

Choosing a guardian for your adopted children

Nobody likes to think about their own death, especially when they are young and starting a family. But things happen—disease, accidents, chronic health issues—things that nobody anticipates that impact the lives of children daily. The sad part of life is that, no matter how wide eyed and hopeful you enter into adoption, life happens. And the only thing sadder than the loss of a parent is for that adopted child to have to return to a system where somebody else chooses who the child's parent will be.

So during the exciting time of preparation for your adoption, we ask that you take some time to consider, if something happens to me, who would be the best person to raise my child until adulthood and beyond? Who can best stand in for me if I am not there? As part of this home study process, we will ask you to tell us something about the people to whom you will entrust your children if something happens to you. And remember, this person might change over time. But give us the best idea of who you trust now. You can change who you choose once you see who is best suited to meet your child's needs.

A. Getting Started:

1. Define your dream parent—think of the qualities that matter most to you as a parent. Think about parenting philosophy, values, lifestyle, and skills. Who would make a good role model for your child?
2. Now ask yourself—is this person physically up to the challenge of parenting a child? Will they be when your child is, say, 17?
3. Also consider where the guardian lives and what changes they or your child may have to make to become a family. How hard would it be for your child to relocate if need be?
4. Is this person stable? Do they have a steady income and place to live? Is their marriage stable and strong enough to handle your children too?
5. Does the chosen guardian have other children? Some parents choose a guardian who has children close in age to their children's ages. Others choose a childless couple or older couple with grown children, to insure that all the children can remain together and not place too great a burden on another family.
6. Consider relatives—if you choose your brother will your spouse's siblings be hurt? Or will they understand the choice? And will that person make sure the children get to see relatives on the other side of the family? Or would a non-relative work better, someone who will cherish your children while keeping them a part of the extended family.

B. Ask Permission:

You will need to discuss your choice with the people you choose, and they should be given the opportunity to openly and knowingly accept, or decline, the honor. This can be difficult, but there are friends and family who don't relish the obligation. Perhaps your parents truly love you but are looking forward to a free retirement, and they would feel better if your sister were chosen. So ask, and listen carefully to the response.

C. Make it Legal

Once you make a choice, name this person in your will and as a recipient of any insurance or trust you create to care for your child. That way, they will have legal right to care for your child and the financial means to do so as you would. And remember, you can change all this in the years to come, if another choice makes better sense for your child.

D. Make it Known

Write a letter of instruction that includes what you want the guardians to know. Will your child's birth mother get a letter and picture yearly? Write it down. Do your children see their birth siblings regularly? Spell it out. Don't expect the guardian to just know this stuff. Put it in writing.

Choosing a guardian for your adopted children

Guardianship Worksheet:

Who do you plan to name as guardian of your children in case of the death or incapacity of all adoptive parents?

What is their relationship to you and the child?

What is their address?

Do they have children of their own? If so, list names and ages.

What do the guardians do for a living?

What made you decide this person/people are the best guardian for your children?

Are all your children (birth/adopted) to be with the same guardian? If not, why not?

Does the guardian know and have they accepted this responsibility?

Will they be named as beneficiary in your will and life insurance policies, or will someone else manage funds for the child?