



Domestic Home Study Guide

Our mission

Is to share God's love by:

- Helping children, both domestic and international, to find loving families
- Assisting birthparents and genetic parents in making a wise and loving plan for their child's future
- Preparing families to be committed and effective parents to adoptive children
- Recognizing and advocating the personhood of pre-born children

We are committed to carrying out our mission in a way that will bring glory and honor to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What We Do

Nightlight provides adoption services as a permanent response for children without parents through child advocacy, parent education, and lifelong support.... because every child deserves a loving family.

About Nightlight

Nightlight Christian Adoptions is a full-service, Hague accredited child placement agency and has been in operation since 1959. In 1997 we pioneered the first embryo adoption program, [Snowflakes Embryo Adoption](#) offering this unique adoption choice to families. Nightlight programs also include comprehensive international, domestic, and home study services. We assist families in all 50 states with licensed offices in California, Colorado, South Carolina, Kentucky, Texas, Georgia, Missouri, Oklahoma, Indiana, and Florida.

More than 2,000 domestic adoptions, 1,700 international adoptions, and 800 embryo adoptions have been completed by Nightlight.

Eligibility Requirements for Domestic Adoptions

Nightlight Christian Adoptions is licensed by the states of California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas to provide home studies.

RESIDENCE	Nightlight can perform Agency Adoptions for families living anywhere in the United States; however, you must live in a state where Nightlight is licensed to obtain a domestic or international home study. We can complete Snowflakes Family Evaluations in any state.
RELIGION	Adoptive applicants must be committed to providing their child with a constructive, wholesome, and spiritual home environment.
HEALTH	Adoptive applicants must give evidence of good health, both physical and mental, which will be verified during the application process by medical examinations and, if recommended, psychological evaluations.
AGE	Varies depending upon the adoptive couple's state of residence; however, typically, applicants must be at least 21 years old.
MARRIAGE & FAMILY	Home study applicants are encouraged to have been married long enough to provide the couple sufficient time to establish a home, financial security, and to adjust to the marriage. Married applicants must have a satisfying and secure marriage and be married a minimum of 2 years.
ADOPTION EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS	Education requirements vary depending upon the adoptive couple's state of residence and, in some cases, the regulations of the state from which the family is adopting (child's birth state). Our goal is to prepare you to be the best parents possible for your child. Therefore, we require classes and reading on parenting skills and adoption issues.
FINANCES	Adoptive applicants must be able to provide a financially stable home, demonstrated by solid credit history and an ability to live within their means.
PREGNANCY	Before you begin the adoption process, you need to complete any infertility treatments so you can truly be ready to be the best parent for your adopted child. <u>If you become pregnant while in the adoption process, notify our office immediately.</u> We will then place your file on hold. When you are ready to consider adoption again, generally no sooner than when your child is nearing their first birthday, call us to discuss reactivating your file.
ADOPTION OF SUBSEQUENT CHILDREN	To have adequate time for attachment and bonding, it is important to have a minimum of one year with the child/ren in the home before beginning another adoption.

WHAT IS A HOME STUDY?

A home study is a document that verifies that you qualify to adopt a child. A home study professional will meet with you in your home to ask you various questions about your background, your values, and the strengths of your marriage (if applicable), your finances, and your reasons for adopting— in addition to other questions. The home visit is not a white-glove inspection, but an opportunity to get to know you and to discuss what it would mean to grow your family through adoption. One of the most important aspects of the home study is education and preparation to help families parent their adopted children.

As part of our overall services, Nightlight conducts home studies for those adopting here in the United States as well as for families interested in international adoption. Nightlight also conducts home studies for those seeking to adopt foster children who are legally free for adoption through the social service departments in other states. In addition, we also have a program called ReNewed Hope, in which children from disrupted/dissolved adoptions are available.

WHY DO I NEED A HOME STUDY?

There are many reasons that you will need a home study, the main being that in order to adopt, you are first required to have an approved home study report completed. It is best to have your home study completed by a licensed and accredited home study provider.

In addition, if you are adopting domestically (adopting a child born in the United States), meeting with the home study provider will help prepare you for the adoption process itself. Some of the questions posed in a home study are the ones you can expect an expectant mother, attorney, or other agency personnel to ask. For example, expectant mothers 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. Also, once your home study is complete, an expectant mother can feel reassured knowing that you have met certain standards that are essential to be a good parent.

Third, most private agencies and attorneys will not match a couple with an expectant mother until the prospective adoptive family is home study approved. If a child is suddenly available, families who have a completed and up-to-date home study will be the first to be considered. The home study demonstrates to the courts that you can provide a safe and nurturing home.

WHY SHOULD I USE AN AGENCY TO CONDUCT MY HOME STUDY?

Using an experienced agency such as Nightlight will give you confidence that your home study provider will be aware of and meet all requirements for the courts and the Department of Social Services. Each state can have different requirements, and if you are matched with a birth mother in another state, Nightlight will make sure that your home study meets that state's requirements.

If you are working with another agency or an attorney for the adoption placement, Nightlight will honor your commitment to that agency/attorney and will conduct your home study and sign all agreements between Nightlight (the home study agency) and the placing agency or attorney. 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 home studies be conducted by a licensed agency.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE HOME STUDY?

During the home study process, you will meet with your home study worker. This is a time of getting to know you; where we can visit your home and see that it is safe and reasonably clean for a child. As required by law, we also meet with each adult member of the household individually. This does not mean that we have to set up a separate appointment; sometimes the husband will go in another room while we talk with the wife, and vice versa. Also, we will meet with your children briefly and ask them a few age appropriate questions. If you have adult children not living in the home, we will contact them by phone to ask them questions about their relationship with you growing up and their relationship with you now.

During the interview we want to find out about you and what makes you the person you are. We want to learn of your strengths, and we also believe that there is strength in weakness, so even if everything about you is not “perfect,” we want to find out what you learned from mistakes or difficulties in your life.

We will discuss topics such as parenting an adopted child, openness in adoption, telling your child of his/her adoption, and other core issues. Depending upon the type of adoption you are pursuing, we will also discuss being a conspicuous family, transracial adoptions, adopting an older child, birth order when adopting, and other matters. Being more prepared for adoption can help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety associated with the process

Some of the topics covered in the home study include: your background, your lifestyle and interests, your marriage, parenting or experience with children, any criminal record, financial stability, and the type of child you seek to adopt. Although the home study is assessing your physical, mental and emotional ability to parent a child, we will also focus on education—so that it will be a time of learning and preparation for you as you seek to bring a child into your family through adoption.

TIPS REGARDING HOME VISITS

- Please ask your social worker if they have pet allergies or sensitivities and make proper arrangements for pets prior to your visit.
- In general, count on the social worker being in your home for about 1.5- 2 hours. Usually after two hours, it is difficult to answer questions and to remember what is being presented. Sometimes additional visits are scheduled to complete interviews or to offer additional education.
- Make sure you sit where the social worker can write—your dining room or kitchen table is perfect for this. Offer the home study provider something to drink, such as coffee or tea and light refreshments, especially if the social worker will be there for an extended period of time.
- Plan on an individual interview with each spouse.
- Make sure all of your children (and any adults) who live in the home are there; but also make sure that they can go to a different room so that you can speak privately without interruption.

CAN I HAVE THE HOME STUDY VISIT IN THE EVENING OR ON THE WEEKEND?

Our staff is flexible and a social worker can generally arrange a time for a home visit that is convenient for you and your family. Nightlight also respects the personal time off of our employees and therefore requests that one of the home visits occur during normal business hours while the other may be done in the evening if needed. Please coordinate your visits directly with your social worker.

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE A HOME STUDY?

If you are adopting through one of Nightlight's programs, you will want to first complete an application for the program. Once your application is approved, you will complete an orientation with your adoption advisor. After the orientation is done you will be able to begin your home study. If you are not adopting through one of Nightlight's programs, we will require that you be working with a placing agency before we can begin the home study.

HOW LONG DOES A HOME STUDY TAKE TO COMPLETE?

A typical home study will be completed in **8-12 weeks**. (This is the time from when Nightlight receives your home study payment and initial documents to the time that Nightlight submits the home study to the appropriate authority). Of course, this timeframe assumes that a family submits all documents required, that they are able to schedule the necessary home study 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. A home study is not considered complete until the family reviews it and authorizes any necessary changes.

HOW LONG IS MY HOME STUDY CURRENT?

A home study 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.

If you were to have any significant changes in your family (such as moving to another home or a change regarding the household members in your home) then your home study would need to be updated and a home visit would have to be made. If someone else begins to reside in your home and is 18 years of age or older, then that person's background checks must also be conducted.

If there are more moderate changes in your life (e.g., change of employment), you can simply notify us of these changes to be made in the home study.

WHAT IF I FAIL TO COMPLETE MY HOME STUDY REQUIREMENTS WITHIN ONE YEAR?

Upon signing the home study agreement, you are agreeing to complete your portion of the home study requirements in a timely manner. If at the one-year mark from the beginning of your home study process, the home study has not been completed due to your own failure to finalize documents, parent education, and/or visits, your file will be closed. In the event that you wish to have your file reopened after the one-year mark and continue working on your home study, you will be charged a home study update fee to reopen your file and finalize your home study (in addition to updating any documents that have expired and paying mileage for an additional home visit, if it has been six months or more since your last visit). If your file is closed out after a year and you do not wish to reopen your file and finalize your home study, you will not be refunded any of the home study fee payment. Also, if your home study social worker is having

difficulty receiving a response from you regarding finalizing documents, parent education, and/or visits at the 6-month mark, you will receive a reminder about your agreement to complete your home study requirements within one year.

WHO QUALIFIES TO ADOPT?

Many people worry needlessly that they may not be approved to adopt. It is very important that you be completely honest and up-front with the social worker so that if there are any areas of concern, such as a criminal history, the circumstances can be explained in the home study report. A less-than-perfect record will not automatically disqualify you. Please remember that when a social worker conducts your home study, they are not looking for reasons to disqualify you; they simply want to know that you are capable of providing a child with a loving and secure environment. When an agency caseworker writes your home study, they are 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. However, other problems are more serious, such as repeated divorces, a recent recovery from alcoholism, or a recent criminal history. Please be up-front in telling us about these potential problems.

Issues of abuse must also be addressed in the home study. If you were the victim of abuse, be prepared to explain how you have overcome this abuse. The reason the social worker must discuss this issue with you is to make sure that the past abuse has been dealt with in a healthy way, 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. Nightlight will always abide by professional and legal standards of confidentiality.

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

- *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 main concern is the stability of your current marriage.
- *You are receiving counseling.* If you or your spouse has been in counseling individually, or if you have had counseling as a couple, your chances of being approved are not lessened. In fact, most agency personnel view counseling as a sign of strength. Counseling to deal with issues related to infertility, communication, or family of origin are 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, then past drug use is not necessarily an issue. If you have been treated for abusing drugs or alcohol addiction, however, you will need to tell the home study provider. Usually this information will not disqualify you, but the agency staff will want evidence from a treatment counselor that you have resolved this problem and your risk of abusing a substance again is minimal. Nightlight staff will want more information regarding why you entered treatment, what the course of treatment was, and whether you followed the treatment plan. In addition, we will require a letter stating that you are no longer addicted to drugs and alcohol and that you are doing well.
- *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 day-to-day 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 home study.

- *You have a criminal history.* A criminal history will not automatically disqualify you, but it is important that you disclose any criminal history that you have. Failure to do so can result in your being automatically disapproved. 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 at Nightlight about these documents if you need further explanation.
- *You have a chronic health condition.* If you have a physical disability, this should not disqualify you from adopting so long as you can care for a child. Neither should a chronic disease, such as diabetes, disqualify you, 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 home study is to determine that the parent is expected to have a normal life span and to be able to care for a child.
- *Financial difficulties and other problems.* If you have had financial difficulties, such as bankruptcy, these problems do not necessarily keep you from adopting. We will discuss how you have handled past financial difficulties and will want to ensure you can financially afford to support an adopted child now.

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.

WHAT IS THE FEE FOR AN UPDATE OR ADDENDUM?

If Nightlight conducted a home study for you within the last two years, your new home study will be half the cost of the original home study fee. If Nightlight has conducted your home study and the home study requires an additional home visit and addendum to reflect changes in your home (such as a move), the cost will be \$300. If the addendum does not require a home visit, the fee will be \$100.

WHAT IS THE FEE FOR A HOME STUDY?

Once your application has been accepted, you will be invoiced for your home study fees. Fees vary by state, so please contact your home study coordinator in your state for exact amounts.

Nightlight charges the federal mileage rate for each visit.

WHAT IS THE FEE FOR POST PLACEMENT/POST ADOPTION REPORTS?

Nightlight charges \$300 for each post placement report and post adoption report required. The required number of visits can vary by state for domestic adoption. The fee for your post-placement services are due prior to your home study being finalized. These fees 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 for them to complete the post-placement report(s).

WHAT SERVICES DOES NIGHTLIGHT PROVIDE?

In addition to conducting home Studies, Nightlight offers a range of other services to its clients.

Adoption Advice and Advocacy: Nightlight can assist you in deciding what type of child may be appropriate for you to consider adopting. Nightlight also ensures that paperwork is processed correctly and quickly for out-of-state adoptions through the United States’ Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children for Interstate Adoptions (ICPC). We serve as more than just a home study agency; we serve as your advocates.

Education: 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 home study 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.

*Before Nightlight will finalize your home study, you must complete the **Parent Education Grid**, indicating that you have completed the approved educational requirements. This statement is included among the supporting documents submitted with your home study.*

Counseling: Nightlight has a counselor that we partner with and home study only clients can receive one session of counseling at no charge and full clients can receive three sessions of counseling at no charge.

Open Adoption Relationships: Nightlight encourages and supports open relationships between birth families and adoptive families. Social workers provide education to both parties on how to navigate this unique relationship for the best interests of the child.

Post-Adoption Support: After you come home with your child, there are still a few forms to be filled out and post-placement/post-adoption visits and reports to be completed. We will be in contact with you to help you with this process. We are also available to talk with you about adjustment issues or parenting issues once you are home with your child. This additional assistance is included in your agency fee.

OTHER HOME STUDY SERVICES

International Adoption: Nightlight is happy to provide home study services for an international adoption, whether you plan on adopting through Nightlight or another agency. Please reference <https://nightlight.org/international-adoption/> for more details.

Embryo Adoption: The purpose of the embryo adoption home study 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 parents. Please reference <https://nightlight.org/snowflakes-embryo-adoption-donation/> for more details.

Foster Care: There are more than 100,000 children available for adoption here in the United States because of abuse and/or neglect. To learn more of these waiting children go to <http://www.adoptuskids.org/>. 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 home study 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, a certified investigator from DSS will conduct your home study. DSS does not charge for this service.

HOW DO I START THE HOME STUDY PROCESS WITH NIGHTLIGHT?

After your home study application has been accepted (or your program orientation completed for Nightlight clients), we will e-mail you instructions for Nightlight's online home study document system. This system allows you to download fillable PDFs, complete the forms on the computer, sign with an electronic signature, and upload back into the home study document system without ever having to print. This system guides you through the various forms and paperwork required for the home study process.

Home study paperwork includes financial information, residential history form, autobiographies, background checks, and copies of birth certificates and marriage certificates, reference letters, and other related items. Completing the forms can be a bit confusing, so feel free to call Nightlight or email us with any questions you have in completing these forms.

Please contact the appropriate office to learn more about a home study in your state or email us at Info@nightlight.org

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