

EXPERT Q&A WEBINAR:

The Adoption Home Study

What to Expect and How to Prepare



Stella Gilgur-Cook, LCSW

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The Adoption Home Study – What to Expect and How to Prepare

Presenter:

Stella Gilgur-Cook, LCSW

Director, Modern Family Center @ Spence-Chapin

Introduction & History of Agency

Founded in 1908

Full service, non-profit, non-sectarian

Hague accredited; licensed in NY & NJ

20,000 children placed since 1908

Comprehensive Post Adoption Services



Why a home study?

- A home study is required by states, agencies, and birth countries in order to place *any* child into *any* home.
- This applies to any adult(s) bringing a child into their family; this includes adoption, foster care, step parent adoption and in some states, even embryo adoptions.
- Requires social workers to assure that child is being placed in a safe home.



What is a home study?

- A document
- A mindset
 - Parent preparation and education
 - Informing family, friends, and community
- A process of assessment and approval
 - Interviews and a home visit with your social worker
 - Submission of documents

Will I be approved?

Barriers to Approval:

- Certain criminal convictions
- Significant and unaddressed mental illness
- Concerns about addiction
- Insufficient financial resources
- Need for additional education & preparation

Common Concerns:

- Number of bedrooms
- Non-violent or petty convictions
- Sexual Orientation/
Relationship status
- Citizenship status
- Medical history
- Other children in the home

Interviews and Home Visit

- Number of visits and location of visits vary based on state and country requirements
 - NY: 2 visits, one in the office, one in the home
 - NJ: 3 visits, two in the office, one in the home. Each applicant will be interviewed separately.
 - Childwelfare.gov has a state directory for home study requirements
- When there are multiple requirements, families will be asked to complete the greater number of meetings.

Interviews and Home Visit

What happens at the meetings?

- Get to know one another
- Set expectations
- Safety check
- Discuss your personal history
- Explore your support systems
- Discuss your reasons and readiness for adopting
- Prepare you to become a transracial or transcultural family



Submission of Documents

- Required as part of any family's approval process
- Information gathered is reflected in your home study
- Paints a picture of your resources, strengths, areas of growth, and what life in your family is like
- This stage relies heavily on applicants' timing and organization

What documents need to be submitted?

- Application
- Criminal History Affidavit
- Criminal Background Checks
- Child Abuse Registry Checks
- Financial Form / Taxes
- Medical Reports/Psychiatric evaluations
- Business Reference(s)
- Personal Reference(s)
- Birth Certificates, Marriage License, Divorce Decrees



Parent Preparation and Education

- Minimum 10 hours required for International Adoptions.
- Foster Care/Foster-to-Adopt typically requires 30+ hours
- State requirement for private domestic adoptions vary or are non-existent, though most agencies and ethical attorneys require 2 – 5 hours of parent education



Parent Preparation and Education

- “Where did you get her? How much did she cost?”
- “The kids at school said you are not my real mom because we don’t look alike...is that true?”
- Attachment, bonding, and parental “claiming” of your child
- Relationship with birth parents
- Appropriate discipline for a child who has been institutionalized
- Gaining confidence in parenting an older child
- Supporting your child in developing healthy identity formation
- Planning for post adoption services that grow up with your child

Parent Preparation and Education

How will I get this information?

- Discussions with your social worker
- Trainings and workshops at your agency
- Readings
- Online courses & resources
 - Adoption Learning Partners
 - Creating A Family
 - Adoptive Families magazine



Process and Timing

A home study happens in 3 distinct phases:

- Paperwork collection & documentation
 - Some paperwork is in control of the family and typically takes 2 weeks to complete and submit. Clearances, child abuse checks, and references are completed by others so timing can vary; can take 3 – 6 weeks.
- Meetings and Interviews
 - Meetings with your social worker typically begin during the submission of your paperwork. Visits are typically 1 – 2 weeks apart.
- Writing the document
 - Once *all* paperwork has been submitted, and all visits have been completed, the home study document is written. This typically takes 1-2 weeks.
 - Once a draft is completed, you will have a chance to approve the document before a final version is signed and notarized.

Updates and Addendums

- Your home study is valid for one year, after which all families are required to complete a home study update
 - A home study update includes many of the same elements as the original home study, though there are less meetings with your social worker.
- During the year that your home study is valid, if there is a change in your family or household, you will need to complete an addendum.
 - An addendum focuses on the element(s) of your life that have changed

Be prepared to...

- Open up...to your worker, your birth mother, yourself
- Be “in homestudy” for 3 to 6 months, or more!
- Hunt down documents, forms, and signatures
- Be flexible
- Learn (even if you are an experienced parent)
- Change your mind
- See this process from a child’s point of view, and act accordingly
- To enter a new community

Q & A

Thank you for joining me today!

*We offer pre-adoption counseling,
support groups, workshops, webinars,
and free adoption information meetings in NY/NJ*

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Questions?

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