



Adopting as a Single Parent

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) found that almost 15,000 single women and nearly 2,000 single men adopted children or youth from foster care in Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017 (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport25.pdf>). More than one-quarter (28 percent) of the children adopted from foster care in FFY 2017 were adopted by single people. The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids (2014), a former service of the Children's Bureau, urges adoption agencies to clarify their commitment to welcome, support, and encourage a diversity of families, including single parents, when recruiting prospective parents.

This factsheet discusses issues that are specifically relevant to single people considering adoption. It includes information about adoption opportunities available to you, including domestic adoption, intercountry adoption, and adopting from foster care. It also discusses the importance of having a support system and dispels the myth that being single impedes the adoption process. On the contrary, this factsheet shows that single people who choose adoption to grow their families have many adoption options and join the millions of parents who are single and raising healthy, thriving children.

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Adoption Opportunities

As you consider your adoption options, you will need to decide whether to adopt domestically (i.e., a child born in the United States) or from another country, what kind of agency to work with, and what type of adoption works best for you.

If you choose to adopt a child domestically, you will need to research the adoption-specific laws in your State. For detailed information on considerations for becoming an adoptive parent, including State laws in terms of marital status, see the Child Welfare Information Gateway webpage, *Who Can Adopt?* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/whocan/>).

For domestic adoptions, you will likely work with one of four types of agencies or service providers:

- **Public agencies** facilitate matches and provide support services for children and youth in foster care waiting for adoptive homes.
- **Licensed private agencies** typically help birth parents match infants to adoptive parents.
- **Attorneys** generally help families who have already connected with expectant mothers or assist expectant parents in identifying adoptive families.
- **Facilitated or unlicensed agencies** link prospective adoptive parents with expectant birth mothers for a fee (some States prohibit adoptions by paid facilitators).

If you decide to adopt through the intercountry process, you will be required to work with an accredited or approved adoption services provider. You can find information about identifying and working with an adoption services provider on the U.S. Department of State's webpage, *Working With an ASP* (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/about-adoption-service-providers/working-with-an-ASP.html>).

For detailed information on intercountry and domestic adoption opportunities, see the Information Gateway factsheet for families, *Adoption Options: Where Do I Start?* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-adoption/>), and the webpage, *What Are My Choices in Adoption?* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/choices/>).

Foster Care Adoption

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System report, more than 100,000 children and youth in foster care are waiting to be adopted (see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars> for the most recent data on foster care and adoption trends). State child welfare agencies welcome single parents, male or female, to provide permanent homes for children in foster care (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parties.pdf>). If you are interested in adopting a child or youth from foster care, you will want to consider the experiences of children who enter foster care. Many of these children have experienced trauma or have difficulties with attachment (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/child-trauma.pdf>). For these children, a parent's ability to provide a safe, loving, and nurturing home may be more important than living in a two-parent household. Other situations favor single parents. For example, a single mother may be the best placement for a girl who has experienced abuse from a male member of the family (<https://www.fosteringsolutions.com/news-events/can-you-foster-single-parent>). In foster care, a caseworker will consider the child's best interests to determine whether you are the right match, regardless of your single status.

Find information on the various stages of the adoption process, State-specific resources, and more on the Information Gateway webpage, *Adopting Children From Foster Care* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/choices/foster-care/>).

Private Domestic Adoption

Because of the increased number of adoptions that begin with birth parents choosing the adoptive family, birth families, particularly birth mothers, are increasingly involved in the selection of adoptive parents for their infants. For a variety of reasons, some birth mothers may express a preference for single-parent families. For example, they may appreciate that a single parent does not face a current risk of divorce, separation, or domestic violence issues. Through home studies, private agencies assure birth parents that the adoptive parent's background, financial standing, and home environment

are stable and that the adoptive mother or father is committed to providing a nurturing home for their child. After that, the birth parent makes the decision based on what they care most deeply about.

Whatever type of domestic adoption you choose, be sure that you are working with people who support your efforts and will be strong allies for your child(ren) and family.

For more information on adopting through a private agency or through an attorney, visit the Information Gateway webpage, Adopting Infants Domestically Through a Licensed Private Agency or an Attorney (Independent Adoption) (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/choices/domestic-adopt/>), and the homepage of the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (<https://adoptionart.org/>).

Intercountry Adoption

Many single people have successfully built their families by adopting children from other countries. Laws regarding prospective adoptive parent eligibility, including marital status, vary from country to country. An accredited or approved adoption services provider can guide you on which countries welcome single-parent applicants and whether the foreign government in the country where you wish to adopt imposes restrictions on single parents, such as the gender or age of the child. You may also find information on a specific country's laws on adoption using the U.S. Department of State's country-specific information search page (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/Intercountry-Adoption-Country-Information.html>).

You may be asked to provide more references than married couples, and your gender may determine whether you can adopt a boy or a girl. In some countries, for example, single men may adopt only boys, and in others they are determined eligible to adopt on a case-by-case basis. Regardless of gender, the criteria, wait times, and costs differ for each country. Accredited or approved adoption services providers that work with specific countries will help you find available programs to complete the adoption process in accordance with the standards set forth in the Hague Convention.

For more about the Hague Convention and other intercountry adoption information, visit the Information Gateway webpage, Adopting Children From Another Country (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/choices/other-country/>), and the factsheet for families, *Intercountry Adoption: Where Do I Start?* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-inter/>).

If you are considering raising a child of a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background than your own, learning about the culture and ways to connect your child to his or her cultural community may provide meaningful ways to help your child thrive. For more advice on successful transracial adoption, read other suggestions from AdoptUSKids (<https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/envisioning-your-family/transracial-adoption>).

Selecting an Adoption Agency

Selecting an agency that is right for you means finding people you trust and services that include the level of training and support you need. You should feel free to ask for references of clients who have recently finalized adoptions in order to contact them to ask about their experience with the agency from beginning to end. It is also a good idea to ask the agency probing questions such as the following:

- How many adoptions did you complete in the past year?
- How many single-parent adoptions did you complete in the past year?
- Do you provide support specifically for single parents?
- What are the fees associated with the home study, placement, and postplacement visits?

For more information, see the Information Gateway webpage, Finding an Adoption Agency webpage (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/finding-agency/>).

Being a Single Adoptive Parent

As with all adoptive families, you should have proper training and preparation before you welcome a child into your home, as well as ongoing support during the adoption process and after the adoption is finalized. You may also want to carefully consider how your support system and job can affect your readiness to adopt and what adjustments you may want to make to prepare for your child or youth.

Preadoption Training

Most trainings for domestic adoptions are offered by an adoption agency. Agencies may provide trainings for their clients that address a variety of issues, such as adoption through the perspective of young children or teens, parenting children with attachment disorders, and helping children in transracial adoptions to develop healthy racial socialization and identity (<https://adoptionsupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/C.A.S.E.-Trainings-for-Parents-and-Professionals.pdf>). Most trainings are developed by adoption experts and can be conducted remotely or in person. Agencies may provide resources in addition to or in place of formal trainings. Examples of web-based courses include the following:

- Adoption Learning Partners (<https://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/>)
- FosterParentCollege.com (<http://www.fosterparentcollege.com/index.jsp>)

Nationally recognized preadoption curricula for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents can be found on the Information Gateway webpage, Preadoption Training (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/before-adoption/preadoption/>).

State agencies also provide preadoptive and foster care training. Although trainings vary from State to State, they can help prepare you for certain behaviors common to children in foster care and those who are adopted from foster care. Some States train families using a nationally

recognized curriculum, such as PATH (Parents as Tender Healers) (10 weeks) or PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) (87 hours), while other States may use locally adapted versions of these or other curricula. Trainings also offer adoptive parents with the opportunity to develop connections with the other parents in these classes (whether single or not). These parents may become your most competent and reliable child care providers. And you don't have to educate them about behaviors they may experience from your child. They already know from their own experience.

Learn more about trainings for those who want to adopt from foster care, including State-specific training requirements, by visiting the following AdoptUSKids' webpages:

- Training to Become a Foster Parent or to Adopt (<https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/getting-approved/training>)
- State Adoption and Foster Care Information (<https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/state-information>)

For intercountry adoption, prospective parents must meet the preadoption training requirements of their State of residence as well as certain Federal requirements (see 22 CFR 96.48), for which accredited or approved adoption services providers are responsible.

Your Support System

All parents need support. As a single parent, you will find your support system to be especially critical. Due to the understanding that continued contact with birth families can mitigate the trauma and other effects of separation from families of origin, all foster care agencies and many private agencies now favor adoptions that involve ongoing relationships between birth and adoptive families. In some instances, this preference may open support systems for single parents.

Consider the following questions about your relationships with family and friends:

- Do you have people you are close to whom you feel comfortable asking for help?
- Are your friends and family supportive of your decision to parent alone?
- How might your friends and family feel about the children you may adopt?
- Will your friends and family accept your child if he or she is of a different race or from a different country and culture? Will they be tolerant of your child's need to learn a new language, overcome past trauma, and understand how to be part of a family?

Talk to friends and family about specific needs that might arise after you bring your child home. Share as much information as you can about your child with your existing support system, so that you get a sense of what they can and will help with and what additional support might be helpful. For example:

- Who will help when you or your child is sick?
- Who will answer a phone call in the middle of the night?
- Who lives close by and can provide help at a moment's notice, if needed?
- Is there someone you would trust to provide an overnight break or a weekend away?
- Who could pick up your child from school, if you were stuck at work or in traffic?
- Whom could you trust to act as guardian for your child, in the event of your death?
- Who will participate in your efforts to expose your child to his or her cultural heritage if it is different from your own?

If answering these questions is difficult, you may need to strengthen or expand your support system before you adopt. Other adoptive and single-parent families, especially role models of the same gender/identity as your child, can be a great source of mutual support or an occasional break.

For emotional support, it is strongly recommended that you join a postadoption (or post-foster placement) support group. Given the separation and loss experienced by children in foster care or by those who are adopted, other adoptive parents may understand your experience and your child's development better than anyone else. Also, consider joining an online or Facebook group for single adoptive parents. For intercountry adoptions, some accredited or approved adoption services providers organize postadoption support groups, and parent-run organizations, such as Families With Children From China, Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption, and others, provide support to families with children adopted from specific countries or regions. But do not make such groups your primary source of support. You will need more than this, as well as some time to yourself or with friends. Do not neglect nurturing yourself!

Over time, your support system will naturally evolve, and new people will likely come into your life because of your child. Nonetheless, it is essential to be prepared with multiple options for support, including child care. Single parents sometimes lose part of their support system early on and have to rely on other, more recent support for child care. Have backup support in place before bringing your child home—and well before a crisis.

It is strongly recommended that you develop a will immediately after the adoption. Choosing family or friends who are reliable and willing to raise your child in the event of incapacitation or death will prevent the possibility of your child returning to foster care or to the custody of a State agency.

Your Job

As a single parent, it is likely that you will have a full-time job. Consider the hours you will spend working, commuting, and sleeping, as well as performing routine parenting responsibilities, such as preparing meals, doing housework, and helping with homework. Think, too, about your employer and the nature of your work. For example:

- Do you consider your employer to be family friendly? Are family and medical leave available to you? Will you be able to take the time you need when you bring your child home?

- Does your schedule allow for flexibility? Will you be able to leave at a moment's notice if you get a call from your child's school? Can you work from home when your child is sick?
- What is your company's policy regarding sick days and personal leave time? Are these days going to be enough to care for both your own and your child's illnesses or emergency needs?
- How much travel does your job require? Is travel optional or flexible? Will you be able to bring your child with you? Who will care for him or her while you are away?

To learn about employer benefits, see the Information Gateway publication, *Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits* (https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/f_benefi.pdf; a Spanish version is available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/sp_benefi.pdf.)

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption webpage, *Adoption-Friendly Workplace*, also features information on workplace-related financial benefits (<https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/our-programs/adoption-friendly-workplace/>).

A Note About Finances and Adoption Costs

One common myth about adoption is that only wealthy parents can adopt and successfully raise healthy, happy children. First and foremost, children need loving families. But the costs associated with adoptions may be particularly relevant to single parents, who typically rely on one income.

Adoption costs can vary widely depending on the type of adoption you choose. In general, if you adopt from foster care, adoption costs will be low or even free. If you choose private domestic or intercountry adoption, costs, such as agency or adoption services provider fees, will be considerably more expensive.

Many children who are adopted from foster care are eligible for Federal and State adoption assistance (subsidy) to help with the cost of their continued care. If you adopt through private domestic or intercountry adoption, your child may also be eligible for nonrecurring expenses, including reasonable and necessary adoption fees, court costs, and attorney fees as well as expenses that are directly related to the legal adoption of a child with special needs. These expenses must not be incurred in violation of State/Tribal or Federal law or reimbursed from other sources or funds. Although it is rare, children adopted through private domestic or intercountry adoption may also be eligible for an adoption subsidy. Each State's adoption assistance policy varies, so you should review what subsidies and other supports your State offers. For State-by-State information on adoption assistance, visit the Information Gateway webpage, *Adoption Assistance by State* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance/>).

To help further offset adoption costs, Federal or State tax credits, loans, grants, or employer-provided adoption benefits may also be available to you. For more detailed information about adoption costs and support, see the following Information Gateway resources:

- *Planning for Adoption: Knowing the Costs and Resources* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s-cost/>)
- *Adoption Costs and Sources of Financial Support* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/expenses/>)

Tips From Other Adoptive Parents

When your child first comes home, plan to spend as much dedicated time as possible creating an environment where he or she feels safe, secure, and loved. No matter how young or old they are when they come to your home, adoptive children are experiencing a loss of everything they have known and are probably frightened. Experienced single parents recommend preparing early, even before you are matched with a child. They emphasize the following tips:

- Connect with an adoption support group. For a State-by-State listing of support groups, see the Information Gateway webpage, National Foster Care & Adoption Directory (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/>). Select your State and check the box for “Kinship, Foster Care and Adoption Support Groups.”
- Create a “lifebook” for your child. These books are recommended for all children, especially if they have had multiple foster homes. Learn more on the Information Gateway webpage, Lifebooks (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/lifebooks/>).
- Get training on the core issues of adoption. For information on the seven core issues of adoption, see the webpage, Lifelong Issues in Adoption (<https://adoption.com/lifelong-issues-in-adoption>).

For tips and encouragement from single and married adoptive parents, read adoption stories from AdoptUSKids (<https://blog.adoptuskids.org/?s=adoption+stories>).

— “[A] key to working through their trauma was keeping an eye on the bigger picture and the boys’ potential for future success. Knowing that whatever might be happening, it was not going to last forever and remembering that every storm, no matter how big, would eventually pass.” (A single adoptive mother, AdoptUSKids)

Conclusion

Many single people have successfully adopted children, and many more are parenting adopted children due to divorce, deployment, or the death of a spouse. Although every adoptive family is different, most single parents agree that the joy of bringing a child into their lives far outweighs the potential challenges of being a single parent. Millions of children are growing up healthy and happy in single-parent households, and yours can, too. What is most important is that you prepare, train, and build support to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home for your adopted child.

Additional Resources

Parenting Resources for Adoptive Families

Adoption may involve feelings of separation and loss for the child, although the degree varies greatly. Adoption-related issues may arise at any point during your child’s life. The following resources provide general parenting information for all adoptive families, including information on understanding and helping children cope with separation and loss:

- *Effects of Separation and Loss on Children’s Development* (<https://www.fosterclub.com/sites/default/files/Effects%20of%20Separation%20and%20Loss%20on%20Childrens%20Development.pdf>)
- Grief & Loss (<https://www.nacac.org/help/parenting/grief-and-loss/>)
- Helping Adopted Children Cope With Grief and Loss (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/helping/>)
- *Helping Your Child Transition From Foster Care to Adoption* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-transition/>)
- Parenting After Adoption (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/>)
- *Parenting Your Adopted Preschooler* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preschool/>)
- *Parenting Your Adopted School-Age Child* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent-school-age/>)
- *Parenting Your Adopted Teenager* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent-teenager/>)

- Potential Parenting Challenges (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/before-adoption/potential-parenting-challenges/>)
- *Too Many Losses, Too Soon: Loss and Grief Among Foster and Adopted Children* (<https://adoptionssupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Too-Many-Losses.pdf>)
- *Understanding Ambiguous Loss* (<https://azfamilyresources.org/pdf/UnderstandingAmbiguousLoss.pdf>)

Many resources available for adoptive families apply also to single-parent adoptive families. The following is a brief selection of additional resources that may be of particular interest to those considering single-parent adoption.

Other Child Welfare Information Gateway Resources

- *Accessing Adoption Support and Preservation Services* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-postadoption/>)
- Adoption by Family Type: Single Parents (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/family-type/single-parents/>)
- *Adoption Options: Where Do I Start?* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-adoption/>)
- Learning From Other Adoptive Families (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/before-adoption/connecting/>)
- Kinship/Relative Adoption (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/relatives/adoption/>)
- Preparing Emotionally for Adoption (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/before-adoption/preparing/>)

Other Resources

- AdoptUSKids: Provides information about adoption training, local rules, and agencies in your State (<https://www.adoptuskids.org/>)
- Adoption Learning Partners: Provides a wide range of online training on a variety of adoption-related topics (<https://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/>)

- *Adoption Today/Fostering Families Today*: Highlights resources for foster care, domestic adoption, and intercountry adoption (<https://fosteringfamielstoday.com/>)
- Adoptions Together: Provides support for single women and men who have a desire to grow their family through adoption (<https://www.adoptionstogether.org/adopting/single-parent-adoption/>)
- Adoptive Families: Single Parenting: Find articles, books, and other resources for single adoptive parents (<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/tag/single-adoptive-parenting/>)
- Intercountry Adoption Accreditation and Maintenance Entity: Accredits and oversees adoption services providers for intercountry adoptions (<https://www.iaame.net/>)
- National Council for Adoption: Addresses the needs of all members of the adoption constellation through education, research, legislative action, and collaboration (<http://www.adoptioncouncil.org/>)
- North American Council on Adoptable Children: Offers information and resources about how to adopt, adoption subsidies, parent groups, postadoption support, and more (<http://www.nacac.org>)
- Single Mothers by Choice: Provides support and information to single women who are considering, or have chosen, single motherhood (<http://www.singlemothersbychoice.org/>)

Reference

National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids. (2014). *Improving customer service: Prospective parent orientation sessions: 10 things you can do*. Retrieved from https://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/10-things-you-can-do-to-improve-customer-services.pdf

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