Adopting a child

Whether public or private, domestic or international, the road to adoption can be bureaucratic, complicated and drawn out. The rewards of welcoming a new family member into your home and nurturing a young life, however, can far outweigh the drawbacks of adoption procedures. Before you decide if you want to adopt a child, it's important to explore, understand, and consider your options.



Types of adoption

Adoption is a provincially regulated practice, so the process varies across the country. Most provinces offer four types of adoption to residents:

Public adoption. Since there are very few infants available for adoption through the public system, prospective adoptive parents can expect to wait six to eight years for an infant through a public adoption or adoptions completed through a local child care protection agency. However, thousands of older and special needs children are waiting for adoptive families in this system. Public adoptions are generally free, although some agencies charge for home studies and other services.

2. **Step-parent and relative adoption.** Many step-parents and other relatives caring for children want to formally adopt the child they're already raising. The processes and laws governing step-parent and relative adoptions vary from province to province. Get appropriate legal advice from a lawyer who specializes in family law in your province. The costs of this type of adoption are usually related to lawyer's fees and court fees and vary from case to case.
3. **Private domestic adoption.** In a private domestic adoption, birth parents usually work with a private agency or facilitator to select adoptive parents for their child. Most children available through private domestic adoptions are infants under six months of age. Everyone involved in a private adoption must agree to the degree of openness and the relationship that the birth parent(s) will have with the child before finalizing the adoption.
   Fees for private adoptions, court costs, facilitators and home study fees are generally paid by the prospective adoptive parents. Some facilitators also ask that adoptive parents pay for counselling for the birth parents. Be sure to ask for a full breakdown of fees and never give money directly to the birth parent. Adoptive parents seeking a private domestic adoption can expect to pay between $6,000 and $10,000.

   Private adoption agencies are only licensed in some provinces, while in others they are unregulated. Be sure to get references and gather as much information about the agency as you can before entering into any agreement.

4. **International adoption.** The adoption of children born in other countries can be quite complicated. Because of this, most people that pursue international adoptions get assistance and guidance from private agencies. These agencies help locate children available for adoption in other countries, make arrangements for the adoption, and help adoptive parents with the immigration process.
   International adoptions can take anywhere from six months to 5 years to complete, depending on the country involved. Rules regarding parental age requirements, marital status, and financial status vary from country to country.

   The costs for international adoptions vary greatly. Expenses can include home study, immigration fees, agency and lawyers' fees, application fees, as well as the cost of translation services, travel and medical check-ups. By its completion, the cost of international adoption can range from $15,000 to $30,000. If you are considering an international adoption, remember to ask for a full breakdown of fees and how they are allocated.

Adoption Home Study

A home study is a chance for the adoption practitioner to assess your home, personality, values, views on parenting and suitability to adopt and helps to determine what kind of child could most benefit from your

home and parenting. Typically, a series of interviews lasting two to three hours each are conducted in the adoption practitioner's office, and in your home. Prospective adoptive parents in all provinces must undergo the home study process before being approved to adopt, which can take anywhere from three to 12 months to complete.

After completing the home study process, the adoption practitioner makes a recommendation to the provincial ministry responsible for adoption on your suitability as adoptive parents. If the ministry approves you to adopt, a child can be placed with you once a suitable match is made.

The home study is the most challenging part of the adoption process, but it's also one of the most important. Remember that adoption placement decisions are based on the child's needs. You might not be paired with the first available child, not because you don't make the grade, but because your home environment isn't a "match" for that individual child. Even though approval provides no guarantees that a child will be placed with you, the home study helps you prepare for the joys and challenges of being a parent.

Choosing an adoption route

Adoption requires a major commitment of time, energy and devotion: both to the process and to the child that you'll raise. Once you've decided to adopt, deciding which route you should take will take real consideration. Examine the benefits and pitfalls of each type of adoption and decide what's most important to you. For example, if you're adamant about adopting an infant, you may decide on domestic or international private adoption. Those interested in adopting older children, however, might find the inexpensive and sometimes more expedient public system preferable.