



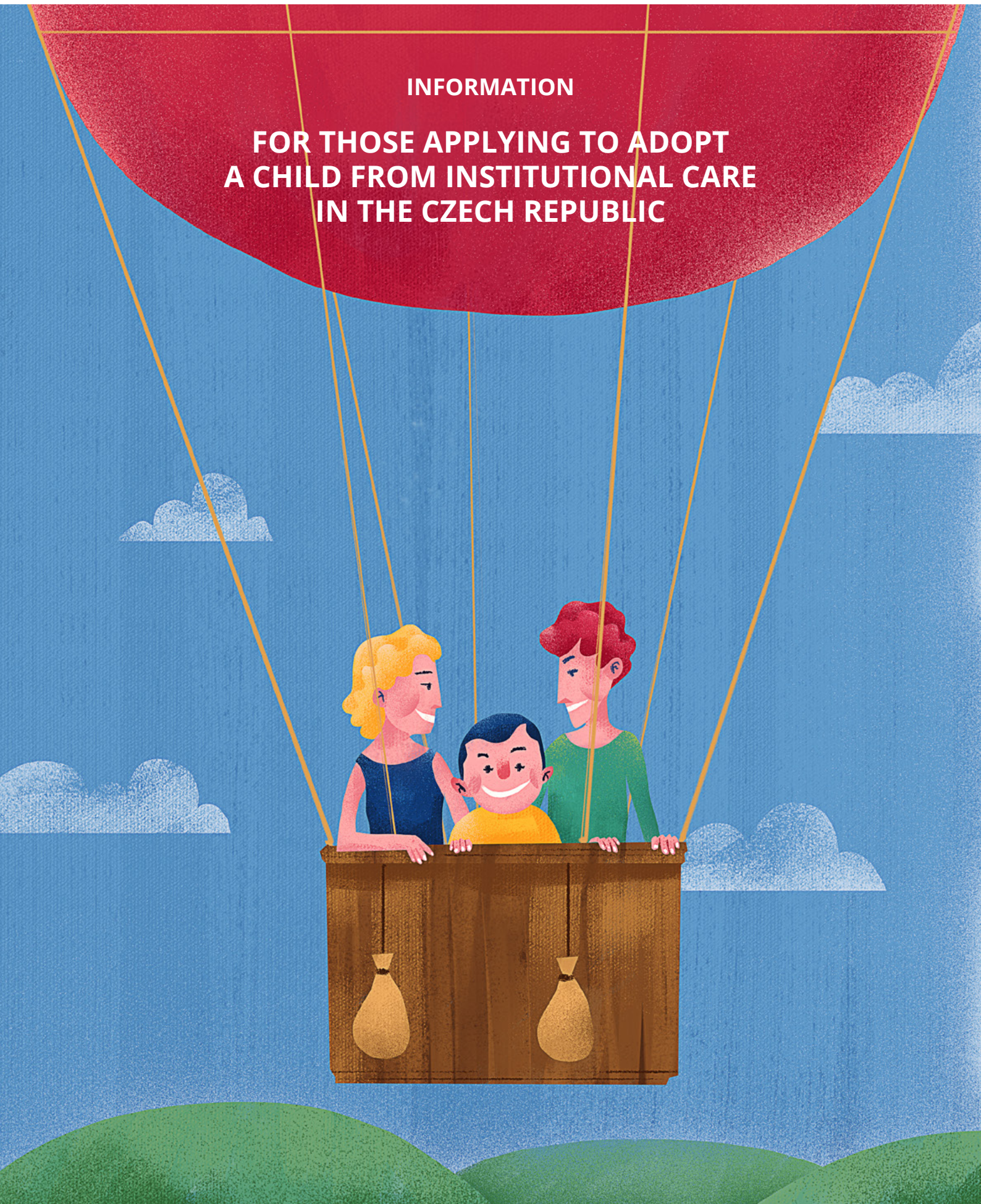
European Union
European Social Fund
Operational Programme Employment



Office for International Legal
Protection of Children

INFORMATION

FOR THOSE APPLYING TO ADOPT A CHILD FROM INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



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Dear applicants for adoption from the Czech Republic,

We are happy you have decided to adopt a child (or children) from the Czech Republic. We deeply appreciate that you are willing to become a parent to a child who was not lucky enough to grow up in their own biological family, and that you are ready to offer them not only your protection and care, but also love, a family, and a home. If you have just arrived in the Czech Republic, you have about eight challenging weeks ahead of you, full of emotions and new situations. If everything goes well, this time will be the start of an exciting new phase of your life.

The Office for International Legal Protection of Children (hereafter referred to as "the Office") has been arranging international adoption since 2000, and we have facilitated the adoption of approximately 700 children. We are happy that the vast majority of these adopted children are doing well and thriving in their families. Our experience has taught us a few things which will make the entire process easier, as well as a few things which can cause unnecessary difficulties. The aims of the material you are reading are:

- to make the whole adoption process more transparent for all participants
- to specify the roles and expectations of all participants
- to inform the child as much as possible and encourage them to take an active role in the process
- to minimise potential complications

Below is a detailed description of the process that you will go through in the upcoming days and weeks. It explains what we expect from you, and what you can expect from us. It includes a number of recommendations to help you and the child undergo this major life change as smoothly as possible.

We realize that this process will be something of an adventure. Many aspects of life in the Czech Republic will be new and unexpected for you. We recommend that you stay active and engaged throughout the process. We ask for your sensitivity, patience, and flexibility – and most importantly, your willingness to communicate with us. Questions and problems will certainly arise – so we ask that you share these with us, whether they seem big or small. In the history of our Office, we have only seen a few isolated cases where the child and the potential adoptive parents cannot come to a mutual understanding. In the majority of cases, most minor and even major problems can be solved with intensive cooperation. We want to work with you as closely as possible, so that in a few weeks you will leave happily for home as a new family, and so that you will always remember your time here with a smile.

Should you have any questions or doubts, do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
All of us at the Office for International Legal Protection of Children

We wish you a nice stay in the Czech Republic.

ROLES OF PARTICIPATING PARTIES

What you should do and must do as applicants for the adoption of a child:

- You should co-operate fully with the Office's lawyer in the preparation and execution of all proposals for legal proceedings (such as obtaining the child's passport, or waiving the right of appeal).
- At least one of the applicant spouses must be present in the Czech Republic with the child for the whole period set aside for building your relationship, until the court has made its decision. The more time you invest in the child now, the faster they will adapt to their new life with you, so we highly recommend that both partners stay here with the child during this time (usually about 8 weeks). Within the adaptation period, both spouses must be in the Czech Republic with the child for the entire first 4 weeks. Then, in exceptional, justified cases, one of the spouses may leave (for example, to return to work, or to care for an older child who has to return to school). However, this must be reported to the Office before your arrival or, at the latest, upon your arrival in the Czech Republic. It is not possible to take turns staying with the child. Any biological or previously adopted child in your family must also be present during this time.
- You are obliged to take part in the so-called "preliminary" meeting, and the first and second formal meeting during the interaction process. You may be asked to attend the third meeting as well, if the child is older than 5 years or if this meeting is recommended by the psychologist.
- You should make a plan and timetable for how you will help the child gradually adapt to your care. In making this plan you should work with everyone involved in the adoption (including the Office's psychologist, the parents, the institutional home, the interpreter, and perhaps also the child's guardian).
- Between the first and second obligatory meetings, you should communicate daily with the institutional home and its staff about how you should care for the child inside and outside the home, how the child has reacted to the adoption process, what the child has been doing, and what the next steps will be (you may need the help of an interpreter on the phone).
- You should cooperate with the Office's psychologist and lawyer as closely as possible, informing him or her every three days on how the child is doing and how well you are getting along together. You can agree on whether to communicate by phone, e-mail, or WhatsApp.
- **You are obliged to inform the Office's psychologist and lawyer about any difficulties you encounter in your relationship with the child or with the staff. If there are problems, you should decide together what to do.**
- You should make plans for the child to say goodbye to other children living in the institutional home and its staff, and their school class.
- You should allow the person that has taken most care of the child to maintain occasional contact with the child after you take it into your full-time care.
- Before or during the preliminary meeting, you must inform the Office's lawyer and/or psychologist about your current place of residence in the Czech Republic, and whether you plan to change residences.
- **Always inform the psychologist and the lawyer about any sudden changes in the child's behaviour or health condition.**

What the institutional home staff should do and must do:

- They should prepare the child for your arrival, for your first meeting with the child, and for the subsequent period in which you will get to know the child (see below for more details on this).

- They should provide the psychologist with information one day before your first meeting with the child (normally, the psychologist will phone the institutional home and ask how the child is doing, how they have responded to the preparations, whether they have learned any words in your language, whether they like your picture, etc).
- They must participate in the first meeting, and provide you (and the Office) with detailed information on the child, including the child's daily routine, favourite activities, special behaviours or skills, current eating habits, current health condition (e.g. if they take any medicines), potential fears (e.g. if they are afraid of the dark, or of insects), travelling experience, and means of transport.
- They should work with you and everyone else involved in the adoption to make a plan and timetable for how you all will help the child gradually adapt to your care.
- Send a report on the first meeting to the Office.
- They should give you an opportunity to help take care of the child in his or her unit/ family group (for example, they should allow you to feed the child or have a meal together, play with the child in the facility, help with the child's hygiene, put them to bed, or play with them in a nearby playground) until the child is given into your full-time care.
- They should support you in taking care of the child, communicate with you regularly and provide their help and advice (by means of an interpreter on the phone, if necessary). At the same time, they should respect your privacy and capabilities (e.g. they should not push you to take the child for the night if you do not feel like it).
- They should continuously support the child as they adjust to the new situation. They should help explain complex matters to the child, and help them relax.
- They should be a helpful observer of the developing relationship between the child and you, of how you react to each other.
- If asked, they should inform the Office's psychologist about how the adaptation process is going.
- **If there are any difficulties in the relationship between you and the child, the representative of the institutional home is obliged to inform the Office's psychologist or lawyer about it without delay (in which case, all of you will decide together what to do).**
- They should work with you to make plans for the child to say goodbye – to other children in the home, the staff, and schoolmates.
- They should allow the child to take away his or her personal belongings, photos, information portfolio, insurance card, and favourite clothes/toys, etc.
- They should stay in touch with the child in the days and weeks after they give the child into your care, and let you take over gradually (staying sensitive to the child's needs).
- They should ask the social worker (the child's guardian) for a permit (Permit for the Child's Stay Outside the Institutional Home).

What the Office's employee(s) will do (in brief):

- We will be in charge of and coordinate the complex legal process of international adoption (we will prepare and complete documents for the court, communicate with the court and other legal entities, collect documentation, coordinate final meetings at the court, etc).
- We will be in charge of and coordinate the complex psychological process of international adoption, which includes: introducing the child to you, the applicants; holding the first, second and third meetings during the interaction process; assessing the gradual building of your relationship with the child; counselling you, the Office's staff and the child; informing the child and finding out their opinions on the process; and monitoring developmental reports until the child reaches the age of 18.
- We will discontinue the process of international adaptation if it does not appear to be in the child's best interests.

PREPARING THE CHILD FOR THE FIRST MEETING WITH YOU

If the child is prepared well for your arrival and first meeting, it will have a major positive impact on their first encounter with you and the subsequent building of your relationship with the child as potential future parents. The child should be purposefully prepared for your arrival by the institutional home staff.

The preparations should help the child:

- better understand their own expectations
- cope with uncertainties
- establish contact with you more easily, and transform unfamiliar people and situations into something more familiar

How will the institutional home staff prepare the child for your arrival?

The preparations vary depending on the child's age and development level. Below we have given some general recommendations for all children for all institutional settings we work with, and then two separate sets of recommendations for younger and older children. The usual division is at around 5 years of age, but this will depend on the child's development.

Below are some general recommendations for institutional home staff, depending on the age of the child:

General principles for children of all ages:

- Only one staff member, ideally the person with whom the child has the closest relationship, tells the child about your visit and discusses it with them.
- The child is always informed about your visit in private, without the presence of other children.
- Your visit is described to the child in a positive way, so that the child is motivated to meet you.
- You are referred to as "a visitor", "Mr./Mrs. X", "Aunt/Uncle," or by your first names. You should not be called "Mum/Dad" or "parents" – this is to protect the child from disappointment in case the adoption process is not completed for any reason. The child is told that they will be visited by people who are interested in how they are doing and what it is like in the home, and who want to get to know them and spend time with them. If the child asks whether these visitors will become their mom or dad, the staff should tell them that nobody knows that now, and that they will see about that later.
- The staff repeatedly shows to the child photos of you. At the same time, they talk with the child about you, and discuss things such as: who you are; what you look like; what you do for a living; what country you live in; how far away you are; what the weather is like where you live; what kind of apartment or house you live in (what it looks like, where you eat, where you watch TV, if there is a garden, who tends it, etc.); whether you have pets and what they are like (which kind of pets, where the pets sleep, what their names are, etc); how many relatives you have; or whether there are other children near you.
- The child repeatedly listens to a fairy tale or songs in your mother tongue so that it gets used to the sound and the pace of speech (not all kids are patient enough to follow a fairy tale in a foreign language, but it is still played for them in the background).

Preparation of younger children (under 5 years of age)

- With children under 3, preparations start about 1 week before your arrival; with children aged 3-5, it is possible to start 2 weeks before your arrival.
- The child has your picture near their bed or somewhere close.
- The child is encouraged to draw a picture for you or create something else for you, and to show you the garden and other parts of the home when you arrive (so that the child becomes your guide, pointing to things that interest them).
- The child is told that they will probably not understand your language, but that they and you will be able to use your hands and show pictures to communicate with each other.
- The child may learn several words in your language, and may expect you to learn some in theirs.
- The staff are aware that the language barrier is a greater problem for adults than children, as children often use gestures, mimicking, games, and physical contact to communicate.

Preparation of children older than 5 and schoolchildren

- The preparations start approximately 2 - 3 weeks before your arrival. At first, the preparation routines are repeated only every 3 days or so, but they become more intensive as your visit approaches, so that right before your arrival the child is being prepared on a daily basis.
- The preparations should continue through the time of your first meeting and the first few days of your visit.
- The child keeps your picture nearby (next to their bed or on a note board).
- The child is informed about the country you come from – how far away it is; what the weather is like there; whether there is a sea; how big the cities are; what kind of government it has; who its famous athletes are; what foods are eaten there; whether Christmas is celebrated, etc. Older children tend to be very interested in information about your country.
- The staff may show the child pictures of you or other information about you on the internet.
- The child might be asked to draw or create something for you.
- The child might be asked to become your guide and show you around the home/ garden.
- The child is told it will probably not understand what you are saying, and this may cause them to become irritated, annoyed or even angry, which is absolutely normal. The child is also told that you will learn some words in each other's languages together, but that you can also use hand gestures to communicate. Older children can make use of phones or tablets with a dictionary.
- Older kids are often informed about the entire process and timetable (usually for the upcoming 2-5 days, at least), which makes them more comfortable and less insecure. You should also keep the child updated on what you will do, and even include them in the planning. It's a good idea, for example, to offer them two options for what to do, so that they can make their own decisions. Of course, you should realize that some children may find it difficult to decide.
We recommend **using a visual calendar**, where you can paste pictures or write simple texts to record the plan for the coming days. You should include on the calendar any planned moving dates (i.e. when the child will go to live in a new place; see information on moving the child below). This will help the child feel more secure and oriented.

Schoolchildren are also prepared for your visit by the Office's psychologist. The child is visited by the psychologist before your arrival, and the psychologist stays in touch with them during the entire process (often by phone). The child can share any feelings of doubt, fear, or anger with the psychologist, but also their positive experiences.

THE ADAPTATION PROCESS AND THE GRADUAL BUILDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A CHILD PLACED IN A INSTITUTIONAL HOME

0th (preliminary) meeting and basic information

The so-called preliminary meeting in the interaction process is your first personal meeting with the Office for International Legal Protection of Children after your arrival in the Czech Republic. It takes place in our consulting room in Brno and lasts about 2-3 hours. The meeting is also attended by your children, the Office's lawyer and psychologist, and the interpreter.

Meeting with the Office's lawyer

The lawyer will inform you about the entire interaction process, including the fact that the legal proceedings of the pre-adoption custody will take about 8 weeks. He or she will explain how you should communicate with the Office's staff on a regular basis. You will be informed about the content of two important documents: first, the proposal to gain pre-adoption custody of the child (including its annexes), and second, the authorization for serving the documents. After that, you will sign these two documents. Also during this preliminary meeting, you will receive information about two subsequent meetings: first, a meeting with the travel documents department; and second, with the court at the end of your stay in the Czech Republic, where (assuming the interaction process has been successful) you will obtain the final decision to grant you pre-adoption custody of the child. If you have not already submitted the originals of your current criminal record and your confirmation of income, you should do so at the preliminary meeting. You will also give the lawyer your contact details. With your assistance, the Office's lawyer will finalise the **proposal to grant you pre-adoption custody of the child, together with all the necessary annexes. Subsequently, you will submit the proposal to the Municipal Court in Brno, Polní 994/39** (or, if the meeting takes place outside the court's official office hours, the lawyer will submit the proposal to the court on the following working day).

The lawyer will also **give you a document confirming that your interaction with the child is taking place** (the so-called "Confirmation of the Ongoing Process of International Adoption").

Meeting with the Office's psychologist

The psychologist will give you a detailed description of the entire adaptation process, from the very first moment up until your departure from the Czech Republic. He or she will tell you everything they know about the child, and what you can expect. There will be also space for discussion, questions and ideas.

The main topics of the discussion are:

- **Basic information about the child**, i.e. a summary of all available information about the child's development so far, including their family medical history and potential diagnoses. The psychologist will mention any potential risks, and explain how he or she sees the child's situation.
- **The child's current health condition**, including their recent moods, how they reacted to the news that you were coming, and any other important progress in the child's condition. This info is usually obtained the

previous day from the carers.

- **The description of the entire process of getting to know the child**, from the first meeting to your departure from the Czech Republic.
- **A more detailed description of your first meeting with the child**. For example, the psychologist will suggest that you bring a small gift to the first meeting (ideally a toy or game that you can play with together – for example, a toy car, a doll, a ball, or a bubble blower).
- **The method of mutual adaptation, adjusted to the child's needs** – starting from shorter visits (such as half a day spent together in the institutional home), then working toward more intensive care of the child. You will discuss issues such as food, hygiene, and what will happen when the child visits your place (for afternoon naps, etc).
- **What behaviours and emotions the child from institutional care might display**. The process of building a new relationship is very emotionally demanding; it will impose enormous strain on both, you and the child. The child might respond to these huge changes in various ways. For instance, the child may react differently to women than to men; they may prefer one applicant over another (and so the other one may be dismissed); if there is already a child in your family, the new child may reject them and be jealous of or hostile to them; **the child suffers from deprivation** (they go with anybody anywhere, they fondle everybody or, on the contrary, act very reservedly and refuse physical contact); they show no negative emotions at first (crying, defiance), which appear gradually; or they try to test the limits of how they can behave and what they can get away with, often with aggressive behaviour or self-harm. They may have problems with sleeping (refusing to go to bed, difficulties falling asleep, or waking up at night); eating problems (refusing food or overeating); or psychosomatic difficulties (stomach-ache, higher temperature, skin reactions). The child might also suffer from developmental regression (sucking their thumb; needing to use diapers again), or they may temporarily stop doing what they already could do before. If there is already another child in your family, they may regress and start to imitate their new sibling.
- **Brief explanation of the causes of children's deprivation**: even though the institutional home staff try really hard, there is a lack of individual care; the child's development is not targeted and there is no bond to a single person. These children differ from children growing up in families (you often cannot apply the commonly used upbringing strategies; it can take longer for the upbringing style to start working; up until now, the child has been used to order, but not to a single person. They may find this new person hard to understand and predict what he or she will do); **necessity to saturate immediate needs but also those needs that were not saturated in early childhood**.
- **Demands on you as future parents** – you must accept that you will have to saturate the child emotionally from the very beginning, without getting an adequate emotional reaction from the child in return. **You must be very flexible** - when it is necessary to adapt the further procedures and your own expectations based on how it is going at the moment and how the child responds to it. These factors cannot be accurately predicted in the long-term.
- **Difficulties with the language barrier**, which is harder for adults than for children. The psychologist will explain the importance of mimicking, gestures, intonation, and showing your emotions, so that the child understands your feelings and requests. You and the child may feel frustrated if you cannot understand each other, so the psychologist will recommend some appropriate ways of handling this.
- **How the child can say goodbye to the institutional home** and their school class (for more details on this, see below).
- **How any complications should be resolved**.
- **How the process of building the relationship may fail and what will come next**. An adoption process is like any other relationship in life – you and the child may get along well, or you may not. The relationship might not work out, and most likely that won't be the particular fault or mistake of you or the child. If the adoption process is terminated for any reason, both you and the child will receive support from us.
- **Mutual cooperation with the Office's psychologist during the whole process**. We will discuss how we will communicate – for instance, you should send reports about the process to the psychologist at least once every three days, and you should immediately inform the psychologist in case of complications.
- **The role of the Office's psychologist**. The psychologist's main task is to support you, provide you with continuous advice, evaluate the entire process with you, and help you resolve any problems, big or small.

Some basic recommendations for you:

- **Set limits for the child firmly and kindly.** Don't be afraid to guide the child as a parent from the very beginning (when you are with the child, the staff will leave the entire care up to you). The child will need a coherent, predictable and clear set of guidelines. You should be both kind and firm at the same time, giving the child lots of cuddling, physical contact and patience, but also establishing clear limits of what they may or must not do.
- **Take photos, make videos, and keep a written journal with the child.** This will not only be a souvenir for your family, but also a way to help the child capture their life story; in the future, you will be able to use these recorded memories when you talk to the child about their past and their identity.
- **Listen to your body and your emotions.** You should not feel like you are being forced into anything. Adjust the interaction process to your needs, not only to the child's needs. Make sure to leave time for your spouse, so that you two can share experiences and communicate. And make sure to take a rest when you need it.
- **Prepare questions to ask the institutional home staff at the first compulsory meeting,** and write them down. Ask about the child's routine, what the child fears, what it does or does not eat, what has worked or not worked when it comes to setting limits, etc.
- **Prepare questions to ask the child's social worker at the second compulsory meeting.** The social worker is likely to know the details about the child's biological family. Ask about this, and note down what they tell you. This information will be very useful in the future, when the child starts asking questions about its biological family.

The lawyer working on the case will prepare a protocol for you and all the other participants to sign at the preliminary meeting, and each of you will receive one copy.

1st meeting (your first contact with the child)

Your first meeting with the child takes place on the next working day after the preliminary meeting. At the first meeting, which will be supervised and time-limited, you will:

- Get detailed information about the child directly from the care workers and staff (they will tell you about the child's personality, special traits, daily routine, fears, etc).
- Make further plans for the child's adaptation, and discuss how you will gradually take over full-time care of the child.
- Evaluate how the meeting went, and share your reactions and impressions.

The first meeting consists of three parts, usually taking place in the morning:

1. Meeting with the institutional home staff (about 30 min-1 h)

This meeting is attended by you (and your children, if you have any), institutional home staff (director/ social worker/ psychologist, doctor/ nurse, caretaker) and the Office's psychologist. The institutional home staff will pass on important information about the child according to their specialisation; remember to ask for and note down specific details.

2. First meeting with the child (about 1-2 h)

This is attended by you (and your children), the institutional home representative (caretaker, psychologist), the interpreter, the Office's psychologist, and the child. The meeting usually takes place in the playroom or in the garden so that the child feels comfortable in a natural and familiar environment. How you interact with the child at this meeting is completely up to you and the child. You may choose to give the child a little gift you have

brought with you (2 items at most). You may look together at what the child has prepared for you. You can start playing with the child right away, and begin the gradual process of getting to know each other. The Office's psychologist will be there to support both you and the child, but if everything is going smoothly, there will be very little intervention. We recommend that you take photos or videos to remember the meeting by. If your own child is present, you should encourage the children to interact too.

3. Evaluation of the first meeting and further plans (about half an hour)

When the first meeting is over (and the child has left), the Office's psychologist will first attend to your biological or previously adopted child (if they have participated in the meeting). After that, he or she will talk with you about your feelings and ideas about the meeting, what it was like for you, whether you can see any potential problems anywhere, and whether you have been surprised by anything. **After that, all the adults will prepare a preliminary plan for the adaptation process (including a timetable for future visits),** and you will all exchange contact info. If the child already attends primary school, they will stop going to school about one week after the beginning of your interaction (communication with the school will be managed by the Office's psychologist, along with the child's social worker).

Another visit with the child usually takes place that same afternoon. This is followed by your regular visits to the institutional home over the following days. During this time, you should start going on walks with the child, taking them to your place for brief visits, and letting them take afternoon naps at your place. Eventually, the child will spend the night in your apartment. From then on, the child will stay with you all the time.

The worker of the institutional home and the Office's psychologist will write a report on the first meeting, which will be added to the documents for the court.

The time between the individual meetings and your departure

After the first meeting, you should gradually build a bond with the child. At first, you should spend shorter periods of time with the child in the institutional home, which should become longer after a few days. Step by step, you should take over the full care of the child – not only leisure time, but also tasks such as feeding and preparing meals, giving baths, and putting the child to bed. Gradually, you should take over all activities concerning the child. At the same time, the child should be allowed to relax and spend time with the institutional home staff. This is especially important for children who are more than 5 years old. Nevertheless, it is essential that you gradually become the main caregiver – somebody who the child will turn to when they are tired, sad, or angry, or when they need something.

Below are several tips that can make the child's transition much easier:

- You should maintain a positive relationship with the child's previous caretakers. Remember that they have been the child's significant others up until now. Your relationship with them will affect the child's relationship to you. If you like and support each other, and if there is a friendly atmosphere, the child will feel that too, and it will make them feel more secure.
- You should encourage the child to tell the caretakers about the time you have spent together. This is very important, especially for older children, who will need to transfer their attachment to you. For example, when you give the child back to the staff after your first few visits, you can show several photos you have taken that day (from a playground or a trip), and encourage the child to comment on the photos, using them to tell the staff what they did that day.
- You should notice when the child might be getting tired of trying to communicate with you or speaking in your language. If you observe a growing frustration (especially in older children), let the child play on their own and "turn off the sound" for a while (go to a playground, draw, or play with Lego). Do not be afraid to

use an online dictionary. Try to express your emotions and feelings non-verbally, and use gestures, even if the child seems to understand what you are saying.

- You should also **use simple drawings and/or a visual calendar**, with pictures and simple text, to note down your plan for the coming days. In the calendar, specify whether things will happen in the morning, afternoon, or evening. Also be sure to include when you are planning to move (for more information, see the section on moving). Having a clear plan will help the child feel more secure.
- With the child and the staff, you should plan the child's handover into your full-time care. Make sure to include a plan for how the child will say goodbye to the institutional home and/or their school class.
- You should agree with the staff and the child on what belongings can be taken to the child's new home (which clothes, shoes, toys, or other mementos they should keep; what new things you should buy for them; and whether you will be given the child's older pictures and health documentation, etc).

Between the official meetings, do not forget to stay in touch with the Office's psychologists. You should inform them at least once every three days about what is going on, how the child is reacting, and how you feel about the process. Please note that the Office's psychologist will also request information from the institutional home staff at least once between the first and second meeting; in the given period, you should communicate with the staff every day (if you are not able to do that due to the language barrier, try using an online translator, or ask an interpreter or the Office's psychologist for help). Feel free to discuss anything with the psychologist – for example, things about the process which have surprised you, or things which you have had trouble coping with. As soon as you take full-time care of the child and they start to live with you, you should allow the persons that are close to the child (the favourite caregiver or a volunteer) to occasionally come to see the child or call them on the phone. That way, the continuity of the child's development will be maintained, and the child's relationships with his former caregivers will become gradually looser as the child forms a new, stronger bond with you. After the second meeting, you should plan and organize the child's farewell (in the institutional home, at school). If the child attends school, they will also communicate with the Office's psychologist on their own.

After the second meeting, and after the child has said goodbye, you should move to Brno. You should book accommodation here for a stay of up to 7 weeks. Your place should be suitable for taking care of a child (for example, it should be large enough for you and the child, it should have a kitchen, and it should be in an area safe for children). So that the child will adapt smoothly, you should have a steady place to stay. Ideally, you should stay in the same place until you and the child leave for your home. If you must move during this period, however, **we strongly recommend that you do not move more than twice.**

The reason we ask you to move to Brno is so that you can access our support more easily. For example, it is much easier for us to provide you with medical care here if necessary. You will also be receiving the court's final decision and collecting the child's passport here, which means that if you were living outside Brno, you would have to make multiple inconvenient trips to the city.

We are aware that any new change (e.g. moving to Brno, changing residences, meeting new people) means another burden for the child that can affect its behaviour or health condition (some children respond somatically, with stomach-ache, higher temperature, toothache, etc). **After moving, you should try to follow the child's original daily routine as closely as possible.** You should take the child to familiar places at first (for example, the same playground they are used to) and not overwhelm the child with too many new things (many children can view a large city as stressful). **Routine and rituals give children a feeling of security and certainty.**

If you plan to invite friends or family over to the Czech Republic during your stay here, you should carefully consider the pros and cons. On the one hand, these loved ones can help you take care of the child and relieve your stress, which can be beneficial for the child as well. However, if your visitors are only staying here a short time, it can mean another burden for the child – they will have to get used to new people, which can be rather demanding. And if the visitors are staying for several days or even weeks (as is often the case with grandparents), the child may end up forming a stronger bond with them, and may feel closer to them than to you. Even though

having friends and relatives nearby could help you while you are in the Czech Republic, it can unintentionally slow down the long-term formation of your bond with the child. **That is why it is necessary to discuss such plans with us in advance; we will decide together what to do based on everyone's best interests.**

2nd meeting (our collective evaluation)

The second meeting usually takes place **between 7 and 14 days after the first meeting, or at some other time that is better for the child.** However, it is always held after you have the child in your full-time care (after they have spent the first night at your place). The meeting will take place at your residence, and it will last for 2 hours. It will be attended by you, your other children, the interpreter, the Office's psychologist, the social worker (the child's legal guardian), an institutional home staff member, possibly also the Office's lawyer, and the child.

The aim of the second meeting is to:

- Carry out a multidisciplinary evaluation of the entire process so far.
- Find out about the child's thoughts/experiences so far, and about their current condition.
- Exchange information between you and the child's social worker (guardian).
- Provide you with counselling and advice on the child's upbringing and other related issues.
- Plan how the child will say goodbye.
- Plan several upcoming activities: your move to Brno; your collection of the child's passport; the third meeting (if the child is older than 5); and your collection of the court's decision.
- Give you recommendations about the child's adaptation process in your home. If the child is younger than 5, this will include recommendations on how to help the child understand and record its life story (since there will be no third meeting).

During the second meeting, all the participants will observe the evolving relationship between you and the child. Each of you will comment on and evaluate the entire adaptation period. The second meeting is coordinated by the Office's psychologist, who will begin by asking you to describe what has happened so far. You will be asked what has worked and what has not, whether there have been any difficulties, how the child has been behaving, how your relationship has changed, how you and the child are coping with the stress and the language barrier, and any other relevant topics. Next, the institutional home staff member will talk about the process too. Then the social worker (the child's legal guardian), who has kept the child's file for a long time, will inform all the others about the child's family situation and history. During this part of the meeting, you can ask the social worker questions and discuss the situation with her or him.

At this meeting, you will jointly assess whether the adaptation process should continue and whether the child should interrupt its contact with the institutional home and its staff (older children can remain in touch with them over the phone), so that you can take over more of the parental role. The decisions on this will affect how and when the child will say goodbye to those closest to them. At the meeting, you will be also provided with psychological counselling concerning the adaptation period after your arrival in Brno, and given recommendations for working on the child's life story (if there will not be a third meeting).

When the second meeting is over, the Office's psychologist and the social worker (guardian) will write reports on the meeting, which will include their individual evaluations of the relationship between you and the child. These reports will be added to your application of adoption.

If there are any complications, the Office's psychologist will decide how to proceed. He or she may suggest a number of intervention measures and recommendations. If he or she determines that the process has not been successful, the Office may interrupt or end it. Such a decision would of course be fully discussed with you, the child and the institutional home staff.

Recommendations for how to manage the child's farewell and subsequent contact

If the process has been going well, and you are on track to obtain custody of the child, you should plan how the child will say goodbye to the institutional home, eventually with the classmates.

A carefully-planned farewell helps the child:

- End their close relationship with its caretakers in a positive way. The child should learn that relationships are built over time, and they should not just be broken off suddenly, but they should be ended so that everyone can remember them in a positive way. In other words, this farewell should be very different from an unexpected move or a sudden removal from a family.
- Obtain memories and mementos (photos, cards), which will help them record and remember their life story.
- Get a better understanding of the entire adoption process.

Some recommendations for planning the farewell:

- It should take place when the child has been in your full-time care for several days and you have planned the moving to Brno. With younger children, it takes place immediately after the second meeting; with older children it should be planned according to the child's needs, usually within 5 days after the second meeting. Until then you should plan brief encounters with the original closest persons.
- The farewell should take place either in your apartment or in a neutral place (a playground or sweet-shop); the child should never return to the institutional home to say goodbye (they could be afraid of being returned there).
- The farewell should be about 30 minutes long, in a positive and joyful atmosphere. It can be conceived as a little party, with some refreshments (chosen by the child) and possibly also some gifts.
- If the child is older than 5, they should play a big part in **planning the farewell**, which should be planned with the staff as well. Ideally, you should let the child make some of the decisions (where and what time it takes place, what refreshments are served, how long it lasts, etc).
- The farewell party should be attended by (2-3) closest staff members and closest friends. If the child had a host family or a volunteer (who took care of them while they were in the institutional home), they should be also invited.
- If the child gets some mementos from the staff or friends (cards, gifts, letters), it is very important to keep these in a safe place; if the child wants to hold onto them, make copies or photos and keep these yourself. In the future, these items might be really precious, and they can help tell the child's life story. It is also important to take some photos at the farewell party.
- Agree with the staff on whether you will take with you some photos from the child's past in the institutional home (electronic or hard copies). You can also take photos of the institutional home chronicle and particularly its parts showing how the child grew up there; the chronicle usually includes records of the child's first achievements: the first smile, the first tooth or the first step.
- It is a great idea for the child to take a favourite toy or another important item with them from their foster home to your home (e.g. a blanket that they have had since they were born). If they received any items from their biological parents, you should definitely ask to take those with the child. You might offer to buy a new thing for the institutional home to replace any older items which they bought. Take a good care of these items, and even if the child does not want to use them in the future, do not throw them away. They might become an important way for the child to remember the time before they lived with you.
- It would be very nice if you could thank the staff for the care they gave your child.
- The final farewell and departure should be quick (5 minutes). Everyone should say goodbye, wish each other a safe trip, wave goodbye, give a quick kiss, and then leave. You should try to avoid crying or making a big emotional scene.

- If the child already attends school and has friends there, you should plan how they will say goodbye to their classmates. It is not necessary to do this on the very last day of the child's school attendance; it can be done sooner, or on the last day before your departure. It can be done in various ways, based on the child's preferences. You should agree with the child's teachers about what will happen. The whole farewell should not take more than 10 minutes. If the child wants to visit their school to say goodbye, they should go there, pick up their belongings, and quickly say goodbye to their friends and their teacher. They can also bring candy for their classmates (as if it were their birthday). If you think it may be a better idea for the child not to say goodbye in person, or if they don't want to, another option is for the child to write and send a postcard to the school to say goodbye.
- After the child has said farewell to the institutional home, it does not mean they must leave the child's life completely. If all of you agree, you can arrange for the child to have occasional contact with their favourite caretakers or children – by text message or a picture with a commentary, perhaps. It is not necessary or even appropriate to stay in touch if the child is younger than 4. With an older child, you should discuss how they would like to stay in touch with their caretakers or friends. If they want to phone them, they should be allowed to do so. However, you should keep the child's meetings with them to a minimum (perhaps once a week a brief encounter in the first two weeks and then only once a week a phone call or email before you leave the Czech Republic). Some older children may want to be in touch more often – which you should allow them to. However, the contact should gradually disappear (or be only occasional, for example when it is the child's birthday).

Your stay in Brno and the meeting at the City Passport Office

After you move to Brno, you must wait there until the court issues its final decision. In order to be able to return to your home country after you have obtained custody of the child, you must have a passport. The issuing of the passport will be arranged by the lawyer, who will contact you by email a few days after your arrival in Brno. The lawyer will arrange a meeting, and he or she will join you when you go to the Brno City Passport Office. All the documentation necessary for the passport will be provided by the lawyer, but you must take the child with you, as they will have their photo taken there. The Passport Office is just a 5-minute walk from the headquarters of the Office, and it will take about 15-20 minutes to process the passport. The lawyer will then give you the passport during your meeting at the Municipal Court in Brno, at the end of your stay in the Czech Republic (after you have received the final decision on getting custody of the child).

3rd meeting and preparing the child for the journey to your home

The third meeting is usually organised only with children older than 5, but it may be recommended for younger children as well, depending on their maturity and needs. It is usually planned after the departure date to the child's new home has been set. It takes place on the Office's premises in Brno (in the children's rooms) or another suitable place (a playground, your residence). **It is attended by your entire new family, the psychologist, and possibly also the Office's lawyer.** If necessary, the interpreter is ready to assist over the phone.

The aims of the third meeting are to:

- Briefly evaluate how the relationship between you and the child (and possibly your other children) has evolved.
- Give you advice on the child's upbringing and other related issues.
- **Find out about the child's thoughts and experiences, and about how they are being prepared for the move to your home (they will be informed about that further in Czech).**
- Give you recommendations on the adaptation period after you take the child to your home and how you should work with the child on remembering their past.

The main task for the third meeting is a direct communication with the child – asking them about what they think and how they feel, and informing them about what is going to happen in the future. This conversation is conducted in the child’s mother tongue, and in a form appropriate for their age and maturity (e.g. using emotion flashcards which can help the child show how they are feeling and what they like or do not like).

At the beginning of the meeting, the psychologist will ask you to share a detailed plan for your journey back home (when exactly you are leaving, after which meal, which means of transport you will use, how long you will drive, where you will stop, who you are going to meet on the way, who will drive you to the airport and who will pick you up at your destination, etc.). At the meeting, the child is shown in a simple way (using dolls, toy houses, toy cars or planes) how they will travel to their new home. The psychologist will refer to the information and the photos you have already shown to the child when you were talking about your home. The psychologist will evaluate how well the child understands the info, and will answer any questions or uncertainties they may have.

A **great aid in this conversation** is the abovementioned **visual calendar** (with all the travel days shown, clearly divided into mornings, afternoons, evenings, and sleep times). This will help the child be more aware of space and time during the journey, and make them less insecure about the changes. It is also possible to plan several little moments which the child can look forward to (for example, you can promise that the first meal in your home will be their favourite meal, etc.). Needless to say, you must be sure to keep these promises.

It may happen that the child tells the psychologist that they do not want to leave. You shouldn’t be too worried about that. There are many reasons why the child may be nervous about leaving with you. This is something that must be discussed with the psychologist, who will find out the reasons behind it. The child may just be in a bad mood or tired that day, or frustrated by the foreign language, or angry at you because you did not allow them to do something. Of course, they may also be expressing some bigger fears or insecurities. The psychologist will analyse the situation as a whole before making any judgements. He or she will speak with the child and try to find out how serious the problem is. He or she may decide to postpone the preparations for the move until the child feels better, help them cope with their fears, or suggest another procedure. **The psychologist always takes the child’s best interests into consideration, and this does not necessarily correspond with the child’s immediate wishes or fears.** If the child’s negative view of the move does not change over time (which occurs only rarely), the psychologist will plan another procedure with you and other experts, and offer recommendations and helpful measures (see potential complications). Only if the situation does not change after an intensive intervention will the Office consider suspending the application in the court. However, such situations are extremely rare, and if this happens, you will receive a great deal of support from the Office.

Potential complications and solutions

If at any time there are complications in the relationship between you and the child, or in your communication with other participants of the process, you should inform the Office’s psychologist or lawyer **WITHOUT DELAY**. They will try to obtain as much info as possible from all participants, evaluate how you and the child feel, and offer possible solutions.

So that we can get information and solve any complications together, everyone must trust each other and communicate openly. Your communication with the psychologist must be flexible and constructive. You should exchange information with each other regularly, especially if you notice problems in communication between you and the child or between any of the other participants, or if you have any doubts about accepting the child. The psychologist can offer a variety of recommendations and interventions (such as intensive counselling, help with childcare, consultations with experts in your country, or prolonging your stay in the Czech Republic).

If such interventions are unsuccessful, and you decide you will not be able to form a bond with the child, you should terminate the adoption process. This is a rare and demanding situation, but it may be the best solution for both the child and your family in the long term.

You can terminate the adoption process by withdrawing your application to obtain full-time care of the child. The Office’s psychologist and/or lawyer can also terminate the process by sending a report to the court recommending that you not take pre-adoption custody of the child. The report includes a detailed justification for the decision. If this exceptional situation arises, both you and the child will be assisted by the psychologist throughout the entire process.

Departure to your home

You cannot leave for your home country until you have collected the final **decision** from the **Municipal Court in Brno giving you custody of the child before adoption**. The lawyer will inform you about the date and time of your visit to the court. This meeting will take place in the assistant judge’s office. After you have presented your passports or IDs, you will waive your right of appeal to the aforementioned decision and confirm that you have collected the decision in person. The meeting usually lasts for about 10 minutes. After this meeting, the Office’s lawyer will also give you the **child’s passport and birth certificate** (he or she will write a protocol for this with you) and you can depart right after that. After you have left with the child, you should stay in contact with the Office, sending them **reports on the child’s development until they are 18**. After the child has spent 6 months in your country and you have submitted 3 developmental reports, you can officially request the Office’s consent to adopt the child internationally. The Office will then initiate the administrative proceedings. If adoption is in the child’s best interest, the Office’s psychologist will recommend that the request be approved. In the proceedings, the Office’s lawyer will ask the guardian about his or her view. Also, the caregiver determined by the state must give his or her consent to the adoption on behalf of the child. Having gathered all the evidence, the Office will issue its decision, and the child can be adopted in your country. If there is anything you would like to know about the child’s biological roots, do not hesitate to ask us. **The entire communication with the Office takes place via a competent central authority or an authorized organisation in your country.**

CONCLUSION

We have already helped 700 children from the Czech Republic find new parents and a new home abroad, and we are committed to helping potential parents like you, who are willing to offer your heart and home to a child, and give them what every child needs – love, individual care, and a sense of security and acceptance.

We deeply appreciate that you are willing to come to the Czech Republic and put so much of your energy, joy and enthusiasm into meeting an unknown child. We understand if you feel a bit insecure and nervous – such feelings are natural when you head into the unknown. We would like to thank you for accepting our rules, which we know may not be easy to understand, since we come from different cultural contexts and experiences. The weeks and months ahead will require considerable effort, but it will be worth it in the end. We strongly believe that through intensive and open communication, and with respect for the space, time and emotions of everyone involved, we will manage to create something beautiful together – a new family with a happy and content child and parents.



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