



RAISE *the*
FUTURE



MAKING CONNECTIONS

A Guide to Adoption

Welcome,

Thank you for contacting us about adoption.

Raise the Future believes every child deserves a family...therefore, we are the connection between children who wait in foster care and families who adopt. We provide expertise and support before, during, and after the adoption process. We are a recruitment, referral, training, and advocacy organization.

The children we serve are generally school-aged, members of a sibling group, children of color, and/or children with physical, mental/cognitive, and emotional delays. Most of them bear the emotional and behavioral scars of abuse and neglect. Raise the Future is NOT an adoption agency; does not have custody of the children, does not conduct family assessments (home studies) for families, and does not make placement decisions.

If you are new to the adoption process, we encourage you to attend orientation meetings about adoption and to contact public and private agencies as well as adoptive parent groups in your area. We also suggest that you read about adoption and how grief and loss, as well as abuse and neglect, can affect children's behaviors. Your library, bookstore, or adoptive parent group should have book lists and materials available. A great deal of information about adoption is also available on the internet. Adoption information seminars are scheduled regularly in some areas. Call our office for more information about orientation seminars, training schedules, and other adoption-related information.

The following information is intended to get you started on your journey toward adoption. Specific guidelines, policies, and procedures will differ from state to state, and even sometimes from country to country. We wish you well in your search for a child to adopt.

Raise the Future Staff



Steps to Adoption

The information described below is general. The process varies from state to state. For more specific information please go to our website www.raisethefuture.org or call Raise the Future. We can give you the name and telephone number of your state's Adoption Specialist, as well as state specific websites to visit.

- 1 Read.** Check out our website for a lot of great information about adoption. Books about adoption are available at your local libraries, book-stores, and Raise the Future through our Lending Library.
- 2 Join an Adoptive Parent Group.** Many adoptive parent groups welcome parents who are waiting to adopt. Other adoptive parents can answer many of your questions from first-hand experience.
- 3 Decide What Kind of Adoption You Want to Pursue.** Your options include infant, waiting child, international, open, closed, private agency, and public agency. You will want to gather more information to help you decide what type of child you feel you can best parent, how much information you want to exchange with an infant's birth family, whether you prefer to work with a public or private agency or if you want to adopt a child from another country.
- 4 Select an Agency.** Interview agencies to find the right fit for you. See Choosing an Adoption Agency for a list of questions to ask. We encourage you to attend orientation meetings offered by public and private agencies in your area. Although you must ultimately select one agency to work with, you are free to gather information from as many agencies as are available, even if you don't live in that agency's region. If you live in a rural area, you may have to make yourself available to travel to the nearest metropolitan area to get the adoption services you need.

County and state departments of social services place children who have been in foster care due to abuse and neglect and cannot return to their birth families. To adopt a child from abroad, you must work with an agency that is specifically licensed to conduct international adoptions. To adopt a healthy infant you will need to work with a private child placement agency.

5 Attend Orientation and Information Classes. Most public and private agencies require you to attend a series of classes to learn about the adoption process and emotional and behavioral issues that adopted children may experience. In many cases, you must complete these classes before the agency will begin the family assessment process.

6 Complete the Family Assessment Process. The family assessment (also called an adoption study or home study) varies by agency and by type of adoption. It should be an educational and self-evaluation process as well as a way for the social worker to get to know you and your family and help you determine what child would best fit into your home. Home Study requirements may differ when pursuing an international, waiting child/foster care or infant adoption. Families will want to make sure the home study they pursue will work (are a match) for their adoption goals.

The family assessment will include some or all of the following:

- Autobiographies written by each parent;
- A visit to your home;
- Medical reports from your physician;
- Proof of employment/ability to financially support a child;
- Checks for any criminal record, including the state child abuse registry;
- References from friends and associates;
- Participation in adoptive parent training classes;
- A family picture book or video to present to the birth mother, waiting child, or overseas agency.

Interviews with your social worker are likely to touch on the following topics; why you want to adopt; your hopes and expectations for your child; your readiness to parent; your family's values, strengths, and weaknesses; how your family handles crises and changes; and where you will get support or professional help if you need it.

7 Child Search. Once your family assessment is completed, your social worker should be considering your family for a child. After being selected, you are given extensive information about the child so that you can decide if this child is a good fit for your family. Some social workers, both with public and private agencies, may encourage you to be involved in the search for a child. Always let your social worker know what you are doing to help identify a child.

1. You may look at photo listings books of waiting children; watch for waiting child features in newspapers, adoption newsletters, social media and magazines; watch television features about waiting children. (E.g., "Wednesdays Child"); and access websites on the internet. (E.g., www.raisethefuture.org, www.utahadopt.org, www.AdoptUSKids.org).

2. You may register with regional or national exchanges, which may assist you in your search.

8 While You Wait... Waiting is one of the most challenging aspects of the adoption process. Waiting happens:

- a. After the voicemail you left an agency to ask about adoption
- b. While you are waiting to attend an orientation
- c. After you submitted your application and until training classes begin
- d. Until your home study begins
- e. After your home study is approved
- f. While you are waiting for a placement
- g. After you have a child placed in your home

..... and it finishes at finalization!

Waiting can be frustrating, lonely, and disempowering. Although you must make many decisions (when is the right time to build our family through adoption, can we handle this, can we afford it, what age/gender of child do we want, shall I quit my job, and so on) throughout this time, mostly it feels as if this very important part of my life is not in your own hands.

During this difficult time, we encourage you to use the time to learn as much as you can.

Some ideas you might consider are:

- Read, read, read any or all of the books that have been recommended by our staff
- Visit your school district and introduce yourself; learn about the types of services that may be available to your child with special needs
- Check out local mental health providers, both public and private, who have experience and expertise working with adoptive families
- Learn about pre/post-adoptive parent support groups; it can be especially helpful getting to know those who are sensitive to adoption-related issues and/or have a specialty in certain diagnoses
- Begin to line up your support network (child care, respite care providers, therapist, pediatrician, support group, and other adoptive parents)
- Consider becoming a respite care provider for another adoptive or foster family (contact your local department of social services)
- Attend adoption-related classes or seminars in your area
- Watch these online videos:

1. ***Multiple Transitions: A Young Child's Point of View on Foster Care and Adoption***
Michael Trout The Infant-Parent Institute
2. ***Struggle for Identity: Issues in Transracial Adoption*** NY State Coalition
3. ***First Person Plural***
The Independent Television Service & National Asian American Telecommunication Association
4. ***The Adoption Trilogy***
Jean Strauss
 - Access online support for waiting adoptive parents through groups and blogs; there are many to choose from
 - View this comprehensive website – Child Welfare Information Gateway, which previously received a Forbes' Best Award
 - Have fun! Attend an adoption party or a Heart Gallery exhibit, volunteer at your local Raise the Future office or another organization that serves children in your city
 - Know that the child who eventually joins your home will be more than worth waiting for!

9 Pre-placement. During this time you may visit with the birth family of the infant you plan to adopt, you may have several visits of increasing length with your child from foster care, or you may begin making travel plans to bring home the child you plan to adopt internationally.

10 Placement. Your child finally comes home!

11 Post-placement. Your agency, social worker, parent group and professional counselors can help your family during this often challenging time. The social worker will be required to visit with you, provide support and assistance, and make reports to the court to be sure the placement is progressing well before finalizing the adoption. During this period, you will need to file a petition to adopt with the court.

12 Finalization. Your social worker or lawyer will usually go to court with you to make the child you are adopting a legal member of your family. Most infant adoptions are finalized six months after placement. Waiting child adoptions are usually finalized a year after placement. Waiting child adoptions are usually finalized a year after placement in order to give the child and family sufficient time to adjust and be sure that the family can successfully meet the child's needs.

13 Post- Legal Period. Adoption is a lifelong process for the child and the adoptive family. Do not hesitate to contact your agency and social worker for help, support, referrals and to share successes.

Choosing an Adoption Agency

When you are considering adoption, the wide variety of options can seem overwhelming. You will have numerous choices to make, so information is the key ingredient.

- 1 Talk to others. Members of adoptive parent groups are full of information about adoption and can often tell you about specific agencies in your area that work well with adoptive families.
- 2 Attend agency orientation meetings.
- 3 Interview public and private agencies. Your state's adoption consultant within the Department of Child and Family Services should be able to send you a list of licensed adoption agencies.

The following questions may help you determine with whom you wish to work.

- **Is the agency a non-profit or a for-profit corporation?** How does the agency allocate its money?
- **What types of adoption does the agency conduct?** Infant adoptions, adoptions of children from foster care, adoptions of children from other countries? Agencies that conduct more than one of these types of adoption or place children from different countries will refer to their different "programs."
- **How many children did the agency place last year?** How many were placed from the specific program you're interested in?
- **What are the agency's general requirements about the characteristics of the parents they work with** (age of adoptive parents, single or non-traditional families, marital history, length of marriage, religious affiliation, fertility restrictions, number of children already in the family)? Do these requirements vary depending on the type of adoption? Requirements for adopting an infant are generally more restrictive than those for adopting a child from foster care.

- **How much will it cost to complete an adoption?** Are there sliding fee scales? When will payments be required? (We recommend that you pay for services as you receive them, rather than paying the total cost upfront.) Adoptions of waiting children through public social services agencies are often free. If fees are charged, they may be reimbursed when a child from that agency is placed with you. In addition, there currently is a federal tax credit available. Agency fees for private infant adoptions range from \$5,000 - \$40,000. International adoption agency fees are generally in the same range. Be sure to ask for a fee schedule so you know before you begin exactly what costs are covered and what costs may be added on later, such as legal fees, the birth mothers and/or infants' medical expenses, expenses for travel to visit a waiting child in another state or to bring a child home from another country. (Further information about financial reimbursements and adoption subsidies can be found on the "Adoption Subsidies" page.)
- **How long will it take to complete an adoption?** Each adoption is unique. However, ask about the average length of time families wait between applying to adopt and beginning the family assessment. Ask how long of a wait to expect between completion of the assessment and having a child placed in your home.
- **What steps are required in the process?** Although each agency's procedures vary and there are different requirements for infants, waiting children, and international adoption, you can complete some or all of the following.
 - i. Initial interview
 - ii. Application form
 - iii. Adoption preparation classes
 - iv. Family assessment (also called adoption home study)
- **At what point does the agency notify prospective parents of their approval for placement?** Can you see a copy of your family assessment/home study? If you are not approved, can you find out why? Does this agency have a grievance process?
- **What steps will the agency take to help identify the right child for your family?** What can or must you do to help find a child?
- **Does the agency conduct home studies for both in-state and out-of-state children?** Most public agencies placing children from foster care are primarily concerned about placing the children in their custody.

As an adoptive family, they see you as a resource for their children. You need to ask at what point in time they will consider helping you adopt a child from another country or state if they have not placed a child in your home. Verify this with your state regulations. Most private agencies that help families adopt waiting children will help you adopt from your state or another state. Most private agencies placing newborns will be facilitating a match between you and one of the birth mothers they are working with.

- **In an infant adoption, do the birth parents select the adoptive parents for their child?** Are the birth parents and adoptive parents able to decide how much communication they want before and after the child is placed? Who determines how open the adoption will be?
- **Does the agency have a website or photos and profiles of waiting children in their state and from other states that you can look at?**
- **Is an adoption subsidy available to help cover the costs of the child's medical or emotional needs?** Do not finalize an adoption of a child from foster care until you have a subsidy agreement in writing from the child's agency!
- **In international adoption, once a family accepts a child, how long will it be before the child can travel to the US?** Is the adopting family required to travel to bring the child home? How long will one or both parents need to stay in the child's country?
- **In international adoptions, is the agency or attorney licensed or Hague-accredited to conduct international adoptions?** Do they work with foreign agencies that are licensed or accredited in their own countries?
- **What happens if prospective parents don't feel they can accept the child the agency had offered them?**
- **What kind of support services does the agency offer before, during, and after the placement of the child?** What services are offered to the adoptive family; and to the birth parents? Does the agency offer counseling or support groups? Are services available after the adoption is finalized?

- **What if the adoption doesn't work out?** Will you be considered for another child?
- **Is it possible to talk to families who have adopted through the agency or through the specific program you're interested in?** Most agencies will give you the names of families who were happy with their adoption experience. Most states maintain complaint files for licensed agencies at their licensing office. Again, parent support groups are often excellent resources for evaluations of local agencies.

Choose your agency on the basis of their programs and your feelings of comfort and trust in them. After your choice is made, get to know your agency! Get on their newsletter mailing list if they have one and try to attend some of their functions such as picnics, fundraisers, and classes. Get to know the staff and, in turn, they will feel increasingly more familiar with you. If you have the time, many agencies would appreciate some volunteer help with their various activities such as assisting at a fundraiser or answering the phones for a few hours per week.

National Adoption Resources

Center For Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E): adoptionssupport.org

Families Rising: wearefamiliesrising.org

National Center For Enhanced Post-Adoption Support: postadoptioncenter.org

Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth In Finding Permanency: qic-ey.org

