



**National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information  
National Adoption Information Clearinghouse**



*Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families*

## **Adoption General Information Packet 1: Getting Started**

This packet is provided for prospective adoptive parents and others interested in learning more about the adoption process. Contents include:

- Adoption: Where Do I Start?
- Adoption Options: A Fact Sheet for Families
- Adoption Options at-a-Glance: A Companion Guide for Families
- The Adoption Home Study Process

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) offers many other resources about all types of adoption. For more information or to order additional publications, visit the NAIC website at <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov>, email the Clearinghouse at [naic@caliber.com](mailto:naic@caliber.com), or call the Clearinghouse at (703) 352-3488 or (888) 251-0075.

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# Adoption: Where Do I Start?

## Introduction

This fact sheet is a “gateway” to the many possible paths to building your family through adoption. It will help give you an understanding of the basic steps in any adoption process and guide you to resources at each step.

- Step 1: Educate Yourself**
- Step 2: Understand the Law**
- Step 3: Explore Your Options/Select an Agency**
- Step 4: Complete a Home Study**
- Step 5: Engage in the Placement Process**
- Step 6: File Necessary Legal Documents**
- Step 7: Parent Your Child**

## STEP 1 Educate yourself

### What You Should Know

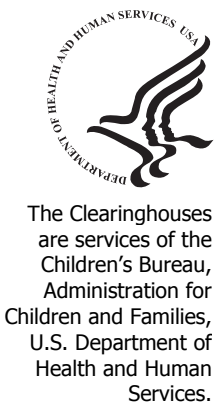
At times, the adoption process can seem complicated, time consuming, and frustrating. However, many resources exist to help prospective adoptive parents educate themselves about adoption.

- Local community colleges, adoption exchanges, adoption agencies, hospitals, religious groups, and other organizations may offer adoption preparation programs.
- Adoptive parent support groups often are willing to assist people considering adoption. In addition, regional adoption exchanges, local agencies, and State adoption specialists can send you information to help get you started.

There are also many books, magazines, and Web sites on this topic. See the resource list at the end of this fact sheet for more information.

### Some Places to Go

To learn more about what to expect when pursuing specific types of adoption, see the related National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) fact sheet *Adoption Options: A Fact Sheet for Families* and companion chart *Adoption Options at-a-Glance*, as well as the resources listed at the end of this document.



**The National Adoption Directory** (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>), available from NAIC, provides lists of adoption resources in every State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, to assist families in their pursuit of adoption.

## STEP 2 Understand the Law

### What You Should Know

State laws and regulations govern U.S. adoptions. Learning about the adoption laws in your State, or any States involved with your adoption, can help avoid frustrating situations.

### Some Places to Go

The Statutes-at-a-Glance database (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/laws/index.cfm>), compiled by NAIC, highlights specific adoption-related topics and provides a quick overview and comparison of laws across the States. Information regarding who may adopt, timeframes for consent and revocation of consent to adoption, and termination of parental rights laws are provided in the database, and can be searched by State, territory, or region.

## STEP 3 Explore Your Options/ Select an Agency

### What You Should Know

Families wishing to adopt have many options. The following is one way to think about how choices in adoption may flow from one another:

- Where will our family's child *come from*? (Domestic or intercountry adoption?)
- If we adopt domestically, what *type of adoption* is best for our family? (Domestic infant or foster care adoption?)
- If we choose domestic infant adoption, who will assist our family with the adoption? (Licensed private agency, independent, facilitated, or unlicensed agency adoption?)

The way you choose to adopt will depend on the characteristics of the child you wish to adopt, how long you are willing to wait for your child, and other concerns.

### Some Places to Go

For more information, see the related NAIC fact sheet *Adoption Options* and companion chart *Adoption Options at-a-Glance*.

## STEP 4 Complete a Home Study

### What You Should Know

No matter what type of adoption you choose to pursue, all prospective adoptive parents must have a home study or "family study." A home study involves education, preparation, and information gathering about the prospective adoptive parents. This process can take from 2 to 10 months to complete, depending on agency waiting lists and training requirements. States vary regarding home study requirements, so you should check with your State adoption specialist to learn about the specific regulations in your State.

### Some Places to Go

*The Adoption Home Study Process* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_homstu.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm)), an NAIC fact sheet, provides more information regarding what is generally included in a home study. The National Adoption Directory, on the NAIC Web site, lists the State Adoption Specialist in each State and Territory (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>).

## STEP 5 Engage in the Placement Process

### What You Should Know

Once your home study is completed, you are ready to begin the placement process—the time when a specific child is identified for your family. Depending on the type of adoption you are pursuing, this process and the potential time involved in waiting for your child vary greatly.

- If you are pursuing an independent adoption, an attorney or facilitator may help you identify expectant parents or you may locate them on your own if allowed by State law.
- If you are using a licensed private agency to pursue a domestic infant adoption, the expectant parents may select your family from among several prospective adoptive families.
- In the case of foster care adoption or intercountry adoption of older children, you may review information about a number of children who are waiting for families. You will often have the opportunity for pre-placement visits, to get to know a child before he or she moves into your home in foster care adoption. Also, many foster parents in the United States adopt the foster children in their homes if the children become available for adoption.
- If you are adopting an infant internationally you may receive a referral during this time.

### Some Places to Go

The NAIC fact sheet, *Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adoptive Child* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_background.pdf](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_background.pdf)) provides suggestions for obtaining a child's medical, social, and educational history.

NAIC has a number of resources for expectant parents who are considering adoption including a fact sheet *Are You Pregnant and Thinking About Adoption?*  
[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_pregna.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_pregna.cfm)

*Intercountry Adoption*, another NAIC fact sheet, provides more information on the placement process when adopting a child from another country.  
[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_inter.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_inter.cfm)

*Foster Parent Adoptions: What Parents Should Know*, an NAIC fact sheet, outlines considerations in this type of adoption.  
[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_fospar.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm)

Most adoptions of children from foster care are handled by public child welfare agencies. The national online photolisting **AdoptUSKids** ([www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)) provides pictures and general descriptions of children in foster care around the country who are waiting for families. The NAIC resource listing, *State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Web Pages* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_agency.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_agency.cfm)) provides links to photolisting services in each State.

**STEP 6  
File  
Necessary  
Legal  
Documents****What You Should Know**

All adoptions need to be finalized in court, though the process varies from State to State. Usually a child lives with the adoptive family for at least 6 months before the adoption is finalized legally. During this time, a social worker may visit several times to ensure the child is well cared for and to write up the required court reports. After this period, the agency or attorney (in the case of independent adoption) will submit a written recommendation of approval of the adoption to the court, and you or your attorney can then file with the court to complete the adoption. For intercountry adoptions, finalization depends on the type of visa the child has and the laws in your State. The actual adoption procedure is just one of a series of legal processes required for intercountry adoption. In addition to your State laws, you must also follow the laws of the child's country of origin, and the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Service's (formerly INS) requirements.

**Some Places to Go**

The National Adoption Directory (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>) provides an attorney referral service for each State. The NAIC fact sheet *Intercountry Adoption* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_inter.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_inter.cfm)) provides more information.

**STEP 7  
Parent Your  
Child****What You Should Know**

The final, and most important step, in the adoption process is to parent your adopted child. Adoption is a lifelong process. Your family, like many families, may need support adjusting to life with your new child. Your family and your child may have additional questions at different developmental stages.

**Some Places to Go**

Read more in the following NAIC publications:

**Adopting Children with Developmental Disabilities**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_devdis.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_devdis.cfm)

**Adopting a Child with Special Needs**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_specne.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_specne.cfm)

**Adoption and School Issues**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_school.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_school.cfm)

**Adoption and the Stages of Development**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_stages.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_stages.cfm)

**After Adoption: The Need for Services**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_after.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_after.cfm)

**Foster Care Adoption: What Parents Should Know**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_fospar.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm)

**Issues Facing Adult Adoptees**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_issues.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_issues.cfm)

**Parenting the Adopted Adolescent**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_adoles.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_adoles.cfm)

**Additional  
Resources**

**Parenting the Sexually Abused Child**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_abused.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_abused.cfm)

**The Value of Adoptive Parent Support Groups**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_value.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_value.cfm)

**Tips on Selecting an Adoption Therapist**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_tips.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_tips.cfm)

**GENERAL ADOPTION RESOURCES**

**Adopting.com**

[www.adopting.com/info2.html](http://www.adopting.com/info2.html)

Extensive index of adoption resources on the Internet.

**How to Make Adoption an Affordable Option**

[www.nefe.org/adoption/index.html](http://www.nefe.org/adoption/index.html)

Booklet available from the National Endowment for Financial Education. (Information current through 2001.)

**DOMESTIC ADOPTION RESOURCES**

**American Association of Open Adoption Agencies**

[www.openadoption.org](http://www.openadoption.org)

Information and resources developed by agencies practicing openness.

**Perspectives Press**

[www.perspectivespress.com](http://www.perspectivespress.com)

Books on infertility and adoption.

**Insight: Open Adoption Resources & Support**

[www.r2press.com](http://www.r2press.com)

Resources and support for families involved in open adoptions.

**Adoptive Families Magazine**

[www.adoptivefamiliesmagazine.com](http://www.adoptivefamiliesmagazine.com)

Bimonthly information source for families before, during, and after adoption.

**Tapestry Books**

[www.tapestrybooks.com](http://www.tapestrybooks.com)

Books on adoption, including many children's books.

**FOSTER CARE ADOPTION RESOURCES**

**National Adoption Center—10 Steps to Adoption**

[http://adopt.org/servlet/page?\\_pageid=67&\\_dad=portal30&\\_schema=PORTAL30](http://adopt.org/servlet/page?_pageid=67&_dad=portal30&_schema=PORTAL30)

Explains steps to adopt children from foster care.

**State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Web Sites**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_agency.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_agency.cfm)

Contains links to each State's photolisting of children in the foster care system waiting for families.

**The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids**

[www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)

National online photolisting service of children in foster care waiting for families.

**INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION RESOURCES**

**State Department Web Site**

<http://travel.state.gov/adopt.html>

*International Adoptions* booklet, important notices, fact sheets, and country-specific information.

**Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly INS)**

[www.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm](http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm)

Downloadable forms and frequently asked questions regarding adoption.

**Hague Conference on Private International Law**

[www.hcch.net/e/conventions/menu33e.html](http://www.hcch.net/e/conventions/menu33e.html)

Full text and explanatory report on the Hague Conference on Private International Law, an intergovernmental organization working for the progressive unification of the rules of private international law.

**Joint Council on International Children's Services**

[www.jcics.org](http://www.jcics.org)

Promotes ethical practices in intercountry adoption.

**International Concerns for Children**

[www.iccadopt.org](http://www.iccadopt.org)

Publishes annual *Report on Intercountry Adoption*.

**Summary of Laws Regarding International Adoptions Finalized Abroad**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/l\\_abroad.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/l_abroad.cfm)

This NAIC legal product has more information about States' laws regarding intercountry adoption finalization.

**Developmental Evaluations of International Adoptees**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_devev.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_devev.cfm)

Nationwide listing of physicians and clinics specializing in assessments of international adoptees, from NAIC.

## **KINSHIP ADOPTION RESOURCES**

### **Keeping the Family Tree Intact Through Kinship Care**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_kinshi.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_kinshi.cfm)

The fact sheet outlines the benefits, barriers, and resources for kinship placements including subsidized guardianships.

### **Kinship Care/Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Resource Listing**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/rl\\_dsp.cfm?subjID=30](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/rl_dsp.cfm?subjID=30)

Linked list of resources for grandparents raising grandchildren.

### **AARP Grandparent Information Center**

[www.aarp.org/contacts/programs/gic.html](http://www.aarp.org/contacts/programs/gic.html)

Information on being a good grandparent, visitation rights, and raising grandchildren.

### **National Center on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children**

[www.gu.org/proj&o.htm](http://www.gu.org/proj&o.htm)

Seeks to improve the lives of these caregivers and the children they are raising.

### **Kinship Care Fact Sheets from the National Center for Resource Family Support**

[www.casey.org/cnc/state\\_contacts/kinship\\_fact\\_sheets.htm](http://www.casey.org/cnc/state_contacts/kinship_fact_sheets.htm)

State-by-State information about kinship care.

### **Tools for Working with Kinship Caregivers**

[www.casey.org/cnc/support\\_retention/tools\\_kinship\\_caregivers.htm](http://www.casey.org/cnc/support_retention/tools_kinship_caregivers.htm)

From the Casey National Center for Resource Family Support.

## **SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES ADOPTION RESOURCES**

### **Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Parents: Resources for Professionals and Parents**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_gay.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_gay.cfm)

This fact sheet explores the status of gay/lesbian parenting, issues, laws, and more.

### **Military Families and Adoption: A Fact Sheet for Families**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_milita.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_milita.cfm)

A fact sheet answering questions often asked by military families.

### **Openness in Adoption: A Fact Sheet for Families**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm)

This fact sheet can help you decide if open adoption is right for your family.

### **Single Parent Adoption: What You Need to Know**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_single.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_single.cfm)

Fact sheet explaining steps to single parent adoption.

### **Stepparent Adoption**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_step.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_step.cfm)

Fact sheet explaining steps involved in stepparent adoption.

### **Transracial and Transcultural Adoption**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_trans.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm)

Fact sheet providing tips and considerations for transracial and transcultural adoptions.





## Adoption Options: A Fact Sheet for Families

Prospective adoptive parents have many adoption options. The way you choose to adopt will depend on what is important to your family, including how you feel about contact with birth parents, how flexible you can be about the characteristics of the child you wish to adopt, the resources you have available for adoption fees, and how long you are willing to wait for your child. This fact sheet provides some basic information about adoption options; for more information, see the resource list at the end of this document.

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) National Adoption Directory (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>) offers State-by-State listings of public officials, public and licensed private adoption agencies, and support groups for adoptive parents or people searching for birth relatives.

This fact sheet focuses on one way to think about how choices in adoption may flow from one another:

- Where will our family's child *come from*? (Domestic or intercountry adoption?)
- If we adopt domestically, what *type of adoption* is best for our family? (Domestic infant or foster care adoption?)
- If we choose domestic infant adoption, *who will assist our family* with the adoption? (Licensed private agency, independent [attorney], or facilitated/unlicensed agency adoption?)

For more specific information about these choices, see the companion table, *Adoption Options at-a-Glance* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_adoptoptionglance.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_adoptoptionglance.cfm)).

One of the first decisions many prospective adoptive parents make is whether to adopt a child from the United States or from another country. Some considerations in deciding between domestic and intercountry adoption may be how you feel about parenting a child whose background differs from your own and how you feel about potential involvement of the child's birth parents.

### Domestic Adoption

Children adopted domestically often (though certainly not always) have more in common with their adoptive parents in terms of racial and ethnic background. Whether you adopt an infant or an older child, the potential also exists for some degree of contact between your family and the child's birth family after the adoption (referred to as "openness"). Even if the adoption is not open, persons adopted domestically may have an easier time locating their birth families if they decide to search as adults.

### Domestic or Intercountry Adoption?



The Clearinghouses are services of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The NAIC fact sheet, *Openness in Adoption: A Fact Sheet for Families* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm)), and the bulletin, *Openness in Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_openadoptbulletin.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_openadoptbulletin.cfm)), offer more information about potential advantages and disadvantages of open adoptions.

### **Intercountry Adoption**

Birth parent involvement is less likely in an intercountry adoption. In order for children to achieve orphan status (and be eligible for adoption) in many countries, the birth parents must have died or “abandoned” them. In these cases, search for birth families as an adult can be more difficult and, in many cases, impossible.

Strict immigration requirements apply to adoptions of children from other countries. It is important to choose a licensed, knowledgeable organization for intercountry adoptions because the process is often lengthy and complex. Expenses for this type of adoption include agency fees as well as transportation, legal, and medical costs. Total costs can range from \$7,000 to \$30,000 or more, but they are generally predictable.

While intercountry adoption can be more expensive than domestic adoption (particularly adoption from foster care), the wait for an infant or younger child is generally more predictable than in domestic infant adoption (depending on the country and agency).

Licensed private agencies with intercountry programs are indicated in the National Adoption Directory (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>). For more information about intercountry adoptions, see the NAIC fact sheets, *Intercountry Adoption* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_inter.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_inter.cfm)) and *Transracial and Transcultural Adoption* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_trans.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm)).

### **Domestic Infant or Foster Care Adoption?**

If you choose to adopt domestically, you will need to decide whether you wish to adopt an infant or adopt a child (or children) from the foster care system. In making this decision, you may want to consider your support system, what resources you have available for adoption expenses, and how flexible you can be about the characteristics of the child you wish to adopt.

### **Infant Adoption**

Many prospective parents seek to adopt healthy infants, often of a background similar to their own. Waiting times for infant adoptions vary tremendously and can be as long as 2 years or more. Many agencies now involve birth parents in choosing adoptive parents and have discontinued traditional “waiting lists” (first come, first placed) because so few infants are available through agencies. In the United States, agency criteria for prospective adoptive parents are often more restrictive for infant adoptions than for adoptions of older children, again because fewer infants are available. Expenses for domestic infant adoption can range from \$5,000 to more than \$40,000. (An amount between \$10,000 and \$15,000 is common).

## Foster Care Adoption

Foster care adoptions, sometimes called “special needs adoptions,” are typically handled by public agencies (local Departments of Social Services). Most children in foster care have been abused or neglected and, as a result, may have physical, emotional, or mental disabilities. These children often are older (grade school through teens) or are sibling groups who have a goal of being adopted together. Adoption services through a public agency are usually free or available for a modest fee. Federal or State subsidies are sometimes available to assist families adopting a child with special needs as defined by the Children’s Bureau Child Welfare Policy Manual ([www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws/cwpm/policy\\_dsp.jsp?citID=49](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=49)). For more information about adoption subsidies, see the NAIC fact sheet *Subsidized Adoption: A Source of Help for Children With Special Needs and Their Families* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_subsid.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm)).

*Cost of Adopting* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/s\\_cost.htm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/s_cost.htm)), an NAIC publication, discusses resources to help defray the cost of adoption. The NAIC fact sheet, *Foster Parent Adoption: What Parents Should Know* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_fospar.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm)) reviews issues that foster parents should consider when making the decision to adopt their foster child. **For all types of adoption**, a Federal adoption tax credit of up to \$10,160 is available for qualifying families ([www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p968.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p968.pdf)). Some employers also offer adoption benefits to offset the cost of adopting ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_benefi.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm)).

## Licensed Private Agency, Independent Adoption, or Facilitated/Unlicensed Agency?

While public agencies handle the adoption of children in the State child welfare or foster care system, if you wish to adopt an *infant* from the United States, you may choose to work with a licensed agency, an attorney (sometimes called “independent adoption”), or an unlicensed adoption facilitator (if allowed by laws in your State). Licensed private agencies need to meet State standards for licensure and have more oversight to ensure quality services. Unlicensed agencies and facilitators often do not have the same State oversight and consequently there may be more financial and emotional risk for adoptive and birth families using these services.

## Licensed Private Agency Adoption

In a licensed agency adoption, the birth parents relinquish their parental rights to the agency. Adoptive families then work with adoption agency professionals toward placement. Licensed agency adoptions provide the greatest assurance of monitoring and oversight of professional services, because these agencies are required to adhere to licensing and procedural standards. The wait for an infant through a licensed private agency may be longer. Prospective parents may not have an opportunity to meet the birth parents face to face. Social workers in agencies make decisions about the match of a child and prospective adoptive parent. In addition, agencies may give preference to certain types of individuals or couples (e.g., due to faith or marital status). Expenses range from nothing (if a private agency contracts with a public agency to place children from foster care) to \$40,000, but they are generally predictable.

**Independent Adoption**

In an independent adoption, attorneys assist families; however, birth parents typically give their consent directly to the adoptive family. You will interact directly with the birth parents or their attorney if you choose this option. Attorneys who facilitate independent adoptions must adhere to the standards of the Bar Association. Some attorneys who specialize in adoption are members of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys ([www.adoptionattorneys.org](http://www.adoptionattorneys.org)), a professional membership organization with standards of ethical practice. *Legal Issues of Independent Adoptions* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_legal.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_legal.cfm)) provides more information. State law regulates allowable expenses (such as the birth mother's medical care) that can be reimbursed by adoptive parents. Read *State Regulation of Adoption Expenses* (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/laws/expenses.cfm>) for more information. Expenses in this type of adoption can be less predictable. Not all States allow for independent adoption; check with your State Adoption Specialist.

Even if the birth mother and adoptive parents locate one another independently, they may still take advantage of services offered by a licensed agency. This is called "identified adoption." The agency's role is to conduct the home study for the adoptive parents and counsel the birth mother and father, if available.

**Facilitated/Unlicensed Agency Adoption**

Adoptive placements by facilitators (or those by unlicensed agencies) offer the least amount of supervision and oversight. A facilitator is any person who links prospective adoptive parents with expecting birth mothers for a fee. Adoption facilitators are largely unregulated in many States; families often have little recourse should the plan not work out as expected. Some States do not permit adoptions by paid facilitators. Check with your State Adoption Specialist.

The National Adoption Directory (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>) lists public and licensed private adoption agencies in every State including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Only licensed agencies are listed in the National Adoption Directory. The directory also lists a State Adoption Specialist for each State.

**How Will the Placement Process Vary?**

In every case, adoption starts with an educational and home study process. *Adoption: Where Do I Start?* has more information ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_start.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_start.cfm)). How you choose to adopt will impact how and when a child is placed in your home. The following information gives a brief overview of how placement may proceed depending on the type of adoption you choose. For more assistance comparing the different types of adoption, see NAIC's companion chart, *Adoption Options at-a-Glance* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_adoptoption.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_adoptoption.cfm)).

**Intercountry Adoption**

The placement process for intercountry adoption varies depending on the agency you choose and the child's country of origin, but it is typically somewhat predictable. As a child becomes available for adoption, he or she is matched with prospective parents who can meet that child's needs. Families often have the opportunity to review a child's information prior to accepting a placement. Some pediatricians specialize in helping parents evaluate that information ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_devev.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_devev.cfm)).

Often, families need to travel to the child's country of origin to pick up their child. Some countries require more than one trip. The State Department Web site ([www.travel.state.gov/adopt.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/adopt.html)) provides the most comprehensive information regarding intercountry adoption, including the most common countries of origin. Necessary forms and frequently asked questions regarding intercountry adoption can be accessed through the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (<http://uscis.gov/graphics/faqs.htm>).

### **Foster Care Adoption**

There are many children in foster care waiting for adoptive families. Check with your local Department of Social Services to learn about children who need homes in your area. Adoption exchanges ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_agency.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_agency.cfm)) provide photolistings with pictures and brief descriptions of children in the foster care system across the State or region. Once a match has been made between a family and child, and you have reviewed and feel comfortable accepting the child's social and background information, you and the child begin visiting at the direction of the involved adoption professionals. Pre-placement visits vary depending on the situation and the age of the child. After the successful completion of these visits, the child is placed for adoption and comes to live with your family. For more information, read *Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adoptive Child: A Fact Sheet for Families* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/f\\_background.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/f_background.cfm)).

The **AdoptUSKids** Web site ([www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)) provides a national online photolisting of children in foster care waiting for families. NAIC provides a complete listing of *State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Webpages* ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_agency.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_agency.cfm)).

### **Domestic Infant Adoption (Licensed Private Agency)**

Adoptive parents working with private agencies often have little control over the process of identifying a child. This process varies greatly depending on the agency. Some agencies are faith-based and give preference to families from a particular religious background. Many agencies allow birth parents to choose a prospective adoptive family for their child based on profiles or books that families create to share information about themselves. As a result, the wait for your child may be unpredictable and, in some cases, quite long. The NAIC fact sheet, *Openness in Adoption: A Fact Sheet for Families*, has more information (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/profess/open.cfm>).

### **Independent Adoption**

Families adopting independently identify the birth parents without an agency's help. Each family's situation is different; it is impossible to predict the length of time you may wait for a child to be placed. Some adoptive parents and expectant mothers have found each other and made a plan within a week, other adoptive parents search for 1 to 2 years. Infants are usually placed with the adoptive parents directly from the hospital after birth.

### **Facilitated Adoption**

The placement process for families adopting through an adoption facilitator will vary greatly depending on the facilitator and the situation. Placements through an adoption facilitator may be much like placements through independent adoptions.

**What Other  
Choices  
Should We  
Consider?**

The following NAIC publications may help with other important decisions as you determine which path to adoption is right for your family.

**Creating a Family Through Birth and Adoption**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_create.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_create.cfm)

Resources for parents creating a blended family of both birth and adopted children.

**Openness in Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_openadoptbulletin.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_openadoptbulletin.cfm)

Information about potential advantages and disadvantages of open adoptions.

**Parenting the Sexually Abused Child**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_abused.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_abused.cfm)

Information about child sexual abuse and special considerations for parents who adopt children who have experienced abuse.

**Transracial/Transcultural Adoption**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_trans.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm)

Tips for families preparing to adopt a child of a race or culture different from their own, including what can be done post-adoption to help the child develop a strong sense of cultural and racial identity.

**Resources**

***GENERAL ADOPTION RESOURCES***

**Adopting.com**

[www.adopting.com/info2.html](http://www.adopting.com/info2.html)

Extensive index of adoption resources on the Internet.

**Adoption Today Magazine**

[www.fosteringfamielstoday.com/adoptinfo.html](http://www.fosteringfamielstoday.com/adoptinfo.html)

Issues and answers surrounding international and domestic adoption.

**Adoption: Where Do I Start?**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_start.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_start.cfm)

An overview of the adoption process.

**Adoptive Families Magazine**

[www.adoptivefamiliesmagazine.com](http://www.adoptivefamiliesmagazine.com)

Bimonthly information source for families before, during, and after adoption.

**American Association of Open Adoption Agencies**

[www.openadoption.org](http://www.openadoption.org)

Information and resources developed by agencies practicing openness.

**How to Make Adoption an Affordable Option**

[www.nefe.org/adoption/index.html](http://www.nefe.org/adoption/index.html)

Booklet available from the National Endowment for Financial Education (current through 1997).

**Insight: Open Adoption Resources & Support**

[www.r2press.com](http://www.r2press.com)

Resources and support for birth and adoptive families involved in open adoptions.

**IRS Adoption Tax Credit**

[www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p968.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p968.pdf)

Printable version of IRS Publication 968 "Tax Benefits for Adoption."

**Legal Issues of Independent Adoptions**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_legal.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_legal.cfm)

An overview of independent adoption issues, including birth fathers' rights.

**National Adoption Directory**

<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm>

A comprehensive State-by-State adoption resource.

**Perspectives Press**

[www.perspectivespress.com](http://www.perspectivespress.com)

Books on infertility and adoption.

**Tapestry Books**

[www.tapestrybooks.com](http://www.tapestrybooks.com)

Books on adoption.

***FOSTER CARE ADOPTION RESOURCES*****The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids**

[www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)

The national online photolisting service of children waiting for families in the foster care system.

**National Adoption Center—10 steps to Adoption**

[http://adopt.org/servlet/page?\\_pageid=67&\\_dad=portal30&\\_schema=PORTAL30](http://adopt.org/servlet/page?_pageid=67&_dad=portal30&_schema=PORTAL30)

Explains steps to adoption of children in foster care.

**State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Webpages**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_agency.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_agency.cfm)

Contains links to each State's adoption and foster care information as well as the photolisting of children in the foster care system waiting for families.

***INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION RESOURCES*****U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly INS)**

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm>

Frequently asked questions regarding adoption.

**Developmental Evaluations of International Adoptees**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r\\_devev.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/r_devev.cfm)

Nationwide listing of physicians and clinics specializing in assessments of international adoptees.

**Intercountry Adoption**

[http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_inter.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_inter.cfm)

An overview of intercountry adoption with resources for more information.

**Joint Council on International Children's Services**

[www.jcics.org](http://www.jcics.org)

Membership agency that promotes ethical practices in intercountry adoption among its member agencies.

**State Department Web Site**

<http://travel.state.gov/adopt.html>

*International Adoptions* booklet, important notices, and country-specific information.





## Adoption Options at-a-Glance: A Companion Guide for Families

See accompanying fact sheet, "Adoption Options: A Fact Sheet for Families" ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_adoption.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_adoption.cfm))

This guide focuses on *one* way to think about how choices in adoption may flow from one another:

- Where will our family's child come from?
- If we adopt domestically, what type of adoption is best for our family?
- If we choose domestic infant adoption, who will assist our family with the adoption?

### Where will our family's child come from?

	Agency Oversight	Voluntary Surrender or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)	Child Characteristics	Cost	Potential Wait	Adoptive Parent Characteristics	Post-Placement Support	Potential Birth Parent Involvement/ Access to Family History
DOMESTIC	Agency oversight varies from licensed and accredited agencies to unregulated facilitators.	Children are legally freed for adoption either through voluntary relinquishment or involuntary termination of the parental rights of their birth parents.	Every age child is available, including sibling groups of multiple ages. Children may be healthy or may have special physical or mental health needs.	Cost ranges from free or very little to \$40,000 or more.	Waits can be unpredictable and range from very short to 2 years or more.	Adoptive parent characteristics sought by birth parents vary. Specific characteristics have been found common to successful adoptive parents of children from foster care.	Post-placement support varies from none to a wide array of services.	The more "open" the adoption, the more potential access to a child's birth family history.
INTERCOUNTRY	Agencies facilitating intercountry adoptions must adhere to U.S. State and Federal regulations and regulations of the child's country of origin.	For immigration purposes, children must be considered "orphans" to be adopted.	Depending on the country, children available for adoption may include infants, school-aged children, sibling groups, and those with special needs due to parental substance abuse, poverty, or institutionalization.	Costs range from \$7,000 to \$30,000 or more, depending on the country and number of trips required.	Waits vary depending on the country. Some countries are able to predict time from "matching" to "placement" so families can plan their lives accordingly.	Requirements for adoptive parents are country-specific regarding age, marital status, background, number of children in family, and other characteristics.	Post-placement support ranges from none, to post-placement visits and required reports to the child's country of origin, to country-specific adoptive parent support groups.	International adoptions generally entail less birth parent involvement due to distance, language or cultural barriers, and taboos.

**If we adopt domestically, what type of adoption is best for our family?**

	<b>Agency Oversight</b>	<b>Voluntary Surrender or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)</b>	<b>Child Characteristics</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Potential Wait</b>	<b>Adoptive Parent Characteristics</b>	<b>Post-Placement Support</b>	<b>Potential Birth Parent Involvement/ Access to Family History</b>
<b>DOMESTIC INFANT</b>	Oversight varies from accredited and licensed agencies to unregulated facilitators.	Most domestic infant adoptions are voluntary on the part of birth parents.	Health status of domestic infants can vary greatly depending on prenatal care, substance abuse, genetics, etc.	Costs range from \$5,000 to \$40,000 or more depending on the agency or facilitator and State laws regarding allowable expenses.	Wait varies greatly depending on the kind of child a family is looking for, timing of the family's home study documents and child's need, and birth parents' choices of adoptive parents.	Agencies may have specific requirements regarding faith (if a faith-based agency), age, marital status, or other characteristics.	Post-adoption support varies greatly from none to support groups for families and children.	Many adoptions involve some level of contact between birth and adoptive families. Access to history varies greatly depending on the situation and type of agency or facilitator.
<b>FOSTER CARE</b>	Foster care adoptions can occur through public social service agencies (overseen by the State) or licensed private agencies (must meet State licensing standards and may be accredited).	Most children are freed for adoption by the involuntary termination of their birth parents' rights. Each State has its own Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) law.	Most children in foster care are older children or sibling groups of different ages. The average age of a waiting child is over 8 years old.	Foster care adoption may be free or involve minimal fees, such as attorney costs, which can often be reimbursed. Federal or State adoption subsidies may also be available depending on the child's special needs.	The wait for placement of children from foster care varies greatly depending on the type of child(ren) the family hopes to adopt and the family's ability to meet the child(ren)'s needs.	Qualities of families who successfully adopt children from the foster care system include flexible expectations and a tolerance for rejection.	Post-adoption support may include Federal or State adoption subsidies, foster/adoptive parent support groups, respite care, individual or family therapy, and other services.	Potential birth parent involvement varies from none to regular contact with the birth family (if in child's best interest). Agencies generally share all they know regarding a child's birth family history.

**If we choose domestic infant adoption, who will assist our family?**

	<b>Agency Oversight</b>	<b>Voluntary Surrender or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)</b>	<b>Child Characteristics</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Potential Wait</b>	<b>Adoptive Parent Characteristics</b>	<b>Post-Placement Support</b>	<b>Potential Birth Parent Involvement/ Access to Family History</b>
<b>LICENSED PRIVATE AGENCY</b>	Licensed agencies must meet State or other licensing standards.	Varies by State and type of adoption. Agencies must have surrenders and/or termination of parental rights for both the birth mother and father.	Licensed private agencies may place domestic infants, children in foster care, or children from other countries.	Generally the expenses are predictable and will be known up front. Cost ranges from nothing to \$40,000 or more.	The wait for a child varies greatly; intercountry adoptions may have more "predictable" waiting periods.	Adoptive parent characteristics vary depending on the type of adoption and child requested.	Post-adoption support varies depending on the region, agency resources, type of adoption, and needs of the child.	The "openness" of the adoption varies by agency, type of adoption, and preferences of all involved.
<b>INDEPENDENT (ATTORNEY)</b>	Independent adoptions generally do not involve as much oversight as adoptions with licensed agencies. They must comply with State laws and regulations (not all States allow for this type of adoption). Assisting attorneys must adhere to the standards of the State's Bar Association.	Generally voluntary relinquishments by birth mothers and/or birth fathers. Situations will vary by laws of the involved States.	Characteristics of children placed independently can vary greatly due to prenatal care and genetics.	Costs can be unpredictable but generally average between \$10,000 and \$15,000. State law regulates allowable expenses (e.g., birth mother's medical care).	Time to find a potential match and have a child placed is unpredictable and may be shorter or longer than a wait for an infant placement through a licensed private agency.	Since expectant parents choose a family, adoptive parents' characteristics depend on individual expectant or birth parent's wishes.	Post-placement support varies depending on the region and the child's needs.	Birth and adoptive families have direct contact with one another, often allowing for exchange of medical and family history.
<b>FACILITATED/ UNLICENSED AGENCY</b>	This type of adoption involves the least amount of oversight. Some States regulate facilitators, while in other States anyone can declare themselves to be an "adoption facilitator."	Generally voluntary relinquishments by birth mothers and/or birth fathers. Situations will vary by laws of the involved States.	The health status of domestic infants vary greatly, as with any newborn, due to prenatal care, genetics, etc.	Expenses are regulated by State law but can still be unpredictable. Facilitated adoptions can cost as much or more than licensed private agency adoptions.	The wait can vary tremendously depending on the situation and involved parties.	Since expectant parents often choose a family through a facilitator, adoptive parents' age and other characteristics will depend a great deal on the individual expectant or birth parents' wishes.	Post-placement services vary depending on the region, agency resources, and the child's needs.	Birth parent involvement and access to the child's family history vary depending on the facilitator and the wishes of involved parties.



# National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information National Adoption Information Clearinghouse



*Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families*

## The Adoption Home Study Process

### Introduction

The laws of every State and the District of Columbia require all prospective adoptive parents (no matter how they intend to adopt) to participate in a home study. This process has three purposes: to educate and prepare the adoptive family for adoption, to gather information about the prospective parents that will help a social worker match the family with a child whose needs they can meet, and to evaluate the fitness of the adoptive family.

The home study process can be a source of anxiety for some prospective parents, who may fear they will not be “approved.” It may be helpful to remember agencies are not looking for perfect parents. Rather, they are looking for real parents to parent real children. With accurate information about the process, prospective parents can face the home study experience with confidence and the excitement that should accompany the prospect of welcoming a child into the family.

Specific home study requirements and processes vary greatly from agency to agency, State to State, and (in the case of intercountry adoption) by the child’s country of origin. This fact sheet discusses the common elements of the home study process and addresses some concerns prospective adoptive parents may have about the process.

If you are just beginning your journey to adoption, you may find the NAIC fact sheet, *Adoption: Where Do I Start?* useful. NAIC also offers the National Adoption Directory, a searchable database listing public and licensed private agencies, attorney referral services, support groups, State adoption specialists, and more for each State, Territory, and the District of Columbia. These resources, as well as fact sheets with specific information on special types of adoption (such as foster care or intercountry), can be found on the NAIC website (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov>).

### Elements of the Home Study Process

There is no set format that adoption agencies use to conduct home studies. Many agencies include the following steps in their home study process, although the specific details and order will vary. For more information, talk with the agencies you are considering.

#### Training

Many agencies require trainings for prospective adoptive parents prior to or during the home study process. These trainings help prospective parents better understand the needs of children waiting for families and help families decide what type of child or children they could parent most effectively.

#### National Adoption Information Clearinghouse

330 C St., SW  
Washington, DC 20447  
(888) 251-0075 or (703) 352-3488  
[naic@caliber.com](mailto:naic@caliber.com)  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov>

The Clearinghouses are services of  
The Children’s Bureau  
Administration for Children and Families  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



## Interviews

You will probably be interviewed several times by the social worker. These interviews help you develop a relationship with your social worker that will enable him or her to better understand your family and assist you with an appropriate placement. You will discuss the topics addressed in the home study report (see below). You will likely be asked to explain how you handle stress and past experiences of crisis or loss. In the case of couples, some agency workers conduct all of the interviews jointly, with both prospective parents together. Others will conduct both joint and individual interviews. If families have adult children living outside the home, they also may be interviewed during this process.

## Home Visit

Home visits primarily serve to ensure your home meets State licensing standards (e.g., working smoke alarms, safe storage of firearms, safe water, adequate space for each child, etc.). Some States require an inspection from the local health and fire departments in addition to the visit by the social worker. The agency will generally require the worker to see all areas of the house or apartment, including where the children will sleep, the basement, and the back yard. He or she will be looking for how you plan to accommodate a new family member (or members, if you are planning to adopt a sibling group). Social workers are *not* typically inspecting your housekeeping standards. A certain level of order is necessary, but some family clutter is expected. Some agencies would worry that people living in a “picture perfect” home would have a difficult time adjusting to the clutter a child brings to a household.

## Health Statements

Most agencies require prospective adoptive parents to have some form of physical exam. Some agencies have specific requirements; for example, agencies that only place infants with infertile couples may require a physician to confirm the infertility. Other agencies just want to know the prospective parents are essentially healthy, have a normal life expectancy, and are physically and mentally able to handle the care of a child.

If you have a medical condition that is under control (for instance, high blood pressure or diabetes that is controlled by diet and medication), you may still be approved as an adoptive family. A serious health problem that affects life expectancy may prevent approval. If your family has sought counseling or treatment for a mental health condition in the past, you may be asked to provide reports from those visits. Many agencies view seeking help as a sign of strength; the fact that your family obtained such help should not, in and of itself, preclude you from adopting. However, each family's situation is unique, so check with the agencies or social workers you are considering if you have concerns.

## Income Statements

You do not have to be rich to adopt; you just have to show you can manage your finances responsibly and adequately. (Some countries may have specific income requirements for intercountry adoption.) Usually, prospective parents are asked to verify their income by providing copies of paycheck stubs, W-4 forms, or income tax forms. Many agencies also ask about savings, insurance policies (including health coverage for the adopted child), and other investments and debts.

## **Background Checks**

Most States require criminal and child abuse record clearances for all adoptive and foster parent applicants. In many States, local, State, and Federal clearances are required. While the vast majority of prospective adoptive parents have no criminal or child abuse history, it is important for children's safety to identify those few families who might put children at risk.

Public and private agencies need to comply with State laws and policies regarding how the findings of background checks affect eligibility for adoptive parents. However, do not hesitate to talk to agencies and social workers you are considering about specific situations that might disqualify you from adopting. Agencies are looking not just at your past experiences, but at what you've learned from them and how you would use that knowledge in parenting a child. Some agencies in some States may be able to work with your family, depending on the charge and its resolution. If the social worker feels you are being deceptive or dishonest, however, or if the documents collected during the home study process expose inconsistencies, the social worker may have difficulty trusting you.

## **Autobiographical Statement**

Many adoption agencies ask prospective adoptive parents to write an autobiographical statement. This is, essentially, the story of your life. This statement helps the social worker better understand your family and assists him or her in writing the home study report (see below). If you are working with an agency that practices openness in adoption, you also may be asked to write a letter or create an album or scrapbook about your family to be shared with expectant birth parents to help them choose a family for their child.

While writing about yourself can be intimidating, the exercise is intended to provide information about you to the agency, as well as to help you explore issues related to the adoption. Some agencies have workers to assist you with the writing. Most have a set of questions to guide you through writing your autobiography.

## **References**

The agency will probably ask you for the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of three or four individuals to serve as references for you. References help the social worker form a more complete picture of your family and support network.

If possible, references should be individuals who have known you for several years, who have observed you in many situations, and who have visited your home and know of your interest in and involvement with children. Most agencies require that references be people unrelated to you. Good choices might include close friends, an employer, a former teacher, a co-worker, a neighbor, or your pastor, rabbi, or leader of your faith community.

Approval would rarely be denied on the grounds of one negative reference alone. However, if it were one of several negative factors, or if several of the references were negative, the agency might be unable to approve the adoption.

## The Home Study Report

Typically, the above steps culminate in the writing of a home study report that reflects the social worker's findings. Home study reports often are used to "introduce" your family to other agencies or adoption exchanges (services that list children waiting for families) to assist in matching your family with a waiting child.

In general, home study reports include the above-mentioned health and income statements, background checks, and references, as well as the following types of information:

- **Family background.** Descriptions of the applicants' childhoods, how they were parented, past and current relationships with parents and siblings, key events and losses, and what was learned from them.
- **Education/employment.** Applicants' current educational level, satisfaction with their educational attainments, and any plans to further their education, as well as their employment status, history, plans, and satisfaction with their current jobs.
- **Relationships.** If applicants are a couple, the report may cover their history together as well as their current relationship (e.g., how they make decisions, solve problems, communicate, show affection, etc.). If applicants are single, there will be information about their social life and how they anticipate integrating a child into it, as well as information about their network of relatives and friends.
- **Daily life.** Routines, such as a typical weekday or weekend, plans for child care (if applicants work outside the home), hobbies, and interests.
- **Parenting.** Applicants' past experiences with children (e.g., their own, relatives' children, neighbors, volunteer work, babysitting, teaching, or coaching), in addition to their plans regarding discipline and other parenting issues.
- **Neighborhood.** Descriptions of the applicants' neighborhood, including safety and proximity to community resources.
- **Religion.** Information about the applicants' religion, level of religious practice, and what kind of religious upbringing (if any) they plan to provide for the child.
- **Feelings about/readiness for adoption.** There may be a section on specific adoption-related issues, including why the applicants want to adopt, feelings about infertility (if this is an issue), what kind of child they might best parent and why, and how they plan to talk to their children about adoption-related issues. If the agency practices openness, there may be information about how the applicants feel about birth families and how much openness with the birth family might work best. For more information, read the NAIC's *Openness in Adoption: A Fact Sheet for Families*.
- **Approval/recommendation.** The home study report will conclude with a summary and the social worker's recommendation. This often includes the age range and number of children for which the family is recommended.

Applicants also will be asked to provide copies of birth certificates, marriage licenses or certificates, and divorce decrees, if applicable. Some agencies allow prospective parents to read the home study report about themselves; others do not. You may want to ask the agency about the confidentiality of the home study report and how extensively your

## Common Concerns About the Home Study

information will be shared. Agency policies vary greatly, depending on the type of agency and type of adoption. In many cases, the information will be shared with other agencies to help in matching the most appropriate child with your family. In some cases, the information may also be shared with birth parents or others.

### How long will the home study take?

The time it takes to conduct the home study will vary from agency to agency, depending on factors such as how many social workers are assigned to conduct home studies, what other duties they have, and how many other people applied to the agency at the same time. On average the home study process takes 3 to 6 months to complete. You can help speed up the process by filling out your paperwork, scheduling your medical appointments, and gathering the required documents without delay.

### How much does a home study cost?

The cost of the home study depends on what kind of adoption you are pursuing. Agencies conducting domestic adoptions of children from foster care (such as your local Department of Social Services) may not charge a fee for the home study. If these agencies do charge a fee, they often are modest (\$300 to \$500), and once you adopt a child from foster care you can usually obtain reimbursement for this fee.

For domestic infant adoption, intercountry adoption, or independent adoption, a private agency or certified social worker in private practice might charge from \$1,000 to \$3,000 for the home study. Other services (such as an application fee and preplacement services) may be included in this fee. Be sure to discuss any fees thoroughly and ask for this information in writing to avoid any misunderstandings.

For more information about costs of adoption and resources to help defray those costs, see the NAIC fact sheet, *Costs of Adopting*.

### What might disqualify our family from adopting?

Aside from a criminal record or overriding safety concerns that would preclude agencies from approving your family under your State's laws or policies, characteristics that might disqualify a family in one situation may be seen as strengths in another. Remember, agencies are not looking for "perfect" families. The home study process is a way for a social worker to learn more about your *real* family, as a potential home for *real* children.

Who may adopt varies from agency to agency, State to State, and by the child's country of origin. Adoptions in the United States are governed by State law and regulations. The Clearinghouse has compiled States' laws regarding who may adopt in *Statutes at a Glance: Parties to an Adoption*. Some States also have their policies posted online. The NAIC publication, *State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Webpages*, has links to each State's online adoption information. Within State guidelines, many agencies are looking for ways to rule families *in* rather than rule them *out*, to meet the needs of children in the U.S. foster care system waiting for adoptive families.



Thousands of children in the U.S. foster care system are waiting for families. The AdoptUSKids website (<http://www.adoptuskids.org>) provides a national online photolisting of children in foster care. NAIC offers a complete listing of *State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Webpages* on its website (<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov>).

### **How will the children in our family be involved in the home study?**

Children in your family (whether they joined your family through birth, foster care, adoption, or marriage) will be included in the home study in some way. Older children may be invited to participate in age-appropriate groups during one or more of the educational sessions. They also might be asked to write a statement describing their feelings and preferences about having a new brother or sister.

The social worker will likely ask how the children do in school, what their interests and hobbies are, what their friends are like, and how their behavior is rewarded or disciplined. However, the emphasis will more likely be on how the children see a new sibling (or siblings) fitting into the family and whether they are prepared to share your time and attention. Children's input is usually quite important in the overall assessment of a family's readiness to adopt a child. The social worker will want to make sure that an adopted child or children will be wanted and loved by all family members from the start.

## **Conclusion**

Although the adoption home study process may seem invasive or lengthy, it is conducted to help you decide whether adoption is right for your family, prepare your family for adoption, and help your family determine which type of child you could best parent. The process also serves to ensure children are placed in loving, caring, healthy, and safe environments.

Flexibility and a sense of humor are vital characteristics when raising children, and they can be useful during the home study process as well. With perseverance and a positive outlook, you will be able to team with the social worker to make this a valuable learning experience—one that will help you do the best possible job in parenting the child who will eventually join your family.



# National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information National Adoption Information Clearinghouse



*Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families*

## ABOUT THE CLEARINGHOUSES

### OUR MISSION

The Clearinghouses connect professionals and concerned citizens to practical, timely, and essential information on programs, research, legislation, and statistics to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.

The **National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information** and the **National Adoption Information Clearinghouse** are federally funded services of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Clearinghouses provide a wide range of print and online information on child abuse, child welfare, and adoption, representing a full continuum of child welfare issues, ranging from prevention to permanency.

The Clearinghouses connect child welfare administrators, professionals, and others with information, research, and resources to:

- Promote safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and youth
- Improve the delivery and evaluation of services
- Enhance the administration of public and private child welfare agencies and organizations

## *Clearinghouse Services*

**Personalized customer responses** to more than 14,000 telephone and email inquiries each year.

**Print and electronic document dissemination**, including more than 140,000 copies of print products and 988,000 copies of electronic products created by the Children's Bureau and other Federal agencies, their grantees, and the Clearinghouses.

**New publications**, including factsheets for families, bulletins for professionals, resource lists, summaries of State laws, and syntheses of recent research.

**Searchable online databases** for information on child maltreatment, child welfare, and adoption, including 45,000 abstracts covering journal articles, reports, books, dissertations, and videotapes; Federal and State legislation; licensed adoption agencies; and conferences.

**Children's Bureau Express**, a monthly online digest available through free subscription and on the web, providing current information to professionals in the field, as well as access to previous issues. <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>

**E-lert!**, an electronic product alert available via a free monthly email service that alerts subscribers to new publications and resources distributed by the Clearinghouses. <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/admin/subscribe.cfm>



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Administration on Children,  
Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau

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## *Clearinghouse Websites*

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Each Clearinghouse has a website recently redesigned to feature clear information organized by topic or audience, dynamic database search capabilities, and resources for both professionals and families. Resources available through the websites can be downloaded, ordered online, or ordered by email or telephone through customer services.

The lists below highlight some of the current features of each website.

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### **NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INFORMATION**

330 C Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20447  
(800) 394-3366 or (703) 385-7565  
Fax: (703) 385-3206  
Email: [nccanch@caliber.com](mailto:nccanch@caliber.com)

Website: <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

#### **Web Highlights**

*Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect*, including resources and information on Child Abuse Prevention month:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/prevention>

*Legal issues*, including Federal and State laws:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal>

*Workforce and Training Resources*, including curricula, publications, training organizations, and university degree programs:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/profess/workforce>

*Spanish-language publications*:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/spanish>

*Systems of Care*, including how to build Systems of Care to enhance service array and collaboration in local communities:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/profess/systems>

*Issues associated with child abuse and neglect*, including domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/issues>

*Clearinghouse Library Search*:  
<http://basis1.calib.com/BASIS/chdocs/docs/canweb/SF>

### **NATIONAL ADOPTION INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE**

330 C Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20447  
(888) 251-0075 or (703) 352-3488  
Fax: (703) 385-3206  
Email: [naic@caliber.com](mailto:naic@caliber.com)

Website: <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov>

#### **Web Highlights**

*National Adoption Directory*, including State-by-State listings of adoption agencies, State officials and services, and support groups:  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/general/nad>

*National Adoption Month*, promoting adoption of children from foster care:  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/general/adoptmonth>

*Legal issues*, including Federal and State laws:  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal>

*What Works in Adoption*, including information for professionals on promising practices:  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/profess/admin/works>

*Resources for Parents*, including information for prospective and adoptive parents:  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/parents>

*Statistics and Research*, including information on adoption trends:  
<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/profess/admin/stats>

*Clearinghouse Library Search*:  
<http://basis1.calib.com/BASIS/chdocs/docs/naicweb/SF>