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## The 411 on Adoption Home Studies

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*In order to adopt a child, you will need to complete what's called a "home study." While that term may conjure up images of white-gloved inspectors looking for construction violations, in fact it's a process whereby a licensed agency is preparing you to become adoptive parents.*

For most prospective adoptive parents, the prospect of the adoption home study is daunting. Many resent having to prove that they are "qualified" to be parents. Something they wouldn't have to do if only biology was working in their favor.

In reality, however, the home study can be as valuable for you as prospective adoptive parents as it is for the agency. It gives you an opportunity to learn more about adoption and parenting an adopted child. It also gives you a chance to think about the kind of parent you plan to be.

While specific home study requirements and processes vary greatly from state to state and agency to agency, here are several common elements:

### **Interviews**

You can expect to be interviewed several times, both individually and jointly as you move through the home study process. They will ask questions about your expectations from adoption, your parenting plans, your relationship, even about your interests and hobbies. You may be asked about how you handle stress or how you have handled past crises.

### **Home Visit**

Couples often fear the home visit, worrying that if their home isn't immaculate or they don't have the right foods in the refrigerator that they will fail. In fact, however, the purpose is to see that you have a safe home and one that can accommodate a new family member.

Your home needn't be spotless and it needn't be a palace, but it does need to be a safe place for a child. That means meeting state standards for things like adequate space for a child, sufficient smoke detectors, and safe storage of hazardous materials and firearms. Your agency will give you a check list of what they are looking for so you can prepare.

### **Autobiographical Statement**

You and your spouse may be asked to write an autobiographical statement in order to better understand your family. This exercise can help you think through why you have chosen to adopt, the kind of parent you will be, and the relationship you have with your spouse. You don't need to be a professional writer. You just need to be thoughtful and honest.

### **References**

Most agencies will ask you for references from three or four individuals who know you well, and who can vouch for your character, and can attest to your interest in children. In addition to your closest friends, you may want to consider asking for a referral from an employer, a former teacher, a co-worker, a neighbor, or leader of your faith community.

### **Health Statement**

You will be expected to have a physical exam to establish that you are healthy enough to handle the day-to-day care of a child. If you have sought help for a previous condition or if you are currently being treated, you may still be approved as an adoptive parent. However, if you have specific concerns, don't

hesitate to discuss that directly with your agency.

### **Income Statement**

Expect to provide income tax returns verification of income. You may also be asked about savings, insurance policies and other investments and debts. The agency is simply trying to see that you are financially stable.

### **Background Checks**

Criminal and child abuse records are required for adoptive and foster parent applicants. While there are offences which will prohibit your being licensed to adopt, in many other cases the agency can work with your family, depending on the charge and its resolution. It is vitally important to be honest in all the documents you submit to the home study process. If you're worried about something in your background, ask your agency which offences would prohibit your being licensed in your state.

### **CONCLUSION**

As you can see from the number of elements included, the home study can be a time consuming process. The home study prepares your family for adoption and ensures that your family is the best match possible for an adopted child. While it may feel at the time like you're jumping through hoops, most adoptive parents report afterwards that in retrospect they were grateful for the process in that it forced them to thoughtfully consider how they will parent.

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