

We care about kids!

Ventura County Adoption Program



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Adoption?

Adoption is the permanent, legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities from a child's birth parents to the adoptive parents.

The majority of the children adopted through Ventura County CFS have suffered some form of abuse or neglect. In addition, many have experienced the difficult task of adjusting to new families, neighborhoods and schools while in foster care. They need people in their lives who will do whatever it takes to provide the nurturing and secure environment all children deserve to develop their full potential.

Adopting a child from the child welfare system is a unique process that is most successful when prospective adoptive parents have special characteristics. These qualifications don't have to do with income, age, marital status, or any other concrete requirement. Most importantly, children in the foster care system need caregivers who are patient, flexible, compassionate and loving. Commitment to the relationship is essential, even when the child does not conform to the parents' expectations.

2. Who can adopt? Do I need to obtain a foster care license?

Yes. In order to adopt, you must be licensed to care for the child until the adoption is finalized. If you are a relative you will need to be approved by Ventura County CFS as a relative caregiver, and certain State requirements similar to foster care licensing must be met.

Real life is full of ups and downs. Ventura County CFS is not looking for perfection, just caring and loving people who want to adopt and are primarily interested in adopting foster children.

Except for certain criminal convictions, such as violent or sexual crimes against children, there are few circumstances that automatically disqualify an applicant from adopting. The following may help dispel some common myths about who can adopt:

- You do not have to be married to adopt. Applicants may be single, married, partnered, divorced, widowed or legally separated;
- Home ownership is not necessary;
- There are no set income requirements—applicants need to show they can meet their new family's basic needs;
- The adoptive applicant and the child do not have to be the same race, color, or of the same national origin;
- Age is generally not a barrier. As long as you are in good health and have the energy and desire to be a parent, age is not a decisive factor.

Additionally, it is important to understand that adoption through Ventura County CFS requires involvement with the dependency court and adherence to public child welfare regulations. As a child-focused agency, our primary responsibility is finding families for children who are unable to reunite with their biological parents.

3. Who are the children available for adoption through Ventura County CFS?

Children of all ages, races and ethnicities may be adopted through Ventura County CFS. The majority will be adopted by their relative caregiver or current foster parent. A small percentage of children have not been placed in prospective adoptive homes, and these children are in need of an adoptive family. Therefore, the first step for prospective adoptive parents is obtaining a foster care license.

4. How much will it cost to adopt?

Ventura County CFS, per California Department of Social Services (CDSS) regulations, requires that you pay a fee of no more than \$500 at the time of the adoptive placement. This fee may be waived under certain conditions. You should also expect to pay for fingerprinting, medical examination, court filing and any other adoption-related costs during the course of completing the home study. Families adopting foster children qualify for the Non-recurring Adoption Expense Program, a program that reimburses families for adoption-related expenses incurred during the adoption process. The amount of reimbursement is limited to \$400 per child.

Adoptive parents may qualify for a federal tax credit for certain expenses paid to adopt an eligible child with special needs as well as a state tax credit for adopting a child who was in the custody of a California public child welfare agency.



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Frequently Asked Questions continued

5. Is there financial assistance provided once the adoption is final?

Yes. The Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) can provide financial assistance and some medical coverage. This assistance may continue until the child is age 18 or, in certain circumstances, age 21. The majority of children in the dependency foster care system qualify for AAP.

6. What are the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) benefits that an eligible child may receive?

The Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) was established by the federal and state governments to provide financial assistance to help families with the on going expenses of caring for a child adopted from foster care. The benefits available for AAP eligible children are as follows: a monthly financial benefit, medical insurance through Medi-Cal, non-recurring adoption expenses (up to \$400 per child), payment for residential treatment or Wraparound services and continuation of AAP benefits in a re-adoption.

7. What is the amount of the monthly financial AAP benefit?

The amount of financial assistance is determined based upon the special needs of the child and circumstances of the family. The AAP benefit cannot exceed the State-approved foster family home rate the child would have received had they not been adopted. If the child's needs are greater and require a higher level of care and supervision, the child may qualify for a Special Care Increment (SCI) in addition to the basic foster family home rate.

8. How long will it take to adopt a child?

Depending on the workload of Ventura County Children & Family Services staff, as well as the workload of the private adoption agency completing the home study, it may take six months to a year to complete an adoption home study. Most adoptive placements occur one to a few months after the home study has been approved. The process may be lengthy but is well worth the wait.

9. What is the difference between adoption and guardianship?

Adoption is the permanent legal assumption of parental rights and responsibilities for a child. Adoptive parents have the same legal rights and responsibilities as parents whose children are born to them, and the children have inheritance rights.

A guardian is someone appointed by the court to care for a child until he or she is 18. If you become a guardian, the court grants you the right to make most decisions regarding the child. A guardian is not a child's legal parent and may be subject to ongoing supervision of the court. Guardianship does not grant full legal rights and responsibilities to the guardian in the same capacity that adoption grants rights and responsibilities to an adoptive parent.

10. Will a new birth certificate be issued?

Yes, the adoption social worker will prepare a new adoption birth certificate (Court Report of Adoption) with the child's new name, if you choose to change it, and submit it to the court with the adoption petition. After the adoption is finalized, the court clerk will send the Court Report of Adoption and the adoption order to the State Registrar in Sacramento. The state will issue a new birth certificate and send it to you.

11. Will a new Medi-Cal card be issued?

Yes, after the adoptive placement is completed, a new Medi-Cal card with the child's adoptive name will be sent to you.

12. I was adopted. How can I get information about my adoption and my birth parents?

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS), or the licensed public adoption or private adoption agency that handled the adoption, can provide non-identifying background information on birth parents to adoptees. The information provided includes general facts about the birth parents and their medical histories. This service is available only for adoptions that were finalized in California. You must request this information by writing directly to the licensed adoption agency, if known, or to CDSS at the following address:

California Department of Social Services / Adoptions Support Unit
744 "P" Street, MS 8-12-31
Sacramento, CA 95814

If you do not know the name of the licensed adoption agency, you can request the name from the CDSS. Your letter must include your name, birth date, and the full names of both of your adoptive parents. Also, your signature must be notarized by a Notary Public.



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