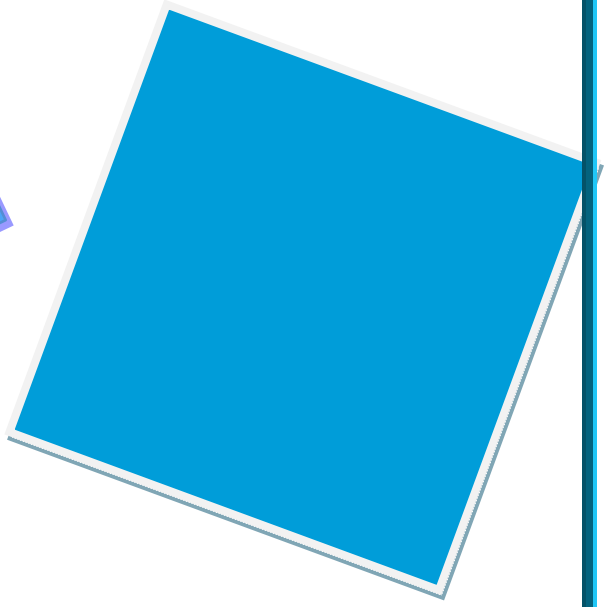


# ADOPTIVE FAMILY HANDBOOK



[www.ourkids.us](http://www.ourkids.us)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Title	Page(s)
Introduction	Letter to Prospective Adoptive Parents	2
1	The Road to Adoptions	3
	What is Adoption?	4
	Why Do Families Turn to Adoption?	4
	Common Adoption Terms	5 - 6
	Frequently Asked Questions	7 - 8
	How Can I Become a Prospective Adoptive Parent?	9
	What Are Some of the Minimum Requirements for Adoption?	10 - 12
	What are Some of the Benefits of Adoption?	13
	Any Other Benefits Available to State Employees Who Adopt?	13 - 15
	Making the Decision to Become a Foster Child's <u>Permanent</u> Family	15
	Who Are the Children Available for Adoption?	15
	Have You and Your Family Considered Adopting an Older Child?	15 - 16
	Why Should Siblings Be Placed Together?	16
	Selecting an Agency	17
	The Our Kids of Miami-Monroe Adoption Staff	18
2	Adoptions: The Legal Process	19
	What Is the Procedure After a Child is Placed for Adoption?	20
	The Adoptions Safe & Family Act (ASFA)	20
	Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA)	21
	What Happens If I Return My Adoptive Child Back to the State?	21
3	What Are Some of the Forms That Will Need to be Completed?	22 - 23
	Adoption Application and Addendum	24 - 28
4	The Waiting Children	29
	Children Available for Adoption	30 - 31
	The Miami Heart Gallery	32
	November: National Adoptions Month	32
5	Adoption Resources	33
	Creating an Adoptions Life Book	34
	Support Systems Available For Adoptive Parents	35 - 37
6	Learning About Our Children's Needs	38
	Turning Losses Into Gains	39
	How Do I Tell My Child He is Adopted?	39 - 40
	Key Contacts	41 - 42
	Do I Have Any Questions?	43 - 44
	Personal Notes About the Child	45 - 46
	Our <u>New</u> Family	47
7	Post-Adoption Services	48 - 52
	The Five-Year Plan for Post-Adoption Services	53 - 54
	No More Waiting Children	55

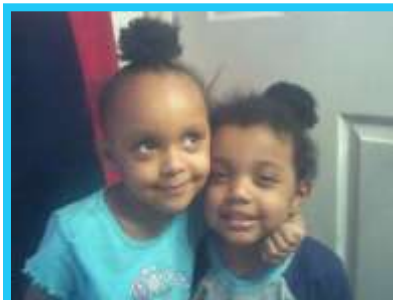
Dear Prospective Adoptive Parent(s):

Parenting through adoption can be one of the most life-changing and yet rewarding experiences that you and your family will ever face. To better assist you in this beautiful journey, we have put together this handbook containing invaluable information regarding the initial adoption process.

Having an understanding of the adoption process and the different adoption opportunities available will help you in making the right choice for your family. We encourage you to call your agency with any questions and/or concerns you may have. If you need additional information, please feel free to contact our office and speak to the Adoptions Specialist.

Remember that adoption is the gift of a lifetime and we would consider it a privilege to help you bring home the child who is best suited for your family.

We thank you for your commitment and dedication to providing permanency in the lives of our children!



**Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.**

# CHAPTER 1: THE ROAD TO ADOPTION





## What Is Adoption?

Adoption is the legal transfer of the parental rights and responsibilities from a child's birth parents to the adoptive parents. When you adopt a child, you legally and emotionally agree to accept a child that is not born to you into your family. Your adopted child will have the same legal rights as a birth child and can bear your name. Once an adoption is approved by a court of laws you will receive an official adoption decree and birth certificate with your name noted as the parent of your adopted child.

Although, family reunification remains the primary goal for a child in foster care, sometimes, this goal may not be possible if the child's safety and well being cannot be assured. Consequently, permanency through adoption may become the goal for that child.

Adoption is a wonderful, intensely beautiful and unforgettable experience

## Why Do Families Turn to Adoptions?

Families turn to adoptions for many reasons. Many want to add or create their family when they find out that they are unable to have children by birth. If it is due to infertility, you need to consider first how you and your family will feel about it. It is normal to have a wide range of feelings like shame, anger and despair. If you often find yourself angry and preoccupied by the unfairness of it all, you may need more time before you are ready to consider adoption. Some people feel a strong desire to have a child that resembles them, or a need to carry on their genes. There are other people who are looking to adopt a specific child with certain characteristics. If this is the case, adoption may not be right for you. If after self-reflection you conclude that what you want is to be a parent and care for a child permanently, then you should explore adoptions.

Other families may have children and want to add more children to their family; however, they may not want to have more of their own but reach out and help other children in need of a home. There are other families that have had their children and now that they are adults and have left the home, they find they enjoyed parenting so much that they want to reach out and help another child. Others hear about the waiting children and may simply want to make a difference in a child's life.

Remember that adoption is not for everyone - even if you fall into one of the categories mentioned above - and that is OK. There are other ways of helping children: You may be interested in becoming a foster parent or a Guardian Ad Litem!



## Common Adoption Terms

Below are a few helpful adoption terms:

Adoptee: An adopted person.

Adoption Agency: An organization, usually licensed by the State, that provides services to birth parents, adoptive parents, and children who are in need of a family. The agencies may be private or public, secular or religious, for profit or non-profit.

Adoption Assistance: Monthly subsidy payments to help adoptive parents raise children with special needs. These payments were initially made possible by the enactment of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (PL 96-272) which provided federal funding for children eligible under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. States also fund monthly payments for children with special needs who are not eligible for federally-funded subsidy payments. "Adoption Assistance" can also refer to any type of assistance given to adoptive parents.

Adoption Attorney: A legal professional who has experience in the filling, processing, processing, and finalizing an adoption in a court having jurisdiction.

Adoption Disruption: The interruption of an adoption prior to its finalization. It is also called a failed adoption or failed placement.

Adoption Dissolution: The interruption or failure of an adoption after finalization that requires court action.

Adoption Exchange: An organization which recruits adoptive families for children with special needs using print, radio, television and Internet recruitment, as well as matching parties (which bring together prospective adoptive parents, waiting children and their social workers in a child-focused setting). Adoption exchanges can be local, state, regional, national or international in scope. (Florida's Adoption Exchange website: <http://www.adoption.org/adopt/florida-adoption-exchange.php>)

Adoption triad: The three major parties in an adoption: birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted child. It is also called an "adoption triangle" or "adoption circle."

Decree of adoption: A legal order that finalizes an adoption.

Dependent child: A child who is in the custody of the State child welfare system.

Employer Assistance: Adoption benefits provided to employees by employers which may include direct cash assistance for adoption expenses, reimbursement of approved adoption expenses, paid or unpaid leave (beyond federal leave requirements established through the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993), and resource and referral services. For a list of employers who provide benefits, you can call the National Adoption Center at (800)-TO-ADOPT.

Finalization: The final legal step in the adoption process; involves a court hearing during which the judge orders that the adoptive parents become the child's legal parents.

Home Study: A process by which potential adoptive parents educate themselves about the challenges and rewards offered through parenting adopted children and assess their own skills, life experiences and strengths to determine the type of adoptive children they could best parent.

Independent adoption: An adoption facilitated by those other than caseworkers associated with an agency. Facilitators may be attorneys, physicians, or other intermediaries.

Legally free: A child whose birth parents' rights have been legally terminated so that the child is "free" to be adopted by another family.

Life book: A pictorial and written representation of the child's life designed to help the child make sense of his unique background and history. The life book includes birthparents, other relatives, birthplace and date, etc and can be put together by the foster and/or adoptive parents working with the child.

Matching: The process of finding prospective families specifically suited to meet the needs of a waiting child, not to be confused with "placement".

Open, Semi-Open, and Closed Adoption: In an **open adoption** the last names, addresses, and telephone numbers are exchanged and the birth parent(s), the adoptive family, and in some cases, the child may visit on a regular basis. In a fully open adoption, the birth parent(s) and the adoptive family know each other and have ongoing communication about the child. In a **semi-open adoption**, communication is more limited. The last names, addresses, and telephone numbers are not usually exchanged, sharing of photos and other information is less frequent, and all communication takes place through a third party, usually the adoption agency. In a **closed adoption**, there is no identifying information about the birth family or the adoptive family and the families do not communicate. After adoption, the records are sealed and typically are not available to the adopted child.

Placement date: The time at which the child comes to live with the adopting parents.

Surrender: Voluntary termination of parental rights. An action taken by birth parents to voluntarily "make an adoption plan" for a child or "relinquish" a child for adoption.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): The legal process which severs a parent's rights to a child.

Waiting children: Children in the child welfare system who cannot return to their birth homes and need permanent, loving families to help them grow up safe and secure.

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How long does the initial process to become a prospective adoptive parent take?** *The initial process for families interested in becoming prospective adoptive parents usually takes about four months: This process consists primarily of an orientation about the available programs, complete background screening, MAPP (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting) Pre-Service Training – a mandatory preparation course lasting 10 weeks, and an in-depth home study. (The home study involves interviews and documentation about things such as health, finances, and employment. Adding a new member affects the whole family and it is important for everyone in the household to participate.) Once you have **satisfactorily** completed this initial process, you will be approved as a prospective adoptive family.*
  
2. **What can I or we do to help the initial adoption process move along?** *While it depends on each applicant's situation, applicants can move the process along by gathering the required documentation and turning it in to the case manager as soon as possible. Some of the documentation they need to provide may include: (a) Current Marriage Certificate; (b) Certified Copy of Divorce Decree(s); (c) Certified Copy of Deceased Spouse's Death Certificate; (d) Certified Copy of Legal Separation Decree; (e) Copy of Military Discharge; and (f) Child Support Documentation. Applicants can also complete and turn in the required forms as soon as possible to the case manager. Some of these forms include but are not limited to the following: (a) Adoptions Application and Addendum; (b) Health Questionnaire; (c) MAPP Profiles; and (d) Personal (and School, if applicable) References.*

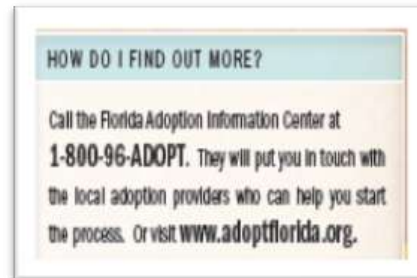
*Applicants must also choose someone to take care of their children in the event of illness, incapacitation or death.*
  
3. **What do you do after you are approved as a prospective adoptive parent?** *Once approved, you continue looking at pictures of available children for adoption along with their biography sketch (see Section 3 – The Waiting Children). You should also attend recruitment activities; e.g. picnics and other events in the community in which foster children who are available for adoption will be in attendance. Do not forget to notify your case manager immediately when you are interested and need more information about a specific child or sibling group.*

*When the needs of a child or sibling group are matched with your family, your case manager will discuss with you the pre-placement activities that must occur. Once the child is placed, a case manager must make a visit - at least once every 30 days - in order to assess the child's adjustment in your home and if new or additional services are needed. The supervision period usually lasts about 90 days. At that time, the case manager will provide "consents to adopt" to your attorney. Your attorney will schedule a hearing before a judge. At this hearing the adoption will be legalized and the child will legally become a part of your family.*

4. **Who can adopt a child?** *We are looking for caring and committed people who want to make a difference in a child's life: You must be willing and able to provide a safe, permanent and loving home to a child. You do not need to be married, own a home, or maintain a specific income level. You will have to meet other minimum standards as cited in the FAC65C-16 for adoption.*
  
5. **What does adoption cost?** *When you adopt a child from the State of Florida you are not charged with an adoption fee or fees related to the pre-adoptive training, home study or placement. There may be expenses related to attorney fees and court costs but these may be reimbursed (up to \$1,000.00) by the State.*
  
6. **Will I receive a complete case history when I decide to consider adopting a child?** *Yes. One of the benefits of adopting a child from the State is having access to a comprehensive case history. You will be given available information on the child's medical background, foster placements and developmental level. You will also be given insight into the child's personality, habits, hobbies, aspirations, likes and dislikes. This information will assist you and your family in making an informed decision about this child becoming and remaining a permanent member of your family.*
  
7. **Can the biological parents take the child back?** *No. Florida's children are not made available for adoption until a court has terminated the parental rights of the birth parents. This form of adoption is very secure.*
  
8. **What does the term, "Special Needs" mean?** *Special Needs is a term used in federal rules to describe certain children that are eligible for financial assistance in the adoption process. It does not mean the child necessarily has a disability. In the State of Florida, one or more of the following criteria qualifies a child for special needs assistance: (a) Age 8 or older; (b) Member of a sibling group being placed for adoption together; (c) African American or racially-mixed; (d) Significant emotional ties with foster parents or a relative caregiver; and (e) mental, physical or emotional handicap.*
  
9. **What kind of support can I expect once my adoption is finalized?** *Each of the provider agencies offers post-adoptive support for the families. These supports may include but are not limited to post adoptive support groups, help in finding medical, behavioral or other services for adoptive children. Additionally, there are many available websites (some of them can be found in this handbook) providing additional assistance and support to adoptive families and their children.*

## How Can I Become a Prospective Adoptive Parent?

Once you have decided that adoption may be right for you, you can



If you already have a local provider agency in mind, you can contact them directly. When contacting one of the local provider agencies (see *Selecting an Agency – below*), they will conduct a telephone inquiry in which they will ask you some questions about you and your family and provide you with basic information about the process. You will then be invited to an orientation where you will be given more information about the agency, the initial adoption process, legal requirements, the children available for adoption, rights and responsibilities of adoptive parents, matching procedures and timeline for adoptions. You will also learn about other available programs, for example, how to become a foster parent. You will be able to ask questions as well as express any concerns you may have at that time.

If following the orientation you are still interested in learning more about how you can become an adoptive parent, the agency will inform you of the next step you and your family will need to take. This includes but is not limited to the following: Completing an abuse and criminal background check, mandated pre-service training (MAPP – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting), and family profiles about you and your family. There will also be a minimum of two home visits conducted by the assigned MAPP Trainer from the provider agency in order that a home study or assessment and an adoption portfolio can be completed. If you satisfactorily complete this initial process as well as meet the minimum requirements for adoptions, you will be recommended as a prospective adoptive parent with that agency.

# What Are Some of the Minimum Requirements for Adoption?

In accordance with the FAC 65C-16 relating to adoptions, some of the minimum requirements for adoption include but are not limited to the following:

## **1. Age**

Adoptive applicants should generally be within the age range usual for natural parents of the children available for adoption. However, chronological age is not the determining factor.

## **2. Marital Status**

Families in which there is a mother and father are important for the well-rounded growth and development of a child; however, single persons seeking to adopt will also be considered. If a couple, they should have been married a sufficient length of time in order to establish stability (usually two years or more).

## **3. Previous Marriages**

If one or both applicants have been married previously, careful evaluation will be given to the current marital relationship and the overall marital history. Additionally, verification of the appropriate legal resolution of the prior marriage(s) will be required.

## **4. Resident**

For any person to adopt in Florida, his or her primary residence and place of employment in this State is required. The prospective adoptive parent must live and work in this state for at least six months out of the year and intend to do so for the foreseeable future.

## **5. Income**

The family must have sufficient income and resources to assure the financial stability and security, meet the expenses incurred in normal family life including those of the child or children to be adopted, and make reasonable provisions for the future. However, a family who would need a subsidy to adopt a child with special needs will not be precluded from applying.

## **6. Housing and Neighborhood**

The applicant's housing and the neighborhood must provide adequate space and appropriate living conditions necessary to promote the safety, well-being and self-respect of the family.

## **7. Health History**

Applicants will be required to share the health history on each member of the household including physical and mental health services and treatments received or presently receiving. If there is a question regarding the physical, mental, or emotional health of any

member of the household that could have an injurious effect on a potential adoptive child, the applicants - upon the agency's request - must supply medical/clinical reports and evaluations. All applicants will also be asked to complete a health questionnaire.

### **8. Religion**

Placement of children will not be restricted to homes with formal church affiliations. Applicants who are of different religions must be in agreement as to how the child will be reared and will have resolved any conflicts about religion that affect the rearing of the child.

### **9. Other Children in the Family**

Families with natural or adopted children will be given the same consideration as those families that do not have any children.

### **10. Working Parents**

It is desirable that one of the parents be able to devote full time to the care of the child following the placement. A family in which both parents work outside the home will not be excluded from consideration as adoptive applicants if after placement one of the parents is able to remain home long enough to provide the needed emotional security for the child during this transition.

### **11. Training**

All applicants are required to satisfactorily complete the Group Preparation and Selection/Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (GPS/MAPP) pre-service training. The Florida MAPP pre-service training is a 30-hour course that meets once a week for ten (10) weeks.

### **12. Application and Home Study**

Prospective adoptive families are required to fully complete an adoption application, application addendum, and individual family profiles. After a minimum of two family consultations a home study will be prepared. Once it has been completed it will be reviewed with you so to ensure you agree with the information provided about you and your family in the home study. *A copy of the final home study will be given to you for your records.*

### **13. Family Composition**

Applicants are selected on the basis of their capacity for developing into parents who can meet the needs of available children.

### **14. Employment**

If an adoptive parent is employed, plans for childcare should meet the physical and emotional needs of the child.

### **15. Sexual Orientation**

Florida statute (Section 63. 042(3) states that, “no person eligible to adopt under this statute may adopt if the person is a homosexual”. An applicant must complete this section of the adoptions application.

### **16. Background Screening**

1. All applicants must sign a Release of Information form.
2. Local, state and national criminal records check must be completed on all persons 18 and over who live in the home.
3. Local and statewide checks will be conducted on all children between the ages of 12 to 17 who live in the home.
4. Fingerprints must have been completed - at one of the local provider agencies - and then cleared by the Department of Children and Families’ Screening Unit.
5. Abuse Registry forms must be completed on all members of the household and submitted for clearance.

## What Are Some of the Benefits of Adoption?

When you adopt one of our children, some of the benefits that are available to your child include but are not limited to the following: (a) Free health care through the Medicaid Program to age 18; (b) Free tuition at a Florida state university, college or vocational school to age 23; (c) Monthly adoption stipend until the child is 18 (The minimum monthly stipend is determined as being 80 percent of the current foster care reimbursement rate and may be negotiated up to the full amount of the child's foster care rate at the time of adoption. This is based on the child's needs). Adoption assistance is funded with federal or state monies, depending on the child's eligibility, and continues even if the family moves to another state; (d) Adoption Tax Credit: While every family's tax situation is different, if your family's income is below is \$204,410 the adoption tax credit available to you should be looked into. The tax credit is applied to your total tax liability and could increase your refund. The form number is 8893. (This form and instructions are available at [www.irs.gov/formspubs](http://www.irs.gov/formspubs)); (e) Employer Adoption Benefits: The National Adoption Center provides a listing of employers who provide adoption benefits. To request your copy, please contact the National Adoption Center at 1-800-TO-ADOPT; and (f) If you are a state employee or a teacher, you may be eligible for a one-time stipend of \$5,000 or \$10,000. This is dependent upon your child's special needs and the legislative funding each year. Enrollment occurs each year from August 1 to October 31, and applications are available online [www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/adopbenefitsprogram.shtml](http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/adopbenefitsprogram.shtml). There is also post-adoption support available through the community-based care agency that assists you in going through the process of becoming an adoptive parent; however, you will need to speak with your adoptions counselor.



## Any Other Adoption Benefits Available to State Employees Who Adopt?

Section 409.1663, Florida Statutes, authorizes monetary benefits to certain employees who adopt a child. The following frequently-asked questions will help you in determining if you are eligible for any of these adoptions benefits.

### ***Who is an Eligible Applicant?***

A full-time or part-time employee of the State (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches, including the Department of Lottery), the State Universities, Community Colleges, School Districts, Water Management Districts and instructional personnel employed by the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, provided the employee is paid from regular salary appropriations (not OPS or otherwise "temporary" or casual labor).

### ***What Types of Adoption Are Eligible for the Adoption Benefit?***

If prior to the adoption, the child was in the permanent custody of the Florida Department of Children and Families or a Florida licensed child-placing agency, and the final order of adoption was granted on or after October 1, 2000 (inception date of program), the child may be eligible. Children adopted internationally do not qualify. The following benefits may be paid:

**Adoption of a Special Needs Child:**

- A monetary benefit in the amount of \$10,000 per child. (Pro-rated for part-time employees)

**Adoption of a Non-Special Needs Child:**

- A monetary benefit in the amount of \$5,000 per child. (Pro-rated for part-time employee)

**Who is Considered a Special Needs Child?**

A "special-needs child" is defined as a child:

1. Whose permanent custody was awarded to the Department of Children and Family Services or to a licensed child-placing agency and meets the same meaning as in s. 409.166, Florida Statutes.
2. Who has established significant emotional ties with his or her foster parents or is not likely to be adopted because he or she is:
  - Eight years of age or older **or**
  - Developmentally disabled **or**
  - Physically or emotionally handicapped **or**
  - Of black or racially mixed parentage; **or**
  - A member of a sibling group of any age, provided two or more members of a sibling group remain together for purposes of adoption;

**AND**

3. Except when the child is being adopted by the child's foster parents or relative caregivers, a child for whom a reasonable but unsuccessful effort has been made to place the child without providing a maintenance subsidy.

**When Are Applications Accepted for Adoption Benefits?**

The Office of Family Safety will accept applications during the annual open enrollment period, beginning the first business day of August and concluding on the last business day of September. To be considered for benefits, applicants must submit a completed Application for Adoption Benefits along with a certified copy of the final order of adoption. The benefit application is available through the Department of Children and Families' website. Employees who apply and are determined to be qualified but are not awarded a benefit must re-apply the next year.

**What Else Should I Know About These Monetary Benefits?**

The funding of the program varies each year and the amount of the annual appropriation affects how many applicants will receive a monetary benefit. By law, payments must be made in a lump sum and are considered supplemental wages and applicable payroll taxes must be deducted.

## Making the Decision to Become a Foster Child's Permanent Family?

With legal permanency, children feel a sense of security and can move ahead to develop and live a healthy life. In other words, they can be a “kid”. When a child has a permanent family he can call his own, he gains confidence in his family’s ability to operate independently without feeling that someone could easily disrupt the family’s life. He can also gain certainty that they will remain together as a family for life – having a permanent home and family. Without permanency, children experience doubt and uncertainty about themselves and their future. A permanent home and family committed to caring gives the child a sense of attachment needed to promote healthy development and growth.



## Who Are the Children Available for Adoption?

The children available for adoption have been permanently committed to the State as a result of voluntary surrender by the natural parents or court-ordered severance of parental rights or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). The majority of the children in need of a permanent place to call their home are not newborns but children who have experienced foster home care prior to the adoptive placement. Many of these children are over the age of eight, come from large sibling groups, and are adolescents. As many of our waiting children are part of large sibling groups, all attempts will be made to keep sibling relationships intact through adoption.

## Have You and Your Family Considered Adopting an Older Child?

When considering adoption, many families assume that the younger the child the better; however, this is not necessarily true. Consequently, they will overlook the advantages of adopting older children. Below are some advantages to adopting an older child that should be contemplated when you and your family are considering your adoption options:

★ You can learn more about an older child as to their abilities, interests, and personalities than you can with a baby.

★ You have more history (childhood illnesses, developmental milestones, skills, talents) that can be evaluated by specialists and doctors.

★ You can match (to a degree) your interests and personality with your child-to-be.

★ Certain disorders, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE) cannot be diagnosed in babies, only in older children.

★ Older children can be less demanding than a baby. Depending on their age, an older child can do things by themselves regarding dressing, bathing, eating, chores, and playing on their own.

★ Older children can interact and play with you. You can DO things right from the beginning with your child: take hikes, plant bulbs, bake cookies, roller blade.

★ With an older child, you are given an extraordinary window into their past lives. They may have special memories of grandparents, or favorite foods and games from their country of birth. You can help them retain and synthesize their memories of their past lives. Their past provides an extra peek inside the emotions and personality of the child.

There are, of course, disadvantages to older child adoption, just as there are disadvantages and advantages to adopting babies. No matter what age you adopt what is important is that you and your family have decided to make a permanent commitment to a child.



## Why Should Siblings Be Placed Together?

Children who come into foster care have already experienced a terrible loss, primarily; they will no longer be with their birth family. In order to help children maintain the birth family connection, ensuring that siblings are placed together from the time they come into care is critical. Consequently, workers and courts should strive to place them together in the same home, and hold fast to the goal of keeping the children in the same placement until they are reunited with the birth family or placed in the same adoptive home. The sibling bond is very important in children's development. Brothers and sisters share a special friendship, warmth, and caring. In addition, evidence shows that siblings influence the development of attachment. Children who are separated from their siblings are likely to be preoccupied with thoughts about their siblings, leading to depression. Thus all efforts should be made to keep them in the same home unless it compromises the child's health, safety and well being. In those cases, separating siblings may be in their best interest.

In the event that siblings are not placed together, efforts should be made for the siblings to visit. Phone calls and letters can bridge great distances and letters can include pictures or other mementos to help siblings feel connected. For children who would rather spend time on the computer than with a paper and pen, e-mail is another way to stay in touch. Instant messaging along with pictures and other attachments can be used. Video-conferencing is another option, especially if the siblings are with two different families' states apart. Many Kinkos have video-conference rooms that can be rented hourly. If the children are in different homes but in the same community, the adoptive parents could arrange for the siblings to spend time together by taking them to an outing or activity.

## Selecting an Agency

Although you may have contacted one provider agency, you can call more than one, as you need to feel comfortable with the agency that you will be working with. We encourage you to ask questions and to speak to other adoptive families as well. It does not matter which agency you choose, what is important is your interest in reaching out and helping one of our waiting children. Our Kids of Miami-Monroe is pleased to be working in partnership with the following provider agencies:

### **HIS HOUSE**

**2000 NW 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue – Building 22  
Opalocka, FL 33035  
CONTACT: Maria Rosell – 305-430-0085 Ext. 239**

### **CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY –**

**10720 Caribbean Boulevard – Suite 800  
Miami, FL 33189  
CONTACT: Shaquan Chambliss – 305-324-1262**

### **ONE HOPE UNITED**

**10720 Caribbean Boulevard – Suite 500  
Miami, FL 33189  
CONTACT: Aileen Grosz – 786-712-0669**

### **CENTER FOR FAMILY & CHILD ENRICHMENT**

**1825 NW 167<sup>th</sup> Street – Suite 102 – Miami, FL 33056  
CONTACT: Yves Francois – 305-493-4303**

### **CHARLEE – 305-779-9600**

**155 South Miami Avenue – Suite 700  
Miami, FL 33130  
CONTACT: Monica Farias – 305-779-9638**

### **FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER**

**155 South Miami Avenue – Suite 400  
Miami, FL 33130  
CONTACT: Herve Preval – 305-960-5571 or 305-216-3913**

### **WESLEY HOUSE FAMILY SERVICES – 305-292-7150**

**3114 Flagler Avenue  
Key West, FL 33040  
CONTACT: Laura Breeden – 305-809-5000**

### ***Lead Agency:***

**Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe  
401 NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue – Suite 1000  
Miami, FL 33128  
CONTACT: Sandra Stewart – 305-455-6000 Extension 1049  
(The following page contains information about our Adoption Staff)**



*THE ADOPTIONS UNIT AT  
OUR KIDS OF MIAMI-DADE/MONROE  
IS PLEASED TO ASSIST AND SUPPORT ITS  
PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE FAMILIES:*

**Sandra Stewart, Adoptions Manager:**

(OFFICE): 305-455-1049; (CELL): 305-904-7970; (FAX): 305-377-7029

The Adoptions Manager is responsible for coordinating the adoption process as well as maintaining collaborative relationships with the Department of Children and Families and other community stakeholders.

**Bree Bofill, Adoption Advocate:**

(OFFICE): 305-455-2859; (CELL): 305-877-7082; (FAX): 305-377-7029

The role of the Adoption Advocate is to work closely with families recruited through the Miami Heart Gallery or other medium and who are actively seeking to become adoptive parents. The Adoptions Advocate will serve as a liaison between these families and the Full Case Management Agencies.

**Alejandra Perry, Adoption Coordinator:**

(OFFICE): 305-455-2563; (CELL): 305-498-9331; (FAX): 305-377-7029

The role of the Adoptions Coordinator is primarily focused on promoting adoption of children in the foster care system that are featured on the Miami Heart Gallery. The Adoptions Coordinator is responsible for coordinating all Miami Heart Gallery and Adoption projects by working with the Full Case Management Agencies (FCMA) and The Children's Trust (TCT) to ensure that the desired outcome is reached.



CHAPTER 2:  
ADOPTIONS:  
THE



## What Happens After a Child is Placed for Adoption?

Once a child is placed for adoption with an adoptive family, the family will want to have the adoption finalized. To do this, the family must file a petition for adoption with the clerk of court. This is generally filed in the county in which the termination of parental rights took place. The petition is generally prepared and filed through an attorney. The matter cannot be heard for a final hearing until the child has been with the adoptive family at least 90 days. (The exception to this 90-day rule is for relative adoptions.)

The adoption is finalized at a final hearing. The adoptive parents must be present. The favorable final report of the agency or case manager must be filed with the court. The attorney handling the adoption will prepare the necessary papers for the court's consideration and present the necessary testimony and evidence to the courts. Assuming that all the requirements of the statutes have been met, the judge will sign a final judgment of adoption. The final judgment of adoption awards the adoptive family parents rights of the children.



## The Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

ASFA or Public Law 105-89, enacted in 1997 in an attempt to correct problems that were inherent in the foster care system that deterred the adoption of children with special needs. It focuses on the safety, permanency and well being of children while in care. This law states the following:

- Emphasizes reduced time in care, safety, and consideration of the best interests of the child when deciding on permanent placement.
- Time in care: If foster care is required, length of stay in foster care should be brief. In Florida, we strive to achieve permanency within 12 months.
- Safety: Child welfare staff and foster parents must ensure the safety of children and demonstrate reasonable efforts to promote reunification if and when safety can be ensured.
- Concurrent Planning: At the same time that reasonable efforts are made to reunify children with their birth parents, efforts can also be made to identify and approve a qualified family to adopt the child. This concept is known as concurrent planning. Concurrent planning allows for the possibility of finding a foster family that could, if necessary, adopt the child should the child not be able to return home. It is ideal when a foster family can make a commitment to keep the child and adopt him/her permanently. These families provide continuity and stability for children.
- Permanent placement based on the best interest of the child: Although these laws assume that children and youth belong with their families, sometimes that is not possible. In these cases, families need help in making plans for their children and youth's long-term care.

## Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA)

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (or MEPA) prohibits the delay in a child's placement on the basis of race, color or national origin. MEPA was an attempt - made by congress - to move children through the foster care system, to eliminate biases in foster care and adoptive placements and aid in the recruitment, training and utilization of foster and adoptive parents from every race, color and national original. The ultimate goal of MEPA is to decrease the length of time that children wait to be adopted and to ensure that children are expeditiously placed in permanent and safe homes. Consequently, the Department and the FCMA's cannot deny any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the person, or of the child involved or delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care, on the basis of race, color or national origin.



## What Happens If I Return My Adoptive Child Back to the State?

When you adopted your child, you became his or her legal parent. Consequently, your returning the child will generate an abuse complaint against you. Thus, upon the Department of Children and Families receiving a report indicating abuse or neglect, it will be handled as any other family on whom a report has been received. The Protective Investigator will conduct a thorough investigation. Information about the complaint, services provided to you, and the reasons for the final decision will be documented and provided to the court. Additionally, the provider agency you went through in order to adopt your children, will be immediately notified.

## CHAPTER 3:

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FORMS  
THAT WILL NEED TO BE  
COMPLETED?



Along with the Family Profiles and homework (from the MAPP pre-service training), you will be given several forms that will need to be completed and turned in to your assigned case manager. It is very important that you complete all the forms honestly and to the best of your ability. If you have any questions in completing the forms given to you, you can always ask your agency to assist you. The thorough completion of this initial package will assist you and the agency in determining if adoption is right for you at this time. It will also enable us work together in finding the child that is best suited for your family. Some of the forms you will need to complete include but are not limited to the following:

- (a) Adoptions Application (must be notarized)\*;
- (b) Adoptions Addendum\*;
- (c) Personal Reference (a total of five will be needed);
- (d) School Reference (for all school-aged children in the home);
- (e) Health Questionnaire; and
- (f) Physician's Report.



(\* - A copy of the Adoption Application and Addendum can be found on the following pages.)



# ADOPTIVE HOME APPLICATION

(All information herein is strictly confidential.)

Man's Name (first, middle, last)	
Woman's Name (first and maiden)	

## I. CURRENT SITUATION

A. RESIDENCE: Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Number and Street) (City) (County) (State) (Zip Code)

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ How long at this address: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Rooms: \_\_\_\_\_

Check One:  House Check One:  Own Monthly Payment: \_\_\_\_\_

Apartment  Rent Mortgage Balance: \_\_\_\_\_

If less than 3 years at above address, list former addresses for 5 years.

B. PRESENT MARRIAGE: Date of Present Marriage: \_\_\_\_\_ Attach copy of marriage certificate.

Describe briefly any separations, including dates and duration.  Copy attached

List children of Present Marriage

Child's Name

Child's Date of Birth

Natural or Adopted

C. Name of Others in Home

Date of Birth

Relationship

D. Man's Religious Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_ Woman's Religious Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

E. INTERESTS:	Husband's (Man's)	Wife's (Woman's)
Community (clubs, lodges, etc.)		
hobbies or special interests		

F. HEALTH: Attach completed physician's report for husband (man) and wife (woman).  Report Attached

G. EMPLOYMENT: If current employment is less than 3 years, list former employment for 10 years.

	Husband's (Man's)	Wife's (Woman's)
Current Employment		
Prior Employment (if applicable)		

H. FINANCIAL STATUS – ASSETS:

	Husband's (Man's)	Wife's (Woman's)
Gross Yearly Salary		
Interest or Dividends		
Rental Income		
Other Real Estate at Market Value		
Savings		
Other Investments	(list on separate sheet and attach to this application)	(list on separate sheet and attach to this application)
Life		
Accident		
Hospitalization		
Other (specify)		

FINANCIAL STATUS – LIABILITIES: Itemize on separate sheet and indicate payment plan. Attach sheet to this application.

	Exclude home mortgage.	Exclude home mortgage.
Debts Totalled		
Other Obligations		

## II. LIFE HISTORY

A. Husband's (Man's) Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ Husband's (Man's) Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Wife's (Woman's) Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ Wife's (Woman's) Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. RACE/ETHNICITY:**

	White	Black	Spanish American	Puerto Rican	Oriental	American Indian	Other
Husband (Man):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wife (Woman):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**C. EDUCATION:**

	Last Grade Completed or Degree	Special Training, if any
Husband (Man)		
Wife (Woman)		

**D. MEDICAL HISTORY — PHYSICAL and PSYCHIATRIC — MAJOR MEDICAL CONDITIONS**

	Condition Treated for	Date Treated	Inpatient or Outpatient	Place Treated
Husband (Man)	1.			
	2.			
	3.			
	4.			
	5.			
Wife (Woman)	1.			
	2.			
	3.			
	4.			
	5.			

**E. PREVIOUS MARRIAGES:** Attach documentation of death or divorce.

	Previous Spouse's Name	Date and Place Married	Date and Place Marriage Terminated
Husband's (Man's)			
Wife's (Woman's)			

**Children of Previous Marriage:**

	Child's Name	Age	Whereabouts	Support Payments	Describe continuing contact if out of home
Husband's (Man's)					
Wife's (Woman's)					

**F. ARREST RECORD:** (violations of law other than minor traffic violations)

Husband (Man):  Yes  No      Civil Rights Restored? Husband (Man):  Yes  No  
 Wife (Woman):  Yes  No      Wife (Woman):  Yes  No

(This section continued on next page.)

F. ARREST RECORD – Continued: If husband (man) or wife (woman) has arrest record, provide details below:

Husband (Man) or Wife (Woman)	Where Arrested	Date Arrested	Nature of Charge	Disposition

G. Section 63.042(3), F.S., states that "no person eligible to adopt under this statute may adopt if that person is a homosexual."

I am a homosexual. Yes No  
 Husband (Man)    
 Wife (Woman)

I am bisexual. Yes No  
 Husband (Man)    
 Wife (Woman)

**III. REFERENCES (two must be non-relatives)**

Name	Address	Telephone Number
Husband's (Man's) Employer		
Wife's (Woman's) Employer		

**IV. ADOPTION**

Do you know anyone well who is adopted? \_\_\_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_ Have you ever applied to adopt a child from another source? \_\_\_\_\_ When? \_\_\_\_\_ What source? \_\_\_\_\_

What children would you like us to consider for your family (age, sex, siblings, disabilities, etc.)?

What children would you not like us to consider for your family (age, sex, siblings, disabilities, etc.)?

I understand the importance of providing complete information and attest that the information provided above is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand, in accordance with Section 837.06, Florida Statutes, that making false statements in writing with the intent to mislead a public servant in the performance of his official duty is a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided in Sections 775.082, 775.083, or 775.084, Florida Statutes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Husband's (Man's) Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Wife's (Woman's) Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date Signed \_\_\_\_\_

**Adoption Addendum**



**ADOPTIVE HOME APPLICATION**

(All information herein is strictly confidential.)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I/We

\_\_\_\_\_

—

Husband's First Name

Middle Name

Last Name

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Wife's First Name

Middle Name

Last Name

Residing at \_\_\_\_\_

County \_\_\_\_\_

Have read and understanding the following:

Pursuant to the Multi-ethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the Small Business job Protection Act of 1996 – Section 1808, “Removal of Barriers to Inter-ethnic Adoption”: Race, culture, or ethnicity may not be used as the basis for any denial of placement, nor may such factors be used as a reason to delay any foster or adoptive placement. Discrimination is not to be tolerated, whether it is directed toward adults who wish to serve as foster or adoptive parents, toward children who need safe and appropriate homes, or toward communities or populations that may previously have been under-utilized as a resource for placing children.

\_\_\_\_\_

Husband's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Wife's Signature

## CHAPTER 4: THE WAITING CHILDREN



## Children Available for Adoption

The following are just some of the available websites containing pictures along with write-ups of children waiting for a home they can call their own, a forever home!

<http://adoptuskids.org/>

<http://www.capbook.org/>

<http://www.adoption.org/adopt/florida-adoption-exchange.php>

<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/search/indexnew.asp>

**(See their Webpage on the following page – you can also subscribe to their newsletter online.)**



### **HEART GALLERIES**

The following heart galleries contain a photography exhibit of children who are waiting to be permanently adopted. The galleries are unique in concept as they are displayed in many public places just like an art exhibit. Every photograph is a vibrant composition taken by a professional media or portrait photographer. Each photograph comes with a bio card that describes the child's personality and interests. The inner spirits of these children come to life in these pictures!

[www.heartgallerytampabay.org](http://www.heartgallerytampabay.org)

[www.heartgallerypinellaspasco.org](http://www.heartgallerypinellaspasco.org)

[www.heartgalleryofbroward.org](http://www.heartgalleryofbroward.org)

[www.heartgalleryjax.org](http://www.heartgalleryjax.org)

[www.heartgallerymetroorlando.org](http://www.heartgallerymetroorlando.org)

[www.heartgalleriesarasota.org](http://www.heartgalleriesarasota.org)

[www.heartgallerieswfl.org](http://www.heartgallerieswfl.org)

[www.miamiheartgallery.org/](http://www.miamiheartgallery.org/) *(See The Children's Trust Miami Heart Gallery write-up on page 32)*

[www.heartgallerypbc.org/](http://www.heartgallerypbc.org/)

[www.chsfl.org/midHeartGallery.php](http://www.chsfl.org/midHeartGallery.php)





# Florida Department of Children and Families

[Home](#) | [Regions / Circuits](#) | [Facilities](#) | [Programs](#) | [Publications](#) | [DCF Forms](#) | [Training](#)

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Enter Keywords:



## Children Available for Adoption

The current database contains :  
400 Boys, 244 Girls and 46 Sibling Groups

In Florida: 1-800-96-ADOPT  
Outside of Florida: 1-904-353-0679

There are 3 search options available. (Scroll to see options)  
Choose one of the following:

For a listing of Available Boys or Girls...

Choose a Group  Ordered by

Younger Than ...  No Older Than ...

Disabilities : Indicate the highest level of disability you can accept.

	Does Not Matter	None	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Disability	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional Disability	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intellectual Disability	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visual/Hearing Impaired	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exceptional Educational Needs	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Special Care	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

OR

Search for Sibling groups...

Ordered by

With a Maximum group size of

OR  
If you know of a specific child/group that you're interested in ...

Locate a Child by ID# :

Locate a Sibling Group by ID# :

## The Children's Trust Miami Heart Gallery



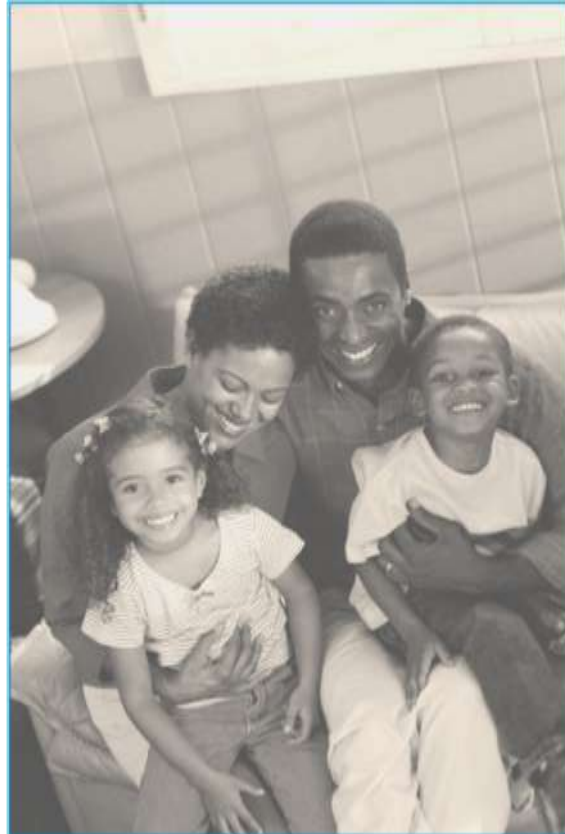
The Children's Trust Miami Heart Gallery is a collaborative initiative between The Children's Trust and **Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.** This website features portraits of children available for adoption in Miami-Dade County's foster care system. There are over 200 children in need of permanent homes featured on that site! The pictures of the children on that website were taken by some of the world's top photographers, who have donated their time and talent. As the Miami Heart Gallery is among only several in the country with audio messages from the waiting children; you are able to hear their hopes and dreams for the future. The website also reaches out to families that are not only interested in adoption but in fostering or volunteering as well. For more information, you can visit the website by going to <http://www.miamigallery.org>. This website will also provide you with linkage to other heart galleries across the United States.

## November: National Adoptions Month



November has been designed as National Adoptions Month. During that month, the focus is the adoption of children currently in foster care. There are many activities and celebrations kicked off with a Presidential Proclamation, and while efforts made at the national level certainly help build awareness of adoption, participation in local programs, events, and activities by those of us with a direct connection to adoption can often be the most effective way to promote positive perceptions, debunk the myths, and draw attention to the tens of thousands of children in foster care who wait and hope for permanent families.

## CHAPTER 5: ADOPTION RESOURCES





## Creating an Adoptions Life Book

As you go through the initial adoption process by attending the mandatory MAPP pre-service training, you will learn about the importance of a Life Book for a child's identity and self-esteem. An Adoption Life Book is a record of an adoptee's life that uses words, photos, graphics, the child's artwork, and memorabilia. The Adoption Life Book includes information about the child's birth parents and the reason for leaving them. It always starts at the child's birth. The fun part of this Life Book is when the adopted child first joined the adoptive family.

An Adoption Life Book is more than a life story. It is a unique opportunity for parents to honor every minute of their children's lives. It is the single most meaningful piece of "paperwork" that any family can give a child. The benefits of the Adoption Life Book include the following:

- ☞ A concrete tool for meaningful conversation
- ☞ An adoption security blanket
- ☞ Attachment rituals
- ☞ Structure for difficult material (such as reasons for the relinquishment)
- ☞ Ways to normalize adoption language
- ☞ Ways to reduce fantasy about birthparents
- ☞ A front-load for adolescence
- ☞ Opportunities to create positive identity and ethnic identity
- ☞ Space for future events in the child's life

## Support Systems Available for Adoptive Parents

Below are some websites containing available on-line training, workshops, conferences, referral services, articles, and much more to better assist and support you and your family before and after you adopt.

<http://www.americanadoptioncongress.org/>

<http://www.nrcadoption.org/>

<http://www.adoptflorida.com/information-center.htm>

<http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/>

<http://www.ococfl.org/>

<http://www.adoptflorida.com/Reunion-Registry.htm>

<http://www.adoptflorida.org/>

<http://www.ococfl.org/>

<http://www.adopt.org/assembled/home.html>

<http://www.adoption.com/>

<http://www.cwla.org/programs/adoption/adoptionlinks.htm>

<http://www.attachment.org> (This website also offers a 6-week program (available on CD) to facilitate attachments: *Taming the Tiger while it's a Kitten*)

<http://www.attachmentsservices.com>

<http://ergo.com> (ERGO Pouch Carrier can carry a child up to 50lbs – available on this website.)

### ***Books on Adoption***

Tapestry Books' Adoption Book Catalog: [www.tapestrybooks.com](http://www.tapestrybooks.com) (Call or go online to request their free catalog)

Pact's Multicultural Book Source: [www.pactadopt.org](http://www.pactadopt.org) (Catalog available)

Post Adoption Center for Education & Research: [www.pacer-adoption.com](http://www.pacer-adoption.com) (Look under "lists" tab on website for their comprehensive book list)

American Adoption Congress: [www.americanadoptioncongress.org](http://www.americanadoptioncongress.org) (Look under "Recommended Books" on website for their comprehensive book list)

*I Love You Rituals* by Dr. Becky Bailey

*Building the Bonds of Attachment* by Daniel A. Hughes

#### **LOVE AND LOGIC BOOKS ON PARENTING:**

*When Love is not enough* by Nancy Thomas

*Ghosts from the Nursery* by Robin Karr-Morse

## Suggested Reading Books for Families

### **FOR ADULTS:**

Arms, Suzanne, *To Love and Let Go*

Blau, Eric, *Stories of Adoption*

Callander, Joan, *Second Time Around: Help for Grandparents Who Raise Their Children's Kids*

Casey, Filis and Casey, Marisa Catalina, *Born In Our Hearts: Stories of Adoption*

Eldridge, Sherrie, *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*

Fahlberg, Vera, *A Child's Journey Through Placement*

Jewett Jarrat, Claudia, *Adopting the Older Child*

Jewett Jarrat, Claudia, *Helping Children Cope With Separation and Loss*

Keck, Gregory and Regina Kupecky, *Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids*

McNamara, Joan and McNamara, Bernard, *Adoption and the Sexually Abused Child*

Melina, Lois Ruskai, *Making Sense of Adoption*

Melina, Lois Ruskai, *Raising Adopted Children: A Manual for Adoptive Parents*

Russell, Marlou, *Adoption Wisdom: A Guide to the Issues and Feelings of Adoption*

Schooler, Jayne, *The Whole Life Adoption Book*

Siegel, Stephanie, *Parenting Your Adopted Child*

Simon, Rita and Roorda, Rhonda, *In their Own Voices: Trans-racial Adoptees Tell Their Stories*

Steinberg, Gail and Hall, Beth, *Inside Trans-racial Adoption*

Sorosky, Arthur D., Annette Baran, and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle*

Watkins, Mary and Fisher, Susan, *Talking With Young Children about Adoption*

### **SEARCH AND REUNION:**

Allen, Madelene, *Reunion: The Search for My Birth Family*

Askin, Jane, *Search: A Handbook for Adoptees and Birthparents*

Blau, Eric, *Stories of Adoption: Loss and Reunion*

Lifton, Betty Jean, *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience*

McColm, Michelle, *Adoption Reunions: A Book for Adoptees, Birth Parents and Adoptive Families*

Rillera, Mary Jo, *The Reunion Book*

Strauss, Jean, *Birthright: The Guide to Search and Reunion for Adoptees, Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents*

Westin, Jeane, *Finding Your Roots*

### **FOR CHILDREN:**

Banish, Rosalyn, *A Forever Family: A Book About Adoption*

Blomquist, Geraldine & Paul, *Zachary's New Home: A Story for Foster & Adopted Children*

Bloom, Suzanne, *A Family for Jamie*

Brodzinsky, Anne Braff, *The Mulberry Bird: A Story of Adoption*

Cole, Joanna, *How I was Adopted*

Curtis, Jamie Lee, *Tell Me Again About the Time I was Born*

Desmoinaux, Christel, *Mrs. Hen's Big Surprise*

Dahl, Raold, *James and the Giant Peach*

Girard, Linda Walvoord, *Adoption Is For Always*

Kasza, Keiko, *A Mother for Choco*

Keller, Holly, *Horace*

Kirk, David, *Little Miss Spider*

Krementz, Jill, *How It Feels To Be Adopted*

Livingston, Carole, *Why Was I Adopted?*

London, Jonathan, *A Koala for Katie*

Rosove, Lori, *Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story*



## CHAPTER 6: LEARNING ABOUT OUR CHILDREN'S NEEDS



## Turning Losses into Gains

During the mandated pre-service training, Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP), you learned about losses and gains and the need to be a loss expert. Unfortunately, due to the losses that children coming into care have experienced, i.e., the separation from their birth family, this will have an impact on their future growth and development. It is important that we help these children deal with the personal losses they have sustained in their short life as their difficult life experiences will affect the success of prospective adoptive and foster parents.



## How Do I Tell My Child that He's Adopted?

Telling a child that he or she has been adopted is not easy. Fortunately some techniques have been developed by adoption experts that will help make talking about the adoption a little easier and more effective - whether it's a warm heart-to-heart conversation or a spur-of-the-moment surprise to your child. Below are some tips that will prove very useful.

### **Begin talking when your child is young.**

Early talks - starting in infancy - help your child learn adoption language and begin to grasp his/her adoption story. But early talks have proven to be more for your benefit than for your child's. Before you start though, practice the story in your mind or even role-play your response to questions your child might ask. It's important for partners in a two-parent family to coordinate their stories. They both have to be committed to talking on how to share the story.

### **Keep your conversations developmentally appropriate.**

"Developmentally appropriate" conversations require you to think carefully about how to discuss difficult issues without lying. Remember that honesty is the best policy. For example, if you know your child was conceived by rape, you don't want to start out by saying, "Your mommy and daddy loved each other very much..." You can say something that would imply that their parents didn't know each other very well.

### **Be honest.**

The adoption story belongs to the child, and the child has a right to know his or her story. "Developmentally appropriate" storytelling doesn't give you a license to replace, make up, or soften harsh facts. It is understandable that as adoptive parents, knowing all the losses and pain that your child has gone through, you want to make it better for them. You want their pain to go away and never come back. But don't make up what you don't know, just admit that you don't know.

### **Talk often, and show that you're willing to talk when your child wants to.**

Repetition will help your child absorb the concepts surrounding adoption. Remember that we are asking children to try to understand complexities about their adoption stories that sometimes the adults themselves can't understand! Sometimes the information is too emotionally laden for the child. Developmentally, he or she may not be able to process it. So it's important for you to revisit the information frequently with your child: Make sure the conversations are relevant. Talk about it when it seems to be a significant piece of whatever is going on at that moment in your child's life.

### **If your child isn't talking, consider using techniques to spark conversation.**

An indirect conversation allows parents to keep the subject open without forcing the child to participate. It's directly meant for the child to hear, but it's not talking to the child. For example, a dad knowing that his child is nearby might ask his wife, "I always think of Lisa on Mother's Day because she's Sally's birthmother. Should we buy flowers for Lisa and put them on the mantel, or send her a card?" Sometimes a direct approach works best. You might say, "Do you have any questions about adoption?" You may get a response that time and maybe not. Don't be discouraged and don't get upset.

**Help children learn to express their feelings.**

Help them develop a feeling-word vocabulary. This starts with toddlers. Help them have an extensive vocabulary so they can identify feelings that get jumbled up and get them out in words. Look for nonverbal ways to help your child work through adoption issues. Some children might benefit from drawing pictures about their adoption story, older children can write down their feelings in a journal. This is a good way to process grief and abstract thoughts. Of course, the journal is the child's property, so **no** snooping!

**Make certain children who are older when placed receive the explanations and support they need.**

Don't try to make your child forget his or her past. Often parents think the child has already been through so much pain that they don't need to bring it to mind. After all, the child is now in your home and everything is going to be better! However, ten years of one's life is ten years. It just can't be swept under the rug! The child should remember everything, good and bad. After all, it is a part of his or her identity. If you don't talk about it, everything will get confused and overwhelming for the child.

**Learn how to respond appropriately to others' questions and comments and teach your children the same skill.**

If somebody walks up to you in the grocery store and asks how much money you make or how often you have sex, you know where the boundaries are. It's important for parents to recognize that they can be honest and open with their children about their histories but that doesn't mean they have to be honest and open with everybody they meet **in the grocery store!** We realize that it can be difficult to do when it comes to adoption. We're so overjoyed to finally have our child with us that we want to tell everyone about the entire process, even a stranger **in the grocery store!** You should not allow the focus to stay there as you are doing it at your child's expense. If you are with your child **in the grocery store** and are asked about your child, simply redirect the conversation. Once you are back in the car, give your child an opportunity to talk about the incident if he or she wants to. Seize the moment by saying, "Remember, we don't talk to strangers about personal matters."

**If you have an open adoption, discuss topics with the birthparents, but don't allow them to set the agenda for discussion.**

If you have an open adoption, you need to always realize that the adoptive parents are the parents forever. One of the worst situations in open adoptions that weren't crafted carefully is that adoptive parents abdicate parenting because they believe the birthparents are there. Adoption is not joint custody. Consequently, birthparents should be treated as extended family members who must be "on board" with the whole adoption agenda. Make certain the birth family is aware of your approach to the adoption story and will work with you as the child asks questions.

Now that you've learned these tips, you need to remember that...

**EVERY CHILD IS DIFFERENT!**

So, if you have more than one adopted child, you're going to deal with each of them differently. To take any list of steps and think you're going to have a template, that's not going to work. What's more, you shouldn't force the topic on any child. In other words, you shouldn't be constantly reminding your child that he or she is adopted. So how do you know what's the best approach for your child? Simple: You're the parent. "As a parent you know your kid. So, you are the expert on your child! Remember to always listen to your child and give them what they need, not what you need. A tall order, perhaps, but it's the essence of parenting.

## KEY CONTACTS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
Office: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



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# **MORE** KEY CONTACTS

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DO I HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

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DO I HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

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# OUR NEW FAMILY



## CHAPTER 7: POST-ADOPTION SERVICES





Because of the lifelong impact that adoption will have on you and your family, you or a member of your family may want or need additional support, education, and other services as your children grow. Post adoption services can help families with many issues, e.g. how to explain adoption to a preschooler or how to help an adolescent search for his or her identity. The following are some available resources to help you and your family on this wonderful journey!

### **What if I need medical assistance for the child I have adopted?**

According to the FAC65C-16 regarding adoptions, the need for medical assistance must be established prior to the adoption placement, although the service might not actually be needed until a later date. When this need is not established prior to the placement and the adoptive parents feel they have been wrongly denied services on behalf of an adopted child, they have the right to request a fair hearing. If, through the fair hearing process, a service is approved, the effective date of the service will be the date the family officially requested the service. Retroactive payment dating back to the date of placement will not be approved.

(2) A service must be terminated when the condition for which it was granted no longer exists or on the child's 18th birthday, whichever occurs first. Children needing residential mental health services will be referred to the district's Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Program Office, children's program for services.

(3) The cost for a service will not be paid when those costs can be or are covered by the adopting family's medical insurance, Children's Medical Services, Children's Mental Health Services, Medicaid, Agency for Persons with Disabilities or local school districts.

(4) The adoptive parents must obtain the approval of the FCMA prior to planning for the use of a service. The adoptive parents must submit a copy of the bill for the service to the FCMA to initiate reimbursement. The bill must be clearly legible and must specify the name of the child, the service rendered and the date of the service, in addition to the charge for the service.

### **Are there any e-mail subscriptions available for adoptive parents?**

In addition to all the services and resources available to families by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, they offer a FREE monthly e-mail publication. The monthly publication, *CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY E-LERT* features an array of topics to assist the adoptive parent in continuing to care for his or her child. To find out how you can order and access this monthly publication on line please visit <http://www.childwelfare.gov>.

The Adoption for Florida website also offers a FREE e-mail magazine. The *ADOPTION MONTH E-MAGAZINE* is another online cross triad adoption publication. Each issue contains adoption news, informative articles, the newest additions to the Adoption.com Photo-listing, recent forum discussions, the most recent blog discussions, as well as upcoming events all over the country. To subscribe for your FREE monthly e-mail publication, please visit <http://www.adoption.com>

## Are there any other websites offering assistance and support to adoptive parents?

Below is a list of sites offering assistance on post-adoption services that may be needed by adoptive families:

**ADOPTION LEARNING PARTNERS:** Provides a wide variety of low-cost online education for parents and professionals: [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org) or 800-566-3995.

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS:** Offers a directory of adoption-competent physicians and advice for both parents and practitioners: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) or 847-434-4000.

**ARCH NATIONAL RESPITE NETWORK:** Provides listings of respite care providers by state and in a searchable database as a program of the Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project, Inc.: [www.archrespite.org](http://www.archrespite.org) or 919-490-5577.

**CENTER FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES:** Offers online education for parents, educators and adoption professionals: [www.centerforadoptivefamilies.org](http://www.centerforadoptivefamilies.org) or 410-402-1121.

**CENTER FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT AND EDUCATION:** Offers information about adoption-competent training and recommended reading for children, parents, adoption professionals and educators: [www.adoptionssupport.org](http://www.adoptionssupport.org) or 301-476-8525.

**NATIONAL ADOPTION CENTER:** Offers an online community, publications and education for children and parents. [www.adopt.org](http://www.adopt.org) or 800-TO-ADOPT

**NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN:** Provides information on adoption subsidies, how to start a parent support group, trans-racial/trans-cultural parenting, answers to adoptive parents' frequently-asked questions and articles on parenting adopted children: [www.nanac.org](http://www.nanac.org) or 651-644-3036.

## Are there any adoptive parent support groups available?

In an adoptive parent support group, primarily made up of volunteers, adoptive and prospective adoptive parents come together to offer and receive information and support to one another. The **FLORIDA STATE FOSTER ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION, INC. (FSFAPA)** provides supportive services to caregivers throughout Florida. In addition to having an opportunity to participate in a monthly telephone conference that provides you with an opportunity to listen to statewide speakers on caregiver issues, there is a local FSFAPA chapter in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties and an on-line support group. The FSFAPA also holds an Annual Education Conference where you have an opportunity to network with other adoptive parents and hear from many speakers regarding adoption issues. Information can be found on their website [www.fsfapa.org](http://www.fsfapa.org).

If you are interested in participating in the monthly telephone conference, it is held on the first Monday of each month from **8:30P – 9:30P. (Call-in Number: 1-888-808-6959 PIN# 9229094).**



Support Groups serving the Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties are:

**NORTH MIAMI DADE COUNTY  
FOSTER & ADOPTIVE PARENT  
ASSOCIATION**

Shamele Jenkins, President  
305-469-1157  
[shabenj@aol.com](mailto:shabenj@aol.com)

**SOUTH MIAMI DADE FOSTER & ADOPTIVE  
PARENT ASSOCIATION**

Maritza Moreno, President  
305-775-4814  
[mcmoreno@me.com](mailto:mcmoreno@me.com)

**Website:**  
<http://southdadefosterparents.shutterfly.com>

**FOSTER CARE & ADOPTION COMMUNITY  
SOLUTIONS**

Rosa Gordon, Executive Director  
954-981-1948  
[rgordon@fcacommunitysolutions.org](mailto:rgordon@fcacommunitysolutions.org)

**FLORIDA KEYS FOSTER & ADOPTIVE  
PARENT ASSOCIATION**

Cindi Miller, President  
305-453-0111  
305-451-8009  
[keyrative@aol.com](mailto:keyrative@aol.com)



To participate in their on-line support group you can go to [ffpa@yahogroups.com](mailto:ffpa@yahogroups.com) share your questions, issues/concerns.



### **Can I organize my own adoptive parent support group?**

If you are interested in organizing an adoptive parent support group, assistance is available at [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org), [www.fsfapa.org](http://www.fsfapa.org), and [www.adopamericanetwork.org](http://www.adopamericanetwork.org).

### **Is there an *adoptions* hotline?**

The Florida Adoption Information Center serves as Florida's adoption hotline by offering an array of FREE services that provides adoption information and referral services to adoptive parents and adoptees. They can be reached at **1-800-96-ADOPT** or via e-mail at [adoptflorida@danielkids.org](mailto:adoptflorida@danielkids.org).

### **Can I contact my FCMA for information on other post-adoptive services?**

The FCMA that assisted you in completing the adoption can provide you with additional information and referral services, support groups, adoption-related libraries, case management and training. To find out what options are available to you in your area you can contact your Adoptions Counselor. If additional information is needed you can also contact the Adoptions Specialist at Our Kids and speak to Sandra Stewart at **305-455-6000 Extension 1049**.



## ***A FIVE-YEAR PLAN...***

### **UPCOMING POST-ADOPTION SERVICES:**

Given the need for post-adoption services to families in the Miami Dade and Monroe Counties, the Department of Children and Families invited representatives from Our Kids of Miami Dade & Monroe, local service providers, government agencies, and other organizations in the Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties to a planning meeting on September 18, 2009. Following this meeting sub-groups were formed in order to identify and implement strategies to promote and continue to support adoptions in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. Under the *FLORIDA CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND PERMANENCY PLAN* initiatives centering on the following post-services will be implemented over a five-year period (starting July 1, 2010 and ending on June 30, 2015). The initiatives recommended by the group coincide with those identified by adoptive parents throughout the State as being the most needed in order to help them address the life-long impact of adoptions.

#### **Adoptive parent and teen support groups:**

Small group opportunities for parents and teens that are accessible; configured and meeting as often as appropriate for the languages, cultures and needs of the participants in your communities; provision of support from umbrella organizations and qualified facilitators where appropriate (e.g., teen support groups); etc. Additionally, a weekly and evening hotline would be available in order to provide immediate support to adoptive parents.

#### **Education and training opportunities for adoptive parents:**

Education and training related to adoption issues, with an emphasis on strategies for handling loss, grief, relationship building, and “acting out” behaviors; skill-building to equip adoptive parents with the skills needed to meet the specific and developing needs of children (e.g., fetal alcohol, substance abuse, autism, etc.); providing adoption resource centers, lending libraries, newsletters, annual adoption conferences, and ongoing training and workshops for parents.

#### **Adoption competent education and mental health assistance services for adoptive families:**

Those providing education and therapeutic services need to have the basic knowledge and skills to effectively work with adoptive families and to empower adoptive parents and families to provide the environment necessary for ameliorating the effects of trauma (e.g., build relationships, improve relationships, develop nurturing and attachment, etc.); campaigns to recruit professionals to seek adoption competency.

## Case management services for adoptive parents and children:

An intake process for families to return for needed services; designated case manager to respond to adopted children and families post-legal finalization; system to notify families of continued training, adoption workshops, and support group meetings, and resource guide that includes adoption-support information and service providers; etc.



# THE WAITING CHILDREN

*They're not only different but they've already faced one of the hardest lessons life has to teach. They have lost their birthparents and will have to confront the reality that painful, sad things can happen to them. For most of us who are not adopted, having a parent die or losing a parent through divorce may be the biggest loss we'll ever know. Our parent is gone and we're on our own, without protection, guidance and unconditional love. When this loss occurs in adulthood, we know it's not our fault - we're not all-powerful and we didn't do anything to cause it. Adopted children, however, experience this loss from a child's perspective - they do think they're omnipotent and, therefore they must have done something to cause what happened: They believe that had they done or said something else, perhaps, they would still be with their birth mother or birth father. Consequently, they feel a part of them is missing and it's somehow their fault.*

*We don't talk enough about the things that hurt in adoption. So when adopted children say, "I miss my birth mother," adults try to "fix" their pain with consoling words like "Mommy and daddy wanted you so much to be in their family." But to adopted children, it sounds as though adults don't listen when they try to communicate their grief and their loss. And even when adults do listen well, adopted children can't be fully comforted because they don't yet fully understand their own feelings. So anger and frustration, or sadness and anxiety result. Though these are normal responses for children, they can become a problem when they affect their emotional growth and development ... and when they negatively affect their relationships and self-esteem.*

*Adoptive families need to validate an adopted child's experience by talking about it - first, name the feeling that's going on - anger, depression, anxiety - and then checking it out with the child. Together, you can find ways to cope. Adopted children aren't crazy or unloving if they feel sad or angry or fearful - let them know that. No one can make these children's losses smaller by suppressing them - caring adults can, however, help them to make the rest of their lives bigger. Assure adopted children, and those who are involved with adopted children, that, together, we can all find ways to cope with these issues successfully. Above all, give adopted kids a break - they're doing the best they can. Simply listen and understand. Adopted children will learn to accept and move beyond their losses; however, it doesn't happen overnight. Help them to step back, take a deep breath, remind themselves of how far they've come, and that you will always be by their side. Together we will make their journey a better one!*