



The Adoption Program of Family and Human Services



*Prince
Edward
Island*

CANADA

Family and
Human Services

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The Real Meaning of Adoption

Adoption is many things. It is a safe and loving family for a child, a sense of fulfilment for a childless couple, and an opportunity for adults experienced in parenting to extend their family to a child who has been disadvantaged at birth or through circumstance.

Adoption is about loving, giving and receiving; the joy and pain of parenting; and children making room in their homes and hearts for a new brother or sister.

Adoption is a profound social and spiritual commitment to make a child an unconditional member of a family. It is a legal commitment to make a child not born to you your own.

Adoption is a Family Court Order giving the adoptive parents full guardianship rights and responsibilities towards their adopted child. The biological link between the child and the birth parents remains.

Adoption is a lifelong process which has an impact in varying ways at different stages in the life of the people involved.

The Reasons for Adoption

Adoption is a service for children who need families.

Not all children are able to remain with their birth parents. Some parents find that despite their best efforts, their life situation does not allow them to meet their children's needs. Other parents, as a result of a court decision, have permanently lost guardianship of their children because of difficulties in parenting.

Children who are unable to live with their birth parents need new, stable, loving families who will accept them into their homes on a permanent basis. In turn, there are many childless couples and families who already have children, who want to make these children their own. Adoption programs are designed to bring these children and families together.

All adoption services are directed towards finding families capable of meeting the needs of each child awaiting adoption. While the needs and desires of families are considered very important, they come second to meeting the child's needs.

Who are the Children?

Children of all ages, stages of development and need are available for adoption from time to time. Each year we place a small number of infants, some healthy and some with health problems or other special needs. Occasionally we have a number of pre-schoolers. Those with siblings are placed together in adoptive families. There are also school-age children, many of them with younger brothers or sisters with whom they should be placed or at least retain contact. From time to time there are younger adolescents requesting families.

Most of the children awaiting adoption are in good health. However, some have experienced early childhood neglect or trauma resulting in attachment problems and delays in their social, emotional or intellectual development. These issues will require special attention from adopting families. A small number may have permanent physical or intellectual challenges.

Who are the Families?

Adoptive families in Prince Edward Island come from all regions of the province and from all walks of life. Some families will be successful financially. Most, however, will be of low to moderate income. All will have a sense of place and stability in their communities and a well-established network of supportive relationships.

Many people believe families somehow have to be perfect and trouble-free to be approved for adoption. This is not true. All families experience joy, tragedies, successes and family problems. What makes adoptive families different from many other families is how they go about dealing with what life hands out to them. Characteristics common in most adoptive families are mature and cooperative marital relations, an open, family-focused lifestyle, and joy in seeing children grow in self-worth.

Adoptive families tend to have a high level of non-judgmental acceptance of the needs of others, and a lot of faith, patience and trust. They tend to be secure, self-accepting, and unafraid to open up their lives to self-examination. They have an ability to understand and deal with the unique issues relating to an adoption and how these may impact on themselves and their children through the years.

Most adoptive families feel good about themselves and want to share these feelings with others, particularly children.

Can Anyone Adopt?

No! Adoption is a privilege, not a right. Just wanting to adopt is not enough. The Director of Child Protection, as guardian of children in care of the Province, reserves the right, based on established criteria, to determine who will be registered as approved adoptive applicants. The Director also maintains the exclusive right to consent to the adoption of a child by a particular family.

What Criteria are Required?

If you are a resident of Prince Edward Island, twenty-one years of age or over, a stable member of your community, living a positive, open lifestyle with others close to you, open to the needs and feelings of others, and have child-centered interests, then we are interested in you.

Family and Human Services has criteria which must be met as a first step towards making an adoption application. These criteria arise from the policies regarding such matters as residency, housing, health, alcohol or drug dependencies, criminal records, and histories of family violence or child neglect. We give first preference in the placement of low-risk babies to young couples who have fewer than two children in their family.

Details of these criteria can be found in the application form called *Adoption: A Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Applicant Information Form*.

It is easy to describe criteria for adoption in negative or limiting terms. Our real interests are in the positive attributes and abilities of those interested in adoption.

Dr. Lorna Forbes, Psychiatric Consultant to the Los Angeles Department of Adoption, in her extensive review of research on factors that make for successful adoptions, lists eight abilities to be sought in adoptive applicants.

These abilities are:

- to work positively and openly with the adoption worker and the agency;
- to express tenderness and care in intimate relationships;
- to help resolve disputes without taking sides;
- to tolerate differences and weaknesses in others;
- to live non-isolated lives;
- to be able to cope with pressure and stress;
- to defer personal gratification;
- to have a lifestyle suitable to the child being placed.

These are the positive criteria we are seeking in people with whom we will place children in need of adoption.

Some Questions to Think About

If you are childless, have you or you and your spouse, thoroughly discussed and accepted the reasons for and your feelings about childlessness? Have you explored the medical options and been informed of the choices open to you? Will you feel differently towards an adopted child if later you have a child by birth?

If you have lost a child, are you emotionally ready to accept another child as a person in his own right rather than as a substitute for the lost child?

Do you or *both* you and your spouse share a strong commitment to adopt a child? Have you thought out the many changes adoption will bring to your life?

If you have children, has the whole family discussed how it might feel to add a new brother or sister by adoption? Who in your family is going to feel threatened or displaced? What can you do to help family members with these feelings?

Are other members of your extended family able to accept a child from the outside joining the family and taking the family name? Remember, aunts, uncles and especially grandparents are very important in a child's life. They will have a very strong influence on an adopted child's feelings of self-worth and acceptance within the family.

Many children within families, either by birth or adoption, are not able to live up to family expectations. Will you be able to accept an adopted child who may turn out to be quite different from the rest of the family or who may not be able to live up to all the standards your family may set? Will you be able to accept an adopted child for what he is rather than for what you want him to be? Have you thought how you might deal with an adopted child's questions about his birth family?

How to Apply

Thoroughly read this guide and have everyone in your household who may be involved read it. Then have a discussion about adoption, its meaning, and the possible effect on your household of adding a child or children from outside the family.

Complete the questionnaire called *Adoption: A Self-Assessment Questionnaire*. This should be done in the privacy of your home, involving all the members of your immediate household. From your answers to the questions it will become evident whether or not Family and Human Services will want to explore your interests in adoption at this time. Some of the questions have time factors involved which may prevent you from applying at this time. However, you may qualify to apply at a later date.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, complete the *Applicant Information Form* attached and mail to the Provincial Adoption Coordinator, Department of Family and Human Services, 161 St. Peters Road, PO Box 2000, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, C1A 7N8. Mark the envelope *Confidential*.

The Provincial Adoption Coordinator will arrange an adoption intake interview for you with a social worker at the regional office nearest to you. There is a waiting list for adoption intake interviews.

What is an Adoption Intake?

The adoption intake workers will attempt to answer questions you may have about adoption, discuss in some detail your current lifestyle and our negotiable adoption criteria, your interest and motivation to adopt and your readiness to engage in the adoption process. You will also be assisted by the workers to identify as fully as possible what the children might be like that could fit into your household, and assess with you whether your family is ready to proceed to the next stage.

An Adoption Intake Report with recommendations is completed and forwarded to the Provincial Adoption Coordinator. If the decision is made to proceed, your file will be placed on hold until you are invited to take part in an Adoption Preparation Program.

If the decision is made that you are not ready to proceed, the worker will advise you of the reasons and may make suggestions on what you need to do to change the situation.

What is an Adoption Preparation Program?

Families are invited to join an Adoption Preparation Program when more approved adoptive families are potentially needed for children who are permanently in the care of the Director of Child Protection.

Wanting to adopt a child does not necessarily mean you are ready to adopt. Our Adoption Preparation Program is a series of activities and assignments designed to increase your readiness to incorporate a new child into your lives and to assure us that a placement with you has a good chance of success.

When your adoption file is returned to the regional office, an adoption worker will be assigned to you. An essential factor in adoption preparation is the development of an open, trusting relationship between you and the adoption worker. The first stage of the Adoption Preparation Program is primarily paper work - medical forms, a child protection record check form, a criminal record check form, and references.

Early on, you will also be invited to participate in an Adoption Preparation Group. These groups are designed to help you find answers to questions that concern you. At least two adoption workers attend each meeting to assist with information and provide pre-planned adoption exercises. Couples experienced in adoption also act as a resource in one or more of these meetings.

Upon completion of participation in an Adoption Group, your adoption worker arranges a series of sessions with you as individuals, as a couple, and as a family if there are children. These sessions are established to help you look at your reasons for considering adoption, the impact adoption will have on your lifestyle, the risks that may exist for you and for an adopted child, and your readiness for adoption. Your worker will also discuss your interest in considering open adoption arrangements.

When you and your adoption worker jointly decide that you are ready for adoption, the worker will prepare a written Adoption Profile. Your profile is used to match you with a child or children. The profile is jointly prepared by you, your children if applicable, and the adoption worker. It usually consists of a detailed family description using a general outline, a photo album, and anything else you think will help us understand your family's background, structure, rules, balances and expectations, particularly as they may affect a new child or children entering your home.

The Adoption Profile is signed by you, your adoption worker and their supervisor. All documents are forwarded to the Provincial Adoption Coordinator for use in the matching process. If the Provincial Adoption Coordinator requires more information, the profile is returned to your worker for further elaboration and updating with you.

How does Match-Placement Work?

All applicants on the Adoption Registry of approved adoptive families wait with anxiety and excitement for the day when their worker calls to tell them a match has been made for them. We recognize this wait is difficult. You may need to contact your assigned worker occasionally for an update on the availability of children.

When social workers are looking for an adoptive family for a particular child, they contact the Provincial Adoption Coordinator to arrange a meeting to review the families on the registry of approved adoptive families. Many factors are taken into consideration. Some of these are religion, geographic location, particular needs of a child or children, and wishes of the birth parents.

When the match of a child or children is made with you, your worker is notified. Your worker then notifies you and sets up one or more sessions to begin placement activity.

The first stage of placement is called a “paper presentation”. The child is not present. Your worker, and if necessary the child’s worker, will meet with you to describe the child’s background, current functioning, known risks if any exist, and to present pictures or a video of the child. They will attempt to answer any questions or concerns you have.

Following the paper presentation you will be encouraged to take at least twenty-four to forty-eight hours with your family to consider whether or not this is a child you can make your own. With older children, sometimes meetings are arranged as well. If you have any significant doubts you are encouraged not to proceed with the placement. This decision will *not* be held against you in terms of being considered for another child.

If you decide to proceed, the child is then prepared for a move from the foster home. How this move will occur is determined by the child's worker in consultation with your worker, the foster parents, and you. It is important to make the child's transition as smooth as possible. If the child is a young infant, the process is not lengthy. If the child presented to you in the paper presentation is beyond the infant stage, the steps to placement will move much more slowly than they would with an infant.

Initially the child is told as much as possible about you, depending upon his capacity to understand. Pictures or a video from you will be given to the child, who will be encouraged to show these to the foster family and significant others. This will help the child prepare for separation and develop anticipation of life with you. It also helps the child obtain reassurance and permission from the foster parents to accept and want new parents.

Your first visit with the child usually takes place in the safety of the foster home. This allows the child to venture towards you at his own speed with the assurance and help of people he knows. Similar visits will take place over time until the child is ready to leave the foster home with you for a visit to your home.

This first visit to your home is very important. Other significant people are usually met for the first time. Having time to meet and play with future brothers and sisters is very important. Seeing a bed, bedroom toys, and clothes identified as their own starts the transition in a serious way. Several half-day visits are followed by a full-day visit which may include visits to other places or people important to your family, like aunts, uncles, grandparents, or really good family friends.

On each visit with you, the child is encouraged to take some of his possessions from the foster home and leave them at his new home. Foster parents have valuable information and suggestions for adoptive parents which can assist in facilitating an easier transition for children.

This period is often difficult for the adopting family, because they are usually very anxious to have the child make the move permanently. Rushing the process is not advisable. It must be remembered that the child is not only getting a new family, but is also leaving a family that has become important to him. Time is needed for children to deal with fears of rejection, separation and the unknown. They need to know the foster parents still love them, and want them to have new parents.

Eventually the big day comes, usually following an overnight stay with you. You, the child, and a worker go back to the foster home to collect his precious possessions and to say goodbyes. After the final move, the relationship between the foster family and the adoptive family varies depending on the wishes and needs of the individuals involved.

Family and Human Services is committed to making your adoption placement a great success for you and the child. We are prepared to offer whatever help we can during the placement period and, upon your request, even after the adoption is legally finalized.

Post-Placement and Legal Finalization

At the time of placement, prior to legal finalization, your worker will contract with you regarding the supervision process and the length of time the placement period will take. The period usually is six months for infants, longer for older children.

During this period your worker will be required to report periodically on the progress of the placement. Sometimes the process of bonding between the couple and the child is difficult. It is important to share any concerns you have with the adoption worker so the best supports can be provided to you. If at any time you feel you do not wish to proceed, it is best to state this as soon as possible for the sake of everyone involved.

At the end of the contracted placement period, if things are going well, your worker will prepare a Pre-Hearing Study and include a recommendation to the Director of Child Protection that consent to adoption be given. Around this time, your worker should also provide you with a written summary of non-identifying background information about your child including cultural heritage, medical history, birth family history, reasons for adoption, and any other available information that will assist you in meeting the needs of your child.

Legal finalization of an adoption placement is made in the Family Section of the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island. At the appropriate time you will be advised to obtain the services of a lawyer at your expense. You will direct your lawyer to prepare and present an Application to Adopt to the Supreme Court.

Your lawyer will contact the Provincial Adoption Coordinator to obtain the documents necessary for the application. Your lawyer will also obtain a court date for you. Together with you and the child, the lawyer will approach the judge with your application and supporting documents, requesting a court order transferring guardianship to you from the Director of Child Protection. The judge will need to be satisfied that all requirements of the Prince Edward Island *Adoption Act* are met and that the adoption is in the best interest of the child before an adoption order is made.

Post-Adoption Services

Family and Human Services has established, in accordance with the *Adoption Act*, a Post-Adoption Service for adoptees over the age of eighteen who are interested in obtaining information about their background and exploring the possibility of contact with their birth family. Information pamphlets about this service and application forms are available.

Contacting Adoption Services

After reading this booklet, if you wish to apply to the Adoption Program of Family and Human Services, please complete the *Adoption: A Self-Assessment Questionnaire* and *Applicant Information Form* and return in an envelope marked *Confidential* to:

Provincial Adoption Coordinator

Department of Family and Human Services

161 St. Peters Road

PO Box 2000

Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8

Tel: (902) 368-6511

Services to applicants during adoption intake, adoption preparation, and the placement period will be provided through the office of Child and Family Services nearest you.

Child and Family Services – *Prince County*

Child and Family Services

Access PEI O’Leary

45 Barclay Road

O’Leary, PE

Tel: 902-859-8831

Child and Family Services

Concorde Building

290 Water Street

Summerside, PE

Tel: 902-888-8100

Child and Family Services – *Queens and Kings Counties*

Child and Family Services

Sherwood Business Centre

161 St. Peters Road

Charlottetown, PE

Tel: 902-368-5330

Child and Family Services

Access PEI Montague

41 Wood Islands Hill

Montague, PE

Tel: 902-838-0703

Child and Family Services

Access PEI Souris

15 Green Street

Souris, PE

Tel: 902-687-7063