

South Carolina Homestudy Services

for Domestic and International Adoptions



*Serving families throughout
South Carolina*

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Nightlight Christian Adoptions

For more information on Nightlight's Adoption Programs, visit our website:
www.Nightlight.org

Nightlight Christian Adoptions provides nationwide adoption services. Nightlight has offices in:

*Anaheim Hills, California
Greenville, South Carolina*

Nightlight Christian Adoptions South Carolina Homestudy Services

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Each adult living in your home must complete a copy of the forms on pages A-16 – A-19. Two copies of these forms are provided in this booklet. If more than two adults live in your home, you can request additional forms or photocopy the forms in this booklet.

What is a homestudy?

A homestudy is a document to verify that you qualify to adopt a child. A homestudy professional meets with you in your home to ask you various questions about your background, your values, the strengths of your marriage (if you are married), your finances, and your reasons for adopting—in addition to other questions. It is not a white-glove inspection. In South Carolina this professional is called a certified adoption investigator. Do not let the name "investigator" frighten you. This is simply the official title for social workers who are authorized to conduct homestudies.

As part of our overall services, Nightlight conducts homestudies for those adopting here in the United States as well as for families interested in international adoption. Nightlight also conducts homestudies for those interested in adopting children with special needs. Many of these children are available throughout the United States through each state's social service department.

Why do I need a homestudy?

First, if you are adopting domestically (adopting a child born in the United States), meeting with a certified investigator will help prepare you for meeting the birthmother. The questions posed in a homestudy are the ones you can expect a birthmother to ask. Birthmothers tend to be interested in the same character traits a social worker is looking for in a couple: stability, a good marital relationship, love of children, and strong family values. A birthmother will also be reassured to know that you have met certain state requirements by completing your homestudy.

Second, most private agencies and attorneys will not match a couple with a birthmother until the prospective adoptive family is homestudy approved.

Third, the courts require that you have an approved homestudy before you can adopt. The homestudy demonstrates to the court that you can provide the kind of home needed by the child being adopted.

Finally, if you are adopting internationally, Citizenship and Immigration Services bases your approval, in part, on a homestudy. Many countries that place children for adoption overseas require a homestudy, too.

Why should I use an agency to conduct my homestudy?

Although certified adoption investigators in South Carolina do not have to be affiliated with an adoption agency to conduct homestudies, some countries (such as China and Russia) and some states (such as Florida) require that a homestudy be completed by a licensed agency. Moreover, using an experienced agency such as Nightlight will give you confidence that your certified investigator will be aware of and meet all requirements for the courts and the Department of Social Services, and—if you're pursuing an international adoption—for Immigration and the country from which you are adopting.

We help you throughout the process by providing guidance. As an agency, we are required by the state to have two face-to-face visits with you; one of these will be at the Nightlight office, where we will discuss adoption issues. Being more prepared for adoption can help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety associated with the process.

During this meeting at the office, we will discuss the issues associated with openness in adoption, birth parents, telling your child of his adoption, and other core issues. Depending upon the type of adoption you are pursuing, we will also discuss being a conspicuous family, transracial adoption, adopting an older child, issues related to receiving a child from overseas, birth order when adopting, and other matters.

If you are working with another agency for the adoption placement, Nightlight will honor your commitment to that agency and will conduct your homestudy and sign all agreements between Nightlight (the homestudy agency) and the placing agency.

Nightlight will also work with you and a caseworker if you are seeking to adopt a child through the social services department of another state. Social service departments require that homestudies be conducted by a licensed agency.

What parts of South Carolina does Nightlight work in?

Nightlight provides homestudy services for the entire state of South Carolina.

What services does Nightlight provide?

In addition to conducting homestudies in South Carolina, Nightlight offers a range of other services to its clients.

Help with Applying to Immigration. Later in this packet we've included information about how to apply to Immigration for an international adoption. Furthermore, we will personally answer any questions you have about Immigration processing, and we will help you if your case is not being approved in a timely manner.

Information Regarding South Carolina's Non-Recurring Cost Reimbursement. Details about receiving the S.C. adoption subsidy are provided in this packet for families and children who qualify.

Notarization of Documents. If you need documents notarized, most of our staff are notary publics, and we will gladly notarize your documents at no charge. (Naturally, we have to observe you sign the documents!)

Adoption Advice and Advocacy. Nightlight can assist you in deciding what type of child may be appropriate for you to consider. Nightlight also works in conjunction with an experienced attorney to see that paperwork is processed correctly and quickly through the United States' Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. We serve as more than just a homestudy agency; we serve as your advocates.

Education. Nightlight is very committed to educating families. Everyone who uses Nightlight's homestudy services will complete at least 10 hours of adoption education. We highly recommend that you visit the website www.AdoptionLearningPartners.org, which offers educational classes online. Nightlight regularly provides information regarding educational opportunities via the agency's website, www.Nightlight.org.

If you are adopting internationally, you must complete an outline provided by Nightlight to demonstrate that you have educated yourself on a range of topics as required by the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. If Nightlight is just your homestudy agency, then your placing agency may have educational requirements that you will complete through them. However, Nightlight will enter into an agreement with your placing agency so that documentation is provided to both agencies of the education that you have received.

Before Nightlight will complete your homestudy, you must complete the Education Statement (pages A-25 – A-26), indicating that you have completed an approved educational class. This statement is included among the supporting documents submitted with your homestudy.

Adoption education helps you determine what type of adoption is right for you, and it also prepares you for parenting a child whose background requires special skills. Not every issue can be addressed while you are going through the homestudy process. Additional education will make

you more confident during the adoption process, and it will connect you with resources that you can use as you continue to educate yourself about adoption for the rest of your life.

Post-Adoption Support. After you come home with your child, there are still a few forms to be filled out. We will be in contact with you to help you with the process if you desire. We are also available to talk with you about adjustment issues or parenting issues once you are home with your child. This is included in your agency fee. In the unlikely event that your adoption disrupts, Nightlight can guide you to the appropriate resources.

When should I have a homestudy?

Regardless of what adoption plan you choose, it is usually best to have the homestudy completed as early as possible in the adoption process. However, before you begin an international homestudy, it is best for you to know the country from which you want to adopt and what agency will be your placing agency (if you are not adopting through Nightlight). If you are certain that you will adopt but are unsure of what type of adoption to pursue, you can still begin the homestudy process. In most instances, a homestudy can be easily modified to comply with the requirements associated with the type of adoption you choose to pursue.

Before you are matched with a birthmother, you need to have a completed homestudy. Most attorneys and agencies will not match a birthmother with you until you have an approved homestudy. Regarding international adoption, you cannot be assigned a child from another county until you have a completed, approved homestudy.

What if I haven't decided between domestic and international adoption?

Many families are unsure of what route they want to take. Initially, some parents want to consider both. If you are undecided about whether you want to adopt a child in the United States or from another country, it is usually better for the homestudy provider to conduct a domestic homestudy.

If you eventually decide to adopt a child *outside* the United States, a domestic homestudy can be adjusted to become an international homestudy. However, be aware that if you adopt through an agency *other* than Nightlight (for example, you use another agency for a China adoption) you must be sure that this placing agency will enter into an “interagency agreement” with Nightlight (which will only be the homestudy agency).

If you decide to adopt internationally after having a domestic homestudy completed, the homestudy and all supporting documentation must be less than six (6) months old when it arrives at Citizenship and Immigration Services. The last visit to your home by the certified investigator must also have been within the last six (6) months.

For information about costs associated with converting a homestudy from one kind to another, see page 13.

What should I know about an international homestudy?

If you are starting an international adoption with an agency other than Nightlight, be sure that the agency will enter into an agreement with Nightlight to conduct the homestudy. Nightlight is Hague accredited, yet every agency has the right to determine which agencies they will accept homestudies from.

The homestudy must also be reviewed by your placing agency (if not Nightlight) to make sure that it meets the requirements of the country from which you want to adopt. If Nightlight is not your placing agency, then we will enter into a contract with your placing agency.

Then the homestudy is sent to the South Carolina Department of Social Services staff. (The Department of Social Services charges \$225 for this service. This fee is included in the schedule of fees you pay Nightlight, and we make the payment to DSS.)

When your homestudy arrives at DSS, the DSS staff will email us to let us know that they have received it. Once DSS has reviewed the homestudy, they send a letter to you and to Nightlight indicating that you have met the requirements for SC and the homestudy is being sent to Citizenship and Immigration Services.

If for some reason you do not receive this letter **within four weeks** of Nightlight's sending your homestudy to DSS, please contact us. Sometimes homestudies are sent there but can be lost in the mailroom. The information in your homestudy contains very sensitive information, and if this information is in the wrong hands, you could become the victim of identity theft. Please let us know when you receive the letter from DSS, even though Nightlight also receives this letter. We can then track your package on to Immigration.

Regardless of whether you are adopting from a **non-Hague country** or a **Hague-country**, the homestudy is submitted to the National Benefit Center where it is reviewed by Citizenship and Immigration Services. Immigration then sends your homestudy packet and approval to the National Visa Center, which then sends your approval (cable 37) to the US Embassy where you will eventually get your child's visa.

How is a Hague-country homestudy different from a non-Hague-country homestudy?

Nightlight has almost the identical requirements for both homestudies. However, if you are adopting from a Hague country, you and anyone else in your household who is 18 years or older must have a child abuse clearance from every state and country in which you have resided since you were 18 years old.

Also, some countries have no child abuse databases or do not release such information. We must then obtain a letter from the country authorities stating that they have no such database and do not release this sort of information.

Obtaining these clearances from each state takes a few weeks to complete. However, obtaining clearances from other countries can take an extraordinary length of time and much effort. Therefore, there is a \$25 fee for each country clearance. Because of the time involved in obtaining these clearances, we also recommend that these clearances be completed before a homestudy visit is scheduled so that your homestudy does not expire before the clearances are completed.

How long is my homestudy current?

A homestudy for a domestic adoption is current for one year. However, all supporting documents must be under one year old when a child is placed with a family for adoption. You are responsible for ensuring that the supporting documents are current or renewed when they expire. An international homestudy (along with its supporting documentation) must be less than six months old when submitted to CIS (Citizenship and Immigration Services).

The fee for updating an expired homestudy (over one year old) initially conducted by Nightlight is half the cost of the original homestudy. The certified investigator must visit you in your home to identify changes that have occurred and then include those changes in an updated homestudy report.

When you are ready to have your homestudy updated, just call Nightlight to arrange to have an investigator visit.

Can I have the homestudy visit in the evening or on the weekend?

Yes, the staff is very flexible, and a certified investigator can generally arrange a time for a home visit that is convenient for you.

What paperwork is required for a homestudy report?

Enclosed are forms for you to complete. Before the certified investigator can schedule the first home visit, you must complete and submit the following forms:

- *Application for Homestudy* (pages A-3 – A-5)
- *Fee Schedule/Agreement* (find the relevant schedule/agreement in A-7 – A-11)
- *Post-Placement Fee Agreement* (A-12 – A-14)
- *Background Information* form (A-15 – A-16)
- *Consent to Criminal Background Check* form (A-17 – A-18)
- *Child Abuse Registry* form (A-19 – A-20)
- *Release of Confidential Information* form (A-31 – A-32)
- *Financial Information Form* (A-21 – A-23)
- *Copy of 1040 tax form (first page of form only)*

Look at the *Checklist of Documents Required for Homestudy* (A-1 – A-2) for more information on documents that you should gather for the homestudy. Except for the ones listed above, the supporting homestudy documents can be gathered during the process. Documents that may take some time to acquire, such as the reference letters and the physician's statements, may be mailed to Nightlight later.

Please pay very careful attention to instructions on the *Checklist of Documents Required for Homestudy*. If a reference letter or physician's letter has insufficient information, it may have to be redone. Furthermore, if the physician's handwriting is illegible, the information will have to be resubmitted.

Completing the forms can be a bit confusing, so be careful—and be sure to sign your name on all DSS forms. Feel free to call Nightlight or email us with any questions you have in completing these forms.

Additionally, prospective adoptive parents will be required to complete an *online questionnaire and assessment tool* after they apply with Nightlight for a home study. This tool is primarily meant to assess each individual's personal strengths and weaknesses. It is not intended as a means by which to approve or disapprove an adoptive family's home study but rather as a tool to prepare you, the adoptive parent, for the challenge of parenting an adopted child. Nightlight will also use this assessment to guide us in your family's education process. Prospective adoptive parents will receive their results, and their home study provider will discuss it with them at their home visit. *Instructions for completing the online assessment tool will be given to you after we receive your application.*

What if I want to adopt an older child or one with special needs?

If you would consider adopting a child with special needs, an older child, or a sibling group, be sure that your homestudy addresses (1) what special needs you are open to considering and (2) what you would consider on a case-by-case basis.

If you want to adopt a child with special physical/medical needs, or a child who may face emotional/psychological issues due to the child's being older or having a difficult background, these issues must be carefully addressed with you by the homestudy provider. In addition, you will need to demonstrate that you are well educated in adoption-related issues, are prepared, have the resources to adopt such a child, and that you will remain committed to being further educated throughout the adoption and beyond.

It is best to be homestudy approved for the widest range of options that are potentially acceptable to you and for which your homestudy provider feels you are capable of dealing with. Of course, being approved for special cases does not obligate you to accept a placement that you're not comfortable with. However, if a special case (such as a sibling group) becomes available but you're not home-study-approved for that case, you will have to get an addendum to the homestudy. (There is a \$100 fee to alter a completed homestudy.)

What if I want to adopt a child who is in the custody of Social Services?

There are more than 126,000 children available for adoption here in the United States. These are children who have been placed into a state's care because of abuse or neglect.

There is usually no agency fee for the adoption of these children. In fact, the child may qualify for special monthly subsidies. The only expenses would be for your homestudy and attorney fees to finalize the adoption.

If you want to adopt a child who is in foster care through the Department of Social Services (DSS) here in South Carolina, a certified investigator from DSS will conduct your homestudy. DSS does not charge for this service. However, if you want to adopt a child through another state's social service department, you will need to have a homestudy conducted by a licensed adoption agency in South Carolina.

Most children adopted through social services are considered to have special needs. Therefore, you will need to be approved to adopt a child with special needs, and as noted in the previous section, these issues will need to be addressed thoroughly.

Who qualifies to adopt?

Many people worry needlessly that they will not pass the homestudy. Nearly everyone who desires to adopt meets the requirements. However, it is very important that you be completely honest right up-front with the investigator so that if there are any areas of concern, such as a criminal history, the circumstances can be explained in the homestudy report. A less-than-perfect record will not automatically disqualify you, but we will look to see that there is not a pattern of recent difficulties and that there is a reasonable explanation for the problems in the past.

Although families are occasionally disqualified on the basis of their initial telephone interview—usually because of a recent criminal history—nearly every family that pursues a homestudy is eventually approved for adoption. Many couples worry about supposed skeletons in the closet. But remember that when a social worker conducts your homestudy, he is not looking for reasons to disqualify you; he simply wants to know that you are capable of providing a child with a loving and secure environment. Most couples who seek to adopt privately are in their late thirties to early forties and have accomplished other life goals that lead to being good parents, such as emotional and financial stability. When an agency caseworker writes your homestudy, he is your advocate. The caseworker will present you in the best light.

If you think something in your past may present a problem, talk with us about the matter. Some people naturally worry about arrests made when they were much younger, such as for shoplifting.

However, other problems are more serious, such as repeated divorces, a recent recovery from alcoholism, or a criminal history. Please be up-front in telling us about these potential problems.

Although you may have an issue that would not disqualify you from receiving an approved homestudy (e.g., misconduct when you were 18 years old), this issue could disqualify you from adopting from a specific country. We at Nightlight do not want to start a homestudy for you only to find out that the country from which you want to adopt will not permit the adoption because of a criminal record, however minor. We are willing to work closely with your placing agency on sensitive issues, but all criminal records (even if the charges were dropped or unfounded) must be included in your homestudy. Such information cannot be taken out of the homestudy that is sent overseas. What may appear to be a minor incident or “youthful indiscretion” may keep you from adopting in other countries. Therefore, Nightlight will want to discuss any such issues with your placing agency before we begin the homestudy process. Again, we do not want you to pay for a homestudy that cannot be used for an international adoption for the specific country you have chosen.

Sometimes couples will ask what they should and should not discuss with a social worker. We encourage you to be forthright and let the social worker determine what should be included in your homestudy and how the information should be presented.

Difficult situations from your past do not automatically disqualify you. But issues of abuse must be addressed in the homestudy. If you were the victim of abuse, explain how you have overcome this abuse. You are not disqualified for having experienced it, but you should be able to demonstrate how it may have affected you and how you have dealt with it. The reason the social worker must discuss this issue with you is to make sure that you are emotionally stable in spite of being abused, that you are not going to abuse a child in the same manner, and that a child from a difficult background is not going to “push your buttons” and perhaps trigger problems in your life that you have not sufficiently resolved. Furthermore, if you are adopting internationally, Immigration requires that the homestudy state whether you have been the victim of abuse.

When a caseworker asks you difficult—and potentially embarrassing—questions, he is not poking around to “get the dirt on you.” His desire is to address issues that could raise red flags later in the adoption process. Nightlight will always abide by professional and legal standards of confidentiality.

The following “problems” will *not* automatically disqualify you as adoptive parents:

- *You have been married only a short time.* Some states (and countries) have laws regarding how long you’ve been married, and some placement agencies may require you to have been married a minimum period of time. However, Nightlight places no additional restrictions on you, and many states and countries have no such requirement.
- *You are not married.* Most countries restrict adoptions to married couples, but if the country from which you wish to adopt allows singles to adopt, Nightlight will not deny you a homestudy based on your marital status.
- *You are divorced.* If you have been divorced (even more than once), you can still adopt. A caseworker will ask you about your previous marriage(s), but the agency’s main concern is the stability of your current marriage. If someone has gone through multiple marriages because he is unstable, this instability will probably manifest itself in other areas of the person’s life as well.
- *You are in therapy.* If one of you has been in therapy individually, or if you have had therapy as a couple, your chances of being approved are probably not lessened. In fact, most agency personnel view counseling as a sign of strength. The reasons you give for

your counseling are what matter. For example, counseling to deal with issues related to infertility, communication, or family of origin is considered very normal.

- *You have a history of drug or alcohol abuse.* If you used illicit drugs in the past, do not have a record, and no longer use them, the drug use is not necessarily an issue. If you have been treated for abusing drugs or alcohol, however, you will need to tell the homestudy provider. Usually this information will not disqualify you, but the agency will want evidence from a treatment counselor that you have resolved this problem and that the risk that you will become a substance abuser again is minimal. Most agencies will require a letter stating that you are no longer addicted to drugs and alcohol and that you are doing well. Some agencies may want more information: why you entered treatment, what the course of treatment was, and whether you followed the treatment plan.
- *You have a history of psychological problems.* If you have been treated for a psychological disorder such as depression or anorexia, and it has not been a life-dominating problem, then this need not be an issue. But if the problem interferes with your life (say, you are not able to work), then this will need to be discussed further. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits an adoption agency from disqualifying you from adopting based on a diagnosis alone; however, if you are currently experiencing problems that would interfere with the safety of a child, then this could prevent you from obtaining an approved homestudy.
- *You have taken or are taking psychotropic medication.* Taking such medication cannot disqualify you from adopting. However, some countries will not allow persons taking certain medications or having certain medical conditions from adopting. Many other countries do not place these restrictions. We can talk with you about this and help you evaluate your situation.
- *You have a criminal history.* A criminal history will not automatically disqualify you, but you must disclose any criminal history that you have. Failure to do so can result in your being automatically disapproved. You will need to obtain for your homestudy provider a signed and certified *disposition* from the courthouse in the county in which you were charged for each of the incidents. This includes acts that have been expunged from your record.

You also need to provide a signed letter explaining why you were charged with each crime—and include a statement of remorse, if appropriate. Please talk with someone here at Nightlight about these documents if you need further explanation.

- *You have a chronic health condition.* People with physical disabilities should not be disqualified from adopting so long as they can care for a child. Neither should a chronic disease like diabetes disqualify someone, provided it is controlled. Even a history of cancer will not disqualify you from adopting, as long as you have close to a normal life expectancy. The purpose of the medical report for the homestudy is to determine that the parent is expected to have a normal life span and to be able to care for a child.
- *You come from a dysfunctional family.* If you have come from an extremely dysfunctional family and have dealt with the issues appropriately—and if other facets of your life are in order—then a social worker will minimize your family’s past and will focus on your life now. If you were physically or emotionally abused as a child and recognize that such behavior is inappropriate, and if you can explain reasonable measures for disciplining a child, then a caseworker will simply say so in your report.

- *Financial difficulties and other problems.* If you have had financial difficulties such as bankruptcy, these problems do not necessarily keep you from adopting. Again, any concerns that you have, please discuss with us.

During the homestudy we will ask you if you have had counseling in the past or present, or if you have taken or are taking medication to treat any emotional issues. We believe that both counseling and appropriate medication can be very helpful in dealing with life stressors that become overwhelming. Our role is not to judge you—we want to understand your background so that we can ensure that all families are able to physically and emotionally care for a child, and so that we can do our part to make your adoption a successful one.

If your background has had some “bumps” and you are a solid family that can provide a child with a good family life, we may recommend that you receive counseling. This can benefit everyone, and it can provide an opportunity to present you in the best possible way.

Can Nightlight do a homestudy for an embryo adoption?

Yes, we can conduct a homestudy for such an adoption.

The purpose of the embryo adoption homestudy is to prepare the adoptive parents to be the best parents they can possibly be to their new child, and to provide a summary of the adoptive family’s information to the agency or organization that is responsible for placing the embryos with the parent; it is not intended to assess the suitability of the child's placement once born. Therefore, no post-placement reports will be required unless the embryo adoption agency requires one. Also, because no legal court proceedings take place, all legal responsibilities of the agency end once the home study is completed.

In the course of the home study process, you will be required to complete education regarding embryo adoption so that as the parent, you can understand the issues involved in giving birth to a child who is not biologically related to you. Such education is provided through your social worker at Nightlight, and additional education is available at www.cedaeducation.org.

How do I apply with Citizenship and Immigration Services to obtain approval?

Everyone who adopts internationally must be approved by Citizenship and Immigration Services. If you are adopting from a non-Hague country, you will submit an I-600A for this process. If you are adopting from a Hague country, you will use form I-800A. Below are instructions for these forms:

I-600A and I-800 A Forms

To begin the process, complete either an I-600A (for non-Hague country adoptions) or an I-800A (for Hague-country adoptions) (forms may be obtained at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>), and mail it to the USCIS Lockbox at the following address:

If regular mail (USPS):

USCIS
PO Box 660088
Dallas, TX 75266

If courier express service:

USCIS, Attn: Adoption Non-Hague
2501 South State Highway 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Your form must be accompanied by a check for the processing fee (\$670), as well as a fingerprinting fee (\$80, “biometric services”) for **each** adult (18 years old or older) living in your household.

When submitting your I-600A or I-800A and the check, also include photocopies of the following documents:

- Birth certificate for each petitioner (husband and wife) as well as for any other adults living in the home (eighteen years old or above)
- Marriage certificate for the petitioners
- Divorce decree(s) for either or both petitioners (if applicable)
- Death certificate(s) (if widowed)
- Court disposition for any crimes or misdemeanors committed by either petitioner or adults living in the home (The disposition(s) can be mailed later with the homestudy.)

Mailing the forms. When you mail the I-600A or the I-800A form, it will be sent to the National Benefits Center (NBC). The NBC will review the form and your homestudy and then issue your fingerprinting appointment for the Charleston CIS office. Please do not mail the form until Nightlight notifies you stating that your homestudy is being sent to DSS for approval.

If you need to reschedule your fingerprinting appointment, you may contact CIS (Nightlight can provide you with the number). Fingerprinting services are not available at any SC CIS office other than the Charleston one. You may be assigned to a fingerprint appointment at the Charlotte, NC, CIS office if your zip code is closer to Charlotte.

Special note

Since a South Carolina homestudy must be approved by DSS prior to being sent to the CIS Lockbox and then to the NBC, *the I-600A and the I-800A application will arrive at the NBC before the homestudy does.* As a result, the NBC will issue a request to the family for additional information, essentially requesting that the homestudy be submitted within a prescribed time frame. In the mean time, your homestudy is being moved through DSS and the CIS Lockbox, so it will (eventually) be forwarded directly to the NBC. If you receive such a request from the NBC, please do not panic, but notify Nightlight. Please do not mail your I-600 A or I-800 A form until Nightlight notifies you to indicate that your homestudy has been sent to DSS for approval.

Since these forms are processed at a national level, it can take about 82 days for the approval to be issued. All questions regarding your I-600 A or I-800A application and processing can be directed to the National Benefits Center at 1-877-424-8374.

How do I apply for South Carolina’s adoption subsidy?

PLEASE NOTE: The law regarding who qualifies for this subsidy may change and additional requirements are pending. Therefore, it cannot be guaranteed that your child will be eligible for this subsidy.

At the back of this packet (page A-30), you’ll find the form for receiving a state subsidy for non-recurring adoption costs; the subsidy will cover \$1500 of the adoption costs per child adopted. Your child must be considered special needs to qualify. Many domestic adoptions meet the criteria—usually when there’s little information on the birth father (even if he’s named) or the

child is part of a sibling group. *International adoptions do not qualify for this subsidy.* Please contact the office as to how to complete the form.

This form must be submitted *after* your child is assigned to you but *before* the child is legally adopted.

Once the form is completed, you may either fax it to the South Carolina Department of Social Services with a cover letter or mail it to them. The Department of Social Services will then send you a Subsidy Agreement, which you must sign and send back (trackable) to the Department *before your child is adopted.* You will supply supporting documents requested on the Subsidy Agreement after the adoption is complete.

To fax:

Attention: Cassandra Brown
Fax number: (803) 898-7641
Telephone number: (800) 922-2504
Direct line: (803) 898-7254

To mail:

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Attention: Cassandra Brown
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29292-1520

If you have any questions regarding your non-recurring costs application, please contact Nightlight by telephone at (864) 268-0570 or by email.

What is the fee for a homestudy?

In the appendix you'll find a list of fees for various kinds of homestudies. Following the list of fees on page A-6, you'll find fee schedules/agreements for each adoption program. Find the program that matches your adoption plans, sign it, and return it with your application.

Along with your application and signed fee schedule/agreement, also send payment for the total homestudy cost. A caseworker will not set up an appointment until you have paid for the homestudy services. If information on your application indicates that you do not qualify for an approved homestudy, all monies except \$250 will be refunded to you.

Nightlight charges the federal mileage rate (0.50/mile for 2010) for any visit that requires a round trip of 60 miles or more. The mileage is calculated from the nearest caseworker's home.

What is the fee for post-placements?

In the appendix (pages A-12 – A-14) you'll find an agreement for post-placement services. The fees for post-placement are due upon application for a homestudy. The fees for post-placement are held in trust and are paid to Nightlight upon completion of each post-placement report. If you move out of state, then the funds can be transferred to another adoption agency to complete the post-placement report(s).

Nightlight charges the federal mileage rate (0.50/mile for 2010) for any visit that requires a round trip of 60 miles or more. The mileage is calculated from the nearest caseworker's home.

How long does a homestudy take to complete?

A typical homestudy will be completed in **4-6 weeks**. (This is the time from when Nightlight receives a family's initial documents and homestudy fee to the time that Nightlight submits the homestudy to the appropriate authority.) Of course, this timeframe assumes that a family submits all documents according to the schedule on pages A-1 – A-2, that they are able to schedule the necessary homestudy visits in a timely manner, and that there are no significant counseling or criminal issues that must be resolved before a recommendation for adoption can be made by Nightlight. (Because some countries such as China require there to be more than two homestudy visits, the process for these countries could take a little longer than the 4-6 weeks average.) A homestudy is not considered complete until the family reviews it, authorizes any necessary changes, and signs a statement that they agree to all the facts in the homestudy.

What is the fee for expedited service?

Homestudies can be expedited for an additional fee of **\$300**. An expedited homestudy will be completed in **2-3 weeks**. (This is from the time Nightlight receives a family's initial documents and homestudy fee to the time Nightlight submits the homestudy to the appropriate authority.) The timeframe assumes timely return of clearances from DSS, in addition to all the other factors mentioned above.

An emergency domestic homestudy visit can be completed in **2-3 days** for an additional fee of **\$600**. Nightlight will conduct a homestudy this quickly only in clearly emergency situations; under normal circumstances, Nightlight cannot endorse homestudies conducted this rapidly. Nightlight cannot control how fast DSS or the FBI issues clearances (though we can request that they be expedited), and Nightlight cannot complete a homestudy this quickly without the family's full cooperation in completing forms, gathering documents, and setting up interviews.

What is the fee for an update or addendum?

If Nightlight conducted a homestudy for you within the last 2 years, your new homestudy will be half the cost of the pre-placement report, in addition to the paperwork processing and handling fee (\$250), DSS submission fee (\$225 for international homestudies), and post-placement reports. If you are moving into S.C. with a completed homestudy that is less than 6 months old, the cost for Nightlight to add an addendum (to make the homestudy S.C.-compliant) is also half the normal pre-placement, plus the initial processing fee (\$250), DSS submission fee (\$225 for international homestudies), and post-placement reports.

If Nightlight has conducted your homestudy and the homestudy requires an additional home visit and addendum to reflect changes in your situation, the visit and addendum will cost the same as one post-placement visit and report: \$300. If the addendum does not require a home visit, the fee will be \$100. Any change to the homestudy after the report is issued – whether the change is requested by the family or by the family's adoption agency – is considered an addendum and will be invoiced to the family.

What is the fee to change a domestic homestudy into an international one (or vice-versa)?

You will be charged the fee for the actual homestudy report minus \$500. Also, there are additional charges associated with the international homestudy report, such as the \$225 for DSS processing, clearances for Hague homestudies, and any extra post-placement visits. For an international homestudy to be changed into a domestic homestudy, the fee is \$300.

