

Why Adopting from Foster Care Might be Right for You

This National Adoption Day, consider adopting from foster care.

Brette Sember | November 21, 2015



Adoption is a wonderful way to build a family. If you want to create or grow your family sooner rather than later, and avoid high costs, foster care adoption may be the way to go.

What is foster care?

Each state runs a foster care program where foster parents are licensed to care for children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect, or who have been surrendered by their parents. The goal of foster care is to provide a safe temporary living arrangement for children until they can be reunited with their biological family. If biological parents are unable to meet goals identified by the child welfare system, the parents' rights will be terminated. If that happens, the child becomes adoptable.

Foster care adoption options

There are two basic ways to adopt through the foster care system. If you want to adopt now, you can contact your state agency and find out about the children who are available for adoption immediately. You'll need to undergo background checks, along with a home study done by a social worker, to be approved as a potential adoptive parent. Once you're approved, you are matched with a child. This can take time, but it's in everyone's best interest to find the right fit. Caseworkers then will arrange meetings and encourage gradual bonding.

If it's determined that you and the child are a good match, he or she is placed with you. The actual legalization of the adoption will not take place for several months to a year, until it is determined that the placement is a good one.

The other option is to become certified as a foster parent and then adopt your foster child. If you wish to go this route, you must first qualify as a foster parent, which involves months of classes, home studies, and background checks. A child is then placed with you. If you wish to adopt the child, you let the agency know.

Since the agency strives to reunite the child with his or her biological family—if they can safely care for them—it can take months or years for the child to be freed for adoption. At that point, you can begin the legal adoption process, which will now be streamlined since you've already jumped through hoops to become a foster parent. Nonetheless, you still must be evaluated with the child, to ensure that the relationship is a good fit. Assuming the evaluation goes well, you will be permitted to finalize the adoption in court.

Adopting your foster child is never a sure thing, since the child could be reunified with the biological parents if their parenting rights have not been terminated. About **54 percent** of children in foster care are adopted by their foster parents. Many of the rest will simply age out of foster care when they reach age 18, entering young adulthood without a family or home to call their own.

Special needs adoptions are special

Children with physical or emotional disabilities are harder to place, and so states offer incentives to parents who welcome them into their homes. These children are eligible for Medicaid and a monthly subsidy, the amount of which is negotiated in each individual case, and is paid to the foster parents. Some states provide additional benefits, such as free day care and respite care services.

Sibling groups, which account for **23 percent** of the foster children available for adoption, are also considered to have special needs. Agencies always hope to keep siblings together, but not many parents are willing or able to care for multiple children. Teenagers in foster care also fall into a special needs category, since most parents hope to adopt a young child, leaving many teens to age out of foster care.

Benefits of foster care adoption

Adoption from foster care is often free, or very inexpensive, a stark contrast to the thousands of dollars it costs to adopt any other way. If you are seeking to adopt a child already freed for adoption, the process can happen in a matter of months, compared to the years involved in other types of adoption.

When you adopt a child through foster care, various state and federal resources are available to you. A child without special needs may receive medical care through a state insurance program, and you may be eligible for a **subsidy**; children with special needs always receive these benefits. Children adopted as older teens may qualify for extra financial aid for college. Also, the adoption may qualify you for tax credits, and some employers offer benefits like paid time off or financial assistance with the adoption itself.

Foster care adoption can be a streamlined way to create or expand your family, and, most importantly, to make a difference in a child's life.



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Happy National Adoption Month!



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