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RESOURCE
GUIDE

for

PRE-ADOPTIVE
FAMILIES

GUIDE ONE **1**

Dear Friend,



first, we want to personally take this opportunity to thank you for considering adoption. We know from God's Word that adoption is close to the heart of God. In fact, we know from Scripture that all of us who have placed our faith in Christ have been adopted! (ROMANS 8:15; EPHESIANS 1:5)

Throughout Scripture, God clearly calls us to care for vulnerable children and to welcome them in His name. A child whose physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs are met will make amazing progress, even in the face of the most daunting challenges. Many of these children come from hard places but are desperate to be loved. We want to help find families for these kids because we believe that every child is a precious gift from God.

Adoption redeems brokenness. Adoption gives a child the chance to belong.

It is our prayer that you will experience God's specific leading in the life of your family to embrace a child or children who need to be loved. Please feel free to contact us if there is some way we can encourage you on your journey. You can email us at letters@fotf.ca or call **1.800.661.9800** from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. PT.

This resource guide is a compilation of educational articles about the process of adoption. The material has been reproduced from Focus on the Family Canada's adoption care website at Waitingtobelong.ca. Visit this website for additional information, plus similar guides for post-adoptive families and for friends, relatives, pastors and church communities who wish to support adoptive families.

But when
the set time
had fully come,
God sent His Son,
born of a woman,
born under the law,
to redeem those under the law,
that we might receive

adoption to sonship.

Because you are His sons,
God sent the Spirit of His Son
into our hearts,
the Spirit who calls out,
“Abba, Father.”

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Sing to God,
sing in praise of His name,
extol Him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before Him –
His name is the Lord.
A father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.

*God sets the lonely
in families,*

He leads out the prisoners
with singing;
but the rebellious live in a
sun-scorched land.

01

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ADOPTION BASICS

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Who are Canada's waiting children?

Public adoption in Canada

Private adoption in Canada

International adoption for Canadians

Who are Canada's waiting children?



MEET THE MANY CHILDREN IN GOVERNMENT CARE WHO LONG FOR A FOREVER FAMILY

Not long ago, someone called our office to express their intention to begin an orphanage in Canada. I stammered a bit, unsure how to respond, and finally said, “We don’t do that in Canada.”

This person truly had a heart for Canada’s waiting children. Many of us, however, are oblivious to the children in our country who do not have family who is committed to them for the long term. If we are to help meet their needs, we need to first understand who these children are.

Canada’s waiting children are usually children who are available for adoption. They typically live with foster families, as the rights of their birth parents have been terminated by the courts. These children are in the care of a foster family while they wait to be adopted.

The majority of these children are between the ages of six and eighteen, and many are one of a group of siblings. While some of these children may be adopted by their foster families, most are not.

Many of these waiting children have experienced neglect and

abuse, and have moved from one foster home to another. Some have been exposed to drugs or alcohol before birth, struggle with behavioural or learning disabilities, or may develop mental health issues. Some have lost parents through death. Nearly all of them are still waiting for permanent families for one or more of the following reasons:

- They are more than two years old, but many adopting families want babies.
- They are part of a sibling group.
- They were prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol in the womb, which may cause brain damage, resulting in some behavioural issues and/or learning disabilities.
- They’ve moved from one foster home to another so many times, they find it difficult to attach to yet another new family and therefore exhibit some challenging behaviours.
- They have suffered abuse or neglect as children and this has delayed their ability to learn and develop normally.

Many of these children are considered “special needs” children because of the trauma they have faced, unwanted and uninvited, early in their lives. But they are also:

- Precious souls, loved by God.
- Hungry for affection, stability and grace in their lives.
- Responsive to those who will work with them, patiently teaching and re-teaching the skills these children need to thrive.
- Sponges who will soak up good nutrition, security, spiritual truth and love.
- Hearts who need to hear that they are valued, worthy, seen and cared for in ways that matter.
- Bodies whose physical development can catch up if their emotional, spiritual and mental health needs are adequately addressed.
- Children in need of what all kids need: a family to call their own, a place to belong!

*Canada's waiting children
are available for adoption.
They typically live with
foster families . . .*

Public adoption in Canada



AN INTRODUCTION TO CANADA'S WAITING CHILDREN

Public adoption involves adopting children who are in the care of a provincial child welfare authority. Commonly referred to as “Canada’s waiting children,” these are children whose parents have been unable to parent them, for a variety of reasons, and the courts have therefore turned over responsibility for their care to the province. These children can range in age from newborns to teenagers. They live in foster homes until a permanent placement (an adoptive home) can be found for them.

Since few parents give up their rights without a period of trying to parent, it can be months or years before these children are legally able to be adopted; this is why few are available for adoption as babies. Some, however, are adopted by families who have fostered them. If you are interested in pursuing public adoption, you should contact your local child welfare office and inquire about the process, which usually involves education and screening (a home study). For a list of government offices to contact, see the article entitled *Adoption agencies in Canada*.

There are no fees for adopting through the public system and some financial support is available if the child requires ongoing services, such as counselling. These children are usually considered “special needs” children, not necessarily because they have mental or physical handicaps (although this is sometimes the case), but because they may have experienced abuse, neglect or disruptions due to shuttling back and forth between birth and foster families before a permanent placement (an adoptive home) is found. Adoptive parents must parent with these special circumstances in mind; a stable, loving, consistent family is an amazing gift for these children.

Christian families who wish to foster and adopt children from the public system need to be aware that spanking is not permitted. In fact, in some Canadian jurisdictions, telling a social worker that you would spank a child will result in the home study being turned down. Parents should consider other means of discipline to provide boundaries for their children. Traditional methods of parenting which may have served parents well in raising their birth children are often not effective techniques for adopted children. Children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected need to be parented differently, with these needs clearly in mind.

You should seek out resources that help you understand how discipline and parenting needs to be tailored specifically for the unique needs of adopted children. Do prepare well by reading this material, talking with other adoptive parents, and paying attention to this topic in your training.

Social workers tasked with finding families for these children do all they can to find the family that is best suited to a particular child. Parents should understand that the emphasis is on finding a family for a child, rather than finding a child for a family. This can mean that, although your application is approved and you keep hearing that there are many children needing adoptive homes, it may take a while to be matched with a child. Be patient; God places children in families and His timing is always right! Many children who are in foster care in Canada today are being influenced by Christian families and hope to be eventually be placed in families who will continue to support these values and teachings.

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*... a stable, loving,
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an amazing gift for
these children.*

Private adoption in Canada



HOW PRIVATE AGENCIES ASSIST PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

In Canada, private adoptions are administered by the provinces. This type of adoption involves children who are placed by a birth family. Usually, although not always, these are infants who are relinquished for adoption at birth. Adoption agencies, licensed and accountable to their provincial government's adoption division, facilitate these adoptions.

These agencies provide birth parents with free counselling, support and referrals if they choose to parent, and with matching services if they choose adoption. There is no obligation for birth parents to continue with the adoption if they suddenly decide it is not what they wish for their child, even though the agency may have provided considerable support. It is essential that birth parents make this choice of their own free will,

without any feeling of obligation or coercion on the part of prospective adoptive parents or agency staff.

Private agencies also provide services to prospective adoptive parents – including adoption information, education and home assessments for those who apply to adopt – as well as support services before, during and after the adoption. There is no guarantee that adoptive families will be successful in adopting when they apply with an agency, but the great majority do succeed in adopting. Agencies will discuss with applicants the likelihood of being chosen by a birth mother, as well as everything involved in the process, before recommending that they complete an application.

Adoptive parents are charged fees for the services provided by the agency. We recommend that you contact your local agencies for specific information about the fees, what they cover and when they are charged. On average, adoption

agencies charge \$10,000 to \$15,000 CAD for a private, domestic adoption.

It's important to understand that, in most cases, private adoptions are considered open adoptions. Open adoption means that the birth parent(s) have the right to receive information about prospective adoptive families, to choose a family for their child, and to meet the family at some point in the process. They may wish to negotiate some form of ongoing contact with the adoptive family. This prospect makes many families nervous about private adoption. Some common questions are:

- Will this confuse the child?
- Will this be intrusive to our family?
- Will my child prefer the birth mother to the adoptive mother?
- Will they try to take the child away from us?

If you choose this option, it is important to explore these issues thoroughly with an adoption worker early in the process. In general, families who are initially afraid of open adoption come to embrace it when it is understood and managed well. If you would like to discuss this at greater length, call a Focus on the Family Canada counsellor at 1.800.661.9800.

Families who are interested in this option are usually invited to attend an information seminar. After this, they may be interviewed by agency staff and may begin an application process. They will be required to attend training and to undergo a home assessment.

Once the home assessment is completed, the family creates a photo album and writes a letter to a prospective birth parent. This forms the basis of their introduction to birth parents who come to the agency looking for a family for their child.

Prospective adoptive parents are often encouraged to join a waiting family support group and continue their adoption education. We encourage you to pray diligently through this process for God's leading in your family and in the lives of those the agency is counselling.

When a birth parent chooses a family's profile, the agency will often arrange and facilitate an initial meeting between the birth and adoptive families so both families can get to know one another. If this goes well, the birth parent may decide that this is a match and everyone waits for baby to be born. The agency will assist after the birth, determining if and when adoptive parents should visit, and whether the birth parent wishes to follow through on the placement.

In some cases, some kind of entrustment ceremony takes place when the child is placed by the birth parent with the adoptive family. This may be

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quite informal, or very formal. Legal requirements regarding when the consent to adopt can be signed, and the period in which the birth parent can revoke the adoption (the revocation period), vary from province to province.

Agency workers will communicate these details early in the adoption process.

Prayer and support from family and friends are crucial for families in this process. It is humbling to realize that you, as adoptive parents, have little control at this stage of an adoption, but trust that God is in control and that He will work in your lives as He purposes.

Canada has three agencies that are specifically run by evangelical Christians: Hope Adoptions works in British Columbia; Christian Adoption Services works in Alberta; and Jewels for Jesus works in Ontario. In other provinces, contact your provincial child welfare ministry for information on licensed agencies. It never hurts to ask an agency if they have Christian social workers

who can work with you on your home study. Some provinces also have services specifically designed for families who are Catholic or Latter-day Saints.

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International adoption for Canadians



AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS FOR ADOPTING FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY

In addition to public and private adoptions, a third option for adoption in Canada is international (or “intercountry”) adoption. Many children around the world are orphaned and in need of families.

Since international adoption regulations vary between countries and change over time, your provincial adoption division is the best source of information on which countries currently have workable programs, as well as requirements for adopting from these countries.

All international adoption programs require a screening process, which is performed by a licensed agency in the adoptive parents’ province. This process involves adoption education, a home study and approval from the provincial authority. Home studies, with other

required supporting documentation (such as medical reports, financial statements, etc.), are then sent to the child’s country, where a child will be selected and proposed to the family.

Once a family accepts a proposal, they are considered to be matched with that child and the legal process is initiated within the child’s country. Again, this process and the cost of the adoption, as well as the length of time it takes, varies from country to country. It may also vary depending on the circumstances within the country.

Countries that have had workable and successful intercountry programs with Canada include China, Haiti, Ethiopia, Russia, the United States, Vietnam, Thailand, Ukraine, Romania, Kazakhstan and Taiwan. Contact your provincial agency or a local agency that works with international adoptions for current information on the status of these programs.

If you decide to adopt internationally, it is important to consider the cultural and racial differences that your child will experience.

Once the legal paperwork is complete, arrangements are made for the family to receive their child, usually by travelling to the country to pick the child up, but occasionally children can/need to be escorted to Canada. Travel forms

a significant percentage of the fees involved in international adoption; the total cost can range from about \$15,000 to \$40,000 CAD.

If you decide to adopt internationally, it is important to consider the cultural and racial differences that your child will experience. While parents often feel that culture or race is “not an issue” for them, the child who grows up outside their culture and/or race may feel alienated, displaced or uncomfortable in situations parents may not have anticipated. It is essential that parents carefully consider how they will help to preserve culture, offer opportunities for their child to interact with others of their race, and help their child feel comfortable “in their own skin.” Agencies will assist in the process of educating parents and heightening awareness of the challenges of intercountry adoption.

Probably the biggest challenge in international adoption for most families

is the cost. Families who have adopted internationally have dealt with this in a variety of ways. The National Bank of Canada offers adoption loans, and the government permits Canadians to deduct adoption expenses from their income tax. Some families ask for assistance from extended family, and others begin fund-raising projects. Some seek additional work to help with expenses.

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Religion that
God our Father
accepts as
pure and faultless

is this:

to look after orphans
and widows in their distress
and to keep oneself from
being polluted by the world.

JAMES 1:27

02

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IS ADOPTION FOR YOU?

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Adoption self-assessment
Why is adoption so expensive? Or is it?

Adoption self-assessment



ARE YOU READY TO CONSIDER ADOPTION? HERE'S A CHECKLIST THAT WILL HELP YOU DECIDE

We are convinced that not everyone who hears the call to care for children in need *should* adopt. There are many other ways to respond to this need. It requires commitment and a specific set of skills to successfully parent a child “from a hard place.” Do you have what it takes?

Here is a list of qualities you and your spouse should carefully consider and talk through together (and perhaps also with a trusted friend, mentor or counsellor) before you embark on this journey.

- Y N 1. We are now both fully in agreement about this commitment.
- Y N 2. We understand that adoption is forever and that our commitment to an adopted child is the same as that made to a birth child.
- Y N 3. We see ourselves realistically, aware of our strengths and weaknesses.
- Y N 4. We have examined our motivations and believe that we want to do this to love and support a child, rather than primarily to meet any needs in our lives.
- Y N 5. We have the time, energy, health and resources to meet the often considerable needs of an adopted child.

...adoption is forever... our commitment to an adopted child is the same as that made to a birth child.

- Y N **6.** We are organized and have structure in our lives, but would consider ourselves quite flexible rather than rigid.
- Y N **7.** We are able to laugh at ourselves and balance taking life seriously with maintaining a good sense of humour.
- Y N **8.** We are able to give love, even when it is not readily returned.
- Y N **9.** We know when and where to get help outside our family when it is needed.
- Y N **10.** We are very good communicators.
- Y N **11.** We have (or can easily build) a solid support system for our family.
- Y N **12.** We are "learners" as well as "teachers" and enjoy sharing our life experiences to help others.
- Y N **13.** We accept that there may be many new things we will need to learn to be effective adoptive parents and we embrace this opportunity.
- Y N **14.** We are willing to advocate for the needs of a child.
- Y N **15.** We finish what we start, even when the wait seems interminable, believing that the timing is in God's hands.
- Y N **16.** We believe that God has called us to enlarge our family by adoption and that He will supply all of our needs at every stage.

If you can answer "yes" to the majority of these questions, you have a very good chance of doing well as an adoptive family.

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Why is adoption so expensive? Or is it?



A COMPARISON OF THE COST OF PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

People who may be interested in adoption often do not take the next step because they have heard that adoption is very expensive. But is this true or not?

PUBLIC ADOPTION

Public adoption in Canada, that is, adopting a child who is in foster care, is not expensive at all. Usually the only costs families bear in adopting through the foster system are costs associated with criminal record checks and medical assessments. These usually total under \$300.

The provincial government covers the remaining costs involved. In some provinces, in fact, the government will provide some form of ongoing financial support to the family, ranging from payments for services needed to parent the child (i.e., medical services,

counselling, respite care), to a monthly subsidy that follows the child until they are an adult.

Private and international adoptions, however, can be very expensive. Here's a look at what all that money pays for.

PRIVATE DOMESTIC ADOPTION

Costs range from about \$5,000 to \$20,000, averaging about \$12,000. These costs cover the work of the adoption provider. This is usually an agency, but in some areas it may be a licensee and/or social worker. Your payment allows them to:

1. Provide you with training
2. Conduct your home study, including several interviews, then produce a written report and have it reviewed by the agency director

... adopting a child who is in foster care, is not expensive at all.

3. Counsel you through the adoption process
4. Facilitate the adoption at the hospital
5. Do follow-up visits
6. Write reports and file paperwork for finalization
7. Provide the birth parents with counselling and support pre- and post-adoption. An agency often counsels birth parents who end up choosing not to place their baby for adoption, so all families help contribute to the cost of that time invested.

There may be additional expenses for travel if a worker has to drive a significant distance to work with the birth parent

and/or facilitate the placement. Be sure to ask about these costs when you choose an agency.

Adoption agencies can give you cost estimates and a schedule of when fees will be charged. Usually you will be asked to pay for each service as it is provided.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Costs range from about \$15,000 to over \$50,000, and depend on the country and program you choose.

The fee covers expenses that fall into three broad categories:

1. **Pre-adoption expenses in Canada** – If you adopt internationally, your adoption agency will need to provide you with the same training, home study and paperwork required for a domestic adoption. There

Be sure to ask about additional expenses when you choose an agency.

may also be costs for document translation and notarizing, as well as post-placement reports. These costs will vary depending on the requirements of the country you choose.

2. Adoption expenses – Fees incurred in the child’s country usually cover a lawyer’s services, the orphanage’s costs incurred in caring for your child prior to placement, and fees to finalize the adoption. These costs vary greatly and may be quite high, depending on the country.

3. Travel costs – Most international adoptions require the adopting parent(s) to travel to the country to receive their child. Some require parents to appear in court prior to

finalization of the adoption and this will necessitate travelling twice, obviously incurring double the cost.

Often families are asked to travel on short notice, minimizing opportunities for cost-efficient travel. Some programs offer escort services either to assist families while in the country, or to bring the child home to you, but this service has fees attached too.

You may have some control over these expenses. The program you choose should be able to give you a reliable estimate that’s based on what other families have had to pay to complete an adoption.

TAX DEDUCTIONS

The Canadian government provides tax benefits to Canadian families who incur adoption expenses. Check out the

Canada Revenue Agency’s website at **Cra.gc.ca** to find out what deductions you can claim.

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For more information on adoption funding plus ideas on fundraising for your adoption, visit Waitingtobelong.ca.

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I will not leave you
as orphans;
I will come to you.

JOHN 14:18

03

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PREPARING FOR ADOPTION

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- Navigating the adoption process
- How to prepare for your home assessment
 - Preparing for adoption
- The benefits of adoption training
 - Becoming a family
 - Building a support system

Navigating the adoption process



A BRIEF LOOK AT THE PROCEDURAL STEPS IN ADOPTION, FROM START TO FINISH

Whether you adopt privately, publically or internationally, many aspects of the adoption process are the same.

If you are considering adoption, here are some of the procedural steps you'll take in your adoption journey:

- 1. Information session** – In this introductory meeting you'll learn about the process and have your initial questions answered in a group setting.
- 2. Application** – This may include an interview with an adoption professional in a more personal setting.
- 3. Training** – See the article entitled *The benefits of adoption training*.
- 4. Home assessment** – See the article entitled *How to prepare for your home assessment*.
- 5. Approval to adopt** – Waiting for a match officially begins.
- 6. Match is proposed** – Adopting parents receive information and counselling about the child proposed, including the child's known social,

*Parents need
to prayerfully
discern if this child
is a good match
with their family ...*

family and medical information. Parents need to prayerfully discern if this child is a good match with their family from their perspective.

7. Bringing the child home – Depending on the type of adoption, a family will wait for the baby's birth, negotiate gradual entry of a foster child into their family, or await legal finalization of an international adoption and travel to bring the child home.

8. Becoming a family – It takes work to become a family. See the article entitled *Becoming a family*.

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How to prepare for your home assessment



DE-MYSTIFYING ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

For families considering adopting a child, one of the most intimidating aspects of the adoption process is the home assessment. Some apprehension is understandable; after all, your continuation on the adoption journey depends on a positive outcome. Often, however, the uneasiness is exacerbated by simply not knowing what to expect.

Here's an overview of the home assessment process that will help you prepare, both practically and emotionally, and hopefully allow you to relax as you contemplate and participate in your home assessment.

PREPARING FOR YOUR HOME ASSESSMENT

1. Book your first appointment with the social worker and ask what you need to have ready prior to this visit.
2. If the visit is in your home, be prepared for “show and tell.” There is no need to make your home absolutely spotless, but he or she will want to see

where and how you live to determine if it is a safe, comfortable environment for a child.

3. Relax. The social worker's goal is to assist you in making adoption a positive experience for your existing family and for the child you hope to add to your family.
4. If you already have children, the social worker will want to meet them and speak with them, both with and without you present. Let the children know that they should answer questions honestly and say what they really think and feel. They are also welcome to ask questions.
5. Have your calendar and schedule ready to help arrange several subsequent visits. Home studies usually require four to eight meetings. Some may be as individuals, others as a couple or as a family. These meetings may or may not take place in your home; that is worked out with each social worker.
6. If you have pets, consider how their presence in the home may impact a child positively or negatively.

7. If anyone else lives in your home (for instance, grandparents), they will need to be interviewed as well. Do prepare them for this.
8. If you are adopting privately or internationally, you will be required to pay for the home assessment. Your agency or social worker will advise you of the cost and when the fees are due. If you are adopting publically, the only costs to you are usually those incurred in requesting criminal record checks and medical reports. Ask your social worker if you are unsure of your financial responsibilities regarding the home assessment.

The social worker's goal is to assist you in making adoption a positive experience for your existing family and for the child you hope to add to your family.

S.A.F.E. FAMILY ASSESSMENT

Most areas in Canada are now using a tool in the home assessment process called the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation. More commonly it is referred to as the S.A.F.E. family assessment. You will be asked to complete two questionnaires. No preparation is required; you will know the answers and there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. These documents help the social worker quickly learn which questions may need more detailed discussion with each of you. The questions also help

you describe some things about yourself and/or your spouse that are sometimes difficult to put into words. There is a significant focus on the family you grew up in as well.

QUESTIONS TO EXPECT

To prepare their report, the social worker will ask questions that help describe the following things about you:

- Your physical appearance
- Personality
- Family background
- Hobbies and interests
- Education
- Work
- Religious beliefs and practices
- Cultural background
- Health
- Marriage (and previous relationships, if any)
- Parenting philosophy and practices
- Understanding of adoption
- Home and community
- Finances
- Child: What age, gender or special needs can you accommodate? Who would be a good fit with your family?

FACING THE HARD QUESTIONS

You will be asked to be quite transparent and vulnerable in this process. You may be asked about topics that include how you were parented, your sex life, your health, your marital satisfaction, previous abuse and/or addictions and other things that can be difficult and embarrassing to discuss with a relative stranger.

The social worker asks these probing questions because he or she needs to be certain that you will be the kind of parent that the child to be placed with you can count on to be fully emotionally and physically prepared to parent this child as they will need to be parented. The purpose of these questions is not to make you uncomfortable, but to ensure that any potentially difficult situations be addressed before you make a commitment to a child. It also helps in discerning together what sort of child would fit best with your unique personal and family situation.

DOCUMENTATION

The sooner you can produce all the documentation, the sooner your home study can be completed. Supporting documents will include criminal record checks for anyone over the age of 12 living in your home, a check for any prior contact with child welfare services (to determine if you have ever been reported for putting a child at risk), medical reports on each applicant, several references (your social worker can advise you how many are needed, from whom and in what format), a financial

statement and, in some cases, psychological assessments. Home studies can be delayed unnecessarily if the worker has to wait for your documentation to be submitted.

Any issues that become evident as a result of these checks may or may not hinder your adoption application. The social worker will assess with you, for instance, whether a health concern is a barrier or simply needs to be explained, or if a criminal record from many years ago is a current concern or not. Some of this depends on the specific type of adoption you are applying for as different countries have different standards.

REVIEWING THE HOME ASSESSMENT

When your report is complete (or nearly complete), you will have an opportunity to read it and discuss the findings with the social worker. If you find inaccuracies, do feel free to point them out. If you are disappointed in what is said, bring it up for conversation. It is possible that you were misunderstood or that you need to clarify some information or perspective.

Before you sign the finished product, you need to feel that this is a true representation of you. In the possible, but unlikely, situation that your social worker has concluded that you are not suited to adopt, they should be prepared to list the reasons for that determination. Usually this conversation will be brought up during the interview process, so it is rare that a family will

be surprised by this result. In most cases home assessments produce reports that families can affirm and that provide matching agencies a good understanding of the family in order to make the best match with a waiting child.

The social worker will make a recommendation based on all the findings of the report. Should you disagree with the recommendations, you can discuss this with the agency with which you have applied.

In the event that your home assessment is approved, you will proceed on to the next step in the adoption process: waiting for a suitable match. Consult your agency/worker about what your next step should be. It will depend on the type of adoption you have decided to pursue.

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Preparing for adoption



TIPS THAT WILL SPARE YOU FROM CONFUSION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

by Katie Porter

In some ways, adoption is like pregnancy. Both are filled with expectations and the hope of an expanded family, but it is also a time of uncertainty. It is critical for families to evaluate their expectations and be realistic about their limitations. Certainly God is in control of our circumstances, but it's important to pay attention to His voice throughout this process. The better prepared your family is, the more you'll feel ready to navigate the waters of adoption.

1. All adoptions involve some level of "red tape." Sometimes families pursue one type of adoption over another because of a perception of less hassle. Regardless of the type of adoption, there is always a fair amount of paperwork and contact with the government (sometimes multiple provincial or federal governments).

However, the focus should not be on the ease or difficulty of the process. Trust that the Lord

will use this time to mould you even more into the parents you need to be for a specific child. The important thing is that a child will find the permanent adoptive family they need. Remember to keep this perspective in mind and focus on the needs of the child when going through the process.

2. Unfair expectations prior to adoption can prove to be most unhelpful further down the road. Do not anticipate that the child will be thankful that you "rescued" him from a bad home or "saved" her from abortion. Also, do not expect the child to show and receive love in typical ways, particularly when a child has experienced tremendous hurt prior to coming home. Remember, adoption is all about the adoptive family meeting the needs of a child, not about the child meeting any of the needs of the adoptive parents.
3. Parenting a child who was adopted (particularly if not adopted as an infant) is not the same as parenting a biological child. Sometimes adoption gets a bad rap because we have heard stories of

families that have really struggled after welcoming a child home. The important thing to remember is that adoption isn't the problem. Instead, something went wrong (in some cases terribly so) that caused that child to be removed from their birth family. Adoption is the mechanism to try and bring healing to that child's life. And depending on the child, this can be a very difficult process.

Allow the child to express his grief at the loss of birth family, and do not dismiss his feelings of rejection. Some children struggle with identity, personal control and intimacy, and it's important to walk with your child through these struggles rather than ignoring his fears and concerns. Instead, be willing to be flexible with the type of parenting your new child needs. It may not be the same as the other children in your home, but that's ok.

4. In some instances, there may be additional monetary costs than originally predicted. Find out exactly what the agency covers and what other expenses may arise in the future. For example,

... adoption is all about the adoptive family meeting the needs of a child, not about the child meeting any of the needs of the adoptive parents.

international adoptions may require one or more trips to the country you're adopting from. Some adoption-related expenses may be reimbursed by the provincial or the federal government.

5. When adopting an infant, be mindful that the birth mother has the right to change her mind. The placement is not guaranteed until after birth and often after an additional waiting period. Some provinces have a longer waiting period that allow for a "change of heart." Be sure to understand what

the law is in your province as well as the province you are adopting from (if different).

6. Research a nation's record with adoption before selecting a reputable international agency. Unfortunately, there are those that play into the desires of adoptive parents and can wrongly place children without communicating properly with birth families. Do as much research as possible on the country's adoption record as well as the agency you're planning to work with.
7. Work through the proper channels (i.e., an agency or lawyer) to make things as official as possible. There have been cases of women claiming to be pregnant in order to receive coverage for their living expenses. Rely on the experience of a licensed and qualified agency to avoid this scenario.
8. If you don't feel your family can meet the needs of a particular child or aren't comfortable with the level of medical care the birth mother is receiving, you can deny a potential placement at any point in the process prior to finalization.

9. The biological father's rights vary from region to region. Ask about the birth father's legal rights in your province to be sure they have been addressed.
10. If your family has experienced infertility or the death of a child, take the time to work through any grief before considering adoption. Adopting a child will not replace a "lost" biological child. Instead, it tends to place unfair expectations on the child and hinders the transition into your home and family. Work to ensure your family is as emotionally healthy as possible and ready to take on the challenge of growing your family through adoption.

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The benefits of adoption training



EVEN LONG-TIME PARENTS NEED NEW SKILLS TO EFFECTIVELY PARENT ADOPTED CHILDREN

Many a parent has sighed and said, “I wish kids came with a training manual!”

All parents, from time to time, wish we knew more about how to parent a child. When we give birth, most of us start from square one, ready or not! We figure it out on the job, we ask friends and family, we read books or magazines and we learn as we go. No one requires us to learn anything to qualify as a parent.

To qualify to adopt, however, the government requires us to take training. While some people welcome this opportunity, others see this as an intrusion or a suggestion that they are less adequate than those who parent biologically. Many who adopt are, in fact, experienced biological parents. Why do they need training? Why does anyone?

WHY ADOPTIVE PARENTS NEED TRAINING

1. Parenting adopted children is different from parenting biological children.

2. Parenting adopted children requires awareness of a variety of issues that biological parents usually do not face.
3. Parenting adopted children will challenge you in ways you need to anticipate and prepare for.
4. You need to be fully aware of what to expect in order to make a well-informed decision about whether parenting adopted children is right for you and your family.
5. Someone else will be held accountable for placing a child in your care; if you are not prepared, the placement worker may not feel that placing a child with you is in the child’s best interest.

WHAT DOES TRAINING INVOLVE?

1. **Time:** Be prepared to invest time in this activity. Training will vary depending on the type of adoption you are doing and the agency providing

the training, but a minimum number of hours is required in each provincial jurisdiction. We strongly advise you to exceed the requirements in terms of the time you invest in training.

- 2. Topics covered:** Some of the topics you can expect to cover will include:
- The basics of child growth and development, especially concerning attachment.
 - How to help adopted children with issues of grief and loss.
 - The significance of the birth family in the life of your child, regardless of whether the birth family is physically “present” or not.
 - How to support adopted kids through issues such as early deprivation, neglect, abuse and temporary or long-term delays in emotional, physical and mental health.
 - The importance and necessity of preserving history and culture for adopted children.
 - Changes the adoptive family will undergo as a result of adopting a child.
 - How to effectively discipline an adopted child.

Parenting adopted children requires awareness of a variety of issues that biological parents usually do not face.

SOME SPECIFIC ADVICE ABOUT TRAINING

- 1.** Expect to feel overwhelmed at first. A lot of information will come at you quickly. Some of it will be exciting and challenging; some of it may feel frightening. Take time to digest the information and then come back with questions and concerns (or discuss these with your social worker).
- 2.** Plan to parent effectively. Once you have completed your formal training and been

matched with a specific child, do your homework to be as well prepared as you can be to meet the needs of that specific child before, during and after placement. It isn't just about meeting the standard or getting the piece of paper that says you took the training. It's also about applying what you are learning to your family.

I have heard so many adoptive parents say, "I wish I had known this before I adopted." Often, as a trainer, I know they were told about these issues, but they did not "get" what was being said. Training can vary greatly in its effectiveness and impact depending on who teaches it and how it is conducted (weekly meetings, all-day workshops, online reading or courses, meeting other families). The effort you put into your training will directly impact how much you get out of it.

3. Don't assume that worst-case scenarios won't happen to you. Many people don't really take in warnings about difficult issues because they believe that their experience will be different. If you are proactive about essentials like promoting

The effort you put into your training will directly impact how much you get out of it.

attachment from early on in your relationship with your child, it is more likely that things will go well.

4. Consider adoption training as a long-term project. Much of the training you receive may not seem relevant at the time or in your particular situation. However, many families find that once a child is home, or when a new developmental stage kicks up something significant, they realize that there's more they need to learn. Keep reading, networking and searching for resources.

Focus on the Family Canada's counselling staff are trained to understand these issues and will

be glad to speak with you if the need arises.

Call 1.800.661.9800 and ask for our counselling assistant.

5. People sometimes report being “scared off” by training. Trainers don’t intend to scare you away; they just want you to have sufficient knowledge to accurately assess your options. A child with severe issues needs a family with special capacity to care for that child. It’s okay if that’s not you.

6. Ask God to show you what you most need to hear and learn. As believers, be diligent to excel at this task so that you can be the best parents possible for your children – parents who embrace wisdom and truth, whatever the source. Be wise, be discerning, be humble, be teachable . . . this is pleasing to God. You don’t have to agree with everything that you hear. As in all things, test what you are told against the Word of God and consult with Christians who are experts in the field.

Becoming a family



TIPS TO HELP YOU AND YOUR ADOPTED CHILD BOND AS A FAMILY

For most of us, being part of a family is something we seldom reflect on. Our role in our family is so familiar and comfortable that we take many aspects of family life for granted. Children who have spent time in multiple foster homes or in orphanages, however, do not have a clear sense of what it means to live in a family.

Every family has its own “style” or “flavour.” Traditions, rituals, expectations and routines vary from family to family. Each new family member, including your adopted child, will inevitably alter your pattern somewhat. When your adopted child arrives, you will need time to adjust to one another. Some refer to this process as “cocooning,” and it is just as essential with an older child as it is with a newborn.

The most successful adoptive families I have observed are those who took their need to cocoon very seriously, investing in both quality and quantity of time together. Here are a few tips from these families that will help you as you welcome your adopted child into your home:

1. Take advantage of government-sponsored parental leave from work – for dad as well as mom.
2. Don't leave adopted kids in someone else's care.
3. Minimize visitors to the home for a few weeks to months.
4. Consider home schooling school-age children while your family is still adjusting to one another.

...successful adoptive families ... [take] their need to cocoon very seriously, investing in both quality and quantity of time together.

5. Cut back on “extracurricular” activities for a period of time. Say no to volunteer work, trips and other opportunities that do not include the family.
6. Talk about how your family does things. Your explanation can be as simple as, “In our family, we eat supper together every night,” or “In our family, we say hello and goodbye with hugs.”
7. Do things together as a family: meals, chores, games, walks, worship etc.
8. By all means take your child to church, but be aware that they may need to stay with you in

the service for a while instead of participating in the children’s program.

9. Expect some clinginess and anxiety when you leave and a need for reassurance that you will return. Don’t be surprised or alarmed if this carries on longer than you anticipated.
10. Remember that, if you have other children, their position in the family is being adjusted as well. Take time for each child and listen to their thoughts on how the adjustment is going.

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Building a support system



DON'T TRY TO GO IT ALONE AS ADOPTIVE PARENTS – YOU'LL NEED A TEAM TO CHEER YOU ON

As you pursue adoption, you may find that not everyone in your relationship circles supports or even understands your decisions.

People often harbour misunderstandings, stereotypes and fears about adoption. Some of these folk may be in your family, your church and/or your workplace.

Others will be casually interested, but not knowledgeable about adoption. Here are a few groups of supporters you will want to cultivate:

1. **People who will pray, care and/or help.** These people don't need to know a lot, they just need to be willing to be there for you. Feel free to let them know what you need, and be specific and

reasonable. Ask for prayer, for a listening ear, for encouragement, for practical help.

2. **People on a similar journey.** You may meet others undertaking the same type of adoption as you. They will understand what you are experiencing first-hand. Comparing stories and progress can be a real help along the way, so do stay in touch.
3. **Experienced adopters.** People who have been down this road before you know what it's like. They can empathize, share and resource you like few others. If you should need it, they'll assure you that you'll survive, too! And you'll save time and effort by learning what did and didn't work for them.
4. **Professionals.** In your adoption journey, you will occasionally

need social workers and/or therapists. Invest in building a positive, enriching relationship with the professionals who are helping your family.

*For further reading, see the article entitled **Adoption and your extended family** at Waitingtobelong.ca.*

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For those who are led
by the Spirit of God
are the children of God.
The Spirit you received
does not make you slaves,
so that you live in fear again;
rather, the Spirit you received
brought about your
adoption to sonship.
And by Him we cry,

“Abba, Father.”

The Spirit Himself testifies
with our spirit
that we are God’s children.

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RESOURCES FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

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Adoption agencies in Canada
Online adoption resources

Adoption agencies in Canada



CHRISTIAN ADOPTION AGENCIES

Canada is home to three licensed Christian adoption agencies. These agencies provide services, including training and home assessments, to families who wish to do a private and/or international adoption. They also provide counselling and support to birth parents, all from a distinctively Christian perspective.

Alberta – Christian Adoption Services
(Christianadoption.ab.ca)

British Columbia – Hope Adoption Services
(Hopeadopt.org)

Ontario – Jewels for Jesus (Jewelsforjesus.net)

Please note: This information is provided for your convenience. Focus on the Family Canada cannot guarantee the accuracy of this information, and its inclusion here does not imply that Focus on the Family Canada endorses these organizations and their views.

GOVERNMENT ADOPTION SERVICES

Alberta – Children and Youth Services: Adoption Services

British Columbia – Ministry of Children and Family Development: Adoption Branch

Manitoba – Manitoba Family Services and Consumer Affairs: Child and Family Services Division: Child Protection and Support Services

New Brunswick – Department of Social Development: Adoption

Newfoundland & Labrador – Department of Child, Youth and Family Services

Northwest Territories – Department of Health and Social Services: Adoption Services

Nova Scotia – Department of Community Services: Family and Children's Services Division

Nunavut – Department of Health and Social Services

Ontario – Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Prince Edward Island – Department of Community Service, Seniors and Labour: Child and Family Services Division

Quebec – Ministère de la Santé et Services Sociaux or Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale

Saskatchewan – Adoption Support Centre of Saskatchewan

Yukon – Health and Social Services: Family and Children's Services: Placement and Support Services

Online adoption resources



FAITH-BASED GUIDANCE

Various Christian organizations provide online resources and guidance about becoming an adoptive family and living out the adoption journey. You'll find something helpful whether you're looking for informative articles or inspiring stories about what organizations are doing to help families parent adopted children successfully.

Empowered to Connect

Empoweredtoconnect.org

Christian Alliance for Orphans

Christian-alliance-for-orphans.org

The Institute of Child Development

Child.tcu.edu

Destiny Adoption Services

Destinyadoptionsservices.com

Show Hope

Showhope.org

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Adopting for Life

Events.sbts.edu/adopting-for-life

SECULAR ORGANIZATIONS

While not operating from a Christian perspective, several organizations – many of which are Canadian – offer useful information about adoption.

Adoption Council of Canada

Adoption.ca

Adoption Council of Ontario

Adoption.on.ca

Adoption Learning Partners

Adoptionlearningpartners.org

Adoptive Families Association of BC

Bcadoption.com

Canada Adopts!

Canadaadopts.com

Citizenship and Immigration Canada: International adoption

Cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/adoption/index.asp

Law Protection, Inc.: Adoption Canada

Lawprotector.ca/adoption-canada.html

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For the Lord your God
is God of gods and Lord of lords,
the great God,
mighty and awesome,
who shows no partiality
and accepts no bribes.

*He defends the cause
of the fatherless*

and the widow, and loves
the foreigner residing among you,
giving them food and clothing.

And you are to love those
who are foreigners,
for you yourselves were
foreigners in Egypt.