



Intercountry Adoption: Where Do I Start?



The number of Americans adopting children from other countries is growing. According to the U.S. Department of State, 22,728 children received visas in 2005 to come to the United States for adoption. In 1990, only about 7,000 children received these visas.

This factsheet provides an overview of the steps involved in any intercountry adoption. Your process will vary depending on your State, your agency, and the country from which you adopt.

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In every case you must meet the basic requirements of U.S. immigration law.

STEP 1 Decide if Intercountry Adoption Is Right for Your Family

What You Should Know

Many families consider the following issues when deciding whether intercountry adoption is right for them:

- **The process can be more predictable than domestic adoption.** Like any adoption, intercountry adoption involves some uncertainty. However, the length of your wait to adopt a child from another country can be easier to predict than when adopting an infant from the United States. The timeframe varies depending on the country, agency, lawyer, and individual child involved, but it generally takes from 1 to 3 years to complete an intercountry adoption.
- **Children become available for adoption in other countries for many of the same reasons children come into foster care in the United States.** Reasons commonly include abandonment, poverty, illness or death of the parents, or family issues such as substance abuse, child abuse, or neglect. Children often have health problems related to these reasons.
- **Younger children are available for adoption.** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reports that in 2003, nearly half (46 percent) of children adopted internationally were less than 12 months old, while 42 percent were between 1 and 4 years old.
- **Intercountry adoption offers opportunities for a connection to the child's first culture.** Some prospective adoptive parents are interested in a child's country of origin and want to make that culture a part of their lives.
- **Contact with birth parents is rare.** Immigration laws require children to be defined as "orphans" for purposes of intercountry adoption. Therefore, contact with birth parents is not common. However, contact with birth families is starting to take place in a few countries.

Some Places to Go

Compare the different ways to adopt. Read the Child Welfare Information Gateway (Information Gateway) publications *Adoption Options: A Factsheet for Families* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptionoption.cfm) and *Adoption Options at-a-Glance: A Companion Guide for Families* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptionoptionglance.cfm).

WHAT IF THE CHILD I WANT TO ADOPT IS MY RELATIVE?

Adopting relatives from other countries can be difficult. The child must still be defined as an orphan according to U.S. immigration law. If the child meets this requirement, an adoption agency that places children in the child's home country may be able to help you with the adoption. If the child does not meet this requirement, a lawyer familiar with immigration law can help you explore other options. USCIS provides information on adopting relatives in *The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adoptive Children* (see *Difficult Issues in Orphan Cases, Section D. Intra-Familial Adoptions* on page 30)¹:

www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/adopt_book.pdf

Also see *Intercountry Adoption of Relatives* on the U.S. Department of State website: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/notices/notices_474.html

STEP 2 Select a Country

What You Should Know

Countries that allow children to be adopted internationally (also called "sending countries") are usually developing nations

¹ To access the most current links to this and other resources mentioned in this factsheet, visit the online version of *Intercountry Adoption: Where Do I Start?*, available on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_inter/index.cfm.

in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, and Central and South America. Each country has different intercountry adoption rules. Parents often find it helpful to compare adoption programs in several countries before making a final decision.

Here are some things to think about when selecting a country:

- **Eligibility requirements for adoptive parents.** USCIS has two basic eligibility requirements for prospective adoptive parents: applicants must be U.S. citizens and at least 25 years old when they apply. For married couples, only one spouse must meet both requirements. In addition, each country and agency sets its own requirements for prospective adoptive parents based on age, marital status, sexual orientation, and other characteristics.
- **Ages of available children.** The ages of children available for adoption vary widely, from 3 or 4 months to 16 years, depending on the country. Laws in some sending countries require that efforts be made to place infants with families in that country before they can be placed with a family overseas. In those countries, infants less than 4 or 5 months old often are not available. According to U.S. immigration law, children must be younger than 16 years old in order to be eligible to immigrate to the United States on an orphan visa, unless a younger brother or sister is being adopted at the same time or has been adopted by the same family. *The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adoptive Children*, on the USCIS website, gives more details in *Eligibility for Immigration Benefits, Section*

A. *What is an Orphan?* (see page 6):
www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/adopt_book.pdf

- **Culture/ethnicity.** Depending on the country you select, your child's ethnic and racial background might be different from your own. Adopting a child of a different culture or race can present special challenges. Read Information Gateway's factsheet *Transracial and Transcultural Adoption* to help you prepare for adopting a child from another culture or race: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm
- **Child's placement setting: Institution or foster care.** In many sending countries, children who need permanent families are cared for in institutions or orphanages. Children who spend early months or years in institutions typically show delays in growth and development. A few countries place children waiting for permanent families with foster families. Research suggests that foster families may offer the child better opportunities to form attachments with caretakers. However, many factors affect the quality of foster care overseas.
- **Travel requirements.** Most countries require prospective adoptive parents to travel to the country to complete the adoption process. The number of trips (generally one or two) and the required length of stay in the country vary. A few countries will allow the child to be escorted to the United States, but costs may not be significantly lower than for the family to travel to the child's country.
- **Cost.** Costs also vary widely depending on the country and agency. They can

range from \$7,000 to \$30,000 or more. See the Information Gateway publication *Costs of Adopting: A Factsheet for Families* for more information: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost/index.cfm

Talking with other adoptive parents about their experiences in different countries can help you with your decision. You can meet other parents through a support group for families who have adopted from certain countries or regions. Find a listing of adoptive family support groups in the *National Foster Care and Adoption Directory*, available on the Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

Some Places to Go

The Office of Children's Issues section of the U.S. Department of State website provides a country-by-country guide to the adoption process in more than 60 countries: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/country/country_369.html

The U.S. Department of State provides information on countries with intercountry adoption restrictions: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/country/country_431.html

Find information on the USCIS website about restrictions on adopting from areas experiencing political unrest or natural disasters. From the USCIS home page (www.uscis.gov), click on "Services & Benefits," and then select "Adoption" in the left menu. Scroll down the page until you see

the link titled “How Do I Apply to Bring a Foreign-Born Orphan to the United States?” and click on this link. See *Can I adopt a child from any country in the world?* to view the information on restrictions.

The *Report on Intercountry Adoption* contains an overview of costs, requirements for prospective adoptive parents, and other information for many countries. Ordering information is available on the Adoption Resource Center of Connecticut website: www.arcct.org/included.html

STEP 3 Select an Agency

What You Should Know

Requirements of individual countries will determine whether you will need to work through a licensed, accredited adoption agency or if you may work with an adoption lawyer. The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends that families work with a reputable private adoption agency licensed by the State in which it is located and experienced in intercountry adoption. Nonagency intercountry adoptions are rarely regulated and may pose additional risks. To help you determine whether an adoption agency is reputable, see the tips in *How to Assess the Reputation of Licensed, Private Adoption Agencies* on the Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/twenty.cfm

Take time to research and carefully select your adoption agency. An experienced, reputable adoption agency should be willing to walk you through the adoption

process, help you prepare to become adoptive parents (through educational classes on parenting and adoption issues or referrals to such programs), contact USCIS about immigration regulations and forms, help you handle problems along the way, and provide support after you bring your child home. Before deciding on a particular agency, attend information sessions or orientations and ask questions about the services the agency provides. Reputable adoption agencies will answer your questions openly. These initial sessions are usually free. Visiting several different agencies may help you find the one that best meets your needs.

Questions to ask adoption agencies:

- By which State is the agency licensed? Is the license in good standing?
- How long has the agency been involved in intercountry adoption?
- In which countries does the agency have intercountry adoption programs? How long have they had programs in those countries?
- How many children has the agency placed?
- What are the agency’s minimum requirements for prospective parents?
- How does the agency prepare parents for an intercountry adoption?
- Does the adoption agency have its own overseas staff or use the services of facilitators or lawyers?
- How do agency contacts (such as facilitators or lawyers) working in other

countries identify children available for adoption?

- What are the agency's fees? (Ask for a detailed list of expenses and schedule for payment.)
- What, if any, is the refund policy if an adoption falls through?
- What services does the agency provide after your child comes home? How long are they available?

Find more questions to ask in "What to Ask Before Choosing an Adoption Agency" from *Adoptive Families* magazine: www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=327

Some Places to Go

Search by country for licensed private adoption agencies in *U.S. Adoption Agencies That Place Children From Abroad* on the Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/country_resource_lists.cfm

Some countries allow only agencies that are accredited with the country's government to place children internationally. The U.S. Department of State's *Country-Specific Adoption Fliers* provide information on countries with such requirements: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/country/country_369.html

The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption will affect the accreditation of adoption agencies in the United States. For more information on the Hague Convention, see the U.S. Department of State website: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/convention/convention_462.html

STEP 4 Meet Eligibility Requirements for Your Family

What You Should Know

Regardless of the country and agency you select, all prospective adoptive parents must complete a home study, submit paperwork to start the USCIS process, and put together a dossier with your family's personal records.

Complete the home study process. The home study process involves a series of interviews with a social worker to help assess your family's capacity to provide a safe, loving environment for a child. (Typically, at least one of these interviews will take place in your home.) The home study process is also designed to help your family think through how the characteristics of the child you are seeking to adopt will be a fit for your family, your support network, and your community. A home study report (reviewed and approved by a licensed agency) must be submitted to USCIS. The Information Gateway factsheet *The Adoption Home Study Process* offers more information: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm

Start the USCIS process. All prospective adoptive parents must meet USCIS eligibility requirements in order to adopt a child from another country. The USCIS application process involves two steps. The first step is designed to document your family's capacity to provide a safe, loving home for a child. The second step, which usually

comes later in the adoption process, makes sure your child can be defined as an orphan as described in the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (www.uscis.gov/lpBin/lpext.dll/inserts/slb/slb-1/slb-20?f=templates&fn=document-frame.htm#slb-act). (See Step 5.)

The USCIS process usually starts when you submit Form I-600A: Application for Advance Processing of an Orphan Petition (www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-600a.pdf), with supporting documents and filing fees. This form helps USCIS determine that your family is eligible to adopt. Filing Form I-600A is not required but is recommended by USCIS to speed up the adoption process later on. You can submit Form I-600A even before you have selected a country or agency. However, it is valid for only 18 months after it is approved by USCIS, so you may not want to submit it too early. After receiving your application, USCIS staff will schedule an appointment for all adults aged 18 and over in your household to be fingerprinted. Fingerprint reports are valid for 15 months and must be current when your child is placed in your home.

Gather documents for your dossier. A dossier is the packet of documents your family will have translated for those involved in the adoption in your child's country of origin. The sending country will use the documents in your dossier to identify a specific child whose needs your family can best meet. Required documents vary depending on the country but generally consist of official records that prove your identity, finances, health, and good character. Typically, these documents include birth certificates, marriage licenses (if applicable), financial statements, proof of employment, criminal and child abuse clearances, health statements, and personal

The USCIS publication *The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adoptive Children* explains USCIS regulations, requirements for prospective adoptive parents, and the orphan definition, and provides links to forms for intercountry adoption:

www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/adopt_book.pdf

USCIS answers common questions on its website. To access these frequently asked questions, open the USCIS home page (www.uscis.gov), click on "Services & Benefits," and then select "Adoption" in the left menu. Scroll down the page until you see the link titled "How Do I Apply to Bring a Foreign-Born Orphan to the United States?"

references. Some of this information also will be included in your home study. Most agencies require you to provide multiple copies of the signed and notarized documents. In addition, some countries will require authenticated translations of the documents. The U.S. Department of State website provides information on how to have a document authenticated: http://travel.state.gov/family/abduction/hague_issues/hague_issues_562.html

Some Places to Go

A detailed list of USCIS requirements for home studies is available in *The Immigration of Adoptive and Prospective Adoptive Children* (see *Basic Orphan Petition Requirements, Section D. Home Study* on page 22): www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/adopt_book.pdf

The U.S. Department of State provides detailed information about the USCIS adoption process in the *International Adoption Booklet*: http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/notices/notices_473.html

STEP 5

Make Sure Your Child Meets Eligibility Requirements

What You Should Know

A few months to a year or more after completing the required paperwork, your family will be matched with a specific child for possible placement. This process varies greatly depending on the country and agency (or lawyer) involved. In a few countries, families will be directly involved in this step by visiting orphanages and viewing photolistings of waiting children when traveling to the country from which they seek to adopt a child. Waiting to be matched with a child is one of the hardest and most unpredictable parts of the adoption process. Tips for helping families deal with the wait are in the Joint Council on International Children's Services publication, *Coping and Difficulties and Delays As You Wait For Your Child*: www.jcics.org/Waiting.pdf

When a specific child is identified, you will receive a referral (a packet of information about the child). This packet usually includes the child's picture and information on the child's health and history. In the case of an abandoned child, medical information and

history may be limited to the period of time since the child's placement in the orphanage or institution. You will have a period of time to review the information and decide whether you can meet this child's needs. Ask your agency or doctor any questions you have before you accept the placement. Take as much time as you need to feel comfortable with your decision, paying particular attention to the information related to the child's orphan status and health. It is better to stop the process prior to meeting the child if you are unsure that you can make him or her a part of your family. Be sure to focus on the following information during your review of the referral packet:

- **Orphan status.** Because foreign adoption laws vary, it is possible in some countries to adopt a child who does not qualify as an orphan under U.S. immigration law. However, a U.S. visa will not be issued to children who do not meet the requirements. All children adopted abroad require an immigrant orphan visa to legally immigrate to the United States. Discuss any questions about the child's status with your adoption agency or lawyer.
- **Health information.** Many factors influence the health of children waiting for adoption in other countries. Children often have health conditions that are common in developing countries but can be prevented or easily treated in the United States. Children's health also can be affected by living in institutions. The University of Minnesota's International Adoption Clinic website provides information about the health of children adopted from other countries: www.med.

umn.edu/peds/iac/preadoption/challenges.html

The type and quality of available medical information will vary depending on the country. Reputable agencies will give you as much information as possible about a child's background and medical history, but they cannot guarantee the information is accurate or complete. A doctor familiar with intercountry adoption can help you understand the information you receive about the child's health and development. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides a State-by-State directory of pediatricians with a special interest in adoption and foster care medicine: www.aap.org/sections/adoption/adopt-states/adoption-map.html

Prospective adoptive parents who plan to make two trips to the child's country might make a video of the child on the first trip and ask a doctor to evaluate it. If you have any questions about the child's medical condition, ask your agency or lawyer for more information.

The Information Gateway factsheet *Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adopted Child: A Factsheet for Families* explains how to obtain a child's medical, family, and placement history when available, and includes questions to ask about the child's health: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_background.cfm

After you decide your family can meet the needs of a specific child, you must submit Form I-600, Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative (www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-600.pdf), to ensure the child is eligible for intercountry adoption. After receiving your Form I-600, the consular officer in the U.S. Embassy or Consulate or the USCIS officer in the child's country will conduct an investigation to make sure your child meets the USCIS definition of an orphan. This can take some time. Some families may wait longer than others. Waiting for final approval for a specific child can be one of the hardest parts of the adoption process for families.

During the investigation, your child also will visit a doctor approved by the U.S. Embassy in the child's country to detect any medical condition that would affect eligibility for a visa. Once the orphan investigation and medical exam are successfully completed, the consular officer will issue an orphan visa. The type of orphan visa your child receives will depend on whether both parents (if applicable) saw the child before or during the adoption process and whether the adoption was finalized in the child's country, according to U.S. immigration requirements. The U.S. Department of State explains the types of orphan visas in *Adoption Guidelines—Bringing Your Child Home to the United States*: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/rsrscs/pubs/7321.htm

WHAT IF I HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE USCIS PROCESS?

First, look on the USCIS website (www.uscis.gov) for information you need to solve the problem. If you cannot resolve the situation with information from the website, USCIS staff prefer that social workers at adoption agencies or lawyers contact USCIS on behalf of their clients. Experienced agencies and lawyers probably have dealt with similar problems before and know how to help you resolve them. If you have questions or need help filling out USCIS forms, contact the USCIS district office in your area for a list of adoption professionals or agencies that can help. Use the USCIS Service and Office Locator to find the office serving your area: <https://egov.immigration.gov/crisgwi/go?action=offices>

Some Places to Go

The USCIS website provides information on the orphan definition in *The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adoptive Children* (see *Eligibility for Immigration Benefits, Section A. What is an Orphan?* on page 6): www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/adopt_book.pdf

The second INS (now USCIS) International Adoptions Conference website explains requirements of the orphan definition, home study requirements, citizenship for adopted children, and medical issues and waivers for orphans with specific health conditions: <http://149.101.23.2/graphics/services/conference.htm>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provide information on the overseas medical exam required for prospective adoptive children: www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/ybGet.asp?section=children&obj=adoption.htm&cssNav=browseoyb

STEP 6 Bring Your Child Home

What You Should Know

The legal adoption or guardianship process begins after you accept a referral for a specific child. In some countries, families are required to travel to the child's country of origin to finalize the adoption in the foreign court. In others, guardianship of the child will be transferred to the prospective adoptive parents or to their agency, but they must finalize the adoption in U.S. courts to fulfill USCIS requirements. Talk to your agency or lawyer about what you must do.

Even if the trip is not required, experiencing your child's country of origin firsthand can give you a deeper understanding of what his or her life was like before joining your family. Traveling with a group of other prospective adoptive parents can help you form supportive relationships with other adoptive families that can last for years. Families who have traveled to another country to complete an adoption have identified both advantages and disadvantages (see table on next page).

Advantages of Travel	Disadvantages of Travel
Opportunity to experience the culture of your child’s birth country.	Inconvenience of spending days or weeks away from home and work.
Opportunity to meet and begin developing an attachment with your child earlier.	Additional costs, depending on the number of trips and length of stay.
Possibility to see and document with photos, videos, and mementos the place your child spent the first months or years of life and share this experience with your child later. If you take two trips, it may be possible to gather additional health and background information.	Potential language barrier (although this presents the opportunity to learn some words in your child’s first language).
Possible feeling of greater involvement in the adoption process.	Depending on the country, dangerous travel.
Feeling “different” in your child’s country. This could help you better understand your child’s experience of being different in the United States and in your family.	Feeling “different” in your child’s country. Feeling out of place and uncertain of what is happening and how to behave could be seen as a disadvantage of travel for some.

Some Places to Go

Prepare for traveling to your child’s country of origin by reading the *Adoptive Families* magazine article “The Top 10 Secrets of Successful Adoption Travel”: www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/10_tips.pdf

View current travel warnings from the U.S. Department of State: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html

View CDC recommendations for vaccines and preparation for travel early in your adoption process to ensure you have time to complete any necessary series of immunizations: www.cdc.gov/travel/vaccinat.htm

STEP 7 Fulfill Remaining Immigration or Citizenship Requirements

What You Should Know

After you bring your child home, there may be additional actions required by U.S. immigration law, State law, your child’s country of origin, or your adoption agency. Adoptive parents may need to:

- **Fulfill remaining visa requirements.** The Child Citizenship Act of 2000 ([www.uscis.gov/files/article/CCAFacts_Jan_04\[1\].pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/article/CCAFacts_Jan_04[1].pdf)) mandates that foreign-born children adopted by at least one U.S. citizen parent

living in the United States automatically become U.S. citizens as soon as the requirements of the Act are met. If your child entered the United States on an IR-4 visa, you must finalize your child's adoption in a U.S. court to satisfy Child Citizenship Act requirements and secure U.S. citizenship for your child. Your child automatically will become a U.S. citizen on the day the adoption is finalized in the United States. Children who enter the United States on an IR-3 visa automatically become U.S. citizens when they arrive in the United States for the first time. Ask your agency which type of visa your child was issued, or check the stamp in his or her passport.

- **Fulfill postplacement requirements.** In most cases, your agency or your child's birth country will require you to provide photographs, written reports, and medical reports for 6 months to several years after your child's placement. These will show that your child is adjusting to your family and is loved. These reports also help foster positive relationships between the United States and your child's country of origin, paving the way for future intercountry adoptions.
- **Consider readoption.** Some children enter the United States with an IR-3 visa. That means that all three of the following have occurred: (1) the parents saw the child in his or her country before or during the adoption process, (2) the child's adoption was finalized before the child left his or her country of origin, and (3) the adoption was recognized by the sending country. Federal law does not require children who were issued an IR-3 visa to be readopted in the United States. (See

the U.S. Department of State factsheet *Adoption Guidelines—Bringing Your Child Home* at www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/rsrsc/pubs/7321.htm for more information on orphan visa categories and readoption.)

Some States do not recognize foreign adoption decrees, even when the adoption has been finalized before the child has left his or her country of origin. These States require adoptive parents to readopt the child in a State court once the child arrives in the United States (regardless of the type of visa issued). Even if their State laws do not require it, many families choose to readopt their children in State courts for the following reasons:

- To obtain a U.S. birth certificate for the child
- To ensure that the validity of the adoption cannot be challenged in the event of a change in the political situation in the child's country of origin
- To protect the child's right to an inheritance. Once the adoption is finalized in a State court, the adopted child is treated by law as the birth child of the adopting parents. The adopted child gains the right to inherit from the adoptive parents and adoptive parents' relatives and is protected from a challenge to inheritance rights in a State court in the future.

The timeframe to complete the readoption process varies, but generally it is much shorter than the full intercountry or domestic adoption process. Ask your

agency or lawyer how to begin the readoption process in your State.

- **Obtain proof of your child's U.S. citizenship.** A Certificate of Citizenship issued by USCIS, or a U.S. passport, provides proof of U.S. citizenship for children who become citizens through adoption. (See http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/orphans_residing_us.htm.) Only a child with a full and final adoption in his or her country of origin, entering the United States on an IR-3 visa, will automatically receive a Certificate of Citizenship from USCIS (within 45 days of entering the United States).

If your child entered the United States on an IR-4 visa, you can apply for a Certificate of Citizenship after the adoption is finalized in the United States by submitting Form N-600, Application for Certificate of Citizenship (www.uscis.gov/files/form/N-600.pdf), and the filing fee, to the local USCIS district office or sub office. It is possible to obtain a passport from the Department of State (http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html) for a child before receiving the Certificate of Citizenship, but the adoption must be full and final according to Federal law. The "full effect" of a foreign adoption decree means that adoptive parents and adopted children have the same rights and obligations as they would have if a State court had issued the adoption decree.

- **Obtain a Social Security Number for your child.** The Social Security Administration will assign your child a social security number before you obtain proof of U.S. citizenship. However, records will not

show your child is a U.S. citizen until you provide this proof. The Social Security Administration provides information on how to obtain a social security number for children adopted from abroad: www.ssa.gov/immigration/children.htm

Some Places to Go

Find out which States recognize foreign adoption decrees in *Intercountry Adoptions Finalized Abroad*: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/international.cfm

Adoptive Families magazine describes the reasons families choose to readopt in "When You Adopt Under the Laws of Another Country: U.S. Readoption Explained": www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles.php?aid=292

The Joint Council on International Children's Services provides a factsheet explaining how to get a passport for children adopted internationally: www.jcics.org/Passport.htm

STEP 8 Begin Your Life as a New Family

What You Should Know

Adjusting to a new family and culture may be challenging for your child. Children who have spent most of their early lives in an institution must adjust to living in a family. Receiving one-on-one attention, sleeping alone, and owning things may be completely new experiences. Children often

have trouble with new eating and sleeping schedules. Older children also may struggle with language and school issues and may need more time to adjust.

Soon after your child arrives in the United States, take him or her for a thorough checkup with a doctor who has experience in intercountry adoption. The University of Minnesota International Adoption Clinic provides a list of recommended screening tests: www.med.umn.edu/peds/iac/postadoption/screeningtests.html

Your family also must adjust to your new status as a transcultural and possibly transracial family. Parents who have not joined an adoptive parent support group may wish to do so to share the joys of parenting, learn from each other's experiences, and help each other through challenges. Adoptive parents also need to be aware of the impact that the adoption of a child from a different country may have on other children in the family.

During this transition and throughout your lives as an adoptive family, adoption agency staff can be a valuable source of support. Some adoption agencies provide services for adoptive families, from about 6 months to several years after placement, to make sure your child is adjusting well. During this time, adoptive parents can also locate resources and referrals for additional

services they need. It is normal for adopted individuals and their families to need support beyond this initial transition period. See Information Gateway's factsheet on postadoption services for more information about adoption services and their benefits: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_after/index.cfm

Some Places to Go

CDC provides information on follow-up medical exams for children adopted internationally: www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/ybGet.asp?section=children&obj=adoption.htm

Adoptive Families magazine provides additional information on postadoption checkups: www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/AskMD_JA03.pdf

There are many resources to help parents strengthen a transracial or transcultural family. See the Information for Transracial/Transcultural Families section of the Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/types/families/trans_info.cfm

Rainbowkids.com: The International Adoption Publication is an online resource designed to educate and support families built through intercountry adoption: www.rainbowkids.com/index.shtml

Resources

Office of Immigration Statistics. (2004). *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2003*. Updated link retrieved May 9, 2007 from <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/yearbook/YrBk03Im.htm>.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2003). *How Do I Apply to Bring a Foreign-Born Orphan to the United States?* Updated link retrieved May 9, 2007, from <http://uscis.gov/graphics/howdoi/fororphan.htm>.

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