



INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION INFORMATION

Thank you for deciding to learn more about becoming an international adoptive family! The process of adoption can be emotional and complex, and it can also be very rewarding. This packet has been designed to provide information about International or Inter-Country Adoption. As you read through the steps, remember that the Wisconsin Family Connections Center staff is here to support, encourage, and assist you throughout your journey. You are welcome to call us at 1-800-762-8063, visit our website, wifamilyconnectionscenter.org, or email us at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org anytime.

GETTING STARTED

You probably have many questions about how to start the process of adopting internationally. What are the requirements? How much will it cost? What are the differences between international adoption and other kinds of adoption? There are probably many more questions, and we are here to answer those for you!

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION?

International adoption is when a married couple, an unmarried couple, or a single person from the United States adopts a child from another country. Each country has rules for whether they'll allow single people, unmarried couples, people of a certain age, etc., to adopt.

International adoptions are done through private adoption agencies. You can find a web link to a list of private adoption agencies in Wisconsin in the Resource Appendix. A licensed adoption agency in Wisconsin must complete your adoption home study. However, you can contact a placement agency from any state to ask about potential children for your home. A placing agency is an adoption agency with professional relationships with programs/agencies caring for waiting children in other countries.

They are also the people who make the referral for your adoption. Some agencies can complete your home study and be the placing agency, while others will only do your home study and work with your selected placing agency. If they do not work with your chosen country, your adoption agency can direct you to a placement agency that you can work with.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR ADOPTION?

The types of children eligible vary by country. Children are generally between two and four years old at the time of adoption. In some foreign countries, you may adopt an older child or a child with functional needs (e.g., developmental/intellectual disabilities, mental health conditions, etc.) and siblings. Many children from foreign countries are placed for adoption due to their families' living situations. In some developing countries, where families live in deep poverty, placing their child for adoption is considered a profound act of love and hope for a better life for their child.

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for international adoption vary depending on the country you choose to adopt from.

Keep in mind that every country's specific requirements may be different. Below are some common requirements for international adoption:

- **Age:** If you are a single parent, US immigration requires you to be at least 25 years old. Many countries require singles and couples to be no more than 45 years older than their adopted child. Again, this may vary depending on the country.
- **Marital status:** Some countries require you to be married for at least two years before you adopt or five years if you have been previously divorced. This may vary based on the country.
- **Home study:** All adoptive parents need to complete a home study. An adoption agency does the home study. The home study allows the agency to get to know a potential adoptive family and assess their readiness to adopt.
- **Training:** All first-time adoptive parents must complete at least 25 hours of pre-adoption training.
- **Health:** Your physical and mental health conditions do not interfere with your ability to provide care for a child. Some countries may require a psychological assessment of the pre-adoptive parents to be completed. If that is the case, often, it is the responsibility of the pre-adoptive parents to find a clinician who can complete the assessment.
- **Travel:** Many countries require one or both parents to travel to pick up their child. You may also be required to visit multiple times and/or stay in the country for a specified length of time before returning to the United States with your child.

TIME FRAME

The time frame for an international adoption varies based on the country you choose to adopt from. The entire process can take anywhere from one to three years to complete. This would include the home study, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's approval process, and referral. Aside from the country you choose, time frames also vary depending on factors that might include:

- The agency or agencies you work with
- Being too specific about the demographics/social histories of the child you wish to adopt
- How motivated you are to complete your requirements in a timely manner
- Delays due to timely filing of legal paperwork
- Political changes within the country of origin and/or international law

PROCESS

The first step involves identifying the country you wish to adopt from and choosing an adoption agency.

When identifying your country of choice, you may want to consider all of the country's requirements for prospective adoptive families and whether you meet their criteria for adoption. You may also want to consider the age, gender, race, and medical needs of eligible children. Many potential adoptive families want to know how the children are cared for before adoption. Some questions may include:

- Do the children live in foster homes?
- Are they living in orphanages?
- What kind of information is available about the birth family?
- Does the information I have gathered match what I am looking for when I think about building my family through adoption?
- What compromises am I willing to make to adopt a child from a specific country?

When choosing an adoption agency, be sure the agency meets your expectations and that you feel comfortable working with the staff. If you have already identified which country you'd like to adopt from, you can disclose this information to adoption agencies during your research to find out if the agency works with that country or can write your home study and work with you to locate a separate child-placing agency. This would also be a good time for you to ask what services are included in the fees outlined in the agreement. For more information on how to choose an adoption agency, please reference the tip sheet noted in the Resource Appendix.

Once you have selected your licensed adoption agency, you will need to fill out your application. You are ready to begin the home study process when the application has been approved.

HOME STUDY

Home studies must generally include the following:

- 1. Personal and family background.** This includes writing about and/or having an interview with agency staff about the family in which you grew up, how you were disciplined, and your life experiences.
- 2. Significant people in the lives of the applicants.** Similar to personal background, you will explain your relationships with co-workers or friends and your experiences with them.
- 3. Marriage and family relationships.** Again, you will explain, either through writing or an interview, your relationship with your partner (if applicable). This includes information such as how you met and how you resolve conflicts. You will also talk about your relationships with your family members.

- 4. Motivation to adopt.** What is your motivation to adopt?
- 5. Expectations for the child.** What are your expectations for your children as they grow up?
- 6. Feelings about infertility (if this is an issue).** How were you able to resolve them?
- 7. Parenting and integration of the child into the family.** How do you plan on introducing the child to your family? How do you view the contact with your family and the child?
- 8. Family environment.** This will involve your family dynamics, how you and your significant other interact and deal with conflicts, and your home environment (condition of the home).
- 9. Physical and health history of the applicants.** All adoption agencies require a physical and a tuberculosis test. You will also need statements from your doctor(s) about your health condition.
- 10. Education and employment.** This includes insurance coverage and childcare plans if needed. You will be asked about your employment history and any job stresses.
- 11. Reference letters.** All agencies require at least three letters of recommendation from three non-relatives. Some agencies also ask for recommendations from family members, school staff, etc.
- 12. Criminal background checks.** The agency will run a criminal and child protective services check.
- 13. Summary and adoption professional's recommendation.** This summarizes the adoption professional's findings and their recommendation for a child for your family.
- 14. Autobiographical statement.** This is essentially the story of your life. Did you get along well with siblings, parents, etc.? Why would you be a good parent?
- 15. Income Statement.** You will need to verify your income by providing pay stubs, a W-4, or an income tax form.

This process usually takes about three to six months to complete. You can begin pre-adoption training while completing your home study or shortly thereafter.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The State of Wisconsin requires all first-time adoptive parents to complete 25 hours of pre-adoption training, of which a minimum of six hours must be in-person training and a minimum of six hours must be child-specific training. The 25 hours of pre-adoption training must cover the required core competencies:

- Adoption and its impact on parenting and family dynamics
- The issues for a child in an adoptive placement
- Loss and grief for the adopted child and the adoptive family
- Attachment issues in adoptive placements
- Support and resources for adopted children and adoptive families
- Cultural sensitivity in adoption
- Effects of abuse and neglect in adoption, including sexual abuse
- Legal issues relating to adoption

- Issues of children being adopted from an institutionalized care setting
- Educational issues in adoption
- Childhood developmental stages
- Trauma issues related to adoption

Within the “support and resources for adopted children and adoptive families” competency listed above, adoption agencies are required to provide prospective parents with information about post-adoption support offered through the Wisconsin Family Connections Center. In addition, adoption agencies are responsible for providing at least six additional hours of training appropriate to the family’s post-adoption needs. These trainings can be taken before the adoption or requested by the families through their adoption agency at any time in the future. Your assigned adoption professional will give you information about your training requirements.

PAPERWORK

Once you have completed your home study and training requirements, you will need to complete the dossier, which contains all of the documents required by the foreign government to complete the adoption of a child. Law and customs will dictate which documents are required in the dossier and how they should be prepared and presented. Your licensed adoption agency will be able to help you find and fill out the correct documents and give you advice on preparing for this process. It can take one to several months to complete this step, depending on how quickly you can gather the required documents and the processing times of the state departments and embassies involved.

When the paperwork for your home study and dossier is completed, your adoption agency will send the information to the country you have chosen. Once this is done, it is time to wait for your referral. The length of the referral process will depend on the country you are working with. Most countries have a waiting period of at least 12 months, with some reaching three years or more. Once there is an identified match between you and a child, you will receive a referral. Before accepting the referral, you may consider having the information reviewed within an International Adoption Medical Clinic to help you understand a child’s potential medical/developmental needs so you can make an informed decision if you are a good match for the child’s needs. Your adoption agency can help connect you or assist with reviewing the information and completing the acceptance documents. Once your child’s visa is approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), you will travel to pick them up.

TRAVEL

Some countries may require you to travel more than once during your adoption process. Check with your agency to see if they help to make travel arrangements and if there will be someone in the country to help guide you and translate if needed, when you arrive.

The length of your stay may vary based on the country you chose. You could stay for as little as three or 30 days or longer. Some of the longer trips may be broken into two visits if needed.

BACK HOME

Once you return home, you must complete your adoption—if it was not done overseas. Your worker will also begin coming to your home for post-adoption placement visits and reports. The final step is to go through the re-adoption process in your county. This helps with obtaining a birth certificate for your child, which, in turn, will allow your child, when they are older, to get a job, a driver's license, apply for college, get married, and more.

SELF-REFLECTION

We know this is a lot of information to take in and digest. Take some time to slow down and reflect on what you've read before you decide if this is the right path for your family or if another type of adoption would be a better fit. Some questions to think about may include:

- Do I meet the requirements of immigration services and the country I've chosen to adopt from?
- Am I open to adopting from another country?
- Are we willing to wait?
- Does this particular type of adoption meet my expectation to grow my family?
- Are my expectations for the child I hope to adopt appropriate?
- Am I too specific about the child's race, gender, and ethnicity?
- Is the cost of this type of adoption something my family is prepared for?
- Are my partner and I in agreement about adoption and this particular type of adoption?
- Can I complete the home study process and training required?
- Will my current family and friends support my adoption plans and adoptive child?
- Do I have a support network or know how to connect with one?

MORE QUESTIONS?

Please remember that the Wisconsin Family Connections Center staff are here for you during every step of your adoption journey, whether getting started, researching, training, or post-adoption. If you have more questions, please give us a call. We are here to help! You may also want to learn more about support groups in your area.

RESOURCE APPENDIX

The Wisconsin Family Connections Center website, wifamilyconnectionscenter.org, has several resources that may be helpful to you through your journey. By exploring the website, you can find:

- Tip Sheets (We recommend the tip sheets titled "I'm Ready to Adopt! How Do I Choose an Adoption Agency?" and "Tips for International Adoption Travel.")
- Support groups
- Information about making adoption affordable

If you need assistance navigating the website or other information or resources, please call us at 1-800-762-8063.