process.”

“Straight forward communication at all times!”

“The biggest complaint that I have heard from others is that they felt often felt "alone" in the process and communication was lacking between themselves and agency representatives. Of course there are others that complain/bad mouth an agency because they wouldn't "do" something that the adoptive parent thought they should do (break rules, make exceptions, move files, etc.) We personally have adopted twice, two different countries and have never had any of the above issues with our agency.”

“Assuming that you know the next step or what the current changes or trends of adoption are.”



“Striking the right balance between advocating for their clients and maintaining a good working relationship with CCCWA.”

“Speed at which they get back to you.”

“Cost and personal relationship with clients (I guess you could call it customer service).”

“Fees, especially for travel! I was happy with our previous agency until they started draining us for travel expenses. They booked the most expensive hotel they could find and charged us \$5K over the estimated expenses for travel. I think they assume adoptive parents are loaded with money -- the opposite is usually true. Slash costs and place more kids. I could have adopted two using AAI with the money ASIA charged us.”

“Communication with their clients. Madison is ok at this, but there is still room for improvement.”

“Helping families put together the dossier isn't exactly a strength - I learned a lot from the RQ forum. Also, the process from LID to TA - one of the agency reps seemed hesitant to share this information with us so again, RQ saved the day!”

“Impersonality, which is part of the problem with the whole IA system. Adopting a child can never be reduced to an official and monetary, one-size-fits-all, transaction. The lack of control and interaction that this leads to for APs, children and prior caregivers is because of the impersonality of the process dictated to them.”

“Corporate Politics-ugh. Agencies need to remember that these are real people, real families, all different. There is no one size fits all for families, so agencies need to take that into consideration.”

“Not supplying people with all of the information they'll need to complete dossier paperwork. Seems like so many people post questions that I was given the answers to on day one (i.e. how does the shared list work, what do you do with the I797c).”

“I think all agencies can do a better job of making sure new adoptive parents understand what may happen when you get your child. In our case, our daughter's medical paper work was not correct and this caused a problem at the medical exam at the end as well as leaving us with questions on her special need. Some other families have talked about not understanding or being prepared for the amount of grieving some children have gone through. This is something that needs to be better addressed before you get to China.”

“For the China programs, the amount of adoptions is reduced, so staffing and keeping abreast of issues is a challenge.”

“Over-extending themselves and sometimes presenting with unrealistic timelines. Whatever they say in regards to how long something should take, add 2-6 weeks to it depending on the stage.”



"The cost is often prohibitive for the average family."

"After you sign up and are matched, you "hang" by yourself.....need more support available if needed!"

"Not following through, knowing where to get the answers."

"Having their own rules outside of CCCWA rules, not enough communication regarding wait times. Our first agency, although having a great reputation in the traditional program, was less than satisfactory in their waiting child program."

"Not being available when you need them in a crisis (large or small), and not being honest about costs."

"The almighty Dollar! Not willing to make exceptions to help the children. Such as take a reduction in their fees, not offering grants and then not helping the PAP's. Such as not answering their questions in a timely manner, not keeping families updated and leaving the parents to sit and wonder. No communication."

"Customer service and lack of transparency in fees or in process."

"We found EAC after signing up with another agency-we kept looking because I just didn't like how they answered questions, it was a total personality thing. They didn't seem very personable."

"Failure to communicate with the families."

"They get too big and make too many 'rules' so something that went wrong once 'won't happen again' rather than just accepting that when you work with people and systems, things go wrong. But then families can get a bit feisty in adoption when the paperwork doesn't go as smoothly or quickly as they had hoped...."

"Long term financial stability with the slowdown of international adoptions."

"Keeping up with all the clients at once, at their varying stages of adoption."

"Sometimes you don't hear from them as soon as you would like."

"Post placement services. We really struggled with the adoption of an "older" 3 1/2 year old at adoption who had an extremely hard time adjusting to us and we needed much more support afterwards than we received."

"Communication in general is what I have heard from families with other agencies. That and not being able to relate with AP's on a personal level because the agency is so large and the family feels like a number on a list."



"Most agencies are businesses that are there to make money and aren't always truthful with their clients."

"Money! Either they need more and don't know how to function or they mismanage what they have."

"Good communication with their clients. Helping to ease the concerns, worries during the wait."

"Communication with the "bad" news."

"Not being proactive in matching adoptive parents with children off the existing shared list!!!!!! Not advocating for children off the existing shared list. Just sitting idly by and waiting for the new list each month is not in the best interest of the waiting children. The agencies need to be proactive in obtaining as much UPDATED information as possible on waiting children."

"Communication with families in regards to the process...more than just checklists of paperwork. I wish they gave more information about the inner workings of the process, instead of sometimes just leaving us to guess how things work or find out on our own."

"The biggest weakness is the inability to be honest. They need to be honest about allowing families to sign up, pay, and then wait for a referral. It is what many focus on: signing MANY families up for their SN program even when they have so many waiting already. Then the family is stuck with them, and the agency then does not make an effort to match them---all their effort goes into signing more/new families up, having them pay, then making them wait for a match. Then the children wait. It is a terrible system. These agencies need to stop signing families up in order for the families "to wait". Families need to also wake up and not sign up with/pay an agency until the match is known. The system is backwards in a lot of agencies."

"I do not think families are sufficiently educated about issues they may face in adoption such as institutional delays, attachment issues and interracial parenting."

"Communication....I have so much more respect and patience for a person/business who is honest and upfront. I don't think agency reps are "bad" people, but I think they should make an effort always...admit when they are searching for an answer, and listen to the adoptive parent's concerns."

"The only problem we had with our agency was that they thought that since I am a "home body" type of person, they thought I was depressed and had issues. My husband and I both explained to them that my whole family is "home bodies". They need to be a little more understanding about things like that."

"Post-adoption follow-up - phone calls while in China, once home, after a few days, weeks, months."



“We have been very lucky with our 3 adoptions, with 2 different agencies and I didn't really see any weak areas.”

“I think they all sell a product - awful but true.”

“Communication! And lack of partnership with the home study agency.”

“COMMUNICATION!!! From the personal experience of my own adoption (and friends and families I have talked with), agencies skimp on vital information at the beginning and withhold info, resources, support after the adoption. Both of which could contribute to less painful adoption processes, and smoother transitions, attachment after placement. (I found that you, Courtney, knew more than my agency, and that this is NOT uncommon).”

“I really don't think many agencies care enough about the children. They hold onto files and let them languish instead of sharing info or releasing kids to the shared list. One agency had a little one we were very interested in for over 6 months!! I contacted them and was told one of their families was interested. CAWLI contacted them and the CCWA and was told the agency had returned the file. We are still hoping she shows up on the list again.”

“Some of the agencies that we have used in the past would not call you back in a timely manner or answer an email.....if I'm the process of adopting time matters to me.”

“There's too many of them. Agencies should join together to make costs less.”

“My issue w/ most agencies is that they reject singles, even when countries would accept us. As if being raised in poverty and orphanages is preferable to the love of a single parent.”

“Not being truthful. Erring on the best case scenario (e.g. wait times for China's non-special needs adoption). Another weakness is probably navigating the China shared list.”

“1. Some of the agencies seem to be so strongly motivated by a religious agenda that it clouds their judgment; they really should not be in the adoption business at all. 2. Some of the people working for adoption agencies are poorly informed (or say whatever they think we want to hear). We had done our research and crossed off our list quite a few agencies from which we heard things we knew to be incorrect.”

“Lack of online tools, resources, and forums (not relying on those created by individuals). Not enough personal contact, hard to speak to the person you need (but I can't comment more because we used the same agency for 3 adoptions).”

“Customer service is my first concern, without a doubt. The second area is speed of locking files when the shared list is released.”

