

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CONSIDERING ADOPTING A DOMESTIC WAITING (FOSTER) CHILD

You can adopt a waiting child with the help of a licensed agency, your local county Department of Social Services (DSS), or inquire directly about a child listed with the NYS Adoption Album (formerly called the Blue Books) or with an adoption exchange. The adoption process should be very similar whether you work with a private agency or local department of social service. Prospective parents can also be listed with the Adoptive Parent Registry administered by New York State Office of Children & Family Services (OCFS). This is a statewide computer network that helps caseworkers match hard-to-place or handicapped children to families listed with the Registry.

When children enter foster care, their permanency goal is usually to return to their birth family. When it is no longer in the child's best interest to return to living with their birth family, Family Court will change the child's permanency goal from return-to-home to adoption. It is then necessary for the child's birthparents parental rights to be terminated or relinquished in court. When a child is placed in a prospective adoptive parents home the placement is considered at risk if the birthparents rights have not been formally terminated in court. After the birthparents rights are terminated or relinquished the child is then legally free to be adopted.

Below is a list of questions to assist you in determining the best service provider for your adoption.

1. Is the agency licensed in NY State? The NYS Office of Children & Family Services maintains a list of adoption agencies licensed by New York State. You can view the list at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/adopt/agcymenu.asp or you can call the OCFS in your area. If you plan to finalize the adoption in NYS the agency must be licensed by the state of NY.
2. How many years has the agency had a waiting child adoption program?
3. Are there any restrictions on who can adopt through the agency (age, income, length of marriage, divorce, religion, single parent, sexual orientation)?
4. How many children did the agency place last year? Two years ago?
5. How many families are currently working with the agency?
6. Is it possible to talk with families who have adopted from the program you are interested in? Can you talk to parents that did not have a completely positive experience with the agency?
7. What support is available throughout the adoption process? Does the agency have meetings for waiting parents? Are you assigned to a different caseworker during different phases of the adoption?

8. What steps are involved in the application process? This usually includes a background check with the NYS Child Abuse and Maltreatment Register and fingerprints to check on criminal records. A home study will also need to be done. Will you have the opportunity to review the home study prior to its submission to verify accuracy? Will you get a copy of your home study? Who will assist you with the application? How long does the application process usually take? Can you specify age range, sex, or race of the child?
9. If you are not approved can you find out why? Is there an appeal procedure?
10. What type of adoptive parent training will be required? Many counties and agencies require prospective parents to receive MAPP training (Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting). This is usually a 9 session training that includes background checks as well as training. This training usually consists of multiple sessions to help families understand adoption and the difficult backgrounds the child may have, decide whether they are ready to adopt, and provide skills and knowledge needed to parent a child with special needs. Will you become a licensed foster parent after the training is complete?
11. What will be the total cost of adopting? Public and private agencies do not charge a fee for adoption services when New York State is the guardian of the child. You may have attorney fees and travel expenses that the state may reimburse you for.
12. How long does it take from approval to the referral of a child? How long does it take from referral of a child to visits with the child? What services will you receive from your local county department of social services if DSS does not have a child in their custody with the age, sex, race, &/or background of a child you were interested in adopting? Will the county work with you to adopt a child from out of the area?
13. What schedule of visits with the child does the agency anticipate prior to the child moving to your home? What type of support is available during this time? If you need to travel to meet the child will you be reimbursed for travel expenses?
14. What is the agency position on sibling or other birth family contact after finalization?
15. What supports are available by the agency for evenings and weekends?
16. Request all medical, educational, and psychosocial reports. If the following information is not in the reports you should ask for the following information about the child:
 - Why is the child not living with their biological parent?
 - What has the child been told as to the reasons for placement?
 - How old was the child when they came into care?
 - How long have they been in care? How many times was the child moved in foster care?
 - Did the child return home only to return to care?
 - Did the child live with other family members?
 - Has a lifebook been done that helps document the child's story for them?
 - What background information is available on the biological parents (jobs, medical condition, education, extended family, interests, talents)?

- Who is in the child's immediate and extended family?
 - When was the last time the child had contact with their biological family?
 - If the child lives with a foster family, why did the foster family not adopt the child?
 - What are the child's strengths & weakness? Any fears?
 - Does the child have problems with attachment?
 - Does the child have anger management problems? Fire setting? Cruelty to animals?
 - Is the child a victim of trauma, neglect or abuse?
 - Does the child have developmental disabilities?
 - How does the child feel about themselves?
 - Are there any significant people the child will need to stay in touch with after the adoption? If the adoption is open, will the agency help mediate contact with the birth family after finalization if needed? When the birthparents rights were surrendered/terminated were there any conditions of surrender relating to future contact with any birth family members? Open adoption agreements between birthparents and adoptive parents can be a legally binding agreement according to NYS law.
 - What are the child's eating & sleeping routines? Night terror? Sleep walking?
 - Is the child involved with any sports &/or activities that should be continued?
 - Does the child have any pets? What are the child's favorite toys?
 - How well does the child get along with other children?
 - What are the child's favorite school subjects? Least favorite?
 - Is there a history of stealing or breaking other laws? Does the child habitually lie?
 - Describe how the child interacts. Do they need excessive approval? Avoid affection?
 - Does the child act out sexually?
 - Does the child have a diagnosis for medical or psychological problems? What is the current prognosis and course of treatment? Require the worker to explain all problems to you so that you know if you can handle the anticipated difficulties with the child.
17. What services (e.g. counseling, physical therapy, respite, case management) does the child have that will need to be continued after placement? If treatment needs to continue, can the child stay in the care of the same service providers? Will subsidies be available to cover the cost of services?
 18. Will you be told if the child has already had an adoption that was disrupted or an adoption dissolution?
 19. What adoption subsidies will be available? Subsidies should be finalized prior to adoption.
 20. Will the child have Medicaid and what services will it cover? What happens if your private insurance does not cover the cost of treatment for counseling and other services?

21. After you take your child home will you be the foster parent or the legal guardian of the child while you are waiting for the adoption to be finalized? Foster parents do not have parental rights concerning the child in their care. Make sure the agency explains the difference to you. Most prospective adoptive parents of waiting children will be foster parents prior to finalization.
22. How long will it take to finalize the adoption? What are the procedures necessary to finalize the adoption?
23. Are there any post adoption services (support groups, respite, case management) available?
24. What happens if the placement is disrupted?