



## How You Can Begin Planning

National Adoption Day is a collective national effort to raise awareness of the 129,000 children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families. For the last ten years, National Adoption Day has made the dreams of thousands of children come true by working with courts, judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare agencies and advocates to finalize adoptions and find permanent, loving homes for children in foster care.

Celebrated in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, more than 300 events are held each year throughout the country to finalize the adoptions of children in foster care, and to celebrate all families who adopt. In total, more than 25,000 children have been adopted from foster care on National Adoption Day.

### There are some critical steps to make National Adoption Day a success in your city:

1. The Juvenile Court (or in some cases it is the Probate Court) must first agree to participate in the day. The Court must coordinate with its court staff and security as well as the judicial officers in order to open the doors on a Saturday to complete the adoption hearings. In most cases, the staff time is volunteered and the judges also offer their services at no cost. Often, National Adoption Day draws Judicial Officers from outside the Juvenile Court arena, enticing appellate and even Supreme Court judges to be involved in this exciting day.
2. Once the Court has agreed to participate, the appropriate local Department of Children and Family Services must agree to finalize their paperwork in enough time for the lawyers to prepare their paperwork. This often involves efforts to streamline the home study process and keep the bureaucratic process at optimum speed. If the City decides to use “pro bono” law firms and attorneys to finalize the adoptions, a group such as a local bar association or children’s rights group can be involved to train the lawyers and assist them with the appropriate paperwork and confirmation hearings.
3. Depending on how large the event will be, the Court should be involved with organizing the publicity for the day. In many cases, National Adoption Day is one of the sole opportunities for the Court and the Department of Children and Family Services to obtain favorable press.
4. The National Adoption Day coalition will assist your efforts by providing a press kit, banners, gifts for the children (including stuffed animals) and other materials to help your city have a successful event. To obtain these materials, please contact 202-572-2993, e-mail us at [info@nationaladoptionday.org](mailto:info@nationaladoptionday.org) or visit [www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org).

### National Adoption Day planning tips:

1. **Planning Committee:** Organizing an event such as this can be a huge undertaking so it is necessary to delegate! Put together a committee of people from key areas such as representatives from: the Department of Children’s Services (or whatever name is used for your local jurisdiction), the court, Court Appointed Special Advocate office (CASA), court administration and the attorneys who finalize the adoptions.

There may be other key people in your community who should also be involved. Get them involved early, and be sure everyone has a job to do.



2. **Adoptive Parent Groups:** If there is an adoptive/foster parent group or association in your area, you may want to consider adding a representative on the planning committee. Invite members to attend the event, and, at the celebration afterwards, provide information about foster adoption parent group activities. This is an excellent time for families to learn about pre and post adoption support services and to make connections with experienced adoptive families.
3. **Presiding Judge:** If the Presiding Judge is not organizing the event, you will need to work closely with him or her and make sure that the Judge gives permission to open the court on a Saturday and can obtain appropriate security. You also need to make sure the Court gives permission to hold a celebration, which includes press, cameras, food, gifts and balloons.
4. **Publicity:** Tools for working with the media are available at [www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org) in the Event Planners toolkit. It is a good idea to have one key person in each jurisdiction in charge of publicity. The person in charge of publicity should be responsible for contacting the local papers, TV and radio stations. That person should be able to give general information about the event, such as:
  - Background information on the number of children in foster care nationally as well as in that local jurisdiction.
  - Need for adoptive parents for foster children.
  - List of organizations coordinating this event.
5. **Teddy Bears:** Pending availability, teddy bears are available to order after registering your event at [www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org). These are available for the children being adopted. A nice touch is setting-up the teddy bears around the courtroom specifically in the areas where the kids can see them.
6. **Banners:** Banners will be available for cities to have printed. The National Adoption Day coalition is supplying the artwork for banners (available on our web site) for your use. It may be an item that someone in your jurisdiction could sponsor (cost to print is around \$150-\$200).
7. **Balloons:** Take some time to blow-up balloons the morning of the adoption day! Place balloons in the courtrooms and in the waiting area to make the courthouse look more festive. The kids then should be invited to take a balloon with them after the hearing.
8. **Food:** Donuts, lollipops, cookies and candy are always a hit with the kids. Try to make some type of fun food available to the kids while they are waiting for their hearing. Keep in mind that the kids will be wearing “good clothes” so try to avoid anything that will cause a big mess! If possible, also provide some lunch type items for the volunteer attorneys, judges and courthouse staff. Often, local stores can donate a lot of the food. The person on your planning committee who takes responsibility for this should put in requests for donations early, and be specific about what you need, including not only food, but also paper goods, plastic cups, forks, etc.
9. **Disposable Cameras:** Ask the pro bono law firms to provide disposable cameras for the families. On a normal court day, families need to apply for a permit to have cameras and video cameras. However, on National Adoption Day, it is unnecessary because there are no other hearings taking place on that day.
10. **Arts and Crafts:** Started an arts and crafts area at the courthouse where volunteers help the children make a drawing or a craft while waiting for their hearing. The children make either a picture or a craft that they can keep to commemorate the day and it keeps them from being bored while waiting.
11. **Certificates:** Some courts have created a “Certificate of Family Membership” that each judge signs and gives to the family. A template is available in the Event Planners Toolkit at [www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org). The judges read the certificate and sign it in front of the families. The families love it!



12. **Pictures:** After every hearing, many judges invite the families to take a picture with the judge. The families love it!
13. **Finalization celebration:** Depending on the size and accommodations in the courthouse, some cities decide to have their celebration in another building or park. For some, these other spaces are better for the kids and less worry about clean-up. If you decide to go that route, make sure that the judges, clerks, lawyers, and visitors are all invited and plan to attend.
14. **Thank You:** Be sure to thank everyone involved – especially the judges, clerks and other court personnel, social services staff, lawyers and others who have donated their time and given up their Saturday in order to support kids and families and make the day possible and successful.
15. **Enjoy the day:** Know that you are part of one of the most important events in the lives of adoptive families. They will remember it forever! We hope that you can help make National Adoption Day a success in your community. We will certainly help in any way possible as we strive to both celebrate adoption in all its forms and have it become a very special day for foster children joining a permanent family.

Please keep in touch with a representative from the National Adoption Day coalition to get the most updated materials and information by calling 202-572-2993 or visiting [www.nationaladoptionday.org](http://www.nationaladoptionday.org).