



## FACTSHEET FOR FAMILIES

July 2014

# Intercountry Adoption: Where Do I Start?

Intercountry adoption continues to be an option for parents who choose to adopt. This factsheet provides an overview of the intercountry adoption process. Depending on your State, your adoption services provider, and the country from which you adopt, the steps in this adoption process may vary and may change over time. For example, some families will first select an adoption services provider; their choice of country will then be limited to the countries with which that provider works or from which the parents are eligible to adopt. In every case you must meet the basic requirements of U.S. immigration law.

The number of U.S. citizens adopting children from other countries increased dramatically beginning in 1990, when 7,000 children received visas to come to the United States for adoption. This continued until 2004, when 22,991 children received such visas (U.S. Department of State, n.d.-b). After peaking in 2004, these numbers began to decline, and in 2013, 7,094 children were adopted from other countries (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

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## The Hague Convention

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the Convention) is a multilateral treaty between the United States and, as of August 2013, 89 other countries (U.S. Department of State, 2013). The Convention provides necessary and important safeguards to protect adopted children, biological families, and adoptive families in adoptions between participating countries, including the prevention of the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children.

There are two processes for adopting from Convention and non-Convention countries. For more information, see the Information Gateway factsheet *Intercountry Adoption From Hague Convention and Non-Hague Convention Countries* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/hague.pdf>.

## Deciding If Intercountry Adoption Is Right for Your Family

Intercountry adoption is just one way to build a family through adoption. Other options include adoption from domestic foster care and domestic infant adoption. Many families consider the following issues when deciding whether intercountry adoption is right for them:

- **Adoptive parent requirements.** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which must approve all intercountry adoptions, has two basic eligibility requirements for prospective adoptive parents: Prospective adoptive parents must be U.S. citizens and, if unmarried, must be at least 25 years old when they file the petition to adopt. For married couples, USCIS has no age requirement, and only one spouse must be a U.S. citizen. Persons applying to adopt from a Convention country also must reside habitually in the United States. (For a definition of "habitually resident," visit <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&rgn=div5&view=text&node=8:1.0.1.2.8&idno=8%20-%208:1.0.1.2.8.3.1.4> and scroll down to §204.303).

- **Timeframe.** Like any adoption, intercountry adoption involves some uncertainty. The length and predictability of the process vary depending on the country, adoption service provider, and individual child involved, but it generally takes from 1 to 5 years to complete an intercountry adoption.
- **Reason the child needs to be adopted.** Children in other countries need adoptive families for many of the same reasons children in the United States need foster care and adoptive families. These reasons may include poverty, illness or death of the parents, abandonment, or family issues such as substance use or child maltreatment. Other factors that contribute to the child's need for a permanent family include the country of origin's government policies on population control, the country's economy, war, famine, natural disasters, and others. It is helpful to understand what these factors are in the specific countries you are considering.
- **Child's age.** In 2012, 10.4 percent of children adopted internationally were younger than 12 months old, 42.7 percent were ages 1 to 2 years, 15.0 percent were ages 3 to 4 years, 23.7 percent were ages 5 to 12 years, 7.7 percent were ages 13 to 17, and less than 1 percent were 18 years or older (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Children's Issues, n.d.-a). In 2003, 45.8 percent of the intercountry adoptions were of children under 1 year, but the international adoption of children less than 1 year of age has become increasingly less likely over time.

A variety of factors have contributed to the recent demographic changes in intercountry adoption, but two of these factors are the internal social changes in countries of origin (i.e., the country from which the child was adopted) and the rise of a vibrant and economically more independent middle class. With the growth of the middle class in some large countries, more families residing in those countries seek to domestically adopt newborn and healthy children. This may be a result of factors in the country of origin, such as changes to government policies in favor of domestic adoption or political choices limiting adoption with the United States.

Another possible factor is the Convention's focus on the principle of subsidiarity. This principle states that a child should be placed with his birth or extended family whenever possible and that other permanent forms of family care in the country of origin should be considered prior to intercountry adoption. Intercountry adoption is not a last resort, however, as it is viewed as preferable to the child being placed in an institution or a series of temporary foster homes (Hague Conference on Private International Law, 2008).

According to U.S. immigration law, children must be younger than 16 years old on the filing date of the immigration petition in order to be eligible to immigrate to the United States for purposes of adoption. (There are some exceptions to this. For additional information, refer to *I am a U.S. Citizen: How Do I Immigrate an Adopted or Prospective Adopted Child or Help My Adopted Child Become a U.S. Citizen or U.S. Permanent Resident?* at <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/A3en.pdf>.)

- **Eligibility for adoption and immigration to the United States.** U.S. Immigration laws (the Immigration and Naturalization Act and the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000) require children entering the United States for purposes of adoption to be classified as "orphans" (if they are from non-Convention countries) or as "Convention adoptees" (if they are from Convention countries), as defined by these laws. (For more information, refer to *I am a U.S. Citizen: How Do I Immigrate an Adopted or Prospective Adopted Child or Help My Adopted Child Become a U.S. Citizen or U.S. Permanent Resident?* at <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/A3en.pdf>.)

## Adoption of Relatives

Prospective adoptive children who are related to the petitioner(s) (i.e., the prospective adoptive parent(s)) must qualify for adoption and immigration to the United States under all the same criteria as unrelated children. Relatives may be able to adopt if the children qualify as orphans or Convention adoptees. The requirements depend on the country in which the relative lives. (Information regarding specific requirements can be found in *I Am a U.S. Citizen: How Do I Immigrate an Adopted or Prospective Adopted Child or Help My Adopted Child Become a U.S. Citizen or U.S. Permanent Resident?* at <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/A3en.pdf>.)

## Determining From Which Country to Adopt

Parents consider many issues when deciding from which country to adopt and often find it helpful to compare adoption programs in several countries before making a final decision. The following considerations may be helpful when selecting a country:

- **Eligibility requirements for adoptive parents.** In addition to U.S. immigration rules, each country has its own requirements for prospective adoptive parents based on characteristics such as age, marital status, sexual orientation, family size, parents' health, religion, and others. Each State also has its own requirements. Requirements also may differ based on whether the country of origin participates in the Convention. To view a list of Convention countries, visit the State Department website at [http://adoption.state.gov/hague\\_convention/countries.php](http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/countries.php).
- **Ages of available children.** The ages of children needing adoptive families vary widely, from 6 months to 16 years, depending on the country. The Convention

and laws in some countries require that due consideration be given to placing an infant or toddler with a family in that country where appropriate and in the child's best interest before making a determination to proceed with an intercountry adoption. In those countries, infants younger than 6 months to a year old may not be available for intercountry adoption. Also, some countries have regulations prohibiting the separation of siblings.

- **Ethnicity/Race/Culture.** Depending on the country you select, your child's ethnic, racial, and cultural background might be different from your own. Resources for transracial or transcultural families are available on the Information Gateway website at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/types/families/trans\\_info.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/types/families/trans_info.cfm).

- **Child's placement setting: Institution or foster care.** In many countries of origin, children who need permanent families are cared for in institutions or orphanages. Spending time early in life in institutions can cause harmful and sometimes permanent effects in children, such as higher rates of developmental delays and behavior problems and decreased motor development and growth than in children who were not institutionalized or who spent less time in institutional care (Groza, Ryan, & Thomas, 2008; Johnson & Gunnar, 2011; Levin, Zeanah, Fox, & Nelson, 2014; Merz & McCall, 2010). The age a child enters an institution, the length of time in institutional care, and the quality of institutional or foster care are important factors to consider when adopting.

Some countries place children waiting for permanent families with foster families. Research suggests that children placed with foster families may have better cognitive and health outcomes than children placed in institutionalized care (Nelson et al., 2007; Miller, Chan, Comfort, & Tirella, 2005).

- **Travel requirements.** Nearly all 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. Traveling to the child's

country of origin may offer the additional benefit to parents of learning about the child's culture. (For more information about adoption travel, read the the Adoptive Families magazine article "The Top 10 Secrets of Successful Adoption Travel" at [http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/10\\_tips.pdf](http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/10_tips.pdf).)

- **Cost.** Costs also vary widely depending on the country, service provider, and the needs of the child available for adoption. They can range from \$15,000 to \$45,000 or more (Adoptive Families, n.d.; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). Accredited adoption service providers should provide a comprehensive schedule of expected fees. For more information about the costs of intercountry and other types of adoption, read *Costs of Adopting* at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s\\_cost/index.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost/index.cfm).

Each country has different intercountry adoption guidelines. For country-specific information about Convention participation, eligibility requirements for prospective adoptive parents and for children to be adopted, and alerts and notices, visit [http://adoption.state.gov/country\\_information.php](http://adoption.state.gov/country_information.php). The countries from which children were most frequently adopted internationally in 2013 include China, Ethiopia, and Ukraine (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Children's Issues, 2014).

## Finding Support

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. To find a listing of adoptive family support groups in your area, refer to the National Foster Care and Adoption Directory at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad>. If you cannot find a support group that meets your needs, there are message boards and online support groups for adoptive parents and those considering intercountry adoption.

Additionally, adoptive families, including those who adopt from other countries, may at some point need to access postadoption services. Prospective adoptive families should begin working with their adoption services providers to determine potential service needs before the adoption is finalized. Examples of postadoption services include support groups; therapy or counseling; respite care; camps, social events, and heritage activities; educational resources; and openness, search, and reunion (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012). The availability of services may vary depending on your State or locality; however the Federal government encourages States to provide postadoption services to any family that needs them, including those that adopted from other countries (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2014). To view more information on potential postadoption services by State, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt\\_assistance/questions.cfm?quest\\_id=7](https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/questions.cfm?quest_id=7).

The following are additional resources for postadoption services:

- Post Adoption (U.S. Department of State)  
[http://adoption.state.gov/adoption\\_process/how\\_to\\_adopt/postadoption.php](http://adoption.state.gov/adoption_process/how_to_adopt/postadoption.php)
- Finding and Using Postadoption Services (Child Welfare Information Gateway)  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_postadoption.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.cfm)
- Selecting and Working With a Therapist Skilled in Adoption (Child Welfare Information Gateway)  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_therapist.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_therapist.cfm)

## Finding an Adoption Services Provider

As of July 14, 2014, all agencies or persons providing any of the six specific intercountry adoption services defined in the accreditation regulations of the Intercountry Adoption Act must be accredited or approved to the standards set forth in the Convention regardless of whether the adoption will fall under the Convention or the orphan (non-Convention) process. An adoption service provider that is not accredited or approved may provide intercountry adoption services under the supervision of an accredited or approved provider or as an exempted provider. This is due to the implementation of the Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012 (UAA) (P.L. 112-276). (For more information about the UAA, visit [http://adoption.state.gov/hague\\_convention/agency\\_accreditation/universal\\_accreditation\\_act.php.](http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/agency_accreditation/universal_accreditation_act.php.))

According to the Intercountry Adoption Act, adoption services include the following:

- Identifying a child eligible for adoption and arranging an adoption
- Securing the necessary consent to termination of parental rights and to adoption
- Performing a background study on a child or a home study on a prospective adoptive parent and reporting on such a study
- Making nonjudicial determinations of the best interests of a child and the appropriateness of an adoptive placement for the child
- Monitoring a case after a child has been placed with prospective adoptive parents until final adoption

- Assuming custody and providing (including facilitating the provision of) child care or any other social service pending an alternative placement, when necessary because of a disruption before final adoption [22 CFR § 96.2]<sup>1</sup>

Adoption service providers also may prepare families for an intercountry adoption, but this is not listed as an adoption service by the Intercountry Adoption Act. To find an accredited and approved service provider, visit [http://adoption.state.gov/hague\\_convention/agency\\_accreditation/agency\\_search.php](http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/agency_accreditation/agency_search.php). For a list of agencies denied accreditation, visit [http://adoption.state.gov/hague\\_convention/agency\\_accreditation/deniedagencies.php](http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/agency_accreditation/deniedagencies.php).

Take time to research and carefully select your adoption services provider. Many have detailed websites that can provide valuable information for your search. An experienced, reputable adoption services provider 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 for you about immigration regulations and forms, help you handle problems along the way, and provide support after you bring your child home. Remember that the country from which you plan to adopt may help determine which adoption services provider you use.

Before deciding on a provider, attend information sessions or orientations and ask questions about the services provided. Reputable adoption providers will answer your questions openly, including those about costs. These initial sessions are usually free. Visiting several different providers may help you find the one that best meets your needs. You can also ask to speak to other adoptive families who used the provider's services or check with your local Better Business Bureau.

To help you determine whether an adoption services provider is reputable, see the tips in Information Gateway's *How to Assess the Reputation of Licensed*,

Private Adoption Agencies (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/twenty.cfm>).

### Questions to ask adoption services providers:

- By which State is the provider licensed? Is the license in good standing?
- How long has the provider been involved in intercountry adoptions?
- Has the provider ever been denied accreditation? Why?
- In which countries does the provider have intercountry adoption programs? How long has it had programs in those countries?
- How many children has the provider placed (both from the country of interest and overall)?
- What are the provider's minimum requirements for prospective parents?
- Does the provider have overseas staff or use the services of facilitators or lawyers?
- How do the provider's contacts (such as staff, facilitators, or lawyers) that work in other countries identify children needing families? Do they travel regularly to the countries of origin?
- What, if any, is the refund policy if an adoption does not occur or if the country closes to adoptions? Can they provide that policy in writing?
- What services are provided after your child comes home? How long are they available?
- Does the provider offer all adoption services? Which other organizations may be involved in providing some of these services in a specific case? (For example, if your adoption provider is only helping conduct your home study, ask which other providers may help identify a child for adoption, obtain the termination of the birth parents' parental rights, or monitor the case until the adoption is finalized.)
- Are there other families who have adopted a child with similar circumstances with whom you can talk?
- What training or support does the provider offer to help parents prepare to adopt and then parent a child with special needs?

<sup>1</sup> For information on adoption disruption, refer to Information Gateway's *Adoption Disruption and Dissolution* at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s\\_disrup.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_disrup.cfm).

- If birth family members are available, what supports does the provider offer to facilitate and support contact, either during the trip for adoption or after adoption?
- What training or support does the provider offer to help parents prepare to adopt and then parent a child who is culturally or racially different?
- Does the provider offer a written contract that outlines the services offered, fees, and expectations of the client and provider?
- Does the provider provide any services in the unlikely event that the adoption is dissolved?
- What happens if you change your mind and decide not to adopt?
- How does the adoption service provider receive referrals (the packet of information about a potential adoptive child)?

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

## Adopting a Child

Your adoption services provider should provide you with all of the information you need to successfully meet eligibility requirements for adoption. For example, all prospective adoptive parents need to complete a home study, submit immigration forms, and put together a dossier, which is a collection of the family's personal records (e.g., proof of identity, finances, health, fingerprints for clearance checks) required by the country's legal system to process the adoption. Parents also are required to complete at least 10 hours of training prior to the adoption, which is separate from any home study requirement. Countries of origin may have additional training requirements for parents. Parents may be exempted from training by the primary provider if the parents already have completed other sufficient training.

A few months to a year or more after completing the required paperwork, your family may be chosen for a specific child for possible placement, or your family may

receive a specific child profile for consideration. This process varies greatly depending on the country and adoption provider involved. In a few countries, families might be allowed to be directly involved in this step by visiting orphanages and viewing photolistings of waiting children. Waiting to be matched with a child is often one of the hardest and most unpredictable parts of the adoption process.

When a specific child is identified, you will receive a referral (a packet of information about the child). Although the level of detail varies depending on the country of origin, this packet usually includes the child's picture and information on the child's health and history, if available. Medical information and history may be inaccurate or limited to the period of time since the child's placement in an orphanage or institution. You will have a period of time to review the information and decide whether you can meet this child's needs. In general, prospective parents have a minimum of 2 weeks in Convention cases to consider all the available information and make a decision. Ask your provider or a doctor who specializes in adopted children 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 health, prenatal health (if known), placement history, and expected emotional or mental health needs. Do not be afraid to ask for additional information, particularly if a professional raises issues that concern you. Make sure your family can meet the needs of the child. If you are unsure about whether you can make the changes necessary to incorporate the child into your family, it is better to stop the process prior to meeting him or her than to risk a possible disruption or dissolution down the road.

## Health and Behavioral/Mental Health Considerations

When reviewing the information of a child with whom you are matched, you should consider their expected health and behavioral/mental health needs. In a study of more than 1,000 parents who adopted from abroad (with 92 percent of parents from the United States), nearly

half (47 percent) adopted a child with special needs (Pinderhughes, Matthews, Deoudes, & Pertman, 2013). Of those children with special needs, half received an initial diagnosis in their birth country, and half received a diagnosis after the adoption was finalized. Additionally, 42 percent of the children diagnosed in their home country as having a special need were diagnosed with an additional special need after having been adopted. Therefore, parents often learn of a child's special need after placement, whether or not they had planned and prepared to adopt a child with special needs.

**Health needs.** The type and quality of available medical information will vary depending on the country and the child's situation. Reputable providers 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. Health records will be in the child's language of origin and may need to be translated. Sometimes translated records are not complete or accurate, and parents should consider requesting copies of the original medical records so that local health professionals who are fluent in that language can translate them. Many factors influence the health of children who need families in other countries. Children often have health conditions that are common in low-resource countries but that can be easily treated in the United States. Children's health also can be affected by living in institutions. A doctor familiar with intercountry adoption can help you understand the information you receive about the child's health and development.

**Behavioral/mental health needs.** Children in other countries enter their country's child placement systems for many of the same reasons children enter foster care in the United States, including malnutrition, parental substance abuse, prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs, physical and sexual abuse, or neglect. In many countries, children waiting for adoption live in institutions, where they are sometimes exposed to physical or sexual abuse and/or neglect. Sometimes a child may not feel safe to share information with anyone, particularly about sexual abuse, until he or she feels comfortable in his or her adoptive family, so the adoptive family may be the first to learn about abuse. It is important to be aware of

the possible effects of these experiences on children's behavioral/mental health so you can have realistic expectations about the child's future needs. Research on domestic adoptions of children with special needs shows that families that have realistic expectations about what it will take to meet a child's needs are more likely to be successful (Reilly & Platz, 2003).

## Meeting Immigration and Citizenship Requirements

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 adoption services provider, but they must finalize the adoption in U.S. courts to fulfill USCIS requirements. Even if a 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.

In the case of a child from a Convention country, it is important that you do not adopt or accept legal custody of the child until:

- USCIS has provisionally approved the petition to classify the Convention adoptee as an immediate relative (Form I-800) **AND**
- The U.S. Department of State has advised the country of origin's Central Authority, which is the entity that ensures the adoption process is safeguarded, that the prospective adoptive parents have been found suitable and the child appears eligible to come to the United States if adopted or if legal custody for the purpose of adoption is granted

There may be additional actions required by U.S. immigration law, State law, your child's country of origin, or your adoption provider before or after you bring your child home. Requirements will vary depending on the type of immigrant visa your child received. Your adoption

provider can tell you more about what must be done in your specific case.

You may need to:

- **Submit postplacement reports and pictures.** Not all countries require follow-up reports; some require annual reports for 5 years or perhaps until the child is 18 years old. Ensuring these reports get filed in a timely manner helps foster positive relationships between the United States and your child's country of origin, paving the way for future intercountry adoptions.
- **Readopt your child in a U.S. court and obtain a U.S. birth certificate.** It is generally a good idea to readopt if your child is not from a Convention country. If your

child is from a Convention country, readoption is not required. Your adoption provider should provide you with the forms you need to obtain U.S. citizenship for your child. For more information on State laws and why readopting in the United States may be beneficial in some cases, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/types/intercountry/readoption.cfm>.

- **Obtain proof of your child's U.S. citizenship.** Either 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 the following box titled "Proof of Citizenship" for more information.)

## Proof of Citizenship

A Certificate of Citizenship issued by USCIS or a U.S. passport issued by the U.S. Department of State provides proof of U.S. citizenship for children who become citizens through adoption. This is different from the certificate provided with Convention adoptions, which is issued at the time of adoption, affixed to the foreign adoption decree by the U.S. Department of State, and states that the adoption is in compliance with the Convention. The process for obtaining the Certificate of Citizenship depends on the type of visa your child was issued.

- **IR-3 or IH-3 Visas:** A child who has a full and final adoption in his or her country of origin and who enters the United States on an IR-3 visa (non-Convention adoption) or an IH-3 visa (Convention adoption) becomes a citizen automatically upon entering the country if he or she is under 18. In these cases, the child will receive a Certificate of Citizenship from USCIS within 45 days of entering the United States. (There are exceptions to this process for U.S. military employees and those who work for the U.S. Department of State.)
- **IR-4 or IH-4 Visas:** If your child entered the United States on an IR-4 visa (non-Convention adoption) or IH-4 (Convention adoption), you must finalize your child's adoption in a U.S. court to satisfy Child Citizenship Act requirements (unless the child was officially adopted in the child's country and the child's State of residence in the United States recognizes the foreign adoption without a requirement to readopt). Your child automatically will become a U.S. citizen on the day the adoption is finalized in the United States provided the child is under the age of 18 on the date of adoption. You may then apply for a Certificate of Citizenship by submitting Form N-600, Application for Certificate of Citizenship (<http://www.uscis.gov/n-600>). If these steps are not completed, the child may not have attained U.S. citizenship. See [http://adoption.state.gov/us\\_visa\\_for\\_your\\_child/citizenship.php](http://adoption.state.gov/us_visa_for_your_child/citizenship.php) for more information.

Check the stamp on your child's passport to see which type of visa your child was issued.

It is possible to obtain a passport from the State Department (see [http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](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, you will need to provide proof that a full and final adoption has been completed. Records will not show your child is a U.S. citizen until you provide this proof. For more information, refer to *Social Security Numbers for Children* at <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10023.pdf>.

## Adjusting to Your New Family

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 and with changes in diet, tastes, smells, and other cultural differences. Keeping some items familiar to the child—such as a favorite blanket or article of clothing or familiar-looking items from the child’s country of origin—or serving the child’s favorite or most-eaten food may ease the transition and provide important mementos for the future. Older children also may struggle with language, school, and other issues and may need more time to adjust. Additionally, some children, especially those previously placed in institutions, may experience difficulties forming healthy attachments (i.e., emotional connections) with their parents (Zeanah, Smyke, Koga, & Carlson, 2005), but parents may be able to help their children build or enhance healthy attachments using various nonintrusive techniques or supports (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009).

Soon after your child arrives in the United States, you should take him or her to a pediatrician who is familiar with the American Academy of Pediatrics policies on intercountry adoption and who has experience in intercountry adoption. There are many clinics and doctors around the country that specialize in international adoption medicine. (See Additional Resources for websites that provide clinic and doctor listings.)

Your family also must adjust to your new status as a transcultural and possibly transracial family. Issues

for families to consider include whether they plan to participate in activities linked to the child’s culture of origin and, for transracial families, how to respond to comments or questions from others about their adoption and the family’s racial differences. Learning how to navigate these experiences can pose a challenge for some families. 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 overcome challenges. Adoptive parents also need to be aware of the effect that the adoption may have on other children in the family and on extended family members.

With the enormous amount of information available online and increasing Internet access throughout the world, more and more adopted persons, including those adopted from other countries, and their birth families are finding each other online (Pinderhughes, Matthews, Deoudes, & Pertman, 2013). Regardless of the existence of a contact agreement, adopted children and youth frequently search for their birth families and vice versa. Adoptive families should seek assistance from their adoption services provider about how they can support their children in safely navigating the Internet and how to navigate any newly established relationships with the child’s birth family. For more information about open adoption and contact with birth families, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/contacts.cfm>.

During this transition and throughout your lives as an adoptive family, staff from the adoption services provider may be a valuable source of support. Some adoption agencies provide services for adoptive families, which may last from about 6 months to several years after placement, to make sure your child is adjusting well. Adoptive parents also can locate resources and referrals for additional services they need from a variety of sources, such as the Internet or the local library. It is normal for

adopted individuals and their families to need support beyond the initial transition period. For more information about postadoption services and their benefits, refer to Information Gateway's *Finding and Using Postadoption Services* at [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_postadoption.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.cfm).

## Additional Resources

**Child Welfare Information Gateway.** Includes several publications and web sections on intercountry adoptions, including the following:

- Adoption Options  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_adoption.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoption.cfm)
- Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adoptive Child  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_background.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_background.cfm)
- Children Who Spent Time in Institutions  
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/types/intercountry/institutions.cfm>
- Adopting Children From Another Country  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/other\\_country.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/other_country.cfm)
- After Intercountry Adoption  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt\\_parenthood/intercountry/index.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_parenthood/intercountry/index.cfm)
- Transracial/Transcultural Adoption  
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt\\_parenthood/intercountry/transcultural.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_parenthood/intercountry/transcultural.cfm)

**U.S. Department of State.** Provides information on a wide range of intercountry adoption topics, such as the Hague Convention, the adoption process, and country-specific notes:

<http://adoption.state.gov/>

**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.** Details the Convention and non-Convention process for intercountry adoptions:

<http://www.uscis.gov/adoption>

**University of Minnesota International Adoption Clinic.** Addresses health issues related to children adopted from other countries:

<http://www.iac.umn.edu/>

**American Academy of Pediatrics.** Includes a listing of pediatricians by State who specialize in providing services to adopted children and information about health-related adoption issues:

<http://www2.aap.org/sections/adoption/index.html>

**ComeUnity.** Highlights information on health issues related to intercountry and domestic adoptions, including a list of clinics and doctors that specialize intercountry adoption:

<http://www.comeunity.com/adoption/health/index.html>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** Provides information about health issues related to intercountry adoption, such as travel preparation, medical exams, and immunizations:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh8-Adoptions.aspx>

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