



# Alberta's Waiting Children

Open your heart  
Let adoption  
be their future



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# Introduction

Making the decision to pursue adoption is a life changing one. It is a path that will affect you and your family in profound ways. Making room in your heart, your home, and your future for a child waiting for a family to call their own is done with good intention, and is an admirable goal. As with any major life decision, it is a journey best taken with eyes wide open, and after very careful consideration of your readiness, motivation, and ability to commit whole-heartedly to the path ahead.

Whether through birth or adoption, parenting is a leap into the unknown, and it is usually a journey undertaken in a spirit of great expectation. The efforts and sacrifices most know to be a part of parenting are offset by hopes of health, happiness, and fulfillment for your family. This is as it should be, but the truth of life and parenting is that there will be both expected and unexpected challenges.

Families undertaking adoption need to be particularly prepared to commit to a journey of unknowns. The hoped-for joy will be greater in the belief that whatever the future brings, your children deserve all of your efforts and full commitment. Those who are well prepared,



flexible, and realistic in their expectations of the journey will experience greater satisfaction and success.

This booklet will offer preliminary information on what adoption of Alberta's waiting children represents. It will provide an introduction to who these children are, what is meant by "special needs", what is required of an adoptive parent, how to get started, and what resources and supports are available to help adoptive parents.

There are many children waiting for the gift of permanent, loving homes in Alberta. We hope that the information within this booklet will assist you in evaluating your ability and desire to offer one or more of these children a future where the security of a family through adoption can be theirs.

"Adopting a child won't change the world,  
but for that child, the world will change".

*Unknown*



# Who are Alberta's Waiting Children?

Adoption is a wonderful and accepted way to form and expand families. Recent history, however, has seen the face of adoption change significantly. Adoption used to be more typically of infants surrendered at birth. Now, the children available for adoption could not be more diverse. This is certainly true of Alberta's waiting children.

## The Children

Alberta's waiting children are those who have been removed from the care of their birth parents and are in the permanent care of the Alberta government. They are most often in foster care and are waiting for a permanent family through adoption. They can be toddlers, teenagers, individual children, or part of a sibling group. They can be bright, have delays in their development, have behavioural issues, be affectionate, impulsive, sweet-natured, slow to trust and attach, or any combination of these. They might have physical disabilities, medical conditions, psychiatric diagnoses, specific cultural needs, or birth family relationships that need to be maintained. Many of these children have been exposed prenatally to alcohol and/or drugs, the lifelong impact of which can vary from mild to severe.

Each of these children has their own story, journey, needs, talents, and gifts. Each is unique in personality, temperament, ability, and capacity. Their histories, struggles, and experiences will have influenced their development, how they behave, and what they will need from their adoptive family. What unites them is their need for stability, continuity, and the sense of belonging that adoption can provide.



## Special Needs

Adoption of Alberta's waiting children is referred to as "special needs" adoption. Being diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, being part of a sibling group of three or more, being part of an ethnic minority, exhibiting behavioural issues due to a history of abuse and trauma, living with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or simply being "older", are some examples of the special needs affecting Alberta's waiting children. These special needs are as diverse as the children themselves and can be seen individually or in combination.

Special needs are often referred to as mild, moderate, or severe in presentation. Understanding what is meant by special needs is important, as is a basic understanding of what these will mean for a child's day-to-day functioning and overall development. Training is provided to prospective adoptive parents as part of the application and approval process to help them learn about and understand these needs.

Doing your own research is also encouraged. The knowledge you gain will assist you in important ways. It will be helpful in providing you with a realistic picture of the children available for adoption, the most common issues affecting them, and what you might expect in parenting a child with special needs. Training is offered to assist you in defining your "child desired" — the kind of child or children you wish to adopt and feel capable of parenting.





## Older Children

Children over the age of six represent the greatest number of children waiting for adoption in Alberta. Children beyond pre-school age are known as “older” children, and this in itself is a special need in adoption.

At any given time in Alberta, approximately 70 percent of children waiting for adoption are “older”, most of these being between seven and 12-years-of-age. The older a child is, the more difficult it becomes to find a suitable adoptive family for them, as far fewer families are seeking to adopt children over the age of six. Teenagers wait the longest, and too often their need for an adoptive family goes unmet. These children may remain in foster care or group care until they reach the age of majority, and become independent without the security of family support that young people need.

In lesser numbers, children under the age of six are available for adoption, and it is a wonderful gift to be able to provide them with a permanent family as early as possible. Many approved adoptive families want to be matched to younger children, and there are few such children available. As a consequence, wait times for families that want a younger child will usually be significantly longer.

Motivations and reasons for pursuing adoption differ from one family to another, and there is no right or wrong in defining one's child desired. For some, a very young child is suitable. However, given the many deserving older children waiting, families are encouraged to give consideration to expanding the age range they will accept. The advantages to doing so are many. These include the possibility of being matched more quickly, having better information about a child's capacity and functioning, being able to develop common interests, and knowing that you are truly giving a child a chance at a more secure future.

To get a first hand look at some of the children waiting for adoptive families here in Alberta, visit [www.humanservices.alberta.ca/adoption](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/adoption). There are always more children available for adoption than are featured on this site, but the children present are a representative sample.

## Traits of the Successful Adoptive Parent

Opening your heart and home to a child through adoption is an important and worthwhile journey. It is also one that can be full of unique demands and challenges. Not everyone has the ability or motivation to successfully navigate the realities and potential difficulties of a special needs adoption, but neither is it something only the extraordinary can handle. Certain personal qualities and traits in adoptive parents have been identified as predictive of success in special needs adoptive placements. These are some examples:

- Acceptance
- Patience
- Able to make and maintain commitments
- Warmth
- Good physical health
- Stable emotional and mental health
- Ability to give love and affection to a child who may have difficulty returning those feelings
- The ability to adjust to children whose values, attitudes and life experiences do not reflect your own
- Good communicators and problem solvers
- A sense of humor
- An ability to “not sweat the small stuff”
- A reliable support network of family and/or friends
- Flexibility to make major lifestyle changes
- Ability to advocate on behalf of your child
- Willingness to seek out supports and ask for help
- Positive self-image and self-esteem
- Ability to adjust expectations of child and/or self
- Realistic expectations of child and/or self



# Becoming Approved for Adoption — Where to Start?

Adoption of a waiting child is not a quick or simple process. This can come as a frustrating reality to prospective adoptive families, especially given that many have already invested time in soul-searching or in exploring alternatives. Once a family makes the decision to adopt, the thought of having to navigate requirements can sometimes be disheartening. It is important to remember that the process is structured with the children's best interests at heart. Ensuring a family is stable, healthy, safe, and adequately prepared to adopt a child, is essential.



## Who to Contact

Once your family has made the decision to adopt a child in government care, it will be important to contact your nearest Child and Family Services Authority or Delegated First Nations Agency to begin the process. Adoption intake services are regionally delivered, so to find the appropriate contact name and number, please e-mail [HS.AdoptionServices@gov.ab.ca](mailto:HS.AdoptionServices@gov.ab.ca), or call: **780-422-0178**. A referral to the appropriate office will be made.

## Basic Criteria to Apply

All applications are reviewed to ensure that the applicant:

- Resides in Alberta
- Is at least 18 years old
- Demonstrates financial and domestic stability, and
- Appears to be physically and mentally capable of parenting an adoptive child

## Specific Criteria to Apply

As defined earlier, Alberta's waiting children have special needs. As such, it is essential that prospective adoptive families be accepting of some of these. When applying,

families identify a minimum number of special needs they are willing to consider. These are identified from a list of the most common special needs affecting waiting children. Below are the preliminary special needs criteria applicants must be willing to accept.

Acceptance of a minimum of two of the following special needs:

- Developmental delays
- Behavioural/emotional issues
- Learning disability/special education

Plus one of the following special needs:

- A child seven years of age or over
- A sibling group of three or more children
- A serious diagnosed medical condition
- A permanent disability
- A psychiatric diagnosis
- Fetal drug effect
- Hepatitis C
- HIV risk or HIV positive
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

OR one of the following family background traits:

- Abuse of alcohol during pregnancy
- Abuse of drugs during pregnancy
- A psychiatric diagnosis in birth parents
- Global developmental delays in birth parents



## Attendance at an Information Session

Having made contact with your regional adoption intake representative, you may be invited to an information session. These are sometimes organized for groups of people exploring their interest in adoption of Alberta's waiting children, or it can be an office visit with an adoption intake worker. The intent is to provide:

- Information about the process and steps to approval
- A realistic understanding of the children available
- An explanation of the Criteria to Apply, and
- Information about other options for adoption (licensed agency, private direct, or international) should it be determined that special needs adoption is not for you

## Documentation Requirements

If you remain committed to adopting a child in government care after obtaining a better understanding of the process and realities of becoming approved for adoption, you will be provided with an application package. The package will include a variety of forms to be completed and submitted, and will also identify documents you will need to provide. Documents required to support your application include:

- A completed application
- A Medical Reference form completed by your doctor
- Three personal references, one of which should be from a family member
- A completed Criminal Record Check, including a vulnerable sector check, for every person aged 18 or older who resides in your home
- A completed Intervention Record Check for every person aged 18 or older who resides in your home
- A copy of your birth certificate(s)
- An original or notarized copy of your marriage certificate, if applicable
- Divorce documents, if applicable
- Death certificate of a former spouse, if applicable
- Change of name certificate, if applicable

## Attendance at Orientation to Caregiver's Training

Becoming approved for adoption of Alberta's waiting children involves mandatory attendance at specific adoption training. Training must be completed before an application to adopt will be approved. Topics will include the effects for children of separation and loss, prenatal drug and alcohol exposure, attachment issues, and abuse and trauma, among others.

The training is intended to provide a basic understanding of some of the issues and needs affecting a significant proportion of the children available for adoption. It is also provided to build capacity in prospective adoptive parents, and to help them identify the kinds of special needs they are willing and able to handle.



## Home Study Report

Once training is completed, all documentation has been reviewed, and the decision is made to proceed with your application, a caseworker or a contracted home study practitioner will be assigned to complete your home study report. The intent of the assessment is to gain insight into a family's overall functioning, capacities, expectations of adoptive parenting, and suitability for adoption.

The home study process takes place in your home and involves several interviews with the family. These interviews will include:

- Joint interviews with the applicants
- Individual interviews with the applicants
- Individual interviews with others who reside or are frequently in the home, including children and other adults
- Interviews with references by telephone or in person, as necessary
- Any other collateral contacts deemed necessary, undertaken with your written consent

Interviews and any additional assessment activities are done to ensure that the family is able to offer a safe, capable, and stable home to a child placed for adoption with them. Areas that are carefully examined and assessed include:

- Family history
- Marital relationship and/or relationship history
- Communication and problem-solving abilities
- Home environment/safety
- Parenting skills
- Experience with special needs
- Discipline views and strategies
- Health
- Employment history
- Financial stability

At the conclusion of the home study process a recommendation will be made to either approve or not approve a family. If approved, the family will be assigned an adoption worker who will be their representative over the time it might take to be matched for adoption and placed with their child(ren). The adoption worker will also support the family through the adjustment and transition period after placement, and will be responsible for activities relating to adoption finalization.

Once approved, you are encouraged to take an active role in your adoption journey. Taking additional training, doing research, attending adoption events, connecting with your worker, and visiting the Adoption Website are all ways to do so. The wait for a match and placement can be long and difficult, but staying involved and active in the process can make a difference!





# Available Supports and Resources

In the past, the costs and practical realities associated with raising an adopted special needs child were major obstacles to some who would otherwise adopt and be suitable parents for such children. Today, families adopting children in government care have access to a wide range of financial supports and specialized services.

## Supports for Permanency (SFP)

The Supports for Permanency Program (SFP) is a provincial program that is available to families who have adopted children who were in the permanent care of the Alberta government. Families can access the program following the granting of an Adoption Order, and are eligible to receive program supports until their adopted child reaches 18-years-of-age. The program offers a variety of supports and services that are negotiated on a yearly basis, and which serve to assist the family in meeting the needs of their children. These include:

- Basic Maintenance rate available for a child in foster care
- Parental Respite (up to 576 hours of respite hours per year, per family. Hourly rates of reimbursement are negotiated)
- Counseling (up to 10 sessions per year, if the child has emotional and behavioural needs)
- Additional Needs Funding (up to \$70 per week can be negotiated to purchase services that will meet the child's emotional and behavioural needs)
- Reimbursement of the cost of transportation to the band of a First Nation child, for the purpose of maintaining cultural ties
- Treatment in an Alberta residential facility if it is believed the placement will break down if such treatment is not provided

Below is a list of other government programs, both federal and provincial, that may be accessed by adoptive parents to support them in the care of their children. Specialized community resources are also available. Your assigned adoption worker will be able to assist you in identifying and accessing these through the adoption and post-adoption process.

"Time and experience have taught me a priceless lesson: Any child you take for your own becomes your own if you give of yourself to that child. I have born two children and had seven others by adoption, and they are all my children, equally beloved and precious."

*Dale Evans, Adoptive Parent*



## Other Government Programs

### Canada Child Tax Benefit

This Government of Canada benefit is a tax-free monthly payment made to eligible families with children under 18-years-of-age. It may include the National Child Benefit Supplement, a benefit for low-income families with children, and/or the Child Disability Benefit, a benefit for families caring for children with severe and prolonged disabilities.

**Call 1-800-387-1193.**

### Universal Child Care Benefit

This Government of Canada benefit is paid to parents in monthly installments of \$100 per month per child under the age of six.

**Call 1-800-387-1193.**

### Maternity, Parental or Sickness Benefits

Employment Insurance (EI) is a Government of Canada program that provides maternity/parental benefits to individuals who are pregnant, have recently given birth, are adopting a child, or are caring for a newborn.

**Call 1-800-206-7218.**

### Child Disability Benefit

This Government of Canada program provides a non-taxable supplement to low- and moderate-income families to help them with the costs of raising children under 18-years-of-age who have a severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment. To be eligible, you must also be receiving the Canada Child Tax Benefit.

**Call 1-800-387-1193.**

### Child Care Subsidy Program

This provincial program provides financial assistance to lower-income families with dependent children to help with the cost of licensed or approved child-care services.

**Call 1-877-644-9992**

### Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)

This provincial program provides supports and services to help strengthen a family's ability to promote their child's growth and development.

**Call 1-877-644-9992**

### Alberta Child Health Benefit

This provincial program provides premium-free health benefits to children living in lower-income families. To be eligible you must not be receiving the Alberta Health Benefit, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, or Income Support.

**Call 1-877-469-5437**

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

*Jane Howard*





# Frequently Asked Questions

## How much does the process of adopting one of Alberta's waiting children cost?

There are no costs to the applicant in applying, becoming approved, or being placed for adoption with a child, other than obtaining medical examinations, Criminal Record Checks, and perhaps in obtaining your Vital Statistics documents (e.g. Marriage Certificate, Birth Certificate).

## Can I meet the children before I decide to adopt them, and how is this done?

No. To protect the child from potential rejection and related issues, the matching and placement process involves meeting the child as a later step. The first step is having an official match made. This involves a child's worker and a family's worker agreeing that a match is promising, and that exploring it more fully with the adoptive family is appropriate.

After receiving all available information about the child, the family then advises if they wish to proceed to placement of the child. A pre placement schedule then sets out when the family will first meet the child, and when the child will actually transition into their home and care. Depending on the age and needs of the child, the schedule can be a few contacts over a few days, or many contacts over several weeks.

## Who should I contact to get started, or to find out more about adoption of Alberta's waiting children?

As adoption intake services are delivered by individual regions, the fastest way to get the contact information for the office in your area is by e-mailing [HS.AdoptionServices@gov.ab.ca](mailto:HS.AdoptionServices@gov.ab.ca), or calling: **780-422-0178**.

## How long does it take to become approved for adoption?

The length of time it takes to become approved from the time you first apply can vary. If there are no delays in providing all necessary documents, taking the mandatory training, and meeting with the home assessor, the average length of time is approximately four months.



## How long will it take to be placed with my adoptive child(ren)?

Once approved, wait times are extremely variable and cannot be predicted. Families open to children who are older, who have more profound needs, or are part of a larger sibling group may be among those matched more quickly.

## Do I have to allow access between my adopted child and their birth family?

No, but each situation is individual. In some cases, access between a child and their birth family has been terminated, and there is no expectation that access should or will occur after adoptive placement. In others, an adoptive family's openness to maintaining birth family connections is an important consideration in matching them to a child.

## Can I get more information about a child featured on the Adoption Website?

Yes, but only if you are already an approved adoptive family for Alberta's waiting children. Alberta's privacy legislation strictly protects personal information, and waiting children's information can only be shared with specific people under specific circumstances. If you are interested in a child from the website, your interest will be registered. Should you become approved, and the child remains available for adoption matching at that time, your interest can be explored. It is at this time that you will be able to receive more information about a child.

## When can I get all of a child's background information?

When a child's caseworker has selected your family as a match for that child, and wishes to explore placement of that child with you, a process of full information disclosure is undertaken. The child's functioning, history, and needs are shared. You may also meet with people and professionals who know the child, such as foster parents, teachers, doctors, and (sometimes) family members. This allows a family to decide if they feel ready and able to commit to being placed with the child, given the information they have been provided.



## Recommended Reading

*Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew.* By Sherrie Eldrige.

*Children with Prenatal Alcohol and/or Other Drug Exposure: Weighing the Risks of Adoption.*  
By Susan B. Edelstein

*The Adoption Resource Book.* By Lois Gilman

*Attaching in Adoption.* By Deborah D. Gray

*Nurturing Adoptions.* By Deborah D. Gray

*Adopting the Older Child.* By Claudia Jewett

*Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow.* By Gregory Keck and Regina M. Kupecky

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To find out how to become approved to adopt a child in government care, please e-mail: [HS.AdoptionServices@gov.ab.ca](mailto:HS.AdoptionServices@gov.ab.ca), or call: **780-422-0178**. Contact information for your nearest adoption intake office will be provided.

For more information, you may also visit: [www.humanservices.alberta.ca/adoption](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/adoption)