



DAVE THOMAS
FOUNDATION
FOR ADOPTION™

A Child is Waiting

A Beginner's Guide To Adoption



A Special Message from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Adoption. It is the answer for thousands of children who are waiting in foster care for permanent homes and loving families.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption was created by Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers, to help raise awareness about waiting children and to close the gap between the thousands of families who want to adopt and the children who so desperately need their love and support. To Dave Thomas, adoption was personal because he believed that he would never had been successful without his adoption.

There are more than 150,000 children waiting in foster care to be adopted in North America. Adoption is personal to them, too.

The Foundation is dedicated to helping these children by supporting programs that will dramatically increase the number of adoptions, while also focusing on ways to make the adoption process easier and more affordable.

One way to encourage adoption is to provide information on how to begin the adoption process. This guide, called "A Child is Waiting . . . A Beginner's Guide to Adoption," is designed to offer some basic information and resources to people who are considering adopting a child.

If you are thinking of starting a family, or adding another child to your present family, please consider adopting a child who has been waiting – perhaps for a very long time – for someone to love them and to provide them with a permanent home and a loving family to call their own.

You'll be giving a precious gift – the special love of a family – to a child who urgently needs it . . . and truly deserves it.



Rita L. Soronen
Executive Director
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption



every child deserves a loving family.

If there is one thing every child deserves, it is a permanent, loving family. Children deserve the love, attention and guidance only a nurturing parent can give.

But unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way. More than a half million children throughout North America — of all ages, races, and backgrounds — reside in foster care and over 150,000 are available for adoption... and they're looking for help.

One way *you* can help is by considering adoption.

Adoption is a big step, and naturally, hundreds of questions come to mind. You may want to know:

- What is adoption and is it right for me?
- What kinds of people adopt?
- What kinds of children are waiting?
- How much does it cost?
- Will it take a long time?
- What kinds of questions will I have to answer?
- How do I get started?

Adopting can be a long and sometimes bumpy journey. But the rewards can be truly wonderful. The simple goal of this guide is to help get you started on your way.

why it is important to ask questions.

The process of adoption is not governed by a single set of national laws or guidelines. Adoption laws vary from state to state, and adoption groups and agencies may have different policies and guidelines as well.

Be prepared to ask questions and get as much detailed information as possible from the very beginning of your journey, and be flexible as you move through the process.

There is no one route for families to follow on their way to becoming adoptive parents. What is important is understanding who the children are and where you'll find them. Then you can take the necessary steps to link up with them.

With a little effort, you'll quickly discover that adoption can be a rewarding and affordable choice. Not only can you change the life of a child, you can change your own as well.

what kind of people adopt?

People who adopt children want to know the joy of helping them grow up to be happy and fulfilled adults. They want to help them when they struggle and share in their accomplishments. They may be first-time parents or they may already have children and feel they "have room for more" in their homes and in their hearts.

The best candidates for adoptive parents are real people with real lives full of ups and downs. Adoptive parents don't have to be the same race or have the same ethnic background as the child they adopt. They don't have to own their own home or have a certain income level, and they can be single or married.

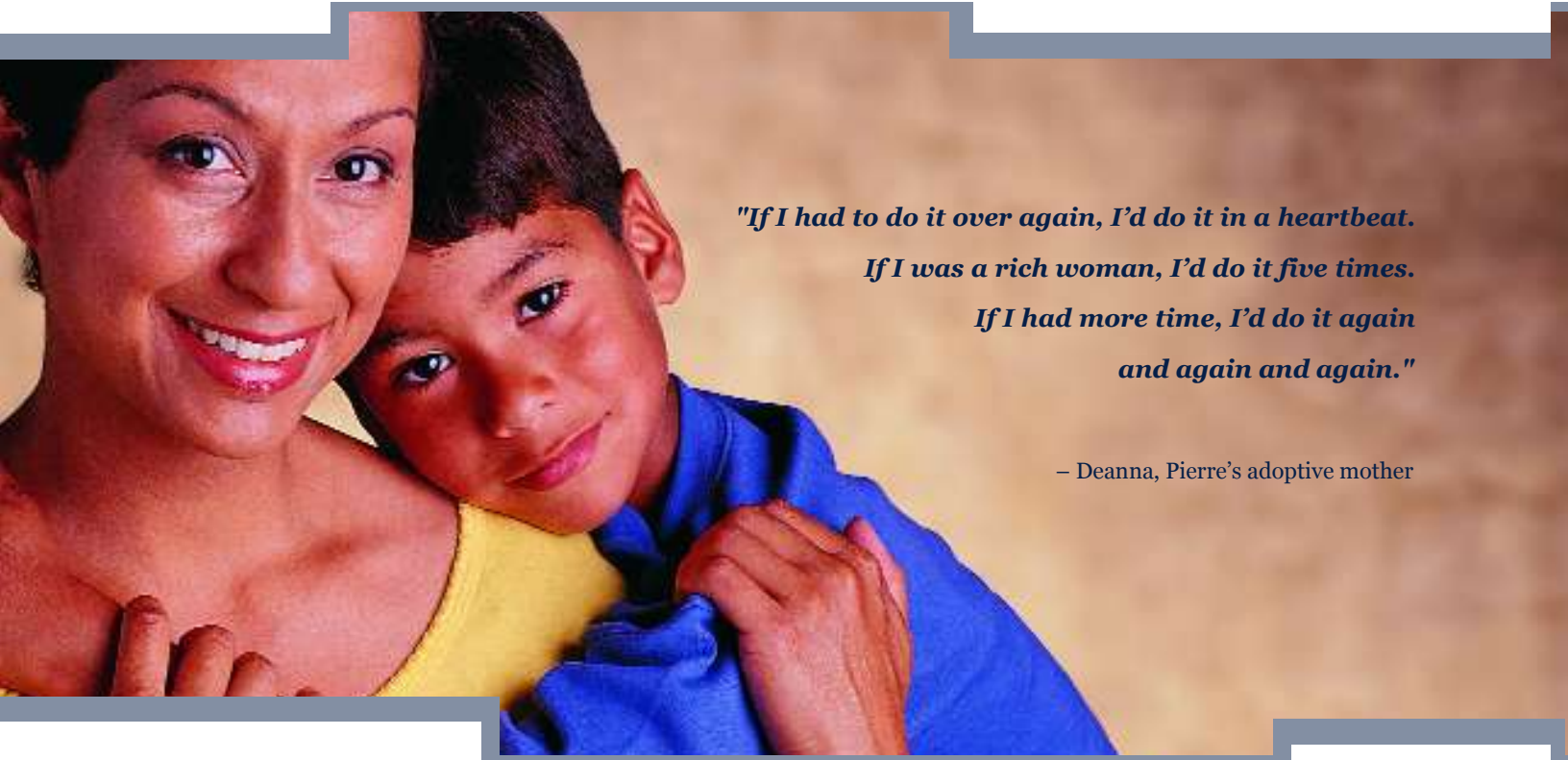
They share a strong desire to love and care for children, and they share two other important ingredients — maturity and acceptance.

If you feel you have something to give and want to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for a child, you are probably the "kind of people" who adopt.

are there age guidelines?

State laws vary when it comes to the question of who may adopt; however, a few guidelines tend to be consistent. For people seeking to adopt infants, most agencies look for parents who are under age 40, married at least three years, financially stable and healthy. This doesn't mean that people over 40 or single adults can never adopt a baby, though.

Agencies are more flexible about age when placing children from foster care, and some agencies have eliminated age limits altogether.



***"If I had to do it over again, I'd do it in a heartbeat.
If I was a rich woman, I'd do it five times.
If I had more time, I'd do it again
and again and again."***

– Deanna, Pierre's adoptive mother

"Our first Christmas together is one I will never forget. We had learned a couple of months before that even though he was in elementary school, he had never seen Santa Claus. So this was not just his first Christmas, this was his first everything. Of course, he got up early, and when he saw the things Santa had left, his eyes were as big as apples. When he's 30 years old, I will look at him and still see him walk into the living room for his very first Christmas."



why must children wait?

On any given day in North America, more than 550,000 children are in foster care, and 150,000 — more than 25 percent — of those children are waiting to be adopted. So, how did they get there and why must they wait?

Many children are in foster care because they were removed from their families due to abuse, neglect or abandonment.

When this happens, a state or county social worker will try to help a child's family resolve their problems. But in some cases, despite everyone's efforts, it is in the child's best interest for him or her to leave and not return to their home.

At this point, the child may live temporarily with a foster family or in a group home while social workers try to help their birth family.

If the birth family's problems can be resolved, the child may be returned to his or her home. However, if the problems cannot be resolved, the agency that has custody of the child may go to court to legally terminate parental rights.

Sometimes it takes several months to determine that the family can't be reunited; sometimes it takes years. And many times, the child must move from one foster home to another while he or she waits for the courts to make a decision.

Once parental rights are terminated, though, social workers are free to try to find a safe and loving adoptive family for the child.

In more than half the cases, children's foster parents eventually adopt them, and those that remain in foster care are America's waiting children.

what kinds of children are waiting?

All kinds. Ages range from toddlers to teenagers. Virtually every race, ethnic group, and socio-economic category is represented. Some children have special needs, and some have only one need: a safe and loving home.

They all need the nurturing and support that a permanent family can provide, and they all deserve a chance to grow up feeling secure and loved.

These wonderful children are among thousands with special needs who are in foster care, group homes or other institutions... waiting for adoptive families.

what is adoption? some easy terms

THE BASICS | Adoption is the permanent, legal transfer of all parental rights from one person or couple to another person or couple. Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as parents whose children are born to them. Adoptive parents are real parents. And adopted children have all the emotional, social, legal and kinship benefits of birth children.

TYPES OF ADOPTION | There are two common kinds of adoption: One involves relatives — a stepparent, grandparent or other family members; the other involves adopting a child or children who are unrelated to the adopting parents.

It is this second kind — the “unrelated adoption” — that this guide addresses. Within that “unrelated” category, several options are available to adoptive parents. You can:

- Adopt a child from the foster care system;
- Adopt an infant from the U.S.; or
- Adopt a child from another country.

YOUR ADOPTION PARTNERS | There are several ways in which you can complete your adoption. You can:

- Use a public agency;
- Use a private agency; or
- Use an attorney or other intermediary. This is called an “independent,” “private” or “identified” adoption.



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AGENCIES | Adopting through an agency is the most traditional route to finding a child. There are both public and private adoption agencies. A public agency is the local branch of your state's or county's social service department. Public and private agencies retain custody of children who are awaiting adoption. Many of these private agencies have religious affiliations such as Jewish Family and Children's Services and Catholic Social Services – but that does not mean they work exclusively with families of that religion.

With either a public or a private agency, finding a baby may be difficult. Most of the children listed with public agencies tend to be of school age and may have some special needs. Many agencies specialize by placing only certain types of children. Some may focus on infants; another on international adoption; others on the adoption of children with special needs.

"I love it as much as I love you, dad, grandpa, grandma, my hamsters, my fish and my dog, all together. That's how much I love it."

-- Benjamin when asked by his mother how he feels about the impending finalization of his adoption

INDEPENDENT ADOPTION | Sometimes, adoptions can be arranged without an agency between a pregnant woman and the adoptive parent, or through an intermediary, such as an attorney or physician. Independent adoptions are not permitted in all states.

There are lawyers who specialize in independent adoption. Frequently, the lawyer has his/her own resource of children and may be able to locate a child for you and provide the legal services needed.

Families looking for a child may spread the word of their desire to adopt in various ways: through an attorney or doctor, by taking out an advertisement in the newspaper, by contacting adoptive parent groups to learn how others adopted, or by printing business cards to hand to friends and acquaintances.

If you elect to use a lawyer or intermediary, make certain you feel confident in their ethics and their knowledge of adoption law. One way to find a good adoption attorney or intermediary is to ask local parent groups if any of their members have successfully adopted children independently. If so, ask them for a recommendation. You can also call the probate court and ask them who does independent adoptions. Another good source of information is your local bar association or the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys at 202-832-2222.

types of adoption

OPEN ADOPTION | In the past, adoption was shrouded in secrecy. Birth parent and adoptive parents were not given identifying information about each other and all records were sealed. Today, the trend is toward openness. An open adoption is a catch-all phrase referring to some type of communication among the adoptive parents, the birth parents and the adopted child. This can range from continuous contact to simply writing a letter to each other annually.

ADOPTING A CHILD FROM THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM | More than 150,000 children who are available for adoption currently wait in foster care. They live in foster care or group homes because their parents were unable to care for them. Often, personal and family problems made it impossible for the parents to maintain a home for their children. Some of these children have been abused, neglected or abandoned.

The reasons for their special needs vary. They may be older, school-age children; they may be brothers or sisters who need to stay together; they may be physically, emotionally, or mentally challenged; or they may be from minority cultures.

Regardless of the reason, they are all very special children, and the most significant need they have is for a home and a loving, supportive family to call their own.

What qualities are important for parents who adopt children from foster care? Traits like flexibility, patience, good problem-solving skills and a willingness to identify local community resources are all critical. Here's why.

- Some of these children are physically or emotionally challenged due to circumstances inflicted upon them by others, and they need someone to help them turn their lives around.

Imagine the thrill of putting a smile on the face of a lonely and scared child who has never known love! Or the joy of seeing a child — your child — achieve something no one thought possible: running a mile, reading a book, playing a musical instrument!

- Some children may have medical challenges — and the good news is that many times their disability or condition is treatable. For example, one family adopted a baby born with a hernia and had it surgically corrected; another family had a child's cleft palate repaired.

There are, however, some medical or emotional disabilities that are not as easily corrected, and there are numerous ways to help these children as well.

- Finally, some waiting children are part of a sibling group. Whenever possible, brothers and sisters should be kept together, and this sometimes makes their wait longer. But what a rewarding experience for the entire family when siblings can find a permanent home together!

ADOPTING AN INFANT | If you would like to adopt a baby, contact your state adoption specialist or other reliable adoption groups, or look in the Yellow Pages under “Adoption Organizations.” Often obstetricians and gynecologists know a good agency or attorney, or you can contact your local bar association or the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys at 202-832-2222. Make sure you work with good, ethical adoption agencies or reputable attorneys, and read as much about adoption as you can.

While you wait for your child, you can prepare yourself for parenthood by talking to adoptive parents. It is recommended that you join a local adoptive parent group. And many hospitals and colleges also offer low-cost adoption classes that could be helpful.

ADOPTING A CHILD FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY | Thousands of children who live overseas in foreign orphanages need families. Nearly 20,000 children from other countries were adopted by U.S. citizens in 2001, part of a trend that is likely to continue.

Intercountry adoptions are rapidly changing and so are the rules, which means they can be very complicated to arrange. If you are interested in adopting a child from another country, it is important to work with someone — whether it is an agency, group, or individual — that is ethical and experienced.

Should you pursue an intercountry adoption, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service requires you to complete a home study. In most cases, the adoption agency or person helping you can assist you both in completing the home study and in finding a child who needs a family.

For more information on intercountry adoptions, visit the U.S. State Department’s website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

ADOPTING A CHILD OF ANOTHER RACE | Through the provisions of the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA), agencies that receive federal funding cannot discriminate by race in choosing an appropriate parent for a child. This has opened the door for more transracial adoption in the United States. Another law affecting transracial adoption is the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) that established provisions for the placement of Native American children.



How Do I Adopt?

EVERY ADOPTION EXPERIENCE IS AS UNIQUE AS THE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN INVOLVED. COMMON TO EVERY ADOPTION, THOUGH, ARE CERTAIN STEPS THAT LEAD YOU FROM THINKING ABOUT ADOPTION TO WELCOMING A NEW CHILD OR CHILDREN INTO YOUR LIFE.

THE FOLLOWING STEPS ARE TYPICAL FOR MOST DOMESTIC NEEDS ADOPTIONS AND PROVIDE A BASIC OVERVIEW OF WHAT THE PROCESS WILL ENTAIL.

OUR SPECIAL THANKS TO THE NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN, THE NATIONAL ADOPTION CENTER AND OTHER AGENCIES FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS.



STEP 1

LEARN ABOUT ADOPTION

WRITTEN MATERIALS AND RESOURCES | A lot of information is available to help you learn about the adoption process. Below are some suggestions that are easy to access.

- **The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)** maintains a listing of adoptive parent support groups and other sources of information about special needs adoption. To request a list of local support groups and other adoption resources, contact:

NACAC

970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106
St. Paul, MN 55114-1149

PHONE | 651-644-3036

FAX | 651-644-9848

E-MAIL | info@nacac.org

WEB SITE | www.nacac.org

- **The National Adoption Center (NAC)** provides information and referral services to families interested in adopting children with special needs; resource packets on various adoption topics, including healthy infants, intercountry adoption, single parent adoption; registration on a national database of children and families approved to adopt; resources about employer-provided adoption benefits; and links to internet adoption sites through the Center's website www.adopt.org. The National Adoption Center also has a "learning center" for adoptive families at www.adoptnet.org. This site includes an exciting web-based course for those entering the adoption process. It includes chats, workshops, a message board and access to adoption-related articles.

National Adoption Center

1500 Walnut Street, Suite #701
Philadelphia, PA 19102

PHONE | 800-TO-ADOPT (800-862-3678)

FAX | 215-735-9410

WEB SITE | www.adopt.org

- **Adopt US Kids (www.adoptuskids.org)** contains photos and descriptions of thousands of U.S. waiting children, as well as valuable adoption information.
- **The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC)** publishes and distributes many different adoption fact sheets free of charge. They also provide information about state and federal adoption laws and keep track of upcoming adoption conferences. NAIC's web site also contains links to online state photolistings. To learn more about their services, contact:

NAIC
 330 C St., S.W.
 Washington, DC 20447
 PHONE | 888-251-0075 or 703-352-3488
 FAX | 703-385-3206
 E-MAIL | naic@calib.com
 WEB SITE | www.calib.com/naic

- **Your phone book.** Adoption agencies, advocates, attorneys, support groups, and more are typically listed in the Yellow Pages under "Adoption."
- **Your public library.** Most libraries now have online access so you can use the Internet, find listings of periodicals, and do inter-library transfers. A wealth of free information can be obtained through libraries.
- **In addition, some publishers and booksellers** produce or market many helpful materials. Some of the best known include:

Child Welfare League of America
 440 First Street, N.W., 3rd Floor
 Washington, DC 20001-2085
 PHONE | 202-638-2952
 FAX | 202-638-4004
 WEB SITE | www.cwla.org/pubs

Perspectives Press
 P.O. Box 90318
 Indianapolis, IN 46290-0318
 PHONE | 317-872-3055
 WEB SITE | www.perspectivespress.com

Tapestry Books
 P.O. Box 359
 Ringoes, NJ 08551
 PHONE | 800-765-2367
 FAX | 908-788-2999
 E-MAIL | info@tapestrybooks.com
 WEB SITE | www.tapestrybooks.com

**National Resource Center for
 Special Needs Adoption
 Spaulding for Children**
 16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120
 Southfield, MI 48075
 PHONE | 248-443-0300
 FAX | 248-443-2845
 E-MAIL | sfc@Spaulding.org
 WEB SITE | www.spaulding.org

Children Awaiting Parents (CAP)
 595 Blossom Road, Suite 306
 Rochester, NY 14610
 PHONE | 716/232-5110
 FAX | 716/232-2634
 E-MAIL | cap@adopt.org
 WEB SITE | www.capbook.org

**New Hope Communications
 Adoptive Families of America**
 42 W. 38th Street, Suite 901
 New York, NY 10018
 PHONE | 646-366-0830
 WEB SITE | 646-366-0842

STEP 2

SELF ASSESSMENT

Children don't need perfect parents, just one or two loving individuals willing to meet the unique challenges of parenting and make a lifetime commitment to caring for and nurturing their children. Important personal characteristics include:

- A belief in adoption and ability to commit;
- Patience and perseverance;
- A good sense of humor and talent for keeping life in perspective;
- A love of children and parenting;
- The ability to accept without judging and to love unconditionally;
- Awareness that healing doesn't always come quickly; and
- Resourcefulness.

If you have all or most of these qualities, then ask yourself these questions:

- Do I clearly understand why I want to adopt?
- Do my partner and I work as a team? Are we both committed to adoption?
- Does my lifestyle allow me the time necessary to meet the needs of a special child?

Really think about your answers to these questions. You may decide that you want to pursue a different type of adoption, or investigate foster care, or that adoption really isn't for you. Take the time to make a good decision, because it is a decision you and your adoptive child will live with for the rest of your lives.

STEP 3

DECIDE WHAT TYPE OF ADOPTION YOU WANT TO PURSUE

Even if you already know that you want to adopt a child who has special needs, you still need to make a number of choices about your adoption. Most importantly, you need to decide what type of child you want to bring into your family.

- Do you have a specific age range in mind?
- Could the child be from a different cultural background than your own?
- Would you like to adopt a sibling group?
- Could you provide a loving home for a child with physical or mental challenges?

STEP 4

INVESTIGATE WAYS TO COVER ADOPTION EXPENSES

WHAT DOES IT COST TO ADOPT? | Adoption fees vary from state to state and depend on whether you adopt an infant or an older child. Whether you use a private or public agency, an attorney, or intermediary also affects adoption fees. And if a child is placed by a public state or county adoption agency, which is financed by tax dollars, fees will be minimal or there may be no fee at all.

Many agencies do not charge service fees to families who adopt children with special needs. However, you will need a home study, and because adoption is a legal process, you may need an attorney.

The cost of a home study is usually included in the adoption fee, but can be separate in some situations. It can range from nothing to \$3,000. Attorney fees and court costs can range from \$1,000 to \$2,000, and special needs adoptive families often incur additional costs for medical services, counseling, etc. — costs that may continue throughout the child's lifetime.

In general, infant adoption fees are the highest, because the agency or attorney often must include prenatal care costs, including childbirth. As a result, fees to adopt an infant can range from nothing to around \$30,000. When a family adopts an infant with special needs, agencies sometimes waive or lower their fees.

It is not costly to adopt a child with special needs. Often the agency has a sliding fee scale and frequently there is little or no cost for their services. However, there may be a fee for a home study, attorney fees and court costs. Under both state and federal assistance programs, adoptive parents of children with special needs are eligible for a one-time payment of non-recurring adoption expenses.

Inter-country adoption can cost families between \$10,000 to \$20,000 in fees and that may not include travel and living expenses while in the child's country of origin.

When working with an agency, attorney or consultant, it is very important to obtain fee information in writing before beginning the process. You should also request a written detailed explanation of the fees, including what they cover and what "extras" may be added later.

OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING | Fortunately, parents have several options for covering the cost of special needs adoptions.



EMPLOYER BENEFITS | A growing number of companies and government agencies (at the local, county and state levels) now offer adoption benefits as part of their benefits packages. These might include financial reimbursement, unpaid and/or paid leave time, and resource and referral services. Among the leading employers that offer these benefits are MBNA, Wendy's International, Inc., Citizen's Bank, Target, Freddie Mac and Astra Zeneca.

Often, companies that do not have benefits will say that employees have not expressed an interest in receiving this type of support. You can take an active role in encouraging your employer to establish an adoption benefits program. To find out if your company has a policy or to find out what is offered, your first step is to speak with your supervisor or the benefits or human resource manager at your place of employment.

To request a list of employers that provide adoption benefits or to learn more about how to ask for this benefit at your workplace, contact:

Adoption Benefits Coordinator
National Adoption Center
1500 Walnut Street, Suite 701
Philadelphia, PA 19102
1-800-TO ADOPT or 215-735-9988

Also, most health insurance plans cover the adopted child from the time of placement in the home.

All of these programs are designed to give adoptive parents and children the same insurance protection parents have when children are born to them.

Be sure to check for any exclusions in your benefits policy relating to pre-existing conditions. (Note: Many large corporations have self-insured medical programs that may not be subject to state law.)

TAX CREDITS AND EXCLUSIONS | Federal legislation was passed in June 2001 that increases tax credits and exclusions for all adoptive families. The Hope for Children Act, that took effect on January 1, 2002, provides an adoption tax credit of \$10,000 for all adoptions from 2002 and thereafter and a tax exclusion of up to \$10,000 for employer-provided adoption benefits.

Families adopting children with special needs do not have to itemize their expenses, but receive a flat credit of \$10,000.

To learn more about tax benefits, you can obtain IRS Publication 968, "Tax Benefits for Adoption" by calling 1-800-829-3676 or accessing the Internal Revenue Service's web site at <http://www.irs.ustreas.gov>.

ADOPTION SUBSIDIES | If you adopt a child from foster care, he or she may be eligible for a federal or state adoption subsidy (also known as adoption assistance). Adoption assistance payments are designed to help offset the short- and long-term costs associated with adopting children who need special services.

Benefits available through subsidy programs vary by state, but commonly include:

- Monthly cash payments;
- Medical assistance;
- Social services; and/or
- Non-recurring adoption expenses.

Before adopting a child from foster care, ask your agency about the availability of federal and state subsidies. It is important to negotiate your subsidy agreement before the adoption is finalized — even if there is no current need for financial assistance — because you won't be able to negotiate a subsidy agreement after the adoption is final. To request more information about federal and state subsidy programs, call NACAC'S Adoption Subsidy Resource Center helpline at 800-470-6665.



LOANS AND GRANTS | Loans may be most helpful to pay for large and immediate expenses that may be reimbursed later by your employer, the military, or the government's reimbursement of non-recurring adoption expenses. One source of loans is the National Adoption Foundation, which can be reached at 203-791-3811 or <http://www.nafadopt.org>.

Loans and travel assistance may also be available through travel agencies or banks. Some airlines offer discounts for adoption-related travel. You may also want to ask your social worker about the Adopt Air program.

MILITARY REIMBURSEMENTS | The military provides active-duty personnel a reimbursement for most one-time adoption costs up to \$2,000 per child. The maximum amount available in a given year is \$5,000, even if both parents are in the military. Reimbursement is made after the adoption is finalized.

A child with disabilities may also be eligible for up to \$1,000 a month in assistance under the military's Program for Persons with Disabilities. In addition, the military's Exceptional Family Member Program is designed to ensure that families of children with special needs are assigned to duty stations where the child's needs can be met. More information about military families and adoption is available from the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) at 888-251-0075.

STEP 5

SELECT AN ADOPTION AGENCY

MAKING THE DECISION | Agencies are not all alike, so choose with care. Some agencies handle the entire adoption process, holding your hand step by step, while others expect you to take the initiative and learn about procedures and deadlines for yourself. Try to get a sense of how much of the adoption process will depend upon your actions and then decide which approach works best for you.

You must work with an agency in the state where you live. Contact several agencies to ask about the type of children they place, their fees, how they assess and prepare families and how long it will take. Speak with another parent who has used the agency. You do not need an attorney at this point, but you may want to check whether the agency is licensed by your state to provide adoption services.

Consider whether you would rather work through a public or a private adoption agency. You can check out potential agencies by contacting your state adoption specialist (listed at the back of this book). Ask them if the agency you plan to work with is licensed and in good standing and if there have been any complaints or investigations about them. You may also want to call adoptive parent groups in your area to ask if any members have had experience with the agency.

HOW TO FIND AN AGENCY | Consider several of the options below to find agencies in your area:

- Contact your state's adoption specialist (listed in the back of this book). He or she should be able to provide you with a list of licensed adoption agencies.
- Look in the Yellow Pages under "Adoption" or "Social Services" for private adoption agencies. If you live in a small town, check the listings in a phone book from a larger community nearby.
- Contact adoptive parent support groups or adoptive parents for suggestions.

FINDING THE RIGHT AGENCY FOR YOU | To find a public or private agency that is a good fit for you, your beliefs, and your situation, compare information from several different agencies. Most will gladly provide details about their services and requirements upon request, and you can also interview agency representatives to learn more about them. You may want to ask:

- What kinds of children does the agency place (ages, backgrounds, etc.)?
- How many children has the agency placed in each of the past few years?
- How will the agency conduct a search for you?
- What criteria do they use to match children with families?
- What types of adoptive parents do they seek?
- How long, on average, must one wait for a child?
- What are the home study requirements?
- If you learn of a child in another state, will the agency pursue the child for you?
- How much does a completed adoption cost — in total and part by part?
- Can the agency help applicants locate sources of financial aid, including subsidies?
- What if the adoption doesn't work out?
- Can the agency provide references from parents who recently adopted through them?



STEP 6

LET YOUR AGENCY KNOW YOU ARE SERIOUS ABOUT ADOPTING

When you call an agency to let them know you are interested in adopting, the person you talk to may ask a series of screening questions, or simply volunteer to send literature about the agency. If you want to adopt relatively soon, find out how you can get the process started.

One common first step is an orientation meeting or training session for prospective adoptive parents. At the meeting you will likely:

- Meet social workers and learn about policies and practices;
- Learn what types of children are available through the agency;
- Learn about foster care;
- Be asked to examine your feelings about adoption, and determine if adoption is the right choice for you;
- Gain insight into the challenges and rewards of adoptive parenting; and
- Obtain application materials.

STEP 7

COMPLETE AN ADOPTION APPLICATION

If possible, attend an orientation session before filling out an application, so you are confident in the agency's ability to meet your needs. Application fees are often non-refundable, even if you decide to work through a different agency or change your mind about adopting.

Once you have chosen an agency to work with and completed the application process, the next step is the home study. Ask your agency how you should go about scheduling and preparing for your home study.

STEP 8

BEGIN THE HOME STUDY PROCESS

A home study is an important part of the adoption process — much more than just a visit to see if your home is clean and neat. The Minnesota Adoption Resource Network defines a home study as “an education process designed to help your social worker get to know you; to teach you about adoption and its impact on children and families; and to prepare you to parent a child who brings experiences, ideas, a history, and expectations perhaps very different from your own.”

Everyone who hopes to adopt a child must complete a home study. The process can take anywhere from two months to a year, depending on the agency, the worker, and the prospective parents' cooperation.



ITEMS YOU MAY NEED FOR A HOME STUDY | Specific requirements for home studies vary by state and agency, so be sure to ask for a list of the items and information your agency needs. Most applicants are asked to provide written information about themselves, and agencies may also require certain documents, such as a marriage license, birth certificate and personal references. They may be required to have a physical examination.

At some point in the process, you may also need to pay for the home study. The cost through a public agency may be quite low or even free; other agencies typically charge about \$500 to \$2,000 for a completed study.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED | During home study meetings, you can expect to answer questions about your background, education, job history, marriage, leisure activities, religion, and your experiences with children.

The important thing to remember is that the aim of any home study is to help the agency locate the best home for each child it places, and make good matches between prospective parents and children. If you have questions about the process or the specific information that you should provide, ask your social worker or agency.

STEP 9

TAKE ADOPTION AND PARENTING CLASSES

Many agencies offer group classes for families considering adoption. These classes also provide an open forum for prospective parents to discuss questions.

Some public agencies require pre-placement training to acquaint prospective parents with issues that can arise after a child or sibling group is placed with them. Older (school-aged) adoptees bring not only unique special needs, but also a history of life experiences that will affect interactions with adoptive parents, new siblings, schoolmates, etc.

Even if your agency does not require a training course, all prospective parents should take advantage of opportunities to learn about adoption issues and parenting. A unique opportunity being offered by the National Adoption Center is the Adoption Road Map course. This online preparation course is available at <http://www.adoptnet.org>.

STEP 10

BEGIN SEARCHING FOR A CHILD

If you decide to adopt through an agency, learn how the agency will conduct a search for you.

The regional and national adoption exchanges listed below publish photolisting books and provide other information about children with special needs who are available for adoption:

Adopt America Network

1025 N. Reynolds Road
Toledo, OH 43615-4753
PHONE | 419-534-3350
FAX | 419-534-2995
WEB SITE | www.adoptamericanetwork.org

Children Awaiting Parents, Inc.

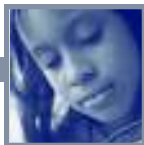
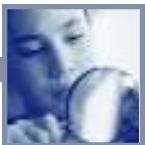
595 Blossom Road, Suite 901
Rochester, NY 14610
PHONE | 716-232-5110
FAX | 716-232-2634
WEB SITE | www.capbook.org

Adopt US Kids

U.S. Dept of Health &
Human Services
WEB SITE | www.adoptuskids.org

The Adoption Exchange

14232 E. Evans Avenue
Aurora, CO 80014
PHONE | 303-755-4756
FAX | 303-755-1339
WEB SITE | www.adoptex.org





- The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse also hosts an Internet site that contains links to online state photolistings: <http://www.calib.com/naic/adptsear/adoption/parents/dhhs.html>.

Stay in close contact with your agency to keep the process moving, and offer to help in the search by reviewing photolisting books, attending matching parties or adoption fairs, or updating your parent profile.

FIND THE PERFECT MATCH

Once you have identified a child that seems like a match for your family, learn as much as you can about him or her. Talk to the child's foster parents or social worker so you can help ease the child's transition into your family. What are the child's favorite foods and games? What's the best way to comfort the child? What is his or her background? And what were the birthparents like? What is the family's and/or child's medical history?

The child's social worker should be willing to provide whatever information is available that will help you finalize your decision and help you provide the kind of support and love your child needs.

Take advantage of the opportunity to visit with your child and get to know him or her. This is a very important step in determining how this child will fit into your family life and home.

If the child has certain medical conditions or other disabilities, now is the time to decide if your family is prepared and committed to address issues that may arise from the child's situation.

STEP 11

STEP 12

PREPARE FOR YOUR CHILD'S ARRIVAL

Take the time to anticipate how the addition of a new family member will affect your life and to plan for your future together. Depending on your situation and the child you adopt, you may need to:

- **UPDATE YOUR FAMILY'S INSURANCE** | An adopted child can be covered under your health insurance from the date he or she is placed with your family. Group health insurance carriers must insure adoptees under the terms of their parent's policy, and cannot deny coverage because of pre-existing conditions. Add a new child to your health insurance plan within 30 days after he or she is placed in your home. If your child is eligible for an adoption subsidy, he or she may be covered through Medicaid. Also change beneficiary designations on life insurance policies and update wills as needed.
- **OBTAIN A COPY OF YOUR CHILD'S ORIGINAL BIRTH CERTIFICATE** | Depending on the state and the type of adoption, it may be very difficult to access the document once the adoption is finalized. Without it, some adoptees have had trouble getting passports, and other important documents.
- **PREPARE TO GET A NEW SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER AND BIRTH CERTIFICATE** for your child — one that recognizes the child's new last name and family situation. If your child already has a social security number, you may be able to keep the number and change his or her name using the new birth certificate. Your child must have a social security number in order for you to claim him or her as a dependent.
- **LINE UP SERVICES FOR YOUR CHILD AND YOURSELF** | If you adopt a younger child, you may need to find day care. Some states provide day care. For an older child, you may need to enroll him or her in school; arrange for therapy, counseling, or tutoring; or identify respite care options. You might also want to join an adoptive parent support group. The most important thing to remember: ask for what you need. Be an advocate for yourself and your child.
- **MAKE YOUR HOUSE CHILD-FRIENDLY** | Modify, reposition, or remove household objects that could be dangerous to your new child. Prepare their room to make it signal that the area belongs to him or her.
- **INFORM YOUR OTHER CHILDREN ABOUT CHANGES THAT WILL OCCUR** | Tell them how their roles may change when their new brother or sister arrives, and prepare them to help ease the transition.
- **NEGOTIATE AN ADOPTION ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT** | Parents who adopt eligible children with special needs from a public or private agency can receive federal or state benefits for their child. Ask your agency about obtaining a subsidy and what steps you must take to obtain them.



STEP 13

BRING YOUR CHILD HOME

Children who are placed for adoption through public agencies may move in with an adoptive family as soon as the parents complete required pre-placement visits and are approved to adopt — provided the timing is not unnecessarily disruptive to the child’s schooling or other activities.

When a new child is placed in your home, you will assume temporary legal custody. For a few months, while your family undergoes the inevitable adjustment period, your agency will monitor how the placement is proceeding.

The monitoring period is normally about six months, but can be as short as a few weeks or as long as a year. During this time, the worker may call or visit to assess how you and your new child are adjusting, and answer questions. If all goes well, at the end of the monitoring period, the agency will recommend to the court that the adoption be approved.

STEP 14

FILE A PETITION TO ADOPT

An adoption petition is the document filed in court that initiates the legal aspect of adoption. Check to see if you need an attorney to help you with this process. Through this document, adoptive parents formally request permission to adopt a specific child. To file a petition, you will likely need the following information and documentation:

- The child’s birth certificate, or birth date and place of birth;
- A written statement that confirms your desire and suitability to adopt, and your ability to provide financially for the child;
- A written declaration that the adoption is in the child’s best interest;
- The date on which you received custody of the child, and from whom you were awarded custody;
- A statement of the legal reason why the birth parents’ rights are being (or have been) terminated—either due to a voluntary surrender or an involuntary court action; and
- A disclosure of any relationship that you share with the child (other than as an adoptive parent)—such as being the child’s aunt, grandparent, or stepparent.



STEP 15

FINALIZE THE ADOPTION

Your newly created family must go through the finalization process in order to legally complete the adoption. Finalization hearings usually take place within six to 12 months after a child is placed in the home. Check with your agency before you schedule your hearing to make sure you have completed the necessary paperwork because if you are missing required documents, the finalization could be delayed.

The finalization hearing is a judicial proceeding, sometimes held in the judge's chambers. This is when adoptive parents are given permanent legal custody of their adopted child. The hearing typically lasts only 10 to 30 minutes and is designed to establish the legality of the new family unit, and confirm that the adoptive parents are willing and able to provide for their new child.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND THE HEARING | The following individuals generally attend the finalization hearing:

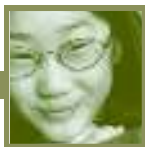
- The adoptive parents;
- The child who is being adopted;
- The adoptive family's lawyer; and
- The agency social worker who placed the child.

WHAT THE HEARING INVOLVES | To verify that the adoption should occur, the court will attempt to establish that the child has been placed in a safe, loving home. Be prepared to provide all the identifying information included in your adoption petition and to answer questions such as:

- Why do you want to adopt?
- How will you care for your new child?
- How will your family adjust to a new child?
- Is there anything the court should know before finalizing this adoption?

As soon as the judge signs the adoption order, you gain permanent legal custody of your child. Finalization is the last formal step in the adoption process, and the official beginning of your new family.

Congratulations!!! Enjoy your new life together!





"He had been in L.A. all his life... and he'd never seen the ocean. We took him to the beach... and to see the excitement on his face... it was amazing. We just cried. We just cried and watched him run. Run and laugh and chase the birds. That's when we knew it was forever."

– Aaron, Kevin's adoptive father

SERVICES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE AFTER ADOPTION

After placement, many agencies offer post-adoption services for the family. These can include support groups, individual and family counseling, workshops on specific topics (such as parenting, community resources and how to work with the family's social worker). If a child was receiving therapy or special schooling before the adoption, it will usually be continued. An employee assistance program at your workplace may offer referral for needed services.

There are hundreds of adoptive parent groups nationwide that can give adoptive parents a chance to meet others who have adopted and discuss the issues facing adoptive parents, share the joys and heartaches and learn ways to build a strong family unit. Support groups can offer a wealth of information and an emotional support network that can help parents and children as they begin this new stage in their lives.

WHEN ADOPTED KIDS GROW UP

There are about 5 million people living in the U.S. today from all walks of life who were adopted. Some of them have grown up to become famous achievers: Olympic Gold Medallists Scott Hamilton and Dan O'Brien; Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers Restaurants; Miss USA 2000 Lynnette Cole; President Gerald Ford; and Nat King Cole... all were adopted.

This doesn't mean the children you adopt will become famous celebrities when they grow up or that you have to be famous yourself to adopt. More than anything, children who are adopted need the care of loving, accepting parents. Maybe you could be that parent to a child who waits for you.

State Adoption Units

Alabama Office of Adoption Adult, Child, & Family Services Division
Department of Human Resources
50 North Ripley Street
Montgomery, AL 36130-4000
334-242-9500

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Box 110630
Juneau, AK 99811-0630
907-465-2145

Arizona Department of Economic Security
Site Code 940A, Box 6123
Phoenix, AZ 85005
602-542-2359

Arkansas Department of Human Services
Box 1437 Slot 808
Little Rock, AR 72203-1437
501-682-8462

California Department of Social Services Adoptions Branch
744 P Street, MS 1969
Sacramento, CA 95814
916-445-3146

Colorado Department of Human Services Child Welfare Services
1575 Sherman Street, 2nd Floor
Denver, CO 80203-1714
303-866-3209

Connecticut Department of Children and Families Office of Foster & Adoption Services
505 Hudson Street
Hartford, CT 06106
860-550-6578

Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families
1825 Faulkland Road
Wilmington, DE 19805
302-633-2655

District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency
609 H Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002
202-698-4637

Florida Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Blvd., Bldg. 7
Tallahassee, FL 32399
850-488-4062

Georgia Department of Human Resources, State Office of Adoptions
2 Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 3-323
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142
404-657-3564

Hawaii Department of Human Services
810 Richards Street, Suite 400
Honolulu, HI 96813
808-586-5698

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
208-334-5697

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
406 E Monroe Street, Station 225
Springfield, IL 62701-1498
217-524-2422

Indiana Division of Family & Children Family Protection/Preservation
402 W Washington Street – W364
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-233-1743

Iowa Department of Human Services
Hoover State Office Building
5th Floor – Adoptions
Des Moines, IA 50319-0114
515-281-5358

Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services Children & Family Policy
915 SW Harrison, 5th Floor
Topeka, KS 66612
785-296-0918

Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children
275 East Main Street
Frankfort, KY 40601
502-564-2147

Louisiana Department of Social Services - Office of Community Services
Box 3318
Baton Rouge, LA 70821
225-342-4086

Maine Department of Human Services
221 State Street
Augusta, ME 04333-0011
207-287-501

Maryland Social Services Administration - Department of Human Resources
311 W Saratoga Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-767-7506

Massachusetts Department of Social Services
24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210
617-727-0900

STATE ADOPTION UNITS CONTINUED...

Michigan Family Independence Agency - Adoption Services Division
Suite 413, Box 30037
Lansing, MI 48909
517-373-3513

Minnesota Department of Human Services - Family & Children's Services
444 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-3831
651-296-3740

Mississippi Department of Human Services Family and Children Services – Adoption Unit
750 N State Street
Jackson, MS 39202
601-359-4981

Missouri Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 88
Jefferson City, MO 65103-0088
573-751-0311

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services
Box 8005
Helena, MT 59604
406-444-5919

Nebraska Division of Protection & Safety - Nebraska Health & Human Services
Box 95044
Lincoln, NE 68509
402-471-9331

Nevada Division of Child and Family Services
6171 W Charleston Blvd., Bldg. 15
Las Vegas, NV 89102
702-486-7650

New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families
129 Pleasant Street, Brown Bldg.
Concord, NH 03301
603-271-4707

New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services
50 E State Street
P.O. Box 717
Trenton, NJ 08625-0717
609-984-2380

New Mexico Central Adoption Unit Children, Youth and Families Department
P.O. Drawer 5160
Santa Fe, NM 87502
505-827-8456

New York State Department of Social Services - OCFS/Adoption
52 Washington Street
Capital View Office Park
N. Bldg. 3rd Floor
Renssel, NY 12243
518-474-9406

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services - Division of Social Services
325 N Salisbury Street, Room 756
Raleigh, NC 27699-2408
919-733-3801

North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 East Blvd
Bismarck, ND 58505-0250
701-328-4805

Ohio Office of Family & Child Services - Department of Human Services
65 East State Street
Columbus, OH 43266-0423
614-466-9274

Oklahoma Department of Human Services - Permanency Planning Section
Box 25352
Oklahoma City, OK 73125
405-521-2475

Oregon Adoption Programs State Office Services to Families and Children
500 Summer Street, 2nd Floor S HSB
Salem, OR 97301
503-945-5677

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
Box 2675
Harrisburg, PA 17105
717-783-6292

Puerto Rico Department of the Family
Box 15091
San Juan, PR 00951
787-721-1331



**Rhode Island Department for
Children, Youth & Family Services**

530 Wood Street
Bristol, RI 02805
401-254-7076

**South Carolina Department of
Social Services - Division of Adoption
and Birth Parent Services**

Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520
803-898-7561

**South Dakota Department of
Social Services**

700 Governor's Drive
Pierre, SD 57501-2291
605-773-3227

**Tennessee Department of
Children's Services**

436 Sixth Avenue N
Nashville, TN 37243-1290
615-532-5637

**Texas Department of Protective and
Regulatory Services**

Box 149030
Austin, TX 78714-9030
512-438-3302

**Utah Department of Human Services
Division of Child & Family Services**

120 North 200 West #225
Salt Lake City, UT 84103
801-538-4078

**Vermont Department of Social and
Rehabilitation Services**

103 S Main Street
Waterbury, VT 05671
802-241-2142

**Virgin Islands Department of
Human Services**

1303 Hospital Ground
St. Thomas, VI 00802
340-774-4393

**Virginia Department of Social
Services**

730 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219-1849
804-692-1290

**Washington Department of Social and
Health Services**

Box 45713
Olympia, WA 98504
360-902-7968

**West Virginia Department of Health
and Human Resources**

350 Capitol Street
Charleston, WV 25301
304-558-7980

**Wisconsin Department of Health and
Family Services**

Box 8916
Madison, WI 53708-8916
608-266-3595

**Wyoming Department of
Family Services**

2300 Capitol Avenue, 3rd Floor
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-3570

Adoption Resource Listing

FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF ADOPTION RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND HELPFUL. WEB SITES CHANGE OFTEN, SO PLEASE CHECK WITH THE ORGANIZATION IF YOU CANNOT ACCESS THE SITE. MANY OF THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ADOPTION EXCHANGES LISTED BELOW PUBLISH PHOTOLISTING BOOKS AND PROVIDE OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE WHO ARE AVAILABLE FOR ADOPTION.

Adopt...

WEB SITE | www.adopting.org
▫ *information, support, links*

Adopt America Network, Inc.

1025 N. Reynolds Road
Toledo, OH 43615
PHONE | 419-534-3350
FAX | 419-534-2995
WEB SITE | www.adoptamericanetwork.org
information, support, photolisting, links

Adopting.com

WEB SITE | www.adopting.com
▫ *information, support, photolisting, links*

Adoption Exchange

14232 East Evans Avenue
Aurora, CO 80014
PHONE | 800-451-5246
FAX | 303-755-1339
E-MAIL | kids@adoptex.org
WEB SITE | www.adoptex.org
▫ *information, support, photolistings*

Adoptive Families Together

WEB SITE | www.adoptivefamilies.org
▫ *information, support, links*

American Academy of

Adoption Attorneys

Box 33053
Washington, DC 30022-0053
PHONE | 202-832-2222
FAX | 202-293-2309
E-MAIL | trustees@adoptionattorneys.org
WEB SITE | www.adoptionattorneys.org
▫ *legal information, support*

Children Awaiting Parents, Inc.

595 Blossom Road
Suite 901
Rochester, NY 14610
PHONE | 716-232-5110
FAX | 716-232-2634
WEB SITE | www.capbook.org

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

4288 W. Dublin-Granville Road
Dublin, OH 43017
PHONE | 1-800-ASK-DTFA (275-3832)
FAX | 614-766-3871
E-MAIL | adoption@wendys.com
WEB SITE | www.davethomasfoundation.org
▫ *information, education*

Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

120 Wall Street, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10005
PHONE | 212-269-5080
FAX | 212-269-1962
E-MAIL | webmaster-geninfo@adoptioninstitute.org
WEB SITE | www.adoptioninstitute.org
▫ *information*

Institute for Black Parenting

9920 La Cienega Blvd., Suite 806
Inglewood, CA 90301
PHONE | 800-367-8858
FAX | 310-348-7302
E-MAIL | info@instforblackparenting.com
WEB SITE | www.instforblackparenting.com
▫ *information, support*

National Adoption Center (NAC)

1500 Walnut Street, Suite #701
Philadelphia, PA 19102
PHONE | 800-TO-ADOPT
FAX | 215-735-9410
E-MAIL | nac@adopt.org
WEB SITE | www.adopt.org
▫ *information, support, links*

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC)

10530 Rosehaven, #400
Washington, DC 10013-1182
PHONE | 888-251-0075
FAX | 703-385-3206
E-MAIL | naic@calib.com
WEB SITE | www.calib.com/naic
▫ *information, photolistings, links*

**National Foster and Adoptive
Parent Association**

P.O. Box 81
Alpha, OH 45301
PHONE | 800-557-5238
FAX | 937-431-9377
E-MAIL | nfpa@donet.com
WEB SITE | www.nfpainc.org
□ *information, support, links*

**National Resource Center for
Special Needs Adoption**

Spaulding for Children
16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120
Southfield, MI 48075
PHONE | 248-443-0300
FAX | 248-443-2845
E-MAIL | sfc@spaulding.org
WEB SITE | www.spaulding.org
□ *information, support, photolisting*

**North American Council on Adoptable
Children (NACAC)**

970 Raymond Avenue, #106
St. Paul, MN 55114-1149
PHONE | 651-644-3036
800-470-6665 (adoption
subsidy questions only)
FAX | 651-644-9848
E-MAIL | info@nacac.org
WEB SITE | www.nacac.org
□ *information, support, links*

Stars of David International, Inc.

3175 Commercial Ave, #100
Northbrook, IL 60062-1915
PHONE | 847-509-9929
FAX | 847-509-9545
E-MAIL | starsdavid@aol.com
WEB SITE | www.starsofdavid.org
□ *information, support*





DAVE THOMAS
FOUNDATION
FOR ADOPTION™



Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
4288 West Dublin - Granville Road
Dublin, Ohio 43017

P. 800.ASK.DTFA (275.3832)
F. 614.766.3871

www.davethomasfoundationforadoption.com
adoption@wendys.com