



Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A FACTSHEET
FOR FAMILIES

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[www.childwelfare.gov/
pubs/empiezo.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/empiezo.cfm)

Adoption: Where Do I Start?



This factsheet 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.

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Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children’s Bureau



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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 websites on this topic. See the resource list at the end of this factsheet for more information.

Some Places to Go

To learn more about what to expect when pursuing specific types of adoption, see the related Child Welfare Information Gateway (Information Gateway) factsheet *Adoption Options: A Factsheet 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 (www.childwelfare.gov/nad), available from Information Gateway, 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 State Statutes database (www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/search/index.cfm), compiled by Information Gateway, 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 Information Gateway factsheet *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.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm), an Information Gateway factsheet, provides more information regarding what is generally included in a home study. The National Adoption Directory, on the Information Gateway website, lists the State Adoption Specialist in each State and Territory (www.childwelfare.gov/nad).

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

Information Gateway has a number of resources for expectant parents who are considering adoption including a factsheet *Are You Pregnant and Thinking About Adoption?* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_pregna.cfm

Intercountry Adoption, another Information Gateway factsheet, provides more information on the placement process when adopting a child from another country. www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_inter/index.cfm

Foster Parents Considering Adoption, an Information Gateway factsheet, outlines considerations in this type of adoption. www.childwelfare.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) provides pictures and general descriptions of children in foster care around the country who are waiting for families. The Information Gateway resource listing, *State Child Welfare Agency Websites* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?rs_ID=16&rate_chno=AZ-0004E) 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.childwelfare.gov/nad) provides an attorney referral service for each State. The Information Gateway factsheet *Intercountry Adoption* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_inter/index.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 Information Gateway publications:

Adopting Children with Developmental Disabilities

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_devdis.cfm

Adopting a Child with Special Needs

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_specne/index.cfm

Adoption and School Issues

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_school/index.cfm

Adoption and the Stages of Development

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_stages/index.cfm

After Adoption: The Need for Services

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_after/index.cfm

Foster Parents Considering Adoption

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm

Impact of Adoption on Adopted Persons

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_issues.cfm

Parenting the Adopted Adolescent
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoles/index.cfm

Parenting the Sexually Abused Child
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_abused/index.cfm

The Value of Adoptive Parent Groups
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_value.cfm

Tips on Selecting an Adoption Therapist
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/r_tips.cfm

Additional Resources

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.adoptivemagazine.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 Websites
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?rs_ID=16&rate_chno=AZ-0004E
 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 Website
<http://travel.state.gov/adopt.html>
 International Adoptions booklet, important notices, factsheets, 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.childwelfare.gov/general/legal/statutes/international.cfm
This Information Gateway legal product has more information about States' laws regarding intercountry adoption finalization.

Pediatricians With a Special Interest in Adoption and Foster Care

www.aap.org/sections/adoption/adopt-states/adoption-map.html
National and international listings of pediatricians.

Kinship Adoption Resources

Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_kinshi/index.cfm

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

Kinship Care/Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Resource Listing

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?subjID=30&rate_chno=AR-0028A
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/projg&o.htm
Seeks to improve the lives of these caregivers and the children they are raising.

Kinship Care Factsheets 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.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_gay/index.cfm
This factsheet explores the status of gay/
lesbian parenting, issues, laws, and more.

**Military Families and Adoption: A Factsheet
for Families**
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_milita.cfm
A factsheet answering questions often asked
by military families.

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

Single Parent Adoption: What You Need to Know

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_single/index.cfm
Factsheet explaining steps to single parent
adoption.

Stepparent Adoption

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/r_step.cfm
Factsheet explaining steps involved in step-
parent adoption.

Transracial and Transcultural Adoption

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm
Factsheet providing tips and considerations
for transracial and transcultural adoptions.