

Adoption

in Washington State



A Lifelong Developmental
Journey



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

DSHS 22-1096(X) (Rev. 1/05)

Adoption

A Lifelong Developmental Journey

Adoption is the permanent, legal transfer of all parental rights from one person/couple to another person/couple. Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as parents whose children are born to them including all the emotional, social, legal and kinship benefits of birth children.

Every child deserves a permanent, stable, loving family to age 18 and beyond. Children need a family where they can feel safe, secure and provided a chance to realize their full potential. Children need a family they can call their own, and have the same rights as birth children.

Adoption is made up of a three way relationship often called the adoption triad. Each member of the triad; birth parent, adoptee, and adoptive parents share a relationship that is unique to their own life. Adoptions today are completed on infants, older children, children with special needs and sibling groups. The decision to adopt is an important one. The following information is a general idea on adoption in Washington through the Department of Social and Health Services, the Children's Administration.

Adoption is a lifelong developmental journey that does not begin nor end on the day the adoption is finalized. The decision to adopt is a personal choice. Adoption can be a bumpy ride, but the reward can be truly wonderful.

Types of Adoption in Washington

In Washington adoption occurs through one of the following ways:

- 1) The public agency – Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration (CA).
- 2) Private agencies – Agencies licensed by the Department of Social and Health Services to provide adoption services.
- 3) Independent adoptions – adoptions completed by an independent agent.
- 4) Step parent & adult adoptions – adoptions that may or may not need a pre-placement report and are usually handled privately, the state agency is not involved with these types of adoptions.

Children adopted through CA often have suffered some form of abuse and neglect. These children may have physical or emotional disabilities, may be part of a large sibling group and may be over the age of six. They are children without a permanent home and, like all children, want nothing more than a family to call their own.



Things to Consider

Questions to Ask Yourself

Thinking about adoption is the beginning of the process. Below is a list of questions to help prepare yourself for the adoption process.

- What laws apply to adoption?
- Who can adopt a child?
- What does it take to adopt a child?
- How do I decide what agency to work with?
- What type of children are available for adoption through the state?
 - > Would I consider adopting a sibling group in order to get the age of child I am interested in?
 - > Would I be willing to have on-going contact (open communication) with a child's birth parents?
 - > Could I parent a child who may have been sexually abused, physically abused and/or neglected?
 - > Could I parent a child that has an on-going medical issue, may be developmentally delayed, or diagnosed with a developmental disability?
 - > Could I parent a child who may have been exposed to drugs and alcohol before birth?
 - > How do birth children feel about adoption?
 - > Does the ethnicity of the child I adopt matter?
 - > How does my extended family feel about adoption?
 - > If I did adopt a child of a different ethnicity than myself, how would my family feel?
 - > How am I going to handle adoption-related questions that my child may ask?
- How much does it cost to adopt?

Laws that apply to adoption

Washington State law provides certain protection for all parties in the adoption process. The main concern is that adoption is in the best interest of the child. Laws that apply to adoption are covered by Revised Code of Washington (RCW 26.33) and the Washington Administrative Code (WAC 388-27).

Who can adopt a child through DSHS?

- Married or single people, over the age of 18
- Same sex couples
- People of any race
- People of any religion or no religious preference
- People who work out of their home
- People who rent or people who own their own homes
- People with high or low incomes but can support the addition of a child
- People with or without children
- People willing and able to parent a child with a wide range of life experiences



What does it take to adopt a child?

Like deciding to parent any child a successful adoptive parent has

- A belief in adoption and a commitment for life
- Understanding
- Patience and perseverance
- Unconditional love and ability to accept without judging
- A good sense of humor and talent for keeping life in perspective
- Awareness that healing doesn't always come quickly
- Flexibility
- Optimism
- Creativity
- Empathy
- Advocacy
- Resourcefulness

How do I decide what agency to work with?

It is recommended that you contact several agencies that provide adoption services and ask about their adoption program. You want to find an agency that can support your needs. You can locate agencies by looking through the yellow pages and/or going to the DSHS website and downloading information from the adoption website at www1.dshs.wa.gov/

What types of children are available for adoption through DSHS?

Children available for adoption through DSHS usually are:

- Older – over the age of 6
- May be part of a sibling group in need of placement together
- May have emotional, behavioral, physical, educational, psychological and/or developmental disability issues
- May not yet be legally available for adoption, but the agency is moving towards the termination of a parental rights and would like to move a child into a prospective adoptive home prior to the child becoming legally free

How much does it cost to adopt?

DSHS does not charge any fees for adoption services. However, adoptive parents do have to pay legal fees to finalize the adoption.

DSHS completes adoptive home studies for free to families that are interested in adopting a child that is in foster care.

Are adoptions open?

Most adoptions in the past were private, often referred to as a closed adoption. However, today many adoptions are completed with some form of openness with the birth parent. This openness is called an open communication or an open adoption agreement, which allows for some type of communication between adoptive parents and the birth parents.

There are different ways to be open:

1. Cards/letters periodically throughout the year
2. Pictures exchanged
3. Phone contact
4. Visits – in some instances

The type of open communication agreement for each adoption is based upon the best interests of the child. RCW 26.33.295.

It is important to note that, even in an open adoption, the legal relationship between a birth parent and child is severed. The adoptive parents are the legal parents of an adopted child.

Why should you think about having an open communication agreement?

- To keep relationships that have been good for the child.
- To maintain and celebrate the adopted child's connections with all the important people in his or her life.
- To allow the child to resolve losses with truth, rather than the fantasy adopted children often create when no information or contact with their birth family is available.

How do I adopt?

■ Step 1: Contacting the State

There are several ways to receive more information about adoption through DSHS:

- Contact your local office. A person will be able to provide information about local adoption process, answer questions, and send out information.
- Contact the recruitment toll free line at 1-800-760-5340. This is an adoption and foster care recruitment service contracted by DSHS. They provide pre-service training information, brochures, and information on your local office.
- Preparation classes. You are required to take Pre-Service Training. Class schedule information can be found on the DSHS website at www1.dshs.wa.gov.

■ Step 2: Adoptive Home Study

All potential adoptive parents must have an approved adoptive home study. The purpose of the adoptive home study is to determine the appropriateness of applicants to become adoptive parents. The process includes education and preparation, as well as gathering information about the potential parents.

An adoptive home study includes:

- Application. Provided by the agency.
- Criminal history background check. Completed through your social worker and must be completed on every person over the age of 16 residing in the home.
- Child abuse and criminal clearances. This is part of the criminal history background check and will be completed by your social worker.

- Personal information. This is a form used by DSHS to get information about you. This helps the social worker to get to know you.
- Medical statements. This is a confidential form that your physician will fill out regarding current and historic medical conditions. Your social worker will send out the form.
- Income/financial statements. A form is provided to you by your social worker, that will identify family resources
- Marital History form. Provides information on marriages and divorces.

References. Four references (only one can be a relative). References are used to get a picture of a family from an outsider. Your social worker will send a questionnaire directly to your references.

Contacts with social worker. At least four contacts will be made with your social worker and one must be in the family home to better understand your lifestyle, beliefs, family history, parenting skills, and to visually see where you live and gain an understanding of the family make-up. In addition to learning about your life experiences, the following issues will be discussed (per RCW 26.33.190):

- The concept of adoption as a lifelong developmental process and commitment.
- The potential for the child to have feelings of identity confusion and loss regarding separation from the birth parents.
- Disclosure of the fact of adoption to the child.
- The child's possible questions about birth parents and relatives.
- The relevance of the child's racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage.

Home Study Approval

The home study has to be approved to continue with the adoption process. The length of time to complete this varies, but the target is to have it completed within 90 days of application.

Washington Adoption Resource Exchange (WARE)

Once an adoptive home study is approved, and you do not already have a child in your home, your social worker should register you with WARE. This let's other social workers know about waiting adoptive families. You can also register yourself with the Adoptuskids (www.adoptuskids.org) website which is another site that recruits for children and families.

■ Step 3: Child Selection

Child identification. There are various ways to select a child:

- A social worker contacts you about a specific child.
- You contact the social worker about a child you identified on a web site or heard about.

Disclosure of information. By law a prospective adoptive parent has the right to receive a family background and child and family social history report, and a complete medical report containing all known and available information concerning the mental, physical, and sensory handicaps of the child. (RCW 26.33.350 and 380; WAC 388-27-0090). At this point, you may start working with two different social



workers – the adoption worker and the child’s individual social worker. The law recognizes that it is important that you have as much known and available information about the child so that you can make an informed decision regarding adopting a particular child.

If the decision is made that your family is able to best meet the needs of the child, then steps are made to move forward with visitation and placement.

■ **Step 4: Visitation & Placement Process**

Visitation begins. It can take two weeks to several months to place the child in your home, depending upon the child’s needs. Factors include:

- Age
- Location of adoptive family to current placement
- Therapy and medical issues
- School
- Child’s well-being

Visitation usually begins at a location considered safe for the child (foster home, McDonalds). The first visit starts with just a couple of hours. Gradually, visits lengthen in time, leading to a first overnight. Visits get progressively longer until the child finally moves to his or her new home.

■ **Step 5: Post Placement**

Services. Your social worker continues working with you until the adoption is finalized. Together, you will arrange for any needed services (medical, counseling, schooling).

Health and safety checks. The social worker comes out to your home to check on the well-being of the child and family.

■ **Step 6: Legal Procedures and Finalization**

1. **Contact an attorney.** You will need a lawyer to finalize the adoption. You may find your own or ask your social worker for a list.
2. Complete the **Adoption Support application** provided to you by your social worker.

3. Your social worker completes a post-placement report. This report provides the court with an update on the child's and family's well-being since placement.
4. CA provides a Consent to Adopt. This is a written statement authorizing adoption of the child.
5. Your social worker sends your attorney a packet containing documents needed to finalize the adoption.
6. Your attorney prepares the documents to present to the court, files the petition to adopt, and gets a court date to finalize the adoption.
7. On the date of finalization you will go to court as requested by your attorney. You may take as many family and friends as you want. You may also bring cameras and video to record this special event.



Washington State Adoption Support Program

The Adoption Support Program helps to make adoptions possible for children who because of special circumstances might otherwise not be adopted. Children eligible for the program are mostly in the legal custody of the Department of Social and Health Services.

When the Department of Social and Health Services decides that adoption is best for the child, the prospective adoptive parents are advised of the availability of the Adoption Support Program. If the child qualifies for the program, a contract between the department and the adoptive family is created. This contract must be in place (signed by both parties) before the adoption is finalized. The contract is reviewed every five years or anytime if child needs or family circumstances change.

Benefits described in the contract may include:

- **Medical and Dental Services** – under the state's Medicaid program.
- **Counseling**
- **Training**
- **A negotiated monthly cash payment** based on the child's special needs and the family circumstances. The amount received must not be more than the amount the child would receive if the child were in a foster family home.
- **Repayment for one time costs incurred by the adoptive parent** in finalizing the adoption.

Adoption Search

Finding Connections to the Past

What information can I get from DSHS?

For adoptions completed through DSHS and for families who adopted a child in state foster care, adoption records are stored through the DSHS Children's Administration headquarters office in Olympia.

Non-Identifying Information

To obtain non-identifying (i.e., first names only, no year of birth, no addresses, phone number, etc.) information for children who have been adopted through DSHS, submit a written request to:

Adoption Archives
PO Box 45713
Olympia, WA 98504

Please include:

- Date of birth and adoptive name
- Name of adoptive parents
- Return mailing address

For private adoptions, contact the agency or attorney that finalized the adoption.



