

THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The staff of MN ADOPT would like to send a heartfelt 'Congratulations' to you on beginning to explore the option of adoption as this is a huge life decision! If this is the first time you are exploring this option, or you are a family that adopted previously, making a decision of this magnitude can often feel overwhelming.

Figuring out the first steps in the adoption process may seem daunting, but you are not alone. MN ADOPT's goal is to help provide information, education and support during the exploration phase, as well as throughout the entire adoption process and after.

The information below is specific to adopting a child from Minnesota foster care, also known as the Minnesota Waiting Child Program. If you are interested in learning more about being a foster care provider only, without the consideration of adoption, please visit: [Steps to Become a Foster Parent](#)

While this is an exciting experience, it is also a complicated process that can feel at times overwhelming or confusing. You may find that at various times you have lots of questions. In order to ensure your questions are answered, many families have found it extremely helpful to have a separate notebook, or app on their cell phone, to keep track of specific questions to ask throughout the process.

INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS

The first helpful step to take in exploring adopting from the Minnesota Waiting Child Program is to contact specific adoption focused agencies to learn more about their organization and the specific adoption programs they provide.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services contracts with five agencies to provide services to families adopting from foster care. Families utilizing any of these agencies to pursue adoption from foster care will not have any agency related adoption service fees.

Some adoption agencies host group informational or orientation sessions on a regular basis, while others may provide them online or on an individual basis.

Outreaching to a variety of adoption agencies will provide you with the information needed to learn more about the agency, the various programs available and their process. The information received should cover:

- Information about children in need of families
- What you can expect during the home study process
- A description of the matching process
- What it specifically means to match with a child or sibling group
- What to expect during the placement and post-placement time frames

As you get information and interact with the agencies you choose to explore, you may realize that you feel more comfortable with one agency versus another. Finding the agency that feels like a right fit for you and your family is an important part of the process as they will be helping you navigate the adoption process.

For a listing of Adoption Agencies contracted through the Department of Human Services, visit: [PPAI Agencies](#)

PRE-ADOPTION TRAINING

After interacting with the various agencies of your choosing, you will be prepared to make a determination if moving forward feels right to you. If so, you will be equipped to decide which agency you would like to engage with for the next step of the process: adoption training.

Children who are in need of an adoptive family have experienced a variety of very difficult life events. This includes separation from birth family and may include various experiences of neglect, maltreatment and other challenging experiences. Adoption training will help you gain insight and knowledge into a variety of important topics associated with these types of early life experiences.

Receiving education at this stage is foundational to you and will provide you necessary understanding of your future child(ren)'s potential experiences. Examples of topics covered include, amongst others:

- Early trauma (i.e. physical or sexual abuse)
- Attachment
- Children's mental health
- Transracial/transcultural considerations
- Fetal alcohol exposure

These trainings are offered statewide and usually last two days/between 12-20 hours. While many people use the same agency for both their training and home study process, it is ok to attend a training with one organization and have your home study completed by a second organization.

The training process will not only provide you with important information, it will also be a great opportunity for you to reflect and finalize your decision to pursue adoption. If you choose to continue the process of adopting, you will move forward by submitting an application to the private agency or county social service agency of your choosing to begin the home study process.

- See [Home Study & Foster Care Licensing Section](#) for additional information.

It should be noted that engaging in continuing education and supports throughout the adoption process, as well as after the adoption process is finalized, is imperative to you and your future child(ren)'s adjustment and stability as a family. MN ADOPT has a variety of supportive and educational programming to assist you throughout the lifespan.

To view upcoming Training schedules, visit: [Pre-Adopt Trainings](#)

To explore why children come into care, visit: [Why Children Come Into Care](#)

MN ADOPT Supportive Program links:

[Education Program](#)

[HELP Program](#)

Suggested Readings:

[Adopting the Hurt Child](#) By: Gregory Keck & Regina Kupecky

[The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child](#) By: Nancy Newton Verrier

[The Whole Brain Child](#) By: Daniel Siegel

HOME STUDY AND FOSTER CARE LICENSING

Below you will find information on the Home Study & Foster Care Licensing process. As this step can seem complicated, many families have found it extremely helpful to have a separate notebook, or app on their cell phone, to keep track of specific questions to ask.

The agency application to begin the Home Study process consists of paperwork and required documentation which you will need to complete/submit to move forward in the process. Examples of some of the required documents include:

- Letters of reference
- Physician statements
- Birth & marriage certificates
- Biographical summaries

A thorough background check, including fingerprints, will also be required. Many of these documents are required by the State for the home study process, and your timeline for completing this paperwork will directly affect the timeline of your home study process.

Once the application is fully completed and all required documentation received, you will be contacted to schedule your first meeting to begin the official home study process. Generally families meet with an adoption worker 3-4 times, including a mix of in-home and office based meetings.

These meetings include time for you and your worker to get to know each other while learning more about your family. It will provide you the opportunity to ask any and all questions about the process you may have at this point. During these meetings, your adoption worker will also explain the requirements for foster care licensing as any family who adopts children from foster care also needs to be licensed as a foster care provider until any adoptions are finalized.

The Home Study & Foster Care Licensing process is a crucial part of the adoption journey. Sharing personal information with an adoption worker at times may feel uncomfortable or intrusive, but it is important to be as honest as possible. This open reflection, sharing and ongoing dialogue will aide your adoption worker in helping you best prepare for this experience and assist in the critical steps of the matching process.

During the Home Study process your adoption worker should explain the significant trauma children in foster care have experienced and the skill-sets necessary to nurture them. This will provide you the opportunity to identify strengths and areas for ongoing education and development so you can be best prepared to support not only the child(ren) who enter your family, but also yourself.

Once the office and home visits with your adoption worker have been completed and the foster care licensing requirements all met, your worker will begin writing the home study report. Depending on your home study process, the time frame for completion will vary. Please check with your adoption worker on the timeline for this to be completed.

This process is an emotional journey that will likely bring up life experiences you have had and how they may impact your adoption journey. Since this is a foundational aspect of your adoption experience, engaging in ongoing support and education is a crucial component to help establish a strong foundation for your future child(ren) and family as a whole.

It is important to note that any time throughout the process an individual, family, or worker may make the decision that moving forward with the adoption process is not a fit at this time.

Useful Links and Resources

For more information about the background check process, visit:

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=245C>

For more information about home study requirements, visit:

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=259.41>

For more information about foster care licensing requirements, visit:

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=9543>

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=2960>

Suggested Readings:

[Parenting from the Inside Out](#) by Daniel Siegel

[Attachment Focused Parenting](#) by Daniel Hughes

[Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief](#) by Pauline Boss

MN ADOPT Supportive Programs:

[Education Program](#)

[HELP Program](#)

MATCHING PROCESS

Once you have an approved home study, you will begin learning more specifics about children in need of adoptive families. You and your adoption worker will have developed a plan on what this will look like. You both will likely be looking online at children available. Communicating closely with your worker on a regular basis will be key during this process. They will be able to provide you additional insight, guidance, support and coordinate getting additional information on any identified child/sibling group you are interested in learning more about.

Matching with a child can take months, or, in some cases, years. Variability in timeframes is due to the important task of determining the right fit for all involved. This is a time where you can remain engaged in the matching process in order to move the process along and help your worker get a better understanding of the children your family feels prepared to parent. See the bottom of this section for suggestions on ways to remain active in your matching process and gain a better understanding of the children in need of homes.

During this time, it will be important for you to gather, read and understand all of the information available regarding any child or sibling group you are considering parenting.

This may include speaking with other professionals and care providers who have spent time with the child(ren). Gathering of information and evaluating the potential fit of the match will take some time and is a crucial necessary step before meeting the child(ren). Your adoption worker will assist you throughout this process.

Since this phase often takes time, this period is a perfect opportunity to seek out, and engage with, additional supportive and educational resources. Examples include:

MN ADOPT Supportive Programs

[Education Program](#)

[HELP Program](#)

[Support Groups](#)

Connecting with other adoptive families

Either through your agency, support groups or online, connecting with other families can be extremely beneficial. You will be able to learn more about their process and experiences while expanding your support network. Seriously consider exploring being a respite care provider for other adoptive families so you can expand your understanding/experiences providing care to a child(ren).

Remaining Active During Your Matching Process

- Visit the State Adoption Exchange (Meet the Kids) on the MN ADOPT web site: <https://www.mnadopt.org/waiting-kids/>
- Watch Kid Connection on Twin Cities Live: <http://twincitieslive.com/article/12879/>
- Read the Star Tribune's monthly Waiting Child Feature
- Attending matching events hosted by counties and agencies.
- Continue to educate yourself by attending workshops and learning more about the needs of children in care.
- Use knowledge gained from ongoing education to evaluate your matching preferences to best find strong fit between you and your future child.

Suggested Readings:

[The Secrets of Successful Adoptive Parenting: Practical Advice and Strategies to Help with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges](#) by Sophie Ashton

[The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma](#) by Bessel van der Kolk

[Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Attachment-Challenged Children with Severe Behaviors](#) by Heather Forbes

[In their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories](#) by Rhonda M. Roorda

[In Their Parents' Voice: Reflections on Raising Transracial Adoptees](#) by Rhonda M. Roorda

PRE-PLACEMENT AND PLACEMENT

As mentioned above, during the matching phase you will have received a variety of information regarding your child(ren)'s previous experiences and current situation.

As you move into the Pre-Placement phase, you will continue to read about the child(ren) and will be involved in meetings with a variety of care providers and professionals who know the child(ren) – often referred to as the adoption team.

These meetings may consist of your adoption worker, foster parents, teachers, school social workers, Guardian ad Litem, Children's Mental Health Case Manager and/or therapists. Taking the time to formulate questions/areas you would like additional information/insight on, as well as taking clear notes, during meetings will be very important.

During meetings with the adoption team, you will be coordinating ongoing services the child(ren) is receiving, or services that will be needed once they enter your home. Considering this is a huge decision and transition all around, the adoption team will be working closely with you to discuss and evaluate the best interests of the child and your family.

Typically, you do not meet the child(ren) until you've gathered all the child(ren)'s information and engaged in adoption team meetings, resulting in you making the decision to commit to parenting them.

Once you have decided to commit to a child or sibling group, you will begin visits with them. These visits gradually increase in time together (i.e. an hour visit to start and work up to a long weekend or a full week at your house). The adoption team will develop this transition plan and placement date, which is when your child will officially move into your home.

The transition timeline can vary and is based on the specific needs of the child(ren) and family. Communicating closely with your adoption worker and engaging in supportive resources during this process will be key.

It is important to note that children who are in foster care have Medical Assistance which will likely be available to them until they are 18 years old. Be sure to talk with your worker about Medical Assistance and to explore Adoption Assistance.

For more information about Adoption Assistance through Northstar Care of Children, visit:

[Adoption Assistance through Northstar Care of Children](#)

POST PLACEMENT AND FINALIZATION

The term "Post-Placement" refers to the timeframe between the specific date that your child(ren) moved into your home (Placement) and the legal finalization of the adoption.

At the time the child enters your home, you should have signed the Adoption Placement Agreement (aka APA). This signifies that the county has placed the child(ren) into your home with the intention that the child(ren) will be legally adopted by you.

Your adoption worker will be visiting your home at least monthly to talk to you and the child and brainstorm ideas or resources. The county worker and Guardian ad litem will also be visiting your home monthly. This is an important time to have a strong support system and your adoption team is there to help!

Typically, families finalize the adoption of their child(ren) within 9 months of the child moving in. Talk with your adoption worker about finalization details, including timeframe, location, and what to expect during the hearing.

It will be critical for your NorthStar packet to be completed, and approved, before finalization. Talk with your adoption worker for more information.

During this time frame there will be a lot of adjusting for the whole family. In addition to your own self-reflection and care, it will be crucial for you to consider this experience from the child(ren)'s point of view! Your child(ren) have experienced a variety of very difficult experiences in their short lives that may make transitioning into your family an intimidating, or scary, experience. Continuing pre-established supportive services (e.g. therapy, Occupational therapy...etc.), or accessing new services if needed, will be very important.

It is not uncommon for children, or parents, regardless of their previous parenting experiences, to experience various adjustment considerations or challenges during this time. It will be essential for you/your family to talk openly and honestly with your adoption worker and support network. Remaining mindful of maintaining realistic expectations as you and your child(ren) navigate this unique time frame is also key.

In addition to your adoption worker, the MN ADOPT HELP Program is a great supportive resource that you can access for support, guidance and assistance not only during this time frame, but throughout the lifespan

POST FINALIZATION SUPPORT

After the adoption of your child or children is finalized, your adoption worker will close your foster care license. The agency may also close your adoption file at this time or they might remain in contact with you to provide ongoing support. It will be helpful to talk with your adoption worker about their agency policy for post-finalization services so you are aware of what to expect during this time frame.

Adoption is often thought of as a specific point in time, however, adoption is not a one-time event. There are myriad nuances that adoption can entail throughout the lifespan for all involved, including Birth Parents/Family, Adoptive Parents, and the person who was adopted (often referred to as an Adoptee). Engaging in ongoing support, not just for the child(ren), but the family as a whole, is an essential approach to establishing a strong family base.

As you move forward adjusting to your new family dynamic, we encourage you to remain aware of this and embrace regularly utilizing your support network (both personal and adoption team), outreaching for additional professional support when needed (see resource options below) and engaging in continuing education on aspects of the adoption journey.

MN ADOPT Supportive Programs:

[Education Program](#)

[HELP Program](#)

[Support Groups](#)

[Additional Resources](#)

Adoption Support Network: <https://www.nacac.org/postadopt/asn.html>

Suggested Readings:

[Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Attachment-Challenged Children with Severe Behaviors](#) by Heather Forbes

[Parenting the Hurt Child](#) by Gregory Keck & Regina Kupecky

[Parenting Adopted Adolescents: Understanding & Appreciating their Journeys](#) by Gregory Keck

[Beneath the MASK: Understanding Adopted](#) Teens by Debbie Riley