Kentucky Home Study Services

for International Adoptions

Serving clients throughout Kentucky

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Nightlight Christian Adoptions

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Nightlight Christian Adoptions
Kentucky International Home Study Services

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What is a home study?

A home study is a document to verify that you qualify to adopt a child. A home study professional meets with you in your home at least twice 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.

As part of our overall services, Nightlight conducts home studies for KY residents adopting domestically from here in the United States, as well as for families interested in international adoption. Nightlight also conducts home studies for those interested in adopting children with special needs. Many children are available for adoption throughout the United States and other countries.

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. If you are adopting internationally, US Citizenship and Immigration Services bases your approval, in part, on a home study. Many countries that place children for adoption overseas require a home study to be submitted to them, too.

Why should I use an agency to conduct my home study?

Although some states allow private social workers to conduct home studies, some countries (such as China and Russia) and some states (like Florida) require that a home study be completed through a licensed agency. Moreover, using an experienced agency such as Nightlight will give you confidence that your social worker will be aware of and meet all requirements for US 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 of Kentucky to have at least two face-to-face visits with you in the home. If needed, additional visits can possibly be at the Nightlight office or in the community. Being more prepared for adoption can help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety associated with the process.

During these meetings, we will discuss the issues associated with openness in adoption, birth parents, 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, trans-racial adoptions, 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 home study and sign all agreements between Nightlight (the home study agency) and your placing agency.

What happens during the home study?

During the home study process we will meet with you at least twice. The number of visits often depends on circumstances and the country from which you are adopting. Because this is a “home” study, we will have at least two meetings at your home. 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 and comfortable 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 age three and older 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 while 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 have learned from mistakes or difficulties in your life.

Some of the topics covered in the home study include: your childhood and background, your lifestyle and interests, your marriage, parenting or experience with children, your health status, 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, most of the home study is really education—about 70 percent—and 30 percent is collecting informational forms and interviewing you.

What parts of Kentucky does Nightlight work in?

Nightlight provides home study services for the entire state of Kentucky.

What services does Nightlight provide?

In addition to conducting home studies in Kentucky, Nightlight Christian Adoptions 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 by USCIS.

Adoption Advice and Advocacy. Nightlight can assist you in deciding what type of child may be appropriate for you to consider adopting. We serve as more than just a home study agency; we serve as your advocates.

Education. Nightlight is very committed to educating families. Everyone who uses Nightlight's home study services will complete at least 10 hours of Hague compliant adoption education**. (If you are adopting from China, there are 12 hours of education required.)**

If Nightlight is just your home study 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 of the education that you have received to both agencies.

> *Before Nightlight will finalize your home study, you must complete the **Parent Education Agreement**, indicating that you have completed the approved educational requirements. This statement is included among the supporting documents submitted with your home study. Your home study will not be approved until you have completed the parent education requirements.*

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.

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. In the unlikely event that your adoption disrupts, Nightlight can guide you to the appropriate resources.

When should I have a home study?

Regardless of what adoption plan you choose, it is usually best to have the home study completed as early as possible in the adoption process. However, before you begin an International home study, 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 home study process. In most instances, a home study can be easily modified to comply with the requirements associated with the type of adoption you choose to pursue. However, it can save you extra time, work and fees if you are certain of the country you wish to adopt from at the beginning of the process.

If you decide to adopt internationally after having a domestic home study completed, the home study must be less than six (6) months old when it arrives at US Citizenship and Immigration Services. The last visit to your home by the certified investigator must also have been within the last twelve (12) months.

What should I know about an international home study?

If you are starting an international adoption with a child-placing agency other than Nightlight, be sure that the agency will enter into an agreement with Nightlight to conduct your home study. Nightlight is Hague accredited, yet every agency has the right to determine which agencies they will accept home studies from.

The home study 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 Supervised or Exempt Provider interagency contract with your placing agency.

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

How is a Hague-country home study different from a non-Hague-country home study?

Nightlight has almost the identical requirements for both home studies. In Kentucky, if you are adopting domestically or internationally, you and anyone else in your household who is 12 years or older must have a child abuse clearance from Kentucky and every other state and country in which you have resided since you were 18 years old.

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. Because of the time involved in obtaining these clearances, we also recommend that these clearances be completed before a home study visit is scheduled so that your home study does not expire before the clearances are completed.

How long is my home study current?

For international adoptions, you also responsible for tracking the Immigration expiration date of your approval and contacting the agency ahead of time to begin the process of updating your home study. An international home study must be less than 6 months old and all supporting documents must be less than 12 months old when submitted to USCIS (Citizenship and Immigration Services). Your home study will need to be updated and resubmitted before your Immigration approval expires (15 months for Hague countries and 18 months for non-Hague countries).

The fee for updating a home study (over one year old) initially conducted by Nightlight is half the current cost of an original home study. For each update, the home study provider must visit you in your home to identify changes that have occurred, and then include those changes in an updated home study report.

When you are ready to have your home study updated, just call Nightlight to arrange to have a social worker assigned to visit you once your home study update fees have been paid.

What if I fail to complete my home study requirements within one year?

Failure to Finalize Home Study: 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 a year 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.

Can I have the home study visit in the evening or on the weekend?

Yes, our staff is very 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 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.

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, you must be sure that your home study addresses (1) what special needs you are open to considering and (2) what special needs 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, you must complete the Special Needs Assessment Questionnaire, and these issues must be carefully addressed with you by the home study 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 "home study approved" for the widest range of special needs options that are potentially acceptable to you and for which your home study provider feels you are capable. 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 type of case, you will have to complete an addendum to the home study, which will require additional time and fees.

Who qualifies to adopt?

Many people worry needlessly that they will not pass the home study process. Nearly everyone who desires to adopt meets the prospective adoptive parent requirements. However, it is very important that you be completely honest 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 from adopting, 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 your past history.

Although families are occasionally disqualified on the basis of their background—usually because of a recent criminal history—nearly every family that pursues a home study is eventually approved for adoption. Many couples worry about supposed "skeletons" in the closet. But remember that when a social worker conducts your home study, he/she is not looking for reasons to disqualify you; he/she 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 social worker writes your home study, he/she is your advocate. The social worker will present you in the best light.

If you think something in your past may present a problem, talk with us openly 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 continual criminal history. Please be up-front in telling us about these potential problems from the very beginning.

Although you may have an issue that would not disqualify you from receiving an approved home study (e.g., misconduct when you were 18 years old), this issue could possibly disqualify you from adopting from a specific country. We at Nightlight do not want to start a home study for you only to find out that the country from which you want to adopt will not permit the adoption due to a criminal record, however minor it may be. 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 reported in your home study. Such information cannot be taken out of the home study that is sent overseas. What may appear to be a minor incident or "youthful indiscretion" may keep you from adopting in some countries. Therefore, Nightlight will want to discuss any such issues with your placing agency before we begin the home study process. Again, we do not want you to pay for a home study 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 home study and how the information should be presented.

Difficult situations from your past do not automatically disqualify you, but issues of any abuse must be addressed in the home study. 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 yet. Furthermore, if you are adopting internationally, Immigration requires that the home study state whether you have been the victim or offender of abuse.

When a social worker asks you difficult—and potentially embarrassing—questions, he/she is not poking around to "get the dirt on you." The 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. Nightlight prefers that all adoptive families be married a minimum of 3 years when beginning the adoption process. Exceptions are handled on a case by case basis.
- *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 conduct your home study.
- *You are divorced.* If you have been divorced (even more than once), you can still adopt. A social worker 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/she is unstable, this instability will probably manifest itself in other areas of the person's life as well.
- *You are in therapy.* If either 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 problems with family of origin are all 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 home study 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 anxiety and it has not been a life-dominating problem, then this need not be an issue, but it does have to be reported. However, if the problem interferes with your life (say, you are not able to work), then this will need to be discussed even 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 your parenting skills and the safety of a child, then this could prevent you from obtaining an approved home study. If you have psychological issues in your past that have not been treated or addressed, then you may be required to have a licensed mental health professional complete a psychological evaluation during the home study process to assess your current mental state and functioning.

- *You have taken or are taking psychotrophic medication.* Taking such medication cannot disqualify you from adopting. However, some countries will not allow persons taking certain medications or having certain medical conditions to adopt. Many other countries do not place these restrictions on applicants. We can talk with you about this and help you evaluate your individual 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 home study 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 will also need to provide a letter explaining why you were charged with each crime—and include a statement of remorse, if appropriate. This letter must be signed by you under penalty of perjury. Please talk with your social worker about these documents, if you need further explanation. Both of these documents must be submitted to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

- *You have a chronic health condition.* People with physical disabilities should not be disqualified from adopting, as 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 home study is to determine that the parent is expected to have a normal life span and is physically/emotionally/mentally 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 current 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 social worker will simply state this 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 home study process, 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 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" but 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.

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

Everyone who adopts internationally must be approved by US 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-800A Forms

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

When submitting your I-600A or I-800A application and the applicable fees to USCIS, you must also include your **original home study, a copy of the agency's license** and photocopies of the following documents:

- Birth certificate for each petitioner (husband and wife) as well as for any other members of the household
- Marriage certificate for the petitioners
- Adoption decrees for any adopted children (if applicable)
- 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, along with the applicant's letter of remorse signed under penalty of perjury

Mailing the forms: Once you mail the I-600A or the I-800A form to USCIS, it will be forwarded to the National Benefits Center (NBC). The NBC will review the form and your home study and then issue you a fingerprinting appointment for the Louisville, KY or Nashville, TN USCIS office.

If you need to reschedule your fingerprinting appointment, you must contact USCIS at the number below. Fingerprinting services are not available at just any KY USCIS office. You will be assigned to an office for your fingerprint appointment based on your residential zip code.

Special note

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 track my file with NBC/Immigration?

If you would like to track your file and receive updated information as to the status of your application and approval, you can file Immigration form G 1145. Go to http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf to print out the form and mail it in with your I-600A or I-800A application form.

What is the fee for a home study?

In this packet you will find a list of fees for various kinds of home study services. Please refer to the last page of this booklet, the ***Quick Reference List of Home Study Fees***.

Home study only clients should complete an online home study application and send your non-refundable application fee of $100 before your application is considered complete. Once your application has been accepted, a social worker will not be able to set up an appointment to meet with you until you have paid for the home study services and post-placement/post-adoption services.

We charge mileage at the federal rate for home study and post-placement visits, calculated from your social worker's home.

What is the fee for post-placement/post-adoption reports?

Nightlight's Kentucky office charges $300 per social worker visit and report. The fees for post-placement/post-adoption are due after your application for the home study has been accepted. The fees for post-placement/post-adoption 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).

How long does a home study take to complete?

A typical home study will be completed in **8-10 weeks**. (This is the time from when Nightlight receives a family's initial documents and home study fee to when the final home study is approved and released to the family to submit to Immigration.) Of course, this timeframe assumes that a family submits all supporting documents promptly, 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. (Because some countries, such as China, require there to be more than two home study visits, the process for these countries could take a little longer than the 8-10 weeks average.) A home study is not considered complete until it has been approved by the home study social worker's supervisor, the family reviews it, authorizes any necessary changes, and signs a statement that they agree to all the facts in the home study.

What is the fee for an update or addendum?

If Nightlight conducted a home study for you within the last 2 years, and you are now in need of a home study update, your home study will be half the current cost of an original home study report. If you are moving into Kentucky with a completed home study, a full new home study must be completed by Nightlight in order to comply with Kentucky requirements.

If Nightlight has conducted your home study and the current unexpired 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 changes to the home study 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 home study into an international one (or vice-versa)?

You will be charged $1,000 to change a domestic home study to an international home study. Also, there are additional charges associated with the international home study report, such as clearances for Hague home studies, and any extra post-placement visits. For an international home study to be changed into a domestic home study, the fee is $500.

How do I start the home study process with Nightlight?

Before the social worker can schedule the first home visit, you must complete and submit the following to our office:

- ***Online Application for Home Study and application fee*** *(if not using Nightlight as your placing agency)*
- ***Home Study Fee***
- ***Pre-Payment of Post-Placement Fees***

After your home study application has been accepted (or your program orientation completed for Nightlight clients), our Kentucky home study coordinator 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 be careful—and be sure to sign your name on all background clearance request forms. Feel free to call Nightlight or email us with any questions you have in completing these forms.

Quick Reference List of Home Study Fees

Nightlight Christian Adoptions (NCA) - Kentucky

Home Study Only Application Fee……. **$100**

Domestic Home Study
Total **$1,500**

International Home Study (NCA Program Clients)
Total **$1,600**

International Home Study Only (Separate Placing Agency)
Total **$1,700**

OTHER SERVICES
Addendum to current KY home study..... $300
Addendum not requiring home visit $100
Updated Domestic HS.....… $750
Updated Int'l HS (NCA Clients).....… $800
Updated Int'l HS Only (Sep. Placing Agency)..… $850
Conversion from Domestic to Int'l HS……....$1,000
Conversion from Int'l to Domestic HS…….... $500

Post-Placement Reporting for All Clients

All clients must sign a Post-Placement Fee Agreement in addition to their program-specific home study fee agreement. Post-placement fees depend upon the number of post-placement reports required by your adoption program. Nightlight Kentucky charges $300/each for social worker visits and reports.

For all services, mileage is assessed at the federal rate at the time of service.