

THE PROCESS

In the state of Arizona, foster and adoptive families must complete an approval process before they can bring children from the foster care system into their lives. This process helps to educate and prepare the family for their future placements and, in addition, provides information to the state about the family's makeup, supports, strengths and talents. There are a few important steps to this approval process:

STEP ONE:

Initial Inquiry – Whether by phone, e-mail or in person, a family will speak to an adoption / foster care professional and get more general information about the children, the approval process and what to expect. Family will then be invited to attend an orientation meeting.

STEP TWO:

Orientation – The family attends an orientation meeting and receives additional information on the adoption process. Thereafter, if a family is interested in proceeding with the process, they are given the opportunity to schedule an intake interview.

STEP THREE:

Intake Interview – The family participates in an Intake Interview at with a social worker. This typically takes place within two (2) weeks of the adoption & foster care orientation. At this time, the Intake Family Specialist provides more specific information about the adoption process and the skills needed to parent a child with special needs. The Intake Family Specialist and the family discuss the family's motivation to adopt, expectations for parenting an adopted child and the mutual assessment process. The family may decide to enroll in a PS-MAPP Training class. Following the family's enrollment in the PS-MAPP class, the Intake Family Specialist will give the family a homework packet, including a request for the family to provide the names and contact information for references.

STEP FOUR:

PS-MAPP Training – The family attends a mandatory 30 hour PS-MAPP training, which includes information about development, issues specific to children in foster care & strategies for successful parenting. PS-MAPP is designed to help families make an informed decision about becoming foster, adoptive or foster/adoptive families. The decision is made with AASK and is based on the capability and willingness to take on the "role" and develop the skills needed to foster and/or adopt. During this time, each member of the family household over the age of 18 must be fingerprinted. The family will also provide their agency with copies of important documentation, which may include: birth certificates, marriage license, divorce decrees.

STEP FIVE:

Family Consultations (Home Visits) & Homestudy - The family and the Family Specialist will meet for Mutual Assessment Meetings. The Family Specialist will interview each member of the household, including children who are able to express themselves. A Homestudy report is written the family's Family Specialist. There are typically 3 to 6 Family Consultation sessions, total. Each session typically lasts 1 – 3 hours. Once completed, the Adoptive Homestudy is submitted to Court and/or the Foster Care Homestudy submitted to OLCR for approval.

STEP SIX:

Approval – The adoptive family is certified to adopt by the Maricopa County Juvenile Court within 90 days after the Homestudy is submitted to the court. Once certified, the agency will work with the family to identify an appropriate child match. The foster family is approved for licensure through the Office of Licensure Certification and Regulation (OLCR). Once licensed, a family and their agency will work together to identify a child or children who are appropriate matches for the family.

FAQ's of the process:

How much does it cost to adopt a child from the foster care system?

The only fee a family pay to become adoption certified is a \$800 certification fee. There are no other fees involved with the adoption of a child in foster care. The fee is \$800 regardless of how many children a family adopts – so if you adopt one child or eight children, the cost is the same! And, this fee is refunded to the family at or before Finalization of the adoption! Families who adopt children with special needs in Arizona are also eligible for two other benefits:

- 1) **A \$2,000 non-recurring state reimbursement** – this will reimburse an adoptive family for expenses incurred during the adoption process, up to \$2,000.
- 2) **A federal special needs adoption tax credit** – families who adopt children with special needs (*which includes children who have experienced abuse, neglect & drug exposure; children who have behavioral, emotional, developmental, physical, social or educational needs*) domestically are eligible for a \$10,650 tax credit which takes effect in the year that they finalize the adoption – and can be used for up to 5 years. The full tax credit is available to all families who adopt children with special needs, regardless of the fees they paid during the adoption process.

How much does it cost to become a foster family?

There is no fee to become a licensed foster family.

What are the qualifications to become a foster or adoptive family?

Adoptive and foster families must be:

- At least 21 years of age
- Married for at least one year or single
- Financially stable
- Emotionally ready for parenting
- In good physical health
- Free of serious CPS or criminal background

Will I be able to say what child would fit best into my family?

Yes! When it comes to adoption and foster care, your family knows better than anyone what will work for you. After completing the PS-MAPP training, you will be asked to create a *Child Desired Profile*. This detailed profile will outline the age range, genders, ethnicities, and special needs you feel comfortable with. In addition, it will tell the state and your agency how many children you feel you can parent.

If I already have my fingerprint clearance card, will I need to be re-fingerprinted?

Probably not! If you are a teacher, health care provider or work with children in another profession or volunteer capacity, you may have already been fingerprinted. If you have a fingerprint clearance card, it is likely that you will not have to do this again.

What are the ages of children available for foster and adoptive placement?

Children in foster care range from newborn to 18. Families wanting to provide safe and loving homes for these children are able to specify what age of child will work best in their family. For families seeking adoptive placements, a great majority of the children awaiting adoptive homes are school age. Families interested in adopting children under the age of 6 will typically wait longer periods of time for an adoptive match to be found and will likely be asked to assume more legal risk.

Can I adopt / foster if I am single?

Absolutely! Single individuals are able to become foster and adoptive parents.

Do I need to own my own home to become a foster or adoptive family?

Actually, home ownership is not an eligibility requirement! Families can *rent or own* their homes, apartments, condos, town homes or manufactured homes. In order to qualify, a family must demonstrate that they have enough space for a child or children in their home. This means that the child would have their own bed, dresser or closet to store their things and that they will live in a bedroom setting with a

door. Children can also share bedrooms with other children, based on the size of the room and the specific regulations of the state.

Do foster families get help from the state to meet the child's everyday needs?

Yes. The state of Arizona provides a foster care reimbursement to the family taking care of the child. The reimbursement rate is predetermined by the state and is based on the child's age and special needs.

What do I do to get started?

The first step is to attend an informational orientation. These are held several times each month throughout the valley. Click here to request an invitation! (this would lead to the form in Getting Started)

Will the child's biological parents know where a foster or adoptive family lives?

Foster and adoptive families' information remains confidential throughout the process. The biological family will not be given your personal and confidential information. However, if a foster or adoptive family member chooses to share this information with the child's family, they are free to have as close a relationship with the biological family as they wish – as long as it is safe for the child and, in foster care situations, approved by the DES case manager.

What is fost/adopt?

Fost/adopt, otherwise known as *Legal Risk Adoption*, is an adoptive placement in which a certified adoptive family agrees to bring a child into their home before the legal rights of the biological parents have been severed.

In the state of Arizona, when children have been removed from their biological families, the court provides the families services and opportunities to correct the circumstances that brought the children into care. The parents may be asked to get drug rehabilitation, submit to regular drug testing, take parenting classes, complete anger management therapy or classes, get a stable job and/or place to live, etc. If the parent(s) is able to complete these tasks and demonstrates that they are willing to do the things necessary to get their children back within the time frame allowed (usually 12-15 months), they will be given custody once again.

However, if the biological parents are unable to unwilling to complete the court-ordered directives and do not demonstrate a sufficient effort *and* if no biological family members can be found to parent the child(ren), the state will begin to move towards severing the parents' legal parental rights. At this time, a concurrent plan will be made. In other words, the state will continue to try with the "Return to Parent" plan while also considering adoptive placement. In these instances, the state will seek a fost/adopt (Legal Risk) placement.

Fost/adopt families must understand that there is legal risk involved with this type of placement. Until both of the parents' legal parental rights have been severed through the court, there is always the possibility that the child will return to the parent or to a biological family member's care. The amount of legal risk involved in this type of placement depends on the circumstances in the individual case. Some fost/adopt placements are riskier than others. A family considering a fost/adopt placement will be able to work with their agency to understand the amount of legal risk involved in the placement.