

FAQ's & Resources

This section includes answers to all of your questions about adoption, as well as helpful links and resources to guide you through the adoption process.

Most Frequently Asked Questions About Adoption

WHAT IS ADOPTION?

Adoption is the permanent, legal transfer of all parental rights and obligations from one person or couple to another person or couple. Adoptive parents are real parents. Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as parents whose children were born to them. An adopted child has the same legal rights and privileges as birth children.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN WHO ARE AVAILABLE FOR ADOPTION?

More than 120,000 children wait for permanent homes in the United States. Most are school-aged or older. There are brothers and sisters who need to stay together. More than 60% of the children come from minority cultures. The majority are boys. Many have emotional, physical, learning disabilities or mental retardation. All are waiting for the love and security that only a permanent family can offer.

WHO CAN ADOPT?

All kinds of people choose to adopt—there is no one "acceptable" type. Agencies will consider single, married, divorced and same sex applicants. Agency requirements vary, but the age range most acceptable is usually 25 and up and often depends on the age of the child. There are women and men who are highly educated with well-respected jobs, high school graduates with blue-collar jobs, people with grown children, and others who want to care for a child with special needs. They are all capable people who have a lot of love to share.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO ADOPT?

The time frame, like the cost, varies with the agency and the type of child being adopted. The wait is typically between two and seven years for a healthy infant. If the prospective family has a completed home study, children with special needs can often be adopted quickly, within several months.

WHAT IS A HOME STUDY?

The home study is an educational process designed to help the agency get to know you and teach you about adoption and its impact on children and families. You will attend a series of meetings with a social worker that will provide more in-depth information. Social workers want to be sure that a person or couple can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a new child in their home. The homestudy process varies from agency to agency. Some conduct individual and joint interviews with a husband and wife; others conduct group homestudies with several families at one time. Most ask applicants to provide written information about themselves and their life experiences.

IS SPECIAL TRAINING REQUIRED TO BECOME AN ADOPTIVE PARENT?

Yes. Before you can become a foster or adoptive parent most agencies require you to take the MAPP (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting/Group Preparation) training class. It is a 30 hour training class given over a 10 week period.

The MAPP program examines 12 criteria or skills necessary for successful foster/adoptive parenting. Through role-playing, personal profiles, and other techniques, the homefinder and the applicant make mutual decisions about foster parenting. It encourages open communication and trust among foster families, adoptive families, birth families and casework staff.

Objectives of the training for prospective foster and adoptive parents are:

- **Learning what to expect and what services are available.**
- **Looking at one's own strengths and needs.**
- **Developing skills in giving love and attention to a troubled child.**
- **Learning about stages of child development.**
- **Helping children manage behavior.**
- **Understanding the roles and responsibilities of teamwork.**
- **Helping foster parents develop an understanding of the child's parents.**

HOW LONG DOES A HOMESTUDY TAKE?

This varies depending on the agency's requirements and on the number of families applying for children. Agencies are eager to place children in appropriate families as quickly as possible, and families who are interested in children with special needs are usually given prompt attention.

WHAT WILL IT COST TO ADOPT?

Adoption fees vary from state to state and it depends on whether you adopt an infant or an older child, or whether you use a private or public agency or an attorney. If a child is placed by a public state or county adoption agency, financed by tax dollars, fees will be minimal or there may be no fee at all. You should request a written detailed explanation of the fees, including what they cover and what "extras" you may be responsible for later. Adopting a child with special needs is less expensive. Often the agency has a sliding fee scale, and frequently there is little or no cost.

- ❖ **Special Needs- Conditions that make some children harder to place than other children include: physical, mental, and emotional disabilities, age, race (minorities), sibling groups, and history of physical or sexual abuse.**
- ❖ **Subsidies may be offered to help defray the costs of raising a child with special needs and take care of medical expenses. The subsidy may include a monthly care payment, medical assistance coverage, and a one-time cash grant to offset initial adoption costs.**

WILL THERE BE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AFTER I ADOPT?

Most children registered with agencies as having special needs have been already classified as eligible for financial assistance, also called subsidy. It is important that you discuss subsidy with your social worker prior to adoption. Many special needs children also receive medical assistance in the form of Medicaid.

WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE AFTER THE ADOPTION?

Whatever the issues, there is help in the form of post-adoption services. Post-adoption services include support groups, therapy, workshops for adoptive families, books, articles, and websites that address parenting issues with a focus on adoption.

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN LIVING WHILE WAITING TO BE ADOPTED?

Most children who are waiting for permanent families in the United States (those with special needs) live in foster or group homes because their parents were unable to care for them. Often, personal and family problems made it impossible for the parents to maintain a home for their children. Most of these children have been abused, neglected or abandoned.

HOW DOES FOSTER CARE DIFFER FROM ADOPTION?

Foster care is meant to be temporary shelter for a child; generally the plan is for the parents to take their child back when they are able. If that fails, the child is legally freed from their birth parents and made available for adoption. Once adopted, the child becomes a legal member of a family other than his/her biological one.

CAN THE BIRTH PARENTS TAKE A CHILD BACK?

In order for a child to be adopted, the birth parents have to relinquish legal custody or their rights have to be terminated. With most agency adoptions, a child is already legally free for adoption before a placement occurs. While cases where a parent changes his/her mind (usually before an adoption is finalized) are highly publicized, they occur infrequently.

CAN I ADOPT A CHILD IN A DIFFERENT STATE?

Yes. The Adoption and Safe Families Act, passed in 1997, requires state agencies to speed up a child's move from foster care to adoption by establishing time frames for permanency planning and guidelines for when a child must be legally freed for adoption. The bill also removes geographic barriers to adoption by requiring that states not delay or deny a placement if an approved family is available outside the state.

CAN I ADOPT A CHILD OF ANOTHER RACE?

Yes. In October 1995, the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act became effective. This act and subsequent revisions bar any agency involved in adoption that receives federal funding from discriminating because of race when considering adoption opportunities for children.

IF I AM GAY OR LESBIAN, CAN I ADOPT?

Yes. Gay men and lesbians are adopting children with special needs in the U.S. as well as being considered in the adoption of younger children through private and international adoptions. A few states still place restrictions on gay and lesbian adoption.

WHAT IF I WANT TO ADOPT AN INFANT?

Depending on several factors, you have a number of options available if you are considering the adoption of infants or toddlers. They include agency adoption (both public and private), independent adoption, and international adoption.

We suggest that you contact a number of agencies to learn about their procedures for approving families for adoption and the availability of infants. It is important that you obtain fee information in writing from any agency, attorney, intermediary or consultant before starting the process.

SHOULD I BE A FOSTER PARENT BEFORE I ADOPT?

In order to adopt, it is not necessary to begin as a foster parent. Foster families should be able to adopt the child in their care, if the child becomes legally free. Becoming a foster parent may increase your chances of adopting a young child.