

CALLED TO ADOPTION: THE ADOPTION HOME STUDY



*“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures..”*

Proverbs 34:3,4

In most states, a social worker will evaluate your fitness to parent during what's known as a home study. Rather than a study and evaluation of your home, it's really a people study. Adoption home studies not only serve to qualify you to adopt, but also help to prepare you for adoptive parenting...for the child you're so eager to meet!

Requirements in each state differ, but an adoption home study usually includes a home inspection, physicals, a review of your finances, references from friends and coworkers, and a background report that may include an FBI check. It also includes personal interviews with everyone living in your home and a little personal history about your family life.

Nearly all people who apply to adopt do qualify for a home study, and most prospective parents worry unnecessarily. The intent of a home study is to screen out people with severe mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, a criminal record of child abuse, or those with so little income that an adopted child would be placed into poverty. If your home life is stable, if you are in reasonably good health, if you have enough income to raise a child, and if you are a loving and responsible person with a heartfelt desire to parent a child for life, you should qualify to adopt.

Adoption home studies should be kept updated. In most states, families only need to update annually. Check with your home study provider to make sure your report is kept current so you don't compromise a potential adoption. Even ordinary changes in your life need to be reflected by a home study update, including moving to a different home, changing jobs, having a relative move into your home, adding a biological child, or if you change your preferences for a child.

After you are home with your child, your home study provider will visit you again. These visits are called post-placement visits and serve to help you finalize your adoption. These visits will evaluate how life is going, how everyone is adjusting, and to complete required court reports that will be submitted with the request to finalize your adoption. This is an excellent time to ask about local support groups or play groups, or for additional resources regarding your unique adoption.

Tips for the Home Study Visit

You will need to prepare for your home study and home visit by your social worker. Remember, social workers are doing a "people study," and part of that is to see where and how you live. They are not looking for a perfect model home, but one where a child will be safe and clean. You may wish to plan to have refreshments to offer your social worker so the appointment feels more like a visit and less like an interview.

Set the date and time for your visit and confirm the day before the appointment. If you have young children, be sure they are fed and rested prior to the visit, or even put them down for a nap before the appointed time. Be sure that you are also fed and rested, as the interview may be a few hours.

Clean and tidy your home the day before, picking up any items in your yard that are out of place. It doesn't have to be perfect, but presenting a home that is clean and neat is important. Your preparation is a good time to discover little changes or adaptations your home could use for a new child, such as minimizing clutter, reorganizing, or making your home more child friendly.

If you have pets, have them fed and put in their area to avoid distraction. They will need to be current on required vaccinations, and you may need to provide documentation as validation.

If you have been asked to complete or submit documents, be sure they are copied and clearly labeled. Similarly, if you have been given a list of topics that will be discussed, come prepared to the discussion. You will need to have ready answers to questions like: who will care for your child should something happen to you, how you plan to discipline your child, and other topics relating to parenting. If you are not a parent yet, these may not be topics you and your spouse have discussed, so some time spent in preparation may be well served.

When we were preparing for our first home study visit, I cleaned our condominium like I was expecting the queen! I was almost disappointed when our social worker didn't open the perfectly organized closets or check for dirt under the refrigerator. I had the house absolutely spotless, only to learn later that it wasn't a "white glove test" of our home.

One helpful thing we did to prepare for the interview was to casually discuss future decisions we'd have to make. We talked about childcare while we took our evening walk. We discussed child-rearing over dinner. We didn't stress about it, but rather, took time to come together about how we wanted to raise our family. If you haven't given these topics a lot of thought, don't worry. No one expects you to have all the answers, but it is a good opportunity to begin to prepare for parenthood.

Answering Your Questions

Is a home study always required?

Yes. A home study is required for all adoptions, including private and international. Additionally, it should be updated at least annually, especially if you are pursuing an interstate adoption. An update is not a new home study, but rather a simple update to confirm that nothing in your lives have changed. Some home study providers will also update your background clearances to ensure you are ready to go.

I have something in my background that I'm worried may keep me from passing a home study. How can I find out for sure?

Call and speak with a home study professional and discuss the situation with them. There are very few things that will preclude a home study from being completed provided they are disclosed and have been dealt with. This is a time when honesty is most definitely the best policy.