

What Is a Home Study?

An adoption and/or foster care home study is a detailed written report of your family compiled and prepared by a social worker. This typically takes two to five months to finish. The home study requires the prospective adoptive/foster care family to gather different documents, answer several questions, and explore their reasons for adopting or providing foster care. Through a series of visits and interviews the social worker can get a complete picture of who you are and what life is like in your family. The home study is a part of the decision making process for both the prospective family and the workers. Not only can the home study help the worker place a child into your home who would best fit into your family, but help the family and the worker decide if now is a good time for your family to pursue adoption or fostering.

The home study for a family living in Ohio includes the following pieces of information.

- **Autobiography/Family Background** - Some social workers work very closely with the family to finish this part of the home study, while others have a detailed list of questions that he/she asks you to write the answers to in advance of meeting with you. These questions are typically about your family, past and present; how you feel about discipline, your fondest childhood memory, or your greatest fears. Most people enjoy this part of the process as they learn so much about themselves and each other.
- **Neighborhood/Community/Schools** - Be prepared to describe your environment. What is your school system like? Which schools will your child/ren attend? Do you have a relationship with your neighbors? What resources does your community offer to help you parent a special needs child?
- **Physical Health** - You will need a physical or health exam. The social worker will also be interested in hearing how you have any health issues under control. Be prepared to explain how these health issues will or will not effect your ability to care for a child. There shouldn't be any issues with you adopting unless you have a serious health problem that effects your life expectancy.
- **Financial Statements** - You must be able to show that you can care for an additional person(s) with your current income. Be prepared to verify your income with paycheck stubs, a letter from your employer, W-2, or income tax forms 1040 or 1040 EZ. You will also need to show information on your savings, insurance coverage, investments and debts. There is a worksheet to fill out that covers your bills, such as mortgage or rent payments, car payments, and charge accounts.
- **Criminal Clearances** - Ohio requires all applicants to obtain criminal background checks from the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification & Investigation and child abuse record checks. Misdemeanors from long ago along with a good explanation of your behavior are usually not held against you. Felony convictions of any charge involving children, spousal abuse, or illegal substances will most likely disqualify you from being approved.

- **References** - You will need the names, addresses, and phone numbers of three or four references. Your references will be required to write a letter of recommendation. Choose people who have known you for several years and know your family. They should be familiar with you and have seen you in a variety of situations, with children, your spouse, etc. References will not keep you from adopting unless workers receive several negative comments, or a reference has brought up a questionable criminal record.
- **Interviews** - Interviews are a time for the social worker to go over your paperwork, learn more about you, clarify anything in your autobiography and see that your home is a safe and healthy place for a child. You do NOT have to be a clean freak! The worker will tour your home and will want to see the room that you have planned for the child. If you haven't already discussed it, you may want to have a safety plan in place in case of fires or other natural disasters. Be honest and show your personality, a sense of humor is always a good thing to have, especially when parenting.
- **If You Already Have Children** – The social worker will want to know about your children's interests, hobbies, and grades. Your children will be involved in interviews, and may meet with the social worker individually. The social worker will want to speak with your children to get a sense about their feelings toward adoption. If they are too young, they may be asked to draw a picture.
- **Training** – The state of Ohio requires trainings for prospective adoptive and/or foster parents prior to or during the home study process. These trainings help prospective parents better understand the needs of children waiting for families and help families decide what type of child or children they could parent most effectively.

Conclusion

Although the adoption home study process may seem invasive or lengthy, it is conducted to help you decide whether adoption is right for your family, prepare your family for adoption, and help your family determine which type of child you could best parent. The process also serves to ensure children are placed in loving, caring, healthy, and safe environments.

Flexibility and a sense of humor are vital characteristics when raising children, and they can be useful during the home study process as well. With perseverance and a positive outlook, you will be able to team with the social worker to make this a valuable learning experience—one that will help you do the best possible job in parenting the child who will eventually join your family.