

# Questions and Answers About Adoption

Adoption is a social and legal process that creates a new family, giving adopted children the same rights and benefits as those who are born into the family.

## Why Are These Children Being Adopted?

About 1,800 children are in the permanent legal custody of the Georgia Department of Human Resources due to unresolved family crisis. Of these children, about 280 are available for adoption at any given time. Some children's parents voluntarily give up their parental rights. Most children, though, have been removed from their birth homes by the courts and have had their parents' rights terminated due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Almost all of the children come from difficult situations and have been cared for in foster homes before adoption. They are generally children with special needs.

### The children waiting to be adopted are:

- African American children over the age of 1
- Three or more brothers and sisters who needs to placed together
- Children ages 8 and older
- Children with physical, emotional or mental disabilities

### Children who are not readily available for adoption include:

- African American infants under the age of 1 with no physical, mental or emotional disabilities
- White or other minority children under the age of 8 with no physical, mental or emotional disabilities

## **Who handles adoptions?**

Adoption of the children in state custody is handled by the DHR office of Adoptions and county Departments of Family and Children.

Services (DFCS). They may also be handled through a licensed private adoption agency. A listing of licensed private child-placing agencies in Georgia can be obtained from DHR's Office of Regulatory Services.

## **Who Can Adopt a Child?**

Married couples must be at least 10 years older than the child they wish to adopt. Single parents must be 25 years old or older and at least 10 years older than the child they wish to adopt. A family needs to earn only enough money to cover it's own living expenses.

## **How Does Adoption Work?**

All prospective parents will need to have a family assessment completed by DFCS or a licensed private adoption agency. Through DFCS the family will attend a 10 week adoption preparation program called "Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting" (MAPP). MAPP consists of 30 hours of group participation and in-home visits with a caseworker. Many private adoption agencies have their own parent preparation programs. Medical examinations of family members, verifications of marriage or divorce, verifications of income, fingerprinting and criminal background checks are required. The Office of Adoptions has contracted with several private licensed agencies to conduct family assessments at no fee to the family.

As the caseworker learns about the prospective adoptive family during the family assessment, the family can learn about the children who need homes, examine their ability to parent the children and learn how the state adoption

program operates. Prospective parents will get a description and see a picture of the child before they meet him or her. They will also have a chance to get to know the child they are interested in before the child is placed in their home permanently.

If there are any problems after the adoption becomes final, parents can contact their DFCS caseworker to talk about assistance. In a crisis, the worker can help the family find resources such as counseling, respite care or financial assistance.

## **How Long Does It Take?**

The wait for a child with special needs can be as short as six to ten months. Parents can reduce their waiting time by choosing a child or children in the “My Turn Now” book, which publishes photographs of children waiting to be adopted. There is a long waiting list for the white children under the age of 8 with no special needs. The wait could be as long as eight to ten years.

The child must live in the home for some time before the legal proceeding can be finalized. A caseworker will help with any questions or problems that may arise during that time. The adoption usually becomes final about six to nine months after placement.

## **How Much Does It Cost?**

The Office of Adoptions or a licensed private agency under contract with state will not charge a family for adoption services. As part of the home study process, prospective parents and others living in the home must get medical examinations, and they must also pay court costs to complete adoption. But families adopting older children, siblings needing to be placed together or children with other special needs can be reimbursed for most of these expenses.

**Some large and small businesses also offer benefits for adoption.**

**Some assistance is available to help meet the expenses of caring for children with special needs. The amount of assistance depends of the child's needs. More money may be available to help pay for medical or psychological services. Many of the children with special needs will still be eligible for Medicaid after adoption.**