



CFSA Fact Sheet

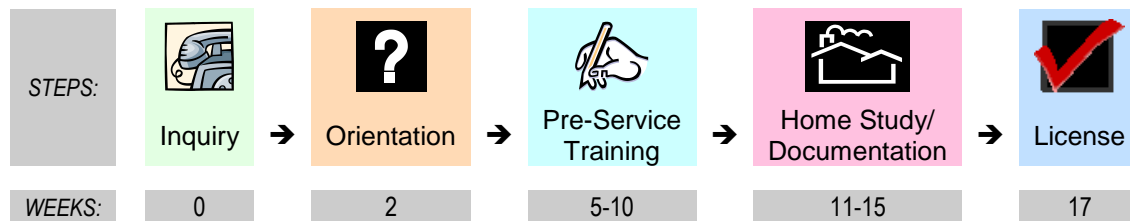


Forever Families for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Adopting from the Public Child Welfare System in the District of Columbia

Adoption is an enduring, life-affirming gift that makes a priceless difference to adopted children as well as to their adoptive parents. Following is an overview of the process of adopting a child, youth, or group of siblings from the DC Child and Family Services Agency. It describes basic steps in the adoption process for residents of the District of Columbia and neighboring jurisdictions, who are the primary source of adoptive homes for District children in foster care. However, individuals and married couples that other jurisdictions have approved can adopt in the District, and basic information for residents outside the Washington metropolitan area is included.

Becoming Approved to Adopt



Inquiry: People interested in adopting a child, youth, or sibling group call 202-671-LOVE (202-671-5683) and talk to a Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruiter at the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA).¹

Orientation: CFSA invites eligible callers to attend an upcoming Orientation. This two-hour session gives prospective parents information about children and youth awaiting adoption and what they will need to do to adopt in the District. CFSA conducts Orientation twice a month, allowing qualified people to choose a session that fits their schedule.

¹ A number of local private agencies under contract to CFSA also recruit adoptive parents for children in the DC child welfare system. People interested in adopting can also contact one of these agencies. Private-agency processes for preparing and approving people to adopt and matching children in foster care with prospective parents are similar to the CFSA processes described here.

Pre-Service Training: This training is mandatory—and well worthwhile in preparing for the challenges and rewards of adoption. CFSA uses the nationally acclaimed “Partnering for Safety and Permanence: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP)” course in two three-hour training sessions a week over five weeks. New sessions begin continuously, and classes take place in the evening and on Saturday.

During the five weeks of pre-service training, experienced trainers cover:

- The process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent and the legal foundation for child welfare services.
- Safety, permanence, and well being needs of children and teens who have been abused or neglected.
- The impact of separation on children’s growth and development and of foster care and adoptive placement on their emotional development and adjustment.
- Individual and partnership roles of foster parents, adoptive parents, and social workers in helping children form new attachments.
- Techniques for managing child and teen behavior without the use of physical punishment.
- The importance to children and youth of contact with their family members and former foster families.
- The impact of fostering or adopting on existing families and lifestyles and individual strengths and needs as a foster or adoptive parent.

As prospective adoptive parents gain knowledge and skills, they are also exposed to comprehensive information that helps them ensure they are committed to adopting. CFSA also requires CPR and First Aid training because both can be essential in an emergency.²

Home Study and Documentation: The home study is a critical part of the approval process for adoptive parents. It provides in-depth information and assurances about residence, parenting style, and attitudes while helping prospective parents to think deeply about the impact of adopting on their lives.

CFSA completes home studies for prospective adoptive parents who are District residents. The home study social worker visits the prospective adoptive home to meet with adoptive parents and to discuss and obtain required information. The home study process typically takes several weeks.

During the home study, CFSA interviews prospective adoptive parents and others living in the home about their:

- Family history including their educational background, work history, religious affiliation, child-raising experiences, and interests and hobbies.
- Reasons for adopting.
- Feelings about their own childhood and parents, including any history of abuse or neglect.
- Opinions about discipline.
- Attitudes toward abused and neglected children and their birth families.
- Attitudes toward different socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural groups and ability to help children from a different background maintain their ethnic identity.
- Feelings about a foster or adoptive child maintaining relationships with his/her siblings and/or other birth family members.

² Participants in CFSA pre-service training include a mix of prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship parents.

- Ability to work with specific behaviors and issues.

During this time, CFSA also screens prospective adoptive parents to ensure their home would be safe, stable, and healthy for one or more adoptive children or teens. Among documentation prospective parents must provide are:

- Police, FBI, and Child Protection Registry clearances for all adults (age 18 and older) living in the home.
- Medical reports for everyone living in the home.
- School adjustment reports for children currently living in the home.
- Proof of marital status, if applicable.
- Financial information.
- Three personal references.
- Proof of employment, if applicable.
- Lead paint inspection results.
- Emergency evacuation plan for the home.

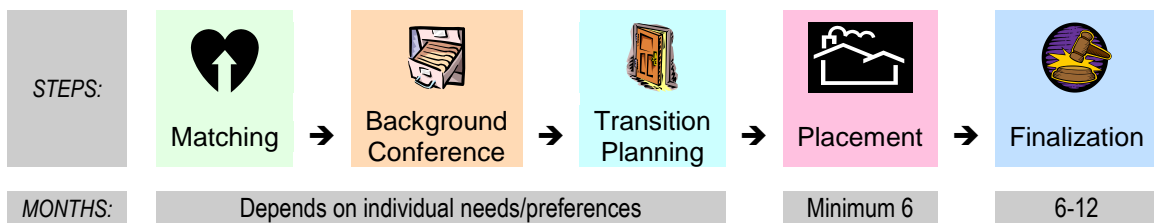
Among factors that generally disqualify people from adopting in the District are:

- A previous finding of abuse or neglect of a child by an adult household member.
- A felony conviction for child abuse or neglect, spousal abuse, a crime against children, or a crime involving violence or homicide.
- Communicable diseases or health barriers to meeting a child’s needs.
- Lack of financial ability to meet the basic needs of the household as it exists before adopting.

Details about these and other disqualifying factors are listed in the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR), Title 29, Foster Home Rules, Chapter 60, §6006 *et seq.*

Licensing: After a prospective adoptive parent completes pre-service training and meets all standards regarding safety, health, and stability, CFSA issues an official foster care license to those who live in the District. For Maryland residents, CFSA maintains contracts with private agencies that issue licenses in that state.

Connecting with a Child, Completing the Adoption Process



Parent-Child Connection: Bringing prospective parents together with waiting children or youth is a thoughtful, planned, progressive process. This phase of adoption has four steps that require considerable openness, patience, and cooperation among all those involved on behalf of the child.

1. **Matching:** The goal is to connect each child with an adoptive parent or family able and willing to meet his/her needs. Social workers use a matching instrument, home studies, and social summaries to compare prospective family preferences and characteristics with the

needs of children and youth awaiting adoption. These tools guide the social worker to a probable match. The social worker then convenes an internal Matching Conference in which a group of professionals review and comment on potential match decisions. This step results in a child, youth, or sibling group who CFSA will present to the prospective adoptive parent or family.

2. **Background Conference:** The social worker convenes a Background Conference that brings the identified prospective adoptive parents together with people who know the child or youth: foster parents, social workers, the guardian *ad litem* (child's attorney), mentors, health care professionals, and others. At the conference, CFSA provides detailed information about the child's background including birth family, medical and placement histories, educational status, behavioral assessments, and the child's overall adjustment.

This disclosure gives prospective parents information for making an informed decision within two days about whether to continue pursuing adoption of a particular child, youth, or sibling group. Prospective parents have the opportunity to ask questions, clarify information, and talk with service providers before deciding whether to move forward with the adoption.

3. **Transition Planning:** The prospective parents and social worker meet to develop a plan for the child's transition and placement with the family. The child's current caretaker is also involved to help facilitate and support a smooth transition for the child.

Because children in foster care have often experienced many separations and losses, change may be difficult for them. Transition planning is an important step that decides how best to prepare and support the child in making the smoothest transition possible. Prospective adoptive families may need to participate in therapeutic activities to assist the child in making the transition.

Major components of the transition plan include:

- A schedule of pre-placement visits that bring about progressive involvement between the prospective adoptive family and child.
- The schedule of appointments for any services in progress for the child and the nature and location of these services.
- Any matters that must be addressed before the adoptive placement and time frames for resolving them.
- The projected date for the child, youth, or sibling group to move into the prospective adoptive home. If the prospective adoptive parent lives outside the District, the state of residence must approve the child's placement under the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC). In such cases, CFSA must receive ICPC approval before placing the child.

4. **Pre-Adoptive Placement:** The day of a pre-adoptive placement is exciting for everyone involved. The child, youth, or sibling group comes to the new home with personal belongings including a memory book. This is a collection of photographs, certificates, cards, letters, and other significant items that the foster parent or other caretaker has maintained and now gives to the adoptive parent or family.

Following placement in the pre-adoptive home, the social worker visits the child at least twice a month until the adoption is final. One of these monthly visits must take place with the child and adoptive family in the adoptive home. This allows the social worker to monitor and

facilitate the child's adjustment and to support the child and parents with any services that will help them come together as a family.

The social worker also provides information and supportive counseling regarding finalization of the adoption. During this time, the child's attorney, the guardian *ad litem*, also visits the child. At least every six months, the social worker submits a report to Family Court about the child's adjustment and the status of the adoption process.

Finalization Process: Adoption establishes a legal relationship between the adoptive parent and child. Within a few months of the pre-adoptive placement, the prospective parent files a petition with the court to adopt the child. In the case of siblings, parents file a separate petition to adopt each child.

To assist with the legal aspects of adoption, prospective parents need an attorney to file their petition(s) and to counsel them in the adoptive process. CFSA reimburses attorney fees up to a preset limit upon finalization of an adoption from the public child welfare system. The attorney must be willing to accept the preset fee.

The court sends adoption petitions to CFSA, which then has 90 days to respond with an Adoption Report and Recommendation pending resolution of all adoption requirements. The court makes the final decision regarding the adoption.

The wait is over! A Family Court judge finalizes the adoption either in chambers or in a Final Decree Hearing in a courtroom with the adoptive family present.

[Taking Advantage of Post-Permanency Services](#)

Building families through adoption is one of the most important aspects of child welfare work. CFSA wants all our adoptive families to thrive. After finalizing an adoption, families can take advantage of post-permanency services from CFSA whenever they feel the need for an understanding ear and extra support.

- CFSA has experienced social workers dedicated to supporting adoptive families. They provide services ranging from telephone consultations to short-term case management and referral to a wide range of professional services, programs, support groups, and sources of information.
- The CFSA-funded Adoption Resource Center in the District offers an array of services especially for families who have adopted from the public child welfare system. Most services are free of charge. For more information, visit www.familyandchildservices.org, click on "Services" in the right column, then click on "Adoption Resource Center."

[Adopting a District Child or Youth from Outside the Washington Metro Area](#)

CFSA is eager to find safe, nurturing adoptive homes for all our waiting children, teens, and sibling groups. We welcome inquires about adopting from qualified people regardless of place of residence. The following information explains the basic process for people who live outside the Washington, D.C. area.

- CFSA requires documentation that a licensed child-placing agency in the state of residence has approved the parents to adopt. This includes proof of pre-service training,

a home study, and background checks comparable to those the District requires for local residents.

- Prospective adoptive parents need an attorney licensed to practice in the District of Columbia.
- Prospective adoptive families must allow additional time for the District to coordinate pre-placement, placement, and placement monitoring services from a licensed child-placing agency in their state of residence. CFSA works with the family's state of residence to obtain these services through the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children (ICPC).

For complete information, call the CFSA Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruitment Line at 202-671-LOVE (202-671-5683) Monday through Friday, 8:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. EST. ■

To see some of the many children, youth, and sibling groups available for adoption from CFSA:



Visit www.adoptuskids.org and www.nac.org on the Internet.



In the Washington metro area, watch "Wednesday's Child" with Barbara Harrison, WRC-TV news, 5 p.m. every Wednesday.



In the Washington metro area, call 301-439-2900 and ask for the current location of the Gallery of Heart exhibit.