

*Answering
the Call*



**Family
Pocket Guide**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

*Photo
of you and/or
your family*

Date you started the journey: _____

1

Welcome to the AdoptUSKids Answering the Call Process

Dear Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents,

Thank you for answering the call to adopt or foster a child in need. We are very pleased that you are interested in working with us.

There is no doubt that fostering and adopting children who are in foster care is hard work and very challenging. There is a lot you will have to do to get ready for this challenge and the many rewards that come as a result. You may think of this as going on a life-changing journey. The *AdoptUSKids Answering the Call Family Pocket Guide* was developed to help you record your questions, log your progress and keep important contact information along the way.

This is your guide for the journey. It is being given to you as part of your initial orientation. So write your name on the opposite page and the names of your important contact people on page three. This may be your assigned social worker, orientation coordinator and/or other important people who you will want to remember and be able to call.

On page six you will see the seven basic steps of this journey. There is a brief description of each with space for you to write in the questions you want to ask and the answers you receive. You may wonder why there is so much information to gather and questions to be asked in this process. It is because the agency is required by law to assure that foster and adoptive children will be safe and well-cared for in their new homes. And, we can serve you better once we get to know you and understand your ideas, preferences and unique circumstances.

Please be aware that the steps in this journey and time it takes will vary somewhat from agency to agency.

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Key Contacts

E-mail: _____

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What Basic Qualifications Do I Need To Go on this Journey?

Following are some of the characteristics necessary to be a good foster or adoptive parent:

- Stability
- Maturity
- Commitment
- Dependability
- Flexibility
- Sense of humor
- Enjoys children and is an advocate for them
- Team player willing to work with your social worker, the birth parents, as needed, and community services

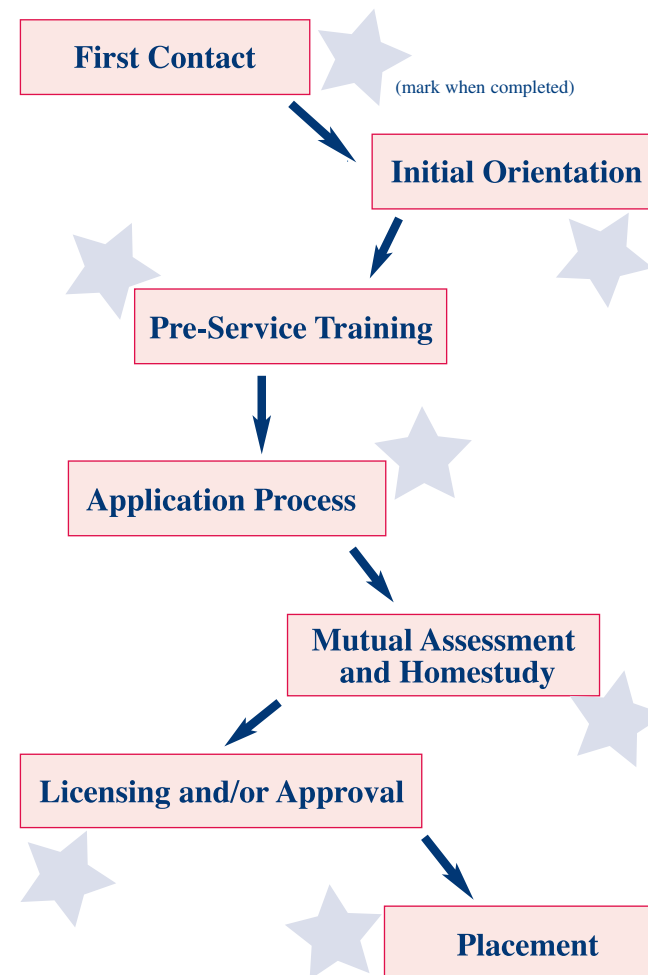
Prospective parents must complete assessment and licensing requirements that vary from state to state and may include:

- A minimum age requirement
- Verification of sources of income
- Criminal record check at local, state, federal levels including finger printing
- References from a doctor to ensure that all household members are free from communicable diseases and in good health
- Confidentiality agreement
- Positive reference letters, e.g., personal, employment, etc.
- Safe home, no previous record of child abuse or neglect
- Attend and complete pre-service training requirements
- Other state/county-specific requirements



See pages 23 and 24 for answers to other frequently asked questions.

The Seven Step Journey



Step 1: First Contact

What is it?

This is where you, the prospective parent, have made a phone call to the agency to get information about fostering/adopting. Or, perhaps you spoke to a social worker directly and are serious about wanting to get more information.

What do I have to do during this step?

As a result of your initial contact you need to decide whether or not you want to find out more about this journey. You should attend an orientation/“let’s get acquainted” meeting.

Do you want to continue on the journey?

Yes ☐

No 

Date of initial contact: _____

Who I talked to: _____

Phone number: _____

Date and time of orientation meeting:_____

Location: _____

Journey Questions and Notes:

[illegible]

Step 2: Initial Orientation

What is it?

This is an orientation meeting where you will be given a good basic understanding of:

1. Who the children are who need care
2. The role and responsibilities of foster/adoptive parents
3. The process you will need to go through
4. The next steps you will have to take on the journey

What do I have to do during this step?

1. Show up with an open heart and mind.
2. Ask questions and listen carefully to what the presenters say.
3. Take notes on things like:
 - a. What you will have to do to be approved or licensed as a foster/adoptive parent;
 - b. Who your important contacts are;
 - c. When the next meetings will happen.

During this orientation you may hear for the first time the real challenges of fostering/adopting. Things such as:

- These children have had a tough journey of their own
- The importance of birth parent(s) to their children
- You will have to go through background checks
- The length of the process

At this point in the journey, you may become conflicted; your emotions may come to the surface. Don't be afraid to ask questions and be prepared to open your heart and mind to what is being said. You don't have to make any major decisions right now. The only decision you need to make is whether or not you want to continue the journey to Step 3: Pre-Service training.

Date, time and location for pre-service training:_____

Journey Questions and Notes:

[illegible]

Step 3: Pre-Service Training

What is it?

This is a training program that usually takes 4–10 sessions to complete. Each agency will be different.

Sessions are designed to:

1. Prepare you for fostering/adopting
2. Create a basis for teamwork between yourself and the agency
3. Challenge you to grow and develop as a resource parent
4. Help you consider: Is fostering/adopting for me? Am I able to parent a child who has been neglected and/or abused? What type of child can I successfully parent?

What do I have to do during this step?

1. Make the commitment to attend and actively participate in the training sessions.
2. Give careful consideration to the information presented.
3. Come prepared to ask questions.
4. Devote time to consider the full impact of fostering and/or adoption on your family.
5. Gain the necessary information to make a personal decision about whether to become an adoptive or foster parent.
6. Gain knowledge of what type of child you can best parent.

During this step, you will probably start the application process and provide references, background information, finger printing, etc. Also, you will have made new friends with other prospective parents, staff, and experienced resource parents. You will start to see yourself as part of an enthusiastic, hard-working and competent team. You are not in this by yourself!!

Journey Questions and Notes:

[illegible]

Step 4: Application Process

Note: Agencies will differ as to when they ask you to fill out an application. Some will do this step before pre-service training, and others will do it during or after training.

What is it?

This is where prospective foster/adoptive parents complete the application and you and your assigned social worker go over it carefully.

Each applicant's file generally includes reference letters from employers (if applicable) and personal friends, family fact sheets and criminal record checks, along with other information.

What do I have to do during this step?

Applicants for foster care or adoption are responsible to:

1. Be open and honest in filling out the applications, during the personal interviews, etc.
2. Supply the necessary information completely and accurately and as fast as possible.
3. Cooperate with the criminal background check and protective service checks.
4. Ask for help, if you don't understand something. It's better to take a little longer to fill out the application correctly.
5. Agree to maintain confidentiality about the child, his/her birth family and to provide, nurturing, safe, and affectionate care for the child.

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” —Sir Winston Churchill

Journey Questions and Notes:

[illegible]

Step 5: Mutual Assessment and Homestudy

What is it?

This is the time that the agency licensing or family worker meets with you in your home to talk about your personal history, family relationships, reasons for wanting to foster or adopt, and the supports you have available to you. They will determine whether your home is safe and has sufficient space for a foster or adopted child. The point of this step is to help you and the agency make the best possible decisions about whether placement of a child in your home will or will not work out and to determine the characteristics of the children whom you are most able to parent.

What do I have to do during this step?

Applicants for foster care or adoption are responsible to:

1. Get agreement among the members of their household to proceed with the process.
2. Cooperate with the homestudy and the home visits.
3. Ensure that all necessary information is supplied completely and accurately.
4. If you have not already met with experienced foster/adoptive parents, now is a good time to do this.

Don't be afraid to ask for the help you need to be qualified. You can even ask to delay this step if you feel you or members of your household are not yet ready.

If you are not ready or are not able to be licensed for fostering or adoption, please consider other roles. You have valuable abilities that can be put to work for children. Consider work as a community volunteer, respite worker, office assistant, tutor, mentor to teens, babysitter and/or assistant recruiter. Discuss these options and others you may think of with your social worker.

Journey Questions and Notes:

[illegible]

Step 6: Licensing and/or Approval

What is it?

This is a time of waiting for you. You may be waiting for the licensing or family worker to complete your background checks and review the various pieces of information you provided.

The agency will have to complete a written assessment (homestudy) and other licensing/approval paperwork. All of this takes time.

What do I have to do during this step?

During this step of your journey try to be patient.

1. You may be having a hard time understanding why it takes so long to complete the paperwork.
2. You may be concerned about what has been put in the record about you and your household.
3. Now is a good time to contact your local foster/adoptive parent group and attend a meeting.

Ask to review a copy of your homestudy so you can look it over and correct any inaccuracies.

Be prepared for a bit of a wait. This process can take time. Use the time for further reading or networking with other foster and adoptive parents. Don't be afraid to use the agency to answer questions and help solve problems during this period.

Journey Questions and Notes:

[illegible]

Step 7: Placement

What is it?

Congratulations, you've been approved and are ready to proceed to the next step in this journey—Placement. This is where the agency and you work to assure the right match between yourself and a particular child's or sibling group's needs. Requirements will differ at this stage, depending on whether a child is placed with you for foster care or adoption.

What do I have to do during this step?

Licensed foster and pre-adoptive parents have the responsibility to the child, the child's birth parents, and the sponsoring agency to:

1. Make sure you have the necessary information to make an informed decision about placement.
2. Provide a safe, nurturing, stable environment for the child. Provide humane and affectionate care.
3. Assure that religious training appropriate to the child's denomination be respected.
4. Assure that the emotional, medical, dental and educational needs of the child are met.
5. Report any changes related to the child's care and/or your family's composition to your family social worker.
6. Promote physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth and development of each child.
7. Maintain confidentiality.
8. Cooperate with the agency/department, especially in treatment planning for the child.
9. Respect the feelings of the foster child for the birth family.
10. Support the child's visiting plan with his/her birth parents, siblings or others, when applicable.

Journey Questions and Notes:

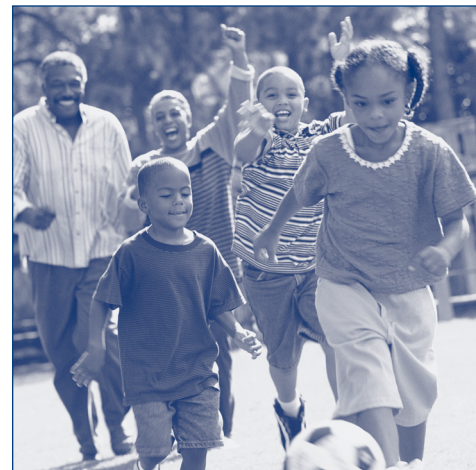
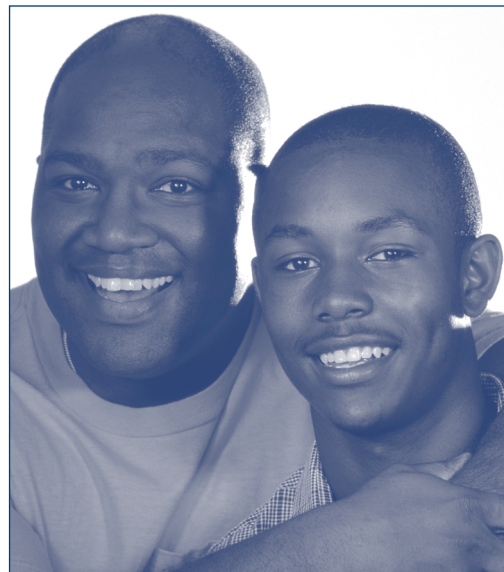
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Thank you for taking this life changing journey!

Once a child or sibling group has been placed with you a new journey begins. You may be working with a new social worker and/or team. We encourage you to continue your learning by attending additional training, working with other resource parents and your social work team.

Someday we hope you will become a trainer or guide for other new foster care or adopting parents.

Wishing you much success.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is there financial help available for foster or adoptive families? Yes, foster parents are given an amount each month to defray the cost of caring for each child they foster. The rate will vary from state to state.

Children with special needs who have been adopted from the foster care system may be eligible for a medical and/or a financial subsidy, which is paid to the adopting family. Each state and/or county has its own eligibility requirements and rates will vary. It is important to ask your agency for information about medical and financial subsidies available for the specific child or children you are considering for adoption.

Does the child have medical insurance? Yes, each child has coverage through the state's insurance plan for foster care children. Many children adopted from foster care are eligible for medical insurance through the state's Medicaid program.

What is the minimum income requirement to be eligible to foster and/or adopt a child or children? States will vary on this requirement, but usually it is necessary for the adopting or fostering parents to have sufficient income to support their current family's needs, before adding an additional child to their family.

Is home ownership a requirement? No, you can rent or own an apartment, single-family house or condominium. Each state has different licensing requirements about the space you have available for a foster or adopted child.

If I live in a rural area or have a good reason for not being able to attend the pre-service training, can I still foster or adopt? If there are special circumstances make sure you talk with your agency. They will usually try to accommodate you.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I work outside of my home? Yes, provided the plan is guided by the needs of the child. Daycare help may be available from the state.

Is there a limit to the number of children in my home? Yes. The maximum number of children allowed is determined by licensing requirements in the state where you live. Your state may have different requirements for adoption versus foster care.

Can single parents adopt? Yes, adoption by single parents is permissible and supported.

Can I foster or adopt if I already have a child or children? Yes you can. Families who have experience parenting are a great resource for waiting children. Some families adopt children while their biological children are still in the home. Many families who have grown children may become foster or adoptive parents, most often for an older child or sibling group.

Are there health requirements for foster and/or adoptive parents? Some states may require a physical examination report from a doctor for the primary caretaker(s) and, possibly, all members of the household. This does not mean that you and/or your family members have to be in perfect physical condition. Every state has its own unique requirements.

Does a recent marriage, divorce, birth of a child or other major change in the family affect the application process? Yes. Any major life change will be assessed on an individual basis. Sometimes a brief wait is encouraged. Families need stability before considering the addition of a child.

Adapted from the State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families.

Appointment Days and Times:

[illegible]

Names and Phone Numbers:

[illegible]



The Collaboration to **AdoptUSKids**

A Service of the Children's Bureau

Adoption Exchange Association
8015 Corporate Drive, Suite C
Baltimore, MD 21236

410.933.5700 • 410.933.5716 (fax)
1.888.200.4005 (toll-free)

www.adoptuskids.org • info@adoptuskids.org



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