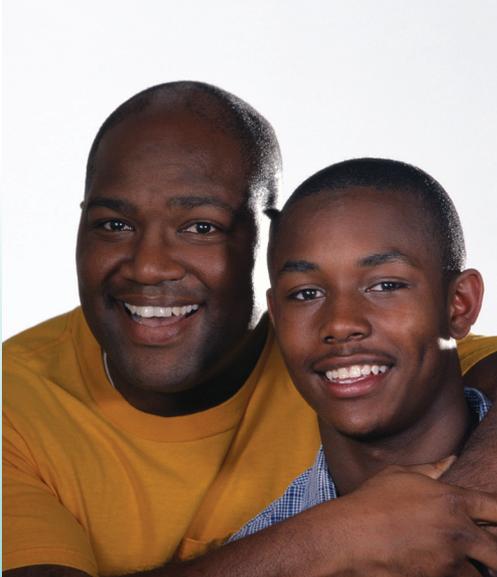




Adopting from Foster Care:

*A Guide for prospective
adoptive parents*



Adoption

Making a lifetime
commitment
to a child.

Foster Care and Adoption information sessions are held the **3rd Wednesday of each month promptly at 6 p.m.** at the following Children & Families First locations. **Registration is not required.**

809 N. Washington Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
302.658.5177

91 Wolf Creek Boulevard
Suite 1
Dover, DE 19901
302.674.8384

410 South Bedford Street
Georgetown, DE 19947
302.856.2388

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Parent Privilege and Child Rights:

To be parents – birth, foster, adoptive, grand, or step – is a privilege, not a right. However, for children to be protected and nurtured – by families of their own – that is a right, not a privilege.

At Children & Families First, we provide this information to you as part of our effort to “Minimize Trauma and Maximize Teamwork” for children awaiting adoptive parents.

1 | INFORMATION MEETING & APPLICATION

Attending an Information Meeting is the beginning of a mutual assessment process. You will start to learn about our agency and the children in need of committed permanent families. At the close of the Information Meeting, you will be provided with an application for our adoption program.

Once you return your completed application, along with the non-refundable application fee, it will be reviewed by the Program Supervisor and Family Assessment Specialist. If it looks like our program and your family may be a good fit, you will be contacted to schedule an application interview.

2 | INTERVIEW

During the interview, you will have an opportunity to ask questions. At the close of the interview, you and the Family Assessment Specialist will determine your next possible steps:

- ▶ Taking the time to consider the information provided
- ▶ Scheduling you to join the next cohort for foster/adoption parenting pre-service training
- ▶ Exploring other options

3 | TRAINING & BACKGROUND CHECK

Prospective adoptive parents will participate in pre-service parent training and background checks which are part of the mutual assessment process. This training will raise your awareness about the issues of adoptive parenting and provide you with some knowledge and understanding about the experiences that cause children to need an adoptive family and the lifelong implications of those experiences.

While the assessment process is mutual, the final decision regarding approval for adoption through our agency rests on Children & Families First. Our part of the assessment is making sure that your family and home meet the requirements of Delacare Regulations and determining if you have the ability, willingness, and resources to parent a child who has experienced trauma.

We accomplish this through assessing your strengths and needs around five core competencies:

- ▶ Protecting and nurturing children
- ▶ Meeting children’s developmental needs and addressing developmental delays
- ▶ Supporting relationships between children and their families
- ▶ Connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime
- ▶ Working as a member of a professional team.



4 | HOME STUDY/FAMILY ASSESSMENT

CFF will visit your home a minimum of two times and in some instances, additional visits may be required. You will be asked to provide proof of financial information and complete a background check; the references you provided will be contacted.

This work culminates in a written Family Assessment that provides a global picture of your life history, family, and home; and indicates what types of children you are seeking to adopt. This report looks at how your life was, how your life is, and how your life will be when you become a parent through adoption.

This process can take anywhere from three months to a year to complete depending on how motivated you, and your support people, are to complete the required paperwork.

During this period you are strongly encouraged to develop an adoptive family photo album showing your family and friends, your home and neighborhood, etc.

5 | SEARCHING & SUBMITTING A REQUEST

Request for Adoptive Families: When Delaware children are in need of an adoptive family the Division of Family Services will make a formal request for adoptive families. Children & Families First will review the request and submit for consideration our families that have characteristics that meet the unique needs of that specific child or sibling group.

Looking for Delaware's Waiting Children: Once your Family Assessment (Home Study) is complete, you will have opportunities to look for children that are awaiting an adoptive family. You may view children on several websites:

AdoptUsKids.org

ChildrenAwaitingParents.org

kids.delaware.gov/HeartGallery/HeartGallery.shtml

Looking for Waiting Children Outside of Delaware: While our mission is to find families for all of Delaware's waiting children, Children & Families First can facilitate the adoption of any waiting child in the United States. Making inquiries into children from other states can be a painstaking process due to the involvement of multiple social workers and state entities. Your Children & Families First worker requests that you limit

inquiries about children from other states to about four at a time as it takes time and effort to get information and answers about each child for whom you inquire.

6 | SELECTION

A Child-Specific Recruitment Worker (CSR) will work with other professionals on the child's team to review the families submitted for the child or sibling group, taking great care to see that the needs of the child match the strengths and criteria of the adoptive parents. In most cases, the decision will be narrowed down to three families.

If your family is one of the candidates, your social worker will review a summary of the child's case record with you, called a Child Profile. You will be able to speak with the child's social worker. Typically the child's current caregiver will participate and provide supportive information relating to the child's life in their home.

Once you have had time to consider the information provided and to get answers to your questions; you will decide if you agree that the child or sibling group seems to be a match. In this process, great care is taken to ensure these children are not put at risk of

Be sure you can commit to the child's more challenging behaviors: some make remarkable improvements once they join their adoptive family, but some regress during the transitional period

rejection by the prospective family once pre-transition visits begin. These children have experienced extensive loss and grief. We need to do all we can to see that we are making decisions based on the children's best interests.

You will be informed about the child's past and current behavioral challenges because they are likely to be what you see in your home soon after they join you. Be sure you can commit to the child's more challenging behaviors, some children make remarkable improvements once they join

Great care is taken to ensure children are not put at risk of rejection by the prospective family once pre-transition visits begin.

once again change in a matter of time. Great care is taken to see that this process moves ahead at a pace comfortable to the specific child or sibling group. Keep in mind that you are going to be much more excited about, and prepared for, the many changes that adoption will bring to your family than your child will be.

Visits traditionally begin in the foster home, moving to a neutral setting such as a park, children's museum or restaurant. The process continues over a period with visits in the new family's home and eventually an overnight visit. These visits are progressive to give the family a sound foundation on which to form and build their relationship. Parents need to make a purposeful endeavor to provide unconditional love and commitment to their adoptive children. Your worker will assist you in implementing attachment activities from the very beginning when meeting your new child.

9 | POST-TRANSITION SUPERVISION

Once your pre-adoptive child joins your family, your Children & Families First social worker will assess your progress for a minimum of six months as required by Delaware law before the adoption can be finalized by the court.

During this time, you will go through the process of learning the child's schedule, routines, and behaviors. You will begin doing the normal things parents do, keeping in mind that while you have physical custody of the child entrusted to you through Children & Families First, the state still retains legal custody of the child.

During this period, you will need to keep your Children & Families First worker apprised of the day-to-day goings on in your child's life and your household through phone contact, emails, and a minimum of once a month home consultations. Other professionals on the child's team may also be required to visit your home for updates on the mutual progress you are making. Your worker will provide you with our 24/7 contact number for assistance in case of emergencies.

Also during this period, your Children & Families First social worker will begin to help you connect your new knowledge and understanding to the task of adoptive parenting and assist you with skill acquisition.

their adoptive family but some regress during the transitional period with their adoptive families. Almost all children make improvements with time. Adoptive parents need to make sure they have the commitment to ride out the bumpier times because they will come; it is part of being a parent. Being a parent is one of the richest experiences in life. It requires commitment, patience, perseverance, and flexibility.

7 | DECISION & PRESENTATION

In Delaware, the final decision regarding whether or not a family is a match for a child rests with The Permanency Planning Committee (PPC). This committee is made up of a team of professions from the state and usually includes therapists and social workers.

The PPC will review the child's profile and the home studies of each family being considered for the child. Your social worker will have an opportunity to meet with the committee and explain why you believe you are the family that can best meet the needs of the child and provide them with the love, structure, and permanency that only a family can provide. Your adoptive family photo album will be shared with the committee, and some families choose to write a letter to be presented to the group. The Committee usually makes a decision that day regarding which family they have selected for the child. Your worker will notify you immediately of their decision.

8 | TRANSITION

In most cases, once a decision has been made, the Child-Specific Recruitment Worker will use the adoptive parent's photo album to begin introducing the child to the adoptive parent. The child will be allowed to keep the album through the transition process. This can be a very useful tool in letting the child acclimate to the changes that are about to take place.

Adoptive parents need to realize how far-reaching this change is for the child. Everything they know and are familiar with will

Visits traditionally begin in the foster home, moving to a neutral setting such as a park, children's museum or restaurant.

were your birth child. The child's last name can be changed to yours. In some cases families choose to change first names too, but this should be considered on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your social worker. Transitioning to a new name cannot occur until after the adoption is finalized. You will be issued a new birth certificate for your child listing you as their parent. At that time you will also apply for a new social security card for your child.

11 | POST ADOPTION SERVICES

Children & Families First makes a long term commitment to all the adoptive families with which we have the pleasure of working. Although you will no longer be required to have supervision visits from your Children & Families First social worker, we will continue to be available at your request to help you navigate post adoption parenting. You are welcome to continue to attend our ongoing foster and adoptive parent training and networking meetings. We will also connect you with the contracted agency for Delaware Post Adoption Services, which covers:

- ▶ Information and Referral; Crisis Assistance
- ▶ Statewide Trainings on adoption-related topics
- ▶ Support Groups for Parents
- ▶ Therapy/Support Groups for Children
- ▶ Love and Logic Parenting Groups
- ▶ Parent/Child Bonding Workshops



Creating a family does not happen overnight. You should expect challenges. We expect you to share the good times and challenging ones with your CFF worker

Your Child's Typical

Acclimation Process: You can expect to see changes in your child's behavior during this process. Initially, there is a "honeymoon period" where things go well. In time, there will be a phase where the child demonstrates challenging and testing behaviors. How parents respond greatly impacts the likelihood of reoccurrence. Reinforce positive behaviors and talents. When challenged, consider it an opportunity to effect positive change. An angry,

punitive response can increase the likelihood of reoccurrence.

The primary focus during the supervision period is for you to get to know your child, help them settle into their new life with you while you begin bonding with them. Creating a family together does not happen overnight. You should expect challenging behaviors, and we expect you to share the good times and the challenging times with your Children & Families First worker. We are here to provide you with support, advice, and encouragement as we help you to connect knowledge to task and develop skill acquisition.

10 | FINALIZATION

You are not required to have an attorney to assist with finalizing your adoption. The State and Children & Families First will work together to see that all required reports and documentation are provided to the court. The court does charge a filing fee which is your responsibility.

You will decide how to have the adoption finalized.

- ▶ You can do it with a formal courtroom hearing before a judge. This can be a memorable and moving experience, at which you may include extended family members and take photographs
- ▶ You can submit required paperwork for a judge's signature

Once the court approves the adoption, you receive the full legal rights and responsibilities for your child just as if they



It's not just our name,
IT'S OUR PROMISE

CFF LOCATIONS

NEW CASTLE COUNTY

809 Washington Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
302.658.5177

1213 Old Lancaster Pike
Hockessin, DE 19707
302.235.5544

KENT COUNTY

91 Wolf Creek Boulevard
Suite 1
Dover, DE 19901
302.674.8384

SUSSEX COUNTY

410 South Bedford Street
Georgetown, DE 19947
302.856.2388

Seaford House Therapeutic
Residence
400 North Market Street Ext.
Seaford, DE 19973
302.629.6996

OUR MISSION

Children & Families First helps children facing adversity on their journey to adulthood.

OUR VISION

Communities where children are nurtured, healthy and safe; individuals are valued; and families are strong and self-sufficient.

OUR VALUES

Accountability | Advocacy
Collaboration | Cultural Competency
Empowerment | Respect
Responsiveness

cffde.org

800.220.3092