



DAVE THOMAS
FOUNDATION
FOR ADOPTION®

Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



FINDING FOREVER FAMILIES

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO ADOPTION

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Who we are

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is driven by a single goal: finding a loving family for every child waiting in foster care to be adopted. We are America's only national nonprofit public charity dedicated solely to finding permanent homes for the more than 100,000 children in foster care.

We award grants to adoption organizations that connect children with families. We increase awareness across the nation about the waiting children and the process to adopt. We raise funds to support our awareness and advocacy programs. We offer free resources, like this guide, to professionals, and prospective and adoptive parents.

Our core beliefs

- Every child deserves a safe, loving, and permanent family.
- No child should linger in foster care or leave the system at age 18 without a permanent family of his or her own.
- Every child is adoptable.

“These children are not someone else’s responsibility. They are our responsibility.”

—Dave Thomas, Founder of Wendy’s® and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Since we began, the Foundation has been guided by Dave Thomas’ inspiring words.

Whether you are an adoption professional, a prospective adoptive parent, or someone who wants to know more about foster care adoption, this guide will help you gain the knowledge you need to make a difference in the life of a child.

What is adoption?

When a child is adopted, that child moves permanently from one family to another family. In the process, all parental rights are legally transferred to the new parents. This means adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as parents whose children were born to them. It also means adopted children have all the emotional, social, legal, and familial benefits of biological children.

There are a few different methods you can use when adopting a child, including:

- Public agency adoption
- Private agency adoption
- Private attorney adoption

PUBLIC ADOPTION AGENCY

The state or county government agency that has legal custody of children in foster care is a public adoption agency. These organizations are also responsible for placing children in adoptive homes from foster care.

PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCY

A private agency is licensed by the state to facilitate domestic or international adoptions. A private agency may be secular or religious, for profit or nonprofit.

ATTORNEY

If you choose to use a lawyer for a private adoption, be sure it is someone who you know has a strong sense of ethics and a wide knowledge of adoption laws in your state. A responsible adoption attorney will be sure the birth parents have received counseling so they are confident about their decision and ready to relinquish custody. The attorney can also ensure that you receive a complete health and medical history of both the child and the birth family.

Two excellent sources for finding attorneys:

- Your local bar association
- American Academy of Adoption Attorneys at **202-832-2222** or **adoptionattorneys.org**

The four types of adoption

When starting the adoption process, you have four options. You can adopt a child from the U.S. foster care system – which is what the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is all about – or adopt an infant in the U.S., adopt a child from another country, or adopt a stepchild. Read on to learn more about what each type entails.

1 ADOPTING A CHILD FROM THE U.S. FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

Children waiting in the foster care system vary in age, from infants to young adults. The average age of a waiting child is 8, and many have brothers or sisters with whom they should stay. The majority are healthy children who simply need and deserve loving and supportive adults in their lives.

Some children have medical challenges, but these disabilities or conditions are often treatable. It is important to understand that some medical and emotional disabilities are not easily corrected. But support and resources are available to help.

Begin by contacting your state's public agency or another adoption organization, like the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. We fund adoption professionals in agencies across the nation to implement aggressive, child-focused recruitment targeted exclusively on moving children from foster care into adoptive families. For more information, refer to our supplemental agency listings included in this guide, call **1-800-ASK-DTFA**, or visit **davethomasfoundation.org**.

2 ADOPTING AN INFANT IN THE UNITED STATES

If you would like to adopt a baby, contact your state's public agency, a licensed private agency, or an adoption attorney. A good place to start is to search "Adoption Organizations" on the internet. To connect with an adoption attorney, contact your local bar association, the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at **800-394-3366** and online at **childwelfare.gov**.

3 ADOPTING A CHILD FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY

Hundreds of thousands of children from around the world who are orphaned need families. Last year, more than 7,000 children were adopted from other countries.¹ Rules governing international adoptions can change quickly and can be complicated. If you are interested in adopting a child from another country, it is important to work with an experienced and ethical agency, group, or individual.

If you pursue an intercountry adoption, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service requires that you complete a homestudy. In most cases, the adoption agency or person helping you can assist in completing the homestudy and help you find a child who needs a family.

LEARN MORE:

- U.S. Department of State at **adoption.state.gov**
- The Joint Council on International Children's Services at **703-535-8045**, or **jcics.org**
- National Council for Adoption **adoptioncouncil.org**

4 ADOPTING A STEPCHILD

To learn about the requirements for stepparent adoption, consult an adoption attorney or contact the court in your state or county that handles adoption. You may refer to the Stepparent Adoption Fact Sheet for Families on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website, **childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_step.cfm**.

¹Source: Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Dept. of State, adoption.state.gov.



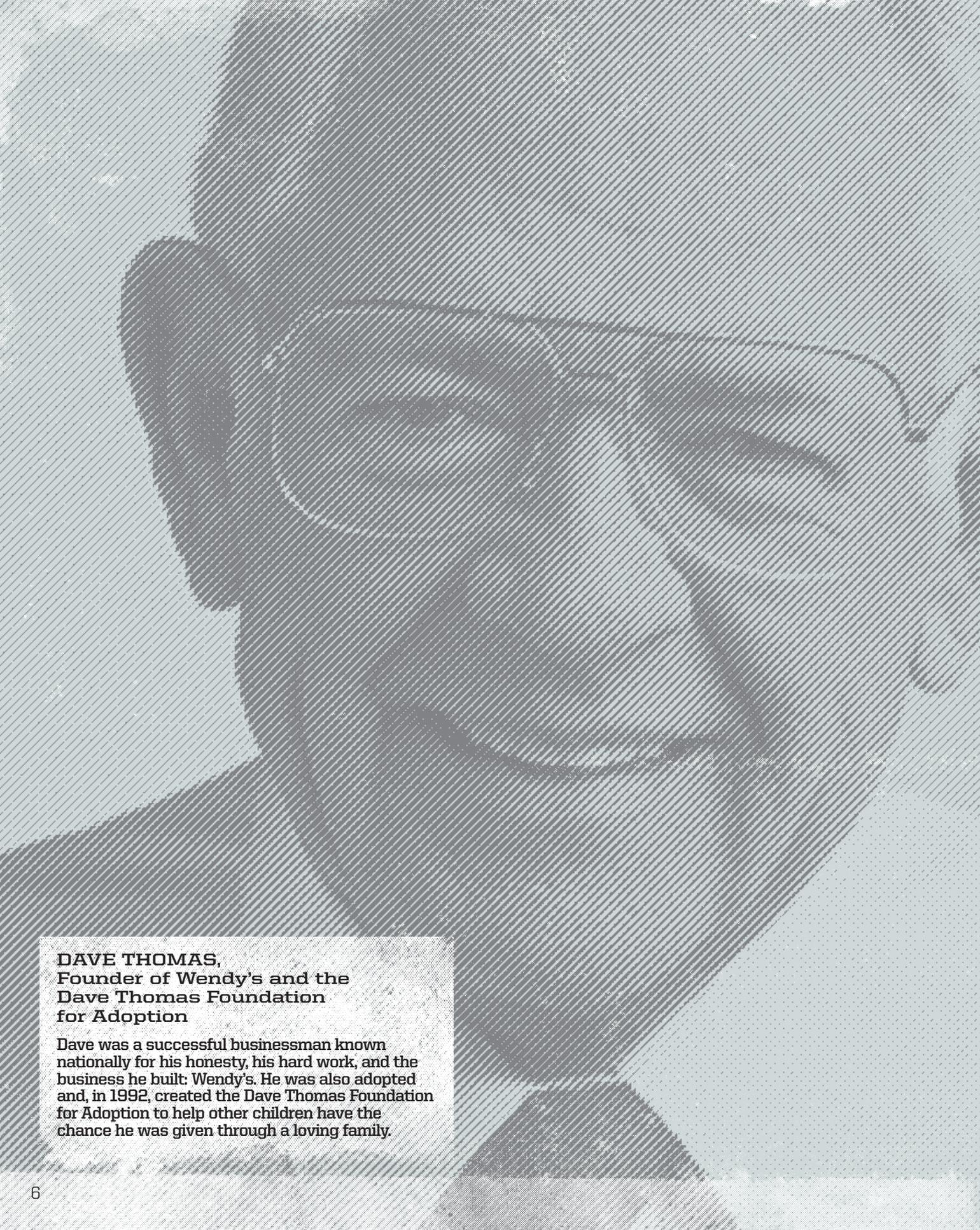
GETTING STARTED

AS YOU BEGIN YOUR ADOPTION JOURNEY, TAKE SOME TIME TO LOOK THROUGH THIS GUIDE AND BROWSE THE OTHER RESOURCES WE'VE COMPILED TO HELP YOU.

READ ON. A CHILD IS WAITING.

"Coming home from prom to see my dad waiting up for me was one of the best nights of my life."

**James, age 18
-adopted at 17**



**DAVE THOMAS,
Founder of Wendy's and the
Dave Thomas Foundation
for Adoption**

Dave was a successful businessman known nationally for his honesty, his hard work, and the business he built: Wendy's. He was also adopted and, in 1992, created the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to help other children have the chance he was given through a loving family.

10 STEPS TO BUILDING YOUR FOREVER FAMILY: A WORKBOOK

Like Dave, every child has a story to tell, and every adoptive family has its own set of traditions. This makes every adoption unique.

But all adoptions share a common process, and being familiar with the 10 steps in that process will help you be fully prepared to welcome a new child (or children) into your home.

In this helpful step-by-step guide, you'll find all of the information you need to become the future every child deserves.

So read on. Find the facts. Start your journey.

STEP 1: EXPLORE THE TYPES OF ADOPTION.

Exploring your wishes for family and your parenting style can help put a successful adoption on the right track. Before choosing what kind of adoption you want, take a quick personal inventory. **How many of the following characteristics describe you?**

- A belief in adoption
- The ability to permanently commit to a child
- Patience and perseverance
- A good sense of humor and talent for keeping life in perspective
- A love of children and parenting
- The ability to accept without judging, and to love unconditionally
- Understanding that healing doesn't always come quickly
- Resourcefulness

If most (or all) of these qualities describe you, then take it one step further. Ask yourself:

- Do I clearly understand why I want to adopt?
- If I have a partner, do we work as a team? Are we both committed to adoption?
- Does my lifestyle allow me the time necessary to meet the needs of children?
- Have I discussed adoption with all of my family members, including my children?
- Do I have support systems to help me after I adopt, or do I know where to find them?

Which of the four types of adoption best fits with your beliefs and goals as a parent?

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MISPERCEPTION:
50% of Americans believe children in foster care have entered the system because of juvenile delinquency.¹

REALITY: Children enter the system through no fault of their own, as victims of neglect, abandonment, or abuse. Children waiting to be adopted may be older, but they are no less deserving of permanent families.

¹Source: National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, July 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.org.

Where to start

DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION

Funds adoption professionals in agencies across the nation to implement aggressive, child-focused recruitment strategies targeted exclusively on moving children from foster care into adoptive families. Visit davethomasfoundation.org.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION

National Council for Adoption meets the diverse needs of children, birthparents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and all those touched by adoption through global advocacy, education, research, legislative action, and collaboration. Call **703-299-6633**, email ncfa@adoptioncouncil.org, or visit adoptioncouncil.org.

NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN (NACAC)

Maintains a list of parent support groups and other sources of information about adoption and post-adoption. To request a list, call **651-644-3036**, or send an email to info@nacac.org. For more information, visit nacac.org.

ADOPTUSKIDS

Contains valuable adoption information, as well as photos and descriptions of thousands of children in the U.S. waiting to be adopted. Call **888-200-4005**, or visit adoptuskids.org.

CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY

Provides access to information and resources to help protect children and strengthen families, including foster care adoption information. A function of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Call **800-394-3366**, email info@childwelfare.gov, or visit childwelfare.gov.

ONLINE

Listings under "Adoption" typically include adoption agencies, advocates, attorneys, support groups, and more.

WEDNESDAY'S CHILD

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption joins with local television stations and child welfare organizations to find adoptive homes for children in foster care in Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Philadelphia. Visit davethomasfoundation.org for more information.

LEARN MORE:

Adoption.org

Adoptive Families Magazine

646-366-0830, adoptivefamilies.com

Child Welfare League of America

800-407-6273, cwla.org/pubs

Children Awaiting Parents (CAP)

888-835-8802, capbook.org

Fostering Families Today/Adoption Today

888-924-6736, fosteringfamielstoday.com

National Center for

Adoption Law & Policy

614-236-6730, ncalp.org

National Child Welfare

Resource Center for Adoption

248-443-0306, nrcadoption.org

Perspectives Press

317-872-3055, perspectivespress.com

STEP 2: RESEARCH THE COSTS.

Once you've decided which type of adoption to pursue, learn more about the costs involved.

Total costs vary depending on the type of adoption, the agency you use, the state in which you live, attorney fees (if applicable), and if travel is required. It is very important to obtain fee information in writing before beginning the process. You should always request a detailed written explanation of the fees, including what the fees cover and any potential additional fees.

Covering the costs

ADOPTION SUBSIDIES

If you adopt a child from foster care, he or she may be eligible for adoption assistance. Federal or state adoption subsidies are available to help cover the short- and long-term costs of adopted children who are in need of special services.

Benefits vary from state to state, but all states typically provide:

- Monthly cash payments
- Medical assistance
- Social services
- One-time-only reimbursement of non-recurring adoption expenses

Before getting too far into the process, ask your social worker whether these subsidies are available from your state. You will not be able to negotiate subsidies once your adoption is finalized, so it is best to investigate your options early, even if you don't currently need assistance. For more information about adoption subsidies, contact the Adoption Subsidy Resource Center provided by the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) at **800-470-6665**, or nacac.org/adoptionssubsidy.

LOANS AND GRANTS

Many sources offer adoption loans or assistance to individuals. Some sources to contact include:

America's Christian Credit Union
americaschristiancu.com

Brittany's Hope Foundation
brittanyshope.org

Gift of Adoption
giftofadoption.org

Show Hope
showhope.org

Additional resources may be available. Visit davethomasfoundation.org for a complete list.

MISPERCEPTION:
39% of Americans think foster care adoption is expensive.¹

REALITY: The truth is that foster care adoption is not expensive, and there is financial support available for parents who choose this path.

EMPLOYER BENEFITS

Many employers offer adoption benefits, such as financial reimbursement, paid leave, or other time off for their employees who adopt. The average adoption-friendly employer offers up to \$7,000 in financial assistance and four weeks of paid leave per adoption.²

The Adoption-Friendly Workplace, one of the Foundation's signature programs, provides free resources to educate employers on how to add adoption benefits. We offer free tools for employers and compile an annual list of companies already offering adoption benefits. Call **877-777-4222**, or visit **adoptionfriendlyworkplace.org**.

TAX CREDITS AND EXCLUSIONS

The adoption tax credit is a non-refundable, permanent tax benefit for eligible families who adopt through foster care, internationally, and privately. In 2013, the maximum federal tax credit for qualifying adoption expenses was \$12,970. It may be carried forward for five additional years, applying to each year's liability until the full credit amount is used or time expires.

Because of potential changes in this credit, it is important to speak with your tax advisor and/or call **800-829-3676** to request the IRS publication called "Instructions for Form 8839," or visit **irs.gov**. To learn more about the adoption tax credit, visit **adoptiontaxcredit.org**.

MILITARY REIMBURSEMENTS

For active-duty personnel, the military offers up to \$2,000 (\$5,000 if more than one child is adopted) for qualified adoption expenses per calendar year. For couples who are both in the military, only one member may claim expenses for each adopted child. Visit **militaryfamily.org** for more information.

A child with disabilities may be eligible for benefits through the military's Extended Care Health Option, and the Exceptional Family Member Program works to ensure that parents of children with special needs are assigned for duty in areas where the child's needs can be met.

LEARN MORE ABOUT MILITARY REIMBURSEMENTS

Child Welfare Information Gateway: A service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: **800-394-3366** or **childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_milita.cfm**

COMMON RANGE FOR ADOPTION COSTS:³

Foster care adoption through a public agency: \$0-\$2,500
Private agency adoption: \$5,000-\$40,000+
Independent adoption with an attorney: \$8,000-\$40,000+
International adoption: \$15,000-\$30,000+

¹Source: National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, July 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.org.

²Source: Adoption Benefits Survey conducted by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2013.

³Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost/s_costs.pdf.

STEP 3: SELECT AN ADOPTION AGENCY.

Not all adoption agencies are alike, so choose carefully. Some handle the entire adoption process, helping you throughout. Others expect you to take the initiative to learn about procedures and deadlines. Get a sense of how much control you want over the process and then decide on an approach and agency that fits you best.

You must work with an agency operating in the state where you currently live, and you will have to decide whether to work with a public or private agency. Contact your state adoption unit for available options. Be sure each agency you consider is licensed to provide adoption services in your state.

Find agencies in your area

- Contact your state's adoption unit for a list of licensed adoption agencies – both public and private.
- If you are interested in adopting a child from foster care, check the agencies listed at the back of this guide.
- Look online under “Adoption” or “Social Services” for licensed private adoption agencies. Ask if the agency is licensed.
- Contact adoptive parent support groups or adoptive parents for referrals.
- Check the Child Welfare Information Gateway (a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) at childwelfare.gov.

To find a public or private agency that is a good fit for you, your beliefs, and your situation, compare information from several different agencies by asking:

- What kind of children does the agency place (ages, backgrounds, etc.)?
- How many children has the agency placed in each of the past few years?
- How will the agency conduct a search for me?
- What kind of training is provided for parents?
- Can I be a foster parent and still be considered as an adoptive parent?
- What criteria does the agency use to match children with families?
- What type of adoptive parents does the agency seek?
- How long, on average, must one wait for a child?
- What does the homestudy entail?
- If I learn of a child in another state, will the agency pursue the child?
- How much does a completed adoption cost – in total and each part?
- Can the agency help me locate sources of financial aid, including subsidies?
- Can the agency provide references from parents who recently adopted?
- What post-adoption resources does the agency provide or connect to parents?

STEP 4: BEGIN TO WORK WITH AN AGENCY.

Once you have selected an agency, it is time to begin the formal adoption process. Ask your agency for guidance. Typically, you will attend an orientation meeting or training session for prospective adoptive parents, where you will:

- Meet social workers and learn about policies and practices
- Learn about the children who are available
- Be asked to examine your feelings about adoption and determine if adoption is the right choice for you
- Gain insight into the challenges and rewards of adoptive parenting
- Get application materials

Attend an orientation session

If possible, attend an orientation session before filling out an application so you are confident in the agency's abilities to meet your needs. Application fees are often non-refundable, even if you decide to work through a different agency, or change your mind about adopting.

Once you have chosen an agency and have completed the application process, ask your social worker how you should schedule and prepare for your homestudy.

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MISPERCEPTION:
Only 29% of Americans think a person over the age of 55 can definitely provide a healthy and loving environment for a child.¹

REALITY: 24% of adopted children live with an adoptive parent 55 years old or older.²

¹Source: National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, July 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.org.

²Source: Child Trends' data tabulation of the 2011 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). August, 2013. Data from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, Cornell University, used with permission. Collected by Children's Bureau. Funded by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth & Families. The data collector, funder, the Archive, Cornell University and their agents or employees bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented.

STEP 5: BEGIN YOUR HOMESTUDY.

A homestudy is much more than a background check on you and members of your family. It is a way for your social worker to get to know you; to educate you about adoption and how it affects children and families; to assure that your home is safe and appropriate for children; and to prepare you to parent a child who brings experiences, ideas, and expectations that might be different from your own.

Everyone must complete a homestudy. The process can take from three to six months, depending on the agency, the social worker, and the prospective parents' cooperation.

Find out costs and requirements for homestudies and parenting classes

HOMESTUDY REQUIREMENTS

Homestudy requirements vary by agency and by state, so you need to ask for a list of the items your agency needs to complete the process, such as birth certificates, licenses, personal references, background and criminal checks, and proof of recent physical examinations.

Costs for a homestudy also vary, depending on the agency type. Public agencies often charge little or nothing. Private agencies typically charge between \$1,000 and \$3,000.

The length of time a homestudy is valid is determined by your agency and your state. Homestudies typically last one year and can be renewed on an annual basis thereafter.

ADOPTION PREPARATION AND PARENTING CLASSES

Many agencies offer, and sometimes require, group classes for adoptive families. Even if your agency does not require a training course, you should consider taking this opportunity to learn more about the ages and stages of childhood, the dynamics of abuse and neglect, adoption issues, the impact of trauma on children, and parenting children who are adopted. The classes provide a forum for you to discuss any questions and concerns you have about the process.

It is important that you be familiar with the kinds of issues that arise when a child or sibling group joins your family. For example, older adopted children may have unique needs and life experiences that will affect their interactions with you, new siblings, and new classmates.

Once you have successfully completed the classes and homestudy, you will be licensed or certified to adopt.



“I love when my mom tucks me in at night.
No one did that for me before.”

Jasmine, age 9
– adopted at 7

MISPERCEPTION:

Only 38% of Americans believe a single parent raising an adopted child can definitely provide a healthy and loving environment.¹

REALITY: One-third of children adopted from foster care in 2011 were adopted by single parents or unmarried couples.²

¹Source: National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, July 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.org.

²Source: The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, AFCARS Report 19, FY 2011 Estimates (July 2013).

STEP 6: FIND AND GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD.

To begin the search for a child, get in touch with your state agency, your county agency, or a private adoption organization in your community. You may also contact the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and work with the recruiter in your city or state.

Here are several national organizations that provide visual information of waiting children (such as websites and photo listing books):

- Adopt America Network, **800-246-1731** or **adoptamericanetwork.org**
- AdoptUSKids, a project of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, **888-200-4005** or **adoptuskids.org**
- Children Awaiting Parents, **888-835-8802** or **capbook.org**
- The Adoption Exchange, **800-451-5246** or **adoptex.org**
- Jewish Children's Adoption Network, **jcan.qwestoffice.net**
- Northwest Adoption Exchange, **nwae.org**
- Wednesday's Child, **davethomasfoundation.org**

For a more comprehensive list of resources, visit our website, **davethomasfoundation.org**.

Get to know your child

When you have found a child and have been identified as his or her potential family, learn as much as you can about the child. Talk to foster parents and social workers. How often has the child moved while in care, or changed schools? Does he or she still have contact with extended family? What are the child's favorite foods and games? What is the best way to comfort the child? What is his or her background? What were the birth parents like? What are the family's and child's medical histories? Knowing everything possible about your child will make the transition from foster care much smoother for both you and the child.

MISPERCEPTION

Same-sex parents are not capable of providing a healthy environment for an adopted child.

REALITY: Every valid study to date concludes children of same-sex parents adjust well and grow up in positive environments compared with heterosexual families.¹

¹Source: adoptioninstitute.org

The agency social worker should provide any available information about the child or the adoption process to help you reach your decision. Your social worker will also help you determine whether your family is the right fit for meeting the child's needs.

If the child has certain medical conditions or challenges, this is the time to decide if your family is prepared and fully committed to addressing any issues that may arise from these special needs.

A child's perspective

It is a simple fact: children waiting for adoption have had disruptive home lives. They've been separated from their birth parents – and often from siblings or extended family – through no fault of their own, and they're often impacted by trauma and left with feelings of loss and grief, and a fear of rejection.

They are eager to belong. But they may doubt themselves because of past experiences, or they may be suspicious of new adults entering their lives. They may not openly discuss specifics, but that doesn't always mean that they have fully accepted or understand the idea behind adoption.

Create a welcoming environment so a child feels comfortable discussing thoughts and feelings with you, and let him or her know that it's okay to talk about it. **As you continue to build a new permanent home for the child, keep in mind some of the questions he or she may have along the way:**

Are you going to give me away someday?

Will I be abused again?

What about my brother and sister?

Will you not only adopt me, but also accept me?

Will I have to change schools?

What if you don't like to do the things I like to do?

Will you want me to call you Mom and Dad?

Will my birth parents think I don't love them?

Will I have to change my name?

Do I dare hope that you will be my forever family?

For more help answering a child's questions:

- Contact your social worker
- Take advantage of counseling offered by the agency
- Join an adoptive parent support group
- Seek adoption-related articles, books, and resources



STEP 7: PREPARE FOR YOUR CHILD AND GET ORGANIZED.

It's time. You know your child, and now he or she is ready to be placed in your home. At this point, you need to get all the necessary documents in order, so the transition is smooth for both your child and your family.

Follow this list of necessary preparations

Contact your insurance company.

- Your child will be covered under your health insurance plan beginning on the date he or she is placed in your home. Find out what documents your insurance company requires for authentication, such as the adoption petition.
- Check for any exclusions in your health insurance policy relating to pre-existing conditions. If your child has special needs and is eligible for an adoption subsidy, he or she may be covered through Medicaid.
- Update wills and change beneficiary designations on life insurance policies as needed.

Obtain a copy of your child's original birth certificate.

It may be difficult to get this document once the adoption is finalized, but without it, your child could have trouble getting passports and other important documents.

Prepare to get a new Social Security number and birth certificate.

Your child will need IDs that reflect a new last name and family situation. If your child already has a Social Security number, you may be able to keep the number and change his or her name by using a new birth certificate. Regardless of what you choose to do, your child must have a Social Security number for you to claim him or her as a dependent.

Plan services for your child and for yourself.

- Day care if you adopt a younger child – some states provide it
- School enrollment for older children
- Therapy, counseling, tutoring, or respite care options
- An adoptive parents' support group

The most important thing to remember is to ask for what you need. Be an advocate for yourself and your child.

Make your house child-friendly.

First, prepare your child's new room to show that the area belongs to him or her. Modify, reposition, or remove any household objects that could be dangerous.

Inform your other children of specific changes that will occur.

Tell them how their roles and lives may change for the better when their new sibling arrives. Be proactive, and prepare to help them through the transition.

Negotiate an adoption assistance agreement.

Parents who adopt eligible children with special needs from a public or private agency can receive federal or state benefits. Ask your agency about obtaining a subsidy and what steps you need to take. You must negotiate the subsidy before the adoption is finalized.



"I was so excited to get an older brother. Now we can play catch together, and he helps me with my math homework."

Michael, age 6

STEP 8: BRING YOUR CHILD HOME AND PETITION TO ADOPT.

A child who is placed with an adoptive family through a public agency may move in as soon as the parents are approved. This means you have completed all required pre-placement visits and the timing is not disruptive to the child's schooling or other activities. You assume temporary legal custody of the child once he or she is placed in your home.

Your adoption agency will monitor the placement while your family adjusts. This monitoring period normally takes about six months, but can be as short as a few weeks and as long as a year. The social worker may call or visit so that you can discuss how the placement is working for your new child and for you. The next step is for the agency to recommend that the court approve your adoption.

ADOPTION PETITION

After your agency recommends you, it's time to petition to adopt. The petition is the document that makes your adoption legal. On the document, you formally request permission to adopt your specific child and then file it with the court.

To file a petition, you and your agency social worker (or attorney) will need to present the following (guidelines vary by state or jurisdiction):

- The child's birth certificate or birthdate and place of birth
- A written statement confirming your desire and suitability to adopt, as well as your ability to financially provide for the child
- A written declaration from the child's caseworker or agency that the adoption is in the child's best interest
- The date on which you received custody of the child, and from whom you were awarded custody
- A statement from the child's caseworker or agency of the legal reason why the birth parents' rights were terminated
- Written disclosure of any relationship that you share with the child (other than as an adoptive parent), such as being the child's aunt, grandparent, stepparent, coach, or teacher

Consult an attorney if you need more help with the legal process or to simply help guide you.

MISPERCEPTION:
47% of those considering adoption are concerned that the biological parents will be able to take the child back.¹

REALITY: This simply isn't true. Once a child has been legally made available for adoption, the birth parents cannot claim a child or petition for his or her return.

¹Source: National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, July 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.org.

STEP 10: CELEBRATE. BE A FAMILY. STAY INFORMED.

Children who are adopted from foster care often have had difficult starts in life. As a result, they may need help with behavioral, emotional, or developmental issues. Adoptive parents can access post-adoption resources to help their child thrive, such as family and child counseling, parent support groups, specialized educational support, respite child care, and grief and loss counseling. Ask your adoption agency if it provides financial assistance for post-adoption needs.

WHAT'S NEXT: FINDING POST-ADOPTION RESOURCES

- Ask your adoption agency for recommendations
- Search national and regional post-adoption provider listings on the internet
- Ask adoptive parents or local adoption support groups for referrals
- Find out if your employer provides resources

CHOOSING A PROVIDER

Find a professional who understands the needs of adopted children and their families. Does he or she have experience with foster and adoptive families? Has he or she received adoption-related training? Can you receive a reference from one or two families he or she has worked with previously?

Most importantly, once you've successfully completed the adoption process, you're not all on your own. Become familiar and stay in touch with the following agencies and resources that can help you along the way.

ARCH National Respite Network

archrespite.org
919-490-5577

American Academy of Pediatrics

aap.org

Center for Adoption Support and Education

adoptionssupport.org
301-476-8525

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

davethomasfoundation.org
1-800-ASK-DTFA

North American Council on Adoptable Children

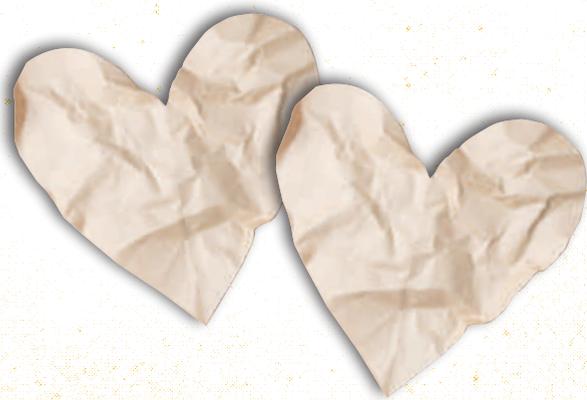
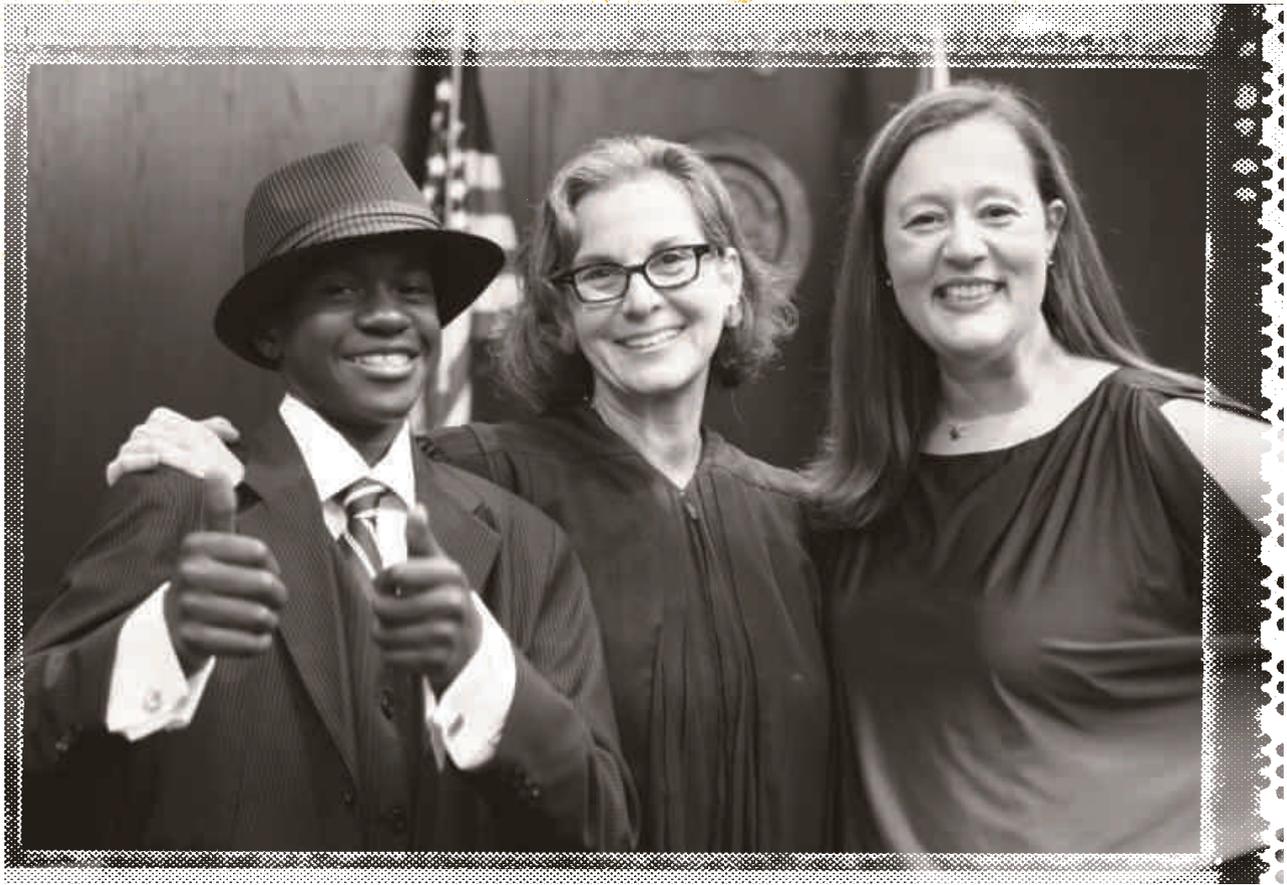
nacac.org
651-644-3036

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Child Welfare Information Gateway
childwelfare.gov/adoption
800-394-3366

Voice for Adoption

voice-for-adoption.org



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What types of adoption are available?

A: The four main types of adoption are:

- Adopting a child from the U.S. foster care system
- Adopting an infant in the United States
- Adopting an infant or child from another country
- Adopting a stepchild

Q: What are the qualifications to adopt? For example, do we as adoptive parents have to be the same race or have the same ethnic background as the child we adopt? Do we have to be married, or within a certain age range or income level?

A: If you adopt from foster care, the answer is no to all of the above. Families are as diverse as the children who are available for adoption.

Q: What qualities are important for parents who adopt?

A: Traits like flexibility, patience, good problem-solving skills, and a willingness to identify local community resources are all critical. Children don't need perfect parents, just loving individuals willing to meet the unique challenges of parenting and make a lifetime commitment to caring for and nurturing them.

Q: What is the adoption process?

A: The adoption process can vary depending on the type of adoption, the agency through which you work, the state in which you live, and the state or county of residence of the child. Once you choose an adoption agency, the social worker will walk you through the process. In all cases, a homestudy and background check will be necessary. In addition, adoption preparation classes are required for foster care adoption.

Q: What is a homestudy?

A: A homestudy is an in-depth application and interview process with a social worker that involves in-person interviews, reference checks, background checks, and home visits. The study is not standardized and may vary from state to state and agency to agency. The average homestudy usually takes three to six months to complete.

Q: How much does adoption cost?

A: It depends on a number of factors, such as type of adoption, the agency through which you work, the state in which you live, attorney fees, and whether or not travel is required. Foster care adoption can cost \$0 to \$2,500, while private or international adoption might cost \$15,000 to \$40,000 or more.

Q: How long does the adoption process take?

A: There are many variables that determine how long it will take to complete the adoption process, such as whether adoption preparation classes are required, the length of time to complete the homestudy, and the length of time to identify a child for your family. On average, the adoption process can take one to two years.

Q: Who are the children in foster care?

A: Children in foster care were removed from their families due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. A child might live temporarily with extended family, a foster family, or in a group home while social workers try to help the birth family. If the birth family's problems can't be resolved, the agency with custody of the child goes to court to legally terminate parental rights. At this point, social workers must find a safe and loving adoptive family for the child.

Ages range from infant to early adulthood, although the average age is 8. Every race, ethnicity, and socio-economic group is represented. Some children are alone, and others are waiting with siblings. Some of the children have physical or emotional challenges, they may be LBGT, opposed to adoption or just lacking trust in adults. They all deserve a family and a home.

Q: How do I find the right adoption agency for me?

A: To find an adoption agency that is a good fit for your family, compare information from several agencies after asking these questions:

- Is the agency licensed by the state?
- What kind of children does the agency place?
- How many children does the agency place each year?
- How does the agency conduct searches for waiting children?
- What criteria does the agency use to match children with families?
- Can the agency provide references from parents who recently adopted?

“At first I was a little scared because of some of the things I heard about foster care adoption. But when these kids came into my life ... well, my family was complete.”

Diana,
– adoptive mom of three, ages 16, 11 and 8

GLOSSARY OF ADOPTION TERMS

Adoption: A legal process in which an adult assumes legal and other responsibilities for another, usually a minor.

Adoption agency: An organization licensed by the state that provides services to birth parents, adoptive parents, and children who need families. Agencies may be public or private, secular or religious, for profit or nonprofit.

Adoption placement: The point at which a child begins to live with prospective adoptive parents or, in the case of foster care adoption, the point at which the status of the placement changes to adoption.

Adoption subsidies: Federal or state adoption benefits (also known as adoption assistance) designed to help offset the short- and long-term costs associated with adopting children who need special services.

To be eligible for the Federal IV-E subsidy program, children must meet each of the following requirements:

- a court has ordered that the child cannot or should not be returned to the birth family
- the child has special needs, as determined by the state's definition of special needs
- a "reasonable effort" has been made to place the child without a subsidy
- the child must have been eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) at the time of the adoption, or the child's birth family must have been receiving, or have been eligible to receive, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Benefits available through subsidy programs vary by state but commonly include:

- monthly cash payments (up to an amount that is \$1 less than the foster care payment the state would have made if the child were still in basic family foster care)
- medical assistance through Medicaid
- social services (post-adoption services such as respite care, counseling, day care, etc.)
- nonrecurring adoption expenses (a one-time reimbursement between \$400 and \$2,000, depending upon the state) for costs such as adoption fees, court costs, attorney fees, physical and psychological examinations, and other expenses related to the legal adoption of a child with special needs

Before adopting a child with special needs, ask your agency about the availability of federal and state subsidies.

Adoption tax credit: The federal adoption tax credit has helped thousands of American families offset the costs of adoption since it was established in 1997. The one-time credit per adopted child applies to all types of adoption (except step-parent adoption), including international, domestic private, and public foster care. Many states also have state adoption tax credits. To learn more about tax benefits, please review the IRS publication "Instructions for Form 8839," available through the Internal Revenue Service at 800-829-3676 or irs.gov, or consult your tax professional.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA): Passed in 1997, ASFA (Public Law 105-89) clarified the importance of safety to child welfare decision-making and emphasized to states the need for prompt and continuous efforts to find permanent homes for children. Permanent homes might be with birth families, if accomplished safely, or with adoptive families or permanent legal guardians.

At-risk placement or legal-risk placement: The placement of a child into a prospective adoptive family when birth parents' rights have not yet been legally severed or when rights have been severed but the appeal period has not expired.

Concurrent planning: A process in foster care case management to reduce the time a child spends in foster care before being placed with a permanent family. Child welfare staff work toward family reunification and, at the same time, develop an alternative permanency plan for the child should reunification efforts fail.

Consent form: The legal document signed by birth parents that terminates their parental rights to their child.

Custody: The care, control, and maintenance of a child that is legally awarded by the court to an agency (in abuse and neglect cases) or to parents (in divorce, separation, or adoption proceedings). Child welfare departments retain legal custody and control of major decisions for a child in foster care. Foster parents do not have legal custody of the children for whom they provide care.

Decree of adoption: A legal order that finalizes an adoption.

Disruption: When a child leaves the adoptive home prior to the finalization of the adoption. This can occur when the adoptive parents choose to return the child for reasons of their own, or when the agency disrupts the adoption if the adoptive parents are not complying with post-placement requirements or are endangering the child in any way.

Domestic adoption: The adoption of a U.S. infant through a licensed adoption agency or adoption attorney.

Fictive kin: People not related by birth or marriage who have an emotionally significant relationship with an individual.

Finalization: The legal process that makes the adoption permanent and binding.

Foster parent(s): An individual or couple who has temporary care of a child but has no legal rights in determining certain aspects of a child's life.

Foster to adoption: In this type of placement, foster parents agree to adopt the child if and when parental rights are terminated. Social workers place the child with specially trained foster-adopt parents who will work with the child during family reunification efforts, but who will adopt the child if he or she becomes available for adoption.

Guardian ad litem: A person, sometimes an attorney, appointed by the court to ensure that the child's best interests are addressed in court hearings and other proceedings. In many jurisdictions, court-appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteers serve as guardians ad litem.

Hague Convention: The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, inaugurated in 1993, is an international treaty setting the framework for the adoption of children between countries. The aim is to protect the best interests of adopted children and prevent abuses such as child trafficking. The Convention standardizes procedures between the adoption authority in the child's country of origin and the corresponding authority in the receiving country. Each country which has ratified the Convention designates a central authority to regulate requests for intercountry adoption and accredit adoption agencies.

Homestudy: Also called a family profile, this is an in-depth review that prospective adoptive parents must complete to be able to legally adopt. A homestudy typically includes inspections of the adoptive parents' residence; evaluations of their relationships, parenting ideals, medical history, employment verification, and financial status; and criminal background checks. Homestudies can become outdated, and typically need to be renewed after one year.

Indian Child Welfare Act: The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law that seeks to keep American Indian children with American Indian families. Congress passed ICWA in 1978 in response to the alarmingly high number of Indian children being removed from their homes by both public and private agencies. The intent of Congress under ICWA was to "protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families". ICWA sets federal requirements that apply to state child custody proceedings involving an Indian child who is a member of or eligible for membership in a federally recognized tribe.

International adoption: The adoption of a child who is a citizen of one country by adoptive parents who are citizens of a different country.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC): The legal agreement between the states concerning a child living in one state being adopted by parents living in another state. In addition to obtaining a homestudy and following their state's adoption laws, prospective adoptive parents must comply with the adoption laws of the child's state of residence. Families who are involved in an adoption across state lines generally work both with an adoption worker in their home state to complete a homestudy and pre-service training, and with another adoption worker in the child's state to walk them through the steps needed to satisfy the ICPC requirements.

Legally free for adoption: A child is legally free when the parental rights of both birth parents have been terminated by the court and all appeals have been exhausted.

Life book: A pictorial and written representation of the child's life designed to help the child understand his or her unique background and history. The life book usually includes input by or information on birth parents, other relatives, birthplace, and birthdate, and can be put together by social workers or foster or adoptive parents working with the child.

Matching: The process of combining the best interests of the child with qualified adoptive parents. The best interests of the child are determined by social workers, advocates, and, with older children, their wishes.

Multi-Ethnic Placement Act/Interethnic Placement Act (MEPA/IEPA): Sometimes called “Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Placement,” this is a federal law enacted in 1994 (MEPA) and amended in 1996 (IEPA). These two laws (together known as MEPA/IEPA) remove race, ethnicity, and country of origin from effective consideration when child welfare workers are making placement decisions for children in the public child welfare system.

Open adoption: An adoption plan in which identifying information about birth and adoptive families is openly shared. There may be ongoing contact after placement occurs.

Parental rights: All legal rights and corresponding legal obligations that come with being the legal parent of a child.

Permanency planning: A goal-directed process designed to prepare children and families for a permanent living arrangement. This includes adoption, legal guardianship, or permanent placement with a relative or non-relative. It also includes independent living or adult residential care.

Placement: The point in time when the child goes to live with his or her legal adoptive parents. This can also be a **pre-adoptive placement** for a six-month pre-finalization period.

Post-legal adoption services: Services provided subsequent to legal finalization of the adoption. There are primarily four types of post-legal service providers: social service agencies, private therapists, mental health clinics, and support groups for parents and children.

Post-placement supervision: Upon placement and prior to adoption finalization, a social worker will be assigned to complete post-placement supervision of the adoptive family. The social worker will visit the home several times during a set period of time (according to state or county requirements) to determine if adoption of the child is in the best interests of the child.

Private adoption agency: An agency licensed by the state to facilitate domestic adoptions, international adoptions, or both. A private agency may be secular or religious, for profit or nonprofit.

Public adoption agency or public child welfare agency: This is the state or county government agency that has legal custody of children in foster care and is responsible for placing them in foster and/or adoptive homes.

Special needs children: This includes several categories relating to disabilities, race, age, sibling status, and at-risk status. When a child is determined to be a member of a special needs group, he or she may qualify for adoption assistance payments (subsidies). The amount depends on the type and severity of the need and on the rules of the county or state.

Termination of parental rights (TPR): The legal process that permanently severs a parent’s rights to a child.

Title IV-E Funding: Federal foster care funds, authorized under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, are paid to states on an uncapped, “entitlement” basis, meaning any qualifying expenditure by a state will be partially reimbursed, or matched without limit. Definitions of which expenses qualify for reimbursement are laid out in regulations and policy interpretations.

Trauma: Many children in foster care suffer a variety of traumatic events, such as physical and sexual abuse, witnessing domestic and community violence, separation from family members, and revictimization by others. Complex trauma can have devastating effects on a child’s physiology, emotions, ability to think, learn, and concentrate, impulse control, self-image, and relationships with others. Across the life span, complex trauma is linked to a wide range of problems, including addiction, chronic physical conditions, depression and anxiety, self-harming behaviors, and other psychiatric disorders.

Waiting children: Children in the public child welfare system who cannot return to their birth homes and need permanent, loving adoptive families to help them grow up safe and secure.

Wendy’s Wonderful Kids: A signature program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Wendy’s Wonderful Kids funds adoption recruiters in agencies throughout the U.S. and Canada whose sole purpose is to connect waiting children in foster care with permanent, loving families. To learn more, visit WendysWonderfulKids.org.

Workplace adoption benefits: Compensation to workers through employer-sponsored programs that may include financial reimbursement for adoption expenses and paid or unpaid adoption leave.