

Adopting a 'Snowflake Baby'

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Ever hear the phrase, "Better living through science"? I'm sure the thousands of couples who've surmounted infertility through advances like IVF would be inclined to agree.



Vivian Manning-Schaffel: In the process of IVF, couples harvest and produce many embryos. Those that go unused in the first transfer are cryogenically frozen in case the transfer doesn't take, or as in the case of **Celine Dion**, the parents would like to try for another child later on. But what happens to those leftover embryos when a family is complete, or the parents divorce?

"You have three choices: You can dispose of them, donate them to science or to another couple," explains Dr. Ashim Kumar of the Fertility and Surgical Associates of California. "With the third option, another couple can adopt the embryo and go forward with the transfer. It's the same as **IVF**, but the preparation for it is a lot easier, because it

requires fewer visits to the clinic. You still prepare the lining of the uterus for the egg, you just don't have to extract the eggs."

This third option, also known as embryo or "snowflake" adoption, is slowly growing in popularity, although it requires wading through a proverbial minefield of legal and religious issues. There's the whole **adoption** vs. stem-cell research debate -- sort of a science vs. science issue, if you will. And a few prominent snowflake adoption clinics make no bones about their religious affiliation or pro-life stance. In spite of claims against religious discrimination, this staunch positioning may be off-putting to, say, a nice Jewish couple surfing their site for leads or answers.

Karen Roeb, Clinical Administrator of **Fertility Miracles**, a division of the American Fertility Institute, explains that snowflake adoption is much like traditional adoption -- in theory. "The process is a little easier than adopting a child. Psychologically it's almost the same. You still get to experience the birth. When a donor donates, she gives up all legal rights to any children that are produced -- even the egg. She's not entitled to the child or the embryo."

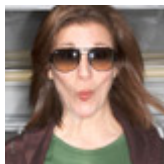
This could get sticky as some of these snowflake agencies promote an open adoption policy. But if an open adoption is something you're open to, snowflake adoptions can be a great fit. "I had a couple who donated 30 embryos, ten each to ten different couples, and it resulted in three sets of healthy twins," says Dr. Kumar. "It's a huge benefit for couples who want to have more children but can't afford donor eggs. Embryos are being destroyed, and this experience is positive in every aspect."

Just ask one of his clients, a Canadian physician (who asked to remain anonymous) struggling with secondary **infertility**. After four failed IVF cycles, she discovered Dr. Kumar's embryo donation program and is now 12 weeks pregnant with **twins**.

The couple is grateful to have found themselves in the right place at the right time, as their experience was far lighter in red tape than many snowflake adoptions. "I don't want to portray our situation as the norm because it's not," she explains. "From talking to other people, their experiences have been a lot more protracted or prolonged. A lot more people go through agencies rather than clinics because a lot of them don't have a lot of embryos. But the legal process can be rather long. There were a lot more steps. There are long waiting lists and home studies. And there's always more demand than supply."

The choice of embryo adoption happened to fall in line with the couple's personal belief system. "When we were doing IVF ourselves, we felt strongly that we didn't want our embryos to be destroyed because we considered them to be life. We wanted to donate them and help a family. It was hard being on the other end of that, but at the same time, we were so grateful there were people out there who were willing to do the same," the mom-to-be explains.

Theirs is a closed adoption at the donor's request. "We were open to the possibility of an open **adoption** when we started looking at it, but the donors wanted to be anonymous and we were fine with that," she says, clearly thrilled about the prospect of being a mom again. And genetic codes aside, she's completely bonded with her gestating twins. "I thought that I might feel differently in this pregnancy, but I don't," she says. "We've seen the twins on the ultrasound and heard their hearts beating ... they are our children and that's all there is to it."



Vivian Manning-Schaffel has written for Babble, Parenting, The Advocate, The New York Post, Business Week and a variety of other publications and lives and works in the heart of breeder Brooklyn with her husband and two kids. She authors two pop culture blogs: [The Mad Mom](#) and [A Hag Supreme](#), and is on the web at vivianmanningschaffel.com.