



Finding Forever Families

A step-by-step guide to adoption



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®
CANADA

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



**It's all
about**

family.

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Who we are

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption Canada is driven by a single goal: ***finding a loving family for every child waiting in foster care*** to be adopted. We are a registered charity public foundation dedicated to increasing the adoptions of the nearly 30,000 children waiting in foster care for permanent, loving homes.

We award grants to adoption organizations that connect children with families. We increase awareness across the nation about waiting children and the process to adopt. We raise funds to support our awareness and advocacy programs. We offer free resources, like this guide, to professionals, and prospective and adoptive parents.

Our core beliefs:



Every child
deserves a safe,
loving and
permanent family.

No child should
linger in foster
care or leave the
system without
a permanent
family.

Every child is
adoptable.



*These children are not someone else's responsibility.
They are our responsibility."*

—Dave Thomas, Founder of Wendy's® and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Since we began, the Foundation has been guided by Dave Thomas' inspiring words.

Whether you are an adoption professional, a prospective adoptive parent or someone who wants to know more about foster care adoption, this guide will help you gain the knowledge you need to make a difference in the life of a child.

What is adoption?

When a child is adopted, that child moves permanently from one family to another family. In the process, all parental rights are legally transferred to the new parents. This means adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as parents whose children were born to them. It also means adopted children have all the emotional, social, legal and familial benefits of biological children.



There are a few different methods you can use when adopting a child, including:

- **Public child welfare agency**
- **Private agency**
- **Approved adoption practitioner, licensed authority or lawyer**

Public child welfare agency

The local branch of your province or territory's social service department or a child and family service agency is a child welfare agency.

Private agency

A private agency is provincially licensed to facilitate domestic or international adoptions. A private agency may be secular or religious, for profit or nonprofit.

Adoption practitioner, licensed authority or lawyer

If you choose to use a lawyer for a private adoption, be sure it is someone who you know has a strong sense of ethics and a wide knowledge of adoption laws in your province or territory. A responsible adoption attorney will be sure the birth parents have received counselling so they are confident about their decision and ready to relinquish custody.

The attorney can also ensure that you receive a complete health and medical history of both the child and the birth family. If you need a source for finding attorneys, talk to members of a local adoptive parent support group. They may have adopted independently and, if so, may be able to give you a recommendation.

The five types of adoption

When starting the adoption process, you have five options.

1 Adopt a child from a public child welfare agency

This is the most traditional way to adopt in Canada. Most of the children available for adoption through public agencies are more than two years old, and some may have special needs. Some agencies specialize and facilitate only the adoptions of infants, children with special needs and children from other countries.

2 Adopt an infant through a private agency or licensed adoption practitioner

Adoption through a private agency simply means that the adoption is not arranged through a public agency. Private adoption practitioners are provincially-licensed specialists who provide pre- and post-adoption services to both prospective adoptive and birth parents in a private adoption.

Adoption practitioners, licensed authorities and lawyers can do direct placements, which means the adoption is arranged between a pregnant woman and the adoptive parents without involving an agency. However, check your local laws: direct placements are not allowed in all provinces or territories, and most require the approval of a local authority.

3 Adopt a child from another country

Adopting a child from another country is complicated, but possible. There are many things to take into consideration, like provincial adoption laws, federal immigration laws, the laws of the child's country of origin, and language and cultural barriers. Private agencies assist with international adoption.

4 Adopt a child, if you are Aboriginal, by completing a custom adoption or other customary arrangement

A custom adoption ensures that children of Aboriginal descent who have been in long-term foster care are raised within Aboriginal families to keep them connected with their extended families, communities and culture.

5 Adopt a child through kinship adoption or stepparent adoption

Kinship adoption is an option if you are a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other member of the extended family. Stepparent adoption is very similar. You can complete this type of adoption on your own if you acquire a self-help kit at the court. Check with your ministry or local agency to learn what the procedures are in your province or territory.

There are nearly 80,000¹ children in foster care.
Of those, 30,000 are waiting for permanent,

LOVING HOMES.

¹2011 Census of Population, www12.statcan.gc.ca/

Getting Started

As you begin your adoption journey, take some time to look through our step-by-step guide and browse the other resources we've helped compile for you.

Read on. *A child is waiting.*



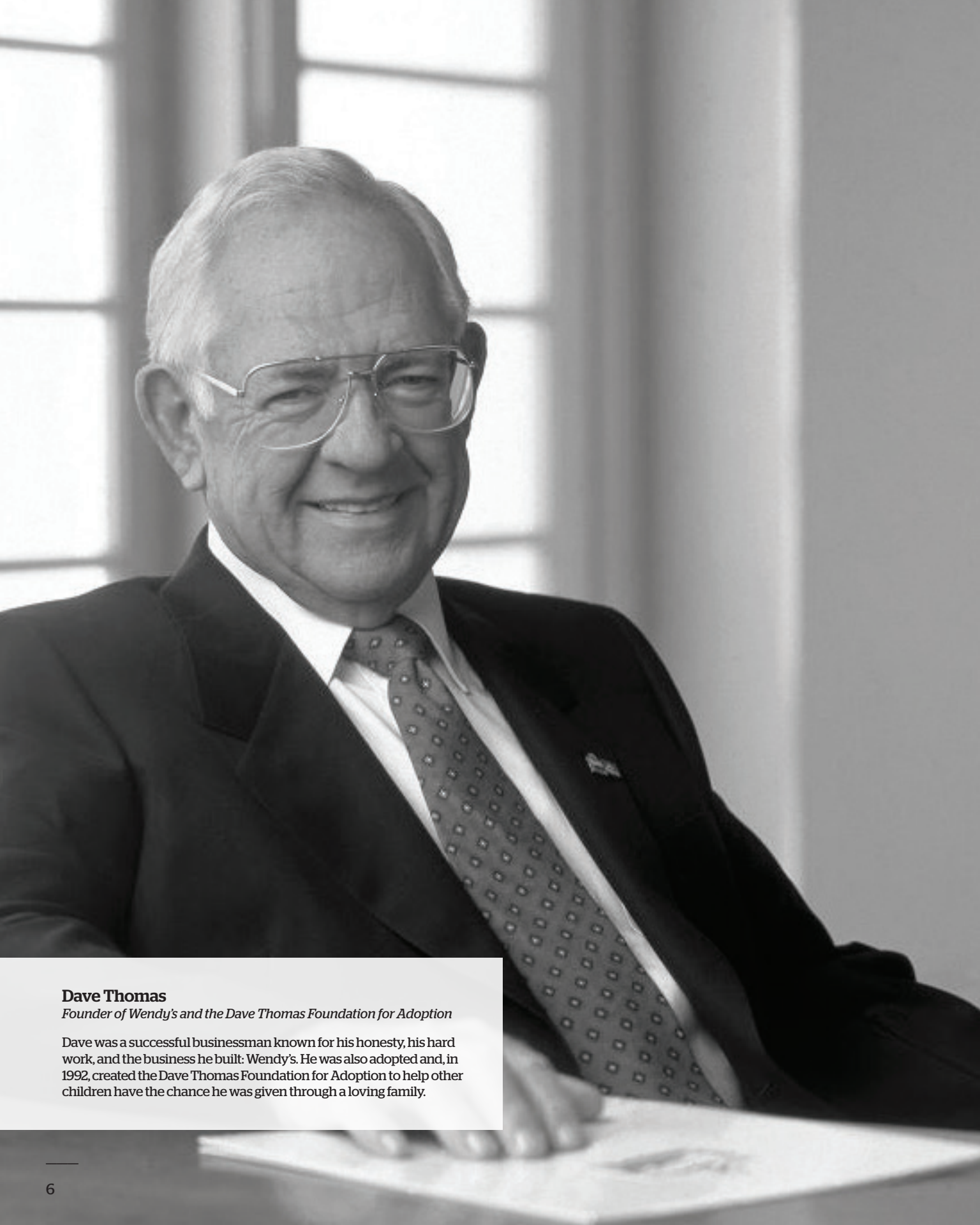
I am home, its final...

I'M IN MY FOREVER HOME."

Becky

Adopted at 13

Newfoundland and Labrador 2016

**Dave Thomas**

Founder of Wendy's and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Dave was a successful businessman known for his honesty, his hard work, and the business he built: Wendy's. He was also adopted and, in 1992, created the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to help other children have the chance he was given through a loving family.

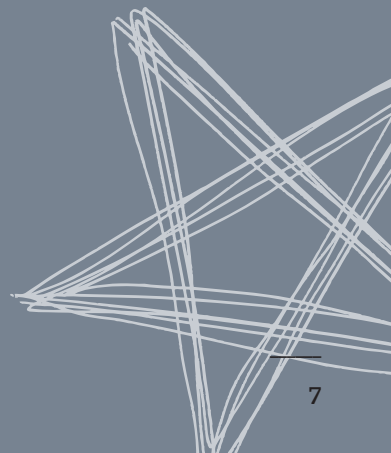
10 steps to building your forever family:

Like Dave, every child has a story to tell, and every adoptive family has its own set of traditions. This makes every adoption unique.

But all adoptions share a common process, and being familiar with the 10 steps in that process will help you be fully prepared to welcome a new child (or children) into your life.

In this helpful step-by-step guide, you'll find all of the information you need to become the future every child deserves.

Read on. Find the facts. *Start your journey.*



STEP 1:

Explore the types of adoption.

*Exploring your wishes for family and your parenting style can help put a successful adoption on the right track. Before choosing what kind of adoption you want, take a quick personal inventory. **How many of the following characteristics describe you?***

- A belief in adoption and the ability to commit to a child
- Patience and perseverance
- A good sense of humour and talent for keeping life in perspective
- A love of children and parenting
- The ability to accept without judgment and to love unconditionally
- Awareness that healing doesn't always come quickly
- Willingness to teach an adopted child about his or her biological culture
(This is a requirement for some international adoptions and highly advised by Aboriginal cultures)
- Resourcefulness

If most (or all) of these qualities describe you, then take it one step further. Ask yourself:

- Do I clearly understand why I want to adopt?
- If I have a partner, do we work as a team? Are we both committed to adoption?
- Does my lifestyle allow me the time necessary to meet the needs of children?
- Have I discussed adoption with all my family members, including my children?
- Do I have support systems to help me after I adopt, or do I know where to find them?

Use your answers to the above questions as food for thought. **Which of the five types of adoption best fit with your beliefs and goals as a parent?**

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Misconception:

More than half of Canadians believe that children in foster care have entered the system because of juvenile delinquency.¹

Reality:

Children enter the system through no fault of their own, as victims of neglect, abandonment or abuse. Children waiting to be adopted may be older, but they are no less deserving of permanent families.

¹Source: Canadian Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.ca.

Where to start

Children's Aid Societies (CAS)

Child welfare in Canada refers to a system of services established by provincial and territorial governments, at times in partnership with private organizations called children's aid societies, to provide services that supplement or substitute for parental care and supervision, including adoption. Each province has a defined system of child welfare services. In all provinces, prospective adoptive parents are assessed by the child-welfare authority (or a licensed private adoption agency) and if approved, and an appropriate child is available, the child will be placed initially in the home for a probationary period before the final adoption order is granted by the court. For province-specific information, contact your Provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development or Youth Services, including:

Provincial Government Adoption Services

ALBERTA Children's Services Adoption child.alberta.ca/home/	NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR Health and Community Services Adoptions www.gov.nf.ca/cyfs	NUNAVUT Health and Social Services www.gov.nu.ca/health	SASKATCHEWAN Social Services Adoption Programs www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/adoption
BRITISH COLUMBIA Children and Family Development Adoption www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption	NORTHWEST TERRITORIES Health and Social Services Guardianship, Adoption, and Foster Care www.hss.gov.nt.ca	ONTARIO Children and Youth Services, Adoption www.children.gov.on.ca/	YUKON Health and Social Services Placement and Support Services www.hss.gov.yk.ca/
MANITOBA Family Services and Housing Adoption www.gov.mb.ca/fs/	NOVA SCOTIA Community Services Adoption www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/	QUÉBEC Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux Secrétariat à adoption internationale www.adoption.gouv.qc.ca/	
NEW BRUNSWICK Social Development Adoption www2.gnb.ca			

The Adoption Council of Canada (ACC)

Promotes adoption in Canada by raising public awareness of adoption, promoting placement of waiting children, and stressing the importance of post-adoption services. Call **888-542-3678**, email **info@adoption.ca**, or visit **adoption.ca**.

The Canada's Waiting Kids (CWK) program

A service of the Adoption Council of Canada. The program's website contains photos and background information on waiting children, as well as valuable adoption information. Call **888-54-ADOPT**, or visit **canadaswaitingkids.ca**.

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)

Promotes and supports permanent families for children and youth in North America, especially children in foster care and those with special needs. The organization also keeps a current list of adoptive parent support groups and other sources for adoption information. Call **651-644-3036**, email **info@nacac.org**, or go to **nacac.org**.

STEP 2: RESEARCH THE COSTS.

Once you've decided which type of adoption to pursue, you can begin to dig deeper into the costs involved.

The total cost of adoption varies depending on the type of adoption, the agency you use, the province or territory in which you live, attorney fees (if applicable) and whether travel is required. It is very important to obtain fee information in writing before beginning the process. You should always request a detailed written explanation of the fees, including what the fees cover and whether extra fees may be added on later.

Covering the costs

Adoption Subsidies

If you adopt a child from foster care, he or she may be eligible for adoption assistance. Adoption assistance payments are designed to help offset the short- and long-term costs of adopting children who need special services.

Benefits vary by province and territory, but these are typically provided:

- Monthly cash payments
- Medical assistance
- Social services
- One-time-only reimbursement of non-recurring adoption expenses

Even if there is no current need for financial assistance, it's important to negotiate a subsidy agreement before the adoption is finalized. After the adoption is finalized, you won't be able to negotiate a subsidy agreement. Pre-adoption legal assistance may be available, depending on the child being adopted and the province or territory.

For a list of adoption assistance by province or territory, go to the Adoption Subsidy Resource Center provided by the North American Council on Adoptable Children at nacac.org.

Misconception:

Foster care adoption is expensive.

Reality:

The truth is that foster care adoption is not expensive, and there is financial support available for parents who choose this path.

Tax Credits and Exclusions

In 2012, the maximum federal tax credit for qualifying expenses in year of finalization was \$11,440.

To learn more about adoption tax benefits, call the Canada Revenue Agency at **800-959-8281** or visit cra-arc.gc.ca.

Military Reimbursements

The Canadian Forces provide parental benefits that assist members in balancing the demands of military service with family responsibilities associated with adopting a child. Eligible members receive time away from their military duties and compensation to care for their adopted children. For more information, contact your local Military Family Resource Centre, or the Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services at cfpsa.com.

Common Range for Adoption Costs:¹

Foster care adoption through a child protection agency: \$0 - \$3,000

Private domestic adoption: \$10,000-\$20,000

International adoption: \$20,000 - \$30,000

¹Source: CanadaAdopts.com, which provides resources, information, and online education for adoptive parents.



STEP 3:

Select an adoption agency.

Not all adoption agencies are alike, so you'll want to choose carefully. Some handle the entire adoption process, helping you throughout. Others expect you to take the initiative to learn about procedures and deadlines. Get a sense of how much control you want over the process and then decide on an approach and agency that fits you best.

You must work with an agency operating in the province or territory where you currently live, and you will have to decide whether to work with a public or private agency.

Find agencies in your area:

- Contact your provincial or territorial adoption department for a list of licensed adoption agencies—both public and private.*
- If you are interested in adopting a child from foster care, check the Wendy's Wonderful Kids agencies at davethomasfoundation.ca/adopt/wwk
- For licensed private adoption agencies, look in the phone book under "Adoptions" or look online.
- Contact adoptive parent support groups or adoptive parents for referrals.

To find a public or private agency that is a good fit for you, your beliefs, and your situation, compare information from several different agencies by asking:

- Is this a licensed agency?
- What kind of children does the agency place (ages, backgrounds, etc.)?
- How many children has the agency placed in each of the past few years?
- How will the agency find a child for me to adopt?
- What criteria does the agency use to match children with families?
- What type of adoptive parents does the agency seek?
- How long, on average, must one wait for a child?
- What are the home study requirements?
- Will the agency pursue children for adoption from another province or territory?
- How much does a completed adoption cost—in total and each part?
- Can the agency help me locate sources of financial aid, including subsidies?
- What if the adoption doesn't work out?
- Can the agency provide references from parents who have recently adopted?

**Note: There are no private adoption agencies in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan or Yukon.*

STEP 4:

Begin to work with an agency.

Once you have selected an agency, it is finally time to begin the formal adoption process. Ask your agency for guidance. Typically, you will attend an orientation meeting or training session for prospective adoptive parents, where you will:

- Meet social workers and learn about policies and practices
- Learn about the children who are available
- Be asked to examine your feelings about adoption and determine if adoption is the right choice for you
- Gain insight into the challenges and rewards of adoptive parenting
- Obtain application materials

Attend an orientation session

If possible, attend an orientation session before filling out an application so you are confident in the agency's abilities to meet your needs. Application fees are often non-refundable, even if you decide to work through a different agency or change your mind about adopting.

Once you have chosen an agency and have completed the application process, ask your social worker how you should go about scheduling and preparing for your homestudy.

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Misconception:

People question if a person over the age of 55 can definitely provide a healthy and loving environment for a child¹

Reality:

Many adopted children live with an adoptive parent 55 years or older.

¹Source: Canadian Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.ca.

STEP 5:

Begin your home study.

A home study is much more than a background check on you and members of your family. It is a way for your social worker to get to know you; to educate you about adoption and how it affects children and families; and to prepare you to parent a child who brings experiences, ideas and expectations that might be different from your own.

Everyone must complete a home study. The process can take from three to six months, depending on the agency, the social worker and the prospective parents' cooperation.

Find out costs and requirements for home studies and parenting classes

Home study Requirements

Home study requirements vary by agency and by province or territory, so you should ask for a list of the items your agency needs to complete the process, such as birth certificates, licenses, personal references, background and criminal checks, and proof of recent physical examinations.

Costs for a home study also vary, depending on the agency type. Public agencies often charge little or nothing. Private agencies typically charge between \$500 and \$3,000.

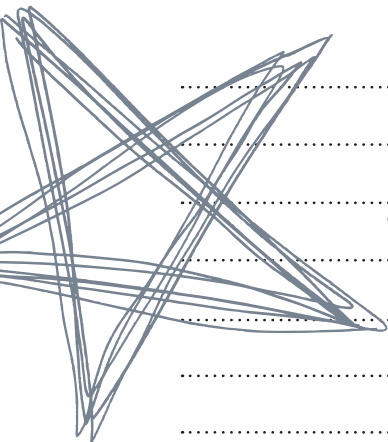
The length of time a home study is valid is determined by your agency and your province or territory.

Adoption Preparation and Parenting Classes

Many agencies offer, and sometimes require, group classes for adoptive families. Even if your agency does not require a training course, you should consider taking this opportunity to learn more about the ages and stages of childhood, the dynamics of abuse and neglect, adoption issues and parenting children who are adopted. The classes provide a forum for you to discuss any questions and concerns you have about the process.

It is important that you be familiar with the kinds of issues that arise when a child or sibling group joins your family. For example, older adopted children may have unique needs and life experiences that will affect their interactions with you, new siblings and new classmates.

Once you have completed the classes and home study, you will be licensed or certified to adopt.



Families help our children heal and grow. There is immense strength in little successes. I believe in small, but powerful steps and I passionately believe that one Wendy's Wonderful Kid's recruiter with strength of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, can make a huge difference, one child at a time, one family at a time, one community at a time."

Darcy Thachuk

Wendy's Wonderful Kid's recruiter from Windsor, Ontario

Misconception:

Some people don't believe that a single parent raising an adopted child can provide a healthy and loving environment.¹

Reality:

Every year, many children adopted from foster care are adopted by single parents or unmarried couples.

¹Source: Canadian Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.ca.

STEP 6:

Find and get to know your child.

Your caseworker will work with you to find a child where both your needs and the child's needs are met. Provincial and territorial child and family service departments, agencies, and organizations have profiles of waiting children and provide additional information about children with special needs who are available for adoption. You may also contact Wendy's Wonderful Kids and work with a recruiter in your province or territory.

Other resources

**Canada's Waiting Kids
a program of Adoption
Council of Canada**
888-54-ADOPT
canadaswaitingkids.ca

**Child Welfare League of
Canada**
613-235-4412
cwlc.ca

Parentbooks
416-537-8334 or 800-209-9182
parentbooks.ca

Interprovincial adoptions are challenging, but possible. You will want to research the individual province or territory regulations on adoptions, such as any restrictions on parents advertising their search to adopt or regulations surrounding open adoptions.

Get to know your child

When you have found a child and have been identified as his or her potential family, learn as much as you can about the child. Talk to foster parents and social workers. How often has the child moved while in care, or changed schools? Does he or she still have contact with extended family? What are the child's favourite foods and games? What is the best way to comfort the child? What is his or her background? What were the birth parents like? What are the family's and child's medical histories? Knowing everything possible about your child will make the transition from foster care much smoother for both you and the child.

Misconception:

Some people question whether same-sex parents can definitely provide a healthy environment for children.¹

Reality:

Many children currently live with a lesbian or gay adoptive parent who provides them with a loving home.

¹Source: Canadian Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.ca.

The agency social worker should provide any available information about the child or the adoption process to help you reach your decision. Your social worker will also help you determine whether your family is the right fit for meeting the child's needs.

If the child has certain medical conditions or challenges, this is the time to decide if your family is prepared and fully committed to addressing any issues that may arise from these special needs.

A child's perspective

It is a simple fact: children waiting for adoption have had a disruptive home life. They've been separated from their birth parents – and often from siblings or extended family – through no fault of their own, and they're often left with feelings of loss and grief and a fear of rejection.

They are eager to belong. But they may doubt themselves because of past experiences, or they may be suspicious of new adults entering their lives. They may not openly discuss specifics, but that doesn't always mean that they have fully accepted or understand the idea behind adoption.

Create a welcoming environment so a child feels comfortable discussing thoughts and feelings with you, and let him or her know that it's okay to talk about it. **As you continue to build a new permanent home for the child, keep in mind some of the questions he or she may have along the way:**

Are you going to give me away someday?
What about my brother and sister?
Will you not only adopt me, but also accept me?
Will I have to change schools?
What if you don't like to do the things I like to do?
Will you want me to call you Mom and Dad?
Will my birth parents think I don't love them?
Will I have to change my name?
Do I dare hope that you will be my forever family?

For more help answering a child's questions:

- Contact your social worker
- Take advantage of counselling offered by the agency
- Join an adoptive parent support group
- Seek adoption-related articles, books and resources



STEP 7:

Prepare for your child and get organized.

It's time. You know your child, and now he or she is ready to be placed in your home. At this point, you need to get all the necessary documents in order, so the transition is smooth for both your child and your family.

Follow this list of necessary preparations

Contact your insurance company.

- Your child will be covered under your health insurance plan beginning on the date he or she is placed in your home. Find out what documents your insurance company requires for authentication, such as the adoption petition.
- Check for any exclusions in your health insurance policy relating to pre-existing conditions.
- Update wills and change beneficiary designations on life insurance policies as needed.

Obtain a copy of your child's original birth certificate.

It may be difficult to get this document once the adoption is finalized, but without it, your child could have trouble getting passports and other important documents.

Prepare to get an updated Social Insurance number, health card and birth certificate.

These forms recognize the child's new last name and family situation. Your child must have a Social Insurance number for you to claim him or her as a dependant.

Line up services for your child and for yourself.

- Day care if you adopt a younger child – some provinces and territories provide it
- School enrolment for older children
- Therapy, counselling, tutoring and child care options
- An adoptive parents' support group

The most important thing to remember is to ask for what you need. Be an advocate for yourself and your child.

Misconception:

Some considering adoption are concerned that the biological parents will be able to take the child back.¹

Reality:

Once a child has been legally made available for adoption, the birth parents cannot claim a child or petition for his or her return.

¹Source: Canadian Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2013. Commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and conducted by Harris Interactive. Available at davethomasfoundation.ca.

Make your house child-friendly.

First, prepare your child's new room to show that the area belongs to him or her. Modify, reposition or remove any household objects that could be dangerous.

Inform your other children of specific changes that will occur.

Tell them how their roles and lives may change for the better when their new sibling arrives. Be proactive, and prepare to help them through the transition.

Negotiate an adoption assistance agreement.

Parents who adopt eligible children with special needs from a child protection agency or a provincial or territorial child and family services department may qualify for some assistance. You must negotiate the subsidy before the adoption is finalized.

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It was never a matter of if, but rather when, Yves would legally join his family. He was officially adopted a week before his 18th birthday, which is truly one of the most rewarding adoption journeys I've had the privilege to witness. Wendy's Wonderful Kids saved Yves from aging out of the system."

Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiter

STEP 8:

Bring your child home and petition to adopt.

Children who are placed with an adoptive family through a public agency may move in as soon as the parents are approved. This means you have completed all required pre-placement visits and the timing is not disruptive to the child's schooling or other activities. You assume temporary legal custody of the child once he or she is placed in your home.

Your adoption agency will monitor the placement while your family adjusts. This monitoring period normally takes about six months, but can be as short as a few weeks and as long as a year. The social worker may call or visit so that you can discuss how the placement is working for your new child and for you. The next step is for your agency to recommend that the court approve your adoption.

Filing documents with the court

At the end of the monitoring period, documents are filed with the court to begin finalizing the adoption. Adoptive parents formally request permission to adopt a specific child with this paperwork. The court will issue a document confirming the adoption after it's finalized. Depending on where you live in Canada, this is often called an adoption decree or adoption order.

In most cases, your child protection authorities will prepare all the necessary documents for the court and for necessary stipulations. Contact your social worker or agency to learn how to proceed with the finalization of your child's adoption.



STEP 9: **Finalize the adoption.**

A finalization hearing legally completes the adoption process. It takes place within 12 months of when the child is placed in your home. If you are adopting through a public child welfare agency, the court will schedule the hearing and the agency will do the necessary paperwork. You may not have to appear in court; in some cases, you may not be allowed to appear. This is different in all jurisdictions and may also depend on the age of the child. Check with your social worker to learn what the process is where you live.

Private agencies often prepare all the required documents for the court. Check with your ministry or local agency to learn what the procedures are in your province or territory.

To verify that the adoption should occur, the court will attempt to establish that the child has been placed in a safe, loving home. The agency that is representing you will give its final report and recommendation to the court as required, depending on the jurisdiction where you reside.

As soon as the judge signs the adoption decree or order, you gain permanent, legal custody of your child. Finalization is the last formal step in the adoption process and the official beginnings of your new family.

IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE WITH YOUR NEW FOREVER FAMILY.

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STEP 10:

Celebrate! Be a family. Stay informed.

Children who are adopted from foster care often have had difficult starts in life. As a result, they may need help with behavioural, emotional or developmental issues. Adoptive parents can access post-adoption resources to help their children thrive, such as family and child counselling, parent support groups, specialized educational support, respite child care, and grief and loss counselling. Ask your adoption agency if it provides financial assistance for post-adoption needs.

What's next? Finding post-adoption resources:

- Ask your adoption agency for recommendations
- Search provincial and territorial post-adoption provider listings online
- Ask adoptive parents or local adoption support groups for referrals
- Find out if your employer provides resources

Choosing a provider

Find a professional who understands the needs of adopted children and their families. Does he or she have experience with foster and adoptive families? Has he or she received adoption-related training? Can you receive a reference from one or two families he or she has worked with previously?

Most importantly, once you've successfully completed the adoption process, you're not all on your own. Become familiar and stay in touch with the following agencies and resources that can help you along the way.

Adoption Council of Canada

adoption.ca/post-adoption-support-training

Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia

<https://www.bcadoption.com/>

Canada's Waiting Kids - Information and Support Groups

canadawaitingkids.ca/support.html

North American Council on Adoptable Children

nacac.org



*I feel privileged to have been
adopted because I have a chance to be*

LOVED BY SOMEONE.

-Adrianna, age 14

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What types of adoption are available?

A: The three main types of adoption are:

- Private adoptions of children from licensed private entities
- Public adoptions of children in foster care through provincial or territorial child protection agencies (such as Children's Aid Societies and child and family service agencies)
- International adoptions of children from outside Canada

There are a few additional options for specific situations: If you are Aboriginal, you can adopt a child of Aboriginal descent via a custom adoption. Kinship adoption and stepparent adoption are for members of a child's family who want to adopt the child.

Q: What are the qualifications to adopt? For example, do we as adoptive parents have to be the same race or have the same ethnic background as the child we adopt? Do we have to be married, or within a certain age range or income level?

A: If you adopt from foster care, the answer is no to all of the above. Families are as diverse as the children who are available for adoption.

Q: What qualities are important for parents who adopt?

A: Traits like flexibility, patience, good problem-solving skills and a willingness to identify local community resources are all critical. Children don't need perfect parents, just loving individuals willing to meet the unique challenges of parenting and make a lifetime commitment to caring for and nurturing them.

Q: What is the adoption process?

A: The adoption process can vary depending on the type of adoption; the agency through which you work; the province or territory in which you live; and the province, territory or country in which the child resides. Once you choose an adoption agency, the social worker will walk you through the process. In all cases, a home study, a background check, medical evaluations, references and specialized training are required.

A child's Aboriginal heritage is honoured with every attempt to place him or her with family or within an Aboriginal community. Aboriginal child and family service agencies work both on and off reserves and actively participate in adoption processes.

Q: What is a home study?

A: A home study is an in-depth application and interview process with a social worker that involves in-person interviews, reference checks, background checks and home visits. The study is not standardized and may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Q: How much does adoption cost?

A: If a public agency places a child, fees will be \$0 - \$3,000. For private and international adoptions, the cost varies due to a number of factors, like the type of adoption, the agency you choose, the province or territory where you live, lawyer fees and whether travel is required. Local private adoptions can cost from \$15,000 to \$25,000, while international adoptions might cost anywhere from \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Q: How long does the adoption process take?

A: There are many variables that determine how long it will take to complete the adoption process, like where you live and the availability of training, the length of time to complete the home study and the length of time to identify a child for your family. On average, the adoption process takes one to two years.

Q: Who are the children in foster care?

A: Children in foster care have been removed from their families due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. A child might live temporarily with extended family, with a foster family or in a group home while social workers try to help the birth family. If the birth family's problems can't be resolved, the provincial or territorial authority that has custody of the child goes to court to legally terminate parental rights. At this point, social workers try to find a safe and loving adoptive family for the child.

Ages range from infant to teenager, and virtually every race, ethnic group and socioeconomic category is represented. Some children are waiting alone, and others are waiting with siblings.

Q: How do I find the right adoption agency for me?

A: To find an adoption agency that is a good fit for your family, compare information from several agencies after asking these questions:

- Is the agency licensed by the province or territory?
- What kind of children does the agency place?
- How many children does the agency place each year?
- How does the agency conduct searches for waiting children?
- What criteria does the agency use to match children with families?
- Can the agency provide references from parents who have recently adopted?

Why foster care adoption?

Because *every child* deserves a safe home and a loving family. These children are *our responsibility*.

Glossary of Adoption Terms

Adoption: A legal process in which an adult assumes legal and other responsibilities for another, usually a minor.

Adoption agency: A provincially or territorially licensed organization responsible for placing children with prospective adoptive individuals or families. Agencies can be publicly or privately operated. If public, they are child protection agencies.

Adoption agreement: A document in which birth parents and adoptive parents agree to a plan that lays out the parameters of their relationship and the degree of communication between them.

Adoption benefits: Compensation to workers through employer-sponsored programs that may include financial reimbursement for adoption expenses and paid or unpaid adoption leave.

Adoption decree/Adoption order: The document issued by the court once an adoption is finalized that states the adoptee is the legal child of the adoptive parents.

Adoption facilitator: An individual who assists prospective adoptive parents in their quest to find a child. Facilitators can be licensed or unlicensed and are illegal in some parts of Canada. Typically he or she works independently of private or public agencies that employ social workers to facilitate adoptions.

Adoption licensee: An individual or agency that arranges placement of adoptive children.

Adoption placement: The point at which a child begins to live with prospective adoptive parents or, in the case of foster care adoption, the point at which the status of the placement changes to adoption.

Adoption resource exchange: An event that facilitates the matching of waiting children with prospective adoptive parents.

Adoption subsidies: Also known as adoption assistance, these benefits help offset the short- and long-term costs associated with adopting children who need special services.

Child profile: A comprehensive review of a child's family medical history.

Children's Aid Society: This public child protection agency is funded by the provincial government and is responsible for protecting children and youth, finding them foster homes, and placing them with permanent families.

Concurrent planning: A process used in foster care case management by which child protection staff work toward family reunification and, at the same time, develop an alternative permanency plan for the child (such as permanent placement with a relative or adoption) should family reunification efforts fail. This planning is intended to reduce the time a child spends in foster care before being placed with a permanent family.

Consent form: The legal document signed by birth parents that voluntarily terminates their parental rights to their child.

Custody: The care, control, and maintenance of a child that is legally awarded by the court to an agency (in abuse and neglect cases) or to parents (in divorce, separation, or adoption proceedings). Child welfare departments retain legal custody and control of major decisions for a child in foster care. Foster parents do not have legal custody of the children for whom they provide care.

Custom adoption: A form of adoption specific to Aboriginal culture that takes place within the Aboriginal community and recognizes traditional customs. For example, in Alberta, bands place Aboriginal children with families on reserves, using custom adoption ceremonies that both recognize traditional practices and conform to provincial law. In the territories, strong traditions of custom adoption have helped Inuit keep their children in their communities.

Disruption: When a child leaves the adoptive home prior to the finalization of the adoption. This can occur when the adoptive parents choose to return the child for reasons of their own, or when the agency disrupts the adoption if the adoptive parents are not complying with post-placement requirements or are endangering the child in any way.

Domestic adoption: The adoption of a child living in the same country as the adoptive parents.

Finalization: The legal process that makes the adoption permanent and binding.

Foster adoption: In this type of placement, foster parents agree to adopt the child if and when parental rights are terminated. Social workers place the child with specially trained foster-adopt parents who will work with the child during family reunification efforts but who will adopt the child if he or she becomes available for adoption.

Foster parent(s): An individual or couple who has temporary care of a child but has no legal rights in determining certain aspects of a child's life.

Fostering with a view to adopt: The placement of a child into a prospective adoptive family when the birth parents' rights have not yet been legally severed or when rights have been severed but the appeal period has not expired.

Guardian ad litem: A person, sometimes an attorney, appointed by the court to ensure that the child's best interests are addressed in court hearings and other proceedings.

Hague Convention: The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, inaugurated in 1993, is an international treaty setting the framework for the adoption of children between countries. The aim is to protect the best interests of adopted children and prevent abuses such as child trafficking. The Convention standardizes procedures between the adoption authority in the child's country of origin and the corresponding authority in the receiving country. Each country which has ratified the Convention designates a central authority to regulate requests for intercountry adoption and accredit adoption agencies.

Home study: Also called a family profile, this is an in-depth review that prospective adoptive parents must complete to be able to legally adopt. A home study typically includes inspections of the adoptive parents' residence; evaluations of their relationship, parenting ideals, medical history, and financial status; employment verification; and criminal background checks. Home studies can become outdated and typically need to be renewed after 18 months.

International adoption: The adoption of a child who is a citizen of one country by adoptive parents who are citizens of a different country.

Kinship adoption: The adoption of a child by a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, another member of the extended family, a godparent or someone else considered kin.

Kinship care: The method of providing children with care by relatives or extended family. The arrangement may include a foster care placement or a pre-adoption placement.

Legally free for adoption: A child is legally free when the parental rights of both birth parents have been terminated and the time period for the birth parents to appeal the decision has passed.

Life book: A pictorial and written representation of a child's life designed to help the child understand his or

her unique background and history. The life book usually includes input by or information on birth parents, other relatives, birthplace and birthdate and can be put together by social workers or foster or adoptive parents working with the child.

Matching: The process of combining the best interests of the child with qualified adoptive parents.

Mixed bank adoption: The term used in Québec (*adoption en banque mixte*) that is equivalent to "fostering with a view to adoption."

Open adoption: An adoption plan in which identifying information about birth and adoptive families is openly shared. There may be ongoing contact after placement occurs.

Open records: Accessibility to adoption records by each member of the triad (the birth parents, the adoptive parents and the adoptee).

Parental rights: All legal rights and corresponding legal obligations that come with being the legal parent of a child.

Permanency planning: A goal-directed process designed to prepare children and families for a permanent living arrangement. This includes adoption, legal guardianship or permanent placement with a relative or non-relative. It also includes independent living or adult residential care.

Photo listing: A list of children available for adoption, usually through public child protection agencies, including photos and descriptions. It may be printed in a book or newspaper, shown on TV or posted on a website.

Placement: The point in time when the child goes to live with his or her legal adoptive parent

Post-legal adoption services: Services provided subsequent to legal finalization of the adoption. There are primarily three types of post-legal service providers: public agencies, private therapists, and community organizations. Services may consist of subsidies, respite care, counselling, day care, medical equipment, support groups and peer support programs.

Post-placement supervision: Upon placement, a social worker will be assigned to complete post-placement supervision of the adoptive family. The social worker will visit the home several times during a set period of time (according to province or territory requirements) to determine if adoption of the child is in the best interests of the child.

Glossary continued on following page...

Glossary of Adoption Terms *continued ...*

Private adoption: An adoption arranged by a privately funded, licensed adoption agency. Most provinces allow private adoption, which is regulated by the provincial ministry responsible for adoptions. Ministries license individuals and agencies to place children privately, approve the social workers to conduct home studies and monitor the performance of licensees and social workers.

Private agency: A nongovernment adoption agency that is licensed by the province or territory the agency operates in. Private agencies charge fees for their services.

Probation period: The time between placement of a child with the adoptive family and finalization, which is when the adoption is legalized in court. It varies by province or territory but is at least six months. This applies to both domestic adoptions and international adoptions not finalized abroad. During the probation period, the licensee monitors the adoptive family and adopted child.

Public adoption: An adoption arranged through a provincial or territorial ministry or agency funded by the provincial or territorial government.

Public adoption agency/Public child protection agency: A government-funded agency that provides a variety of services for children and families, including adoption. Services are usually provided at no cost.

Relinquishment: The voluntary surrender by a birth parent of legal rights to his or her child. It's a legally binding process involving the signing of documents and court action. If birth parents don't voluntarily surrender their rights, the court may act to terminate those rights.

Respite care: Temporary care provided for a child.

Reunion registry: A service that allows adult members of the adoption triad (the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the adoptee) who wish to learn about birth relatives to register personal data and ask for notification if other parties from the same triad register.

Special needs children: The specific meaning of this term varies by province, but typically it refers to children who have a diagnosed physical, mental or emotional disturbance or disability, or who have a recognized high risk of such. It is also sometimes used to describe children who belong to a sibling group that is waiting to be adopted or has been previously adopted; who are older; or who belong to a minority population.

Subsidy: A government benefit to offset the costs of adopting and raising a special needs child.

Supervision: The process through which the licensee visits the adoptive home during the probation period to see if the child is adjusting well and to give advice and support.

Termination of parental rights: The legal process that involuntarily severs a parent's rights to a child.

Transracial adoption: The adoption of a child who is a different race than the adoptive family. The adoptive family should be prepared to incorporate the child's heritage and culture into their lives and to teach the child about their background so they have a strong sense of identity and self-esteem.

Triad: The three parties involved in adoption: the birth parents, the adoptive parents and the adoptee.

Waiting children: Children in the public child protection system who cannot return to their birth homes and need permanent, loving families to help them grow up safe and secure. They are legally free for adoption.

Ward/Crown ward/Permanent ward: A child in foster care who, by order of a court or Children's Aid Society, has been made the legal responsibility of the government. If the child's parents are unable to care for him or her, and if efforts to reunite the child with family fail, the province or territory can be given parental rights for the child and then work to develop a permanency plan.



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