

*Especially for the Children
and Families of Utah*



***Division of Child and Family Services
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www.utdefsaadopt.org***

UTAH GUIDE TO ADOPTING CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN FOSTER CARE

A Handbook for Prospective Adoptive Parents



**State of Utah
Department of Human Services
Division of Child and Family Services
October 2007**

National Adoption Center

www.adopt.org

A nonprofit organization whose mission is to expand adoption opportunities throughout the United States for children with special needs and those from minority cultures.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption (NRC) www.spaulding.org

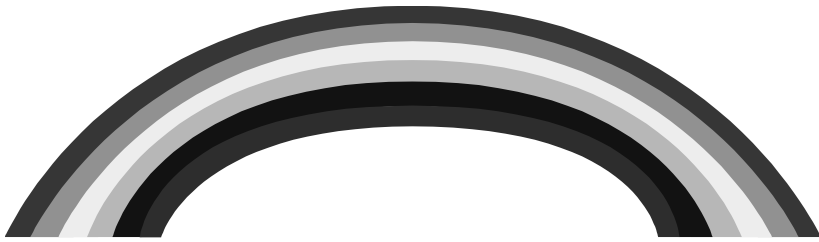
This multi-faceted organization provides help to children who wait the longest for permanency and support services for their adoptive, foster and kinship families. Nationwide, Spaulding's NRC provides training, consultation and informational materials for professionals, organizations and parents.

North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)

www.nacac.org

Founded in 1974 by adoptive parents, NACAC is committed to meeting the needs of waiting children and families who adopt them. A great resource for adoption triad members.





Adopt: Assistance Information Support:

www.adopting.org

This site has something for everyone who is touched by adoption. Here you will find information on various types of adoptions, state-by-state waiting children, information for adoptees and much more.

Adoptive Families of America

www.adoptivfam.org

This is a must-see site for all adoptive and prospective adoptive parents. Regularly updated national calendar of events, "Ask the Adoption Experts" section and much more!

Casey Family Programs

www.casey.org

Innovative foster and adoption programs from across the nation as well as information regarding foster and adoptive families.

Child Welfare Information Gateway

www.childwelfare.gov/adoption

A comprehensive resource on all aspects of adoption. This is a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

Evan B Donaldson: Adoption Institute

www.adoptioninstitute.org

This site offers education on research to promote ethical practice. The Institute was created to provide leadership that improves adoption laws, policies, and practice.

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Useful Websites

Utah Adoption Connection: www.utdcfsadopt.org

This website, created on behalf of Utah's waiting children, is designed to connect families and children who wait to form loving permanent families. This site was developed and is being managed by The Adoption Exchange through a contract with the Utah Department of Human Services, Child and Family Services.

The goals of this website are to:

- o Decrease the time children must wait in foster care for a permanent family.
- o Make it easier for social workers to find out about possible families for their children statewide.
- o Increase availability of post-adoption resources.

The Adoption Exchange: www.adoptex.org

A nonprofit organization whose purpose is to make the connections between families who adopt and children who wait for a safe and loving family to care for them. General information about adoption. Photo listing of waiting children and waiting families.

The Utah Foster Care Foundation: www.utahfostercare.org

This nonprofit organization was established in 1999 to work as a partner with the State of Utah by recruiting, educating and nurturing foster and adoptive families. All training for Utah licensed foster and adoptive parents is done by the Foundation.

Southwest Region

Regional Office
856 Sage Drive, Ste. 7
Cedar City, UT 84720-1876
Phone: 435-867-2760
Fax: 435-867-2795

Cedar City Office
106 North 100 East
Cedar City, UT 84720-2608
Phone: 435-865-5600
Fax: 435-865-5666

Beaver Office
875 North Main Street
P.O. Box 72
Beaver, UT 84713-0072
Phone: 435-438-3400
Fax: 435-438-3401

Manti Office
55 South Main Street #24
Manti, UT 84642-1349
Phone: 435-835-0780
Fax: 435-835-0798

Panguitch Office
665 North Main Street
P.O. Box 395
Panguitch, UT 84759
Phone: 435-676-1400
Fax: 435-676-1407

Richfield Office
201 East 500 North
Richfield, UT 84701-2251
Phone: 435-896-1250
Fax: 435-896-1260

St. George Office
377A East Riverside Drive
St. George, UT 84790-6714
Phone: 435-652-2960
Fax: 435-652-2988

Kanab Office
310 South 100 East
Kanab, UT 84741-3632
Phone: 435-644-4530
Fax: 435-644-4535

Acknowledgments

The Utah Division of Child and Family Services wishes to express their thanks and appreciation to Utah's children and parents for the many things they continue to teach us, and to our community partners and all those who work with us to try to make things better for Utah's families. We thank LeRoy Franke and all the other individuals and organizations who have assisted us in making this publication possible.

Appreciation is also expressed to the State of Ohio for allowing Utah to use its Adoptive Guide as a model for this publication.





Western Region
(Continued . . .)

Delta Office
39 South 300 East
P.O. Box 1038
Delta, UT 84624-9001
Phone: 435-864-3869
Fax: 435-864-2630

Orem Office
1106 North 1200 West
Orem, UT 84057
Phone: 801-224-7820
Fax: 435-426-0623

Fillmore Office
55 West 100 North
P.O. Box 589
Fillmore, UT 84631-4545
Phone: 435-743-6611
Fax: 435-743-5822

Heber City Office
69 North 600 West
Heber City, UT 84032-1648
Phone: 435-657-4200
Fax: 435-657-4220

Spanish Fork Office
607 East Kirby Lane
Spanish Fork, UT 84660
Phone: 801-794-6700
Fax: 801794-6733

Northern Region

Ogden Office
950 East 25th Street
Ogden, UT 84401-2626
Phone: 801-629-5800
Fax: 801-629-5866

Bountiful Office
57 West 200 North
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: 801-397-7640
Fax: 801-299-0197

Clearfield Office
1350 East 1450 South
Clearfield, UT 84015-1611
Phone: 801-776-7300
Fax: 801-776-7383

Brigham City Office
1050 South Medical Dr. Ste B
Brigham City, UT 84302-4715
Phone: 435-734-4075
Fax: 435-734-4078

Logan Office
115 W. Golf Course Rd. Ste B
Logan, UT 84321-5951
Phone: 435-787-3400
Fax: 435-787-3444

Eastern Region

Price Office
475 W Price River Drive. #152
Price, UT 84501-2838
Phone: 435-636-2360
Fax: 435-636-0224

Moab Office
1165 South Hwy 191 #1
P.O. Box 1030
Moab, UT 84532-3062
Phone: 435-259-3720
Fax: 435-259-3739

Vernal Office
1052 West Market Drive
Vernal, UT 84078-2398
Phone: 435-781-4250
Fax: 435-781-4270

Roosevelt Office
140 West 425 South 330-15
Roosevelt, UT 84066-3701
Phone: 435-722-6550
Fax: 435-722-6566

Castle Dale Office
1060 N Desbee Dove Road
P.O. Box 878
Castle Dale, UT 84513
Phone: 435-381-4730
Fax: 435-381-4734

Blanding Office
522 North 100 East
Blanding, UT 84511-2707
Phone: 435-678-1491
Fax: 435-678-1472

Eastern Region

(Continued)

Ute Family Services
86 North 1500 East
Or P.O.Box 1446
Ballard, UT 84066
Phone: 435-722-6440
Fax: 435-247-2546

Western Region

Provo Office
150 East Center Street #5100
Provo, UT 84606-3157
Phone: 801-374-7005
Fax: 801-374-7822

American Fork Office
578 East 300 South
American Fork, UT 84003
Phone: 801-492-3320
Fax: 801-492-3350

Nephi Office
54 North Main
P.O. Box 47
Nephi, UT 84648-1402
Phone: 435-623-7207
Fax: 801-435-623-7091

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Child and Family Services Offices

You can obtain the most current information on adoption support available by calling 1-866-872-7212, or by visiting Child and Family Services adoption website at www.utdcfsadopt.org.

The following is a list of the local Child and Family Services offices.

Salt Lake Valley Region

Holladay-Post Adoption
645 East 4500 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84107-2968
Phone: 801-264-7500
Fax: 801-264-7695

Magna Office
3452 South 8400 West
Magna, UT 84044-1870
Phone: 801-252-3560
Fax: 801-252-3595

Liberty Office
1385 South State Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84115
Phone: 801-468-0057
Fax: 801-468-0235

Quirrh Office
2655 South Lake Erie Drive
West Valley City, UT 84120
Phone: 801-952-4100
Fax: 801-952-4101

Murray Office
6100 South Fashion Blvd.
Murray, UT 84107-6159
Phone: 801-281-5100
Fax: 801-281-5134

Tooele Office
305 North Main Street
Tooele, UT 84074-1665
Phone: 435-833-7350
Fax: 435-833-7345

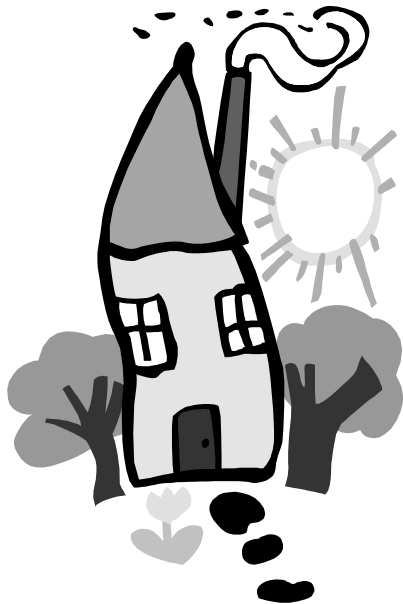
Jackson Office
1715 West 700 North #201
Salt Lake City, UT 84116-1801
Phone: 801-333-3500
Fax: 801-333-3550



Finalizing the Adoption

In Utah, an adoption can be legally finalized in court after the child has been in the home six months. The time a child has spent in your home as a foster child can also count towards that six-month period.

You will need to contact an attorney to assist with the court filing for legal finalization of the adoption. Methods of reimbursement for adoption-related costs are explained in the "Developing an Ongoing Support System" portion of this guide. A number of resources are available to help with the adoption-related costs, including private insurance, tax credits and, if the child qualifies, Federal Adoption Assistance funds.



Introduction

On any given day in the state of Utah, approximately 2,500 children are in state custody because their primary caretakers are currently unable to care for them. On average, 20 percent of those children will not be able to return home, and they will need another permanent family to love and care for them. These children need safety, acceptance, love and nurturing with an adoptive family in order to grow into happy, productive adults.

Over the past several years, many people have been working on developing public and private partnerships on behalf of Utah's children and families to help address the needs of these children. Two major needs have been identified. The first and foremost is the need to find more families to permanently care for these children. Secondly, that adopting families are going to need the ongoing support of the entire community as they take on the challenges of parenting these children -- many of whom have experienced far more pain, loss and suffering in their short lives than any child should ever have to endure.

We invite you as a foster and/or adoptive parent to join with us in this partnership. If you are interested, you will be invited to enter into an application process that will involve training in adoption issues and an evaluation of your interests, desires and abilities in parenting one or more of these children. Once the training and evaluation are completed, your careful consideration of available children will be invited. The Division of Child and Family Services (referred to in this booklet as Child and Family Services) will work with you to place the child or children that you feel are most appropriate for your family.

Both single parents and married couples have been successful in these kinds of adoptions. Both younger families with children and older couples with experience in raising children have had

good adoption experiences. The key to a successful experience is knowing your strengths and limitations as an adopting family and assuring that the child or children placed with you can succeed within your family. Your permanency team will help you examine your strengths and limitations through a very careful placement assessment process.

When you are approved as an adoptive family in Utah, you are also issued a foster care license, since Child and Family Services applies the same standards to adoptive families as it does to foster families. You may wish to only adopt, and not provide foster care. Providing foster care to a child is not a prerequisite to adopting; however, approximately 85 percent of the adoptions of children in state custody are by their foster parents. We understand how difficult it is to provide a temporary home. Yet, it is very important to understand, when considering fostering or adopting, that all of the adults in the life of a child belong to that child, in one way or another, throughout their life. When a child is adopted, it is important that we keep a child connected to his or her past, present and future.

Once a child is placed in your home for adoption we would invite you into an ongoing partnership with other adopting families and the supporting public and private agencies. We know this support is important to you and your child to assure the adoption experience is successful.

Also, in a very real sense, when you adopt a child you are adopting that child's biological family as your extended family. If the child is of a different race or culture than yours, it is important that you help to maintain your child's cultural identity by preserving and respecting the child's culture. By adopting that child you are also choosing to make that culture an integral part of your family life.

2. Nonrecurring expenses for the legal finalization of the adoption that are not paid for through other sources may be reimbursed up to \$2,000 per child.
3. A monthly financial subsidy to assist with basic, on-going costs for the child until the child reaches 18 years of age. The rate is negotiated with Child and Family Services and the adoptive family based upon the needs of the child and the ability of the family to provide for the child. The rate can never exceed the foster care payment.
4. Supplemental adoption assistance may be available to assist with extraordinary, infrequent or uncommon documented needs not covered by other sources.

Note: It is imperative that your **Adoption Assistance Agreement** be signed prior to the finalization of your adoption.



Crisis Management

If an issue arises that places you or your adopted child into a crisis situation, support systems are in place to assist you. A post adoption worker can help connect you to the needed supports to help you deal with specific problems, respite care or other needed interventions. Your insurance and Medicaid services can help purchase needed medical or mental health services. Get help for any developing problems **early**, rather than waiting until you are “at the end of your rope.”

An information line is available to you weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at 1-866-872-7212. Additionally you can find post-adoption resources at Utah’s Adoption Connection website at www.utdcfsadopt.org.

State and Federal Adoption Assistance

State and Federal Adoption Assistance funds have been made available to help support the placement of children who otherwise may not be adopted. A child must meet the definition of a “child with special needs” in order to receive adoption assistance.

Prior to finalization of your adoption, your Child and Family Services worker will provide you with information on available Federal and State Adoption Assistance, and determine with you if your child qualifies. The Adoption Connection website outlines details about the adoption assistance services. If the child qualifies for adoption assistance, you may be able to obtain the following on behalf of the child:

1. Utah Medicaid coverage. This will be available to supplement your private insurance in providing needed medical and mental health services for the child. Medicaid is a secondary source of payment after private insurance.

What is Adoption?

Adoption is a legally recognized relationship between a parent and a child who are not related biologically as parent and child. The adoptive parent(s) become legally and morally responsible for the child’s safety, well-being, education, health care, values and life skills development, as well as the day-to-day care of the child.

Earlier adoption laws were based on “ownership”-type principles and focused more on the rights of adults to parent a child. However, more recently the law has come to focus more on meeting the emotional, physical, spiritual and developmental needs of children.

Historically, most children in our country were raised in a traditional family by their birth mother and father. Today, a majority of children are parented either by a single parent, a grandparent, a stepparent, a foster parent or other parental figure at some time in their lives. Many children in our society are experiencing multiple sets of parents or grandparents and extended family members in parental roles. Children who are adopted always have at least two sets of parents: birth parents and adoptive parents. For these children to be able to understand who they are, it is important for them to come to know, at some level, each of the parents who have had a part in creating the life they are living. All children try to make sense of these complex relationships. The more they know about the people to whom they have had any type of parental tie, the more successful they will be at developing a more complete picture of themselves.

There are many children who need adoption. Most are older children, children who have siblings with whom they need to be adopted, or children who have special needs. Some reside in other communities and states, but many are waiting in your own community or region. Many of these children face physical, emotional and/or educational challenges.

What they all have in common is the need for a person to step forward and accept the responsibilities and commitment to take care of them until adulthood and beyond; to offer them a caring family that is prepared to address their unique needs.

Dr. Vera Fahlberg, a child and family expert and author, divides parenting roles into three categories:

Biological Parent – This parent gives life to a child. This determines the child’s sex, eye color, hair color and texture, intellectual potential, temperament, potential talents as well as some medical conditions. Racial and ethnic heritage is determined by biology.

Legal Parent – This parent makes all the important decisions for the child. For instance, where the child will live, what school to attend, what medical care is given, etc. This parent is financially and legally responsible for the child’s actions.

Parenting Parent – This parent provides the day-to-day care of the child. This parent is responsible for providing love and discipline. This parent models behavior for the child to copy. This person cooks meals, washes clothes, helps with school work, takes care of the ill child, watches the ball games, etc. This is the primary educator who teaches values, religion and life skills.

People become legal members of a family by birth, marriage or adoption. Government and societies have developed ways to recognize the great importance and permanence of such deep, emotional commitments. Laws, regulations and practices have been developed to give persons related by adoption and marriage comparable rights and responsibilities as those related by birth. All families, whether formed by birth, adoption or marriage, are expected by our society to be permanent connections to love, acceptance and support by all members.

Developing Ongoing Support

Developing Your Support Network

When adopting a child with special needs, families do best when they utilize a variety of family, private and community resources to assist with rearing the child. Extended family, support groups, counseling, respite care, medical services, educational resources, special day camps and a variety of other community services may be available to help meet any ongoing or new needs you may identify. During your foster/adoption training, involvement with Cluster support groups and experience as a foster parent, you will learn about many resources available in your area. Also, there is a Child and Family Services post-adoption worker in every region of the state. These professionals can be a great resource for you and can inform you about other resources available in your area.

If your adopted child is of a different race or ethnic culture, it is very important to connect with the community of your child’s race and become a part of that community’s activities. This will help to honor your child’s heritage and facilitate contact with that community.

You will continue to be the best advocate for your child’s needs. Maintaining contact with supports for yourself and the child will help you feel more secure in your parenting role. Think of the connections to support groups as an “insurance policy” that is there in case you need it in the future.

The Utah Foster Care Foundation, Child and Family Services, the Utah Adoption Council and local adoptive parent Cluster support groups provide ongoing classes and other post-adoption educational and support activities.

See the Utah booklet, “The Utah Post-Adoption Resource Connection” available at your local Child and Family Services office or visit Utah’s Adoption Connection website at www.utdcfsadopt.org.

Post-Placement Services

After your new family member arrives, you will experience some transitions familiar to most adopting families. Those transitions may include a “honeymoon” period of several weeks, followed by some testing of your resolve to really show a commitment to the child as a part of your family. Educating yourself about adoption issues can help you understand emotional dynamics that you may want to anticipate and think about. A Child and Family Services worker will visit with you regarding the adjustment of your family and the child and to provide support.

Depending on the history of the child and previous trauma and losses, there will be a period of adjustment as the child comes to really understand that they are now a part of your family and will remain so. Testing behavior may come at different times as the child goes through different emotional adjustments to your family. You may have already experienced similar testing behavior with other children in your home or other children you know. Make use of the experiences of other adoptive or foster families you have met, especially how they resolved challenges similar to the ones you experience with your adopted child.

Cluster support groups as well as current adoption resources and a lending library on many relevant topics can be found on Utah’s Adoption Connection website located at www.utdcfsadopt.org.

Determine what ongoing supports and services you will need with your child, and assure those are in place. If your child qualifies for adoption assistance such as Medicaid or financial subsidy, you can work on that application with your worker. If there is a need and your child qualifies, make sure that a written “Adoption Assistance Agreement” is in place prior to the finalization of your adoption.

Through the Eyes of the Child

If we do not understand adoption “through the eyes of the child,” we do not fully understand adoption. Even if an outcome of adoption is a positive experience for a child, filled with love, security and acceptance, there are, for the child, no “happy” ways that lead to adoption. The fact that a child has come to be adopted means that something unpleasant has already happened in that child’s life. By the time an adoption occurs, loss and grief have touched each child’s life. Even for infant adoptions, the nature of the mother-child relationship and the bond that has formed through nine months of carrying the child is important. The adult concept that a biological parent loved a child so much that they made an adoption plan for their child often makes little sense to a child. Children who may have been abused or neglected by their parents also remember many instances of feeling safe and loved by them. A child’s understanding of why they came to adoption is usually very different from those held by the adoptive parents and other adults in their lives. There is always a need for adopting parents to understand and honor the adopted child’s biological heritage.

If, through the eyes of the child, it seems they were “kidnapped” from their biological family, and the legal/nurturing parent only thinks of adoption as a “happy” or “good” thing, the child may feel very alone in their legal family. It is essential that an adoptive parent, as the legal and care-giving parent, sees the value of the biological parent as the child sees it. How does one show respect toward someone who has allegedly abused a child or someone who has possibly made some poor life choices? Taking the time to find out the “strengths” and “good points” of your adopted child’s biological relatives and honoring them for those things will assist you in strengthening those in this child and honoring the full range of this child’s inherited strengths and talents. For example, your family may not be musical or athletic. Yet, your adopted child may bring great strengths in

those areas to your family. By demonstrating positive regard for their biological family, you show the ultimate respect to your adopted child.

The grief and loss a child feels at adoption should not be viewed or treated as abnormal. These are a normal part of the adoption transition for a child. These losses may be manifest in a number of behaviors in the adopted child throughout his or her life. It is much like a birth parent who has lost a child. Life's events will mark points of loss and ongoing grief. We need to understand this ongoing loss, and honor and support children through these difficult periods.

It is the value of Child and Family Services that **all children need and are entitled to enduring relationships that provide a family, stability, belonging and a sense of self that connects children to their past, present and future.**



If you have other children, it is important to understand their feelings about adding another family member. You will want to help each of them express their feelings about the adoption and help each of them with the adjustments they need.

The first days and weeks after a child is placed into your home requires focused time and energy on getting to know each other and getting off on the "right foot." You may want to work closely with your social worker to plan time and activities to assist in the initial adjustment.



Pre-Placement and Placement Activities

You will always have the final decision on whether a particular child is the right one for placement in your home. Utah law and rules require full disclosure to you of all of the information the state has about the child's background. This information may be limited but includes what the state has about medical, educational and psychological information. A worker should go through the record with you and share with you all information relevant to parenting the child. Child and Family Services cannot release third party reports, such as from doctors and psychologists, but can help you obtain that information from these professionals. Take as much time as you like and ask as many questions as you need to be sure you have all the available information about the child.

If you determine you could commit to a child, pre-placement visits may be arranged. There is no rule about how many or how long these visits should be. You, your worker, and the child's current caregiver should work out a plan that minimizes disruption and stress to the child and will work for your family. You may be invited to participate in a "transition ceremony" of some kind where the child is helped to make the transition from a current foster family or biological family to your family. This may also include activities related to the child's biological family, where the child is helped emotionally to make the change to your home.

You may find, as you become committed to a particular child, that commitment is not always the same as loving that child. Even parents who have biological children often report that they learned that they were first committed to the birth child, then learned to love them. Love, in adoption, becomes a decision to follow principles of commitment, caring, sharing and service. Learning how this worked for other adopting families can help you work through the process of growing together as a family.

The Application and Family Evaluation

The State of Utah has a unified application and family evaluation process for adoption and foster care. Interested families may contact the Utah Foster Care Foundation for information on becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent in Utah. A staff member from the Foundation will meet with families to familiarize them with the foster care and adoption process. All new families who meet the basic qualifications will be invited to complete a 32-hour foster/adoption training offered by the Utah Foster Care Foundation. You will be given information on foster/adoption training classes that are offered in your area as well as an application to become licensed. Attendance at the classes is mandatory. These classes receive high praise by foster/adoptive families who report, "Any parent would benefit from attending these classes."

During the foster/adoption training you will receive assistance in completing your licensing paperwork. You will be asked to complete an initial application, which will include some basic information as well as approval for the state to conduct criminal and child abuse background checks for all adults living in your home. If there is a history that includes convictions of felony offenses or child abuse, your application may be denied. Also, current state law requires that if there are adults residing in your home that are not related by blood, marriage or adoption, with whom you have a sexual relationship, you will not qualify to foster or adopt children. In Utah you will also need:

- Four letters of reference from people who know your ability to parent.
- Medical reports from your physician.
- Social history information questionnaire.

You will turn in your completed application materials to become licensed to the training instructor and they will be given to the Office of Licensing staff member in your area.

During the course of training, you will be given other parts of the application that are required to become licensed, such as the Provider Code of Conduct, Office of Licensing Rules, Confidentiality form, and Emergency Plan. Next, you will be ready to have your family evaluation conducted. The family evaluation is often called a home study.

The family evaluation process provides an opportunity to look at yourself and your support system, and to explore beliefs, attitudes, opinions, self-image, goals, achievements and coping skills. It will be a time for your whole family to examine your readiness to adopt and the special gifts you have to offer an adopted child. It will also be a time for you to learn more about the types of children needing an adoptive family and the joys and challenges of adoptive parenting.

A worker from the Office of Licensing, from Child and Family Services or from a private contract adoption agency will visit your home and interview all members of your family to conduct the family evaluation.

Once the family evaluation is complete, a licenser will then approve or deny your home for foster care. If approved, you will be issued a license. Then a regional Child and Family Services committee made up of foster care and adoption staff will approve or deny your family for the placement of children to be fostered or adopted.



State law requires that for the first 120 days after the court shelter hearing when the child came into Child and Family Services custody, relatives of the child will be given preference for his or her placement. After that time, preference is given to the foster family where a parent-child bond has formed.

If a child has been in a particular foster home and formed a significant bond to the foster family, that family will have preferential consideration for adopting the child. Many families choose to be foster-to-adopt families for the purpose of making adoption decisions earlier in the placement process.

Choosing to be a foster-to-adopt family requires an understanding that until a child has a goal of adoption or becomes legally free for adoption, the foster parent is an important team member helping to facilitate the goal of returning the child to the birth family. Foster parents may play an important role in mentoring birth parents while they are working to have their children returned to them.

When you have been selected as a possible placement for a specific child, your agency worker will present to you all of the information Child and Family Services has about the child. While the agency is required to provide the information it has, it is ultimately up to you to make sure that you understand as much as possible about the child. Ask all the questions you have to assure you are making an appropriate lifelong decision for your family. Your adoption is a “forever” decision.

After you have been selected as the foster-to-adopt or adoptive family, take a few days to make certain the decision is the right one. Jitters are normal; however, if your feelings go beyond jitters to the “something’s not right” category, take more time and/or get more information. If you do not believe that a particular child is a good fit for your family, do not proceed with the placement. Instead, use this experience to further define for yourself and your agency worker what type of child would be a better fit. This decision will demonstrate your desire to do the right thing for the child or children to be adopted and for your current family.

The Family Selection Process

Using information from your foster/adoption classes, books you have read and advice from other adoptive parents and your agency worker, you will be better prepared to make a good and realistic decision as to the child you might adopt. You will have considered many of the characteristics of a child you feel would fit into your family.

When adopting a child through the state of Utah, **it is important to remember the agency is seeking a family for a child and not a child for a particular family.** This can create frustration at times for some families when they may find a particular child they have an interest in but the state selects another family for that child. This is not a rejection of your family, but a decision that is based on the best match for the child.

The decision to place a child with a particular family is made by a Regional Adoption Committee consisting of adoption professionals within Child and Family Services and at least one other professional from outside of Child and Family Services.

Child and Family Services' rules require that, when considering families for the placement of a child, at least three families be reviewed, if available. Thus, when you are considered for a child, generally at least two other families will also be under consideration and could be selected. If you are not the family selected, this is not a rejection of you, nor is it an indication of your capabilities of caring for a child. There simply can only be one family selected from the three or more considered.

You may be considered for a number of children before the right match is made for your family. This requires patience on your part.

If the child is Native American, the Indian Child Welfare Act requires a preference be given to a member of the child's extended family, families from the child's Indian Nation tribal band or other Native American families in regards to placement consideration.

After the Evaluation

The period of time after the approval and prior to placement of a child can be a difficult time. It is, in a way, like being "engaged" to a child about whom you know nothing, with no real target date for the "wedding." A mere phone ringing can bring a lump to your throat.

Using this time to advance your learning regarding adoption-related issues can help. An excellent source of support includes other adoptive families. They can share their experiences and how they coped during the waiting period. There are Cluster support groups in every part of Utah. The Adoption Exchange website at www.utdcfsadopt.org maintains a current list of Cluster support groups so you can locate one in your area and begin to acquaint yourself with other adoptive parents.

During this time, Child and Family Services will be reviewing available children for a match with your family. Remember that families who are willing to foster children have less waiting time for a placement than those who wish only to adopt. Foster parents who are caring for children who become available for adoption will be given preference to adopt the children in their care.

You may lessen your stress by actively searching for and screening children through The Adoption Exchange internet listings, adoption events and other available resources. If you have signed a release to be listed on Child and Family Services password protected Internet site, caseworkers from throughout the state will have access to contact your worker about children they are seeking to place. It may be helpful to check with your worker from time to time to obtain information on the number of children being placed in the ages and profiles you are considering adopting.

Take this time to try to relax and have fun. Enjoy your spouse and other family members, engage in your regular activities and don't become focused only on the adoption event. This isn't easy, but it may really help.