international adoption

Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
Congratulations on making the decision to build your family through adoption! The process of adoption can be a complex one, but it is one of the most rewarding decisions you will make. This packet has been specifically designed to provide you with information about International, or Inter-Country, Adoption. As you read through the steps involved, keep in mind that the staff of the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families is here to support, encourage, and assist you throughout your journey. You are welcome to call us at 414-475-1246 or 800-762-8063, visit our family of websites, or email us at info@coalitionforcyf.org at any time.
Getting Started
You probably have a lot of 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, unmarried couple, or a single person from the United States adopts a child from another country. Each country has its own 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. Your adoption home study must be completed by a licensed adoption agency in Wisconsin. However, you can contact a placing agency from any state to ask about potential children for your home. A placing agency is an adoption agency that has connections to the orphanages overseas. 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 placing agency that you can work with.

Who are the Children Available for Adoption?
The types of children available vary by country. The children, at the time of adoption, are generally between nine months and four years old. In some foreign countries, you may have the option of adopting an older child or a child with special needs, as well as siblings. Many of the children from foreign countries are placed for adoption due to their families’ living situations. In some developing countries, where families live in deep poverty, the decision to place their child for adoption is thought of as 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 alike to be no more than 45 years older than the child they are adopting. 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. The home study is done by an adoption agency. 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 need to complete at least 25 hours of pre-adoption training.

• **Health:** You must be in good physical and mental health without any serious medical conditions that would hinder or affect the care of a child.

• **Travel:** Many of the countries require one or both of the 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 amount 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, 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 type of child you wish to adopt
• How motivated you are to completing your requirements in a timely manner
• Delays due to timely filing of legal paperwork
Process

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

When identifying your country of choice, you may want to consider all of the requirements a country has 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 the children available. Many potential adoptive families want to know how the children are cared for before they are adopted. 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 in order 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 is able to 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. When the application has been approved, you are ready to begin the home study process.

Cost

The cost for an international adoption varies based on the country you choose. International adoption can cost between $25,000 and $50,000, due to travel costs and other factors. And costs are likely to vary across agencies.

There are financial resources that can help offset costs associated with adoption. For information about grants and scholarships, as well as loan opportunities and additional information on how to make adoption an affordable option, see the Resource Appendix.
**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? Is it to add to your family because you are unable to have birth children? Because you wish to help those in need?

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 and how you and your significant other interact and deal with conflicts, as well as 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 child care plans if needed. You will be asked about your employment history and any stresses that come with your job.

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 on you to be sure the child is entering a safe environment.

13. **Summary and social worker’s recommendation.** This is a summary of the social worker’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 normally takes about three to six months to complete. While you are completing your home study, or shortly thereafter, you can begin your pre-adoption training.
Maintaining Connections with Foster Families: An International Perspective

Jane and Doug first met their son’s foster mother when they traveled to Guatemala in September 2003 to bring Rob home. They invited her to their hotel room, where, with the help of an interpreter, they visited for a few hours. They asked her at length about Rob's schedule, his likes and dislikes. They also got to see the easy, gentle way she interacted with their son—how he smiled for her and followed her with his gaze. Toward the end of the visit, she gave them a small photo album containing photos of Rob during the nine months he was in her care. Jane remembers feeling overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness, generosity, and love that went into the gift.

It was Olivia, Rob’s foster mother, who very subtly suggested keeping in touch during her visit with Jane and Doug. She told them that she has received hundreds of photos of her foster children over the years. She also gave them a letter, which contained her home address. Since then, Jane and Doug have sent her letters, gifts, and photos.

For Jane and Doug, the willingness of their sons’ foster families to stay in touch with them demonstrates the depth of their love for their boys.

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 Adoption and Permanency Support (WiAPS) program. In addition, they are responsible for offering at least six additional hours of training post adoption that is appropriate to the post-adoption needs of the family prior to or at the time of adoption. Families should know that they may request this training through their adoption agency at any time in the future.
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 custom 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 between one and 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 are 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 the country of choice has identified a child for your family, you will receive a referral. With the help of your licensed adoption agency, you will accept the referral and complete the acceptance documents. Once your child's visa is approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), you will travel to pick up him or her.

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 days or 30 days or longer. Some of the longer trips may be broken into two trips if needed.

Back Home

Once you return home, you will have to 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 help for your child when he or she is older for things such as getting a job or getting married.
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, perhaps, 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?
- Does the time frame suit what I and my family were hoping for in an adoption?
- Are we willing to wait?
- Do the children who are available in the country I chose meet what I am looking for?
- Does this particular type of adoption meet my expectation to grow my family?
- Are my expectations for the kind of 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 make time to complete the home study process and training required?
- Am I comfortable having someone new added to my family?
- Will my current family and friends be supportive of my adoption plans and adoptive child?
- Do I have a support network or know how to connect with one?

Wisconsin Adoption Permanency Support (WiAPS) program

The WiAPS program provides training, free library resources, information, post-adoption services, and support to adoptive families. For more information, visit https://wiapsp.org/ or call 1-833-WIS-APSP (1-833-947-2777).
More Questions?

Please remember that Coalition staff are here for you during every step of your adoption journey, whether it is getting started and 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 Adoption website, www.wiadopt.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
- Personal stories
- Information about making adoption affordable
- The Coalition’s Partners newsletter

If you need any assistance navigating the website, or any other information or resources, please call us at 1-800-762-8063 or 414-475-1246.
Our mission to inspire, inform, and support individuals and families caring for children and youth touched by foster care and adoption.
Families who use the Coalition services have:

Increased access to tools and resources
Stronger networks of support
Improved confidence in their ability to be a “no matter what” family

Because of our work, foster and adoptive families are strong and resilient—they are flexible, accepting, able to celebrate each victory, and endure lifelong.

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