## Adopting as an older parent

The faces of the families adopting today are rapidly changing, along with the definition of "family". Adoption is not just for "mommies and daddies", nor is it just for people in their 30s. The adoption community is seeing an increase in the number of "older parent" adoption-people in their 40s and above. They are the ones who are starting families later in life with a partner or by themselves, or they are the "empty nesters" who still have lots of love and time to devote to a child who needs a family. I know that there are still some reservations in the adoption community about letting older parents adopt. In the international adoption community, for example, there is an age minimum and maximum. In foster care adoption, there is only an age minimum. But people still get hung up on the idea that they are approaching an age that will mean they are "too old to adopt". Obviously you know yourself the best, and what your limits are when it comes to caring for a child. But statements like "if I don't adopt by the age of 50, it will never happen" are just not true. It will happen. It can happen. You are never too old to be a parent. All a child in foster care wants is a family that will love them unconditionally, meet their needs, and support them in all their endeavors. You also don't have to subscribe to the belief that you can only adopt teenagers after you reach a certain age, because that's not true either! It all depends on the time and energy you have. I know men and women who are twice my age that have more energy and life in them than some of my peers. My dad and stepmom are in their mid 40s and 50s respectively, and they have a 3 1/2 year old daughter together. And they're doing just fine. Sure, some days they're a little more tired than others, but they still keep up with her. My friends ask me if it is weird to think they'll be in their late 50s and 60s when she graduates from high school, and my answer is no. Why would it be? They're still going to love her all the same and will still take care of her. Their age is not going to change that.

All children in foster care want is a loving home. It doesn't matter if you're 25 or 65-if you're able to meet a child's needs, that's all that matters. Check out this heartwarming video from NBC News about a retired couple who adopted a 17 year old boy.

## Things to remember as an older parent

1. You can (and should) adopt. You are perfectly capable of raising a child, so do it!

2. You don't need copious amounts of energy. In fact, sometimes what is needed is patience and understanding. And you can provide that. Remember, there are successful parents out there who are physically disabled or blind, and they're still raising great kids.

3. Carefully consider what needs you can meet. Factors to include in your decision are your physical fitness, health, experiences, knowledge, and support, in addition to the

basic needs of the child(ren) you are seeking to adopt. Babies and younger children will require bigger adjustments to a family's schedule and more energy, while young adults and teenagers will require more patience and understanding. All children in foster care have some level of special needs, so do some research on the special needs that you will be able to accept. Think about your life as it is now and how a child of each age would fit in, and how you would adjust.

4. Keep in mind any other family obligations. This can be taking care of your own parents, or even your adult children. Just because your children are grown doesn't mean they won't need you anymore, so make sure to factor in any of their potential needs as well.

5. Don't feel embarrassed to be an older parent. Remember, the definition of a family is changing, so the next time you're at the playground take a look around-I bet you'll see a variety of families, and you won't be the only older parent there.

For more things to consider in regards to adopting as an older parent, visit Adopting.org's article on 16 Steps to Older Parent Adoption.

## Articles on adopting as an older parent

If you are still skeptical that adopting as an older parent is totally possible and that you're not alone, check out these articles written by and about older parents.

Older, Wiser and Warming Bottles

'Too Old to Adopt'? Not the Case for These Parents

Who Needs Retirement?

Filling up an Empty Nest

When are you "Too Old" to Adopt?

Baby Boomers: Older Parents Who Can Afford to Adopt

## Resources

Adoption Group: Older Parents

*Hot Flashes, Warm Bottles* by Nancy London, MSW

*Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Changing our Families --and America* by Adam Pertman