Congratulations on making the decision to build your family through adoption! The process of adoption can be a complex one, but it is one of the most rewarding decisions you will make. This packet has been specifically designed to provide you with information about adopting from the foster care, or child welfare, system. As you read through the steps involved, keep in mind that the staff of the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families is here to support, encourage, and assist you throughout your journey. You are welcome to call us at 414-475-1246 or 800-762-8063, visit our family of websites, or email us at info@coalitionforcyf.org at any time.
Getting Started
You probably have a lot of questions about how to start the process of becoming an adoptive parent for children in the foster care system. What are the requirements? What types of children are in foster care? What is the time frame for getting licensed? Perhaps you have many more questions. We are here to provide the answers.

Who are the Children 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 a variety of 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.

Children are placed in foster care for different reasons. Some examples include: a child who has been abandoned, a child who is at high risk of harm (the non-abused child in a sibling group), a child who is a victim of abuse or neglect, 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 delinquent act.

Many children in foster care have come from traumatic backgrounds and life experiences, and will need help overcoming hurt related to those past traumas. They may also be at higher risk of developing varying degrees of cognitive and/or physical developmental delays, emotional issues, behavioral acting out, or other medical and mental health issues. Individuals considering adopting a child from foster care need to have a general understanding of the child’s needs and be willing to learn and prepare for a potentially challenging parenting experience.

A child adopted from the foster care system may come from a background of varying culture, 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 important 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 years old to adopt in the state of Wisconsin.
- **Finances**: You must be financially able to provide for your family.
- **Marital status**: For public adoptions, married couples are required to 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. The home study is done by an adoption agency. 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 need to complete 25 hours of pre-adoption training.
- **Health**: You must be in good physical and mental health without any serious medical conditions that would hinder or affect the care of a child.

Time Frame
The time frame to adopt from foster care can vary for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, the following examples:

- Being too specific about the type of child you wish to adopt
- How devoted 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 available for adoption.
Process
Adopting a child from foster care is commonly called public adoption. This occurs when a child in the foster care system cannot return to their birth family or respective caregiver for a variety of reasons.

Your first step in becoming an adoptive family is to reach out to 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 you are accepted into the program, you will be assigned a public adoption worker from one of the Department of Children and Families’ subcontracted private agencies to begin the adoption home study process.

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

Home Study
During the home study process, you and your family will participate in a series of personal interviews in your home. Your licensing worker will:

- Gather information about your parenting skills and abilities and learn what you have to offer a child(ren) who has been through traumatic experiences.
- Discuss with you the reasons you are interested in adopting and assess how adopting may impact you and your family members.
- Complete a thorough criminal background check on every family member 10 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 gives you and your family a chance to ask questions or voice concerns you may have. This process takes about two to three months to complete. During the home study process, or shortly after it is completed, you will need to complete the pre-placement trainings before obtaining your license.

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 Adoption and Permanency Support (WiAPS) program. In addition, they are responsible for offering at least six additional hours of training post adoption that is appropriate to the post-adoption needs of the family prior to or at the time of adoption. Families should know that they may request this training through their adoption agency at any time in the future. Your assigned adoption worker 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 to voluntarily terminate his rights. Samantha believes that 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 2009, Jesse was able to travel to Wisconsin and visit with Paul. “When they saw each other, it was like they were never apart. It was the most heart-warming thing that I’ve ever seen,” Samantha says. At one point, Jesse received a call from a buddy of his 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

Many families that adopt from foster care 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, then the adoption worker 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

After being foster parents to Diane, Laura and Rachel for over two years, Douglas and Wendy decided to adopt the girls. The girls were the fourth set of foster kids the Johnsons welcomed into their home and into their hearts.

“We wanted to foster older kids. Give them a better chance,” said Wendy, who 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.

And Wendy certainly has seen the changes and growth in Diane, Laura, and Rachel, who were part of the foster care system for 10 years. After being moved around in foster care for so long, the girls have finally found a home for themselves, 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 24 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.

On October 1, 1999 they got the call that would change their lives forever. There was a little girl named Jennifer who needed a home. Edward and Jonathon were told that Jennifer had several problems, but they were not about to let her “diagnosis” scare them away. All that really mattered was that Jennifer wanted a permanent home. The trio instantly hit it off, and Jennifer became their little princess.

A few years later, Edward and Jonathon adopted Jason. Jason and Jennifer are very bonded and have a genuine love for each other. And Edward and Jonathon are extremely happy with being parents and even hope to add another child to their family through adoption.

Self Reflection

We know this is a lot of information to take in and digest. Take some time to slow down and reflect on what you’ve read before you decide if this is the right path for you and your family. Some questions to ask yourself are:

- Do I meet the requirements to be an adoptive family?
- Does this particular type of adoption meet my expectations to grow my family?
- Do the children available meet my hope for age, needs, and background?
- Are my partner and I in agreement about adoption and this particular type of adoption?
- Can I make the time to complete the home study process and the training required?
- Am I comfortable having someone new added to my family?
- Will my current family and friends be supportive of my adoption plans and adoptive child?
- Is this particular type of adoption right for me and my family?
- Do I have a support network or know how to connect with one?

Wisconsin Adoption Permanency Support (WiAPS) program

The WiAPS program provides training, free library resources, information, post-adoption services, and support to adoptive families. For more information, visit https://wiapsp.org/ or call 1-833-WIS-APSP (1-833-947-2777).
More Questions?
If you have more questions, please call us at the Coalition. 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 Coalition for Children, Youth & Families’ website, www.wiadopt.org, has several resources that may be helpful to you through your journey. By exploring the website, you can find:

- Access to the Wisconsin Waiting Kids Database
- Access to our FREE Lending Library
- Tip sheets, current and archived newsletters, personal stories
- A calendar of events, including informational meetings, trainings, 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 if you are looking for additional information or resources, please call us at 1-800-762-8063 or 414-475-1246.
Our mission to inspire, inform, and support individuals and families caring for children and youth touched by foster care and adoption.
Families who use the Coalition services have:

Increased access to tools and resources  Stronger networks of support  Improved confidence in their ability to be a “no matter what” family

Because of our work, foster and adoptive families are strong and resilient— they are flexible, accepting, able to celebrate each victory, and endure lifelong.

COALITION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

6682 West Greenfield Avenue Suite 310
Milwaukee WI 53214
T/TTY 414.475.1246
TOLL FREE 1.800.762.8063
FAX 414.475.7007
info@coalitionforcyf.org

Family of websites:
coalitionforcyf.org
wiadopt.org
wifostercareandadoption.org

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