

# Adopting Older Children offers guide to parents thinking about adopting

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The authors of the new book, *Adopting Older Children: A Practical Guide to Adopting and Parenting Children over Age Four* (New Horizon Press), hope to help guide parents through the process of adopting an older child.

The book's coauthors are:

- Stephanie Bosco-Ruggiero, a communications and research assistant at the National Center for Social Work Trauma Education and Workforce Development and a doctoral student at Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service;
- Gloria Russo-Wassell, a national certified counselor and doctoral candidate in educational development psychology at Cornell University and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) in New York;
- Victor Groza, the Grace F. Brody Professor of Parent-Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University's Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences.

Three adoption and [child development](#) experts pooled their vast knowledge on adoptions, child welfare and clinical practices in writing this guide to help parents answer the question: Are we ready to take this journey and adopt?

They provide a realistic outlook about considerations in adopting or having already adopted an older child. They also dispel many

misconceptions people have about bringing an older child into the family.

And what does it mean for the child to find a home? According to Russo-Wassell, a better future, with hope and promise of reaching life goals.

According to the Office of the Administration for Children and Families, the 26,000 teens aging out of the [foster care](#) without a permanent home are more likely than adopted [children](#) to end up in the criminal justice system, lack opportunities to go to college or become young parents.

Bosco-Ruggiero, through work with children who have faced traumas, has seen the incredible resiliency and hope older children have.

"I want the public to know how many wonderful kids are waiting for a family to love them," said Bosco-Ruggiero, an adoptive parent herself.

"The book is realistic but not sensationalistic—that tells the good, the not-so-good and the cautions of adopting an older child," said Groza.

"To be prepared is to be forewarned and forearmed in case issues arrive. We see that families struggle when they are not adequately prepared for the adoptive experience with an older child."

The guide, in time for November's National Adoption Month, was inspired by the large numbers of children yearning to be part of a permanent family and the need to correct misconceptions that prospective parents often have about adopting children about age 4 and older.

Contrary to misconceptions about older children:

- Not all older children available for adoption have special needs or are juvenile delinquents.
- Many older children, available for domestic and international adoptions, are not unruly children with behavior problems, but are in foster care due to neglect or abandonment that is driven by the parent's inability to raise them because of poverty or health conditions.
- Parents of older adopted children feel fulfilled as parents, but differently than parents adopting a baby.

While parents of older adopted children miss out on the early developmental milestones in infancy, Groza points out a number of advantages—beyond missed diaper changes and late-night feedings—such as the capacity for better communication and indications of what the child wants or doesn't want.

Older children can also use words and gestures to communicate. Whereas with babies, it can be a guessing game, he said.

Another advantage of adopting an older child, particularly from the public foster care system, more information about the family history exists in the domestic records. For intercountry adoptions that may not be true of older children, Groza explained.

For [older people](#) who want to be parents, adopting an older child might be the only way to make it happen, he said, because of less age restrictions. For example, a couple with a mother of 45 and father, 60, they might consider the mother's age in the adoption process.

He said few adoption agencies would want a 60 year old raising an infant or a 70 year old having enough stamina to run after a 10 year old child.

Also, the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption has encouraged

limiting foreign adoptions to [older children](#) or young children with special needs.

When it comes to the final adoption decision, the authors report adoptions are made in what's best for the child, not the preferences of the adoptive families.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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