



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: How do I begin the process of adopting a child with special needs?**

A: The first step is to learn a lot about adoption. There are many sources, including the “A Child in Waiting: A Beginner’s Guide to Adoption” booklet in this folder. A good clearinghouse for information is the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC).

NACAC  
970 Raymond Ave., Ste 106  
St. Paul, MN 55114-1149  
Phone: 651.644.3036  
E-mail: [info@nacac.org](mailto:info@nacac.org)  
Website: [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)

The process of adoption is not governed by a single set of national laws or guidelines. Adoption laws vary from state to state, and adoption groups and agencies have different policies and guidelines as well.

There is no one route for families to follow on their way to becoming adoptive parents. Adoption can be a rewarding and affordable way to expand your family, but only you can decide if it is the right choice for you.

As you learn about adoption, you will need to assess your own situation. Adopting a child is a lifelong commitment. Do you know why you want to adopt? Are you and your partner (if applicable) in agreement about adopting? Do your lifestyle and interests lend themselves to caring for a child? Do you have the time, patience, skills and understanding needed to care for a child with special needs?

If you think adopting a child with special needs is right for you, or if you simply want more information, contact REACH toll-free at 1-866-79-REACH (1-866-797-3224), at [www.adoptinfo.org](http://www.adoptinfo.org) or by mail at REACH Project, c/o PATH, Inc., 2324 University Avenue West, St. Paul MN 55114.

REACH will help you move to the next step: referral to a source for beginning an adoption application.

**Q: How long does the adoption process take?**

A: The process may take from several months to two years or more. A minimum of at least 16 hours of basic adoption education is required for all adoptive parents. Completed application forms, including a current home study by a licensed social worker, must be on file. Making the best possible match between a child and a potential adoptive family takes time. Once a child is identified, several pre-placement visits take place. Even after the child is in your home, it may be several months until the court hearing at which the adoption is made final.

**Q: How much will the adoption process cost? Is there financial support available?**

A: People who adopt a child with special needs are usually eligible for financial and medical assistance from their state and/or from the federal government. This is to make sure the child’s present and future special needs are taken care of so financial burden is not standing in the way of children finding permanent homes. In some cases, the only cost to parents may be to have an attorney of their choice review all the adoption documentation before the adoption is finalized.

The REACH Project itself is not designed to provide financial support to individual families, but can sometimes refer families to local resources.

**Q: What if the child and adoptive parent(s) cannot make their new family work?**

A: According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, approximately 80 to 90 percent of special needs adoptions are successful. Education and support resources for families before, during and after an adoption is final can make a big difference to the success of the adoptive family. REACH works to make these resources available whenever and wherever they are needed.

When adoption relationships do not work, it is a difficult emotional situation for everyone. Social service professionals work with the adoptive family and with the child to try to find the next best option for everyone and focus on finding permanency for the child. In most cases with young children, the search begins to find another adoptive family. Teens and older youth sometimes stay in long-term foster care or with a guardian rather than enter the adoption system again.

**Q: How is REACH funded?**

A: The Professional Association of Treatment Homes (PATH) was awarded a five-year federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau to launch the project. Additional funding is being received through foundation grants.

**Q: Who is REACH accountable to for its results?**

A: The grant sets the guidelines and expectations, and regular reports are required to the federal government (Children's Bureau) to monitor accountability.

**Q: What happens after the grant period ends?**

A: The goal of the grant is to put materials, resources and support structures in place so families in rural communities will continue to benefit from these enhanced resources after the grant period ends. Funding sources apart from the initial federal grant are expected to extend beyond the end of the grant period as well.

**Q: Can adoptive parents in urban areas use REACH's services?**

A REACH's focus is specifically on rural adoptive families so that is where the efforts will be concentrated (as determined by the Children's Bureau and the parameters of the grant). If an urban family hears about REACH through mass media or other means, REACH will refer them to urban resources close to where they live. Of course, public resources such as the REACH Web site are available to everyone with an interest in adoption.

**Q: Why were three communities chosen for initial services?**

A: REACH initially focused on southwestern Minnesota, north/northwestern Wisconsin and the north central North Dakota. It isn't possible to provide services to all areas of the grant's three states at once, so REACH targeted one area in each state for Year 1 of the grant. In Years 2-5, the focus rotates to eventually cover all rural areas of each of the states.

The communities that were chosen have a significant need for more services and a strong desire to strengthen their adoption resources. PATH offices in each region provide initial contacts in the communities and will serve as a resource for helping to support local needs.

Although the initial focus was on specific areas of each state, all potential adoptive families in any parts of the three states are encouraged to contact REACH for support.