



YOUR GUIDE TO Adoption in Massachusetts

the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency charged with the responsibility of protecting children from abuse and/or neglect. DCF's goal is to keep children at home and to support families so that everyone is safe and healthy. When reunification is not an option, achieving permanency through adoption can be a child's best hope for ensuring a caring, stable family that will support and nurture their growth and development into adulthood.

Is the Department of Children and Families an adoption agency?

While much of DCF's work is focused on child protective services, we also provide adoption services. Each office has a unit that specializes in placing children/youth for adoption. Whenever a child/youth needs adoption services, he or she is referred to the adoption unit and is visited and prepared for adoption by an adoption social worker. DCF also works with some private adoption agencies to meet the needs of children who are in foster care.

Who are the children awaiting adoption?

Children of all ages, from all ethnic, linguistic and economic backgrounds await adoption.

- We tend to have an equal number of boys and girls in need of permanent homes.
- We have children between birth and eighteen years of age.
- Most children awaiting adoption are between six and twelve years old, and we actively seek adoptive parents for this age range.
- We have some children between 12 and 18 who are eagerly waiting for an adoptive home.

Typically, the infants who come into our care present difficult challenges. Many have drug-related and complex medical issues, and are not yet legally free for adoption.

Children become free for adoption in two ways:

1. The child's birth parents both sign voluntary adoption surrenders.
2. The Department of Children and Families petitions the court to terminate the parents' right to consent to their child's adoption.

Many children who are in the care and custody of the Department are involved in cases where the Department must seek to involuntarily terminate the birth parents' rights. There is a legal risk that the child will not be free for adoption at the conclusion of the court proceeding.

In some of these cases, the Department of Children and Families seeks to place a child in a pre-adoptive home before the child is legally free for adoption. We believe it is important to have children in the most permanent setting as early as possible. We seek adoptive parents who are willing to accept the legal risk for these children.

Is there an age requirement to be an adoptive parent?

In Massachusetts, you must be at least 18 years old to adopt.

How many children can be in my care at one time?

You may have up to six children residing in your home at any given time, including birth children, adoptive children, relatives' children, foster children, and children in child care in the home.

Can I be an adoptive parent if I don't own my own home?

You may either rent or own your home. During the physical standards check that is part of the approval process, we ensure that the living and sleeping quarters in your home provide adequate space, privacy and safety for all family members. We allow children of the same gender to share a room. Children less than one year old may share a parent's room.

Are there minimum income requirements to be an adoptive parent?

You must be able to support a child on your current income. Special needs children are eligible for subsidy that often provides financial support and insurance coverage until the child is 18 or in some cases 22 years of age.



Becoming an Adoptive Parent

- First, call 1-800-KIDS-508 to discuss with a DCF social worker your interest in becoming an adoptive parent. We will answer any questions you have, and will begin the registration process when you are ready to proceed.
- A social worker from the Department will visit your home or, upon your request, will send you an application. You must fill out this form and return it to the Department of Children and Families.
- Background record checks are completed on each household member over age 14. We seek to ensure that your household is a safe environment for placing a child.
- Your home must pass our physical standards check. We will verify that your home has working safety equipment, such as a smoke detectors, and that the living and sleeping quarters in your home provide adequate space, privacy and safety for all family members. If your home does not meet one or more of our standards, you will be given time to comply and we will do a follow-up visit.
- Once your application is approved, you will be invited to attend the Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) training program. MAPP training sessions are approximately three hours per week over several weeks. You will learn about the difficulties faced by our waiting children, and how your family life will be impacted by the addition of an adopted child. MAPP covers topics such as communication, building self-esteem, child guidance and discipline.
- Applicant caregivers complete fingerprint checks.

- One of the social workers leading the MAPP group will visit your home, interview your family members, and request personal references from you. Following the visits and reference checks, the social worker prepares a home study document. This document details your family's strengths and identifies the right type of child for your family.
- When you have successfully completed MAPP, a DCF Supervisor will review the home study, and will approve you and your family for one or more children. When your family is approved, your home becomes licensed. Placement decisions are based on matching the needs of the children and the ability of your family to meet those needs.

How long will I have to wait for a placement?

The length of your wait will depend on when you have been approved, which children are available at that time, and the potential of a match between the child's needs and your ability to meet those needs. Individuals and families seeking to adopt very young children may wait for a significant period of time.

Will I be able to meet the child before the placement?

DCF follows an extensive placement matching process for prospective adoptions.

- When an adoption worker determines that you and your family may be a good match for a child, you will be contacted and given non-identifying information about the child. If you believe that you may be a good match for the child, the process will move forward.
- You will attend a full disclosure meeting to discuss the child's history and current situation before you meet the child.
- We ask that you take a few days to think about what you have heard and to determine whether you want to proceed with meeting the child. You may also be asked to talk to the child's foster parent, teacher(s), or other professionals.

- When you and the adoption worker have decided to proceed, you will begin a series of planned visits with the child at his or her foster home.
- Following foster home visits, you will meet with the child outside of the foster home, leading to visits at your home.
- When everybody feels comfortable and ready, the child can be placed with you.

Are there any adoption fees?

There are no fees involved in adopting a child through the Department.

How long will it be before my child's adoption can be legalized in court?

By law, a child must reside in your home for at least six months before an adoption can be legalized. When adopting through the Department, it is not unusual to wait at least a year from the time of placement until the adoption is legalized. In some cases we are placing very challenging children and we want to be sure that the family feels fully supported and prepared to meet the child's needs before we legalize the adoption.

Will I have an opportunity to adopt another child?

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families has a re-evaluation process to assess your readiness for another adopted child. Generally, families should wait for one year after the first child is placed before beginning the steps for an additional placement. During this one-year period, celebrate important anniversary dates with your current adopted child to enforce the special moments that brought him or her into your family.

DCF AREA OFFICE DIRECTORY



For more information please contact the DCF Area Office in your area, or call toll free: **1-800-KIDS-508**.

WEST

- ★ Pittsfield 413-236-1800
- ★ Greenfield 413-775-5000
- ★ Holyoke 413-493-2600
- ★ Van Wart Center E. Springfield 413-205-0500
- ★ Springfield 413-452-3200

CENTRAL

- ★ Leominster 978-353-3600
- ★ Whitinsville 508-929-1000
- ★ Worcester, East & West 508-929-2000

NORTHEAST

- ★ Lowell 978-275-6800
- ★ Lawrence 978-557-2500
- ★ Haverhill 978-469-8800
- ★ Cape Ann, Salem 978-825-3800
- ★ Lynn 781-477-1600

METRO

- ★ Malden 781-388-7100
- ★ Framingham 508-424-0100
- ★ Cambridge/Somerville 617-520-8700
- ★ Arlington 781-641-8500
- ★ Coastal/S. Weymouth 781-682-0800

SOUTHEAST

- ★ Taunton/Attleboro 508-821-7000
- ★ Brockton 508-894-3700
- ★ Fall River 508-235-9800
- ★ New Bedford 508-910-1000
- ★ Cape Cod & Islands 508-760-0200
- ★ Plymouth 508-732-6200

BOSTON

- ★ Hyde Park 617-363-5000
- ★ Dimock St., Roxbury 617-989-2800
- ★ Park St., Dorchester 617-822-4700
- ★ Chelsea 617-660-3400