



CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

# Adoption Journeys

*In Massachusetts*

## PARENTS' GUIDE TO SERVICES

160 Osborn Street

Fall River, MA 02720

1-800-97-CARE-4 (800-972-2734)

# Your Guide to Adoption Journeys

Adoption Journeys:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes / Scheduled Appointments:

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The Massachusetts Department of Children & Families provides funding for the Adoption Journeys in Massachusetts program.



Child & Family Services has been serving the community since 1843. We are a comprehensive agency offering a wide range of counseling and community support services. These include specialty clinics, individual, group and family therapy, psychological testing, psychiatric consultation, adoption services and community youth support.

Child & Family Services' commitment is to serve the community with the highest respect and professionalism.

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## What is Adoption Journeys?

Adoption Journeys, a program of Child & Family Services, Inc., offers post-adoption supports and services to adoptive families throughout the State of Massachusetts. To participate in services, a family needs to meet the following criteria:

- Be a current resident in Massachusetts
- *and*
- Have a legal, finalized adoption or a permanent legal guardianship. Legalized adoptions may be either domestic or international.

This program is funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, and services are provided through 5 regional offices. All services provided by Adoption Journeys are voluntary, and families choose whether or not to join the program, and how they want to participate.

## Why Are Post-Adoption Services Important?

Post-adoption services can be essential to help adoptive families embrace their new family identity. These services are especially important for families who face challenges after their adoptions are finalized. Post-adoption services help maintain family stability and permanence. Pre-adoptive support programs often end when adoptions are finalized and families may find it difficult to replace the supports they had prior to finalizing their adoption. The permanency of the adoption can be at risk without ongoing support.

Adoption is both an event and a process. Adoption as a process does not end with the finalization of the legalities. When a family's journey includes adoption, all members have to accept the changes that being a part of a new family brings. Adoptive families are not simply adding a new member to what exists – they are growing as a family, and also becoming a part of a new extended family and community. What went before does not simply cease to exist for the child; the first family and the early life experiences are always a part of who the adopted person is. For example, a Caucasian family who adopts transracially is becoming a multi-racial family, and will need to learn to navigate all of the benefits and challenges that brings. When adopting internationally, families are also bringing a new culture, including its language,

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smells, tastes and celebrations, into their lives. When adopting a child who has experienced trauma, the legacy of that trauma will not resolve simply because the child is now loved and cherished. Parents are faced with helping their children heal, which often requires altering traditional parenting strategies. When families can both understand and embrace these realities, the opportunity for joy is endless.

Each individual brings their own history, preferences, strengths and needs to the table. As the members of this “new” family learn to live together they might be able to make these adjustments seamlessly. However, as in all families, there can be unforeseen obstacles that emerge. In families formed through adoption some of these obstacles can be the result of unrealistic or unmatched expectations held by all members of the new family, including the extended family. Additional obstacles can arise due to a past history relating to abuse, neglect, or other trauma experienced by any member of the adoptive family.

Post-adoption support from an organization that is sensitive to these concerns and understands these adjustments through the lens of adoption can be essential to the long term success of the family. Each role in the family hosts unique experiences, and can each benefit from specialized attention.

*Adopted children:* Not all children who join families through adoption have been abused or neglected; however, all children who are adopted have experienced loss and grief. For those children who have also experienced trauma prior to adoption, the ability to create and accept a new family identity can be even more complex. As a result of difficult experiences, some children learn that adults are not to be trusted, relationships don’t last, life is full of danger, and constant vigilance is required to be safe. Some children have not learned how to calm themselves, or how to accept soothing and calming from others. Having experienced little care and compassion themselves, they may have limited empathy for others. All of these characteristics can present challenges for the adoptive family and additional supports are helpful while learning how to help the child heal from these early experiences.

*Adoptive Parents:* All parents bring their personal history, hopes, expectations, concerns, strengths and needs to parenting. Becoming a parent by adoption is no different. All parents desire to love and care for a child, to form a deep and lasting attachment to the child, and to experience the child’s attachment to them. At times adoptive parents can feel misunderstood by their community, or discouraged when traditional parenting methods aren’t as successful as expected. Adoptive parents may also have experienced disappointment in attempts to conceive. If this is the case, additional supports may be necessary, especially if the adopted child presents unanticipated challenges.

*Extended Family and Community:* Birth and adopted children already in the family also have hopes and fears about the changes a new adoption will bring. They might worry about being displaced in their parents' affections or be concerned about the emotional and physical toll that raising an individual with complex challenges could bring to their parents. They can also be excited about the possibility of a new sibling.

Grandparents and extended family may not understand the choice to adopt or be able to support the adoptive family due to the challenges the adopted child brings, the race or ethnicity of the child, or the gender expression of the child. Grandparents can also be a major source of support for the adoptive family, often providing nurturing, guidance and childcare so parents can get a break.

Community members, school and medical providers, and friends may no longer be able to support the adoptive family due to the complex needs that the family has. Adoptive parents may find that extended family and friends question their choices and that not all social services or community agencies have expertise in adoption or the challenges and rewards adoption presents to families.

Post-adoption communities are especially helpful in these instances: natural supports can be formed, recommendations for sensitive care providers can be offered and information about navigating the various systems of care can be provided. Most importantly adopted families are able to see themselves in others.

**Philosophy:**

Adoption Journeys' program philosophy is based in the recognition of both the joys and the challenges adoptive families face. We believe that with support, all families have the strength and resilience to manage challenges and that all families have the capacity to find cause for celebration and joy in their lives. Adoption Journeys is designed to support adoptive families as they explore and come to identify their strengths, resources and needs.



## What Services and Supports Are Available?

This section will describe the services available to you and your family from Adoption Journeys. Because families have different strengths and needs, an Adoption Journeys worker will help you design a program that supports you and your family. The range of services are described in the following pages, and include:

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL LINE (I&R)

REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM

RESPIRE SERVICES

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

TRAINING SERVICES

### Information and Referral (I&R) Line

Adoption Journeys can respond to a call from an adoptive family 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through this toll free number: 1-800-97-CARE-4 (800-972-2734). Parents and professionals can call the I&R line at any time and connect directly with the Adoption Journeys staff.

Adoption Journeys staff can provide the following:

**Information:** The Adoption Journeys staff has extensive knowledge of the resources available for adoptive families. We maintain a list of adoption and guardianship resources that are local, statewide, and national. Professionals and other service providers may call seeking information relating to adoption, assistance in locating appropriate adoption support services, or for case consultation on behalf of an adoptive family.

**Brief Assessment:** Parents may call the I&R line seeking information about adoption and resources related to adoption. They may also call in order to speak to a knowledgeable adoption professional with questions or concerns about a specific adopted child. As a result of this discussion, the parent and the staff may decide a referral to the regional Adoption Journeys office, or other service provider, is necessary.

**Referrals:** Referrals can be provided for Adoption Journeys services, other agencies and organizations, and for therapists or counselors with expertise in adoption.

**Identifying Risk:** If staff learns anything during a call that indicates a child or adolescent is at risk of harming himself or others, they will assist families in connecting with the appropriate crisis services. Should staff learn that a child is at risk of harm from others, the Adoption Journeys staff has an obligation to make an immediate report to the appropriate emergency service, including police or the Department of Children and Families. Adoption Journeys staff will follow up on these calls to ensure that appropriate and timely intervention has occurred.

**Follow Up:** Occasionally we do not have the information the caller is seeking. In those instances the staff will research the request and call back with the information.

### Why do people call Adoption Journeys?

Parents call for a variety of reasons. They ask questions like:

*“Should I be concerned about my child’s behavior?”*

*“How can I tell my child that they were adopted?”*

*“How do I handle questions about my child’s past from others, including family, friends and strangers?”*

*“Where do I find a therapist who understands adoption?”*

*“When is the right time to share sensitive information with my child about their first family?”*

*“How can I work with my child’s school to get my child what they need?”*

*“Where is my local Adoption Journeys office and how can I reach them?”*

Parents need different information and resources at different stages in the life of their adoptive family. The questions and concerns change depending on the age of the child and the individual adoption story. Parents also call to get help with behavioral issues, mental health concerns, adjustment issues, attachments, and relationship concerns.

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## Regional Response Team

When parents contact Adoption Journeys they are often seeking information and support to understand and respond constructively to issues which are causing stress in the family. At least half of the families who contact Adoption Journeys say they are facing behavioral, relationship or other issues related directly to the adoption.

The Regional Response Team is the component of Adoption Journeys services that provides the direct response to adoptive families experiencing increased stress. This service offers families brief, adoption-focused home-based counseling, as well as advocacy and coordination of services. Areas of attention can include discussion about birth family, identity issues, parent support, understanding trauma and loss, and navigating complex systems. The Team can also participate in meetings with schools, courts, and other community providers. Regional Response Team services can vary greatly across families and across time, as they are tailored to a family's current need.

There is one Team at each Adoption Journeys location. These Teams usually provide some response to an inquiry within 24 hours. Typically the first response is by telephone and is followed by an appointment for an in-person meeting. Generally, the first meeting is in the family home with the parents, and is at a time that is convenient for the family. Regional Response Team services are intended to be relatively brief, usually in the range of 4 to 6 months.

**The Family is the Expert:** Adoption Journeys recognizes that families are the experts in knowing their strengths, resources and needs. At times of stress it may be difficult for families to recognize and apply their own expertise. Regional Response Teams assist families in developing plans that recognize their family strengths, resources and natural supports. The Team may also offer referrals to other Adoption Journeys services or appropriate community programs as needed.

**Making a Plan and Putting it in Place:** The first step for the Regional Response Team is to get to know the family, the family's experience, current level of stress, and hopes. The Response Workers will help the family identify their existing strengths and resources, and provide the family with information, support and strategies for addressing their concerns. Together, the family and Adoption Journeys staff may complete a Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST). The FAST ensures better communication and collaboration between the family and their Response Team members. The FAST can help to clarify goals and objectives for the work the family is undertaking. It allows the family and team to easily identify their progress and to see what work remains to be done.

### Why use the Regional Response Team?

Every call, like every family, is unique. Calls for Regional Response Team support can vary depending on the circumstances, age or developmental level of the child. A child newly joining a family may have trouble sleeping because the sounds and sights at the new home are all different or trouble eating because the food is not what they were accustomed to in their previous home. Middle school aged children may have a reaction to a sibling leaving for college. Some families who have had a totally smooth childhood experience suddenly have an adolescent who is struggling with identity issues relating to their racial or cultural background. At times, families deal with behavioral, mental health or other issues so severe that they wonder if their adopted child needs the intensive services of temporary, out-of-home residential placement. The Regional Response Team can support families directly through their in-home services, and with advocacy and referrals as they navigate systems of care which will meet both the family and child's needs.

## Respite Services

As the word '*respite*' implies, these services are intended to provide a brief break for families. The type, intensity and duration of the Respite Services are planned in advance, are based on the needs of the family, and are limited by the availability of funding. Families may participate in all categories of the respite program. Parents and Adoption Journeys staff work closely to determine which form of respite (or combination thereof) could be most supportive for the family and most appropriate for the child.

Adoption Journeys Respite Services are not intended as a response to, or intervention for, a mental health crisis.

Respite Services fall into three categories: Family Social/Recreational Respite, Child Recreational Respite, and Child Care Respite:

**Family Social/Recreational Respite:** These activities are designed for adopted children and at least one parent. Organized and sponsored by Adoption Journeys, these family events include outings and activities such as apple picking in the fall, visiting a water park in the summer, and learning how maple syrup is made as part of a “sugaring brunch” in the spring. These activities may have a small fee to help offset expenses.

#### Why use Family Social/Recreational Respite?

In addition to normalizing the adoptive family experience and reducing isolation, family respite events allow adoptive families to remember to relax and play together. Many adoptive families feel like they work all of the time on correcting behaviors and struggling with specialized needs. The opportunity to have time to play together allows all family members to rest, recharge and remember that they can have good times as a family.

**Child Recreational Respite:** Adoption Journeys organizes and sponsors a host of activities for groups of adopted children, supervised by program staff or program-approved providers. These activities can include picnics, trips to see children’s shows, learning activities, and overnight adventures. Parents do not attend these activities. Some of these activities may have a small fee to help offset expenses.

#### Why use Child Recreational Respite?

Being in a group where the unspoken understanding is that everyone there is adopted offers a great relief. Frequently it is the only place where kids see others who look just like them. No one needs to explain things like why they aren’t the same race as their parents or why they don’t look like their siblings, or answer questions that are intrusive and insensitive like “why did your mom give you away?”. This kind of social connection normalizes the adoption experience. It reduces isolation and allows kids to form friendships with others who have had similar early life experiences.

**Child Care Respite:** This service involves structured financial support for care of the adopted child in the parents’ absence. The parent is responsible for selecting their provider and ensuring that the provider can safely provide the supervision and level of care that the

child(ren) require. The child care may be provided in the family's home, in the child care provider's home, or in another designated setting. The frequency and amount of time available to an individual family for child care respite is determined by the Adoption Journeys staff in collaboration with the family.

Child care respite is planned according to the family's needs and the availability of resources. The respite provider is chosen and paid for by the parent and some or all of the cost of the respite may be reimbursed afterward by the Adoption Journeys program in accordance with our policy and procedure. Child Care Respite reimbursement is never guaranteed and is reimbursed at limits set by the Adoption Journeys program. To be eligible for support, all child care respite must be approved in advance by Adoption Journeys staff. For a full description of the guidelines for reimbursement, please contact your regional site.

### Why use Child Care Respite?

Sometimes parents need to have support so they can take a brief break to take care of themselves or other family needs. For example:

- a single parent was able to have a night out with friends to go to dinner and a movie for the first time in 3 years;
- a couple was able to find someone with exactly the right kind of behavioral training to care for their adopted child with very challenging needs, so they could attend a school conference for another child;
- an adoptive grandparent, in the hospital following surgery, needed someone to bring her granddaughter to visit.

## Family Support Services

Adoption Journeys provides a range of group and individual support services for parents and adopted children. Support Groups provide opportunities for members to meet with others to explore common concerns and interests. Regular meetings allow adults and children to share common experiences, learn from, and support each other. Adoption Journeys provides group services through the regional offices and by partnering with other agencies and organizations.

**Adoptive Parent Support Groups:** Parent support groups address a wide range of family issues, including: parenting adolescents, sibling rivalry, behavioral concerns, trauma and attachment, family transitions, open adoption, adoption searches, and handling their child's first meeting with birth parents and/or family.

**Psycho-Educational Parent Groups:** Psycho-educational groups usually focus on a specific topic and meet for a set number of times. For example, a series may focus on the adopted child in adolescence or on specific behavioral issues that may arise in children who have a history of abuse.

**Children's Groups:** Children, as well as adults, can benefit from talking with their peers about their experiences. Adoption Journeys provides several different types of children's groups where adopted children can spend time with and get to know other adopted children. These groups are facilitated by trained Adoption Journeys staff.

**Adolescent Groups:** Adoption Journeys provides groups specifically for teens whose experience of the normal changes of adolescence is entwined with their experiences of adoption. Groups for adolescents are typically activity oriented and include a focus on developing social skills and making friends with other adopted teens.

### How to find a group:

Information and referral for all Adoption Journeys group services are available through the Information & Referral line (1-800-97-CARE-4) or regional offices.

**Parent Liaisons:** Adoption Journeys also promotes the development of independent support resources for parents. Adoption Journeys has a small group of volunteer adoptive parents who provide one-on-one peer support to other adoptive parents on an as-needed basis. Whenever possible, Adoption Journeys staff matches parent liaisons with families by language, culture, and specific adoption circumstance.

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## Training Services

When adoptive families seek help in their communities from social services, therapists or educational systems they may encounter misunderstanding and myths about adoption. Skilled professionals may misdiagnose an issue or blame adoptive parents for the concerns the child is having. Adoption Journeys provides training and case consultation to professionals in the community about adoption. We are available to assist professionals in becoming more informed and skilled in helping families formed through adoption. Training is provided to schools, emergency responders, medical teams, the courts, and mental health service providers. These trainings are provided by staff from the regional Adoption Journeys offices upon request and through ongoing collaboration and consultation.

Adoption Journeys, in partnership with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), is also leading a curriculum-based training program for clinicians statewide in the clinical issues relating to adoptive families. This training program, Training for Adoption Competency (TAC), is a comprehensive educational approach developed by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE). This model is currently being taught in 40 states and has been rigorously evaluated. To request training or obtain information about TAC, call 1-800-972-2734 or your local Adoption Journeys office; you will find these numbers listed on page 15 of this guide.

## Making Use of Adoption Journeys Services: How it Works

The best way to get involved with Adoption Journeys and our services is to call us. You can reach us through the toll free number 1-800-972-2734 or at your regional Adoption Journeys office (phone numbers can be found on the next page of this guide).

Making contact is the first step to receiving services. In that first phone call, you can gather information about what we have to offer and through our discussion decide which Adoption Journeys resources are best suited to your current situation. Sometimes the information you need will be provided in one phone call, other times a follow up meeting is scheduled and additional programs and services are made available. Because Adoption Journeys is a voluntary program you are not required to accept any service you don't want or need.

Families can participate in all of Adoption Journeys services, or any combination of these services, simultaneously and at any time in their post-adoption experience. We hope that you will take advantage of all of the services that you need at the present time, and feel free to call again in the future as things change. Adoption Journeys is always just a phone call away!



## Who Provides Adoption Journeys Services?

Adoption Journeys services are provided through Child & Family Services, Inc.

Adoption Journeys services are available throughout Massachusetts and can be accessed through a 24 hour phone number: 1-800-97-CARE-4 (800-972-2734) or by calling the direct number listed by the regional office during regular business hours (see below). Child & Family Services, Inc. coordinates services in each region of the state. Staff of Adoption Journeys include licensed social workers, counselors, child welfare and human services workers, as well as adoptive parents.

### **Southeast Region:**

(508) 676-5708  
160 Osborn Street  
Fall River, MA 02720

### **Boston and Metro South Region:**

(781) 444-1042  
395 Totten Pond Rd, Suite 204  
Waltham, MA 02451

### **Northeast and Metro North Region:**

(978) 687-5852  
1501 Main St, Unit 40  
Tewksbury, MA 01876

### **Central Region:**

(508) 459-2339  
330 Southwest Cutoff, Suite 101  
Worcester, MA 01609

### **Western Region:**

(413) 320-4680  
140 Pine Street, Florence, MA 01062  
MAILING ADDRESS:  
P.O. Box 60006, Florence, MA 01062



## Notes and Numbers

*This section can be used for recording notes, names, phone numbers and other useful information.*

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Website / Other Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

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