

Adopting as a Single Parent



Many single people are choosing to adopt, reflecting national trends toward greater acceptance of nontraditional families. Nationally, approximately one-quarter of children and youth, or about 22 million, are growing up in single-parent households.¹ In 2011, nearly one-third of adoptions from foster care were completed by unmarried people. This included adoptions by 1,400 single men and more than

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). *Custodial mothers and fathers and their child support: 2007*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-237.pdf>

What's Inside:

- Making the decision to adopt
- The path to adoption
- Parenting your child
- Conclusion
- Resources



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13,000 single women.² Several research studies have shown that adopted children raised by single parents experience outcomes that are as good as, if not better than, those for children adopted by couples.³

Despite these statistics, many single people report that they are more likely than couples to experience challenges in completing an adoption. Biases that persist against single-parent adoption in some circles reflect some of the disadvantages of single parenting, including greater financial pressures and the lack of a second parent with whom to share responsibilities. Nonetheless, single adoptive parents are quick to point out that their families also possess unique advantages. For example, some children who have experienced trauma or attachment difficulties may experience a higher degree of consistency and emotional safety with single-parent than with dual-parent families.

As one single adoptive parent said,

“It’s been a journey that I never, ever expected. One filled with challenges, hard times, and changing expectations.”

Although the desire to adopt a child is an emotional one, the more realistic your expectations are, the more likely you will be to complete a successful adoption and develop a satisfying lifelong relationship with your child or children. Learning as

much as you can about the core issues of adoption, the impact of trauma on children, and the special needs that many adopted children experience can increase your chances for success.

This factsheet discusses some of the main issues to consider when making the decision to adopt as a single person.

We recognize that this is just a starting point on your adoption journey. Throughout this factsheet, we will refer to other resources, where they are relevant. Much more information about adoption is available on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption>

Making the Decision to Adopt

The decision to adopt as a single parent involves a series of considerations, including, for some, whether to parent alone (rather than wait for a partner) and how to become a parent. This factsheet focuses exclusively on the decision to build your family through adoption. However, if you are considering other paths to becoming a single parent, you may find that many of the issues discussed in this section apply to your situation, as well.

It is important to note that there are other options, besides parenting, for making a difference in children’s lives. If you decide single parenting is not right for you, you can still develop a special relationship with a child as an aunt or uncle, neighbor, teacher, group or club leader, respite care

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau. (2012). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2011 estimates as of July 2012* (No. 19). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport19.pdf>

³ Shireman, J. F. (1995). Adoptions by single parents. In M. B. Sussman & S. Hanson (Eds.), *Single parent families: Diversity, myths and realities* (pp. 367–388). New York, NY: Routledge.

provider, court-appointed special advocate (CASA), mentor, or even as a sponsor to a child in another country.

Deciding to Parent

It is a good idea for *anyone* making the decision to parent to explore why you want a child. Experience has shown that if your urge to parent comes primarily from a desire to meet your own needs (e.g., loneliness, disappointment in romantic relationships, unresolved fertility or other losses), parenting will prove more challenging and less satisfying for both you and your child. If, however, your desire to parent arises from a wish to meet a child's needs and enjoy a relationship with him or her, adoption has a greater chance of a positive outcome. As a single parent, some additional considerations include your support system, your job, and your finances.

Your Support System

All parents need support; as a single parent, your support system will be especially critical. Consider the following questions about your relationships with family and friends:

- Do you have people you are close to? Do you feel comfortable calling on them for help, and accepting help when they offer it?
- Are your friends and family supportive of your decision to parent alone?
- How might your friends and family feel about the children who are available for adoption? For example, will they support you in parenting an older child? A child of another race/ethnicity? A child with

special physical, mental, or emotional needs? A child from another country who has spent time in institutional care?

- If you consider your own parents to be part of your support system, consider their ages, health, and well-being. Might you find yourself taking on caregiving responsibilities for your own parents before your children are grown? Are your parents young and healthy enough that they can realistically provide backup childcare and support?

"I may be a single parent, but I'm not raising my children alone."

Experienced single parents suggest that you talk to friends and family about specific needs that might arise after you bring your child home. For example:

- Who will come over to help when you or your child is sick?
- Who will answer a phone call in the middle of the night?
- Who lives close by and can provide help at a moment's notice, if needed?
- Is there someone you would trust to provide respite overnight or for a weekend?
- Who could pick up your child from school, if you were stuck at work or in traffic?
- Whom could you trust to act as guardian for your child, in the event of your death?

If you have difficulty answering some of these questions, you may need to consider whether your support system is strong enough, or whether it might be advisable to focus on expanding it before you

adopt. Keep in mind that biological family members are just one option: friends and “chosen family” may be just as important to you. Some families have even “adopted” grandparents. Other adoptive and single-parent families also can be a great source of mutual support or occasional respite. Your support system will naturally evolve over time, and it is possible that new people will come into your life because of your child. Unexpected new relationships are one of the great benefits of parenting alone, if you are open to them. Nonetheless, it is essential to have strong supports in place *prior* to bringing your child home, and well before a crisis.

“It really does take a village ... and the best village is other adoptive parents.”

No matter how wonderful your support system, you will be the sole parent for your child. The lack of time for yourself and the amount of pressure and responsibility involved in parenting alone are significant factors to consider. Be honest with yourself about your parenting style and expectations. If you have very high expectations for yourself or your children, or a tendency to be inflexible, single parenting may prove especially difficult.

A NOTE ABOUT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

If you decide to adopt, you may want to put dating on hold, at least for a while. You should expect to spend your first few months to several years of parenthood forming a secure, one-on-one attachment as your child’s primary caregiver. Even after that time, dating as a single adoptive parent poses some significant challenges. These include limited time and babysitting options, as well as questions about when to introduce children to a new relationship and how to educate a new partner about adoption issues and any special needs your child might have.

Your Job

As a single parent, it is likely that you will be a working parent. Make sure your expectations are realistic by envisioning what your weekdays will be like, in addition to imagining weekends and other special times with your child. Consider the hours spent working, commuting, and sleeping, as well as other routine parenting responsibilities such as preparing meals, completing housework, and helping with homework. Also evaluate the nature of your work and your employer’s culture. How compatible is your present career with the life of a single parent? For example:

- Do you consider your employer to be family friendly?
- Are there other parents and single parents in roles similar to yours at the company? If you are hoping for further promotions, how might parenting affect this goal?

- What is your company's policy regarding sick days and personal leave time? Are these days adequate to care for both your own and your child's illnesses? (Keep in mind that children, even those without special needs, are sick quite often during their early years while their immune systems are developing. You may find that you are sick more often than usual, too.)
- How much travel does your job require? Is travel optional or flexible? Can you bring your child with you, or who will care for him or her while you are away?
- Does your job offer comprehensive medical benefits that will cover the cost of your child's medical and mental health needs?
- Does your schedule allow for some flexibility, such as leaving at a moment's notice if you get a call from your child's school, or working from home when your child is under the weather?

Your Finances

"You don't have to be rich and do fancy things, but it takes more than love."

Cost is another consideration when becoming a single parent. According to a 2011 U.S. Department of Agriculture survey, single-parent families with one child under age 18 spend between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per year on child-related expenses.⁴ When considering whether you can comfortably

⁴ Lino, Mark. (2012). *Expenditures on children by families, 2011* (Miscellaneous Publication Number 1528-2011). Alexandria, VA: United States Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. Retrieved from <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/CRC/crc2011.pdf>

support a child, be sure to look beyond the initial cost to complete the adoption, including the following:

- Child care (while you are working as well as babysitters and respite care)
- Afterschool care and summer camps for school-age children
- Medical care (including potential therapies for grief and loss, attachment difficulties, learning disabilities, or other special needs)
- Activities (sports, music, etc.)
- Education

This is not to say that only wealthy parents can successfully raise healthy, happy children. Children need loving families, first and foremost. However, financial stress can be greater in single-parent households, which rely on one income and often have little to fall back on in the case of a layoff, job loss, or disability that prevents the sole parent from working.

If you adopt a child with special needs from foster care, your child will most likely be eligible for adoption assistance. If you adopt through private or intercountry adoption, your child may also be eligible for nonrecurring expenses and, although it is rare, these children are sometimes also eligible for adoption subsidy. Each State's policy around adoption assistance varies, and you should review what your particular State offers in terms of State subsidies.⁵ The amount of this subsidy, however, will not be enough to cover all of the costs of caring for a child. In addition, keep in mind that

⁵ For State-by-State information on adoption assistance, visit https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance.

some costs, such as buying a larger house to accommodate your family or contributing to college tuition, will extend beyond the subsidy period.

Can I Adopt?

Many people considering becoming parents may wonder whether adoption is a viable option in their situation. For example, you may be wondering, “Can I adopt if I am divorced or widowed? What if I have never been married?” Some people question whether they are too old or young to adopt, or whether they have a high enough income or enough assets to qualify. Gay men and lesbian women (single or partnered) may wonder whether a single parent adoption is an option for them. The answers to these questions will depend on many factors, including the State in which you live, the agency with which you decide to work, and the child or children you wish to adopt.

The following publication discusses State laws regarding eligibility for becoming an adoptive parent (in terms of marital status, age, residency, and more): https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/parties.pdf

For more information and resources about factors that might affect your eligibility to adopt, see the Information Gateway webpage Who Can Adopt? at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/whocan.cfm>

A Word About Foster Parenting

Some people consider foster parenting as a step to deciding whether adoption is right for them. There are some advantages to this approach. Providing foster care to a child in your home will give you a good idea of how

your life will change if you adopt and to what degree the responsibilities of parenting conflict with work demands. You will get a realistic idea of how tired you may feel, how your parenting style may differ from what you expected or how it changes under stress, and whether your current support system is adequate. You also may develop a better idea of what kinds of children you are and are not willing or able to parent. For example, you may wonder about adopting an older youth or whether you are equipped to care for a child who is medically fragile.

If you decide to pursue foster parenting, it is important to be as honest as you can with yourself and your caseworker about your reasons for fostering, what you can handle emotionally, and what kind of support you are willing and able to provide to a child. The majority of children in foster care return to their biological families.⁶ In these cases, foster parents must be willing to support the child in working toward a positive reunification with their family. On the other hand, when parents are not able to correct the conditions that brought their children into foster care, the goal changes to adoption. More than half of children adopted from foster care are adopted by their foster parents.⁷ Being clear up front about whether you are ready to make a permanent commitment to a child may help minimize additional trauma that would be caused by his or her move to another family.

For more information about foster parenting: https://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/resources_kinship/resources_foster_families.cfm

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, AFCARS report.

⁷ Ibid.

The Path to Adoption

Once you have made the decision that adoption is right for you, you may consider several different ways to adopt a child. It is important to understand that the types of adoption described here are more similar than they are different. All forms of adoption involve some trauma and loss for the child, although the degree varies greatly. No matter how old the child is at the time of adoption, or how he or she joins your family, adoption-related issues may arise at any point during his or her life.

For more information about concerns for adopted people, see *Lifelong Impact of Adoption*: https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_people/impact.cfm

For more information about the adoption process in general, see *Adoption: Where Do I Start?* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_start.pdf

Choosing a Type of Adoption

This section covers some of the factors and characteristics of various types of adoption, including single-parent eligibility, risks, and financial assistance. More information about the different types of adoption can be found in the Information Gateway factsheet *Adoption Options*: https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoption.pdf

Foster Care Adoption

Adoption from foster care by single people is fairly common. The first formal effort to engage single parents for adoption in the

United States took place in 1965.⁸ In 2011, close to one-third of the children adopted from foster care (30 percent) were adopted by single people.⁹ Although these adoptive parents have traditionally been almost exclusively women, more than 1,400 foster care adoptions were completed by single men in 2011.

Single-Parent Eligibility:

In an adoption from foster care, the decision about whether to place a child in a single-parent home will be made by the child's caseworker in accordance with agency policy and beliefs about the child's best interests; therefore, be sure to ask questions about policy and preferences when selecting an agency (see *Selecting an Agency*). In some cases, the agency or caseworker may prefer to place children in a two-parent home when possible. However, there is growing recognition in the field that some children function better in the right single-parent home (for example, when a child has suffered trauma or has attachment difficulties).

Risks:

Many children adopted from foster care will have some special physical, mental, social, or emotional needs. Be honest with yourself and your caseworker as you consider your ability to cope with various needs and your willingness to access support and respite care services.

⁸ Herman, E. (2012). Single parent adoptions [Webpage]. Eugene, OR: The Adoption History Project. Retrieved from <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/singleparentadoptions.htm>

⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, AFCARS report.

The term “special needs” has a specific meaning within the adoption community that has to do with a child’s ability to qualify for Federal adoption assistance (subsidy). Children may receive this label for any of several reasons, including their age, membership in a sibling group, or ethnic background, in addition to medical, physical, or emotional disabilities. For more information, see Information Gateway’s “Special Needs” Adoption: What Does It Mean? at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds/>

You may be asked if you are willing to accept the placement of a child in your home who is not yet legally freed for adoption. If you say yes, you are agreeing to support the child’s positive reunification with his or her birth family or relatives, if that becomes an option. If the birth family is unable to complete the steps necessary to reunify their family, then their parental rights will be terminated, making the child eligible for adoption. By taking on this risk yourself, you are minimizing the child’s risk of another move and additional trauma. However, consider whether this level of uncertainty is tolerable for you, your support system, and any other children living in your home.

Financial Considerations:

Many children with special needs who are adopted from foster care are eligible for Federal and State adoption assistance (subsidy) to help with the cost of their continued care. If you are adopting a

child with special needs, be sure that you understand what kinds of assistance he or she is eligible for, under what circumstances, and for how long.

Further Information:

- Adopting Children From Foster Care: https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/foster_care.cfm

Intercountry Adoption

Many single people have successfully built their families by adopting children from other countries.

Single-Parent Eligibility:

Eligibility guidelines for adoptive parents are set by the sending country and change frequently. Some countries permit adoptions by single people, but most do not. Other requirements, such as the age limit for adoptive parents, may be different for single people than for married couples applying to adopt. In some countries, single parents are permitted to adopt children with special needs only, or the percentage of children who can be placed with single parents may be limited.

Information about country-specific guidelines can be found on the U.S. Department of State website: http://adoption.state.gov/country_information.php

Risks:

There are many reasons why people decide that adopting a child from another country is right for them. However, if your reason for considering intercountry adoption is to avoid issues and needs that are common among waiting children in foster care in

the United States, be aware that many children adopted from other countries share similar histories and characteristics. In addition to the trauma of being separated from their birth parents, which every adopted child experiences, many children adopted internationally spend time in orphanages, without the care and attention of a dedicated adult. This can affect their current well-being, as well as their ability to form healthy attachments later in life. In addition, little may be known about your child's genetic history, life experiences, and/or medical status prior to adoption.

Because you are often matched with a child for some time prior to completing the adoption, there is a chance that changes in diplomatic relations between the United States and the sending country, or changes in the sending country's adoption laws and policies, may delay or prevent you from bringing your child home. Working with a reputable adoption service provider experienced in intercountry adoption may reduce but will not completely eliminate this risk.

Financial Considerations:

In addition to agency fees and other costs, completing an intercountry adoption often requires travel to the sending country to meet and bring your child home. Countries vary in their requirements for the number and length of these visits. This travel has benefits in addition to costs—you will learn more about your child and his or her country of origin, and you may find yourself developing a special bond with a country and people very different from your own.

Children adopted via intercountry adoption may be eligible for nonrecurring expenses

or subsidies to offset the costs of medical or other therapy needs in rare cases. Each State's policy around adoption assistance varies, and you should review what your particular State offers in terms of State subsidies for children adopted through intercountry adoption.¹⁰ Parents adopting via intercountry adoption are still eligible for the Federal tax credit.

Further Information:

- Adopting Children From Another Country: https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/other_country.cfm

Private Domestic Adoption

Domestic adoption of infants through a licensed private agency or through an attorney (independent adoption) is the least common way for single people (or married couples) to become adoptive parents. Fewer infants are available for adoption than were just a few decades ago, in part because of the decreased stigma regarding single parenting, so the wait for a healthy infant can be long. Agency and birth family preferences also play a significant role. However, some single adoptive parents do take this route.

Single-Parent Eligibility:

Birth families, and particularly birth mothers, are increasingly involved in the selection of adoptive parents for their infants. Some birth mothers express a preference for two-parent families, and some choose single parents over eligible couples. Agency, caseworker, or attorney biases may affect your eligibility to adopt or the likelihood that a birth mother will

¹⁰ For State-by-State information on adoption assistance, visit https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance.

be discouraged from selecting you to parent her child, so be sure to ask a lot of questions when selecting an agency or attorney (see next section, *Selecting an Agency*).

Risks:

Adopting an infant through private domestic adoption carries the least risk for trauma that may occur before a child is placed in your home. However, all adoptions involve loss, and it is common for issues related to adoption to surface in even the happiest of homes. Although you are likely to have a fair amount of information about the birth mother, there still may be unknowns about your child's genetic history or prenatal care—and as with any child, whether joining your family by birth or adoption, there are no guarantees that special needs will not arise.

You may be matched with a birth mother for some time (even months) prior to your child being born. Despite any agreements made prior to that time, the birth family always has a certain window of time after the birth in which to change their minds about adoption. (Learn more about a birth family's rights to revoke consent in Information Gateway's *Consent to Adoption*: https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/consent.cfm) Working with a reputable adoption service provider (agency or attorney) that provides extensive counseling for birth families, and birth mothers in particular, can help minimize but will never completely eliminate this risk.

Financial Considerations:

Children adopted via private domestic adoption may be eligible for adoption assistance to help offset the costs of any medical or therapy needs. Children adopted

privately, who are SSI-eligible, would also be eligible for adoption assistance. Each State's policy around adoption assistance varies, and you should review what your particular State offers in terms of State subsidies for children adopted through private adoption.¹¹ Their parents are still eligible for the Federal adoption tax credit (as of July 2013).

Further Information:

- Adopting Infants Domestically Through a Licensed Private Agency or an Attorney (Independent Adoption): https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/domestic_adopt.cfm

Selecting an Agency

Obviously, one of the first things to learn about any adoption agency you are considering will be its policy and preferences regarding single-parent adoptions. If agency personnel seem critical or discouraging of your choice, you will likely be better served to find another agency. Assuming the agency is welcoming to single people, as many are, you may want to explore these additional questions:

- Is the agency licensed to provide adoption services in your State?
- What accreditations does the agency hold? (Agencies that have been accredited have gone through a review process focused on providing quality services.)
- What kind of counseling and support do staff offer to the birth family? (It is better for you, the birth family, and your child if the birth family feels at peace with their

¹¹ For State-by-State information on adoption assistance, visit https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance.

decision and the plan they have made for their child.)

- What kinds of classes or workshops does the agency offer that will help you understand the needs of children waiting to be adopted?
- What degrees of openness in adoption does the agency support? (For more about open adoptions, see Contact With Birth Family: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/contacts.cfm>)
- What kinds of postadoption support do staff provide (support groups, ongoing training, online forums, respite)? Do they have any support specifically for single parents?

Preparing to Bring Your Child Home

“Most families get 9 months to prepare [for a child]. I got a phone call.”

You may not know exactly when a child will be placed in your home, and in some cases it can happen with little advance notice.

That’s why experienced single parents recommend beginning to prepare for your adoption early, even before you are matched with a child. The following suggestions may help:

Before you are matched with a child:

- Get training on the core issues of adoption. Understand the importance of attachment and forming a strong, secure bond with your child. Learn as much as you can about the special needs an adopted child might have, including trauma, attachment disorders, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.
- Address your own losses. How have you dealt with past experiences of loss (which might include infertility, romantic relationships, childhood trauma, or even just your idea of a “perfect” family)? As one adoptive parent said, “You will be triggered constantly by your child’s losses,” so it is a good idea to get some professional support, if needed.
- Learn as much as you can about the types of children available for adoption. If you have not already, spend time around the age and type of child that you are considering adopting, as well as children from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs and abilities. Know your limits and be clear about what you can and cannot live with.
- If you are considering adopting a child from a different racial or ethnic background from yours, learn as much as you can about the child’s heritage, country of origin (if not the United States), and issues facing transracial families. Connect with families and adults who “look like” your child or family. Now is a great time to build relationships and bolster your support system.
- Learn how the child welfare system works (if adopting from foster care) and what kind of postadoption services or supports your agency provides.
- Create a support system specifically for you and your adoption process. Meet regularly with a small group of chosen friends who can support you in different ways. This can be a huge help before, during, and after you adopt.

- Connect with an adoption support group. This is an excellent way to get your questions answered and learn more about how to handle possible challenges before they arise.

After you are matched with a child, before your child comes home:

- Get training on anything you can related to your specific child and his or her history, including his or her ethnic background, country of origin, traumas, or special needs.
- Identify local providers of adoption-competent therapy and other supports that you and your child might need.
- Share as much information as you can about your child with your existing support system, so that you get a sense of what they can and will help with, and what additional supports might be helpful.
- If your child will be adopted internationally, prepare yourself to gather any and all information available about your child at the time of his or her placement. You may never get another chance to ask those important questions.

Parenting Your Child

Parenting advice is everywhere these days, fueling countless books, blogs, and websites. The information below is by no means comprehensive, but it does represent some tips from experienced single adoptive parents. You can find much more information about parenting after adoption on the Information Gateway website: https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_parenting/

Bonding With Your Child

The quality of your relationship with your child will have a tremendous impact on his or her well-being. When your child first comes home, plan to spend dedicated time (as much as your job and finances will allow) creating an environment where he or she feels safe, secure, and loved. Keep in mind that, no matter how old they are when they come to your home, they are experiencing a loss of everything they have known and are probably frightened. Some suggestions to help children feel secure include:

- Establish regular routines and keep to them, so your child knows what to expect and learns that she or he can rely on you.
- Allow your child to choose favorite or familiar foods (if old enough), and make sure he or she knows that there is plenty of it.
- Encourage your child to keep a comfort object close by (e.g., a favorite blanket or stuffed animal).
- After returning to work, keep a flexible schedule, if possible, so that you can be home when your child is home (after school with an older child, for example).

“When it comes to helping your child feel secure, the little things are huge ... Slow down your expectations and take it one moment at a time.”

The need for bonding does not end as the child grows. For older children, showing interest in their hobbies, books, movies, games, and TV shows is a great way to stay connected. Find activities that you both enjoy.

“You have to take opportunities to have fun with your kids. If the two of you are connected, your child is much less likely to get into trouble and more likely to come to you for help if needed.”

Making Adoption Feel “Normal”

Whenever possible, avoid comparing your family to others—as a single-parent, adoptive family, you are going to look and behave in ways that are different from other families. If your child is of a different race, you will likely encounter some racism and other challenges. Your status as an adopted family will be more visible to others, and you (or your child) may at times find yourself asked to be a “spokesperson” for adoption. Many adoptive parents find that the joys of sharing their lives with a child and embracing another culture or community far outweigh these difficulties.

Do get in the habit of talking about adoption often, as a matter of course, so that it doesn’t become a “secret” or something the child is afraid to bring up. Some ideas from other single parents include the following:

- Create a Lifebook for your child. Be sure to include entries that relate to his or her life before joining your family. If you don’t have actual photos or information, include what you do know or have (e.g., an image of China’s flag).
- Each year, celebrate the day your child came home or the date of your family’s adoption finalization. This might be referred to as “the day we became a family.”

- Include an extra candle on your child’s birthday cake in recognition and thanks for the child’s birth/first family.
- Emphasize that adoption was a conscious, thoughtful choice on your part (and the part of the birth family, if applicable). Make it clear that your child is loved and wanted.
- Bring up adoption and its related losses from time to time. “I wonder if your birth parents were good at sports. Do you ever wonder about that?”

Self-Care

“We need to take care of ourselves, too. It’s okay to need help and to rely on other people.”

Although every family is different, most single parents agree on one thing: You must continue to meet your own needs! This is not always easy. However, taking time for yourself will be important to maintaining your health and well-being. Some recommendations from other single adoptive parents include the following:

- Continue to build and maintain your support network. This includes nonadoption friendships, as well as your adoption support friends.
- Attend trainings about adoption issues and/or your child’s special needs regularly. In addition to enhancing your knowledge and skills, these are opportunities for you to make social connections and reduce feelings of isolation.
- Do something you enjoy, just for you, at least a couple of times per week. This

could be as simple as taking a bath or a short bike ride, or pursuing a creative hobby.

- Build positive memories with your children. Find things that you can all enjoy together—it doesn't matter what the activity is, as long as you are laughing and having fun.
- Celebrate small successes with your children.
- Commit to having some regular child care. Consider establishing a trade system with other single parents; they may be your best and most reliable source of help.
- Take advantage of respite opportunities when you can. This could be a weeklong vacation, a weekend away, or even just getting a babysitter for a few hours' break.
- If you start to feel overwhelmed, reach out and get help! Asking for help does not mean you have failed.

"It's important to give yourself that break, to get away."

Adopting Again

It is natural after a successful adoption to think about bringing another child into your family. Any family with more than one child must consider how they will balance the children's needs for parental time, energy, and affection. Financial concerns and needs such as child care also increase in any family when adding a second child. The following are some specific considerations suggested by single adoptive parents:

- With each additional child, the chance that one of them will have significant special needs increases.
- Your support system will become even more important when one child has a medical or therapy appointment, or for any reason your children simply need to be in two different places at the same time.
- Children with trauma backgrounds and attachment issues often do better one on one. This can be difficult to balance as a single parent with more than one child.
- On the other hand, as children get older they often appreciate the company and camaraderie of siblings. The sibling relationship also may relieve some of the pressure you experience as their sole parent.

Conclusion

Although adopting as a single parent may feel overwhelming at times, the bottom line is this: Many single people have successfully adopted children, and many more are parenting adopted children alone due to divorce, deployment, or death of a spouse. Most single parents agree that the joy of bringing a child into your life far outweighs the hard work required. Millions of children are growing up healthy and happy in single-parent households, and—with a little preparation and hard work—yours can, too. Like all worthwhile journeys, the path of single adoptive parenthood is easiest when taken one step at a time.

For more information about parenting adopted children, see Parenting After Adoption on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website: https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_parenting/

Resources

The following is a brief selection of resources that may be of particular interest to those considering single parent adoption. For the most recent resources related to single parent adoption and other adoption issues, search the Child Welfare Information Gateway Library: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/library/>

Books

- *Adoption for Singles: Everything You Need to Know to Decide If Parenthood Is for You*. Second Edition. Victoria Solsberry. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010.
- *Single Adoptive Parents: Our Stories*. Sherry Fine and Lee Varon. Bookstand Publishing, 2012.
- *Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families*. Jayne Schooler, Betsy Keefer Smalley, and Timothy Callahan. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009.

Online Resources

- Adoption Learning Partners. Wide range of online training on a variety of adoption-related topics. <http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/index.cfm>
- *Adoption Today/Fostering Families Today*. Resources for foster care, domestic adoption, and intercountry adoption. <http://www.fosteringfamilies.com/>
- *Adoptive Families: Single Adopters and Parents Resources*. *Adoptive Families* articles, books, and other resources for single adoptive parents. <http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/singles>
- ATTACH. An international coalition of professionals and families dedicated to helping those with attachment difficulties. www.attach.org
- North American Council on Adoptable Children. Offers information and resources about how to adopt, adoption subsidies, parent groups, postadoption support, and more. <http://www.nacac.org>
- The SEEA-L List. A mailing list for single parents who are involved in adoption from Eastern Europe. Preadoption parents are welcome. <http://eeadopt.org/subscribe-today-mainmenu-71/63-the-seea-l-list-single-adopters.html>
- Single Mothers by Choice. Provides support and information to single women who are considering, or have chosen, single motherhood. <http://www.singlemothersbychoice.org/>
- Yahoo! Adoption Groups. Chat groups for almost any adoption topic or type of adoption. <http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/dir/1600042055>.



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