



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



Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

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

The National Adoption Directory (www.calib.com/naic/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 Statues-at-a-Glance database (www.calib.com/naic/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 (www.calib.com/naic/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 (www.calib.com/naic/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* (www.calib.com/naic/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?* www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_pregna.cfm

Intercountry Adoption, another NAIC fact sheet, provides more information on the placement process when adopting a child from another country. www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_inter.cfm

Foster Parent Adoptions: What Parents Should Know, an NAIC fact sheet, outlines considerations in this type of adoption. www.calib.com/naic/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) 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* (www.calib.com/naic/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 (www.calib.com/naic/database/nadd/naddsearch.cfm) provides an attorney referral service for each State. The NAIC fact sheet *Intercountry Adoption* (www.calib.com/naic/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

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_devdis.cfm

Adopting a Child with Special Needs

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_specne.cfm

Adoption and School Issues

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_school.cfm

Adoption and the Stages of Development

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_stages.cfm

After Adoption: The Need for Services

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_after.cfm

Foster Care Adoption: What Parents Should Know

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_fospar.cfm

Issues Facing Adult Adoptees

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_issues.cfm

Parenting the Adopted Adolescent

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_adoles.cfm

**Additional
Resources****Parenting the Sexually Abused Child**

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_abused.cfm

The Value of Adoptive Parent Support Groups

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_value.cfm

Tips on Selecting an Adoption Therapist

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/r_tips.cfm

GENERAL ADOPTION RESOURCES**Adopting.com**

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

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

Information and resources developed by agencies practicing openness.

Perspectives Press

www.perspectivespress.com

Books on infertility and adoption.

Insight: Open Adoption Resources & Support

www.r2press.com

Resources and support for families involved in open adoptions.

Adoptive Families Magazine

www.adoptivefamiliesmagazine.com

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

Tapestry Books

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

Explains steps to adopt children from foster care.

State Child Welfare Agency and Photolisting Web Sites

www.calib.com/naic/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

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

Downloadable forms and frequently asked questions regarding adoption.

Hague Conference on Private International Law

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

Promotes ethical practices in intercountry adoption.

International Concerns for Children

www.iccadopt.org

Publishes annual *Report on Intercountry Adoption*.

Summary of Laws Regarding International Adoptions Finalized Abroad

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/l_abroad.cfm

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

Developmental Evaluations of International Adoptees

www.calib.com/naic/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

www.calib.com/naic/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

www.calib.com/naic/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

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

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

State-by-State information about kinship care.

Tools for Working with Kinship Caregivers

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

www.calib.com/naic/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

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_milita.cfm

A fact sheet answering questions often asked by military families.

Openness in Adoption: A Fact Sheet for Families

www.calib.com/naic/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

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_single.cfm

Fact sheet explaining steps to single parent adoption.

Stepparent Adoption

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/r_step.cfm

Fact sheet explaining steps involved in stepparent adoption.

Transracial and Transcultural Adoption

www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_trans.cfm

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