



International Home Study Guide

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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

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

RESIDENCE	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 25 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 country from which they are adopting. 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 complete home studies for families adopting embryos called Snowflakes Family Evaluations.

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 Hague accredited home study provider.

In addition, when adopting internationally, US Citizenship and Immigration Services and the country from which you are adopting base your approval, in part, on a home study. You will also have education during the home study that is crucial to help you understand how to parent a child who is adopted internationally.

WHY SHOULD I USE A HAGUE ACCREDITED AGENCY TO CONDUCT MY HOME STUDY?

Since the Universal Adoption Act went into effect in July 2014, home studies for international adoptions are required to be conducted by a Hague-accredited adoption agency. Moreover, using an experienced agency such as Nightlight, which employs a full-time home study coordinator to oversee every facet of the home study process, will give you confidence that you will meet all the requirements for Immigration and the country from which you are adopting.

In addition, we can provide guidance throughout the process. Typically, families will have at least 2 in person visits with the home study provider. Sometimes this can vary depending on state requirements or country requirements. During these meetings, we will discuss the issues associated with the adoption process, telling your child of his or her adoption, multicultural

issues, attachment and bonding, and other core issues. In pursuing an international adoption, we will also discuss being a conspicuous family, adopting an older child, issues related to receiving a child from overseas, birth order when adopting, and other matters such as adopting a child with special needs.

If you are working with another agency to conduct the actual adoption (called the placing agency), Nightlight will honor your commitment to that agency and will conduct your home study and sign all agreements between Nightlight (the home study agency) and the placing agency.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE HOME STUDY?

During the home study process, you will meet with your home study worker at least twice. This is a time of getting to know you. This is not a “white-glove” inspection, but a time 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.

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 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.
- 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.

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.

WHAT SERVICES DOES NIGHTLIGHT PROVIDE?

In addition to conducting home studies in 10 states, 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. We serve as more than just a home study agency; we serve as your advocates.

Education - Nightlight is very committed to educating families. If you are adopting internationally, you will 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 home study agency, then your placing agency may have educational requirements that you will complete through them.

Adoption education helps you determine what type of adoption is right for you, and it also prepares you for parenting a child whose background may require 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.

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.)

Post-Adoption Support and Counseling - Nightlight offers post adoption support as well as professional counseling services. We are also available to talk with you about adjustment issues or parenting issues once you are home with your child.

Post-Adoption Paperwork - Once your child is home with you, you will need to make sure your child is a U.S. citizen, has proof of this status, and obtains a social security card as well as obtain a certificate of foreign birth. We can help provide information for getting these tasks accomplished.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT AN INTERNATIONAL HOME STUDY?

If you are starting an international adoption with a placing agency other than Nightlight, the agency will need to enter into an agreement with Nightlight to conduct the home study. The home study must also be reviewed by your placing agency (if you are not using Nightlight) to make sure that it meets the requirements of the country from which you want to adopt. Regardless of whether you are adopting from a **non-Hague country** or a **Hague country**, the

home study is submitted to the National Benefit Center where it is reviewed by Citizenship and Immigration Services.

IS A HAGUE-COUNTRY HOME STUDY DIFFERENT FROM A NON-HAGUE-COUNTRY HOME STUDY?

Historically, there have been some differences in requirements between a Hague-compliant and non-Hague international home study based on whether the client was adopting from a Hague country, such as China, or a non-Hague country such as Ukraine. However, because of the Universal Accreditation Act of 2012, which requires all international home studies to meet Hague standards and went into effect as of **July 14, 2014**, Nightlight now conducts all international home studies to meet the Hague standards. Therefore, Nightlight has identical requirements whether you are adopting from a Hague or non-Hague country.

A requirement for a Hague adoption is that we obtain clearances from each state/country in which you have resided since you were 18 years old. This can take a few weeks to complete. However, obtaining clearances from other countries can take an extraordinary length of time and much effort. **Because of the time involved in obtaining these clearances from other countries, we recommend that these clearances begin to be processed before a home study visit is scheduled so that your home study completion is not delayed by waiting for your clearances to be returned. Fortunately, once these clearances are completed, they NEVER expire and can be used for subsequent home studies if needed.**

HOW LONG IS MY HOME STUDY CURRENT?

An international home study must be less than six months old when submitted to USCIS (US Citizenship and Immigration Services). A home study for a non-Hague country is then current for 18 months after you receive approval on the I-600A. If you are adopting from a Hague Convention country, the home study expires when the I-800A approval expires which is usually about 15 months after the approval. Typically, we will start you on a home study update about 3 months before the expiration date.

Sometimes adoptions do not occur as quickly as desired or expected, and the approval from Immigration expires before the adoption overseas takes place, which also means that your home study expires. Immigration does not charge a fee for the renewed I-600A or I-800A when you submit the first updated home study before the I-800A Approval expires; neither are you charged for the fingerprints to be taken again. **However, you must submit your new home study within three (3) months before your Immigration approval expires; otherwise, you can be charged for submitting a new I-600A or I-800A.**

While the first update for immigration approval is offered at no fee, there is a fee for the home study. An **expired home study (or nearly expired)** initially conducted by Nightlight (and less than

two years old) is less expensive than the original home study. The home study provider must complete a new home visit with you to identify changes that have occurred and then include those changes in an updated home study report.

Therefore, be sure to contact Nightlight approximately **3 - 4 months** before your Immigration approval is ready to expire. **THIS IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, SO WHEN YOU RECEIVE YOUR APPROVAL FROM IMMIGRATION, PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOUR MONTHS BEFORE YOUR APPROVAL EXPIRES.**

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.

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, we will be sure that your home study 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 being older or having a difficult background, the home study provider must carefully address these issues with you. 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 process and beyond.

It is best to be approved for the widest range of options that are potentially acceptable to you and for which your home study 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 are not comfortable with. However, if a special case (such as a sibling group) becomes available it will be beneficial to have already been approved for the necessary special needs rather than having to have an addendum to your home study.

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 investigator 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, she is not looking for reasons to disqualify you; she simply wants to know that you are capable of providing a child with a loving and secure environment. When an agency caseworker writes your home study, she 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. 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 probably 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 issues.* If you have been treated for a psychological disorder, such as depression, anxiety, 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 taken or are taking psychotropic medication.* Taking such medication cannot disqualify you from adopting. We will discuss any medications you are currently taking and will want to know how effective they are in treating a given diagnosis.
- *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 here 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.
- *You come from a dysfunctional family.* If you have come from a dysfunctional family and have dealt with the issues appropriately—and if other facets of your life are in order—then a social worker will discuss with you your family’s past and will focus on your life now.
- *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 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 AN UPDATE OR ADDENDUM?

If Nightlight conducted a home study for you within the last 2 years, your new home study will cost less than the initial pre-placement report. Other fees may be incurred as well such as travel/mileage expenses and post-placement/adoption reports.

If Nightlight has conducted your home study and the home study requires an additional home visit and addendum to reflect changes in your situation, the visit and addendum will cost \$300. If the addendum does not require a home visit, the fee will be \$100. Any change to the home study after the report is completed – whether the change is requested by the family or by the family's placing agency – is considered an addendum and will be invoiced to the family.

SUPPORT PLAN

Sometimes when families adopt an older child or one with more serious special needs, they become overwhelmed and feel that they need more than the usual day-to-day support. Nightlight, as your home study agency, wants to be the first contact you make (as well as your placing agency if different from Nightlight). We are closest to you and can see you face-to-face to provide that help. Most families have some struggles but manage to get through the hurdles, but about one-third of families have more significant issues and need outside resources. We do not want you to struggle alone and ask that you put a plan in place of those who can be a support to you in the event that you need time alone, extra hands in your home, or counseling for you and your child, and in more serious situations, a place where your child can go for some time.

Nightlight can provide counseling and support as well as furnish the names of those who can come into your home to provide therapeutic techniques to help you and your child adjust.

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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