



Working With Military Families as They Pursue Adoption

Adoption is a great way to build a family, and military families can be excellent resources for children in need of permanent homes. However, the adoption process can be challenging at times for any prospective adoptive family, and military families may face special circumstances not experienced by civilian prospective adoptive families. Adoption workers must understand the unique benefits and challenges of working with military families (including those living temporarily outside the United States) and familiarize themselves with the resources available both inside and outside the military support structure.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Benefits of military families as adoptive resources for children

Potential challenges and solutions in working with military families

Military resources that assist adoptive families

Organizations with resources to support military families

Benefits of Using Military Families as Adoptive Resources for Children

For active military couples, military life and deployment may strain relationships in areas like adjusting to life before and after deployments, handling finances, parenting (especially if one or both parents is deployed outside the United States), and coping with long separations. However, the reality is that children and youth in military families generally fare as well as those in civilian families. Military families can make excellent adoptive families because they have experience with adaptation and flexibility, may encounter and/or live among a range of diverse cultures, and have access to a number of support services and military benefits.

For a comprehensive view of what military families face in considering adoption, read *Answering the Call: Wherever My Family Is: That's Home!* from AdoptUSKids at http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/wherever-my-family-is-thats-home.pdf. In addition to resources and other information, this booklet lists and refutes a number of myths having to do with military life or other characteristics that may prevent workers from viewing military families as good potential adoptive families.

Structure and Flexibility

Military families receive training and support in how to be flexible and organized through multiple moves and how to maintain family stability during periods of adversity and separation. They are accustomed to a structured lifestyle and experienced in adjusting to new surroundings, building new connections, and supporting each other all over the world. Children and youth in military families often benefit from this combination of structure and flexibility and develop these skills too.

Military Support Networks

Military installations have built-in support networks for military families, including substantial health-care and housing benefits and “ready-made” communities. More benefits for adoptive families include adoption reimbursements, Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) for children (as well as adult family members) with particular medical and/or educational needs, and New Parent Support Programs on many installations. (See page 4 for more information about military supports for families.)

Considerations for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

Many children and youth who are adopted—particularly those adopted internationally or from the U.S. foster care system—have experienced some form of trauma. When finding homes for these children, it is especially important to consider the individual needs of each child or youth when determining whether a specific military family is a good fit. Some aspects of military life, such as the potential stress and uncertainty of a parent’s deployment or frequent moves, may prove challenging for some children. However, the structure that many military families can provide, as well as the support services and other military benefits they receive during periods of change, may more than offset these potential challenges for many children.

For more information and resources about working with children who have experienced trauma, see the Trauma-Informed Practice section of the Information Gateway website at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/trauma/>. Information Gateway also offers a factsheet for families, *Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma*, that may be helpful and is available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/child-trauma/>.

Potential Challenges and Solutions in Working With Military Families

Most of the challenges of working with military families center on the fact that these families are sometimes subject to frequent moves and/or deployment, or one parent is deployed frequently or for longer periods of time.

Permanent Change of Station (PCS)

If a family has already started the process of adoption and receives orders for a PCS, the family may be able to have their home study documents transferred to an agency near the new home or installation. However, many agencies require a new home study using their own forms and protocols. Home study requirements also vary from State to State, and a family's home study will have to reflect the conditions of their new home State.

Nonprofit agencies that can help workers and U.S. military service members with adoptions outside of the United States include:

- The International Social Service has social workers in 140 of the countries where the United States has military installations. Visit their website at www.iss-usa.org.
- Adopt Abroad has representatives in Europe, Japan, Korea, and the Middle East. Visit their website at <http://adopt-abroad.com>.
- VIDA (Voice for International Development and Adoption) is a not-for-profit agency with programs that span four continents. Visit their website at www.vidaadoptions.org.

Deployment

In the case of deployment, it is most likely that only the active military member of the family will be required to be out of the area. Families that are close to finalizing an adoption may request a deployment deferment or extension of assignment. This deferment is available for single parents or one member of a military couple and is more likely to be granted once a child has been placed in the home.

A deploying military family member will need to grant power of attorney to his or her spouse (or another family member, in the case of a single parent adoption), and more information about power of attorney is available on the Military OneSource website at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/legal?content_id=269356. The spouse or family member should also have a mailing address for the military member during deployment, as well as a method for reaching him or her in an emergency. It is a good idea for the military parent to keep his or her command informed about the adoption process to facilitate timely completion and delivery of essential documents.

When working with military families, it is important to be aware of the emotional cycle of deployment. Families experience common emotional stages around a family member's deployment that may include denial, detachment, anger, and worry (predeployment); disorganization and stabilization (during deployment); and apprehension, conflict, and renegotiation of roles (upon return). Adoption workers who are knowledgeable about the military experience are more likely to view these stages as normal parts of a military family's life, rather than as signs of dysfunction.¹

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

The ICPC establishes procedures for ensuring the safety and stability of placements across State lines and applies when a child travels from one State to another for the purpose of adoption. All 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have signed this agreement, which requires an application for approval before a child can be transferred into the receiving State for placement. Parties must comply with the law of the sending State (the State where the child originated) before the sending State's ICPC office will approve the child's transfer. Also, home studies in the receiving State, where the family resides, cannot be initiated until ICPC receives the request from the sending State and gives

¹ Virginia Department of Social Services. (2009). Strengthening military families. *Virginia Child Protection Newsletter*, 86.

permission to initiate the study. For more information on interjurisdictional placement, visit <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/interjurisdictional/icpc/>.

The Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA) officials will look at the State where the adoption is finalized to determine the appropriate receiving State (e.g., if a family is adopting a child from Kansas but is finalizing its adoption in Virginia, an ICPC referral would be necessary from Kansas to file in Virginia). For military families stationed overseas, ICPC may not apply. Find out about specific States at http://icpc.aphsa.org/content/APHSA/en/resources/LINKS/STATE_CONTACTS.html.

Finding Solutions to Challenges

Successful recruitment campaigns and adoption processes with military families depend on cooperative relationships among military services and agency personnel. Adoption workers need to understand and respect the military command structure and lifestyle, and military personnel may need to learn about the adoption process.

Some strategies that adoption workers have used to overcome potential barriers to adoption by military families include the following:

- Being aware of their own cultural, racial, social class, or other biases, or myths about military families, as they pertain to adoption
- Learning the cultural standards, protocols, and communication styles of military personnel to better appreciate the unique culture of many military families
- Developing collaborative relationships with military personnel on installations (e.g., social workers, chaplains), and providing training, when needed, to encourage their help with recruiting families, completing home studies, and conducting postplacement follow-up visits for families stationed overseas

- Maintaining a positive and creative attitude to help military families believe that most barriers to adoption they encounter can be overcome
- Offering flexibility in scheduling education sessions and home studies
- Providing the final court hearing by telephone after completing postplacement services

Military Resources That Assist Adoptive Families

Adoption professionals can help families draw on the resources available to military families. To find an overview of adoption benefits and allowances offered by the Department of Defense (DoD), visit the Military OneSource website at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/taxes?content_id=267085.

These benefits and allowances include the following:

Financial Assistance

Military family members are eligible for reimbursement of some adoption expenses. DoD's updated Adoption Reimbursement Policy (Instruction 1341.9) describes the policy and responsibilities for the reimbursement. Up to \$2,000 per child (but no more than \$5,000 per calendar year) can be reimbursed for qualifying expenses. This benefit is available to military families whose adoptions were arranged by a qualified adoption agency and is paid after the adoption is complete. Find more information at <http://www.dfas.mil/militarymembers/payentitlements/adoptionreimbursement.html>.

Military families are also eligible for the same adoption tax credit that is available to civilian families. For more information, go to the Information Gateway webpage that lists grants, loans, and tax credits for adoption at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/expenses/grants-loans/>.

Medical Care, Benefits, and Eligibility

Health care benefits for military family members are provided under TRICARE. Family members select a primary care manager (PCM) and must obtain referrals for specialty care. At some installations, family members must select a military treatment facility for a PCM. Some of these facilities are full service hospitals, and others operate more like clinics. At other locations, a PCM may be selected at a civilian medical facility.

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) (800.538.9552).

Specific information about access and eligibility is available by calling the DoD Worldwide TRICARE Information Center at 888.363.2273 and online at <http://www.tricare.mil/>.

Leave

Service members may receive up to 21 days of nonchargeable leave following an adoption. This leave must be approved by the service member's supervisor and is dependent upon mission requirements and other circumstances. For dual-military couples who adopt a child, this leave may be authorized for only one service member.

Family Services

Adoption Specialty Consultations are available to active duty, National Guard, or reserve service members through Military OneSource. Adoption consultants answer questions specific to military services and benefits and help families find adoption agencies and support groups. Find more information at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/parenting/adoption?content_id=273295

Military and Family Support Centers are located on most major military installations and provide military families with information about adoption reimbursements and other familial benefits. Each branch of the service has a different name for these centers. Assistance locating installation program and services nearby can be obtained by calling Military OneSource at 800.342.9647 or by accessing the installation program directory at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>.

Affordable child development programs provide child care at many DoD locations. The DoD requires the centers and family child care homes to provide high-quality services that are consistent from one installation to another, although not all services are available at all installations. More information is available on the Military OneSource website at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/cyt/leaders?Content_id=271919

Family Advocacy Programs exist in each branch of the military. These programs provide individual and family counseling services for military families. Most of the programs are focused on preventing spousal and child abuse and developing a healthy lifestyle. New Parent Support Programs at some installations are one component of the Family Advocacy Program. DoD Instruction No. 6400-05 and the Military OneSource website provide more information at www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/640005p.pdf and at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/phases-military-leadership?content_id=266712.

The Exceptional Family Member Program enables military families to have a family member's special medical and/or educational needs taken into consideration during the assignment coordination process (for transfer or PCS orders). In addition, each installation has EFMP family support personnel in the family center to assist families with information and referral about local resources both on the installation and in the community. However, while an effort is made to accommodate any special needs a family may have, depending on the military mission, it cannot be guaranteed that those needs will be met.

It should be noted that the military defines “special needs” to mean “physical or mental disabilities or severe illness.” This differs from what some States may refer to as “children with special needs” with regard to adoption, which may be more broadly defined to include children who may be healthy but are older than 3 to 8 years, members of sibling groups, or children of color.

Not all countries and military bases support adoption of children with special medical and/or educational needs. More details about the Exceptional Family Member Program are provided on the Military OneSource website at http://www.militaryonesource.mil/efmp?content_id=271240.

Organizations With Resources to Support Military Families

AdoptUSKids

The Children’s Bureau funds AdoptUSKids, a comprehensive, multifaceted project that includes an online photolisting service providing pictures and brief descriptions of U.S. children in foster care waiting for families, as well as a registry of waiting families. For answers to questions about adoption and the military, go to www.adoptuskids.org/resourcecenter/rrtpackets/military.aspx.

Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA)

www.aaicama.org/cms

AAICAMA is a source of technical and legal assistance, training, and information on interstate and intrastate adoption. The website was created to help State and local agency adoption professionals work effectively with families who have adoption assistance agreements and move from one State to another.

The Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

<http://icpc.aphsa.org/content/AAICPC/en/home.html>

ICPC is a membership organization that does not work directly with families. From its website, caseworkers can access names and contact information of the compact administrators who facilitate activities and placements under ICPC in their States.

Intercountry Adoption, U.S. Department of State

www.adoption.state.gov

The Office of Children’s Issues formulates, develops, and coordinates policies and programs and provides direction to Foreign Service posts on intercountry adoption. Caseworkers can refer families to the website, which offers notices, alerts, statistics, and information about the Hague Convention and visas.

International Social Service (ISS), United States of America Branch, Inc.

<http://iss-usa.org/>

ISS is a network of social workers in 146 countries. It is a nonsectarian, nonprofit agency that expedites sociolegal communication among social service agencies internationally. Services include arranging home studies and home study certifications, background checks, repatriations, and more. On this website, social work professionals can find out if ISS can serve a family in a particular country.

Military OneSource

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/> or 800.342.9647

Military OneSource is a confidential DoD-funded program providing comprehensive information on every aspect of military life at no cost to active duty, National Guard, and reserve members and their families. It includes information about deployment, reunion, relationships, parenting and childhood services, and more.

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

NMFA is dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families through education, information, and advocacy. For information on benefits for adoption reimbursement and health care, visit <http://www.militaryfamily.org/info-resources/adoption.html>.

U.S. Department of Justice, Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

www.uscis.gov

USCIS administers the nation's immigration laws, including laws about adoption from foreign countries. Its website provides a list of USCIS offices, online forms, and answers to frequently asked questions about adoption.

For the latest resources in adoption issues that apply to military families, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/adoption-by-family-type/military-families/>.

Suggested Citation

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Working with military families as they pursue adoption*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.



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

