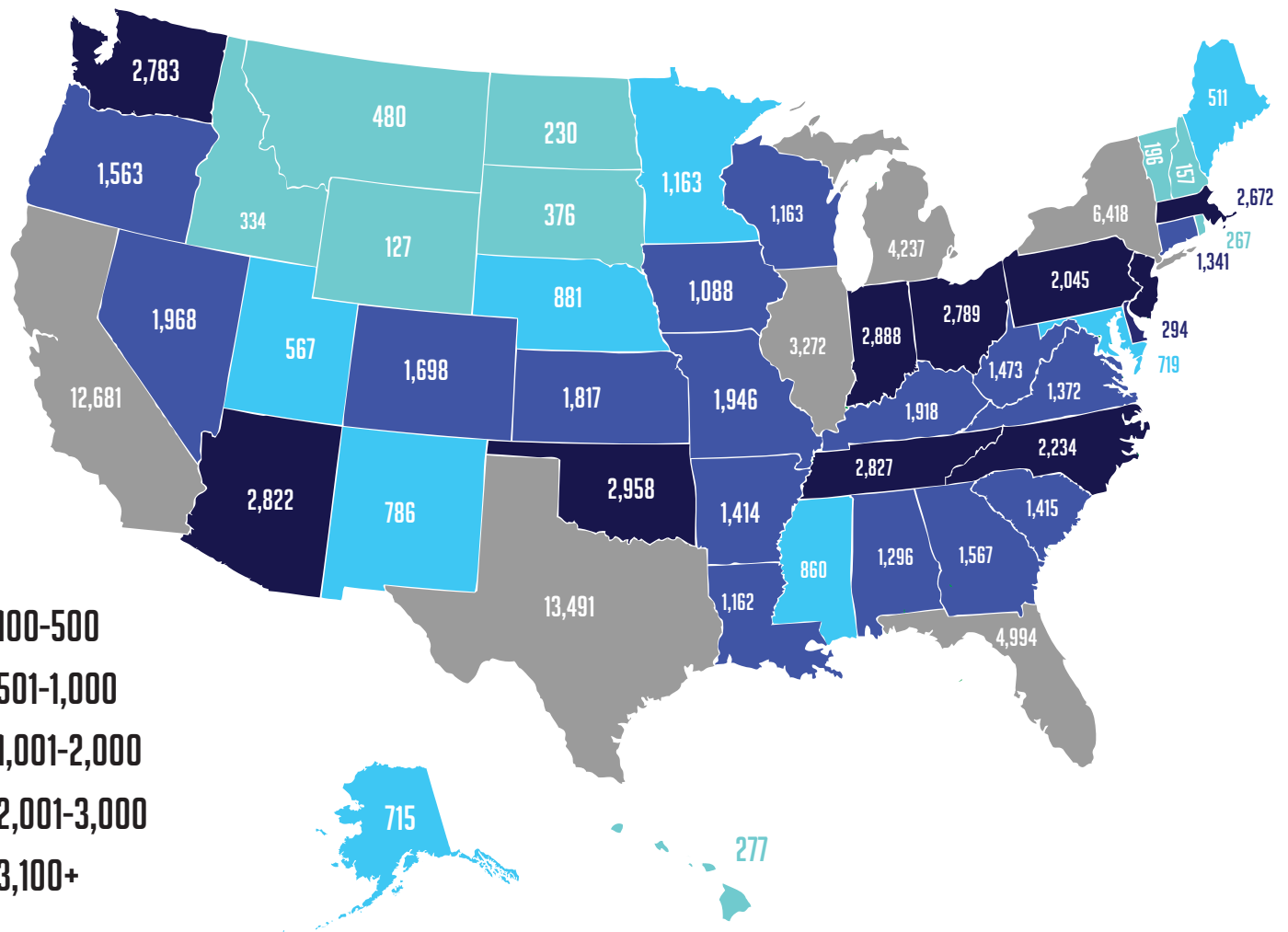




♥ A Foster Care to Adoption Guide ♥

Children Waiting to Get Adopted



TOTAL = 104,236





What is Foster Care

Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for abused, neglected, and dependent children who need a safe place to live when their parents or another relative cannot take care of them. Often their families face issues such as illness, alcohol or drug addiction, or homelessness.

What is Foster Care to Adopt

Children waiting in the foster care system can range anywhere from infants to young adults, however the average age is 8. In some cases, these children also have siblings in the system that they shouldn't be separated from. The majority of foster children are perfectly healthy kids who simply need and deserve loving and supportive adults in their lives.

Some Statistics:

- 1 of 3 foster children are homeless within one year after turning 18
- Only 3% of foster children will receive a college degree
- Approx. 80% of the prison population have been in foster care
- 75% receive public assistance after leaving the foster care system



What is Adoption?

Adoption is when a child is permanently moved to a new home with a new family. These new parents are now legally responsible for the child and have all parental rights as if they were the biological parents. These adopted children now have all of the same benefits as the biological children in their family.

Step 1. Choose an Adoption Method

PUBLIC ADOPTION AGENCY

When a child is removed from their home and is determined by the state or local government agency that they are no longer fit to be raised by their biological parents. The government is now responsible to help find a permanent family for the child.

PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCY

Most states utilize private agencies, non-profits or for profits, which are licensed by the state to assist in domestic. These private agencies can be started by oneone, so they can be secular or religious.

ATTORNEY

Your attorney ensures that you have all of the proper documentation needed to complete the adoption process. When fostering to adopt there is a hearing set by the state to terminate parental rights which allows biological parents to make one last effort to regain custody. However, If this hearing is set, it is unlikely that they will award custody back to the biological parents. This is where an attorney can be of great assistance to you and your family.



Step 2: Choose the Type of Adoption

1) Adopting a Child from the US Foster Care System

Children waiting in the foster care system can range anywhere from infants to young adults, however the average age is 8. In some cases, these children also have siblings in the system that they shouldn't be separated from. The majority of foster children are perfectly healthy kids who simply need and deserve loving and supportive adults in their lives.

Even though some of these children have medical challenges, their disabilities or conditions are often treatable. However, it is important to understand when becoming an adoptive parent, that some medical and emotional disabilities are not easily corrected, but support and resources are always available to help.

2) Adopting an Infant in the United States

If you wish to adopt an infant, contact any of the previously stated adoption methods. Searching "Adoption Organizations" online is a good place to begin. You may contact your local bar association if you wish to connect with an adoption attorney.



Step 3: Covering the Cost

Adoption expenses depend on a variety of variables including: adoption type, agency type, state, attorney fees, and travel (if necessary). Prior to starting the process, it is important to obtain all cost information and detailed information pertaining to these costs.

Knowing Your Options:

Adoption Subsidies

When adopting a child from foster care, he or she may be eligible for adoption assistance through federal or state adoption subsidies. These subsidies are available to help cover the short and long-term costs associated with adopting children in need of special services.

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

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

Before going too deep into the process, it is important to ask your social worker whether these subsidies are available from your state. Unfortunately you will not be able to negotiate subsidies once your adoption is finalized, so investigate your options early, even if you aren't sure if you will need the 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 email adoption.assistance@nacac.org.

To help with these costs, loans and grants are available. Consider starting a fundraising page, so friends and family can help with the costs.

Step 3: Continued..

Misperception: Foster Care Adoption is expensive

Reality: Foster care adoption is not expensive and there is financial support available for parents who choose this path

Employer Benefits

Another great option for prospective adoptive parents is employer adoption benefits, such as financial reimbursement, paid leave, or other time off for their employees who adopt. Many employers offer these benefits, and the average adoption-friendly employer offers up to \$5,000 in financial assistance and five weeks of paid leave per adoption.

Tax Credits and Exclusions

Based on 2010 records, the maximum federal tax credit for qualifying adoption expenses was \$13,170. However, families who adopt children with special needs don't have to itemize their expenses, but instead receive a flat tax credit equal to the maximum tax credit.

To learn more about tax benefits, call 800-829-3676 and request the IRS publication called "Instructions for Form 8839." Or visit irs.gov. For tax advice specific to your situation, and to determine if your state has tax benefits, consult your tax advisor.

Military Benefits

After the adoption has been finalized, the military may offer as much as \$2,000 per child for active-duty personnel. Whether both parents serve in the military or not, the maximum reimbursement is \$5,000 per year and are not combinable. Visit <http://www.militaryfamily.org/your-benefits/adoption/> for more information.

Under the military's Program for Persons with Disabilities, a child with disabilities may be eligible for up to \$1,000 per month. In addition, the Exceptional Family Member Program ensures that parents of children with special needs are assigned for duty in areas where the child's needs can be met.

Learn More About 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

National Military Family Assistance Association: 800-260-0218 or nmfa.org

Step 4: Working with an Agency

Once you have selected an agency, you can begin the formal adoption process. It is helpful to ask your agency for guidance during this process. Typically, you will attend an orientation meeting or training session for prospective adoptive parents, where you will:

- Interact with experienced social workers who specialize in adoption
- get more information about the children
- Express your feelings and concerns about the adoption process to reinforce your choice to become an adoptive parent
- Learn about the benefits and hardships of adopting
- Obtain application materials

It is wise to attend an orientation session before filling out an application to gain confidence in the agency's abilities to meet your needs.

Step 5: Begin your Homestudy

More in depth than a background check, a homestudy is a way for your social worker to get to know you and your family, as well as educate you about adoption and how it affects children and families. The social worker will also help to prepare you for what parenting a child who brings different experiences and ideas with them is like.

Everyone must complete a homestudy during the adoption process. The homestudy process can take anywhere from three to six months to a year, depending on the agency, the social worker and the prospective parents' cooperation. Homestudies typically last one year and can be renewed on an annual basis thereafter, however the length of time a homestudy is valid is determined by your agency and your state.

Associated costs and requirements: [Homestudy Requirements](#)

Because these requirements vary by state and agency, request a list of items for you agency to obtain to finish this process such as birth certificates, licenses, references, background/criminal checks, and proof of recent physicals.

Homestudy costs also vary. Often times, public agencies often charge very little if anything, and private agencies usually charge between \$500 and \$2,000.



Step 6: Get to Know Your Child

It is obviously very important to find out all that you can about the child you are interested in adopting. You can do so by talking to the child's previous or current foster parents, as well as the child's current social worker. Some good questions to ask them may include:

- How often has the child moved or changed schools while in foster care?
- Does he or she still a relationship with their extended family?
- What are the child's favorite foods and games?
- What is the best way to comfort the child?
- What were the birth parents like?
- What are the family's and child's medical histories?

The agency's social worker should provide any available information about the child or the adoption process to help you reach your decision. Since knowing everything possible about your child will make the transition from foster care much smoother for both you and the child, your social worker will also help you determine whether your family is the right fit for meeting the child's needs based on their experiences with the child.

A Child's Perspective

It is a fact that children waiting for adoption have had a disruptive and unfortunate home life. Through no fault of their own, these children have been separated from their birth parents, as well as their siblings or extended family in some cases, often leaving them with feelings of loss, grief and a fear of rejection.

Because of their experiences, they are eager to belong and long for love and attention. Understandably, these past experiences may cause them to doubt themselves and be suspicious of new adults entering their lives.

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: Preparing for Your Child

Getting all the necessary documents in order so the transition is smooth for both your child and your family.

Contact your insurance company.

- Starting on the date your child arrives home, they will then be covered by your health insurance plan. You need to find out what documents your insurance company needs for authentication.
- Your child may be covered through Medicaid if he or she has special needs and is eligible for an adoption subsidy. Review your insurance policy for any exclusions pertaining to pre-existing conditions.
- Be sure to update documents such as wills and change beneficiary designations on life insurance policies

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

- Although it can be difficult to get your child's original birth certificate after the adoption is finalized, it is important that you do so because obtaining other important documents such as a passport will be difficult without the birth certificate.

Get a new Social Security number and birth certificate.

- In order for you to claim your child as a dependant, your child needs to have a Social Security number. If your child already has one, it is possible to keep the number while changing the last name by using a new birth certificate.

Find services for your child and for yourself.

- Day care if necessary— some states may provide this
- School enrollment for older kids
- Therapy, counseling, and/or tutoring
- A support group for adoptive parents

It is important to understand both you and your child's needs in order to appropriately accommodate for everyone.

Make your home child Friendly

Modify the child's room to ensure that they will feel at home and comfortable in their new space. Make sure to make adjustments and modifications to your home such as removing any dangerous objects. Communicate specific changes with your child

Make sure to keep them informed about the changes they are about to see in their lives, and help them through this transition.

Negotiate an adoption assistance agreement.

Parents may receive federal or state benefits when they adopt an eligible child with special needs. Talk to your agency about the steps you need to take to receive a subsidy. Negotiate the subsidy before the adoption is finalized.

Step 8: Bringing them Home & Petition to Adopt

Once all required pre-placement visits are completed, a child placed with an adoptive family through a public agency may move in with you and your family, giving you temporary legal custody of the child once he or she is living in your home.

While your family adjusts, your adoption agency will monitor the placement for a period of time that averages around six months, but can also range from a few weeks to a year. During this time, your social worker's job is to monitor how the placement is working for you and your new child, which may involve phone calls and visits. After this period of adjustment, your agency will recommend that the court approve your adoption.

Adoption Petition

After your agency has recommended you, you may start the petition to adopt. This petition serves as your formal request for permission to adopt your specific child so that you can file it with the court in order to make your adoption legal.

You will need to make sure that you have the following presented in order to file the petition (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 case worker 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

Misconception: Biological parents will be able to take the child back

Reality: This is simply not 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

Source: National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, November 2007. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.org.



Step 9: Finalizing the Adoption

To finalize the adoption process, a finalization hearing must take place in order for you as the adoptive parent or parents to have permanent legal custody of the child.

While your social work or attorney will inform you of the date and time, these finalization hearings can typically take place within 6 to 12 months after the child is placed in your home. It is important to have completed the necessary paperwork before the hearing because the finalization can be delayed if there are any missing documents. **The proceeding are usually very short and typically includes you, your adopted child, your family's lawyer, and the social worker who placed the child.**

The court's main goal will be establishing that the child has been placed in a safe, loving home, so it is important to be prepared to provide all the information included in your adoption petition, in addition to having you answer open-ended questions.

These questions could resemble the following:

- Why would you like to adopt?
- How do you plan to take care of your newly adopted child?
- What adjustments does your family attend to make to accommodate for your new child?
- Is there anything you wish to inform the court about before finalizing the adoption?

The judge signing the adoption order is the final step in the adoption process and officially grants you permanent legal custody of your child and marks the beginning of your new family!



Step 10: Celebrate and Stay Informed

Understandably, many adopted children may need help with behavioral, emotional, or developmental issues because of their difficult starts in life. Knowing this, adoptive parents can access post-adoption resources to help their child thrive within their new family. Resources include family and child counseling, parent support groups, specialized educational support, grief and loss counseling, and respite child care. You may want to ask your adoption agency if they provide any kind of financial assistance for post-adoption needs in order to cover these costs.

FINDING POST-ADOPTION RESOURCES:

- Ask your adoption agency if they have any 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

If you do decide to pursue post-adoption resources, it is important to find a professional who understands the needs of adopted children and their families in order to truly benefit your child.

Most importantly, once you've successfully completed the adoption process, it's important to know that you are not all on your own. Becoming familiar with the following agencies and resources can help you along the way if you decide to stay in touch with them and use them as resources.

ARCH National Respite Network
archrespite.org 919-490-5577

Center for Adoption Support and Education
adoptionsupport.org 301-476-8525

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
davethomasfoundation.org 1-800-ASK-DTFA

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Child Welfare Information Gateway
childwelfare.gov/adoption 800-394-3366

North American Council on Adoptable Children
nacac.org 651-644-3036

Adoption Terms and Resources

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.