

DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDELINES

1. Start with an attention-getting phrase. Draw readers in with a fun introduction such as: "With her sunny disposition and easy-going nature, Laurie is able to get along with just about everyone."
2. Include colorful details on the child's unique character. Active or intense children are more enticing when described like this: "Rough-and-tumble Cherise is a tomboy for whom sports are very important," or "Jason, who has an engaging personality, plays cards and checkers with a vengeance!"
3. Highlight progress and ways to manage challenges. Praise children for improvements and paint a picture of the parents' responsibilities through a description such as: "Good news! Olivia is beginning to demonstrate attachment to her foster mom, seeking her out for love and acceptance. Since she began taking medication, she has improved self-control and reduced aggressive behaviors."
4. Define clinical diagnoses and provide examples. Letters like ADD, ADHD, ODD, and PTSD mean little to families. Explanations like: "Jacob has challenging special needs associated with static encephalopathy - an abnormal condition of the function and structure of the brain tissue. The most challenging aspect of this condition is that, Jacob cannot grasp cause and effect or learn from experience" - offer more clarity.
5. Focus on milestones when describing a disabled child. To illustrate a child's functioning in understandable terms, say: "Jeremiah, age one, is about six months delayed developmentally. His movements do not yet appear to be purposeful."
6. Emphasize the rewards the child could bring a family. Let prospective adopters know what they can gain by saying: "Martin presents many challenges and needs total care, but because of his sweet disposition, caring for him will surely be a labour of love."
7. Describe how the child relates to adults and peers. For instance say: "Samuel and Sonny get along well with other children, but prefer to interact with adults. Due to their fear of strangers, they must be introduced to new people slowly."
8. Highlight the ways the child is similar to other children. Children with special needs are first and foremost children, so it's fair to say: "At times Corina, like many preteens, has difficulty accepting authority and occasionally breaks house rules."
9. Include the caretaker's impressions about the child. Prospective parents can identify with the foster family through descriptions like: "Mark, according to his foster mother, is a sweet, soft-spoken boy. He rarely needs discipline," she says, "and is motivated to try his best."
10. Mention the positive observations of important adults. Add perspective and credibility to descriptions by saying: "Head Start staff report that Courtney is very social. She blends in with the other children and handles the routines, limits, and schedules of the program well."
11. Quote the child. A family might be interested to hear Billy's comment: "I've always wanted a dog, and a nice family that would take me camping in the woods."
12. Discuss how a family could help a child. Provide parents a sense of purpose by saying, "Everyone who cares about Robert feels that having a permanent family will be a significant key in helping him turn his behavior around."
13. Mention any financial support if it is available. Help families realize that they can afford to adopt a child with special needs by mentioning that financial supports may be available.