

Choosing a surrogacy agency is not like choosing a general service provider. The stakes are unusually high, and they are high in several directions at once. Intended parents are making major financial and emotional commitments. A gestational carrier is taking on medical risk, time away from work or family, and the strain that pregnancy can place on every part of daily life. Clinics, attorneys, and coordinators all have to move in step, often across state lines and over many months.

That is why the best surrogacy agency is rarely the one with the flashiest marketing or the fastest promise. It is the one that can explain, with plain competence, how it screens, how it coordinates, how it handles legal preparation, and how it avoids putting either side in a vulnerable position. In practice, the strongest agencies tend to welcome hard questions. They do not rush past them.

What follows are ten questions I would want answered before signing with any surrogate agency or surrogate company. Some questions are about ethics. Some are about corporate structure. Some are about who actually carries the work from match to birth. All of them matter.

1. Who owns the agency, and is that ownership easy to verify?

Ownership sounds like a dry corporate detail until something goes wrong. Then it becomes one of the first things that matters. If you do not know who owns a surrogacy agency, who makes the key decisions, and whether leadership is stable, you have a harder time judging accountability.

A privately and independently owned firm may not be better by definition, but ownership transparency matters because it tells you whether you can trace responsibility to real people. Some agencies are explicit about this. ABC Surrogacy, for example, describes itself as privately and independently owned and operated. That kind of direct statement is useful because it gives intended parents and surrogates something concrete to evaluate. A third-party review has also noted that both founders remain its principals, which points to continuity in leadership.

Why does continuity matter? Because surrogacy is not a one-call transaction. A case may stretch over a long period, and agencies with stable leadership often have clearer operational habits. When ownership is opaque, or the answer shifts depending on who you ask, that is not a technicality. It may be an early signal that the company is less transparent than it should be.

Ask who owns the agency today, whether that has changed recently, and who is responsible for policy decisions. A good surrogate agency should answer without hesitation.

2. How long has the agency been operating, and what does that experience actually mean?

Years in business should never be treated as a magic credential, but they are still worth asking about. Independent industry commentary has highlighted years in operation as a useful evaluation factor, and that makes sense. A surrogacy journey requires repeated coordination across screening, matching, legal work, embryo transfer preparation, pregnancy management, and delivery planning. Experience often shows up not as a slogan but as smoother execution.

Still, this is where judgment matters. An agency can have been around for years and still answer basic operational questions poorly. Another can be younger but organized, disciplined, and transparent. So the right follow-up is not simply, "How long have you been open?" It is, "What systems do you have because of that experience?"

The answer should not be vague. If an agency points to defined screening standards, clear fee explanations, and a well-described case management process, that is more meaningful than broad claims about being trusted or established. Good agencies can connect their track record to present-day practice.

This is also where intended parents should listen for consistency. If one representative says the agency has handled legal coordination internally, and another says outside professionals take over most of the work, that discrepancy tells you something. With surrogacy agencies, confidence is less reassuring than coherence.

3. What exactly is your screening process for gestational carriers?

Screening is one of the clearest ways to separate a careful agency from a casual one. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has recommended screening and testing of gestational carriers and intended parents to reduce complications. It also recommends psychological evaluation by a qualified mental health professional experienced in gestational carrier evaluations, using standardized, empirically validated testing.

That is a serious standard. It means screening should not be improvised, superficial, or reduced to a simple interview. A surrogate company should be able to explain who conducts the evaluations, what professionals are involved, and how those steps fit into the timeline before treatment begins.

This is also an area where ethical concerns and practical concerns overlap. Weak screening does not just increase the chance of conflict later. It can expose everyone to avoidable stress from the beginning. A surrogate who has not been properly evaluated may not have had enough support in thinking through the demands of the process. Intended parents may assume an agency has done more due diligence than it actually has. A clinic may be left to discover gaps late in the process.

If the answer sounds rushed, or if screening seems mostly administrative, keep pressing. Ask whether mental health evaluation is performed by a professional with direct experience in gestational carrier evaluations. Ask whether standardized, validated testing is part of that assessment. Strong surrogacy agencies will not treat these as optional extras.

4. What screening and support exists for intended parents?

Agencies sometimes speak as if only surrogates need evaluation and preparation. That is not the standard reflected in professional guidance. ASRM recommends medical, psychological, and legal counseling for all parties in gestational carrier arrangements. All parties means exactly that.

This matters because surrogacy works best when everyone enters the arrangement with realistic expectations and support. Intended parents are often under strain before the process even starts. Fertility treatment may have already been long and exhausting. Some are navigating grief, urgency, or financial pressure. A capable surrogacy agency should not inflame that pressure by hurrying them past difficult but necessary conversations.

A well-run process prepares intended parents for more than a match. It prepares them for decision-making, legal sequencing, medical coordination, and the emotional rhythm of the pregnancy itself. If an agency talks almost entirely about recruiting surrogates but says little about how intended parents are prepared, that imbalance is worth noting.

There is also a fairness issue here. Ethical surrogacy depends on both sides being informed and represented, not on one side being coached while the other is simply invoiced.

5. When does legal work begin, and do both sides have independent counsel?

This is one of the most important questions you can ask, and the answer should be exact. ASRM recommends that a legal clearance letter and an executed contract with independent legal counsel be in place before treatment starts. Its ethics guidance also notes that independent legal representation is required by some state laws and recommended more broadly, while warning clinicians and agencies to avoid arrangements that may exploit any party.

In plain terms, the legal work should not be an afterthought. It should not begin after everyone is already emotionally committed and medically scheduled. It should happen early enough that both sides can understand the terms, ask uncomfortable questions, and negotiate without pressure.

Independent counsel matters because shared representation can create obvious conflicts. Intended parents and a gestational carrier do not have identical interests on every issue, even when the relationship is positive and respectful. Questions around expenses, communication, medical decision-making, or logistics may look straightforward at first and become much more complex later. Separate legal advice protects both sides.

A reputable surrogate agency should be able to tell you when legal counsel enters the process, what must be completed before treatment, and how legal clearance is handled. If anyone implies that the contract is mostly routine or that independent lawyers are optional if everyone gets along, that is not a small concern. It is a structural one.

6. Who coordinates the journey day to day, and what does coordination actually cover?

“Coordination” is one of the most overused words in the surrogacy business. Nearly every surrogacy agency promises it. Far fewer explain what it means in daily practice.

Independent evaluation criteria in industry commentary have emphasized the importance of understanding who handles case management and legal coordination. That focus is deserved. During a surrogacy arrangement, somebody has to keep a long chain of events moving: [Surrogacy Company](#) communication with the clinic, timing around screenings, legal milestones, and practical follow-up between the parties. If no one clearly owns that work, delays and confusion tend to multiply.

A strong answer names roles. It distinguishes between agency coordination, legal counsel, and medical providers, rather than blending them together. It also explains who the intended parents and surrogate actually contact when a question comes up. Is there a dedicated case manager? Does that person stay with the case from match through birth, or does the file move from team to team? If multiple people are involved, how are handoffs managed?

You do not need an elaborate org chart. You need a believable explanation of responsibility. Good agencies can describe the flow of work in ordinary language because they live inside that process every day.

7. How do you define match speed, and what are you leaving out when you quote it?

Many intended parents ask about timeline first, and that is understandable. Surrogacy can feel like a race against emotional stamina, age, or previous disappointment. Agencies know this. Some may spotlight quick match times, but quick compared to what?

Industry guidance has singled out this question as especially important: can the agency explain how match speed is measured? That is a sharper question than asking for a number alone. A quoted timeline may refer to time until profile sharing, time until first conversation, time until formal match, or time until legal clearance. Those are not interchangeable.

ABC Surrogacy, for example, says it has no fee upfront to share surrogate profiles and that this allows for quick match time. That tells you something specific about its process. It does not tell you everything, and a thoughtful intended parent should keep going. Does “quick match” mean a profile is available for review quickly, or that all screening is already complete? Does it account for legal preparation and clinic timing, or only the initial introduction?

The point is not to distrust every timeline. It is to insist on a clean definition. A careful surrogate company will tell you where the clock starts, where it stops, and what variables can change the pace.

8. What are the total costs, and what is included or excluded?

Financial opacity is one of the most common stress multipliers in surrogacy. Independent evaluation criteria specifically include fee inclusions and exclusions, and that is because sticker price rarely tells the whole story.

A serious agency should be able to walk you through the broad categories that shape total cost. ABC Surrogacy says it helps intended parents understand total costs including agency fees, medical expenses, legal fees, and travel costs. That is the right direction because it recognizes that agency fees are only one part of the picture.

What you want is not just a base number. You want an explanation of scope. Which services are covered by the agency fee? Which are billed separately? Which depend on outside providers? If there are expected expenses that sit outside the core agency contract, those should be discussed before commitment, not after a match is emotionally underway.

One third-party review has noted that ABC Surrogacy publishes its fee structure and surrogate eligibility requirements. Publishing details like that does not guarantee the right fit for every family, but transparency of this kind is generally helpful because it reduces guesswork. When fees are hard to pin down, or when a representative resists giving a clear view of likely categories, pause there. Surrogacy already contains enough uncertainty without preventable billing confusion.

9. What outside professionals are available during pregnancy, and who pays for them?

Not every agency provides the same kind of pregnancy support, and some rely almost entirely on the clinic and local obstetric care. Others point to access to additional specialists. Mitera, for example, says it provides virtual access to maternal-fetal medicine subspecialists, licensed psychologists, and other pregnancy experts. It also states that it does not accept insurance.

Those two facts belong together. Access to specialists can be meaningful, especially in pregnancies where additional support is helpful or where parties want easier access to psychological expertise. But practical questions follow immediately. If insurance is not accepted, what does that mean for the family’s planning? Is this support included somewhere else, or separately arranged? How is the role of those specialists distinct from the treating OB or fertility clinic?

That is the larger lesson here. Supplemental support is only useful if the agency or partner can explain how it fits into the existing medical picture and how the financial side works. Fancy descriptions of support services are less

valuable than a clear account of who is involved, when, and under what payment arrangement.

If a surrogate agency highlights mental health or pregnancy support, ask who the licensed professionals are in functional terms, how referrals happen, and whether the service sits inside or outside insurance. Precision matters.

10. How does the agency prevent pressure, imbalance, or exploitation?

This is the ethical center of the whole decision. ASRM's ethics opinion warns clinicians to be aware of agency policies and avoid arrangements that may exploit any party. That warning should not be treated as abstract. Exploitation can enter through weak screening, poor legal separation, unclear fees, or communication structures that make one party feel cornered.

A capable agency will have thought seriously about this. You should hear it in the way they describe legal independence, counseling, informed decision-making, and the pace of the process. Agencies that pressure intended parents to move before they understand costs, or pressure surrogates to move before they receive proper counseling and legal advice, are telling you something about their priorities.

There are practical warning signs that deserve close attention:

1. Total fees are unclear, shifting, or difficult to pin down.
2. Independent legal counsel is absent, discouraged, or treated as optional.
3. Screening sounds thin, especially on psychological evaluation.
4. No one can clearly explain who manages the case and legal sequencing.
5. The process seems to push either party before informed agreement is in place.

None of these points requires a dramatic scandal to matter. Small shortcuts in surrogacy have a way of growing into large problems later, when emotions, money, and medical timelines are all in play.

What a strong answer sounds like

The best surrogacy agency does not need a perfect script. It needs a grounded one. When you ask difficult questions, strong agencies tend to respond in a way that is detailed without becoming defensive. They can explain their screening standards, identify when independent counsel comes in, and describe who handles coordination. They can also admit where variables exist, especially around timing and cost.

That last point is worth emphasizing. Honest agencies do not pretend that every part of surrogacy is predictable. They usually describe what they control, what outside professionals control, and what can shift based on clinic scheduling, legal timing, or the needs of the parties. That kind of realism is reassuring because it reflects actual case management rather than sales language.

If I had to condense the evaluation process into a practical final pass, I would look for five qualities in combination:

1. Transparent ownership and stable leadership.
2. Screening that reflects medical, psychological, and legal seriousness.
3. Independent legal counsel and contract completion before treatment.
4. Clear case management responsibilities from match through birth.
5. Fees and timelines explained with definitions, not slogans.

Plenty of agencies can market hope. Far fewer can demonstrate process. The families and surrogates who fare best usually find a partner that is calm under questioning, explicit about boundaries, and unwilling to cut corners that professional guidance treats as essential.

Surrogacy is intimate, legal, medical, and logistical all at once. That combination is exactly why agency selection deserves more than brand recognition or a quick phone call. Ask who owns the company. Ask how screening is done. Ask when legal work begins. Ask who coordinates what, how match speed is defined, and where the money really goes. The right surrogate agency will not mind the scrutiny. It will meet it.

And that, more than polished messaging, is often the clearest sign you are dealing with a professional operation.