



Fact or Fiction: Dispelling Some of the Common Myths About Adoption

Families come to consider adoption as a way to grow for many reasons. Some families have biological children already, and simply want to add to their number through adoption, some struggle with infertility and others may have always “known” that they want to adopt. Ultimately, the one thing that all of these people have in common is a devotion to care for children who may have experienced some challenges at a young age.

As you take your own personal adoption journey, you’re likely to find a lot of information – some of it conflicting, some of it accurate and timely, and some that gets passed along as fact when it is anything but.

Adopting at a younger age doesn't guarantee fewer challenges.

We hear from many families every day about a range of issues in fostering and adopting. Following are several examples of common myths, inaccuracies, and errors that we find ourselves addressing frequently. We believe that access to timely, accurate, and factual information helps everyone along the journey of adoption.

Misconception #1: *The younger the child is, the fewer challenges will occur.*

Unfortunately, we encounter this myth a lot, and it can contribute to a family’s feelings of frustration when looking to adopt an infant. The fact is, infants aren’t available for a variety of reasons.

The cost of working with a private adoption agency is not possible for every family, and

there often is a long waiting list to be matched with an infant. The children in the public adoptions program (children who are currently in foster care who need adoptive families) are typically elementary school aged and older.

Simply put, adopting a younger child doesn’t automatically guarantee fewer challenges. In fact, just as with birth children, there simply are no guarantees. There are ways to predict potential challenges, such as exposure to drugs/ alcohol in utero, family, and social history.

However, research shows that a child’s experience during pregnancy can create challenges

regardless of exposure to abuse and neglect after birth. The environment the birth mother was in throughout her pregnancy and her ability to obtain appropriate prenatal care can play a big role.

Finally, there is no type of adoption that exists without loss. While children adopted in infancy may not remember their birth parents, their feelings of loss will still be there, just as they are for older children who may come to you with memories of their first families.

Misconception #2: *Adopting an older child is too difficult because they have already been influenced by their environment and they can’t overcome their past.*

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Adopting an older child may seem more challenging simply because their issues may have already been identified. However, these children can overcome challenges and even thrive. But they may need different methods of parenting than birth children. Healing can occur and is most likely to occur in a “no matter what” family. This can be an opportunity to have an incredibly fulfilling experience to change the course of a child’s life.

Misconception #3: *Adopting an older child will create issues with children currently in my family because it will disrupt birth order.*

This is something to take into consideration. However, with enough preparation and education, an older child who is adopted can successfully transition into a family. Having conversations with your children about the possibility of adopting a child that would redefine the birth order may give you some insight into how they will be affected. Children are great teachers for other children. Having peer interaction with children of varying ages can help improve verbal and social skills.

This decision may not be a perfect fit for your family, but don’t rule it out without first looking into your individual situation and family dynamics.

Misconception #4: *There are so many children out there who need good homes that the process should go quickly and be inexpensive.*

This common myth seems to be one of the most frustrating and upsetting for those families currently considering adoption. It’s true that there are many children in need of homes and the agencies who work with them—whether private or through the state—are responsible for the safety of these children. They take this responsibility very

seriously. As a result, it may seem like it takes longer than you would like to adopt a child from foster care, but the safety of the children is the most important priority.

Depending on what type of adoption you choose, there may be various costs associated with the process. Private agencies specifically are responsible for ensuring the laws of the state of Wisconsin and other states or countries are satisfied.

Not only does this mean that extra time may be required for correspondence between states or countries, but it can also mean additional resources will be necessary to complete everything appropriately. These processes are in place for the protection of children.

There are many wonderful potential adoptive parents in Wisconsin, although not every family will create a successful match with every child. Finding the right fit for a child becoming a forever member of a new family can take time.

Your time and other resources are valuable. It may be frustrating to spend time waiting or receiving a different response than the one for which you hoped. Staying open minded to alternatives can still provide you with an opportunity to help.

Misconception #5: *Becoming a foster parent is a way I can adopt a child, maybe even an infant.*

While it’s true that you might end up adopting if you become a foster parent, as we’ve already mentioned about other scenarios, there are no guarantees.

The purpose of foster care in general is to reunite the child with his or her family.

Many families involved in the child welfare system have what is called a *concurrent*

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plan. The purpose of a concurrent plan is to start the process of making alternative plan(s) in the event a child can not go home. Essentially, foster families are asked to do two things at once: work with birth families and the foster child but prepare to be a “no matter what” family if reunification is not successful. What’s most important in either situation is for the adults to focus on the child. While foster care is intended to be temporary, many children in foster care who *can’t* go home are adopted by their foster families—but fostering is not necessarily a direct route to adoption.

Preparing Yourself for an Adoption

Just as any new journey that you take, the adoption process will be different than you expect. Following are some ideas that might help you with your expectations throughout the adoption process.

- Be prepared. Make lists of questions to ask; check with several agencies (for infant/international adoptions).
- Stay positive. Well meaning friends, family and the media may share negative stories or relay misinformation. If you aren’t sure about something, please call us at the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at 1-800-762-8063.
- Examine your motivation and expectations about adopting—it may not look like what you anticipated, but create boundaries around what is acceptable for your family.
- Be open to the possibilities before you. Things may not progress the way you anticipated, but being adaptable may bring an opportunity to you that you would have never known you wanted.
- Be kind to yourself—especially families who struggle with infertility can become easily disappointed and frustrated with the adoption process because it is so contrary to their original plan.

Talking to Others

You may hear one of the misconceptions from people who have adopted or know someone who has. Despite that, other adoptive parents are a great resource for answering your questions and sharing their experience. For every story of heartbreak or misconception you might hear, there are also great triumphs among adoptive families.

Each family’s situation is different and the adoption process is unique for each one. What is true for one family may not be true for yours. The Wisconsin Family Connections Center is here to support you by answering questions or helping to clarify information when needed. Please contact us at: 1-800-762-8063 or via email at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org.

