

From: Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverchild.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 4:41 PM
To: scott@afamilyforeverchild.org
Subject: Frequently asked questions (and answers!) about adopting from foster care



Dear ,

We understand that adopting from foster care can be a long and sometimes confusing process. Below are a few commonly asked questions about adopting a child from foster care, with answers. If you have different questions about the foster care system, selection process, or the adoption process, feel free to contact us!

Q: Can I adopt a child outside my state?

A: Yes! However, sometimes these adoptions can take a little longer. When a child is moved from one state to another, caseworkers must follow the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) set up by their state. This ensures the safety of the child, and acknowledges that child is being moved legally from one state to another. Families adopt children from outside their state every month. Please keep in mind that you will need to qualify to the standards and requirements of the state the child resides in to adopt them. You can learn more about the ICPC requirements and regulations for all 50 states on the [AAICPC](#) website. Select the state you want from the drop down menu on the right, and then for category, select "ICPC Processing". You can also look at some general information on the ICPC process in Oregon [here](#).

Q: How long does it take to adopt a child?

A: It usually takes about 18-24 months from the time a family first calls an adoption agency to the time when a child is placed with the family. These estimates can vary depending on where you live and your individual circumstances. Please keep in mind that this is an **average**. There are a number of ways to increase your chances of being matched, including having a well-written family biography; being open with your adoption preferences; having your adoption worker follow up on your submissions; submitting for children that you know you will be able to meet all of their needs; attending matching events online and in your area; and paying special attention to things in their biography like desired family characteristics.

Q: What factors are considered in selecting a family for a child?

A: The most important consideration is the family's ability to meet the needs of the child. For example, is the family willing and able to adopt all members of a sibling group, or does the family have experience with a specific learning disability? This is where remaining open with your preferences and keeping up to date with trainings is important! Other needs include remaining in contact with relatives or siblings, staying in state or in a nearby state, being part of a single, same-sex, or two-parent family, or being in a home where the child will be an only child or the youngest in the home. For more detailed information, please see [Finding a Fit that Will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Waiting Children with Adoptive Families](#).

Q: What is the difference between a "family caseworker" and a "child caseworker"?

A: The **family caseworker** (also known as an **adoption worker** or **family social worker**), helps a family with the foster care or adoption process, including identifying children that might be a good fit for the family. Some families inquire about children available for adoption on their own and then get their family caseworker involved. A good relationship between a family and their caseworker is very important. A **child caseworker** is responsible for finding families for the children they work with that will best meet the children's needs. Family and child caseworkers work together as a team to make the decision about placing a child with the most suitable family and then to follow through with actually moving the child to the new family and making sure the family has the services it needs to parent the child.

Q Will the child's caseworker contact me after I submit my home study?

A: It depends. Most caseworkers typically contact a family's adoption worker **only** if the family is being considered as a potential match for the child due to time constraints. If a caseworker receives 50+ home studies for a child, they will not have the time to follow up individually with every family. In addition, some caseworkers tend to communicate solely with the family's adoption worker and/or agency, and may not contact the family outright. While this is understandably frustrating, it is the reality of the situation. Families can

increase the likelihood that they will hear back about a submission by having their adoption worker contact the caseworker. If the family submits for a child through our (AFFEC's) site, their adoption worker receives the caseworker's contact information in a separate email. In addition, the family will receive notifications when AFFEC receives a recruitment update from a child's caseworker.

To learn more about the "typical" day of a caseworker, check out the Courier's article [A Day in the Life of a Foster Care Worker](#) and the [Hamilton County Job and Family Services](#) piece about a caseworker's day.

Q: Can I obtain additional information on a child before I submit my home study for them?

A: Unfortunately, no. The information that is listed in a child's biography is all the information that we have on a child due to HIPAA. Caseworkers hold on to more personal information about a child's special needs and case history until they have identified a potential match. Then, they will either send the family's adoption worker and/or the family the child's history to let the family decide if they want to still be considered as a potential placement and be represented at the child's committee hearing or staffing. The reason caseworker's hold on to this information is because it is private and personal. They don't want the child to be embarrassed by having that information publicized.

Q: How can I improve my chances of being selected as an adoptive parent?

A: While there is no guaranteed formula for adopting, there are a few things you can do to increase your chances of being selected. The first is to **be open with your child preferences**. We cannot stress this enough. Being open to older children and different races will make a difference. As of 2011, the average age of a child in foster care was 9.3 years old. Families who seek to adopt a child under the age of 10 are limiting themselves already. Adolescents and teenagers need loving adoptive homes just as much as a young child, and can fit into a family just as nicely. Families can still have "firsts" with an adolescent or teenager, just as they can with a younger child. The three dominant ethnicities in foster care are White/Caucasian (41%), Black/African-American (27%) and Hispanic/Latino (21%), so families who are open to at least those three races will find more matches than families who limit themselves to one race. Families should also keep in mind that younger children may often have more significant developmental, medical and behavioral needs than an older child. Remember, there is no such thing as a "perfect" child, and that includes infants and toddlers. The second is to **write a family biography**. Again, we cannot stress this point enough either! The family biography is a personal narrative written by the family. Caseworkers use the family narrative to learn more about the family and what they are like before they read their home study. It is often the first thing a caseworker will read, so it's important you take your time in writing your family biography to include all necessary information and make sure it is error free. The family biography also gives a caseworker a chance to make a more personal connection with your family. If they see photos of you, your pets, your house and other children, they'll picture all that when they read your home study, and it will make your family stand out more in their mind. Just like you use a child's photo and biography to gauge your level of interest, caseworkers will do the same with a family. If you don't have anything written, they might pass over you to another family who does. The third is **making sure that your child preferences in your profile match those that are in your home study**. Again, when a caseworker searches for families on our site, they will be looking for matching families based on the child preferences they have entered into their profiles. If your child preferences do not match those in your home study, the caseworker is less likely to consider your family. If you change your mind about your adoption preferences, you must get an addendum to your home study; changing them in your online profile does not make those changes official. Fourth, make sure that your family **meets all of the requirements laid out in a child's biography**. I understand that information may not be available to a family at the time of submission, but paying attention to key phrases such as "needs to be the youngest/oldest/only child in the home" or "needs an in-state/surrounding state family", or even requests for certain parental makeups will help you. Fifth, have your adoption worker **follow up on your home study submissions**. Caseworkers may not reach out to you after you submit your home study, but they will be more likely to respond to an adoption worker if the adoption worker reaches out to them. This is also a great opportunity for your adoption worker to do some advocating on the behalf of your family. Sixth, participate in **matching events** through AFFEC or your state, and in **AFFEC's free recruitment options!** We offer these benefits to our families to help them connect with caseworkers, so take advantage of them! Finally, **have patience, and keep a positive attitude**. This is a long process, it is a challenging process, and families will need to develop some thick skin to make it through. If a child or sibling group is placed with another family, you can be disappointed that family wasn't yours, but be happy that the child found his/her forever home. If a caseworker gives you a reason why you were not selected, think of ways you can make some changes so you will be considered in the future for another child. Don't take their rejections as negatives; instead turn them into constructive feedback. Also, keep things in perspective. Just because you were not selected for one, ten, or twenty children doesn't mean you are "bad parents" with nothing to offer a child. It just means that you will have to keep searching and keep the faith that the right child is out there for you.

Please feel free to contact me with any of your other questions that I did not address here!

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