

FOSTER PARENT



Have you considered adopting foster children?

Are you preparing the child in your care for adoption?

This resource package includes information you will find helpful when you are considering adopting a foster child in your care or when the foster child in your care is preparing for a move to an adoption home.

This information package was developed by Ministry of Children and Family staff and foster parents in the Upper Fraser Region and adapted for use in the Central and Upper Vancouver Island Region. Central/Upper Vancouver Island Region would like to thank the Upper Fraser Region for their generosity.



What is adoption and what is the Ministry of Children and Family Development's philosophy and practice when planning adoption for children in care?

Adoption is a *lifelong* experience that affects adopted children and adults, birth and adoptive families. It is both a legal and a social process. The purpose of adoption is to provide every child legally available for adoption with the stability and security of permanent family ties, giving paramount consideration in every respect to the *child's best interest*.

When the plan for a child in your home is adoption, it could affect you in one of two ways:

- 1) If you are interested in adopting the child you may be considered as prospective adoptive parents for the child,**
or
- 2) If you are not interested in adopting the child, you could be a key player in preparing the child for adoption placement in another home (this section begins on page 14).**

**YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BEING CONSIDERED AS
PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS FOR THE FOSTER CHILD
IN YOUR CARE.**

“ When foster parents decide to adopt their foster children, they have some advantages over other adoptive parents. The biggest advantage is familiarity with their children: foster adoptive parents are frequently acquainted with their children’s history and /or birth parents, and what issues their children face before finalization.” Diane Riggs (1995)



Questions you need to consider and might be asking.

Are there other prospective adoptive parents?

- ❑ The child’s social workers **must** contact and explore the possibility of any extended family member adopting this child. If an extended family member is approved to adopt they will be considered as prospective adoptive parents.
- ❑ The child’s social worker **must** consider all other suitable prospective adoptive families along with your interest in adopting the child.

The child’s social worker in consultation with a team supervisor and/or adoption supervisor will determine if there is a strong likelihood that you are the most suitable or only possible adoptive home for the child.

How well informed am I about the child I want to adopt?

□ *Does the child have siblings and if so how does that effect adoption?*

Adoption practice standards clearly emphasize the importance of placing siblings together in adopting families. Social workers **must** make every effort to place siblings together in the same adopting family. MCFD Adoption Branch in Victoria will help to find adopting families for sibling groups. If no adoptive family can be matched for the sibling group the Regional Manager for Adoption must agree to an exception to the sibling policy, in order to place siblings in separate homes. If the siblings are separated every effort must be made by the adopting parents to maintain sibling contact through an openness agreement.

□ *What if the child I want to adopt has a sibling who has been adopted?*

To explore the option of siblings being placed together in the same permanent family, the adopting family of the sibling may be asked to consider adopting the child in your care. The social worker would then determine if this placement with the sibling would be in the best interest of the child or if other options should be explored.

□ *Do I know the child's medical and social history so I can make an informed decision about adopting?*

You should receive in writing all medical and family history information known to the Ministry about the child. (Confidentiality will be maintained in the sharing of information)

If I am non-aboriginal, can I adopt a child with aboriginal heritage?

When making placement decision concerning an Aboriginal child in continuing custody, the social worker ***must*** consider placement options in the following order of priority:

- members of the child's extended family
- other members of the child's Aboriginal community who are living either inside or outside of the community
- approved Aboriginal homes outside the child's Aboriginal community that have a plan to preserve the child's unique cultural identity
- if no Aboriginal homes are a suitable match for the child, then the social worker ***must*** apply and obtain an aboriginal exception from the Aboriginal Exceptions Committee in Victoria, to place the child in a non-aboriginal home. This family must participate in developing and agree to implement a cultural plan to preserve the child's unique cultural heritage.

How does adopting a foster child affect my foster care relationships?

- Issues to be aware of and to consider as a foster parent before adopting might include:
 - How do I explain to other foster children that I am adopting one child but not the other children in my care?
 - What are the sibling dynamics with birth children, adopted children and foster children in the same home?
 - If I adopt, how many children can I foster? The total number of children in any foster home cannot exceed 6 children... how does adopting limit my ability to foster and still meet each child's needs?

Is there financial assistance for adopting?

What is post-adoption assistance?

The post-adoption assistance program provides financial assistance and access to other support services to families who qualify when they adopt children who have special service or placement needs. An income test determines if you are eligible to receive post adoption assistance.

When a child has been designated for post-adoption assistance, and a family is assessed as eligible for assistance through the income test, the adoption social worker **must** determine the appropriateness of the following types of assistance:

- specific service payments: financial assistance to purchase services for the child or the family
- direct service support: access to services provided by the ministry that address the child's or family's needs
- maintenance: financial support for day-to-day expenses. To be eligible for maintenance one of the following circumstances must apply:
 - the child is a member of a family group that should be placed together, either jointly or successively
 - the child has established significant emotional ties with a person who proposes to adopt the child
 - the child has cultural ties that require a culturally compatible placement or support

Post adoption assistance agreements are negotiated for 2-year periods up until the child turns 19.



What is the next step if I want to proceed with applying to adopt a child in my care?

Discuss with the child’s social worker and your resource liaison worker your interest in adopting the child. If the child’s social worker supports your plan, ask for a referral to an adoption social worker. Make sure you understand what will be required of you before you decide to apply.

The adoption social worker will inform you of the following steps:

- ❑ Complete the Application to Adopt and Adoption Questionnaire; the adoption worker will open an adoption file and register your application to adopt a specific child with Adoption Branch in Victoria. Your signed application provides written consent to review your resource file and any other files you may have with the Ministry. A new prior contact check will be completed for your adoption file.
- ❑ You will be asked to participate in the adoption homestudy. The Adoption Regulation uses the term “homestudy” to refer to two separate but equally important activities used to assess whether prospective adoptive parents can be approved for adoption:
 - An education component to help prospective adoptive parents become knowledgeable about adoption and its lifelong impact
 - The structured family assessment.

The term “written family assessment” refers to the summary document prepared at the conclusion of the homestudy. This assessment covers the two components

of the homestudy and includes a recommendation on whether to approve the prospective adoptive parents for an adoption placement.

I have taken foster parent training; must I take adoption education training?

The adoption social worker will discuss your relevant foster training and will determine which training you need to attend to meet legislative requirements for adoption. Many experienced foster parents have found completing the adoption education program valuable in preparing themselves and their child for adoption.

As a foster parent I have been assessed and approved for fostering children; will I have to participate in another home assessment?

The adoption worker will obtain your written family assessment from your resource file to review. They will update any information in the assessment, and will assess your current and future capacity to parent the child you are applying to adopt. The adoption home assessment is generally more comprehensive and addresses the skills and abilities you have to parent the specific child.

The adoption worker will access the following information from your resource file and transfer to your adoption file.

- ❑ Results of prior contact check
- ❑ Results of criminal record checks- if completed within the last two years. You will be advised that before a Notice of Placement is signed new criminal record searches will be required if the searches on the resource file are more than 9 months old.
- ❑ Any current evaluations (annual reviews)
- ❑ Any reports regarding protocol investigations or quality of care reviews
- ❑ Minimum of four new references are required for adoption
- ❑ New medical reports will be required

The adoption worker will conduct a series of interviews with you, your children and other members of the household to discuss the following:

- ❑ Current ability to care for the child you are applying to adopt
- ❑ The differences between fostering and adopting, including your future needs for services which are currently provided by the ministry, such as financial, ongoing counselling and support.
- ❑ Relationship with the birth family.
- ❑ Potential reaction to the adoption by other foster children in the home who are not being adopted.
- ❑ The potential impact of the adoption on any of your birth children.

Tell me more about the written family assessment.

After the completion of the interview, a full written family assessment or an abbreviated point form study will be written. Upon completion of the written family assessment the social worker will give you the opportunity to read and discuss the contents of the assessment to:

- ❑ Ensure the information is correct
- ❑ Indicate the assessment is an accurate reflection of you
- ❑ The social worker will review with you a consent statement, and if you are in agreement with the contents of the written assessment you will be asked to sign the consent statement.

The written family assessment is then signed by the adoption social worker and the team supervisor and registered with Adoption Branch.

I have been assessed and approved to adopt, what is next?

The child's social worker and team supervisor will review your approved homestudy and determine if your family is the best adoption placement for the child. If you are:

The adoption proposal and preparing for placement:

When the adoption placement of a child is proposed you will receive in writing:

- All information on the child provided by the child's social worker - it might be important to share medical information about the child with your physician to make a fully informed decision. Information you will receive includes the following.
 - the child's current comprehensive plan of care
 - all assessments – Psychological, educational, etc.
 - birth family history booklet
 - medical records
 - school records and assessments
 - child's written placement history and life experiences

You will complete a statement that acknowledges you have received the documentation and that information has been provided about the birth parents and child.

- The child's social worker or adoption worker will help you negotiate the terms of openness agreements with birth family members and other significant people in the child's life, for example foster/adoptive parents of other siblings or former foster parents.
- If the child you are adopting is not currently in your home, the child's social worker will develop a placement plan including pre-placement visits.

- You will be asked to sign a Notice of Placement indicating your intention to adopt. *Upon signing Notice of Placement the foster placement and payment for this child is terminated.* If your application for post adoption assistance has been approved payments will be effective on the date of the Notice of Placement. Your adoption social worker will now handle all financial matters involving the child you are adopting.

Adoption Placement Agreement

You will be asked to sign an Adoption Placement Agreement, which includes:

- The transfer of care and custody enabling you to:
 - Authorize a health care provider to examine the child.
 - Consent to routine health care for the child, if in the opinion of the health care provider health care should be provided.
 - Consent to the child's participation in school, social or recreational activities.
- The director retains guardianship of the child until the adoption order is granted and, as guardian, only the director can consent to medical treatment that has significant risk associated with it, such as surgery.
- Your obligation as the prospective adoptive parent will include
 - Applying for medical coverage for the child under your British Columbia Medical Services Plan. *When the Notice of Placement is signed MCFD medical will be cancelled.*
 - Ensuring the child's immunization remains current.

- Advising the social worker immediately of any serious incidents.
- Obtaining social worker's permission to take the child out of British Columbia.
- Compliance with the ministry's behaviour management practices.
- Immediately advising the director of significant changes affecting any member of the household, including but not limited to the onset of or recurrence of a serious illness; a serious injury; or criminal charge or conviction.

When does adoption completion occur?

The child must live in your home on adoption placement status for six months before you can apply to the Supreme Court for an Adoption Order. At the end of the six month period your adoption social worker will prepare the court documents and have you sign an affidavit.

If the child is between the ages of 7 and 12, a social worker must interview the child and report to the Court the child's views about the adoption, and their views on any proposed name change. A child 12 years or over must sign a consent to their own adoption and name change.

A court date is set and a Judge approves and finalizes the adoption of your child. Neither your social worker nor you are required to be present at the court hearing.

The Adoption Order will be sent to your social worker, who will give it to you, along with a new birth certificate with the name change.



YOU ARE NOT INTERESTED IN ADOPTING A CHILD BUT THE FOSTER CHILD IN YOUR CARE IS BEING PREPARED FOR ADOPTION IN ANOTHER HOME

Research has found that two-thirds of the foster parents indicated that helping children leave for an adoptive home was one of the hardest problems with which they had to cope. (Urquhart, 1989). Little attention has been given to the critical issue of foster parents' grief over the loss of a child. They simply are expected to separate gracefully in a way that is helpful to the child and nondisruptive to the agency and subsequent parents. (Urquhart, 1989)

Your role when the child in your care is being prepared for adoption.

The child's social worker will inform you and your resource worker when the plan of care for the child is adoption. The child's social worker, your resource worker and you will develop a plan/role for your inclusion in the child's adoption process.

Foster parents need to be included in the preparation and placement process. Some ways in which you can assist in the planning are:

- Preparation of the child's life book (with child if age appropriate).

- Reviewing written family assessments of potential adoptive homes. You know the child well; you can assist in identifying the child's needs and in selection of prospective adoptive parents.
- The child's social worker may co-ordinate an introductory meeting between you and the prospective adopting parent(s). The social worker might use this time to facilitate an exchange of information about the child's routines in your home. This will also be an opportunity to discuss openness agreements and a post placement visiting schedule.
- You may be provided a photo album or video of the adoptive family. You will be asked to show these to the child prior to visits beginning. Encourage the child to show their new family to others, and to talk about feelings, questions and concerns about meeting the new family and moving.
- You will be included in developing a pre-placement schedule for the child and the new family. You will be asked to host the introduction meeting so that the child is in a familiar environment. Prospective adopting parents will be encouraged to visit the child frequently and at different times of the day in your home. Throughout these visits you are encouraged to model or actually teach the new parents how you care for the child. As well as pointing out any strengths or gains that the child has made in your care, it will be important for you to let the prospective adoptive parents know what specific issues you are currently working on with the child. (e.g. we have discovered that Johnny functions better if allowed to shoot a few hoops with his basketball after school before starting his homework)
- You will be encouraged to host a good-bye party for the child, before he/she moves to his/her new home. Rituals, including good-bye parties,

provide a meaningful, public recognition of life-altering events. This will be an opportunity to take pictures for the child's life-book.

- ❑ On the day of the move, current foster parents and adopting parents should join together to finish packing the child's belongings and load the car. With pre-verbal children, the foster parent should physically hand the child over to the new parents. The child needs to feel that he/she has your permission to move on to new relationships

- ❑ Structure time with your resource worker to discuss how it feels for you and your family to have the child in your home preparing for adoption. Grief and loss are common feelings for both you and the child in your care. You may request additional counselling to deal with your family's feelings of grief and loss.

- ❑ Regardless of the child's age and stage of development it is critical that the child receives from you the message that you approve of the new caregivers and the adoption plan. You are the link of attachment for this child to the new caregivers.