

Adoption Advocacy

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1. Who are the children in foster care?

Children may be in foster care for a variety of reasons. The most common reason is the birth parents' inability to offer the child a safe and suitable home, coupled with inadequate supervision. This can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and/or substance abuse. Typically, the children are taken from the care of their birth family and are placed with a foster family to remove them from immediate harm. Most birth families are offered the opportunity to work on the issues that lead to the removal of their children. If the birth family fails to remedy the issues, parental rights will be terminated in order to provide for permanency for the children. Many of the children are a part of a sibling group. The children come from all ethnic groups; however, there is a growing number of children that are African American, Hispanic or from mixed ethnic heritages. The issues that the children have vary greatly. Some may have physical handicaps, cognitive challenges, and/or emotional handicaps from the trauma of abuse or neglect. A large majority of the children have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Deficit and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In addition, some children may be classified with special needs due to their age or the number of siblings that will be placed together as a sibling group.

2. Do I have to own my own home to adopt?

A person may own their own home, but it is not a requirement. The person may rent or own. The adoptive family may also be residing in a mobile home or an apartment. The only home requirement is that there are no more than two children of the same gender in one bedroom. No child may share a bedroom with an adult.

3. Can I be single and still adopt?

A married couple or a single person, male or female, may apply to adopt. A person may not be separated, however, to adopt through the Adoption Advocacy program.

3. Will I be working with DSS?

No, Adoption Advocacy is a private not- for- profit adoption agency.

4. What kind of background checks will be completed as a part of the process?

The agency will complete a criminal background check on anyone that resides in the home over the age of seventeen. In addition, there will be a check to see if there is a history of sexual abuse and/or child abuse. If there is a question or concern about your specific record, do not hesitate to ask us.

5. Do I have to be a foster parent to adopt?

While we are always thrilled to have foster parents in our program, it is not a requirement. Children that are placed through Adoption Advocacy are placed for adoption and are not placed as foster children.

6. What is the process for a special needs adoption?

The first step in the process is to complete a home study and family preparation session. Once a family is “home-study ready”, their agency, in cooperation with the family, will submit their paper work for consideration for a child or sibling group currently in foster care. With the advent of the Internet photo listings, a family may seek and be considered for a special needs child in any state. Families are encouraged to register on various matching web sites for added exposure. Once a family has been selected for being a potential adoptive resource for a child or sibling group, a staffing will be held with caseworkers to ascertain which family will be the best suited for a pre-adoptive placement.

Once the family is selected, they will meet with the child and the caseworkers involved with the child. This meeting helps a family to learn about the child's needs and history. After the face-to-face meetings, the family and staff will

decide if the adoptive placement is still a good match. If so, Interstate Compact for Protection of Children will be applied for if the child resides outside of the state. A placement may proceed once the Interstate Compact Compliance has been met. The family will provide care for the child until the finalization takes place. During the time from placement until finalization, the family will be supervised by a local licensed agency. The agency staff, an attorney, and the Family Court system will assist in the finalization of the adoption.

7. How much does an adoption from foster care cost and where can I find help?

The costs of an adoption from foster care are minimal if any. In fact, a foster care adoption can often be cost-free due to special programs such as purchase of services between states, agency grants, non-recurring costs program and tax incentives. Most public programs that work with foster care adoptions assist the family in the cost of transportation, medical needs of the child, finalization costs, and a monthly subsidy for care. Families should also be aware of their employee reimbursement programs for adoption as well as state and federal tax credits for families that adopt. The Hope for the Child tax credit is an excellent example of public policy in action that assists families in their adoption efforts. You may find out more about this legislation from your local congressman's office or your tax preparer.

8. After the adoption, how can I pay for the costs of raising a child?

Most families who are adopting children from foster care system are provided with a subsidy until they turn eighteen years old. This subsidy, which can vary from state to state, is intended to help with the basic needs of raising a child. In addition, most children are provided a Medicaid card that covers medical costs. With monthly assistance and medical coverage, most people can afford to adopt children from foster care.

9. What type of questions will I be asked during the home study?

During home study meetings with your worker, you can expect to answer questions about your background, your education, your job history, your marriage, your leisure activities, your religion and your experiences with children. For instance, the worker may ask:

- **What is your family like, and how will you integrate a new child into it? How will your extended family treat an adopted child?**
- **How is your marriage? How do you make decisions, resolve conflicts, and share your feelings?**
- **Why do you want to adopt?**
- **What is your home like? Are there places for your child to play or spend time alone?**
- **What is your neighborhood like?**
- **How do you plan to address discipline issues with your new child?**
- **What was your family like when you were growing up? How were you raised? Are you close to your parents?**
- **Where do you work? Is your schedule flexible enough to accommodate the responsibilities that come with parenting?**
- **What sort of child care arrangements will you make for your child?**

The goal of home studies is to help agencies locate the best home for each child it places, and make good matches between parents and children. If you have questions about your study, ask your social worker or agency.

10. What items will I need for my home study?

The following items are required during the home study process:

- **Tax return for the past two years- First two pages only – must be signed by the person who prepared the return.**
- **3 notarized reference letters (Letterhead is preferred. The letters should be addressed “to Whom It May Concern.” Suggestions for references include your minister, co-workers, banker accountant, neighbors and doctor.)**
- **Birth Certificate and Marriage Certificate**
- **Divorce Papers, if applicable**
- **Medical Clearance Statement from you doctor that says that you are healthy, free from communicable disease, psychologically sound and emotionally capable of parenting children.**
- **Several pictures of member of your household**

11. What is a home study?

A home study is a written document that your family caseworker will write about your family. It is the final result of a family's interviews with an adoption or foster care agency and includes basic information on a family and the types of children the family feels they are able to parent. Home studies are shared with child caseworkers who are looking for families for specific children. This lets caseworkers know that the family has been approved to adopt and/or foster and what the family can offer to a child, for example, the family might have a home that is wheelchair accessible or might be very interested in taking in a sibling group.

12. Am I too old to adopt?

There is no maximum age limit on adoptive parents. There is a minimum age requirement of 21, but many older parents make wonderful adoptive parents for older children.

13. How long does it take to adopt a child?

It usually takes about 12 months from the time a family first calls an adoption agency to the time when a child is placed with the family. Adoptions are usually finalized in court about 6 months after the child is placed with the family. Of course, these estimates can vary depending on where you live and your individual circumstances.

14. Can I adopt a child of a different race or ethnicity?

Yes. It is against federal law to prohibit parents from adopting a child from foster care of a different race or ethnicity. The only exception to this is the adoption of American Indian children where special considerations apply.

15. Can I adopt a child outside my state?

Yes! When a child is moved from one state to another to make sure the child is placed safely, social workers must follow the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). Families adopt children from outside their state every single month.