

Article in Indian Express on 13 December 2019

A substantial number of families today are registering for adoption and not just because of infertility, Deepak Kumar, CEO, CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority) stated to Express Parenting. CARA is the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to promote and facilitate in-country adoptions and regulate inter-country adoptions, as Central Authority of Government of India.

There were about 3374 domestic and 653 inter-country adoptions in the financial year 2018-19. And there are those who are opting for **adoption even after having a biological kid**. “You’ll be happy to know that most people are adopting girl children these days. There has been a societal change in terms of awareness but we still have a long way to go,” remarks Kumar. The need of the hour is to sensitise not just parents but also the future generation in schools and other institutions for increased acceptance of adoption in the years to come, he believes.

We need to note here that adoption is not an act of charity. It is about taking absolute care and responsibility of a child as you give them a home and a family, no different from that of a biological child. So, if you are considering child adoption, here is everything you need to know to go about the process.

1. Who can adopt?

As per the **Adoption Regulations 2017** and in accordance with the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, issued by the Ministry of Women and Child Development:

1. The prospective adoptive parents (PAP) “should be physically, mentally and emotionally stable, financially capable and shall not have any life-threatening medical condition.”
2. A person can adopt irrespective of their marital status and whether or not he or she has a biological son or daughter.
3. A single female can adopt a child of any gender but a single male shall not be eligible to adopt a girl child. In case of a married couple, both spouses should give their consent for adoption.
4. “No child shall be given in adoption to a couple unless they have at least two years of stable marital relationship,” mention the regulations.
5. Couples with three or more children shall not be considered for adoption “except in case of special need children”, “hard to place children” and in case of “relative adoption and adoption by step-parent”.

Apart from resident and non-resident Indians, even overseas citizens of India and foreign parents can adopt children from the country.

2. How old should the prospective adoptive parent be?

To adopt a child less than four years old, the maximum composite age is 90 in case of a couple and 45 in case of a single parent. For adopting a child above four years old, the maximum composite age for a couple

is 100 while the maximum age for a single parent is 50 years. For adopting a child between eight and 18 years, the maximum age is 110 and 55 years for a couple and a single PAP respectively.

3. Which child is eligible for adoption?

The child could be an “orphan, abandoned and surrendered child, declared legally free for adoption by the Child Welfare Committee”, or a “child or children of spouse from earlier marriage, surrendered by the biological parent(s) for adoption by the step-parent”. One can also adopt a child of a relative as defined under sub-section 52 of Section 2 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

As mentioned in the regulations, the minimum age difference between the child and either of the PAP should not be less than 25 years. This, however, is not applicable in case of relative or step-parent adoptions.

4. What is the adoption procedure like?

The parent(s) who wishes to adopt a child is required to register online with CARA where they can state preferences and upload the documents, as mentioned on its official website. Once the registration is received, the parent can select a Specialised Adoption Agency, selected from place of residence, for Home Study that is conducted through a social worker. The report remains valid for three years and confirms the suitability of the parents for adopting a child. After they are found to be eligible and suitable, they are given referrals of children legally free for adoption. The prospective adoptive parents have to reserve a child referred to them within 48 hours. An appointment is thereafter fixed with the adoption committee of the agency for matching the PAP with the suitable child.

5. What happens after adoption?

The agency that prepares the Home Study Report also does a post-adoption “follow-up on six monthly basis for two years from the date of pre-adoption foster placement with the prospective adoptive parents and the report is uploaded on the Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System (CARINGS) along with photographs of the child”. The District Child Protection Unit also prepares the post-adoption follow-up report in case of relocation of adoptive parents to a different place of dwelling.

6. What happens if the parent and child are unable to adjust?

In such cases, the Specialised Adoption Agency or District Child Protection Unit arrange for a counselling session for the adoptive parents and adoptee. Non-adjustment of the child with the family despite efforts through counseling can lead to disruption or dissolution of adoption.

7. What does disruption or dissolution of adoption mean?

Disruption refers to the child being unmatched from the adoptive family due to problems in adjustment of the child with them, during pre-adoption foster care by the PAP, before the legal process of adoption is completed. Non-adjustment of the child after the court decree for the adoption will require dissolution of the Adoption legally by the same court which passed the Adoption Order.

We also got Deepak Kumar to answer some of our other queries on child adoption in India.

8. How does the match between PAP and the child work?

When the parent registers, they specify certain requirements, like gender of the child, age group and the state from where the child can be. They can choose the age group of the child based on their eligibility. The profiles of children legally free for adoption are given as referrals based on the parents' preferences. Parents have the choice of either accepting that referral or they can skip and wait for 60 days for another option. After three such referrals, if they don't reserve a child, then they get relegated to the bottom of the seniority list. Once they reserve, they have to go to the adoption agency where there is an adoption committee (comprising a visiting doctor or a medical officer from a Government hospital, an official from the District Child Protection Unit and a Child Care Institution representative) which does the final assessment of the parents before matching the parents with the child for adoption.

9. Can a parent adopt siblings?

Yes, they can. Parents usually are not able to handle more than two siblings. Hence, more than two siblings are hard to get placed and are available for being reserved directly from the Immediate Placement portal of CARINGS.

10. Can you adopt children of the same sex? If you want to adopt two kids, do you need to wait for a specific time period between the two adoptions?

Yes, you can adopt children of the same sex. After adopting one child, you can register for the next one. The wait period for a single adoption is almost two years, so there would automatically be a waiting period.

11. Is there a minimum family income that prospective adoptive parents should have?

It depends on where the family is residing. In rural areas, the cost of living would be lesser than that of a metro city. So, there is no particular figure that is stipulated. This assessment is done through the Home Study to analyse if the PAPs have the capability to sustain the child, so the family income assessment is subjective.

12. If one parent lives in India and the other abroad, can they adopt?

The Home Study is done to look into eligibility and suitability of the prospective adoptive parents. So, if the partners are staying at different places, there will definitely be a difficulty in the assessment. It is generally done at the habitual place of residence. There has to be one base of dwelling where the child is going to go and stay. If one partner is staying abroad and the other in India, there is an issue of where the child will finally go and stay after adoption. If it happens to be abroad, then it requires an inter-country adoption process. Ultimately, it is about finding families for the child and not the other way round. In accordance with the Juvenile Justice Act, the child should be placed in a family that will really be able to look after him or her.

13. Can a differently-abled parent adopt?

There is no criteria that does not permit them to adopt a child. But every PAP requires a fitness certificate from the doctor to confirm that they are not suffering from any ailment that can hamper their process of looking after the child. Further the Home Study assessment establishes whether they are suitable to adopt or not.

14. Do single parents who want to adopt need to have an extended family to look after the child?

For a single parent, there should be an undertaking from a relative in case of any eventuality, which is mentioned on the registration form itself.

15. Why are girls adopted more?

Parents usually show preference for the girl child more as compared to boys. About 2,398 girl children among a total of 4,027 kids were adopted in 2018-19. Besides, there are already a large number of parents waiting in comparison to the number of children who are legally free for adoption, and the child of whichever sex is available will get adopted.

16. How often are special needs kids adopted?

Special needs children are generally placed in inter-country adoption. Very few domestic parents opt for a special needs child. On an average, there are about 50 special needs children who are placed for adoption in India every year and they also are not very severely special. They mostly have correctible or manageable disorders.

17. Why does disruption/dissolution happen in India?

In India, disruptions happen mostly in case of the **older children** which is primarily because parents are not counselled well and also because the children are not prepared. Parents tend to have reasonable expectations from the adopted child which also is a cause for disruption/ dissolution.

Further, in case it is found that the child is not being cared for well during the post adoption follow up, then he or she can be taken back by the agency. Child protection agencies can put the child into temporary institutional care after which a long-term rehabilitation plan is made. Again, there are times when the child does not want to adjust in the family and wishes to return to his or her institution. This can happen if the child is not counselled to understand that it is in their interest to have a family rather than growing in the institution.

18. Should you tell your child that they are adopted?

It is always advised that the child must be made aware that he or she has been adopted in due course of time, at an appropriate age and in an appropriate manner. Adoption is not a taboo but an alternative way of **making a family**.

(Parents can also visit the website cara.nic.in, send email to carahdesk.wcd@nic.in or avail the toll free helpline 1800-11-1311, to know more about child adoption.)

For all the latest **Parenting News**, download **Indian Express App**