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Single Parent Adoption

In 1970, if you had gone to an adoption agency as a single person and applied for a child, you would have, unfortunately, been turned down -- it just wasn't done. In fact, in some States, there were laws against single parent adoption. Now, thousands of children in the United States and other countries are living with single men and women who have chosen to become parents and who have been given the opportunity to provide a loving permanent home for a child. In the last 20 years there has been a steady, sizable increase in the number of single parent adoptions -- some people feel that it is the fastest growing trend in the adoption field. Approximately 25 percent of the adoptions of children with special needs are by single men and women, and it is estimated that about 5 percent of all other adoptions are by single people. The outlook for single parent adoption is encouraging as it becomes more widely accepted.

Why Does a Single Person Adopt?

Why would a successful, independent single man or woman want to give up his or her freedom and assume the responsibilities of raising a child?

The desire to nurture and to share life as a family is a strong universal need that is felt by a large number of people and one that is not exclusive to married people or couples. Often a single person finds life incomplete, as one single woman expressed, "I had a stable job and could give a child many benefits. And I had love that needed to be given and a need to be needed. I wanted some purpose to my life other than my work and my cat." Because many women have pursued careers and put off marriage and having children until they are older, they find that they have reached their thirties, without a husband, but with a compelling desire for a child. Adoption becomes a viable option for single women who feel that having a child out-of-wedlock is unacceptable or who find that they are infertile.

Some men and women feel that they can provide a better life for the children living in institutions or foster care or in countries that cannot provide them with the basic necessities. One teacher said, "Because I continually saw children in my special education classes who lived in institutions or went from foster home to foster home, I decided that even as a single parent I could do more for a child."

Why Is Single Parent Adoption Becoming More Prevalent?

A number of factors have encouraged the acceptance of single parent families. Perhaps most is the growing number of one-parent households due to divorce and to unmarried women having and keeping their children. With so many children living in this type of home environment, adoption agencies have been more willing to consider unmarried men and women as prospective adopters. Most of these single parents work full-time and are financially responsible for their families. While shouldering the economic burden, they continue to maintain the home and care for the children.

The issue of personal finances has become less important with the availability of adoption subsidies in almost every State for children with special needs. This has encouraged those with limited incomes who are otherwise capable and willing to adopt to pursue adoption.

What Are the Obstacles?

Despite the greater acceptance of single parent adoption, the traditional view of parenting, that a child needs a mother and a father for healthy growth and development, still exists. Mental health experts say that the "ideal" is to place a child in a two-parent home with a mother and father who are compatible and loving. However, there are many children for whom this "ideal" is not possible and many single people who feel that such bias is unfair.

Your family and friends may be your first hurdle. They may not understand why anyone would assume the responsibility for raising a child alone.

Agencies have varying policies in dealing with single applicants. Some don't accept them at all. Others may put your application and request for a home study (a family assessment) on the back burner while waiting to find a couple who wants to adopt.

Single men face even tougher scrutiny as they are asked intimate questions about their sexuality, motives, friends, and living arrangements. They may be qualified to parent and still be turned down.

Tips for Single Parent Adoption

Going at it alone is not easy. Adoptive parents and agencies, in preparing prospective adoptive parents, stress the importance of having friends and family who can lend support and serve as a back-up system. All the responsibilities will land squarely on your shoulders, such as caring for a sick child, picking the child up at his or her friend's house, choosing the right school, and speaking to school counselors. Having a strong network that you can rely on will ease some of this responsibility and provide relief from the constant role of parent. As you approach agencies and other adoption resources, you have to believe in yourself. The process may not be a smooth one and you may have some doors closed to you. But as one successful adopter put it, "You have to believe that there is a child somewhere in the world waiting for you." Your determination and assertiveness can make your dream come true.

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