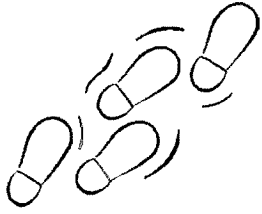


BEGINNING STEPS TO ADOPTION



- ❑ **Attend local orientation:** Attend the local orientation in your area to learn more about the system and the process. Pick up your licensing application form there.

- ❑ **Fill out licensing application:** It is generally advised that interested persons go through the licensing process, so that children can be more easily placed in your home. Fill out the licensing application and send it back. This starts the process of licensing which will include a home visit and background checks. If you are licensed, OCS can place children who may be possibly available for adoption but not yet legally free for adoption. If you choose not to be licensed, OCS is still interested in you as an adoptive family, but can only place children who are legally free for adoption in your home. Contact your local Permanency Planning Specialist directly if you are interested only in children who are currently legally free for adoption.

- ❑ **Complete the Adoption Learning Path Courses: ACRF offers a series of three trainings designed to prepare families for adopting through the Office of Children's Services.**
 - **Core Training for Resource Families:** No matter if you are going through the recommended licensing process or not, all potential adoptive families are encouraged to complete the Core Training for Resource Families. Many communities offer this on site. Some rural communities use a self-study, web-based course, and even a rural telephonic series is available through the Alaska Center for Resource Families.
 - **Building Families Through Adoption:** We strongly suggest that if you are adopting through OCS, you also take the Building Families Through Adoption class available through the Alaska Center for Resource Families. This class addresses the specific issues of becoming an adoptive family and gives you valuable tools to help a child become part of your family. The class is available through our regional offices, as a self-study option, as well as web-based course.
 - **Adopting through OCS:** Provides the mechanics of adopting from the foster care system. This course includes information on home studies, adoption subsidies, talking to a child about adoption, disclosure, and post adoption supports. This class is offered through our regional offices, self-study, web-based course, and even a rural telephonic course through the Alaska Center for Resource Families.

- ❑ **Profile for families on the Heart Gallery of Alaska:** Beacon Hill manages the Heart Gallery of Alaska in collaboration with ACRF and the Office of Children's Services. Families who complete the ALP courses are afforded a space on the family section of the Heart Gallery website. This hidden page, allows approved OCS workers to gain access to profiles of families interested in adopting through the foster care system.

- ❑ **Complete adoption home study:** The next step is the home study, which is a comprehensive written document that helps OCS understand your home and what you have to offer a child. If you are currently licensed and have a child in your home who is being considered for adoption, the Permanency Planning Specialist (PPS) or your caseworker can refer you for a home study. There are also private home study writers that can complete the document, but you will need to pay for a private home study yourself. If you adopt a child through OCS, up to \$2,000 of your nonrecurring expenses can be reimbursed which includes attorney's fees, court costs, and home study fees, so keep your receipt. Ask your local PPS or ACRF for a list of private home study writers.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADOPTION & GUARDIANSHIP?

The following chart is taken from the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Office of Children's Services Website at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/adoptions/comparisonchart.aspx>

	Adoption	Guardianship
Legal Status	<p>Birth parent's rights are voluntarily relinquished or involuntarily terminated.</p> <p>The adoptive parent is given all the rights and responsibilities that once belonged to the birth parent.</p> <p>Adoption is a permanent, lifelong, legal relationship.</p> <p>Both persons in a married couple must adopt, unless a judge has excused the other spouse from adopting.</p>	<p>Birth parent/s' rights may or may not be voluntarily relinquished or involuntarily terminated. The birth parent retains "residual rights" when parental rights have not been relinquished or terminated.</p> <p>The guardian is given legal responsibility for the child and assumes the rights of care, custody, and supervision of the child.</p> <p>When married, either one or both spouses may be named guardian.</p> <p>The court makes all decisions regarding the transfer of guardianship, but the birth parent/s can request that guardianship be taken away from the caregiver and that the child be returned to their care if parental rights have not been terminated.</p> <p>Although guardianship legally ends when the child turns 18, most legal guardians enter into this commitment intending it to be a lifetime relationship.</p> <p>The guardian must file an annual report with the court.</p>
Decision Making	<p>All decisions are made by the adoptive parent, except for provisions in court orders establishing parental retained privileges.</p>	<p>Decisions regarding school, medical treatment and most other life decisions are made by the guardian.</p> <p>When parental rights have not been relinquished or terminated, the birth parent/s retain important rights, e.g., visitation, choice of religion, consent to adoption, consent to marriage, consent to military enlistment, and the right to claim the body of a deceased child.</p>
Child's Legal Name	<p>The adoptive parent determines the child's legal name.</p>	<p>Usually the child retains his/her name.</p>
Inheritance	<p>An adopted child has all of the same rights as birth children when the adoptive parent does not have a will. Otherwise, inheritance rights are established through a valid will as they are for birth children.</p>	<p>The child has no rights of inheritance from the guardian unless the child has been included in the guardian's will.</p>

Consent of the child

A child who is 10 years of age or older must consent to his/her own adoption, unless the court in the best interest of the minor dispenses with minor's consent.

A child who is 10 years of age or older must consent to his/her own guardianship

Death of Adoptive Parent/ Guardian

The adoption subsidy ends with the death or termination of rights of the adoptive parents. The child most likely will remain eligible for adoption assistance in a subsequent adoption. Please contact OCS regarding requirements well before the second adoption is finalized.

A guardianship subsidy ends due to the death or incapacitation of his/her guardian/s.

A subsidy may be offered to the successor guardian listed in the subsidy agreement for IV-E Federal Guardianship Subsidies

Termination of Adoption/ Guardianship

The commitment entered into by adopting a child is one that lasts for a lifetime.

Guardianship is a strong commitment to the child and is intended to be a lifetime relationship. The guardian may petition the court for permission to resign or another person, such as the biological parent may petition to dissolve the guardianship.

Adoptive parents retain their parental rights until such time as a court terminates parental rights.

Financial Matters

A child in foster care is almost always eligible for adoption assistance in the form of a subsidy. Rarely, a child not in custody may be eligible for a subsidy if they are determined to be special needs by state statute. The adoptive parent/s are financially responsible for the support of the child. The adoption subsidy lasts until the child is 18 with no exceptions.

A child in foster care is almost always eligible for Guardianship Assistance in the form of a subsidy. Non-custody children are not eligible for a guardianship subsidy. A guardian is financially responsible for the child. Guardianship subsidy lasts until the child is 18.

Any PFD Funds held in trust by OCS are released when the child turns 18.

Effective October 24, 2016, any PFD Funds held in trust by OCS are released when the child turns 18. Adoptive parent files for PFD's subsequent to adoption.

Guardian file for PFD's subsequent to guardianship.

Check with your tax professional regarding the Federal Adoption Tax Credit.

Relationship with the Birth Parent/s

The adoptive parent has the right to determine if the child will have any relationship with the birth parents and how that will occur, unless there are other provisions in a specific court order.

If the birth parent/s' rights have not been terminated, they have the right to visit the child unless a court orders no visits. The guardian will have input into how the visits are structured, but cannot prevent visits from occurring. If the guardian and the parent/s cannot work out visitation scheduling one of the parties may wish to seek court involvement.

Steps For Preparing A Child For Adoption

Think of the road to adoption as a journey for a child. He or she is often in the process of grieving, mourning, and ending one family even as he begins another. That complicates the process, and sometimes the uncertainty and changing goals of the child protective systems makes it even harder to make the journey smooth. Here are some things to think about as you prepare a child for adoption:

1. **KNOW WHERE YOU ARE IN THE PLAN FOR PERMANENCY.** Don't make a promise you may not be able to keep. A child should never be told that he will be adopted by your family, if the case plan is still for reunification with the birth family or if the search for relatives has not yet been completed.
2. If the plan turns to adoption by a relative or by your family, you can **INTRODUCE THE IDEA OF ADOPTION USING AGE APPROPRIATE EXPLANATIONS AND WORDS.** Choose the right in the process. Don't let the idea first come from the home study writer who talks to the child!
 - Always be truthful. Speak the truth in love, gentleness and in a way they can hear it. Be age appropriate -- older children will need more information. Just because children may not be talking about it or actively asking questions, doesn't mean they aren't thinking about it. Remember that this is not a one-time conversation. Kids may not always understand or be able to accept what you say, so you will need to have repeat opportunities to talk about adoption or have the conversation in several different ways. Watch for clues, kids will often test the waters to see if this is a safe conversation to have with you.
 - Gently talk about the process so kids understand how they got to this point. "Do you understand why you are in foster care?" Ask child to explain it to you. "Mom and Dad worked hard to learn how to keep you safe and take care of you. If they can learn you'll go back home. If they can't, you will stay with us. We will be your forever family."
 - For older children, acknowledge the fact that changing families can be hard and scary. Validate their feelings. Allow them the freedom to love and talk about their birth family, and that they can love both their birth family and their adoptive family. Tell them to ask questions and that you will be open tell them what is going on every step of the way. A lot of their fear and anxiety stems from not knowing what is going to happen.
 - Schedule a meeting with caseworker to explain the reunification plan.
 - Movies can be a non-threatening way to open up discussions. Some suggestions include: *Like Mike*, *Lilo and Stitch*, *Secret Garden*, *Matilda*, *Yours, Mine, and Ours*, *Blind Side*, *Angels in the Outfield*, *Meet the Robinsons*, and many of the superhero films like *Spiderman* and *Ninja Turtles*
3. **USE BOOKS AND RESOURCE TO HELP YOU FIND THE WORDS** and the ways to talk to children about some of the hard issues around adoption such as why a child won't be returning home, what adoption means, and what a forever family is. Try to give children a way to talk about what they are feeling. Remember, acceptance of adoption is a process for

children. Included in your materials is an extensive list of books that can help start conversations with children.

- 4. IF A CHILD IS SEEING A THERAPIST, WORK WITH THAT PERSON** to help the child understand the process. Children will need this information repeated often and given a chance to think about it. It might be easier for a child to talk with someone other than the adoptive parent about his fears, questions and misgivings.
- 5. EXPECT A WIDE RANGE OF FEELINGS**, from confusion, to denial to anger to hope. Adoption is a huge event for children, but part of that is grieving the loss of his family while he is trying to adjust to a new one. Often the time right before finalization is a time when many children act out.
- 6. IF A CHILD DOESN'T ALREADY HAVE A LIFEBOOK, START ONE FOR HIM.** A lifebook is really the story of a child's life, and it offers a way to help a child what has happened to him and why. Children need an understanding of their story, and that story must include information about birth parents and the reasons why children became available for adoption by your family.

Beth O'Malley talks about the idea of "front loading", that the work you do now with your child in terms of helping them understand their story, will help when the issues of adolescence, including the issue of identity, comes up. Children that understand where they came from and feel understood will weather those identity issues better.

RESOURCES TO USE:

Lifebooks: Creating A Treasure for the Adopted Child By Beth O'Malley, M.Ed.

Beth O'Malley also has a website filled with lots of good materials on lifebooks. Find it at <http://www.adoptionlifebooks.com/>

Also available on <http://www.adoptionlifebooks.com/> and through the Office of Children's Services Regional Adoption Specialists, two lifebook templates for children including

When I Am Famous: A Teen Foster/Adoption Lifebook and **My Foster Care Journey.**

And the Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association site has over 70 free lifebook pages that families can download.

http://www.ifapa.org/publications/IFAPA_Lifebook_Pages.asp

- 7. THINK ABOUT A CHILD'S EXTENDED FAMILY AND THEIR PLACE AFTER THE ADOPTION.** Does the child have siblings? Grandparents or aunts and uncles? Where will these people fit in a child's life after becoming part of your family? Children will have these questions too. Adoptive parents need to make the final decisions about appropriate contact, but remember that children have other important bonds and ties than just those to their birth parents. Is there room for them in his new family?
- 8. WORK ON BUILDING ATTACHMENT AND BONDING WITH YOUR CHILD** if adoption is the plan. An important part of the process of growing into a family includes building a sense of belonging, attachment and claiming. Following is a list of activities that you can use to work on building attachment with your child. Remember to go slow and have realistic expectations of a child's adjustment.

ADOPTION SUBSIDIES

What are Adoption Subsidies?

Adoption subsidies are financial assistance to families who need assistance in order to make a long term commitment to a child with special needs. Subsidies are intended to assist the family in meeting the current special needs of the child.

Things you need to know about subsidies...

- Based on child's special needs
- Becomes a legal agreement with the State
- Subsidy supports placement of hard to place children

Other Things to Know:

- Families must apply and be approved for a subsidy before an adoption or guardianship is finalized.
- The amount of the subsidy cannot exceed 90% of the foster care.
- Subsidy agreements can be renegotiated at the adoptive family's request as the special needs of the child or family circumstances change.
- Medicaid health coverage is usually included in the adoption subsidy.

Which Children Qualify?

First, "The State must determine that in EACH CASE a reasonable, but unsuccessful, effort to place the child with appropriate parents without providing adoption assistance has been made."

- Adoption exchanges
- Recruitment efforts
- Relative searches
- Other activities

In these cases, the State must "pose the question of whether or not the prospective adoption parents are willing to adopt without assistance."

EXCEPTIONS:

- The child has significant emotional ties to the adoption or guardianship family
- Adoption with relatives in which meeting statutory requirements on the placement of children with relatives

Second, "the State must determine that the child cannot or should not be returned to the home of his or her parents."

- Relinquishments
- Termination of Parental Rights
- Consent
- Tribal Adoption with State's Consent following Stipulation to Permanency

Finally, the State must determine that there exists a specific factor or condition because of which it is reasonable to conclude that the child cannot be placed with adoptive parents without providing title IV-E adoption assistance or Medicaid. Such a factor or condition may include (but is not limited to)

- ethnic background,
- age or membership in a minority or sibling group,
- the presence of a medical condition, or
- physical, mental or emotional disabilities."

Are There Other Factors To Consider In Determining A Subsidy?

- Does child receive DBH or Medicaid Waiver services?
- Is child SSI eligible? Does he receive SSA (survivor) benefits?
- What funds and services can adoptive family provide? It is expected that family will provide basic care for their child.
- What supports does OCS need to assist with?

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME

- SSI is means tested, which means that the family's income will count against the benefit.
- SSI will typically be reduced by the amount of the subsidy.
- SSI availability and amount must be considered when negotiating the subsidy.

SURVIVOR BENEFITS THROUGH SOCIAL SECURITY

- Social Security Survivor's Benefits are available to children whose parent(s) is deceased.
- These benefits follow the child in both adoption and guardianship
- The Survivor's Benefits are deducted dollar-for-dollar from the negotiated subsidy amount.

Subsidy Possibilities

Federal Subsidy (for both adoption and guardianship)

- *based on SSI eligibility
- *based on IV-E eligibility
- *based on IV-E eligibility in prior adoption
- *based on parent being in custody too
- *based on specific language in court orders & financial status of birth parents at removal
- *Medicaid comes with this subsidy and is accepted in 49 states and the District of Columbia

State Subsidy: with or without Medicaid

- * Based on lack of federal IV-E eligibility
- * All funds come from the state budget
- * Medicaid is included in the State Subsidy with Medicaid but is *guaranteed* only in Alaska. Medicaid is not an automatic benefit of state-funded adoption assistance should a child reside in another state. Currently COBRA reciprocity is not offered in four states: HI, IL, NM and NV.* The new state may not approve the application for Medicaid (check aaicama.org)

Deferred Subsidy The family may choose to have a deferred subsidy, which is a zero amount each month with the potential for a subsidy amount to be negotiated in the future if the child acquires special needs or if there is a family hardship.

ZERO SUBSIDIES

- You are able to financially meet your son's or daughter's needs
- \$0 subsidy agreement is insurance for the future and is a safety net
- Preferable to do \$0 paperwork rather than no subsidy so a family is eligible for financial assistance in the future.

Frequently Asked Questions about Adoption Support and Subsidies

NOTE: Policy and procedure about adoption support and subsidies is subject to change. These answers are general guidelines. Talk to your caseworker or the Permanency Planning Specialist for any changes in procedures or policies.

Why does OCS provide adoption subsidies? How do I know if my child is eligible for an adoption subsidy?

OCS encourages adoption of children from the foster care system. Under federal and state law, a subsidy may be provided to families who would not be able to offer an adoptive home to a hard-to-place/special needs child without continuing financial and/or medical assistance. OCS has an Adoption Assistance Program to provide medical and/or financial assistance in such circumstances.

When should I talk to my case worker about a possible subsidy?

As soon as the permanency plan for the child becomes adoption by your family, start talking with your case worker about adoption support. The negotiation of a subsidy amount is a series of dialogues, not a one-time discussion. OCS is required by Federal regulation to make a reasonable effort to place a child without a subsidy, so please know that your case worker has to ask if you can adopt without a subsidy.

How do I figure out what I should ask for in a subsidy?

Each subsidy is negotiated on a child-by-child, case-by-case basis. Three factors are considered when negotiating a subsidy: *What can the family provide? What can other community services provide? What can OCS provide to address other needs that fall outside of these areas?* Think about the special needs of your child—are there additional therapeutic services or school supports that aren't covered by Medicaid or other supports. Are there cultural considerations? The agreed upon amount should combine with the parents' resources to cover the ordinary and special needs of the child, projected over an extended period of time and should cover anticipated needs.

Can day care expenses be included in an adoption subsidy?

Yes, day care expenses can be negotiated if each parent is employed outside of the home. Subsidies related to child care are time limited but can be renegotiated with State Office if still needed. Before an adoption is finalized, child care that is funded by OCS must be provided by a state licensed home or center. After finalization, adoptive parents make the decision about licensed care.

Can I negotiate for anticipated needs such as a savings account for a college fund?

Financial assistance is meant for the here and now care of a child. For families adopting older teens, there are some Independent Living Funds that may be available to assist with transition expenses and higher education expenses. Check with your Independent Living Specialist for more information if you are adopting an older teen.

How large can the subsidy be? Are there limits on what a subsidy might be?

Unlike the foster care reimbursement, there is no fixed amount for an adoption subsidy. Each subsidy is negotiated individually with each family and will vary because it is based upon the child's special needs and the family circumstances. Caseworkers are required to begin the subsidy negotiation at \$0 plus Medicaid for each child. The subsidy cannot be larger than 90% of the OCS foster care rate for which the child qualifies. This is based on OCS daily rate, not rates established by child placement agencies for therapeutic foster care. Any renegotiation of subsidies cannot exceed this rate. Monthly childcare costs paid by OCS during foster care may be included when calculating the foster care rate but the daycare portion will be time limited.

If the financial needs of my child change in the future and I want to renegotiate the subsidy, who should I contact?

The adoption subsidy needs to be finalized and approved before the finalization of the adoption. After the finalization, all post-adoption negotiation or questions should be directed to the Adoption and Guardianship Unit of State Office of the Office of Children's Services in Juneau. The number is 907-465-3204. The procedure for post adoption subsidy renegotiation is also outlined in the subsidy agreement.

OCS may also consider requests for one-time expenses beyond what is included in the monthly subsidy. This may mean an unexpected expense such as emergency travel for a funeral. Contact the Adoption and Guardianship Unit of OCS in State Office at 907-465-3204 to ask about applying for assistance with these expenses.

Do I have to put a child on my insurance for medical care?

Post adoption support for families usually includes Medicaid as part of the subsidy. You are also encouraged to put your child on your private insurance to help cover additional expenses, but you are not required to do so. It is important that you notify the OCS Adoption and Guardianship Unit if you add your child to your existing insurance coverage, as this needs to be reported to Medicaid.

What if we move to another state? Will Medicaid follow us there?

There are two kinds of funding for adoption and guardianship assistance. Federal funding pays for most subsidies and covers children who are IV-E eligible. These subsidies also include Medicaid in all other states.

If a subsidy is not federally funded, the State of Alaska pays for it and it may or may not include Medicaid. Not all states will provide Medicaid for State funded subsidies. Check www.nacac.org and look at State profiles to check out the requirements of the other state.

As you go through the process, find out if your adoption subsidy is federally funded or state funded. Either way, you should contact the OCS State Office Adoption and Guardianship

HANDOUT 5

Unit regarding your move. They will request that Medicaid be set up for your child in your new state if possible and make sure your payments are going to the correct location.

What happens to the child's Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD)?

During a child's time in foster care, the PFD is applied for by the State on behalf of the child and is held in an OCS trust fund. When a child in OCS custody is adopted, any PFD money that is held in an OCS trust fund is released to the adoptive parent one year after the adoption is finalized.

When a legal guardian is appointed for a child in OCS custody, the legal guardian's responsibilities include applying for the PFD on behalf of the child after the guardianship becomes finalized. Any PFD money that is held in an OCS trust fund remains in trust until the child reaches the age of 18 at which time the money in the trust fund is released to the child.

When does the subsidy start? When does it end?

The subsidy payment will start retroactively to the first of the month when your subsidy agreement was signed in State Office. For example, if your subsidy agreement was signed in State Office July 15th, the subsidy would be calculated to start July 1, and foster care payment would end as of June 30th. The adoption subsidy, including the Medicaid coverage, ends when the child turns 18 years of age. This is true even when the 18th birthday occurs while the adolescent is still attending high school.

Can the subsidy cover travel funds to help a child return to his village for visits?

If keeping a child connected to his culture, such as a village trip, has been part of the foster family's experience, wording that allows approval for reimbursement of travel funds can be negotiated into the subsidy agreement. The estimated costs must be submitted to Juneau OCS for pre-approval when the travel is occurring. Agreed upon expenses may be reimbursed after travel receipts have been submitted to OCS.

What kind of support is there for legal guardianships?

A guardianship subsidy is available for families based on the special needs of the child. The same procedure and criteria apply for negotiation of a guardianship subsidy. Guardianship subsidies may or may not include Medicaid. If not, the guardian is responsible for applying to Denali Kid Care for Medicaid coverage for the child. When applying for Denali Kid Care Medicaid, the guardian should apply based on the child's income only, and not on the income of the guardian family. You can find out more about the application process by calling 1-888-318-8890 or in Anchorage call 269-6529.

Am I financially responsible for damage that my adopted child might do in the future?

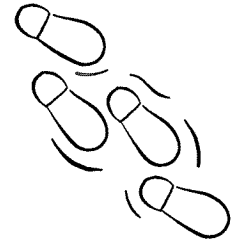
Legislation in the State of Alaska (A.S. 09.65.255), states that if an un-emancipated minor under the age of 18 years destroys property against an organization or belonging to a person, recovery of damages are not authorized from the legal guardian or the adoptive parents of a hard-to-place child if the adoptive parents are receiving, at the time the property is destroyed, financial assistance from the state as a result of the adoption.

What changes do I need to report to the OCS State Office Adoptions Unit?

The subsidy agreement outlines when you are required to notify the OCS Adoption and Guardianship Unit in Juneau. Contact them if any of the following changes occur:

- Change in family's address
- Change in the child's legal guardian
- Date child enters military
- Date child is married
- Date child is no longer in the home
- Date a birth parent of the child moves into the adoptive home
- Date of child's death
- Change in health insurance benefits
- Date adoptive parent(s) are no longer supporting child or are no longer legally responsible to support the child

FINAL STEPS... AS YOU MOVE TOWARD FINALIZATION



✓ **Seek Out The Information You Need**

Ask for a **disclosure meeting** with your caseworker. You can ask for this after the home study has been completed and you have been approved for adoption of a specific child. At this disclosure meeting, ask for:

Client History Profile. This is a letter that contains a listing of everything that Medicaid ever paid for, the doctors the child saw, the treatment received and the dates. This will give you a more comprehensive understanding of this child's medical history. Of course, it will contain only the treatment paid for by Medicaid.

History of the child and family history from the case file. Some of this may be withheld because of confidentiality on the birth parents part, but the information about the child should be made available.

Ask for a **Signed Release of Information or ROI** from the caseworker to get information from schools and medical personnel.

Ask your caseworker about how to **get mental health records** and a release to talk with the therapist. You may need to get a **Signed Release of Information (ROI)** from the Guardian ad Litem or the caseworker may need to seek the release.

✓ **Hire An Adoption Attorney**

- Hire an adoption attorney to assist with the finalization. You have a copy of the Adoption Attorney list in your folder or you can look in phone book for other contacts. **NOTE:** *Consulting an adoption attorney is sometimes helpful earlier in the adoption process to review the relinquishment agreement if applicable or with subsidy negotiations but OCS may not reimburse for those kinds of legal expenses.*
- Attorney's fees, court costs, home study fees, transportation costs, and other expenses directly related to the adoption may be reimbursable up to \$2,000 after the adoption is finalized.
- Usually, your attorney will send a bill and the legal decree to Central Office. Reimbursement will be sent to you unless prearranged to go directly to the attorney.

✓ **Attend Court Hearing**

The adoption hearing is the final court proceeding and varies from community to community. It is a joyous occasion so plan to make it fun. It is usually brief, with the main parties present and informal, so you can invite friends and family (and of course, all the children) and cameras and video recorders are usually allowed. It is a time to celebrate because the child is now legally a member of your family!

✓ **Details After The Finalization**

- If your child has a social security number, contact the Social Security Administration to change information on SSI card, such as a name change
- Notify schools and health care provider regarding new status of your child.
- The caseworker needs to apply for the release of the Permanent Fund Dividend which are held in trust. Depending on what your attorney requested in the adoption, the child's PFD will either continue to be held in trust until the child turns 18 years of age, or released to the adoptive parent.

✓ **Celebrate!**

Adoption is a day of celebration, as important as the birth of a new baby, so create a Family Ceremony that will allow you to acknowledge the past (how the child came to you) and embrace the future (the claiming of a child as your own.) Some families celebrate the day the adoption became final as well as the child's connection to their family.

✓ **Prepare For The Ongoing Journey**

Even though this is a joyful event, prepare for escalation of behaviors. Children may have many mixed feelings or may feel the stress and tension of the process or have feelings of loss, denial and grief mixed in with feelings of relief, joy and happiness. It is not uncommon that children's behavior starts to escalate in the month immediately preceding the official adoption. So prepare for it, take care of yourself and see the behaviors not as a rejection of you but a reflection of the child's inner struggles as he adapts.

✓ **Seek Out The Resources You Need For Yourself And Your Family.**

Also remember, as your child's need change, so may yours. Seek out assistance as needed, whether it be counseling, parenting classes or parent-to-parent support. Try to seek out professionals or resources that have a thorough understanding of adoption issues and attachment issues, as well as any special needs your child has.