

Adoption in America Today: The Good, the Bad, and a Path to Reform



THE DONALDSON
ADOPTION INSTITUTE

Adoption in America Today: The Good, the Bad, and a Path to Reform

The Good

When adoption processes and practices are ethical, parents and professionals are informed, and children are at the center, the extended family of adoption can be a model for a truly evolved definition of family.

The Bad

Lack of uniform laws, regulations, and consistent standards, coupled with a lack of education, can leave everyone in the extended family of adoption unprepared and vulnerable, including children, parents, and professionals. Even after decades of research by The Donaldson Adoption Institute and others, adoption is still so often seen as a one-time transaction. To address the needs of families and children today, reform is not only necessary, it is urgent.

A Path to Reform

Since 1996, DAI has investigated the issues of greatest concern to everyone in the adoption community including the professionals who serve them. Our research has helped uncover many issues that expectant and first/birth families, adopted people, and adoptive families are confronted with on a regular basis. With this in mind, our hope is that our research, education, and advocacy—plus our passion—will continue to fuel a path to reform.

Our Path to Reform

In the fall of 2015, DAI launched *Let's Adopt Reform*, an initiative aimed at igniting a modern conversation to address the needs of the adoption and foster care adoption communities. We conducted a comprehensive, national public opinion research poll that helped give us a timely understanding of America's views on adoption, foster care adoption, and family today. We also hit the road on a national Town Hall tour visiting New York, Dallas, San Francisco, and Chicago, engaging thought leaders, educators, professionals, and members of the adoption community to inspire solidarity, and raise awareness about the issues that matter most.

We believe that what we already know, plus what we discovered about family, identity, human rights, and education will serve as the foundation for the path to reform that will strengthen all families.



Family is the foundation of humanity.

Family is everything (even when they're reminding us of our most embarrassing moments). Under the best of circumstances, maintaining healthy family connections is challenging and requires thoughtfulness and patience. For everyone in the adoption and foster care adoption communities, navigating this journey can be even more challenging. Sixty percent of Americans have a connection to adoption through friends and family, which means these challenges are closer to us than we may realize.

Our research, education, and advocacy is guided by this reality. We work to strengthen families in the adoption and foster care adoption communities, which in turn, strengthens all families.

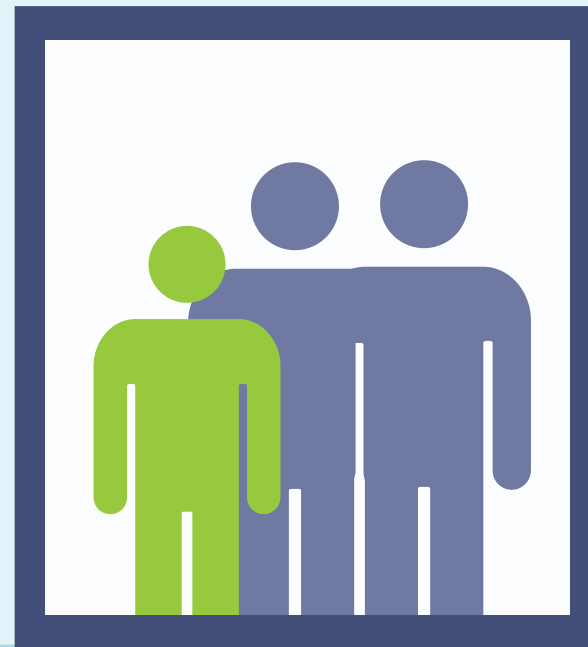
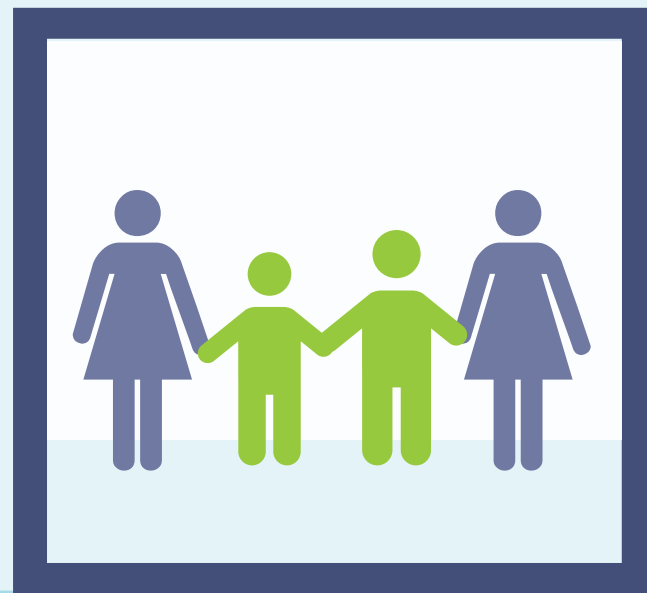
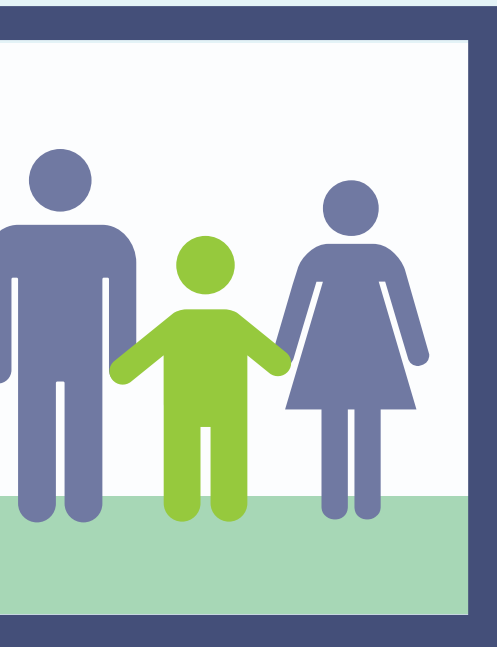


60%
of Americans
have a connection
to adoption

The definition of family is expanding.

Over the last few decades, the definition of family has expanded and evolved. It spans different races, classes, and cultures and includes step, adoptive, foster, and LGBTQ families as well as those formed through third-party reproduction. However, the laws, policies, and practices that support families have not kept up. Family is family, regardless of how they're formed. All families deserve to be happy, healthy, and strong. That means healthy identity formation for all and operating with truth, integrity, and love—with children, if they are a part of one's family, at the center.

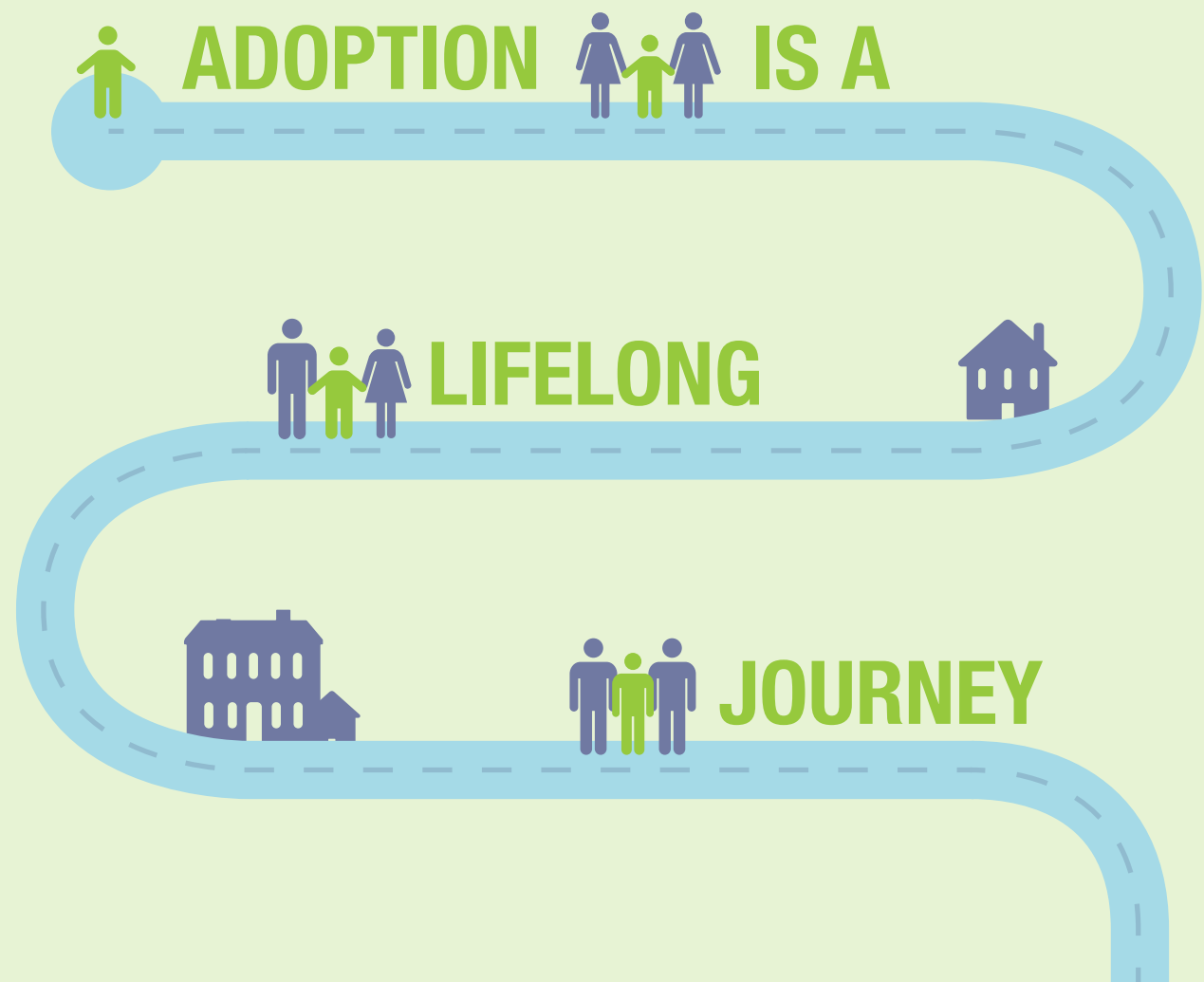
Our work helps educate, shining a light on the unique experiences of modern families. Ultimately, we seek to revise the laws, policies, and practices that will serve to strengthen all families.



Adoption is not a one-time transaction.

Adoption is not a notarized signature on an adoption certificate or a raised government seal from the State. It's not a third installment to an adoption agency or a signature of relinquishment from a first/birth parent. It's not even a court decree that says "finalized." Adoptions are not transactions, they are transformations—and any meaningful transformation is a lifelong journey.

We're working to educate and prepare families to embrace the lifelong journey of adoption to support the healthy identity and well-being of all members of the adoption community.



Basic human rights for all humans.

Due to current state laws, most adopted people cannot access their original birth certificate and critical health information, even after turning 18. Most people are a mess when they lose their phone—imagine what it would be like to lose a part of your identity. While this is not the only human rights violation that exists in adoption, it is certainly one of the more egregious. Sixty-nine percent of Americans believe that birth/medical records should be made available to all adopted people.

We're advocating to change prohibitive laws because we believe access to personal history, hereditary health history, and all parts of identity are basic human rights. Furthermore, we're promoting ethical practices and openness in adoption so extended family relationships between first/birth families and adoptive families are the rule and not the exception.

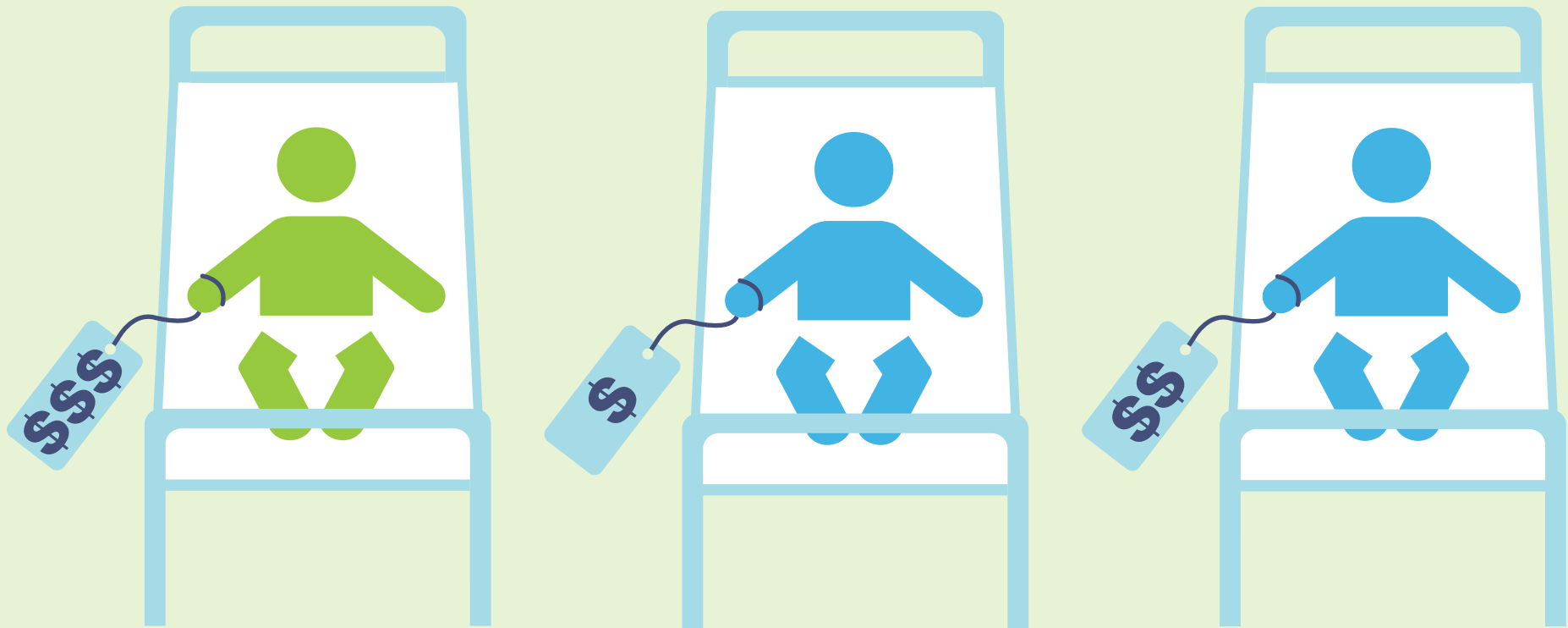
My Family, by Katie [REDACTED]

I was born in the beautiful city
of [REDACTED]. My mom's
name is [REDACTED] and her
favorite flavor of ice cream
is [REDACTED].

Children are not commodities.

While a significant number of adoptions occur ethically, adoptions can be unfairly influenced by privilege and money. Our research discovered that more than two-thirds of the adoption community believe privilege and money distort adoption. In these cases, children can be viewed as commodities and parents (expectant and adoptive) can be vulnerable. In many ways, adoption has become a marketplace that can privilege and value some over others and take away from the essence of what family all about.

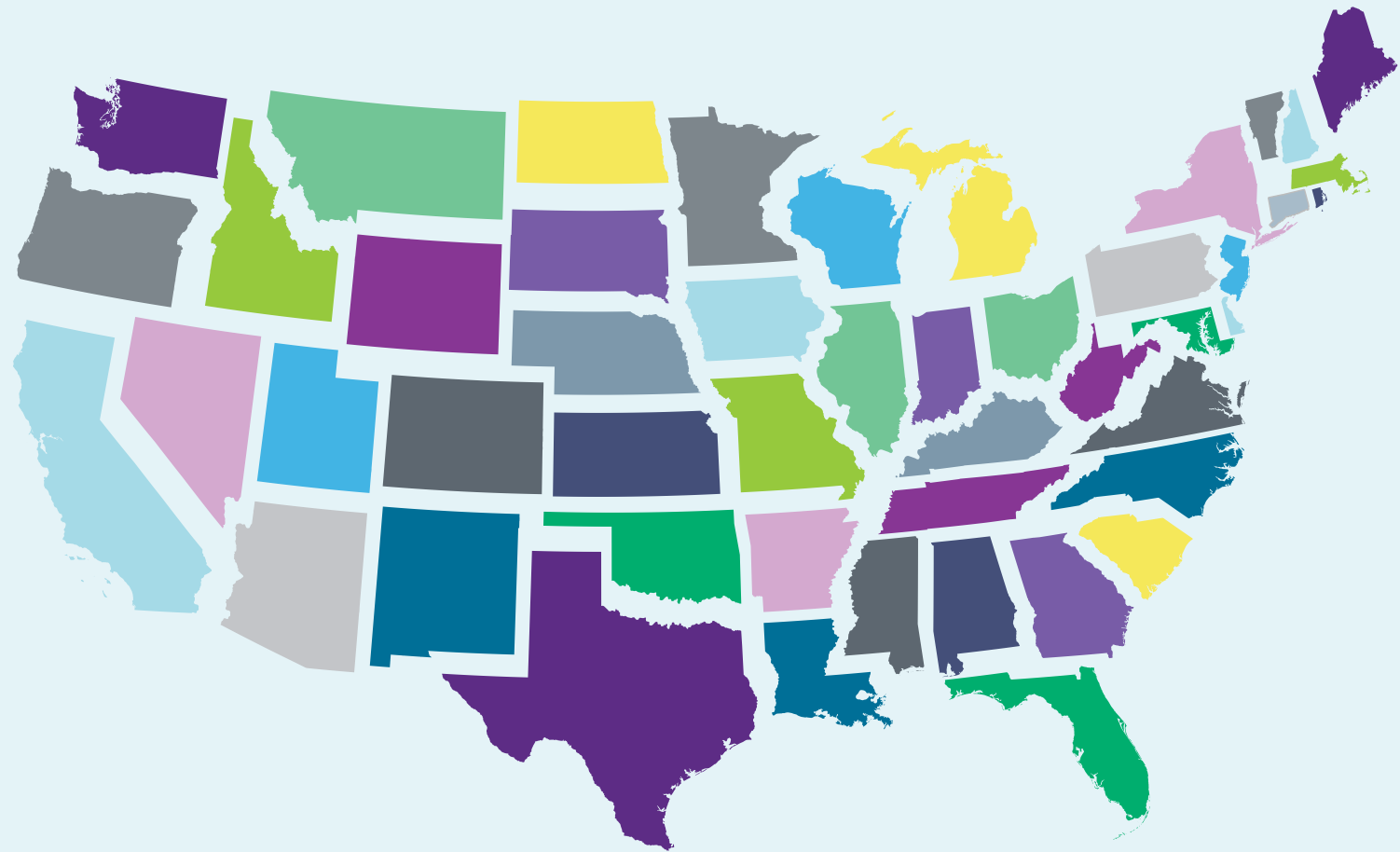
We believe it is critical to develop uniform standards and regulations in order to remove the influence of money and privilege on the practice of adoption.



Adoption in America lacks uniformity.

Right now, adoption laws, policies, and practices differ widely from state to state and have not kept up with the ever-evolving definition of family. The unintended consequences of this lack of uniformity, coupled with a lack of education, can lead to fraud, coercion, undue stress on families, and ultimately, leaves children vulnerable.

We're advocating for national standards that uniformly regulate the adoption process to ensure the safety of children and strengthen all families.

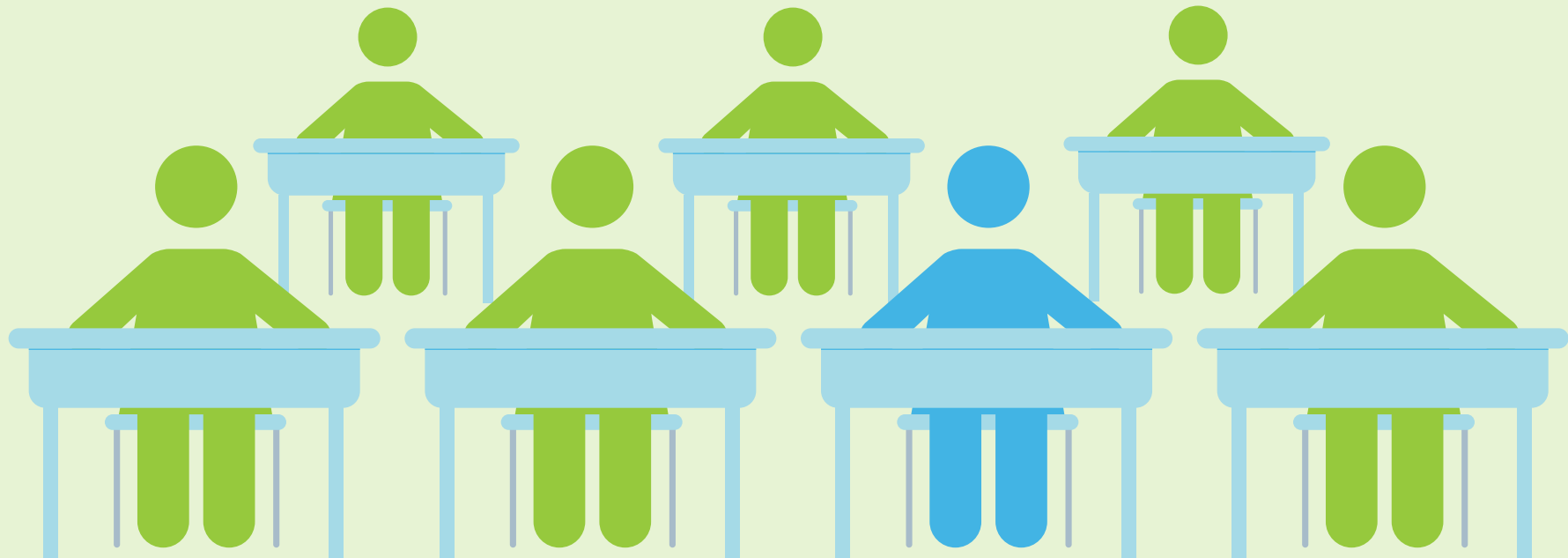


* Colors do not reflect actual laws and/or policies, rather a general lack of uniformity from state to state

Adopting reform into our systems.

The unique experiences of the adoption and foster care adoption communities are rarely considered in the systems they interact with on a regular basis. For example, teachers and doctors can unintentionally demonstrate insensitivity through marginalizing language, microaggressions, and unfair treatment. It is already tough to be a kid these days—all professionals need to be ready to embrace children and teens from all kinds of family backgrounds.

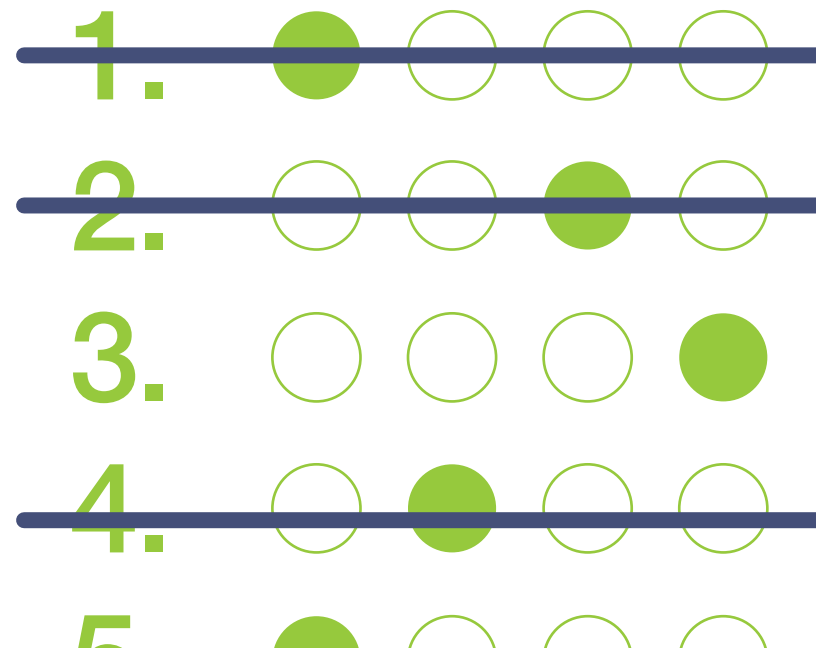
We're taking steps to engage professionals in adjacent systems like schools to ensure that the unique experiences of members of the adoption and foster care adoption communities are being considered and everyone is given an equal opportunity to thrive.



No reform without education.

If knowledge is power, we need to do a better job giving power to the people. On a simple adoption and foster care adoption quiz, Americans scored a C-. Is C- good enough for our families?

We're passionate about overcoming this lack of awareness and understanding, not just for the adoption community, but for all modern families. We know that reform is not possible without education—and with this, we have a unique opportunity to drive the needed changes in policy and practice to protect children and strengthen families.



Let's Adopt Reform

We've reached many milestones on the path to reform, but there's still a long way to go. We need to work together to do more research, educate more people, and advocate for more policy changes in order to strengthen all families. Strong families build strong communities, and strong communities build a better world for all of us.

We invite you to join us. Let's Adopt Reform!

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