

7 Step Journey to Foster Care or Adoption

Step 1: Getting Started

This is where you, the prospective adoptive parent, have made a phone call to the agency to get information about fostering/adopting. Or, perhaps you spoke to a social worker directly and are serious about wanting to get more information.

What do I have to do during this step?

After contacting an agency, you need to decide whether or not you want to find out more about the foster/adoption process. You should attend an orientation/“let’s get acquainted” meeting.

Step 2: Initial Orientation

This is an orientation meeting where you will be given a good basic understanding of:

1. Who the children are who need care
2. The role and responsibilities of foster/adoptive parents
3. The process you will need to go through
4. The next steps you will have to take on the journey

What do I have to do during this step?

1. Show up with an open heart and mind.
2. Ask questions and listen carefully to what the presenters say.
3. Take notes on things like:
 - a) What you will have to do to be approved or licensed as a foster/adoptive parent;
 - b) Who your important contacts are;
 - c) When the next meetings will happen.

During this orientation you may hear for the first time the real challenges of fostering/adopting. Things such as:

- ◆ These children have had a tough journey of their own
- ◆ The importance of birth parent(s) to their children
- ◆ You will have to go through background checks
- ◆ The length of the process

At this point in the journey, you may become conflicted; your emotions may come to the surface. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and be prepared to open your heart and mind to what is being said. You don’t have to make any major decisions right now. The only decision you need to make is whether or not you want to continue the journey to Step 3: Pre-Service training.

Step 3: Pre-Service Training

This is a training program that usually takes 4–10 sessions to complete. Each agency will be different.

Sessions are designed to:

1. Prepare you for fostering/adopting
2. Create a basis for teamwork between yourself and the agency
3. Challenge you to grow and develop as a resource parent
4. Help you consider: Is fostering/adopting for me? Am I able to parent a child who has been neglected and/or abused? What type of child can I successfully parent?

What do I have to do during this step?

1. Make the commitment to attend and actively participate in the training sessions.
2. Give careful consideration to the information presented.
3. Come prepared to ask questions.
4. Devote time to consider the full impact of fostering and/or adoption on your family.
5. Gain the necessary information to make a personal decision about whether to become an adoptive or foster parent.
6. Gain knowledge of what type of child you can best parent.

During this step, you will probably start the application process and provide references, background information, finger printing, etc. Also, you will have made new friends with other prospective parents, staff, and experienced resource parents. You will start to see yourself as part of an enthusiastic, hard-working and competent team. You are not in this by yourself!!

Step 4: Application Process

Note: Agencies will differ as to when they ask you to fill out an application. Some will do this step before pre-service training, and others will do it during or after training.

This is where prospective foster/adoptive parents complete the application and you and your assigned social worker go over it carefully.

Each applicant's file generally includes reference letters from employers (if applicable) and personal friends, family fact sheets and criminal record checks, along with other information.

What do I have to do during this step?

Applicants for foster care or adoption are responsible to:

- ◆ Be open and honest in filling out the applications, during the personal interviews, etc.
- ◆ Supply the necessary information completely and accurately and as fast as possible.
- ◆ Cooperate with the criminal background check and protective service checks.

- ◆ Ask for help, if you don't understand something. It's better to take a little longer to fill out the application correctly.
- ◆ Agree to maintain confidentiality about the child, his/her birth family and to provide, nurturing, safe, and affectionate care for the child.

Step 5: Mutual Assessment and Homestudy

This is the time that the agency licensing or family worker meets with you in your home to talk about your personal history, family relationships, reasons for wanting to foster or adopt, and the supports you have available to you. They will determine whether your home is safe and has sufficient space for a foster or adopted child. The point of this step is to help you and the agency make the best possible decisions about whether placement of a child in your home will or will not work out and to determine the characteristics of the children whom you are most able to parent.

What do I have to do during this step?

Applicants for foster care or adoption are responsible to:

- ◆ Get agreement among the members of their household to proceed with the process.
- ◆ Cooperate with the homestudy and the home visits.
- ◆ Ensure that all necessary information is supplied completely and accurately.
- ◆ If you have not already met with experienced foster/adoptive parents, now is a good time to do this.

Don't be afraid to ask for the help you need to be qualified. You can even ask to delay this step if you feel you or members of your household are not yet ready.

If you are not ready or are not able to be licensed for fostering or adoption, please consider other roles. You have valuable abilities that can be put to work for children. Consider work as a community volunteer, respite worker, office assistant, tutor, mentor to teens, babysitter and/or assistant recruiter. Discuss these options and others you may think of with your social worker.

Step 6: Licensing and/or Approval

This is a time of waiting for you. You may be waiting for the licensing or family worker to complete your background checks and review the various pieces of information you provided.

The agency will have to complete a written assessment (homestudy) and other licensing/approval paperwork. All of this takes time.

What do I have to do during this step?

During this step of your journey try to be patient.

- ◆ You may be having a hard time understanding why it takes so long to complete the paperwork.

Courtesy of <http://www.adoptuskids.org>

- ◆ You may be concerned about what has been put in the record about you and your household.
- ◆ Now is a good time to contact your local foster/adoptive parent group and attend a meeting.

Ask to review a copy of your homestudy so you can look it over and correct any inaccuracies. Be prepared for a bit of a wait. This process can take time. Use the time for further reading or networking with other foster and adoptive parents. Don't be afraid to use the agency to answer questions and help solve problems during this period.

Step 7: Placement

Congratulations, you've been approved and are ready to proceed to the next step in this journey— Placement. This is where the agency and you work to assure the right match between yourself and a particular child's or sibling group's needs. Requirements will differ at this stage, depending on whether a child is placed with you for foster care or adoption.

What do I have to do during this step?

Licensed foster and pre-adoptive parents have the responsibility to the child, the child's birth parents, and the sponsoring agency to:

- ◆ Make sure you have the necessary information to make an informed decision about placement.
- ◆ Provide a safe, nurturing, stable environment for the child. Provide humane and affectionate care.
- ◆ Assure that religious training appropriate to the child's denomination be respected.
- ◆ Assure that the emotional, medical, dental and educational needs of the child are met.
- ◆ Report any changes related to the child's care and/or your family's composition to your family social worker.
- ◆ Promote physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth and development of each child.
- ◆ Maintain confidentiality.
- ◆ Cooperate with the agency/department, especially in treatment planning for the child.
- ◆ Respect the feelings of the foster child for the birth family.
- ◆ Support the child's visiting plan with his/her birth parents, siblings or others, when applicable.