



# ADOPTING FROM FOSTER CARE (PUBLIC ADOPTION) INFORMATION

**Thank you for deciding to learn more about becoming a foster adoptive family! The process of adoption can be an emotional and complex one, and it can also be very rewarding. This packet has been designed to provide information about adopting from the foster care system, often called public adoption. As you read through the steps, remember that the Wisconsin Family Connections Center staff is here to support, encourage, and assist you throughout your journey. You are welcome to call us at 1-800-762-8063, visit our website, [wifamilyconnectionscenter.org](http://wifamilyconnectionscenter.org), or email us at [info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org](mailto:info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org) anytime.**

## **GETTING STARTED**

You probably have many questions about how to become an adoptive parent for children in the foster care system, commonly referenced as public adoption. What are the requirements? What are the demographics of children and youth in foster care? What is the time frame for getting licensed? You may have additional questions, and we can help you answer them.

## **WHO ARE THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH AVAILABLE FOR ADOPTION THROUGH THE PUBLIC ADOPTIONS PROGRAM?**

They are children in Wisconsin's foster care system who cannot return to their birth families or respective caregivers for various reasons. These children are usually school-aged (5-17), although sometimes there are also infants and toddlers. Often, children are part of a sibling group who would benefit most from a home willing to keep them together. Some examples include a child who has been abandoned, a child who is a victim of abuse or neglect, a child who is at high risk of harm (a sibling of a child who was abused or neglected), a child whose parent is incarcerated or hospitalized, a child who has significant medical or mental health needs, or a child who has committed a juvenile offense.

Many children in foster care experience multiple forms of trauma that often continue to manifest after adoption. An example of this might include emotional and behavioral challenges tied to grief and loss from the adoption, among many other things. Individuals considering adopting a child from foster care need to be aware that a child's current needs may change in the future due to delayed trauma responses. They also need to be willing to seek additional education, information and resources, services, and support to best meet the evolving needs of their children.

A child adopted from the foster care system may come from a background of varying cultures, values, customs, and traditions different than yours. They may bring with them the culture of their birth family, any foster families they may have lived with, or the culture and their feelings associated with adoption.

Since children in this program are usually older, they have an opportunity to stay connected with members of their birth family, siblings, and, sometimes, former foster families, as well as other essential adults, when safe and appropriate. These relationships are familiar to your

child and can offer additional support to both your child and your family.

## REQUIREMENTS

Some basic requirements for public adoption include:

- **Age:** You must be at least 21 to adopt in Wisconsin.
- **Finances:** You must be financially able to provide for your family.
- **Marital status:** For public adoptions, married couples must have been married at least one year before adopting unless you have an exception. You can also adopt if you are single, divorced, or part of an unmarried couple (only one person in an unmarried couple can adopt).
- **Home study:** All adoptive parents need to complete a home study. An adoption agency does the home study. The home study allows the agency to get to know a potential adoptive family and make sure the family is ready to adopt.
- **Training:** All first-time adoptive parents must complete 25 hours of pre-adoption training.
- **Health:** Your physical and mental health conditions do not interfere with your ability to provide care for a child.

## TIME FRAME

The time frame to adopt from foster care can vary for several reasons, including, but not limited to, the following examples:

- Being too specific about the type of child you wish to adopt
- How dedicated you are to completing your requirements in a timely manner
- Children are required to be placed for a minimum of six months before an adoption can occur
- Delays due to timely filing of legal paperwork
- Delays with the court process

Time frames can also vary based on the children currently in the foster care system who are eligible for adoption.

## PROCESS

Your first step in becoming an adoptive family is to contact a regional public adoption agency and register to attend an informational meeting. After the informational meeting, if you wish to pursue being considered for public adoption, you will be asked to complete an interest survey to share your skills, experiences, tolerances, and wishes regarding a possible child placement. You will undergo a review and screening process. If accepted into the program, you will be assigned a public adoption professional from one of the Department of Children and Families' subcontracted private agencies to begin the adoption home study process.

The time frame for completing the adoption home study process may vary and depend on how motivated you are to complete the paperwork and meet additional requirements in a timely manner. DCF 56.04(5)(c) allows agencies up to six months to approve or deny an adoption application.

## **COST**

There is no fee for required training nor an adoption home study completed through public adoption agencies. Most costs incurred in pursuit of a public adoption are usually minimal. They may be reimbursed up to \$2,000 once the adoption is finalized and if an adoption assistance agreement exists. Check with your adoption professional for more details.

## **HOME STUDY**

The State of Wisconsin requires using the SAFE Home Study licensing tool. As part of the home study process, you and your family will participate in a series of personal interviews in your home. Your adoption professional will:

- Gather information about your parenting skills and assess your ability to care for children with various needs and trauma responses.
- Discuss why you are interested in adopting and assess how adopting may impact you and your family.
- Complete a thorough criminal background check on every family member ten years of age and older living in the home.
- Complete reference checks on your family.
- Inspect your home to ensure that it satisfies the State's requirements to meet the needs of the children in foster care.

The home study also allows you and your family to ask questions or voice concerns.

## **TRAINING REQUIREMENTS**

The State of Wisconsin requires all first-time adoptive parents to complete 25 hours of pre-adoption training, of which a minimum of six hours must be in-person training and a minimum of six hours must be child-specific training. The 25 hours of pre-adoption training must cover the required core competencies:

- Adoption and its impact on parenting and family dynamics
- The issues for a child in an adoptive placement
- Loss and grief for the adopted child and the adoptive family
- Attachment issues in adoptive placements
- Support and resources for adopted children and adoptive families
- Cultural sensitivity in adoption
- Effects of abuse and neglect in adoption, including sexual abuse

- Legal issues relating to adoption
- Issues of children being adopted from an institutionalized care setting
- Educational issues in adoption
- Childhood developmental stages
- Trauma issues related to adoption

Within the “support and resources for adopted children and adoptive families” competency listed above, adoption agencies are required to provide prospective parents with information about post-adoption support offered through the Wisconsin Family Connections Center. In addition, adoption agencies are responsible for providing at least six additional hours of training appropriate to the family’s post-adoption needs. These trainings can be taken before the adoption or requested by the families through their adoption agency at any time in the future. Your assigned adoption professional will give you information about your training requirements.

## **AN ADOPTION STORY**

When Paul met his adoptive family, he had already been in 14 placements within two years. He had minimal contact with his sister and was told that his birth father was deceased. But, at the TPR hearing, Paul’s adoptive mom, Samantha, was shocked to meet his birth father, Jesse, face to face.

Jesse met with the case worker and the adoptive family. Samantha brought pictures of Paul. Jesse saw how happy Paul was and decided the best thing he could do for his son was voluntarily terminate his rights. Samantha believes Jesse did this “because Paul’s dad truly loved him.”

From that time forward, Samantha made it a point to send Jesse letters and pictures of Paul.

Over Thanksgiving one year, Jesse traveled to Wisconsin and visited with Paul. “When they saw each other, it was like they were never apart. It was the most heart-warming thing I’ve ever seen,” Samantha says. At one point, Jesse received a call from his buddy and told him, “I am having the time of my life.”

As Jesse left to go home, he came to Samantha with tears in his eyes and said, “Thank you for raising my son and doing a wonderful job.”

## **ADOPTION ASSISTANCE**

Families that adopt from foster care may receive adoption assistance until their child reaches the age of 18 (or until age 21 in certain circumstances). Adoption Assistance can be a monetary monthly stipend and/or Medical Assistance through Wisconsin’s Medicaid Program. Adoption Assistance is based solely on the needs of the child. If the child is eligible for Adoption Assistance, the adoption professional will determine the adoption assistance

with the adoptive family and submit the Adoption Assistance Agreement to the state for approval.

### **ALL THEY REALLY HAD WAS EACH OTHER: A FAMILY STORY**

“We wanted to foster older kids. Give them a better chance,” said Wendy, who, with her husband Douglas, strongly believes in providing a stable home for her kids. She is committed to seeing them get more self-esteem and getting them to see life from a different perspective.

Wendy and Douglas have certainly seen the changes and growth in daughters Diane, Laura, and Rachel, who were part of the foster care system for ten years. After being moved around in foster care for so long, the girls have finally found a home where they can be together and believe in a future for themselves.

“All they really had was each other,” Wendy said. “What they wanted more than anything was to stay together.”

### **WE ARE FAMILY**

Jonathon and Edward are a loving couple who have been together for over 20 years. They are doing their best to raise their children, and they face the same triumphs and struggles in life that every other parent in America does—with love, patience, persistence, and a little bit of luck.

They will never forget the day they got the call that would change their lives forever. There was a little girl named Jennifer who needed a home. Jennifer’s presenting challenges and mental health needs were disclosed to them, and they did not let that stop them from moving forward. All that truly mattered was that Jennifer wanted a permanent home. The trio instantly hit it off.

A few years later, Edward and Jonathon adopted Jason. Jason and Jennifer are very bonded and genuinely love each other. Edward and Jonathon are thrilled their children chose them to be their “no matter what” family.

### **SELF-REFLECTION**

We know this is a lot of information to digest. Take time to slow down and reflect on your reading before deciding if this path is right for you and your family.

You may also want to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my motivation to adopt?
- Do I meet all the qualifications to become an adoptive parent?
- Am I patient and flexible, and do I have a sense of humor?
- How does my partner, child, and/or extended family feel about adopting?

- Can I handle having my family's way of life examined?
- Can I make the time to complete the home study process and commit to the required training that may call for travel at times?
- Do I have the knowledge and skill to care for a child of a different race, ethnicity, or SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression) status than myself?
- Am I willing to seek additional education, information and resources, services, and support to best meet the evolving needs of the child post-adoption?
- Am I supportive of the child maintaining connections with their birth and extended family post-adoption?
- Do I have a solid support network or know how to connect with one?
- Am I comfortable managing the grief and loss associated with adoption?

## MORE QUESTIONS?

If you have more questions, please call us at the Wisconsin Family Connections Center. We are here to assist you with information and support throughout your adoption journey. You may also want to learn more about support groups in your area.

## RESOURCE APPENDIX

The Wisconsin Family Connections Center website, [wifamilyconnectionscenter.org](http://wifamilyconnectionscenter.org), has several resources that may be helpful to you through your journey. By exploring the website, you can find:

- A link to the [wiadopt.org](http://wiadopt.org) website where you can access the Wisconsin Waiting Kids Database
- Access to our FREE Resource Library
- Tip sheets, current and archived newsletters, resource lists
- A calendar of events, including informational meetings, training, conferences, and family fun events
- Helpful lists (e.g., Adoption attorneys, therapists, support groups)
- Other post-adoption related resources

If you need assistance navigating the website or are looking for additional information or resources, please call us at 1-800-762-8063.