

The Oregon Committee Process



Every state has its own ideas about how to move children from foster care to adoption. In Oregon, we use the committee process because we believe that we need to focus on finding families for children rather than children for families. It's a good process for kids because it means the caseworker and his or her supervisor get to choose the prospective families from as many home studied families as possible, the families get good and fairly complete information about the child, and the committee usually has three great families to find the perfect fit. The greatest difficulty is that it does tend to be hard on

families. Here's how the process works:

1. When the decision is made to move the child or sibling group to an adoption track, the caseworker (CW) begins recruiting families by putting together a bulletin which he or she sends in to the DHS Central Office in Salem.
2. Central Office sends out all the new bulletins to everyone on their list and posts the new bulletins every Friday. The bulletins can then be posted on websites like ours or Northwest Adoption Exchange on the same day. Agencies that have a hard copy notebook receive the bulletins by mail and add them to their book.
3. People like you find the child's bulletin online or in the notebook, express interest to your adoption worker (AW) at your agency, and your AW contacts the CW to get more information.
4. The child's CW sends further info to your AW. It may include any of the following: Adoption Child Summary on each child, including background information about how the child came into foster care, whether he or she has been in foster care before, information about his or her birth parents and siblings, if any; Psychiatric evaluation or mental health assessment; treatment notes; Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), medical records, and any other records or evaluations that seem appropriate to the CW.
5. If your interest continues, you can ask your AW to submit your home study (HS) and/or ask questions on your behalf. You may also have the opportunity, either now or after you have been selected for committee, to speak with the child's CW, foster parent, therapist or other service providers.
6. The CW reviews the home studies that come in – sometimes there may be as many as 60-70 of them – to find families that seem appropriate and able to meet the child's needs. Many of them feel strongly about reading every single home study to find the absolute best possible families. Sometimes, though, if there are a LOT of studies the CW may read a certain number or read only until they have at least three families that would be excellent placements for the child. Often they will winnow it down to five or ten families and then go over them – or “staff” them – with their supervisor to cut it down to the three best. These are the families that will “go to committee”.
7. The CW requests a committee to be set up. Sometimes the committee is through the Central Office and sometimes it is Regional. Either way, the AWs for the three families selected are notified, and a date is set.
8. If one or more of the families lives out of state, Oregon contracts with our agency, A Family for Every Child, to represent the families at committee. Usually we only represent one family at a committee but occasionally it might be two or even three. Our task is not to be the family's advocate but simply their representative.



9. We also represent our own families, of course – the families whose home studies we have completed and for whom we advocate.
10. The home study demonstrates that a family is a safe and healthy place for any special needs child to grow up. Our job at committee is to demonstrate how YOUR particular family would be able to meet the needs and be a safe and healthy place for THIS particular special needs child. So we need to get to know you as well as possible.



11. The committee consists of three members, usually DHS caseworkers or retired caseworkers, or social workers experienced in the adoption field. The committee meets for three hours, usually 9-Noon or 1-4 p.m. Occasionally it runs over a bit, but not often.
12. Committee starts with a presentation of the child by the CW. Sometimes the child's foster parent, therapist, CASA or attorney is also there and they are invited to tell about the child as well. The CW usually brings pictures or the child's LifeBook so the committee can see photos. The goal is for the committee to have a thorough understanding of who the child is and what are their special needs. The committee members may have questions during this time about the child, based on what they hear or on the paperwork they have read.
13. Once the child has been presented, any representatives for the child except the CW are dismissed and the AWs for the families each have a turn telling the committee about the family they represent. Again, the committee members may have questions for the AW based on what they hear or what they have read in the family's home study.
14. The committee members then remark or list the strengths they heard or read about each family and the concerns they have about each family. Then they vote. If the two junior members each vote for a different family, the chair must break the tie with a vote for one of those two families so that we leave committee with a decision. We nearly always leave committee with a decision about who will adopt the child.
15. When committee is over, you will receive a call as to whether or not you were selected by the committee. The AW who represents you will take notes throughout the committee and will type them up and forward them to you, usually the next day. If you are not Oregon residents, at this point, our agency will step aside and your AW will work directly with the child's CW to move forward with the placement.
16. The CW comes to committee prepared with the child's files, which are given or sent to the family's AW. There is a 7-day blackout period then to give the family an opportunity to review the files more thoroughly with physicians, psychologists, teachers, whoever is necessary to be certain this is what they want. During this time, the CW and AW will be working with the family to make a transition plan.
17. If you are not already foster-certified, a plan is made to expedite certification.
18. The transition plan depends on the child and his or her needs, as well as how far away the family lives. The committee may have recommendations to make about the transition plan. Transition is focused on spending time with the child, meeting foster parents, therapists, birth family members, etc. Sometimes, depending on the child's age and needs, an out-of-state family will then go back to their home state while the child takes 1-3 days for goodbye meetings with friends or family. Then the CW or the foster parents will fly with the child to the new family's home and be there to introduce the child to the home, sort of as an endorsement and to ease the transition. Other times the child may go home with his or her new adoptive parents right away at the end of the transition period.