



Matched Adoption Process

We believe all children should be provided a family environment that encourages them to develop to their full potential. In order to do this Pathways works with families that can provide safe, stable and nurturing homes.

- **Approval process:**
Adoptive applicants will participate in pre-service parent training and background checks leading up to a Home Study that will provide a global picture of their life history, family and home, along with indicating what types of children they would prefer to adopt. Applicants are encouraged to develop an adoptive parent photo album showing themselves, their home, neighborhood, hobbies, extended adoptive family, friends, etc.
- **Request for adoptive homes:**
As children become available for adoption, CPS will make a formal request for adoptive homes. Pathways staff will review the request and submit the homes with matching characteristics for a specific child or sibling group.
- **Waiting children:**
Adoptive parents have a few opportunities to look for children that are available for adoption in Texas. Adoptive parents can view children on the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) web site. The Adoptive Family Network on the TARE web site allows homes to make self-referrals for children they are interceded in hearing more about. There are several Heart Galleries around the State that have local events and web sites that profile waiting children.
- **Selection process:**
CPS reviews the homes submitted for the child or sibling group taking great care to see that the needs of the child match the strengths and criteria of the adoptive parent. In most cases, CPS selects a lead adoptive parent (and two alternates) then conducts a meeting with Pathways staff to discuss and identify matching criteria between the child and parent. If Pathways staff and CPS agree there is a match CPS will provide a de-identified copy of the child's case record for Pathways staff and the adoptive parent to review. If the adoptive parent agrees the child or sibling group seems to be a match for them, Pathways staff notifies CPS and a full disclosure or presentation staffing is scheduled.

Adoption Assistance application and negotiation: CPS may provide additional support services to adoptive children that meet "special needs" criteria. Children who meet these criteria can receive adoption subsidy payments, Medicaid, and non-reoccurring legal fee reimbursement. Children that receive subsidy payments can also receive tuition waivers for state colleges and technical schools in Texas.

Adoption subsidy payments begin accruing on the first day of the next month following the signing of the adoptive placement agreement. (For example, if the Adoptive placement agreement is signed on April 10th, the payment would begin accruing on May 1st). Generally there is a 30-60 day delay in receiving the initial adoption subsidy payment. Please see the Adoption Assistance Program handout for more detailed information.

- Presentation process:**

The presentation staffing is to provide a formal full-disclosure staffing for the prospective adoptive parent and Pathways staff. CPS staff will give a verbal case history report specific to this child or sibling group based on the information known to them. In turn the adoptive parent and Pathways staff have the full opportunity for questions and clarifications. Normally the children's current caregivers participate in this staffing to provide support information relating to the child's placement in their home. In most cases the staffing concludes with CPS asking the adoptive parent to wait 24 to 48 hours to notify them of their final decision accepting placement of the children. The prospective adoptive families are asked to make a very strong commitment to the children based on what they have heard up to this process. One must understand great care is taken in this process to ensure these children are not put at risk of being rejected by the prospective families once pre-placement visits begin. Needless to say these children have been through great measures of loss and grief. We need to do all we can to see that we are making decisions based on the children's best interests. Please remember what you are told and read about the child's current behavior challenges because they are likely to be what you see in your home soon after they are placed with you. Be sure you can commit to the child's more challenging behaviors, some children make remarkable improvements once in adoptive placement but many come to adoptive placements with behaviors similar to their time in foster care. Almost all children make improvements with time. Adoptive parents need to make sure they have the commitment to ride out the bumpier times because they will come, it's part of being a parent. Being a parent is one of the richest experiences in life it requires: commitment, patience, perseverance and flexibility.
- Pre-placement and placement process:**

After the adoptive parent has made the decision to move forward, the introduction and placement process will begin. In most cases the CPS case worker will use the adoptive parent's photo album to begin introducing the child to the adoptive parent. The child will be allowed to keep the album through out the pre-placement process. This can be a very useful tool in letting the child acclimate to the change in placements. One must understand how far reaching a placement change is to a child. Basically everything they know and are familiar with changes in the matter of a few days. The foster parent they live with, their church, their school, their neighborhood, and in most cases all of their friends change. Great care is taken to see that this process moves ahead at a pace comfortable to the specific child or sibling group. Visits traditionally begin at the foster home, moving to a neutral setting such as a park, children's museum or restaurant. The process continues over a period of 5 to 7 days concluding with an overnight visit to the adoptive home. Soon after the child will have a good bye visit with his previous foster parent and the adoptive placement will occur. An adoptive parent's primary goal is to establish a stable emotional bond and relationship with their children. Attachment and commitment are the foundation of the relationship. Children thrive when they know they are in a safe and stable family. Pre-placement visits are slow and progressive to give the family a sound foundation to form and build their relationship on. Parents need to make a purposeful endeavor to provide unconditional love and commitment to their adoptive children. Pathways encourages parents to work on attachment activities from the very beginning when meeting their new children.
- Post placement process:**

Adoptive placements are supervised for six months prior to the adoption becoming finalized by the court. With the children placed, the adoptive parent goes through the process of really learning the children's schedule, routines and behaviors. The adoptive parent begins doing the normal things parents do: school enrollment, adding the children to insurance, selecting a pediatrician and a dentist. Pathways' Adoption staff will help coordinate activities by providing an Adoptive Plan of Services and scheduling counseling and other support services,

as needed. Pathways' Adoption Coordinator will provide the adoptive parent 24/7 contact numbers for assistance in case of emergencies. The adoptive parent can expect to see a cycle occur regarding the child's behaviors during this process. Initially there is a honeymoon period where things go well. Within time there be a phase where the child demonstrates challenging and testing behaviors. How parents respond to behaviors greatly impact the likelihood of reoccurrence. First reinforce positive behaviors and talents. When challenged consider it an opportunity to effect positive change. An angry and punitive response can increase the likelihood of reoccurrence. The primary focus during this supervision period is for the adoptive parent to get to know their child, help the child to settle into their adoptive placement and begin bonding with their child. Children do not change overnight. Parents should expect challenging behaviors from their children, all parents do. As the children adjust to their new home, parents can begin to see their more problematic behaviors taper off. Parents need to share the good times and the challenging times with your Pathways' staff. It is Pathways' desire and full intent to provide adoptive parents support, advice and encouragement.

- **Finalization process:**

The family is required to select independent counsel (an adoption attorney) to have their adoption presented in Court. The family is responsible for payment of the attorney fees and any associated filing fees. Around the fifth month of placement your attorney and Pathways' staff will be coordinating the finalization of the adoption. The Attorney will schedule a hearing to have the Court approve and make the adoption permanent. At the hearing the family, Attorney, Pathways' staff, (and any friends and family) will go before the Court and make the adoption permanent.

Once the court approves the adoption, the adoptive parent receives the full legal rights and responsibilities of their adopted child/children just as if they were birth children. Following this adoption hearing, the family is free to go about their life raising their children. Pathways can continue to offer adoptive counseling services through Medicaid, private insurance, or on a fee for service basis, at your discretion.

- **Post Adoption Services:**

Pathways makes a long-term commitment to all the adoptions we have the pleasure of working with. We welcome the opportunity to assist our adoptive homes long after the courts dismiss us. "Post Adoption Services" are available to support adoptive families after finalization, with case management services, support groups, counseling, respite, residential placement services and 24-hour crisis intervention. Adoptive parents are encouraged to use Post Adoption Services early on if they are experiencing difficulties. These services are designed to help smooth out more difficult times and to ensure the stability of your adoption. Because children exposed to abuse and neglect can have a wide range of characteristics ranging from emotional disturbances, medical complications and/or developmental issues their needs can be demanding and seem overwhelming at times. Utilizing Pathways, Post Adoption Services and various community resources will ensure the best opportunity for a rich and enjoyable adoption experience.