



Military Families Considering Adoption



Adoption is a realistic option for military personnel who want to expand their families, and many military families adopt children from the foster care system. This factsheet provides basic information to help military families learn about the adoption process.

What's Inside:

- Getting started
- Adoption laws
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- Length of time
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- Resources



Getting Started

There are a number of places to find information on adopting:

- Visit your Family Service Center to find out if there's an adoptive parent support group on or near your installation.
- The AdoptUSKids website includes a section on How to Foster and Adopt: Military Guidelines, which has information specifically for military families and includes a contact number for more information: www.adoptuskids.org/resourcecenter/rrtpackets/military.aspx
- AdoptUSKids has produced a booklet, *Wherever My Family Is: That's Home!* that is a comprehensive guide to adoption for military families: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourcecenter/militaryguide.pdf
- The article on Military Money's website "Adoption for Military Families: How To Get Started" covers the basics: www.militarymoney.com/Spouse/MilitaryChildren/tabid/128/itemid/2207/Default.aspx
- *Adoption: Where Do I Start?* is a factsheet by Child Welfare Information Gateway that answers many questions families have when considering adoption: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_start.cfm
- If you live overseas, talk with your installation's school, legal assistance, or medical clinic personnel, who are often familiar with local resources and services.

The Department of Defense's (DoD) Exceptional Family Member Program helps families with a special needs family member before, during, and after transfer or PCS orders. It should be noted that the military defines "special needs" to mean "physical or mental disabilities or severe illness." This differs from what adoption professionals often refer to as "children with special needs"—they include children who may be healthy but are older, in sibling groups, or children of color. For information on how "special needs" is defined in adoption, read Information Gateway's *"Special Needs" Adoption: What Does It Mean?:*

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds

More details about the Exceptional Family Member Program are provided on the MilitaryHOMEFRONT website:

www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_DETAIL_1?section_id=20.40.500.570.0.0.0.0.0¤t_id=20.40.500.570.500.20.0.0.0

Adoption Laws

State law governs U.S. adoptions. The State Statutes Search feature on the Information Gateway website provides information on

the adoption laws in each State:
www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state

Families who want to adopt children from another State need to be aware of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, which is a legally binding agreement between States that regulates the placement of children across State lines. Your social worker or agency should be familiar with its requirements and can provide you with more information.

For families interested in intercountry adoption, adopting a child from a country that is a member of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption is different from adopting a child from a non-Hague Convention country. Read Information Gateway's *Intercountry Adoption From Hague Convention and Non-Hague Convention Countries*:
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/hague.cfm

For families stationed overseas, the Judge Advocate General or legal assistance office may be able to point you to applicable laws, policies, and agreements the United States has with countries where military personnel are stationed. You may want to ask how the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), a treaty between a host country and a nation stationing troops in that country, affects the relocation of children from one country to another.

The Home Study

Generally, a home study—also called a family assessment—is the same procedure for military families as it is for civilian families, although it may differ in the following ways:

- More criminal background checks may be requested because agencies may require background checks for every State in which you have lived.
- To adopt a child or infant living in another State, your adoption professional must check that State's requirements before completing the home study.
- Families overseas must have a home study completed and approved by a social worker licensed in the United States to do adoption home studies. Two agencies licensed to place U.S. children with overseas families are Adopt Abroad (<http://adopt-abroad.com>) and Voice for International Development and Adoption (www.vidaadoptions.org). Also, the International Social Service has social workers in 140 of the countries where the United States has military installations: www.iss-usa.org

Information Gateway offers resources on home studies:

- *The Adoption Home Study Process*, an Information Gateway factsheet, provides information about what is included in a home study and topics discussed in this process: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm
- The National Foster Care and Adoption Directory contains a State-by-State listing

of adoption program managers and adoptive parent support groups:
www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

Permanent Change of Station or Deployment

In the event of a family's permanent change of station (PCS) or deployment, you may be able to have some of your home study documents transferred to an agency near your new home or installation. Some agencies may require their own forms and protocols for the home study.

In case of deployment, it is very important to keep your command informed about your adoption process to ensure that essential documents are completed and delivered. Appropriate powers of attorney also are important to have in place for a deployed service member.

Before a child moves to another State to be adopted, administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children will need to grant approval. When a child has been legally adopted, families are free to move to different States.

Length of Time

To complete a home study takes at least 3 months. The time it takes for a child to be placed in your home will vary greatly depending on the agency or the country. It is not unusual to wait 2 years or longer for a child to be identified for an adoptive

family. Older children may require more preplacement visits over a longer period of time to ease their transition into a new family. States' terms for the preplacement plan will vary. Preplacement transition plans are based on agency policy and the needs of the child or children. Out-of-State or overseas families may need to travel to the home State of the child to meet and visit with him or her. Realistic expectations about the waiting period and making use of that time to prepare for the child you would like to parent can help ease the frustration of the wait.

Leave

Military service members are not eligible for leave under the Family Medical Leave Act. However, legislative changes allow service members to be eligible for up to 21 days of nonchargeable leave in conjunction with the adoption of a child. If both parents are in the military, only one can take adoption leave. See DoD instruction Number 1327.06 (page 17) from June 16, 2009: www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/132706p.pdf

Costs

The costs of adoption can range from nothing, if you adopt from the foster care system and use a public agency, to more than \$40,000 if you adopt independently (that is, without an agency). This is an area of great fluctuation. Several resources can help defray the costs of adoption:

- **Adoption reimbursement:** According to DoD Instruction 1341.9, up to \$2,000 per child or up to \$5,000 per year for qualifying expenses is available to military families whose adoptions were arranged by a qualified adoption agency. Benefits are paid after the adoption is completed. Read more here: www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/134109p.pdf
- **Adoption assistance (or adoption subsidies):** For some eligible children, this assistance is another possible resource. The subsidies will vary depending on the child's needs.
- **Tax credit:** Military families are eligible for an adoption tax credit. For more information, go to the Information Gateway webpage that lists grants, loans, and tax credits for adoption: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/grants_loans.cfm

Two Information Gateway factsheets offer more information:

- *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm
- *Costs of Adopting:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost

Postadoption Services

- For medical coverage, an adopted child or a child who is placed for adoption before the adoption is finalized should be enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS)

immediately upon placement: www.tricare.mil/DEERS. Patient affairs personnel at specific medical treatment facilities may have more information, and details about access and eligibility are available on the TRICARE website: www.tricare.mil

- Family service centers located on most major military installations can provide military families with information regarding adoption reimbursement and other familial benefits.
- Information Gateway has a number of factsheets:
 - *Postadoption Services*, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.cfm
 - *Parenting Your Adopted Preschooler*, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preschool.cfm
 - *Parenting Your Adopted School-Age Child*, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent_school_age
 - *Parenting Your Adopted Teenager*, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent_teenager
 - *Selecting and Working With an Adoption Therapist*, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_therapist.cfm
 - *Parenting a Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused: A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents*, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_abused
- If you are stationed in the United States, your adoption caseworker or adoption agency can help you find the services available in your State. Information Gateway has a webpage

of links to adoption information provided by State child welfare agencies in all 50 States and the District of Columbia: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?typeID=8&rate_chno=AZ-0001E

- Adoptive parent support groups are a great source of information about the services in your area. Some military installations have active adoptive parent support groups by State here: www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

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Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway
www.childwelfare.gov/adoption

Defense Finance and Accounting Service
www.dfas.mil/militarypay/adoptionreimbursement.html

MilitaryHOMEFRONT
www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/tf/adoption

Military OneSource
www.militaryonesource.com
Counselors are available at 800.342.9647 to connect families with adoption and therapeutic resources.

National Military Family Association (NMFA)
www.militaryfamily.org/resources/links/adoption.html

U.S. Department of State
www.adoption.state.gov