

The Center for Child & Family Studies
College of Social Work
University of South Carolina
226 Bull Street
Columbia, SC 29208
Phone: (803) 777-1378
<http://www.sc.edu/cosw/center>
*I would say to go with what your
heart tells you to do. My [life] has
been changed in a positive way.
I would say, 'Go for it!'
—adopted at age 12*

They're Never Too Old

Teen Adoption

Adopting Teenagers?!

Adolescence was a tough time for all of us—imagine what it must be like for teenagers who have spent years in foster care. The usual teen angst is compounded by instability and maltreatment.

Adoption is one way to offer hope to foster teens. Many adolescents in foster care want to be adopted, and although it's challenging, adopting a teenager can be a positive, rewarding experience. In a recent study conducted by the University of South Carolina's Center for Child and Family Studies, parents and their children—all of whom were adopted as teens—discussed their adoption experiences. In this pamphlet, they share their thoughts and offer their advice.

Why adopt? When asked why they decided to adopt a teenager, parents answered

...to be a parent.

When that [pregnancy] didn't happen, we decided we're older anyway. We'd rather adopt an older child.
—*adopted a 13-year-old*

I gave birth to them from my heart . —*adopted two 13-year-olds*

...to offer a home to a child.

When all else fails, a family is what you have. I also think that families are about relationships and not about blood. There is nothing magical about blood—I think relationships are what is magical. —*adopted a 13-year-old*

...to provide permanence for a teen you love.

It [adoption] never really crossed my mind. It was just the connection the two of us had and the way it progressed along. —*adopted a 14-year-old*

I thought she was a very worthwhile kid and deserved a chance to be somebody's kid. —*adopted a 15-year-old*

This report was made possible by grant #90 CO 0891 from the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the official views or policy of the funding agency. Publication does not in any way constitute endorsement by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Challenging but Worthwhile

The adoption process can be difficult for both parents and adoptees. Love and trust, freedom and responsibility, independence and belonging—families must deal with all these issues along with the way. But the reward can be invaluable.

Being Adopted as a Teen

Deciding to be adopted can be a tough, but beneficial, leap of faith for foster teens.

The down side was the huge change in environment and people and knowing that there would be problems, but they eventually do work out. —*adopted at 12*

I have a normal life now. I have a driver's license and I drive. I have friends and I get to go to overnights and do school events. My parents are very reasonable and supportive people. There is no comparison to what my life is now to what it was before. —*adopted at 12*

I thought that I could finally settle down and concentrate on my abilities that I never knew that I had because I was always worried about where I was going to end up. —*adopted at 16*

I knew I would have a place to come home for Christmas and a place to bring my own children when I had some of my own.
—*adopted at age 12*

Adopting a Teen

Although parents must be prepared for the challenges that come with adopting a teenager, the result can be overwhelmingly positive.

I have always had this incredibly strong sense that any of my kids' taking a risk to love and trust again is phenomenal. It is the biggest compliment that I could receive. —*adopted an 18-year-old and two 20-year-olds*

I knew not to expect a bed of roses. —*adopted a 12-year-old and a 16-year-old*

You can look in their eyes and see the trust there and you know that it is something good and it is going to continue on. —*adopted a 16-year-old and an 18-year-old*

The negative effects are the on-going stress of parenting, just dealing with all the things you have to do. —*adopted two 14-year-olds*

It really got dull and boring without kids. It's great now and I love it. —*adopted two 12-year-olds*

I have the neatest kid in the whole world. I can't imagine having a birth child that would make me feel more satisfied or have more pride in or be more connected to. —*adopted a 14-year-old*

The Top 10: Advice from the Experts

[Parents who have adopted teens share their knowledge.]

1. Be as prepared as possible.

The more you are educated or prepared, the better off you will be. —*adopted a 16-year-old*

2. Know about the child.

It's best to find out the background which they don't want to give you. I think it's right to let people know what they're getting into. Then it is up to them if they want to go ahead and get into it. —*adopted a 13 & a 15-year-old*

3. Be realistic!

You can't go into it full force and think that you are going to be the master. Teenagers balk. They don't like to be told what to do. —*adopted an 18-year-old*

4. Consider all possible impacts.

I would probably talk to them about the impact on the children that they already have and see if they were aware of that because there really is an impact. —*adopted two 14-year-olds*

5. Know that adopting teens is not easy.

We are still dealing with sassy mouths, disrespect, lying, stealing, and all of the things that teenagers do. It is hard to be patient sometimes. —*adopted a 12 & a 13-year-old*

6. Get advice from other parents or counselors.

When a person wants to adopt...they hear all of these horror stories, but they think they are different and that they are capable and then when it happens to them, they wish they had listened! —*adopted a 12 & a 13-year-old*

7. Have a sense of humor and be flexible.

I would tell them to have a sense of humor and to try to remember what it was like when they were teenagers. —*adopted a 16-year-old*

8. Stay committed.

It takes a lot more than love. If you are not committed in your mind then it won't work. —*adopted a 14 & a 15-year-old*

9. Get continuing support.

I would definitely tell him or her to go to counseling and go together with the child. —*adopted a 12-year-old*

10. Go ahead and adopt.

I'd say, good for you! I hope you enjoy this adventure in life. —*adopted a 13-year-old*