



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

Speakers Bureau

MEDIA GUIDE



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WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in the AdoptUSKids speakers bureau. We are grateful for your partnership in helping raise awareness of foster care and adoption.

It is important we tell the story of children and youth in foster care who need loving, caring families, and the best advocates for foster parenting and adopting are those with first-hand experience—people like you, who can inspire and motivate others!

As a member of our speakers bureau, you may be asked to participate in media interviews and public speaking engagements or have your story featured on our website and in other publications.

Possible roles for spokespeople include:

- Speaking with local, state, and national media
- Representing AdoptUSKids at foster care and adoption events
- Having your story featured on our website, social media, email newsletters, or other publications
- Participating with research focus groups
- Participating as part of a workgroup dedicated to a specific topic, such as National Adoption Month in November

We developed this booklet to serve as a guide for you when working with the media to raise awareness about adoption and foster care. For more information, please contact us: 888-200-4005 or media@adoptuskids.org.

Section 1

BE KNOWLEDGEABLE

About children in foster care

Children and youth enter foster care through no fault of their own because they have experienced abuse or neglect.

- There are approximately 400,000 children and youth in the US foster care system. Of these children, more than 100,000 are waiting for adoptive families.
- More than 40% of children in foster care are over the age of 8, and of those in care and waiting to be adopted, 1 of every 5 is over the age of 12.
- Approximately 40 percent of children in care are white; one quarter are black or African American; and more than one fifth are Hispanic.
- More than 20,000 youth age out of the foster care system each year without a permanent family.



About AdoptUSKids

AdoptUSKids provides tools and technical assistance to support states, tribes, and territories in their efforts to connect children in foster care with families interested in adopting them.

AdoptUSKids is a project of the US Children's Bureau and has been in operation since 2002. Our mission is to raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in foster care, and assist states, tribes and, territories to recruit, develop and support foster and adoptive families.

Services for families

AdoptUSKids offers the only federally funded national photolist-
ing of children and youth in United States foster care who are waiting to be adopted.

In addition to the information provided on our website, we have a staff of foster care and adoption resource specialists who are available by phone call, email, or chat. Our specialists provide introductory information to families about getting started in the foster or adoption process and help them to assess their readiness and suitability to foster or adopt. AdoptUSKids then connects these families with foster care- and adoption-related agencies, services, and professionals in their state.



Our national ad campaign uses humor to encourage families to adopt from foster care.

Resources for professionals

On adoptuskids.org, registered caseworkers can search a national listing of thousands of families who are approved to adopt, find tools to help them manage their caseloads, and access a library of publications on topics ranging from respite care to family support programs.

Our National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment website offers additional tools and resources to help state and tribal program administrators develop and implement comprehensive diligent recruitment plans and programs.



Understanding foster care and adoption terminology

The terminology used by foster care and adoption agencies is sometimes new and unclear to families. Child Welfare Information Gateway has a comprehensive glossary of child welfare terms on their website. Go to www.childwelfare.gov and search for “glossary.”

Raising awareness of the need for adoptive families

The National Adoption Recruitment Campaign—a partnership of AdoptUSKids, the Children’s Bureau, and the Ad Council—promotes adoption from foster care and raises awareness of the children and youth currently in foster care waiting to be adopted.

This national campaign includes public service advertisements (PSAs) that appear on television, radio, in print, outdoors, and online. Through humorous depictions of imperfect parents, the campaign shows prospective parents that what children in foster care really need is not perfection, but rather the commitment and love that an adoptive family can provide.

The campaign is built around the theme “You don’t have to be perfect to be a perfect parent.” Each year, the campaign targets the recruitment of families that reflect the race, ethnicity, and needs of children in foster care, including African American and Latino communities, and families for pre-teens, teens, and sibling groups.

Volunteer speakers bureau and conference presence

AdoptUSKids raises awareness and promotes positive adoption and foster care stories by developing, training, and supporting a diverse group of spokespeople. We also exhibit and present at state, regional, and national child welfare and adoption conferences.



PROMOTE WITH AWARENESS

Before speaking with the media it will be helpful to develop a fact sheet to refer to during interviews. This could include basic facts about yourself and your family and hints about what messages you would like to share publicly. See page 31 for specific ideas. We've also provided some helpful tips below.

Be brief

Speak briefly but in full sentences. In media language, this is called a sound bite because a reporter might use a single sentence or phrase without the surrounding context. Make sure you are clear and concise so that the interviewer can comprehend your points. Here are some examples of things you might include in your responses:

- Every child/youth needs and deserves a loving family.
- You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent.
- There may be challenges to adopting children/youth from foster care, but there are also many rewards.
- Our family has experienced a lot of "firsts" together: first vacation, first time playing on a team, first time behind the wheel of a car.

Representing AdoptUSKids

The primary purpose of being interviewed is to share your story to encourage others to consider fostering or adopting; however, please remember that you are also representing AdoptUSKids, a national initiative funded by the federal government. Knowing that we want to reach the broadest audience possible, it's important to avoid divisive issues, such as religion and politics.

Don't lobby

We cannot lobby or advocate for or against pieces of legislation, nominees, or politicians. Be careful not to get pulled into this and to avoid politically charged questions. You can certainly encourage others to contact their legislators to express their opinions; however, when you are acting as a spokesperson, it's important to remain neutral.

Prepare local information

It is helpful to be aware of current information about the status of children and youth in your state or community. You can find state-specific data at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars.

Local information that you might want to share in your interview could include:

- Number of children in your state or community who are in foster care

- Number of children who are legally free and waiting for an adoptive family
- Suggestions of ways to help children in your community, e.g., tutoring, respite care, mentoring, and being a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) or guardian ad litem volunteer

We would be happy to help collect and organize local information to help with specific interview requests.



Don't tell all

Avoid giving personal information about yourself or your children. Sometimes reporters will attempt to steer people into sharing information they later wish they had kept private. Consider ahead of time what information you and your child or children are comfortable sharing.

We've developed a visual guide to help you decide what information you are comfortably sharing publicly:



Red light zone!

Private information you do not want to share publicly!



Yellow light zone!

Information you feel comfortable sharing with close friends and family, but may not want shared in public.



Green light zone!

Information you feel comfortable sharing with the general public.

Remember confidentiality

It is important to protect the identity and privacy of children and youth. If you are currently fostering children, you will need to check with the children's caseworkers before allowing them to be photographed or sharing their names. Most agencies prohibit the use of photographs or full names of children who are placed on a foster care or pre-adoptive basis.

Be careful of too much criticism

Avoid criticizing the system, specific individuals, groups, or organizations. While there is always room for improvement, it's important to stay positive and upbeat. It's also important to:

- Encourage your audience to focus on the children who are waiting for families rather than on the foster care system.
- Mention positive things happening in your community in support of adoption from foster care, e.g., National Adoption Month activities, Heart Gallery, etc.
- Focus on the positive.

Parents:

Emphasize the rewards you have received by being a foster or adoptive parent. For example, saying that you have gained personal satisfaction just by knowing you are making or have made a difference in the life of a child provides encouragement for other families.

It's also appropriate to be realistic about the challenges of parenting. All children can present challenges. What's important (as the tagline of our outreach campaign with the Ad Council and Children's Bureau states) is that prospective parents know that "You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent."



Youth/young adults:

Emphasize the importance and benefits a permanent family can bring, or how you never outgrow the need for family. For example, celebrating milestones and achievements as a family, having parents teach you how to drive or prepare for a job interview, and knowing that you always have a home and family who will support you.

Mention resources

Highlight the many informational and practical resources available to families and professionals. Some examples include:

- Parent support groups
- Respite programs
- Adoption assistance programs and the adoption tax credit
- The AdoptUSKids website
- Social media channels, including our Facebook and Twitter pages, which provide opportunities to interact with other families and adoption professionals

Don't feel that you have to answer every question

You are not obligated to respond to every question you are asked. If faced with a question you cannot answer, or you do not want to answer, simply say so. If the question is intrusive, remain respectful and kindly decline. An appropriate response might be, "That's a great question, but that's not something we share publicly." Stick with the 2–3 key messages that you have prepared.

It's OK to tell us no

When we request your participation in an interview or event, please feel free to decline. When you receive a request from us for an interview, you can specify, for example, that you would rather not appear on television or have your picture in the paper.

Don't get discouraged

Accept the fact that even after you take the utmost care to speak clearly, you might be misquoted or have a single statement you made taken out of context, thus changing its meaning.

If you have questions about what to say, contact us at 888-200-4005 or media@adoptuskids.org and we'll provide additional suggestions.



Section 3

LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT

The language we use has a great influence on the way the public views adoption and foster care. Take care to use “people-first” language and appropriate and sensitive wording, such as:

Use these words

✓ “Birthparent”

✓ “My child”

✓ “Was adopted”

✓ “Place a child for adoption”

✓ “Waiting child”

✓ “Child with special needs”

✓ “Child in foster care”

Do not use these

✗ “Real parent”

✗ “My adopted child”

✗ “Is adopted”

✗ “Give up a child”

✗ “Adoptable child”

✗ “Special needs child”

✗ “Foster child”
“Ward of state”

If a reporter uses incorrect language, respond by using more appropriate words.

“Do you have any children of your own?”

“Yes, they are all our own.”

“No, I mean, are any of them your real children?”

“Two of our children joined us by birth and three by adoption.”

“Do you have any contact with the natural parents?”

“Yes. We have contact with our daughter’s birth parents.”

“Do your children miss their real parents?”

“We are their real parents. If you are asking if they miss their birth parents, this is something private to our children.”



Section 4

INTERVIEW TIPS

Newspaper, magazine, or radio interviews over the phone

DO

- Keep comments professional from the moment you pick up the phone to the time you hang up.
- Be sure you are in a quiet place free from distractions and outside noises.
- If possible use a landline as cell phone reception can be problematic. Speaking directly into the handset rather than using a speaker phone also optimizes sound quality and minimizes background noise.
- Prepare and practice your answers.
- Answer all questions on a positive note.
- Speak in simple terms and keep it short.
- Keep statistics to a minimum.
- Be honest, responsive, and factual.
- Offer to obtain additional information when appropriate.
- Repeat key messages to ensure the reporter has a grasp of your ideas.
- Speak up and clearly at a volume appropriate to the surroundings.
- Answer in full sentences, not with “yes,” “no,” or one-word answers. For example, in response to the question, “How long have you been fostering?” an appropriate response would be, “We have been foster parents for X number of years and have provided care for X number of children during that time.”

- If given a “yes” or “no” question, try to rephrase the question. For example, in response to the question, “Is it difficult to adopt from foster care?” an appropriate rephrase might be, “Adopting from foster care can be challenging, but it so rewarding.”
- Refer members of the media to AdoptUSKids whenever you think a question is outside of your scope of knowledge. You can do this by suggesting that they get that particular piece of information from AdoptUSKids, or that AdoptUSKids might be in a better position to respond to that particular question.

What to wear and do

- Wear a conservative, dark-colored suit or dress, or other professional attire, with minimal or no pattern. Solid colors are best. A long-sleeved blue or white button down shirt without stripes coupled with dark pants or a skirt work well for TV. You can add a splash of color using a tie or scarf with minimal design.
- Always check your appearance before any on-camera interview.
- Style your hair neatly and away from your face.
- Tuck the tails of your coat underneath you when you sit to ensure a wrinkle-free look.
- Use a light layer of powder to control shine in the lights.
- Turn off your cellphone and any other devices that might make noise.

DO



Special note for radio and television

You should assume everything you say will be heard on-air.

- Don’t improvise. Stick to your prepared messages.
- Don’t be negative or repeat negative examples or words used by the interviewer. This will reinforce negative ideas in the audience’s mind.
- Don’t ramble. Say what you want to say as clearly and concisely as possible.
- Avoid the “ums.” Most people are prone to using “um” and “uh” more than they realize.

DON'T





Always remember there is no “off the record.”

You should assume everything you say is “on the record” and quotable. An interview is different from a conversation. You should take your time and express your thoughts with care. A simple rule: if you do not want to see a particular thought in print or on the air, you should not voice it.

TV interviews

All of the tips for participating in a newspaper, magazine, or radio interview apply equally for TV interviews. Here are some additional tips for TV. Given that TV is a visual medium, viewers quickly form an impression or opinion based solely on what they see. Never let your appearance distract from what you are saying.

- Don't wear flashy colors, stripes, checks, plaids, or floral prints.
- Don't wear dark, heavy eyeglass frames, or self-adjusting lenses that turn dark under bright studio lights.
- Don't wear distracting jewelry.
- Don't carry bulky items in pockets.
- Don't chew gum.

DON'T

On-camera body language

Maintain relaxed, friendly body language while making eye contact and paying attention to posture.

- Communicate with high energy and confidence.
- Have a friendly smile and relaxed demeanor.
- Maintain direct eye contact with the interviewer.
- Use occasional hand gestures to emphasize your point.
- Speak clearly and at a volume appropriate to the surroundings.
- If given a “yes” or “no” question, try to rephrase the question.

DO

- Don't fidget with pens, glasses, buttons, or microphones.
- Don't touch your face or hair or fix your clothes while on camera.
- Don't rustle papers.
- Don't swivel in your chair.
- Don't bounce or cross your legs.

DON'T

Section 5

USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Promoting your participation on social media

We will send you a link to the television, radio, or print clip when, and if, we receive it. We encourage you to share your interview on Facebook, Twitter, a blog, or other social media sites you use.

If you want to tag AdoptUSKids in your posts, we are active on Facebook (facebook.com/adoptuskids) and Twitter (@AdoptUSKids).

Note: A reporter's topic may change during the course of interviewing different sources. Don't be surprised if the overall theme of the final story is different from what you expected. There is also a possibility that the reporter might misquote you. If this should happen, please don't speak unkindly about the reporter or the media outlet when posting the story on your social media accounts. Remember, you are representing AdoptUSKids, a national program funded by the federal government.



Facebook: facebook.com/adoptuskids



Twitter: @AdoptUSKids

? Potential interview questions

- Why did you decide to foster or adopt?
- How has fostering or adopting changed your life?
- What is most important for people to know before fostering or adopting?
- What advice would you give prospective adoptive parents?
- Where can people go to get more information on becoming a foster or adoptive parent?

Answer: AdoptUSKids has information about foster care and adoption available in both English and Spanish at adoptuskids.org and a toll-free number at 888-200-4005.



Section 6

FINAL THOUGHTS

Thank you!

AdoptUSKids is grateful for your willingness to participate as a member of our speakers bureau, share your stories, and encourage others to foster or adopt. We sincerely appreciate your generosity of time, dedication, and flexibility on behalf of children and youth in foster care. We are here to support you in any way you might need.

If you know other families, youth, or professionals who would like to be part of our speakers bureau, or if we can answer any questions or provide additional information, please contact us by phone at: 888-200-4005 or email: media@adoptuskids.org.



YOUR SON HAS ASKED A CALCULUS QUESTION YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL

Do you:

(A) Create a diversion.

(B) Look up the answer on your phone but pretend you knew it.

(C) Hire a tutor. For yourself.

When it comes to being a parent, there are no perfect answers – just being there is enough. So don't worry, you don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. There are thousands of teens in foster care who will love you just the same.

FACT SHEET

Name(s)/age(s):

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.....
.....

Placement/legalization dates:

.....
.....

Why did you choose to adopt or foster?

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.....
.....

What are the challenges adoption or foster care may bring?

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.....
.....

What do you see as the benefits of adoption or foster care?

.....
.....
.....

What advice do you have for others who are considering adoption or foster care?

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.....
.....



AdoptUSKids

888.200.4005 AdoptUSKids.org

NOTES



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