

# Working With Military Families as They Pursue Adoption of Children and Youth

The adoption process for military and civilian families is similar in most ways. Some child welfare professionals may be reluctant to support military parents through the adoption process due to limited understanding of military life. A deeper awareness of the resources and culture that support military families may help adoption professionals place children in caring and stable families.

This bulletin provides an overview of the ways military families meet the needs of children and youth who need forever families. It addresses concerns specific to families with one or more service members interested in adoption and provides resources to assist adoption professionals in better serving these sometimes-overlooked prospective adoptive parents.

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## VALUABLE RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH ELIGIBLE FOR ADOPTION

The military culture enables families from military communities to provide loving, stable homes. They have experience adapting to new settings and often live among a range of diverse cultures. Military families receive support and training in how to be flexible and organized through multiple moves and in 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 use these skills throughout their lives.

[Military OneSource](#), a program funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, provides key information and support on a range of life topics, including [adoption](#). The program helps families navigate adoption processes and connects them with resources, services, and additional supports.

To gain a better understanding of military culture, visit the [Military Life Cycle](#) web section on the Military OneSource website.

### MILITARY SUPPORT NETWORKS

Many military installations have built-in support networks for military families to help them raise and care for their children, including substantial health-care and housing benefits and "ready-made" communities. Other supports and benefits for adoptive families through Military OneSource include [adoption consultations](#), the [Family Advocacy Program](#), [affordable child care programs](#), and the [Exceptional Family Member Program](#).

For the latest resources in adoption issues that apply to military families, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Adoption by Family Type: Military Families](#) webpage.

## UNIQUE ADOPTION CONCERNS FACING MILITARY FAMILIES

Adoption professionals may feel that parents whose work involves frequent moves or overseas deployments cannot provide a stable home for the children they may adopt. These aspects of military life may prove challenging for some children. When considering adoptive homes for children, it is important to recognize the individual needs of each child or youth when determining whether a specific family—military or civilian—is a good fit.

### PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION (PCS)

Military families may receive PCS orders, which require that they move to a new installation for up to 3 years. If a family has already started the process of adoption and receives PCS orders, it may be able to have its home study documents transferred to an agency near the new home. 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 must reflect the requirements of its new State.

## UNDERSTANDING RESIDENCY FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE MILITARY FAMILIES

Even if the entire family is stationed overseas, they can maintain their legal residence in the United States and use it for domestic adoption. For international adoptions, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the Convention) is an international treaty designed to promote the best interests of children, birth families, and adoptive families in adoptions between participating countries. Families that are stationed in countries party to the Convention should consult the country's [Central Authority](#) for specific details involved in the adoption of a child in the United States. The U.S. Department of State provides the name and contact details of each country's adoption authority on its [country-specific](#) web sections.

When determining an active-duty military family's residency for purposes of a foster care or adoption placement, a State may consist of the following:

- *Permanent duty station:* The military installation where an active-duty service member is currently assigned and is usually physically located
- *State of legal residency:* The State in which the active-duty service member is considered a resident for tax and voting purposes

When determining which State to designate for residency, the prospective adoptive family should consider the following factors:

1. Which State would result in a timelier placement for the child?
2. Which State would result in a placement that is in the best interest of the child?

## The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

The ICPC establishes procedures for ensuring the safety and stability of placements across State lines. It 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. Visit Information Gateway's [Interjurisdictional Placements](#) web section for more information.

## DEPLOYMENT

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

A deploying military family member will need to grant [power of attorney](#) to their spouse (or another family member, in the case of a single-parent adoption). Adoption workers can direct military families to Military OneSource's [Parenting Through Deployment](#) web section to learn more.

When working with military families, being aware of the emotional cycle of deployment is important. Families experience some common emotional stages around a family member's deployment, which may include guilt, sadness, and anger (predeployment); disorganization and numbness (during deployment); and comfort and renegotiation of roles (upon return). Watch the webinar "[The Emotional Cycle of Deployment](#)" by Military OneSource to learn more.

### **Intercountry Adoption: Military Families Interested in Adopting a Child From Abroad**

Military families who are interested in adopting a child from abroad will become familiar with one of two different adoption processes: the Hague Adoption Process (the Convention) and the [Non-Hague Process](#).

If a U.S. military member resides in a [Convention country](#), that country may have additional requirements for families to complete the [adoption process](#). The Department of State outlines specific details about the adoption process for each country.

### **STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH MILITARY FAMILIES**

Strategies that adoption workers have used to address their reluctance to work with military families include the following:

- Be aware of their cultural, racial, social class, or other biases about military families, as they pertain to adoption.

- Learn the cultural standards, protocols, and communication styles of military personnel to better appreciate the unique culture of many military families.
- Develop collaborative relationships with military personnel on installations (e.g., social workers, chaplains).
- Know what resources the military offers to serve military families (Visit the [Service Providers & Leaders](#) web section on the Military OneSource website for information, documents, and products).
- Maintain a positive attitude to help military families navigate the adoption process.

### **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WITH RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES**

#### **[Intercountry Adoption](#), U.S. Department of State**

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 other information. The Department of State's website includes important information regarding [adoption by U.S. citizens living outside the United States](#). Visit the [For Adoption Professionals](#) web section for additional guidance and resources.

#### **[Intercountry Adoption](#), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)**

USCIS is responsible for determining the suitability and eligibility of prospective adoptive parents who are U.S. citizens pursuing intercountry adoption. For more information, see the [USCIS Citizenship for Military Family Members](#) page which includes "Naturalization or Citizenship for Children of Service Members."

### **National Council For Adoption (NCFA)**

NCFA provides resources and education on adoption issues for all people and organizations so all children can thrive in nurturing, permanent families. "[Adoption Options for Members of the Military](#)" (also available as a [webinar](#)) and "[Supporting Military Families in Adoption](#)" offer practical tips and guidance to equip adoption professionals who are working with military families.

### **National Military Family Association (NMFA)**

[NMFA](#) is dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families through education, information, and advocacy

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