



KNOX AREA FOSTER CARE & ADOPTION MINISTRIES

Suggested Questions for Selecting a Child Placing Agency

(Foster Care and Foster Care Adoption)

The following is a list of suggested questions that are designed to help families (and singles) in selecting a child placing agency to foster, foster-to-adopt or adopt a child in the protective care of the State of Tennessee (i.e., foster care). In order to become licensed to provide foster care and/or adopt a child in foster care in Tennessee, people can generally choose to either work directly with the Department of Children Services (DCS), which is an agency of the State of Tennessee, or a private licensed child placing agency.

A very important consideration in selecting a child placing agency is determining whether the agency is a “good fit.” This can generally be achieved by ensuring that the family has accurate information and realistic expectations about the agency, the licensing and placement process, the characteristics and needs of the child(ren) that are likely to be placed in their care, the costs associated with the process and providing care and the services and support available to families – both before and after placement of a child. It may also be important to clearly understand the motivations of a private agency (e.g., are they involved in the placement of children as a “Christian ministry”) and whether or not the agency and its staff share your faith, beliefs and moral convictions.

In addition to obtaining answers to the following questions, foster and adoptive families are strongly encouraged to carefully read any policies and contracts that they are asked to sign or agree to by the agency and ask questions (including consulting an attorney, if necessary). Strict compliance with the agency’s policies and procedures will be critically important throughout the process.

General Questions About the Agency:

- What are the agency’s requirements for foster and adoptive families (e.g., age, marital status, number of children already in the home, religious, criminal background, financial, health considerations)?
- How long has the agency been licensed in Tennessee? How long has the agency been in operation?
- Is the agency a non-profit or for-profit organization? If a for-profit organization, who owns the agency?
- Is the agency accredited by the Council of Agencies or some other association?
- Does the agency have any religious or denominational affiliation?
- How long has the agency’s director and/or senior management been working in the foster and adoption field? How long has he/she been the director of the agency?
- How many professionals are on staff with the agency? What is the average length of service at the agency for the agency’s case workers who are currently on staff?
- What is the education and licensing background of the agency’s director and professional staff?
- How many case managers does the agency have and what is their caseload (current and

average)?

- Who at the agency will be the primary contact during training and pre-placement? During post-placement? For ongoing support?
- Will the agency provide contact with families who have recently used the agency to foster and/or adopt (i.e., family references)?
- Does the agency provide foster care, foster-to-adopt and/or foster care adoptions? If so, what is the ratio of foster parents to foster/adoptive parents? *Note: Some agencies are focused on recruiting foster care families and therefore do not provide and/or focus on adoption services (i.e., foster-to-adopt and/or foster care adoption). It is important to know at the outset whether an agency is adequately focused and experienced in providing the services in which you are interested.*
- Does the agency license families for and make basic and/or therapeutic foster care placements?
- What characteristics regarding the child placements does the agency allow families to specify (e.g., gender, age, etc.)? *Note: Typically, DCS and/or child placement agencies will only allow families to specify an age range (generally not less than a five year range) for foster and foster-to-adopt.*

Questions About Fees and Costs:

- What out-of-pocket fees and costs are charged by the agency in connection with the foster or adoption process and when are they due? Are these out-of-pockets eligible for reimbursement by the State? *Note: Generally, child placement agencies will charge no or only nominal fees and costs to foster and adoptive families. However, adoptive families are often responsible for their own legal fees and expenses associated with the adoption of a child from foster care, but typically such costs are eligible for reimbursement by the State. Check with your agency or DCS for more information.*

Questions About Wait Time:

- What is the current estimated wait time for families wanting to adopt only? How many families are currently waiting? *Note: Given the tremendous shortage of qualified foster families in most areas, there is generally not a significant wait to receive a foster placement. In fact, we are familiar with many families that have received placements within hours of being licensed. However, there can often be a wait for families wanting to adopt a child whose parental rights have already been terminated (particularly those wanting to adopt younger children). Wait times at most agencies are often highly dependent on the adoptive family's parameters (e.g., age, gender, racial/ethnic, health conditions and other behavioral and developmental challenges that an adoptive family is willing to consider). To the extent that an adoptive family has already determined certain of its fundamental parameters, questions regarding wait times should be asked in specific relation to those parameters (for example, what is the estimated wait time for an infant girl without known exposure to drugs).*
- Have average wait times for families increased, decreased or remained generally the same over the past several years (and if they have increased or decreased, why)?
- How often should I expect to hear from the agency during the waiting process?

Questions About the Agency's Placement Process and Experience:

- How does the agency typically handle or facilitate birthfamily visits (i.e., what degree of direct contact and/or communication between birthparent(s) and the foster family does the agency expect)?
- If interested in foster-to-adopt, ask for an explanation of how the agency assesses the likelihood that matching process work?

- If interested in adoption only, ask for a detailed explanation of the process that the agency uses to match a family with a child. *Note: The process often differs according to the age of the child in question. Therefore it is very important to understand and become comfortable with the process and the amount of information that will be made available prior to a match becoming final.*
- How many children has the agency placed in foster homes in each of the past five years? In adoptive homes?

Questions About Training and Support Services Provided by the Agency:

- What are the agency's required trainings (i.e., number of training hours required for licensing, number of training hours required for continuing education, etc.)? What percentage of the required training can be self-instructional? When, where and how often does the agency offer required trainings? Does the agency give credit for training offered by other organizations/agencies?
- How does the agency support families if an investigation occurs in their home?
- How does the agency support families to ensure that they are in compliance (and remain in compliance) with state minimum standards?
- What general post-placement training and support services does the agency provide (e.g., support groups, access to on-staff counseling services, social events, newsletters, etc.)?
- What post-placement services for adoptive families are provided? What help or services are available for adoptive families experiencing post-placement challenges and difficulties relating to their adoption?
- What are the agency's requirements for respite care providers? How does the agency help foster families obtain respite care? Will the agency allow families to use an informal respite care network at the family's church for short-term respite care (where the respite care providers are 21 years or older, have obtained safety/CPR training, required criminal background checks and some minimal training)?

Disclaimer: This document is not intended to constitute, nor does it represent, legal advice of any kind. A qualified attorney should be consulted with respect to any legal questions or issues.