



## Military Families and Adoption



Adoption is a realistic option for military personnel who want to expand their families. This factsheet answers the most common questions asked by military families.

*Adoption: Where Do I Start?* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_start.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_start.cfm)), a factsheet by Child Welfare Information Gateway, answers many of the questions families have when considering adoption. Visit your Family Service Center and see if they are aware of an adoptive parent support group on

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or near your installation. If you live overseas, talk with your installation's school or medical clinic personnel, who are often familiar with local resources and services.

## Where can I learn about adoption laws?

State law governs U.S. adoptions. State Statutes ([www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/)), compiled by Child Welfare Information Gateway, provide information on the adoption laws in each State. Your Judge Advocate General (JAG) officer may be able to point you to applicable laws and policies as well as applicable agreements between the United States and other countries where military personnel are stationed.

## Does the home study differ for military families?

The home study process will generally be the same for military families. *The Adoption Home Study Process* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_homstu.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm)), a Child Welfare Information Gateway factsheet, provides information regarding what is generally included in a home study and topics discussed in this process. The process may differ slightly for military families in the following ways:

- More criminal background checks may be requested because agencies often require

background checks for every State in which you have lived.

- Overseas families will need to have a home study completed by a social worker licensed in the United States to do adoption home studies.
- Adoption of a child born in the United States requires checking with the State adoption specialist in the **State where the child resides** to verify that State's requirements **before** completing the home study.
- Adoption of a child born outside the United States requires families to comply with the laws of their State of record, United States immigration law, and the laws of the foreign country where the child resides.

The National Foster Care & Adoption Directory ([www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/index.cfm)) contains a State-by-State listing of adoption specialists and adoptive parent support groups.

## How will deployment impact my home study?

You may be able to have some of your home study documents transferred to an agency near your installation; however, many agencies require their own forms and protocols for the home study. The International Social Services ([www.iss-usa.org/](http://www.iss-usa.org/))—phone: 410.230.2734—has social workers in 140

countries where the United States has military installations.

## How long will this process take?

While each family's situation is different, it usually takes at least 2 to 10 months (depending on agency waiting lists and training requirements) to complete the home study. After that, it may take as many as 6 to 12 months for a child to be placed. It is not unusual to wait up to 2 years to find an appropriate adoptive child. Older children may require more pre-placement visits to ease their transition into a new family. Overseas families may need to travel back to the United States to meet and visit with their child. 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.

## How long will I have to stay in State?

Families are able to move to different States after a child has been placed in their home; however, the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children needs to grant prior approval any time a child moves to another State for the purposes of adoptive placement. *Military Families and Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/militarybulletin.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/militarybulletin.cfm)) has more information on the Interstate Compact.

## What if I am deployed?

Deployment Deferment or Extension of Assignment are options military families may request if they need to remain in one State to finalize an adoption.

## How much leave can I get?

Military families are not eligible for leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA); however, according to U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 1341.9 ([www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/html/13419.htm](http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/html/13419.htm)), commanders are encouraged to approve requests for ordinary leave once a child is placed in the home of a service member. Check with your JAG if there is a question about this instruction, as interpretation varies from installation to installation.

**2006 Update:** As of January 6, 2006, primary caretakers in military adoptive families are eligible for 21 days of paid maternity leave and guaranteed health coverage for their families through the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2006 (P.L.109-163).

The instruction states that single members or one member of a military couple shall receive a 4-month assignment and deployment deferment immediately following the date a child is placed. A child is considered a dependent in determining travel and transportation allowances (Public Law No. 102-190, section 621, reference (d)).

## How much will adoption cost?

The costs of adoption can range from nothing (if you adopt from the foster care system and use a public agency), to more than \$30,000 (if you adopt independently). *Costs of Adopting* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s\\_cost/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost/index.cfm)), a Child Welfare Information Gateway publication, has more information. There are several resources to help defray the cost 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 complete. The National Military Family Association ([www.nmfa.org](http://www.nmfa.org)) has a fact-sheet, DoD Adoption Reimbursement Program ([www.nmfa.org/FactSheets/Adoption.pdf](http://www.nmfa.org/FactSheets/Adoption.pdf)), with further information on allowable expenses.

- **Adoption Subsidies** (sometimes called Adoption Assistance) are available for some children with special needs. A Child Welfare Information Gateway factsheet, *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care: A Factsheet for Families* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_subsid.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm)), is another resource. Not all children will qualify for adoption subsidies, and the subsidies will vary depending on the needs of the child.

The military defines special needs more narrowly to mean “persons with physical or mental disabilities or severe illness.” This differs from what adoption professionals often refer to as children with special needs—more broadly defined to include children who may be healthy but are older, in sibling groups, or members of a minority group.

## What services are available after adoption?

**Child Development Programs** are available at approximately 300 DoD locations, including 800 childcare centers and approximately 9,000 family childcare homes. The services may include full day, part-day, and hourly (drop-in) childcare; part-day preschool programs; before- and after-school programs for school-aged children; and extended hours care, including nights and weekends. Not all services are available at all installations.

The **Exceptional Family Member Program** within the military provides many services including assisting families who need to be stationed in areas that provide for specific medical or other services that might not be available in remote locations. For additional information on special needs resources in the military, go to the Special Needs Network website at [www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page?\\_pageid=73,44033&\\_dad=itc&\\_schema=PORTAL&section\\_id=20.40.500.570.0.0.0.0.0](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page?_pageid=73,44033&_dad=itc&_schema=PORTAL&section_id=20.40.500.570.0.0.0.0.0).

**Family Service Centers** located on every major military installation can provide military families with information regarding adoption reimbursement and other familial benefits.

**Postadoption Services** are provided by many public child welfare agencies. The Child Welfare Information Gateway factsheet, *Postadoption Services* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_postadoption.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.cfm)), has more information. If you are stationed in the United States, your adoption caseworker or State Adoption Specialist can help you find the services available in your State. Adoptive parent support groups are also a great source of information about the services in your area. Some military installations have active adoptive parent support groups.

*Selecting and Working With an Adoption Therapist* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/r\\_tips.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/r_tips.cfm)) is another factsheet from Child Welfare Information Gateway that may be helpful.

## What about medical coverage for my child?

An adopted child, including a child placed in the home of a service member by a placement agency, is eligible for benefits after the child is enrolled in the **Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS)**—**phone: 800.538.9552**. The patient affairs personnel at a specific medical treatment facility may have information. Specific information on access and eligibility is available on the TRICARE website at [www.tricare.osd.mil/](http://www.tricare.osd.mil/) or by calling the DoD Worldwide **Tricare Information Center at 888.363.2273**.

## What organizations can provide more information?

### Military HOMEFRONT

**Website:** [www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil)

The MilitaryHOMEFRONT web portal is a central, trusted, and up-to-date source for service members and their families to obtain information about all Department of Defense Quality of Life programs and services. The Troops & Families section of this website offers information and resources about children, teens, and parenting.

### Military OneSource

**Phone:** 1.800.342.9647

**Website:** [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)

Military OneSource is an online, phone, and face-to-face resource for military personnel and their families. The Children & Youth section of this website offers general resources on parenting as well as a section on adoption.

**National Military Family Association (NMFA)**

2500 North Van Dorn Street, Suite 102  
Alexandria, VA 22302-1601

**Phone:** 703.931.6632

**Fax:** 703.931.4600

**Website:** [www.nmfa.org](http://www.nmfa.org)

NMFA is the only national organization dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families. Their mission is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through education, information, and advocacy. They offer information on benefits for adoption reimbursement and health care, but *not* on placement.

Your family could be one of the many military families who successfully adopt each year. For more information, read *Military Families and Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/militarybulletin.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/militarybulletin.cfm)). For hard copies of the factsheets mentioned in this publication, contact Child Welfare Information Gateway at 800.394.3366.