



Adoptive Families
Association of BC



Adoption & permanency 101

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The Adoptive Families Association of BC is a charitable, accredited, non-profit organization offering adoption support, information, and education. Find out more about AFABC at www.bcadoption.com.

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For more than 40 years, AFABC has offered personalized supports, education, resources, family events, and opportunities to connect with others. We know there is no simple blueprint to being a family. We're here for you at **every stage of your journey**.



The Pakula family

Adoption 101: An introduction

You're probably here because you're thinking about adopting. Maybe you've come to adoption through unforeseen circumstances or maybe you've always known that adoption would be a part of your journey. Whatever your reason, we're glad you're here, and we certainly hope that this resource can be a helpful guide as you begin to navigate your journey.

Adoption is the legal transfer of ongoing parental responsibilities from one family to another. When a child or youth is adopted, they become a part of a new family. The child has all the emotional, social, legal, and familial benefits of having a permanent family. There are many different types of adoption in BC, including adoption from foster care, local agency adoption, international adoption, Indigenous custom adoption, relative & step-parent adoption, and adult adoption.

In addition to adoption, there are other ways to create safe, loving families for kids who need them. Permanency is an umbrella term for the myriad of ways of creating safe, permanent, loving families for kids who need them. Permanency includes guardianship, kinship care, moral adoption, and Indigenous custom adoptions. Sometimes these options are better fits for legal, cultural, or personal reasons. If you feel like adoption is not the right choice for your situation, you may consider exploring another form of permanency. While this guide will primarily focus on adoption, the AFABC Family Support team can help with questions regarding alternative forms of permanency.

What are my options for adopting in BC?

Of the children and youth adopted in BC in 2019-20:

67%

were adopted from foster care through Adopt BC Kids

18%

were intercountry adoptions

12%

were local infant adoptions

There are four main ways to adopt in BC:

- **Adopt from foster care:** Adopt a child, teen, or sibling group through the Adopt BC Kids program. This program is run by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).
- **Local infant adoption:** Adopt a BC child (almost always a baby) whose birth parents have chosen to place them for adoption. These programs are run by BC's licensed adoption agencies.
- **Intercountry adoption:** Adopt a child or children from another country. These programs are also run by BC's licensed adoption agencies.
- **Relative or step-child adoption:** Adopt a child who is related to or living with you. This can often be completed with the help of a family law practitioner.



The Thai-Abel family

Adopting from foster care

Each year **approximately 200—300** BC children, youth, and siblings are adopted through the Adopt BC Kids program, facilitated by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in BC.

Adopt BC Kids places some of BC's children and youth who are currently in BC foster care into adoptive homes. For a child to be eligible for adoption, the courts must first grant a permanent continuing custody order (CCO). Birth parents can also consent to a CCO. Birth parents' level of involvement with adoption planning varies.

MCFD provides the homestudy, facilitates the Adoption Education Program (AEP)—delivered by the Adoptive Families Association of BC—and assists with designing openness agreements. BC residents adopting a child through Adopt BC Kids **must be at least 19 years of age**, complete the AEP, and complete

a homestudy offered by MCFD. Applicants can either be a single adult, or two adults applying jointly. Diverse family types are welcome and Adopt BC Kids is LGBTQ2S+ friendly.

Approved adopting families wait for a match to be identified by their social worker. Families may also participate in matching events hosted twice a year or review matches online once they are approved to adopt.

Matches are **child-centred**. Each child or sibling group is matched with an approved family that best suits the children's needs. Timing is not predictable. The kinds of families who are most urgently needed are those who are open to older kids, sibling groups, and kids with special needs. Parents who have Indigenous heritage and cultural ties are also urgently needed.

The vast majority of children in the Adopt BC Kids program **are aged 5 to 18**. Many of them belong to sibling groups of two or more children who need to be adopted together.

All children adopted through MCFD are considered to have **special needs**. This includes younger children, even if they don't have a specific medical or behavioural diagnosis. Their needs can—but don't always—refer to a specific medical diagnosis. Often, special needs are related to the reason they came into care in the first place. Common needs include trauma or behavioural issues caused by neglect or abuse; prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol; a genetic risk of mental illness; or having had several caregivers in their young life.

Indigenous children are also considered to have a special placement need. Careful planning must occur to ensure the on-going nurturing and preservation of their culture. Every effort must be made to place them with Indigenous adoptive or permanency families.

After a child is placed in the adoptive home, a minimum **six-month residency** period begins before the adoption may be finalized.

MCFD pays for the homestudy, the AEP, all court fees, and the cost of your criminal records check. When applicable, prospective adoptive parents pay travel costs associated with the adoption, for their medical reports (if their doctor charges), out of country criminal record checks, and a \$95 per person administrative fee if they complete their pre-adoption training online.

Post Adoption Assistance (PAA) is offered through two programs: services and

maintenance payments. Both are income and asset-tested supports. Qualifying families who adopt a child with a special need (or a projected need) are entitled to on-going support services related to those needs.

Some families may also qualify for on-going monthly maintenance. Families may qualify for maintenance through one of three conditions:

- They adopt a sibling group.
- They adopt a child with whom they have a significant pre-existing emotional bond (e.g. foster parent, relative, or community friend of the child).
- They offer a child a culturally compatible home (usually this means an Indigenous family adopting an Indigenous child).

To get started or learn more, please visit gov.bc.ca/adoptBCKids or attend a free information session. Registration is available at bcadoption.com/events.

Watch: [MCFD answers common FAQs \(video\)](#)

"I learned that [teenagers ageing out of the foster care system] had few long-term relationships with trusted adults, little family, and no one to call mom and/or dad. This heartbreaking reality was the catalyst for my decision to adopt a pre-teen from foster care."

-Dawn Watters

The Adopt BC Kids process

1. Get a BCeID

General applicants must have an active BCeID before they can apply through the Adopt BC Kids program. Apply for your BCeID at <https://www.bceid.ca/register/personal/>.

2. Submit your Adopt BC Kids application

Complete your adoption application, track your application progress, and access profiles of waiting kids on the easy-to-use Adopt BC Kids online portal at adopt.gov.bc.ca.

3. Take the online Adoption Education Program (AEP)

This intensive online course explains the social, emotional, legal, and financial aspects of adoption. A social worker will refer you to register for the AEP after your online application is approved.

4. Complete a home study

Applicants whose skills and family vision match the needs and demographics of waiting children will be referred to their local office for a homestudy. Once completed, you will be an approved waiting parent!

5. Find a match

Being “matched” means you’ve been officially identified as a potential adoptive family for a child or sibling group. You can find potential matches by searching the profiles on the Adopt BC Kids portal, attending matching events, and talking to your social worker about matches they’ve identified for you.

6. Make a decision

If you decide you want to say “yes” to a match, the guardianship worker will prepare a document called a proposal package with detailed information about the child’s health, history, and development. MCFD provides prospective parents with all medical, social worker, and school reports from the time a child has entered care.

7. Welcome a child

Once you’ve accepted the proposal, the child’s guardianship worker will arrange a schedule of pre-placement visits so you can get to know the child. Once the child moves into your home, your social worker will continue to visit and offer support.

8. Finalize your adoption

After a minimum six-month residency period, your social worker will mail the final adoption paperwork to the courts. It may take a few more months for the judge to sign off on the adoption order.

Note: other types of adoption and permanency follow a slightly different process. For more information, please contact one of our Family Support workers.

“There have been many high points, but it has been especially heart-warming to see the boys’ confidence grow. Consider older children. They can have baggage, but they also have resilience and unbelievable strength.”

-Laura & Joel Lafortune

Infant and toddler placement

One of the most common questions hopeful adoptive parents ask is, “Can I adopt a baby or a toddler from foster care?” The reality is that few babies and toddlers are available through any form of adoption. Families who wish to adopt an infant or very young child should consider a local infant or intercountry adoption program. These programs are offered by licensed adoption agencies (see p. 18).

In the Adopt BC Kids program, recruitment is focused on finding families for school-aged children and teens. In 2020, **87% of BC foster children** who were registered for adoption were **between the ages of 5 and 18**. The remaining 13% were likely the younger sibling within a sibling group, had significant special needs, and/or were Indigenous children requiring a cultural match. What the Adopt BC Kids program needs are families who want to adopt **sibling groups, older kids and teens**, or children or youth with **significant challenges**. Could that be you?

A special note for Indigenous applicants: Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit) applicants may be more likely to receive a match with a younger child compared to non-Indigenous applicants. This is because 59% of children in BC are Indigenous and need Indigenous homes.

“I used to think that babies adopted from birth were exempt from things like attachment disorder, and this is completely false. Most adoptive families will face challenges at some point in their parenting journey ... no matter what age adoption happened at.”

-Jamie and Tyler Giesbrecht





“Throw everything you think you know about parenting out the window. Your job now is to know and understand your child(ren) and become the expert on them. Never let anyone tell you what they will/won’t be capable of, they have a whole life ahead of them and with unconditional love and support they will grow to amaze you.”

-The Saunders family



Local infant adoption

If your dream is to adopt an infant, the most common path is to adopt a baby born in BC whose birth parents have chosen to make an adoption plan. This type of adoption is facilitated by BC's licensed adoption agencies.

Each year approximately **30 local infant adoptions** are completed in BC. In local infant adoptions, expectant parents choose to make a plan to place their baby for adoption. They do this with the help of an adoption agency.

Adoption agencies in BC facilitate the entire adoption process for adopting parents, including adoption education, home study preparation, openness agreements, and post-placement reports. For expectant parents, adoption agencies provide pregnancy counselling, assistance making a plan for the child if the parents choose adoption, openness agreements, and post-placement support.

Approved families wait for birth parents to choose them as parents for their child. Many

prospective adoptive parents find the uncertain waiting period a difficult time. Because birth parents choose the family for their child, timing is unpredictable and a match is not guaranteed.

Direct Placement Adoptions are facilitated when the birth and adoptive parents are not related, but already know one another well before the adoption plan is made. A licensed adoption agency must be used to complete the mandatory homestudy and pre-adoption preparation.

Fees associated with local infant adoption planning through a licensed adoption agency are approximately \$20,000. Prospective adoptive parents pay for the registration fee with the agency, the homestudy, the adoption education program, and the placement fee when the child is physically placed with the family. In a direct placement, where the birth parent(s) and adopting parents are known to each other, adoption costs including legal fees are approximately \$10,000.



The McKinney family

Relative or step-child adoption

For many reasons, sometimes a person may want or need to adopt a relative or a step-child.

For relative or step-child adoptions within British Columbia, most applications can proceed directly through the courts. However, a judge may request the assistance of MCFD. If you are Indigenous, you may also wish to involve your Indigenous community or band in the process.

Your lawyer prepares and submits court documents and gathers any required consents. Children between the ages of 7 and 11 must be interviewed by a registered social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist prior to the adoption. BC's licensed adoption agencies can help you complete this report. Adult step-children and youth age 12 and up must sign consents.

For intercountry relative applications, a homestudy is required by Immigration,

Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Homestudies can be completed by one of BC's licensed adoption agencies. Other documents or post-placement reports may be necessary, depending on the requirements of your child's home country, and which country the adoption will be finalized in.

It is important to confirm that your adoption and immigration plans meet local, federal, and international requirements before pursuing any international adoption, including relative adoptions.

Check with a licensed immigration consultant, or Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to ensure you're meeting all provincial and federal requirements before getting started: www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship.html.



The Nishi family

Intercountry adoption

Each year **up to 100 children** come to BC families through international adoption. Most are available for adoption due to difficult family issues, war, poverty, death, or social factors. Children range in age, gender, ethnicity, and special needs status.

BC residents adopting internationally must be at least 19 years of age. They **must complete a mandatory educational component**, and a homestudy offered by a licensed BC adoption agency. This is true even for most international relative adoptions, and for dual citizens who wish to adopt from their second country of citizenship.

BC's licensed adoption agencies facilitate intercountry adoptions. Their role is to provide an education program, a homestudy, and support in choosing a country. They offer support and advocacy for families throughout the adoption process, and post-adoption support.

The length of time it takes to adopt internationally varies depending on the needs and requirements of the participating agency, sending country, and prospective parents. The whole process can take **up to two years**, often even longer. The education program, the homestudy, and the immigration process take a minimum of several months. Gathering required documents also takes time.

Adoptive families will wait 3-12 months to have a child proposed to them and then wait for the legal adoption papers and travel documents to be completed. Some countries require multiple in-country visits before the child can move home to Canada.

Married couples, single parents, LGBTQ2S+ singles and couples, and common-law couples can adopt internationally, however options may be limited for some applicants. Each country sets their own requirements, and many countries are not yet welcoming

of diverse individuals and family types. Prospective adoptive parents are advised to consult with their adoption agency and research carefully.

Intercountry adoption programs open, close, and change with dizzying speed. Some adoption agencies may consider processing an adoption from countries other than those they list. Your best bet is to do your research and check with the adoption agencies. Canada has ratified our agreement with the Hague Convention, an international agreement designed to protect the interests of children involved with adoption. It is possible to adopt from a non-Hague country, however Canada is still bound by Hague requirements. Your agency will be able to inform you of the Hague status of any country. Canadian immigration procedures must also be followed to bring your child home to Canada. You may have the choice to apply for direct citizenship or for permanent residency. Research both options carefully.

Intercountry adoption costs range from **\$15,000 to \$60,000+** depending on the country of choice and the associated costs including as agency fees, travel and hotel costs, orphanage donation, individual country requirements, consultant, and legal fees. A fee schedule for each country is available through the adoption agencies.

“The most challenging part for us was the long wait. With our oldest son, we had a more typical adoption waiting period of a couple of years—but it still wasn’t easy. We waited over six years for our youngest son’s adoption. Waiting is hard! But I wouldn’t change it now for anything.”

-Meghan and Brent Domonkos





Other forms of permanency

While adoption is a form of permanency, it is certainly not the only form. Permanency is an umbrella term for the many ways of creating safe, permanent, loving families for kids who need them. Permanency includes guardianship, kinship care, moral adoption, and Indigenous custom adoptions. Sometimes these options are better fits for legal, cultural, or personal reasons.

Guardianship means that you are responsible for all the decisions, care, supervision, and day-to-day decisions for a child. When parents are absent or unable to raise their children, other parents, family members, or grandparents often step in to help. Unlike adoption, guardianship does not sever the child's parental rights.

Some Indigenous people feel more comfortable with guardianship as a permanency option. For decades, adoption has been used as a tool of colonial violence against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

Because guardianship isn't associated with the same trauma and stigma, some Indigenous people feel more comfortable with guardianship as a permanency option.

In some cases, the process of legalizing guardianship can be done privately through a lawyer. The Parent Support Services Society of BC's website has extensive information on benefits, subsidies, and other resources for caregivers interested in learning more about guardianship (www.parentsupportbc.ca).

Custom adoption is an extension of custom care, which provides temporary or alternate care for children whose parents are not able to care for them. Custom adoption enables Aboriginal families, organizations, and communities to use a culturally appropriate way of sharing in the permanency planning for Aboriginal children. Each case is designed to meet the unique cultural, spiritual, and linguistic needs of a child. It's recommended

that Indigenous parents consult a lawyer if they wish to apply to have a custom adoption recognized by the Supreme Court.

Adult adoption is sometimes an option for former youth in care and other adults who wish to legally recognize a parent/child relationship. Youth from foster care or adult step-children who are 19 or older can be adopted by other adults who supported them before they turned 19. Adult adoptions are administered through BC's legal system and can be completed with the assistance of a family lawyer.

Families who come together after a youth turns 19 can participate in a **moral adoption**. Moral adoptions are parent-child relationships that are not legally formalized. Some families may choose to celebrate their commitment with a ceremony they design.

Other ways to support children and youth in BC include mentorship, which might look like working with a youth through a

program like the Boys & Girls Club, or fostering, which is the process of providing a safe and secure temporary home for a child who will most likely return to their birth family. While fostering and mentorship are less permanent forms of support, they can be incredibly meaningful and rewarding.

"A few years ago my mom and her husband walked me down the aisle at my wedding. But they didn't give me away, because they will never give me away. They will always be my family. It's never too late to have a family, and I am never too old to have a mom."

-Sarah Groothedde, moral adoptee



FAQS

Am I eligible to adopt?

Probably! The only requirements to apply to adopt in British Columbia are that you are over the age of 19 and a BC resident. Since 1996, British Columbia has allowed any one or two persons to adopt jointly regardless of gender, sexuality, age, income, religion, and many other factors. Your suitability as an adoptive parent and the kind of child or children you're best suited for will be determined by discussions with a social worker and during your home study. For intercountry adoptions, each country sets their own rules. Ask your adoption agency for information about the specific country you're interested in.

What is the difference between adoption and foster care?

Foster care is a temporary arrangement in which a family is financially compensated to care for a child until the biological parents are able to do so, or until an adoptive home is found. Adoption is a lifelong commitment in which the child becomes a permanent member of your family.

Aside from any agency fees, what costs can I expect to have after I adopt?

Raising a child is expensive. Raising children from care can add another layer of financial responsibility because of the additional support costs that your family may need such as counseling, therapies, school tutoring support, respite, health costs, prescriptions, diagnostic costs, and others.

What is a homestudy and how do I prepare for one?

A homestudy is a mandatory process by which an adoption social worker assesses a family or individual who is considering adoption. The process involves a series of interviews and helps prepare the family to meet the needs of an adopted child or sibling set.

Each visit will probably feature a different topic. Some days you may talk about your history and family of origin, other days you might discuss parenting approaches. You are not expected to be perfect. Social workers understand that people have different life experiences, beliefs, and personalities. What they are interested in is how you have managed and learned from those experiences.

I've heard the term "open adoption"? Are all adoptions open adoptions?

Openness with the birth family is part of nearly all local adoptions. Openness can mean sharing letters and pictures through the agency or it can mean having a fully open relationship with birth family (or something in between). It is very important that adoptive families think carefully about openness and what this will mean for them, the birth family, and especially their child. Sometimes a closed adoption is possible for various reasons (geography, the birth family has passed away), but maintaining a connection between the child and their birth family has been shown to be extremely beneficial to the child.

Who to contact

Local infant and intercountry adoption

You must work with a BC adoption agency if you are pursuing:

- A local infant adoption, or any adoption of a child not related to you whose adoption plan is voluntary (no involvement by MCFD).
- Intercountry adoption of a child (whether or not they are related to you), even if you hold citizenship with or emigrated from the nation you intend to adopt from.

BC currently has two licensed adoption agencies:

The Adoption Centre of British Columbia

Kelowna Community Resources (KCR)
620 Leon Avenue, Kelowna BC V1Y 9T2
Phone: 250-763-8002 | **Toll-free:** 1-800-935-4237
Email: adoptioninfo@kcr.ca
Website: www.adoption-bc.com

Sunrise Family Services Society

Vancouver: 102-171 West Esplanade, North Vancouver BC V7M 3J9
Victoria: Suite 301, The Atrium | 1321 Blanshard Street, Victoria, BC V8W 06B
Toll-free: 1-888-984-2488 *Both locations*
Email: info@sunriseadoption.com
Website: www.sunriseadoption.com

Relative or step-child adoption

If you are adopting a relative's child who was/will be born in BC, or adopting a step-child already living with you in BC, you may use a family lawyer to complete the adoption.

Adopt BC Kids

If you are applying to adopt a child from foster care in BC, you will apply directly to the Ministry of Children and Family Development at www.gov.bc.ca/adoptbckids.

Questions about immigration? Contact Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship.html>.



Get support

AFABC's team of Family Support Workers are here to support you on every step of your journey. They offer free one-to-one support, workshops, family events, and more. Don't be shy—they'd love to connect.

Brandi Kennedy

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Angie McMullen

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lfrench@bcadoption.com | 778-897-1315

Learn more

Check out these great resources on our website, www.bcadoption.com! Or head over to our [Facebook page](#) to check out our virtual support groups, attend a workshop, or watch a Facebook Live.

- **[Adoption Basics](#)**: This one-hour interactive presentation answers your adoption FAQs.
- **[Online resource centre](#)**: Hundreds of articles about everything you've ever wanted to know about adoption!
- **[Meet the Families story series](#)**: Real stories from real adoptive and permanency families—a great way to learn more about the experiences of adoption and permanency.





adopt

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