



Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

FACTSHEET
FOR FAMILIES

July 2010

Adoption: Where Do I Start?



This factsheet is an introduction to the many paths to building your family through adoption. It will give you an understanding of the basics in any adoption process and guide you to resources at each step.

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



Child Welfare Information Gateway
Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW
Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024
800.394.3366
Email: info@childwelfare.gov
www.childwelfare.gov

Step 1: Educate Yourself

What You Should Know

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 Program Managers can send you information to help get you started.

There are also many books, magazines, and websites on this topic; some are listed at the end of this factsheet.

Some Places to Go

To learn more about what to expect when pursuing specific types of adoption, see the Child Welfare Information Gateway factsheet *Adoption Options*: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptoption.cfm

You can also check the resources listed at the end of this document.

The National Foster Care & Adoption Directory allows users to search for 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:

www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

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 smooth the process and help you avoid frustrating situations.

Some Places to Go

The State Statutes Search on the Information Gateway website highlights adoption topics and provides a brief overview and summaries of State laws on each topic: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state

Information regarding who may adopt, timeframes for consent and revocation of consent to adoption, termination of parental rights laws, and more are provided in the database and can be searched by State, Territory, or region.

In many States, the process to adopt a stepchild is different from other kinds

of adoption. To learn more about the legal issues involved, see the Information Gateway factsheet *Stepparent Adoption*: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_step.cfm

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? (Public agency, licensed private agency, independent, or facilitated/unlicensed agency adoption?)
- If we choose intercountry adoption, *what country* will our child come from? (Hague Convention or non-Hague Convention country? See box.)

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 Information Gateway factsheet *Adoption Options*: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoption.cfm

If you choose to adopt a child from another country, you will need to know whether the country from which you plan to adopt is a party to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. Countries that are parties to the Hague Convention have specific requirements for the adoption process, including the home study, parent training and eligibility, applicable forms, and more. The mission of the Hague Convention is to safeguard the children and parents involved in the adoption process.

- The U.S. Department of State website lists countries that are parties to the Hague Convention: www.adoption.state.gov/hague/overview/countries.html
- Information Gateway's factsheet *Intercountry Adoption From Hague Convention and Non-Hague Convention Countries* provides more information on this topic: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/hague.cfm

Step 4: Complete a Home Study

What You Should Know

No matter which 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 gathering information 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 Program to learn the specific regulations in your State. Intercountry adoption may carry special home study requirements, depending on the country and agency involved.

Some Places to Go

The Information Gateway factsheet *The Adoption Home Study Process* provides more information about what is generally included in a home study: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm

The National Foster Care & Adoption Directory lists public adoption agencies in each State and Territory: www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

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, the characteristics of the child or children you are seeking, and a variety of other factors, this process and the time involved in waiting for your child can vary greatly.

- If you are pursuing a foster care adoption, you may review information about a number of children who are waiting for families. Your agency may have adoption events, a photolisting service, TV or video segments describing waiting children, or other ways to let you know about available children waiting for families. You can also view waiting children at the national photolisting website: www.adoptuskids.org. You will often have the opportunity for preplacement visits to get to know a child before he or she moves into your home. Your family may also be able to serve as a resource, foster, or concurrent planning family, working with the agency to support the child's return to his or her birth family as well as being considered as a potential permanent family for the child if reunification does not occur.
- If you are pursuing adoption through a licensed private agency, the expectant parents may select your family from among several prospective adoptive families.
- 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 pursuing intercountry adoption, you may review information about your prospective child and may have the opportunity to meet your child in his or her placement setting (foster home or orphanage).

Some Places to Go

Information Gateway's *Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adoptive Child* provides suggestions for obtaining a child's medical, social, and educational history: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_background.cfm

Foster Parents Considering Adoption, also from Information Gateway, outlines considerations in this type of adoption: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm

Information Gateway's *Intercountry Adoption: Where Do I Start?* provides more information on the placement process when adopting a child from another country: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_inter

Use of Advertising and Facilitators in Adoptive Placements provides summaries of State laws regulating the use of advertising and facilitators in private placements: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/advertisingall.pdf

Step 6: File Necessary Legal Documents

What You Should Know

All domestic adoptions need to be finalized in court. The process varies from State to State. Generally a child must have lived with the adoptive family for at least 6 months before the adoption can be legally finalized. 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 an independent adoption) will

submit a written recommendation of approval of the adoption to the court. You or your attorney can then file with the court to complete the adoption.

For intercountry adoptions, the actual adoption procedure is just one of a series of required legal processes. In addition to the laws of your State, you must also follow the laws of the child's country of origin and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services requirements (see www.uscis.gov). If you adopt from a country that participates in the Hague Convention, the process carries further requirements to safeguard the parties involved. The process to finalize the adoption depends on the type of intercountry adoption, the type of visa the child has, and the laws in your State.

Most adoptions of children from foster care are handled by public child welfare agencies. The national online photolisting at **AdoptUsKids** provides pictures and general descriptions of children in foster care around the country who are waiting for families: www.adoptuskids.org

Information Gateway publishes resource lists of links to photolisting services in each State:

- *State Adoption Photolisting Services Websites:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?rs_id=19&rate_chno=AZ-0005E
- *State Adoption Exchange Websites:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?typeID=81&rate_chno=AZ-0003E

Some Places to Go

The National Foster Care & Adoption Directory provides an attorney referral service for each State: www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

Two Information Gateway factsheets provide more information about finalization of intercountry adoptions:

- *Intercountry Adoption: Where Do I Start?:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_inter
- *Intercountry Adoption From Hague Convention and Non-Hague Convention Countries:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/hague.cfm

Step 7: Parent Your Child

What You Should Know

The final, and most important, step in the adoption process is to be a parent to 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 Parenting Your Child From Birth to Adulthood section of the Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/postadoption/families/parenting.cfm

This includes information about:

- Parenting adopted children of different ages
- Adoption and school issues
- Transitioning from foster to adoptive parenting
- Parenting a child who has been sexually abused
- Postadoption services
- Selecting and working with an adoption therapist

Additional Resources

General Adoption

Adopting.com

www.adopting.com/info2.html
Extensive index of adoption resources on the Internet

Adoptive Families Magazine

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

How to Make Adoption an Affordable Option (PDF – 2,221 KB)

www.smartaboutmoney.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=KDo4VV4Mzfo%3D&tabid=442&mid=832

Booklet from the National Endowment for Financial Education (current through 2004)

Pediatricians With a Special Interest in Adoption and Foster Care Medicine
(PDF – 52 KB)
www.aap.org/sections/adoption/SOAFCAAdoptionDirectory2.pdf
Nationwide listing from the American Academy of Pediatrics of physicians and clinics specializing in assessments of international adoptees

Domestic Adoption

Insight: Open Adoption Resources & Support
www.openadoptioninsight.org
Resources and support for families involved in open adoptions

Openness in Adoption: A Factsheet for Families
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm
A factsheet to help you decide if open adoption is right for your family

Foster Care Adoption

State Child Welfare Agency Websites
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?rs_ID=16&rate_chno=AZ-0004E
Contains links to State child welfare agency websites in all 50 States and the District of Columbia

AdoptUsKids
www.adoptuskids.org
National photolisting service of children in foster care waiting for families

Intercountry Adoption

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
www.uscis.gov (click on Adoption)
Downloadable forms and frequently asked questions about intercountry adoptions

U.S. Department of State
<http://adoption.state.gov>
Publications, news and statistics, factsheets, information on the Hague Convention, and country-specific information

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption
http://hcch.e-vision.nl/index_en.php?act=conventions.text&cid=69
The full text of the May 1993 convention

Joint Council on International Children's Services
www.jcics.org
Membership organization that sets standards, conducts legislative advocacy, and provides country-specific adoption information

State Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions Finalized Abroad
www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/intercountry.cfm
More information about States' laws on intercountry adoption finalization

Kinship Adoption

Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System: A Factsheet for Families
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_kinshi/index.cfm

The benefits, barriers, and resources for kinship placements, including subsidized guardianships

Kinship Care/Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?subjID=30&rate_chno=AR-0028A
Linked list of organizations and resources for grandparents raising grandchildren

AARP Grandparent Information Center

www.aarp.org/family/grandparenting
Information about being a good grandparent, visitation rights, and raising grandchildren

State Factsheets for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children

www.cwla.org/programs/kinship/statefactsheets.htm
State-by-State information about kinship care

Generations United

www.gu.org
Programs, trainings, resources, public policy, and events of interest to grandparents and other relatives raising children

Tools for Working With Kinship

Caregivers (PDF - 130 KB)
www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/Tools-for-working-with-kinship-caregivers.pdf
Training materials, handbooks, assessment tools, links, and publications from the Casey National Center for Resource Family Support

Special Circumstances

Military Families and Adoption: A Factsheet for Families

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/militarybulletin.cfm
Answers to questions about adoption often asked by military families

Stepparent Adoption

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_step.cfm
Factsheet explaining the steps involved in stepparent adoption

Transracial/Transcultural Families

www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/types/families/transracial.cfm
Resources for professionals and families who have adopted or are considering adopting transracially or transculturally

Adoption Publishers/Booksellers

Adopting.org (online)
www.adopting.org

Adoption World Specialties
www.adoptionworld.net

EMK Press
www.emkpress.com

Pact, An Adoption Alliance
www.pactadopt.org

Perspectives Press
www.perspectivespress.com

Tapestry Books
www.tapestrybooks.com