



THE ADOPTION HOME STUDY

In order to adopt a child, adoptive parents are required to complete a very thorough life, home and background screening called an adoption home study. A home study requires a detailed questionnaire, one or two home visits, interviews and a variety of documents and verifications (some requirements may be specific to the state you live in).

We have included checklists and tip sheets that include the most frequently requested documents, but please know that your specific home study provider may have additional requirements. This is really a starting place to help get you prepared to complete your home study as smoothly as possible.

Looking at the home study process as an opportunity to prepare for parenthood and adoption will help you sail through the questions, forms, and requirements. It isn't about "proving" you will be good parents, it is about ensuring you are ready for the legal requirements and responsibilities required to adopt a child.

Most people find it odd and uncomfortable to open their home and personal lives to an outsider. It is good to keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to ensure that children are placed in safe and loving families who are ready to care for them financially and emotionally.

The good news is that nearly all people who apply to adopt, successfully complete the home study process. Its intent is to screen out people with severe mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, a criminal record of child abuse or sexual misconduct, or not enough income to raise a child in a safe manner.

If your home life is stable, you are in reasonable good health, have enough income to raise a child, and are a loving, responsible person with a heartfelt desire to parent a child for life, you can usually adopt.

Adoption Home Study Myths:

"They can't adopt because..."

- *They've only been married two years.*
- *They have biological kids.*
- *They are over 45.*
- *They've already adopted once.*
- *He has a physical disability.*
- *They both work full time.*
- *They don't make enough money.*
- *They don't own a home.*
- *She's a single parent.*



HOME STUDY 101

There is not set format, checklist, or plan that all home studies must adhere to. Each state has specific regulations that must be met but other than that, each adoption agency or independent home study provider has the freedom to develop their own format, questionnaire, requirements, schedule, etc.

Our discussion and checklists contain typical requirements, but please be aware your specific adoption professional has more, less, or different requirements for you depending on their policies and the type of adoption you are choosing.

A home study is a written report that demonstrates that you are ready legally, physically, and emotionally to adopt. It also gives you time to think and prepare to be parents through adoption

The home study itself is a written report that summarizes the findings of the social worker who has met with you and reviewed all of your documentation.

On average, the home study process takes between three and six months to complete. Private providers are usually faster than public

(state based) organizations. The timing of your home study involves how long it takes you to submit all the required documents, the scheduling of the home visits and interviews, and the wait to request certified documents needed.

During the wait for home study completion, you can be working on your adoption profile and website. This isn't idle wait time, but rather ensuring you are receiving and responding to social worker requests, and working on other aspects of your adoption.

Let's begin by going step-by-step through the major requests you will encounter in your home study.

YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR QUESTIONNAIRE

The first step typically is a very detailed questionnaire, often referred to as your autobiography. Each adopting parent will need to complete this for themselves. It can seem overwhelming and intimidating, but it is basically the story of your life.

You will be encouraged to share about your parents, how and where you were raised, their parenting styles, your siblings, and your role in the family growing up. It will include current information about where your extended family lives and how involved they are with you now.

You will share about your high school and college, as well as your career history. You will be asked what educational level you reached, if you have



plans for future education, and what you think about education for your child. Are you satisfied at your current employer or do you have plans to change in the future?

If you are married, there will be questions about your relationship including how you met, your courtship, and how you handle disagreements and make decisions together. You will be asked your spouse's strengths, weaknesses, and how you think they will be as a parent. You may be asked to provide a specific situation that you faced together and overcame.

If you are single, you will be asked about your network of friends and family as a support system for you and a child. Your social worker will ask about your social life and how you plan to integrate a child into it.

For people who have been previously married, prepare to address those marriages including what led to the dissolution. You may want to demonstrate what is different in your relationship now as compared to previous marriages. If you have children from that union, you will need to discuss your relationship with your ex-spouse and how you manage co-parenting your children together.

Typically, you will discuss daily routines and normal aspects of your life, such as your workdays, how you spend weekends, activities you do together and separately, and what holidays look like.

You will be asked about your experience around children, nieces, or nephews. There are no right or wrong answers, but you will have opportunity to discuss experiences you have had volunteering, coaching, babysitting, or just spending time with children of all ages.

Home Study Tip:

Get started right away on the required documents, and do a little bit every day. For example, Monday start with the first few pages of the questionnaire. On Tuesday, contact the vital statistics office and order a copy of your birth and marriage certificates. Wednesday, schedule your doctors' visits. Doing a bit each day will make the process seem less overwhelming.

The subject of parenting and discipline will come up and for some parents, this is the first time they have really sat down and discussed how they plan to parent their children. You will also want to consider childcare and discipline methods. Will you raise your child in a specific faith or religion? Are there family traditions or names you wish to pass down?



You will be asked about your neighborhood. Are you friendly with your neighbors and is it a safe place? Be prepared to discuss community resources, school plans, playgrounds, recreational activities, and the type of people who live nearby.

Perhaps one of the easier set of questions will deal with why you want to adopt. You will also be asked to consider the type of child you are seeking, your opinion on birth parents, how your family will treat an adopted child, and how you are preparing to bond with a child who is not genetically your own.

Remember, no one expects you to know the answers to everything right now. The home study process is part of preparing you to adopt. Additionally, the social worker is prepared to offer help, advice, and resources to help you along the way. One example of this is referring you to local play groups for adopted children.

The documents required for this part of the home study are birth and marriage certificates, divorce decrees, drivers' licenses, and any other documents related to your legal residence and status to adopt.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

You will need to show your assets and liabilities, which typically make up your net worth. This will include your home, cars, and other assets at their current value, offset by any loans or mortgages on them.

Your recent tax return and paystub will verify your current income and employment, although you may need to be prepared to explain bonuses or non-routine income shown on tax returns.

Showing your insurance policies, savings (including retirement savings), and other investments and debts will establish your financial stability and plans to support the addition of a child to your family.

A monthly expense statement that includes routine bills like utilities, mortgage/loan payments, car and commuting fees, and other spending will establish your ability to add the expense of a child to your monthly budget.

Remember, you do not need to prove you are rich or wealthy to adopt. You just have to show you manage your finances responsibly and are prepared to add another person to your family.

HEALTH STATEMENT

Call the doctor! You will need to schedule a physical for your home study. At the time of your appointment, your physician can complete the required health statement provided to you by your home study provider.

The health statement just affirms that you are in good health with a normal life expectancy, and are able to raise a child. If you are under a doctor's care for a condition that is under control (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or thyroid conditions), a statement will be needed. Medical



conditions alone seldom preclude an approved home study.

Additionally, you may be required to submit a test for HIV and tuberculosis.

If you have had a more serious diagnosis (such as cancer) or are under a psychiatrist's care (for anxiety or depression for example), you can likely still adopt, but will need special statements from your specialists.

CRIMINAL STATEMENTS AND CHECKS

Home studies require a variety of different background checks. At a minimum, criminal history and child abuse clearances must be conducted on the adoptive parents, as well as any other adults living in the home.

If you have lived in a state other than your home state within the past five to ten years, additional clearances will need to be obtained from those states as well.

Some states use the "Live Scan" system, others require full FBI background checks. Your provider will give you the specific forms and information you need.

If you have misdemeanors or other charges, be prepared to describe them and explain what is different in your life now. These won't preclude an approved home study, but you will need to provide detailed information on the charges, how they were resolved, and how they affected you.

If you have been convicted of driving under the influence, you will need to provide evidence that you completed the required course of action and assurance that this will not happen in the future.

A felony conviction, any sex-related charges, or crimes against children will most likely not result in an approved home study. If these are in your past, have a frank conversation with your home study provider prior to getting started.

Want to see a completed home study?
Be sure to view the sample we have provided so you have an idea before you get started.

REFERENCES OR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

You will be asked to provide letters of recommendation, or actual names and addresses of people who can be references for you. They can be close friends, employers, co-workers, neighbors, or your pastor.

If your social worker speaks to them directly, she will ask questions about you (similar to some that you have answered), your experience with children, the stability of your marriage, and why you are seeking to adopt.



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References are required in order to verify a family's support system and get a third party verification of some information submitted. It's okay if they don't say you are perfect – no one is. But they should be people you know well and who know about your adoption plans.

When choosing your references, pick people you know well and who have seen you in situations. They should know about some of your hobbies and perhaps have even been in your home. Having references who know you will help your home study go smoothly and will make it easier on your social worker.

THE INTERVIEWS AND HOME VISIT

The interviews are often the most dreaded part of the home study process, however they can be the most beneficial both for you and your home study provider. Typically at least one interview is in your home.

The social worker will often schedule interviews with a couple, both separately and together. Separately, they will discuss many of the things you answered in the questionnaire or autobiography. Together they will discuss parenting, your marriage, and future plans.

Part of the interview at your home will be a tour of your home. Don't worry, there won't be a white glove test! They want to confirm that your home is a safe environment for a child. It does not have to be baby-proofed, however they will provide

information for you to ensure that it is in the future.

It is natural to be nervous about having a stranger come into your home, but remember, they want to work with you and they want to approve you. If you provide a perfect home with perfect parents, that may raise more alarms than a normal home with a normal family.

The Home Visit:

Most parents dread the home visit, but understand that the social worker is not looking for a freshly remodeled home or worthy of the 'white glove test.' They are making sure it is a loving and safe home, without severe safety concerns. If they see something, they will advise you and give you time and opportunity to make necessary adjustments or repairs.

OTHERS IN THE HOME

If you have children already, they will be included in your home study. They may be invited to an interview or may be included in some of the parenting classes. They may be asked to write a statement or draw a picture that expresses their feelings about having a new sibling.



You will be asked about how you parent them, how they perform in school, what their interests and friends are like, and how another child will fit into the family dynamic that is already established.

An interview may be conducted as a family, so that the social worker can see how you all interact now. This will help her write her report from experience, rather than just write what she is told.

If you have other adults in the home, they will be included similarly, however they will also have to submit to all of the background and criminal screenings that the adoptive parents do.

It is important to note that even if you have a rental apartment on your property, the renter will have to be included. Anyone who lives on your property or in your home is subject to inclusion. This is important because if you have someone who has some criminal background, it could be a problem in the home study process. It may be advantageous to make other arrangements for them before you begin.

TRAINING

Most providers will encourage or require that you take specific classes or training including general adoption education, cultural diversity, or basic CPR and first aid. Requirements will vary by professional. Some may be in person classes, online trainings, or just reading books and taking a quiz.

Even if your provider does not require that you complete education, it is still highly recommended so you are prepared for adoptive parenting.

Online Training Available!
Ask if your provider will accept online parenting classes. We have resources for you to complete required classes online, in the comfort of your own home.

HOME STUDY REPORT

Once all of the documents are received and the interviews completed, your home study provider will compose a home study report. It varies from provider to provider but averages between about ten and twenty-five pages. This report is what is considered your home study, and ultimately approves or disapproves you as an adoptive parent.

Your report typically begins with a biographical summary of each adoptive parent, including their childhood, family, and education. If married, it discusses how you met, how you came to be married, and the strength of your union. If single, it will go into detail about your current support system and the friends and family who will be a part of your child's life.



It will discuss your health, employment and salaries, your income and monthly bills, and your preparation for financial or medical emergencies. Your home will also be described and discussed in detail, including details about the neighborhood and school plans.

Any other people in your home, including children, will be discussed in detail. Remember, if you have adults at home, including adult children, parents, renters, or other extended family, they will be included in detail, including results of background checks.

Your report will include greater detail if you have situations that require more explanation, such as chronic illness, convictions, or previous divorce. Remember, none of these will necessarily preclude adoption approval, but they will need to be disclosed and the resolution discussed.

Also included will be your motivation to adopt and your preparation to be adoptive parents. Your home study will typically include the type of child you are open to, including race and age.

Once the report is done, the home study process is considered complete and you are considered approved to adopt!

HOME STUDY UPDATES

It is vital to know and understand when your home study requires updates or modifications. Moving forward with an adoption, only to find that your home study is not ready, can cause lost time and

money, not to mention a great deal of heartache. There typically is a small fee to update your home study, but this is vital to a completed adoption.

Annual Updates: Most states require that your clearances be no more than 12 months old. For that reason we recommend updating your home study annually. Plan to contact your home study provider about 10 months after the initial date of approval to find out the timeframe and requirements for an update. This is especially important if you are networking out of state. Even if your state doesn't require an annual update, say birth mother's state does. You may be stuck for up to six weeks or longer waiting for clearances to get your home study updated to clear the inter-state requirements.

Your Home: If you make modifications to (like adding a pool, rooms, or bathrooms) or move to a different home completely, you will need to update your home study. Remember, part of your approval status comes from the home inspection and preparation. This is usually a quick and easy walk through with your social worker so she can update that section of your home study.

Your Employment or Other Income Changes: If you change jobs, quit to be a stay-at-home-parent, or take a dramatic decrease in pay, you will want to phone your social worker to ask about an update. It may not be required, but it is better to be safe than sorry.



Accusation of Crime or DUI: If you are facing or are convicted of charges, let your home study provider know. It may be suggested that you pause your adoption search until these are resolved. Having active, pending charges may impede finalization of adoption or change the results that come back for a criminal history. With a DUI charge, it may be required that you wait a certain period of time to demonstrate that you have completed the requirements and will not put a child in danger.

Modifications to Adoption Preferences: At times, a family may begin the adoption process only to decide that they are more open on age or race than they were when they began. Contact your home study provider to find out if modifications need to be made. Often, a family is required to take a class to adopt outside of their race or one that is older than a toddler. Again, the requirements will be minor but better to be prepared before you have a potential match.

Changes to Health Issues: If you are diagnosed with a chronic illness or if you begin treatment for any mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, you will need to update your home study. You may need additional doctors statements explaining the condition.

Changes in Adoption Goal: If you begin with a domestic adoption but decide later to pursue international adoption, your home study will likely need to be rewritten to accommodate the needs of the international organization. Not all home study providers are able to write international home

studies, so find out the requirements early on in the process.

Change to People Living in the Home: If you have a biological child or have others come and live with you, your home study will need to be updated to accommodate them. Remember, if they are adults they will need background clearances too.

Relationship Status: If your relationship status changes, such as a separation in a marriage, or if single, you have a partner that moves in with you, your home study will have to be updated. You will probably need to provide detailed information about the role that they will play in your adoption. For instance, if separated, are you planning to adopt together and then co-parent? If you are living together, will you be adopting together?

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY HOME STUDY?

Your home study is the “proof” that you are approved and ready to adopt. It is signed by a social worker and includes her credentials with which to certify you.

Your home study is usually provided to any adoption professional you are working with. They need it in order to effectively work with you on an adoption. Copies will also be submitted to the inter-state compact office when you have a match, as well as with your court documents when you are working to finalize your adoption.

You may or may not be provided with a copy. Home study providers vary on their policy in



regards to this. You should always request a copy and keep it on hand, should you need it for an urgent or last minute situation. It does have personal information, so it should not be sent out in your networking efforts.

WILL A BIRTH MOTHER SEE IT?

In a few states, it is required that the birth mother be offered the opportunity to read and review your home study. This makes some adoptive parents very nervous because of the detailed information about your finances, home, health, and address. This is understandable.

It is offered so that birth parents are fully informed about who is raising their child, and so they can see how thoroughly you have been screened. It adds a layer of safety and security to the adoption.

For this reason, among others, it is vital that you be presenting yourself accurately and honestly through your adoption profiles.

When a birth parent is provided with your home study, it is typically not to keep a copy, but rather to read it in the presence of the attorney or social worker who is informing her of her rights and taking her signature.

POST-PLACEMENT VISITS

Once you are home with your child, most statements require that your social worker come and conduct post-placement visits. These are usually happy visits that feel more like social calls

than the nervous interviews that happened at the beginning.

They will ask how the baby is doing and how you are doing in your role as a new parent. They will discuss the baby's sleeping habits and the last pediatrician visit.

Their primary goal at this point is to submit to the court a report that the baby is growing and thriving in your home and family.