

How to Adopt

FROM FOSTER CARE



MARE

massachusetts adoption
resource exchange

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
DECIDING TO ADOPT FROM FOSTER CARE	5
ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS	6
You are probably eligible to adopt	7
STEPS IN THE PROCESS.....	8
Adoption Consultation	9
Select a Licensing Agency	9
Information Session With Your Agency	10
Agency Application	10
Safety Check	10
Caregiving Training and Licensing	10
Matching and Visiting	11
Placement Support	11
Adoption Legalization	11
GET SUPPORT	12
Let's Talk	13
Find a Mentor	13
All The Resources You Need	13
Register Your Homestudy	14
Post-Adoption Resources	14
Join Our Community	14
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	15
Starting the Process	16
How long does it take to adopt from foster care?	16
Why is the process so long?	16
How much does it cost to adopt from foster care?	16
What is the difference between DCF and a contracted agency?	17
Should I work with DCF or a contracted agency?	17
Can I talk with someone who has adopted? I need help deciding if this is right for me.	17

MAPP Training and Homestudy Process	18
How do I sign up for MAPP training?	18
Who offers MAPP training?	18
Does my partner also have to attend MAPP training?	18
“Home Inspection” and “Home Study”, what’s the difference?	18
Why is my homestudy taking so long to complete?	19
I am already a foster parent. What do I need to do to adopt from foster care?	19
Eligibility	20
Am I eligible to adopt from foster care?	20
If my CORI background check shows a misdemeanor, am I automatically disqualified from adopting?	20
Does my partner also have to attend MAPP training?	20
Why can’t I start the process until I move to my new home/apartment?	20
Does owning a dog disqualify me from adoption?	21
My home has a pool. Will that cause me to fail the home inspection?	21
Out Of State	22
I don’t live in Massachusetts, but I plan to move. Can I start the process in the meantime?	22
I live in another state. Is it possible for me to adopt a child from Massachusetts?	22
Other Questions	23
Can I start as a foster parent and later adopt a child placed in my home?	23
Why are some children removed from pre-adoptive families?	23
What is Open Adoption?	23



INTRODUCTION

Adopting a child or teen from foster care is a great way to grow your family while helping youth find the love, stability, and permanency they deserve. The process to adopt from foster care can be daunting, but the overwhelming feedback we have heard from families over the years is that it is worth it!

We're here to provide all the details you need to know about adopting from foster care in Massachusetts. From understanding different types of adoption, to eligibility requirements, to the specific steps in the process, we've got you covered.



DECIDING TO ADOPT FROM FOSTER CARE

The road to adoption as a way to create or add to your family is different for everyone. One of the first decisions is which type of adoption best suits your family. There are three types of adoption: foster care, domestic infant, and inter-country. Regardless of the type of adoption, Massachusetts requires that all families work with a licensed adoption agency.

MARE's mission supports adoption from foster care. All of the children MARE serves are in the custody of the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) and reside in either foster homes or residential facilities.

Adopting from foster care is similar to other types of adoption in that after all of the decision making, paperwork, and preparation are completed, a dream of family is fulfilled. But foster care adoptions are different in a few important ways:

- Though it is possible to adopt an infant from foster care, the children who are available for adoption generally range from toddler to 18. Most of the children we serve are ages six and older, are children of color, are a part of a sibling group and many have not yet been [legally freed](#) for adoption.
- Children enter foster care through no fault of their own. Many of them have been neglected, abused, or have experienced poverty. All children in foster care have experienced some form of [trauma](#).
- Parents who adopt from foster care either work directly with DCF or a private agency that has contracted with DCF to provide services.
- Adopting from foster care is free! There are no fees to get licensed and adopt from Massachusetts foster care.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The road to adoption as a way to create or add to your family is different for everyone. One of the first decisions is which type of adoption best suits your family. There are three types of adoption: foster care, domestic infant, and inter-country. Regardless of the type of adoption, Massachusetts requires that all families work with a licensed adoption agency.

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Adopting from foster care is similar to other types of adoption in that after all of the decision making, paperwork, and preparation are completed, a dream of family is fulfilled. But foster care adoptions are different in a few important ways:

- Ability to offer a child unconditional commitment, love and support
- Flexibility and comfort tolerating the unknown
- A good sense of humor
- Advocacy skills
- Stability and self-confidence
- Good communications and problem-solving skills

The Tito Family by Shana Sureck



YOU ARE PROBABLY ELIGIBLE TO ADOPT

There are many myths about who is eligible to adopt from foster care. You can be:

- An adult of any age, as long as you are at least 21 years old; there is no upper age limit to adopt from foster care
- Single, married, partnered, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer
- Starting your family or have other children in your home
- A homeowner or renter
- Of almost any income level, as long as there is a stable source of income that can support the family; there is no cost to adopt a child from foster care and financial and medical subsidies may be available
- Of any race, ethnicity and religion
- An adult with a medical or mental health condition and disability; disabilities or medical conditions are not reasons for automatic disqualification from the process; they will likely be a consideration when deciding what type of child you can best parent
- A permanent legal resident
- A Background Record Check will be completed on all applicants; applicants with a charge on their CORI can apply for a waiver and if a waiver is granted, you will be eligible to proceed with the licensing process

For more detailed information regarding the Department of Children and Families' standards for foster and adoptive parents, click [here](#).

If you live outside of Massachusetts, please visit [AdoptUSKids](#) to learn about the policies and resources in your state.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

There are just 9 steps to adopt a child from foster care. MARE is here to help you along the way, and if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to reach out.



1 ADOPTION
CONSULTATION



2 SELECT A
LICENSING AGENCY



3 INFORMATION
SESSION WITH
YOUR AGENCY



4 AGENCY
APPLICATION



5 SAFETY CHECK



6 CAREGIVER
TRAINING AND
LICENSING



7 MATCHING &
VISITING



8 PLACEMENT
SUPPORT



9 ADOPTION
LEGALIZATION

1: Adoption Consultation

[Create a MARE account](#) to receive information about adoption from foster care and to be in contact with a MARE staff who can guide you along the process. We offer regularly scheduled [Explore Adoption webinars](#) to help orient you to what to expect in this process and help you know which licensing agency to contact. Think of us as your friendly guide to the adoption process, ready to help you every step of the way.

2: Select A Licensing Agency

Next, you will select an agency to work with through your adoption journey. This agency will license you to adopt. You can start the process by contacting one of the agencies below:

NAME OF AGENCY	CONTACT INFORMATION
DCF - Statewide	DCF Adoption Inquiry Form
18 Degrees - West Springfield & Pittsfield	Stephanie DiMichele (413) 770-7079 sdimichele@18degreesma.org
Bright Futures Adoption Center - Statewide	Karen Cheyney (978) 263-5400 kcheyney@rfkcommunity.org
Bridges Homeward - Cambridge	Sarah Medrano-Palmer (617) 876-4210 familyservices@helpfamilies.org
Child and Family Services – Fall River	Melissa Millar (774) 488 5019 mmillar@cfservices.org
Children’s Friend - Worcester	Veronica Listerud (508) 796-0159 vlisterud@childrensfriend.org
The Home for Little Wanderers - Dorchester	Victoria Tucker (617) 910-8819 vtucker@thefamily.org

3: Information Session With Your Agency

Your agency will invite you to an information session for you to learn more about the process with that agency. Depending on the agency, this will either be a virtual group information session or a one-on-one information session over the phone. If you selected DCF as your agency, you can view their [upcoming information sessions here](#).

4: Agency Application

After the information session, you will have a follow-up conversation with a social worker. If you decide to move forward in the process, you will receive an application which is to be returned to that agency. You will be assigned a social worker who will provide you with guidance and support throughout the process.

5: Safety Check

Background record checks, including criminal and state child welfare histories are completed. Your home must meet housing standards established by state law and regulations. The agency seeks to ensure that your household is a safe environment for placing a child or sibling group.

6: Caregiver Training And Licensing

Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) Training prepares adults to parent a child from foster care. You will learn about the needs of children who have been placed in foster care. The training covers such topics as communication, building self-esteem, child guidance, understanding behaviors, and working with agencies and courts.

Concurrently, the caregiver licensing process begins. This is the time when a social worker will visit you, interview you and your household members and will request personal references. The caregiver licensing process is a mutual assessment process and it allows you to actively engage in the process. This process identifies your family's strengths, and it will also identify the type of child(ren) who is the best match with your family. Once your training and assessment has been completed and approved, you become licensed to adopt.

7: Matching And Visiting

Now that you are licensed, you can register the home study with MARE for access to our matching services. Social workers will match the needs of a child or sibling group with your strengths. You will be given all available information about the child so you can make an informed decision about moving forward. You and the child will have pre-placement visits and support prior to placement.

8: Placement Support

Placement decisions are mutual and are based on the planned transition schedule. You receive support throughout the process. When the child is placed, you will work with the child's social worker and with your social worker, issues are assessed and services located that will support the child and your family, as may be needed. If the court has ended the parental rights of the biological family of the child placed in your home and the child has stayed with you for at least six months, the adoption can be finalized by the court. Based on the child's needs and adjustment, this process may take longer.

9: Adoption Legalization

Your adoption is officially legalized by the court! Support services continue to be available to you and your family after the adoption is legalized. Post adoption services can be sought when a child is approaching developmental milestones or when a crisis occurs in the family. Services are available on a periodic or ongoing basis.



GET SUPPORT

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

Navigating adoption can feel overwhelming. Choosing to extend your family through adoption is one of the largest decisions you can make and the system is often complex. But it is a lot easier when you have a knowledgeable ally on your team, ready to help out.

Our family support team is ready to be with you every step of the way!



MARY LIZ NOGUERAS

Family Support Coordinator
for Families of Color

LIZ JOYAL

Director of Family
Support Services

EMILY GOLDBERGER

Family Support
Services Coordinator

LET'S TALK!

Join our Family Support Services team in one of our Explore Adoption webinars.

[Find A Webinar](#)

FIND A MENTOR

We consistently hear from families that the most helpful support in their adoption journey is from experienced families. That's why we created our *Friend of the Family* mentor program - so that you can get connected with a family who has "been there and done that" and can help give you the confidence you need to move forward.

[Learn More](#)

ALL THE RESOURCES YOU NEED

Adoption and parenting can be complex. That's why we created our *Learning Center* to help families like you get all the information they need. It's full of helpful articles on starting the process, understanding adoption supports, trans-racial adoption, and much more. What are you waiting for? Go check it out!

[Explore](#)



REGISTER YOUR HOMESTUDY

If you are a Massachusetts family with a current, approved home study for foster care adoption, you can submit your home study for verification, allowing you access to an additional pool of waiting children who have not yet been legally freed.

Email your home study to Liz Joyal: lizj@mareinc.org. Families from other New England states and New York can also submit their homestudy for consideration.

POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT

The support available to adoptive families doesn't end once an adoption is finalized. There are still many post-adoption support resources and providers who would love to help you on your adoption journey.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

Keep up with MARE news, events, resources, and stories from adoptive families. Not only will you learn a lot, you will also join our amazingly supportive online community of adoptive families, advocates, and supporters.



@ MASSADOPT



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



STARTING THE PROCESS

How long does it take to adopt from foster care?

On average, it takes families between 8 months to one year to complete all the steps to be licensed for adoption through the foster care system.

This includes the application, background checks, initial home visit, MAPP classes, and homestudy. The time it takes to be matched with a child varies greatly depending on the family's criteria and the needs of our waiting children.

Why is the process so long?

The process takes time because it includes three stages: (1) Eligibility process, (2) MAPP training, and (3) Home Study writing. These steps are crucial to ensuring the safety and well-being of children who have been neglected and/or abused. The goal is to prepare families as well as possible to care for and parent these children.

The first step of the process is to obtain a "Family Resource Application" from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or one of the contracted agencies. When your application is processed and backgrounds record checks, and personal and medical references are completed, a social worker will reach to you to schedule a home visit to ensure that your home meets the physical safety standards established by state law. This first eligibility stage might take several weeks.

Once your application is approved and you have had your home safety visit done you will be invited to a 10-week training known as MAPP (Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting). Sometimes families have to wait until a MAPP training convenient for them is scheduled in their area.

The final step is the Home Study which is both a process and a document. It involves a series of home visits and interviews conducted by a social worker who will help the family with the submission of document and who will produce an extensive document detailing the family's composition, background, strengths, and child interest characteristics. The elaboration of the home study usually takes between 8-12 weeks.

How much does it cost to adopt from foster care?

There is no cost to adopt from foster care!

Unlike other types of adoption, there are no fees to become licensed to adopt from foster care or to process your adoption. In fact, there are many supports and possible subsidies that you may qualify for as an adoptive family.

What is the difference between DCF and a contracted agency?

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency charged with protecting children from abuse and neglect and strengthening families in Massachusetts. While much of DCF's work is focused on child protective services, they also provide adoption services through the adoption units.

DCF also works with “contracted agencies” to screen potential adoptive families, conduct MAPP trainings and complete family home studies. The requirements, stages, and duration of the licensing process is the same whether you work with DCF or one of the contracted agencies. Sometimes families working with DCF are MAPP trained by one of the agencies.

Should I work with DCF or a contracted agency?

This is a matter of personal preference, geographical location, or convenience with the scheduled trainings. It is important to know that all children in foster care with a goal of adoption in Massachusetts are under the custody of the DCF and for that reason families who get licensed through one of the agencies will eventually work with DCF in the matching and finalization stages of the adoption process.

Be diligent in your research as you select an agency to work with. Ask a representative from the office how long it is currently taking for homestudies to be completed. You may also benefit from asking community forums what other foster and adoptive families have experienced in working with a particular office/agency.

Can I talk with someone who has adopted? I need help deciding if this is right for me.

The prospect of adopting a child can be both exciting and overwhelming. There are many different types of adoption and choices to be made in pursuing this path. In addition to that, for many couples and single individuals the decision to create or to grow their family through adoption implies a lot of emotional work. Families in the process of adoption have consistently commented on the tremendous benefit of speaking with experienced adoptive parents. In response, MARE has created the Friend of the Family Program. This program matches experienced adoptive parents with families at all stages in the adoption process to provide ongoing guidance, share their own experiences, and to equip them with resources and services.

This is what one family commented about their experience with this program: “Having the opportunity to connect with a family who has been where we are, feeling exactly the way we feel, has been a tremendous support.”

[Learn more about our mentor program here.](#)

MAPP TRAINING AND HOMESTUDY PROCESS

How do I sign up for MAPP training?

Families new to adoption from foster care think that the first step is the MAPP training but actually there is a step before the classes. The first step of the process is to complete a “Family Resource Application” with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or one of the contracted agencies.

When your application is processed and backgrounds record (CORI), and personal and medical references are verified, a social worker will reach to you to schedule a home visit to ensure that your home meets the physical safety standards established by state law.

This first eligibility stage might take several weeks or longer in some cases. Once your application is approved and you have had your home safety visit done you will be invited to a 10-week training known as MAPP (Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting).

[Create an account](#) with MARE to learn about the trainings offered by the contracted agencies.

Who offers MAPP training?

After your initial application has been approved and your home inspection is completed, you will be invited to attend a 10 week course called Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) training.

For a comprehensive list of DCF and contracted agencies that offer MAPP training, [create a MARE account](#). You can view a list of upcoming trainings [here](#).

Does my partner also have to attend MAPP training?

MAPP training is mandatory for the adults who will be the primary care providers of the child/children placed in your home. This applies to all couples, married or partnered, who will be parenting the child(ren). If you have difficulties with the hours of the training you might want to explore the MAPP rolling classes or the intensive 4-5 weekends offered by some agencies.

“Home Inspection” and “Home Study”, what’s the difference?

Sometimes families get confused about these two different stages of the adoption process. The **home inspection** occurs early in the process when a social worker from the Department of Children and Families or a contracted agency visits your home to verify that it passes the Physical Standards Check. To learn more about the Standards for Foster/Pre-Adoptive homes please visit DCF’s website:

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/30/EligibilityStandards.pdf>

The **home study** is the final stage of the licensing process and it is both a process and a document. It involves a series of home visits and interviews conducted by a social worker who will also request personal references from the family. Once interviews are completed and references are checked, which typically takes 8-12 weeks, the home study is ready to be compiled into an extensive document detailing the family's composition, background, strengths, and child interest characteristics. This document will help other social workers match children with families that would best meet their needs.

Why is my homestudy taking so long to complete?

We often receive inquiries from families who have finished MAPP training and are excited and eager to move forward but feel impatient because the home study has not been completed.

Please keep in mind that the home study stage encompasses 3 steps:

1. You need to fill out the family assessment questionnaire
2. Your social worker needs to have at least two home visits with you. There should be also individual interviews with your spouse and any other household member
3. The social worker writes the home study narrative. On average, families need 10-12 weeks to complete this step. This timeline can be significantly affected by staffing levels at the agency you are working with.

Be patient and use this time to begin reading about adoption issues, participate in webinars and workshops, and get matched with an experienced adoptive family through our Friend of the Family program.

I am already a foster parent. What do I need to do to adopt from foster care?

The first thing you need to do is to contact DCF's Adoption Development Licensing Unit (ADLU) in your region. There are 5 ADLUs in MA: Springfield, Worcester, Lawrence, Boston, and Brockton. For more info on these locations check this [link](#).

Then, you need to request the ADLU to do a study update as you are currently licensed for foster care and not for adoption. This update will focus on preparing you to understand what it means to adopt through DCF versus foster care. The area office you are currently working with as a foster family should know about this change as they will need to share their impressions on your experience as a foster family.

Finally, it is possible you may have to attend a couple of MAPP sessions related to legal risk, adoption, and the various services available to you during the matching process and after you are placed with a child or sibling group.

ELIGIBILITY

Am I eligible to adopt from foster care?

To be eligible to adopt a child from the Department of Children & Families (DCF) you must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Be a Massachusetts resident 18 years of age or older
- Have a stable source of income
- Rent or own a home that meets DCF's home safety standards
- Pass a background check

If my CORI background check shows a misdemeanor, am I automatically disqualified from adopting?

All household members age 14 and older must have a record which is free of criminal conduct which, in the judgment of the Department, bears upon the pre-adoptive family's ability to assume and carry out the responsibilities of a pre-adoptive family. When a "discretionary disqualification" is revealed in your CORI, the Department will determine the probable effect that the misdemeanor would have on your ability to fulfill the needs of a child placed in your home and will inform you if you are eligible as a pre-adoptive family or not.

Why can't I start the process until I move to my new home/apartment?

The first step of the process to become a pre-adoptive family is the background record (CORI) check and the physical standards check. A social worker will verify that your home has working safety equipment, such as working 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 the standards, you are given time to comply and DCF will do a follow-up visit. If the family is planning to move to a new home, they need to wait until they are in the new place and the social worker completes the safety check.

Does owning a dog disqualify me from adoption?

The Department of Children and Families has a clear policy with regard to regulations and breed restrictions for dogs in pre-adoptive homes. “All dogs maintained on the premises of the pre-adoptive home must have up to date vaccinations and rabies shots, and must be licensed in accordance with local authority requirements.” It also states that “No child under age 12 will be placed in a home where a **Rottweiler, Pit Bull or German Shepherd dog**, or a dog which mixes at least 2 of these 3 breeds, is maintained on the premises, except after a review conducted in accordance with Regulation 110 CMR 7.105 (18) and with the approval of the Area Director.”

Please check with your social worker to determine if a waiver may be requested.

My home has a pool. Will that cause me to fail the home inspection?

Having a pool in your house will not rule you out as a pre-adoptive family however there are state laws about barriers and protection around pools and hot tubs. Swimming and wading pools must be made inaccessible to children when not in use by means of barriers or fences. Hot tubs must be made inaccessible to children at all times.

If a home opens directly into the pool area, the wall of the home is an important part of the pool barrier. Doors to the pool area must be kept locked. In lieu of a fence or wall, a hot tub may be made inaccessible by covering it with a secure, sturdy cover that is held in place with a child-proof lock. To learn more about safety regulation for pre-adoptive homes please visit https://eecweb.eec.state.ma.us/docs/family_child_care_regs.pdf

OUT OF STATE

I don't live in Massachusetts, but I plan to move. Can I start the process in the meantime?

No. You need to wait until your residence is in Massachusetts because during the first stage (eligibility) a social worker will need to make a visit to the home where the child(ren) will be potentially be placed.

I live in another state. Is it possible for me to adopt a child from Massachusetts?

In order to become an adoptive parent to a child or teen in foster care in the state of Massachusetts, or in any other state, a family must first become licensed for adoption from foster care by an agency in their home state. Once a family has been licensed they are eligible to adopt a child or teen in foster care from anywhere in the United States as long as the child's social worker is considering out of state families.

For information about foster care adoption in your state please go to this link: <https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/state-information>, and select your state or territory from the drop down menu underneath the map.

OTHER QUESTIONS

Can I start as a foster parent and later adopt a child placed in my home?

Families approved for foster care may request the DCF's Adoption Development Licensing Unit that their home study be updated for adoption. However, this doesn't imply that the children they are providing foster care for are going to have their goal changed to adoption. There are other factors to be considered, for instance, if the children are legally freed for adoption or if the family's characteristics are what the social worker is looking for the permanency of the children.

Why are some children removed from pre-adoptive families?

Removal of a child from a pre-adoptive family is conducted in a thoughtful, planned manner that minimizes disruption to the child and the pre-adoptive family. Reasons for removal include:

- A request from the pre-adoptive family to have the child removed
- A decision by the Department that a more suitable setting is needed to meet the child's needs for permanency, safety, and/or well-being.
- A supported 51B investigation in which a pre-adoptive parent or other household member is identified as the person alleged to be responsible for the child abuse or neglect.

What is Open Adoption?

Many of the children waiting for adoption are still at "legal risk" which means that their parent's legal rights have not been terminated by the court. Others are legally freed.

However, in many cases when a legally freed child is placed and adopted by a family, it is in the best interest on the child to keep a healthy connection to his/her biological family. This type of adoption is known as "Open Adoption." The Open Adoption agreement is a legally binding document determined by the judge which allows adoptive parents, and often the adopted child, to interact with the child's birth parents. Openness can vary greatly from family to family and may change over time.

Communication may happen through letters, emails, social media exchanges, telephone calls, or visits. Visitation might take place at visitation centers supervised by a third party social worker. While some families may exchange brief notes and photos, others may spend more time together and celebrate birthdays or holidays together. The frequency of contact will be decided by the judge and can range from one to six visit per year.

[Read More: Understanding Open Adoption](#)

Didn't see what you are looking for?
Attend a webinar to get the inside scoop
on adoption from foster care.

[Find A Session](#)

