



Frequently Asked Questions

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN?

Children in state custody through the U.S. foster care system who are without permanent families due to neglect, abuse, and/or parental alcohol and drug abuse. NWAEE features children in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and Idaho who are in need of an adoptive family.

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

While waiting for permanent families, they live in foster homes or group homes and, sometimes, residential treatment centers.

Some have been in alternative care a long time and will have had many placements while waiting to be adopted.

ARE THE CHILDREN LEGALLY AVAILABLE FOR ADOPTION?

A child is legally available for adoption when the parental rights have been terminated, at the point the child is considered "legally free." Even for those not yet legally free, it is common to start recruiting for adoptive placement once termination of parental rights (TPR) has been filed with the court, OR the presiding court or birth parents have given written permission to recruit an adoptive family. When a pre-adopt placement is made for a child who is not yet legally free, that placement is said to be "legal risk," since the birth parents rights have not yet been terminated and the parents could regain custody of the child.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL NEEDS?

In the adoption of foster children, "special needs" refers to the age and needs of the children waiting for adoption. The majority are between the ages of 6 and 18, with psychological, behavioral, emotional, developmental, and medical needs associated with past environmental and biological causes.

Neglect alone is recognized as the primary cause of a host of special needs in children. Abuse, too, is a primary cause of special needs.

Many children in care also have biological needs like learning disabilities, hyperactivity, attention deficits, cerebral palsy, seizure disorders, autism, fetal alcohol and drug syndromes, and mental retardation. These needs are often aggravated by neglect and abuse.

WHO CAN ADOPT?

Primary criteria are the ability to provide a safe, caring permanent home; sufficient income to support a child; and good physical and mental health.

WHAT PARENTAL TRAITS DOES A SOCIAL WORKER LOOK FOR?

There are many differences among adoptive parents, such as age, race, religion, economic status, educational background, sexual orientation, etc., yet they have many things in common, including:



Frequently Asked Questions

- Belief that permanency and families make a difference to every child
- Willingness to learn new parenting tools
- Willingness to ask for help
- Willingness to “hang in there” when the going gets tough
- Ability to talk openly about scary, mature, or disturbing topics
- Ability to define family roles and provide safe boundaries for all family members
- Ability to be realistic and flexible about themselves and their kids
- Ability to laugh and maintain a sense of humor
- Sufficient self-esteem to care enough about themselves and their kids to develop support among family, friends, professionals, and community resources.

HOW DO I BECOME ELIGIBLE TO ADOPT?

Families become eligible by having a special needs adoption homestudy done by a licensed adoption agency in the state in which they reside.

In some states, only the state human services department is licensed. In others, both public and private adoption agencies are licensed. You can receive a homestudy from any state licensed agency (public or private).

The length of time the homestudy process takes varies among adoption agencies and among states. The time frame is usually 3 to 6 months, in order to get to know and to evaluate the family. This document is the primary way children’s caseworkers get to know you. It is a recommendation by the adoption agency representing you that you are qualified to adopt children with special needs.

WHAT IS A HOMESTUDY?

The homestudy consists of the following components:

ORIENTATION: The orientation helps you to understand the homestudy process in your specific state and acquaints you with adoption resources in your community.

TRAINING CLASSES: These classes prepare families for issues that surround special needs adoption; help them gain understanding of the grief, abandonment, and betrayal a child often feels; and teach them how to learn how to cope with a child’s needs. You will learn why advocacy is crucial and, more importantly, how to do it.

PERSONAL HISTORY: A comprehensive history is developed on each adult living in the family home. Questions are asked about family of origin, education, past experience with children, employment status, future plans, daily routines, friends, religious preferences, neighborhood, and community.



Frequently Asked Questions

The parent(s) are asked question about their support systems, significant others, and availability of child care resources. A couple will be asked questions about how they met, how long they have been together, the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship, how decisions are made, and more.

Children in the home may be interviewed regarding their feelings about another child and what adoption means to them.

The social worker assesses the family's capacity to parent a child with special needs and helps the family identify the needs they can handle. The written assessment done by the social worker is a crucial part of the final homestudy document.

HEALTH REPORT: A medical history, including a physical exam within the last 12 months, is required for prospective parents. TB tests are required for all member of the household. A medical condition that is under control (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.) usually does not prevent being approved to adopt. However, a serious health problem that affects life expectancy might.

BACKGROUND CHECK: All adults in the household complete forms that are sent to a state police check center and child protective services. Some state or counties require local police clearances and FBI fingerprint checks. Those who have been convicted of harming children cannot adopt.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT: You will be asked to list the amount of your family's income. Some states may require a copy of an income tax form, a paycheck stub, or a W-2 form. Even if you receive some type of assistance, you are eligible to adopt as long as you have adequate resources to provide for your family. Financial assistance in the form of subsidies is often available when adopting children with special needs.

PERSONAL REFERENCES: You will be asked for names, addresses, and phone numbers of 3 to 4 people who can attest to your experience with children, the stability of your marriage and/or household, and your emotional maturity.

ONCE WE ARE ELIGIBLE TO ADOPT, WILL WE GET THE CHILD WE INQUIRE ON?

Not necessarily. The agency child's social worker may be evaluating a number of families for that child. The family chosen will be the one the worker feels can best meet the child's needs.

When a child's social worker and your family decide come to a mutual agreement on placement, the child's worker will set up a series of visits between you and the child. If the visits are successful, the child will come home to you.

An agency, usually the one that did your homestudy, will be assigned to provide support to you and the child during the first 6 to 12 months prior to finalizing the adoption. When this supervisory stage has been successfully completed, you will go to court to legalize your child's adoption.



Frequently Asked Questions

WE'RE ELIGIBLE TO ADOPT! WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

Take initiative in the search for a child or sibling group to adopt:

- Check online photolisting services such as www.nwae.org. Place an inquiry to receive a social worker's contact information to get more information on the child and/or submit your family's completed foster adoption homestudy.
- Look for waiting child features in local newspaper and TV programs.
- Subscribe to and read adoption-focused magazines.
- Attend local adoption parties, fairs, and conferences on adoption and parenting techniques.
- Educate extended family and friends about what you have learned about adopting children from foster care.
- Participate in an adoptive parent support group. Such groups often offer resources to the entire family.
- Acquaint yourself with local counseling services that specialize in adoption issues, and learn about the educational and social services in your area.
- Stay in touch with the adoption agency that did your homestudy and with your assigned adoption worker.
- Begin to plan for the changes that a new child will bring to you and your family.