



Adoption Council of Ontario

The Homestudy

A homestudy is an assessment process that involves an adoption practitioner and the family or individual who is considering adoption. At the completion of the homestudy process, the adoption practitioner and the applicants will arrive at a decision about the characteristics of the children most appropriate for their family. A report is written by the adoption practitioner and is a requirement for all adoptions in Ontario.

Ontario has standardized the adoption homestudy format called SAFE (Structured Analysis Family Evaluation). Topics covered in a homestudy include your education, childhood, parenting beliefs, and hobbies. The standardization of the homestudy also goes hand in hand with the PRIDE training, which is the mandatory parenting course all adoptive applicants must complete (see page 8 for more information). Ideally, PRIDE and the homestudy should take place at the same time, as what you learn in PRIDE can be applied to the homestudy and vice versa. The two elements work together to prepare you for adoption as much as possible. Your decisions throughout the process should not be rushed—you should take the time to reflect on what you are learning about yourself and your partner, if applicable.

The homestudy process can often result in personal growth and self understanding. Families are often intimidated and somewhat wary at the thought of exploring every aspect of their lives, but by the end, they realize the process is a positive experience that gave them insight on themselves, their partners if applicable, and what parenting means to them. In any case, the time it takes to complete your homestudy is time well spent.

The average length of time for the completion of a homestudy varies from individual to individual. Typically, the 4-6 interviews are completed in 6-8 months. At least one of the interviews must take place in your home. If you have anyone else living with you, they will also be interviewed. Any adults in the home will need to provide police clearances, and if you have other children, they will be included in the process in some way as well. This is just to make sure they know what is going on and understand how adopting will affect them.

Completing a homestudy requires time, thought, energy, and paperwork. Some people may approach the homestudy with anxiety. It is important to remember that the homestudy is designed to be a tool for both you and your adoption practitioner to identify strengths and vulnerabilities that will affect you and your child in the months and years after placement has occurred. Openness and honesty by both you and your adoption practitioner are needed to ensure that the final decision will be one that you can feel good about, in both the short and long run. Because the homestudy deals with fairly personal topics, it is *very, very, very* important that you find a practitioner you are comfortable with so that the process can be as open, honest, and stress-free as possible.

A homestudy is a process of education and self-evaluation. It is a time for you to look at your readiness to continue on your adoption journey, as well as the special gifts and abilities you have to offer a child who comes to your family through adoption. It is an opportunity to look at yourself and your support system, explore beliefs, attitudes, opinions, self-image, goals, achievements, and coping skills. Examining your motivation to adopt is also important. If

infertility has been your experience, examining how this will impact expectations regarding an adopted child and/or parenting is crucial.

When choosing a practitioner to conduct your homestudy, it is extremely important to ensure you are comfortable with them. They will be a part of your life for the next little while and you will likely be discussing some things you have never discussed with anyone before. For this reason and so that your homestudy will be an accurate representation of yourself, a practitioner who you can connect with and trust is essential. Otherwise, the process will not be as enjoyable and worthwhile as it should be. You should also ask them what hours they work and what their fees are. It is not viable to contract with a worker who can only meet on weeknights if you work a night job, for instance.

In all families, it is important that all members, including extended family, be involved in the preparation process. Adoption will impact all future generations of the family, and extended family may have thoughts and feelings to share about this. It is better to discuss these up front than to be surprised after the placement has occurred. The homestudy process is also a time for you to learn more about the types of children needing adoptive placements and about the joys and challenges of adoptive parenting. Some family members such as children or extended family members who are living with the adoptive applicants may be interviewed.

If there are existing issues that may present a challenge to you adopting a child right now, your adoption practitioner will suggest ways to resolve this challenge. Remember that you and the adoption worker are focused on the best interest of your future child and on a successful parenting experience for you.

Many people may feel that a large income, the ownership and location of their home, a “good” job, marital status, perfect health, and physical appearance are the most important factors to look for in adoptive parents. However, these factors are considered to be much less important than being mature and possessing good parenting and life skills.

In general, personal qualities that have been found to lead to successful adoptions are: a sense of humour, flexibility, good coping skills, non-judgmental attitude, and experience with children. People who later feel good about their decision to adopt are usually those who enjoy being with children, like adventure, have a good support system, can use community resources, and have a history of surviving and/or solving life’s problems.

You will only have one homestudy completed, however you will need to have an update of your homestudy completed after two years or if there are any major changes in your lifestyle. Any updates will be added as an appendix to your original homestudy. You may also need to have new medicals, child welfare checks, and police clearances completed.

You will always have the opportunity to review the completed homestudy. You will sign the completed homestudy report and retain a copy for yourselves.

A list of private practitioners can be found on the Ministry of Children and Youth Services website at:

://www.gov.on.ca/children/english/resources/child/STEL02_179892.html

A link of Children’s Aid Society can be found at: .oacas.org

Additional Documentation

Adoption Homestudy Package: The homestudy is the written report completed by the adoption social worker. The adoption package includes several other documents:

Application and Financial Statement: Applicants do not need to be wealthy, but they need to demonstrate that they are able to assume the financial responsibilities of raising a child or additional children.

Letters of Reference: A couple is required to provide 5 references and a single applicant is required to provide 3. Your social worker will provide the forms and tell you more.

Police/Child Welfare Clearances: The following types may be necessary:

- 🚓 RCMP: fingerprinting required, then forms sent to Ottawa for clearance
- 🚓 Local: through local police headquarters (some jurisdictions, such as Toronto and York Region, require special forms that are available through your adoption practitioner).
- 🚓 Out of Country: if you have lived out of Canada at a fixed address for a period of time since age 18.
- 🚓 Child Welfare Record Checks: to ensure no previous reports have been made against prospective parents

Medicals: Each applicant will have a medical form completed by their doctor or a nurse practitioner. If you are/were under the care of a specialist (for example, a psychiatrist or an orthopedic surgeon) during the past 5 years, a report from that professional may also be required. Some countries have their own medical forms in addition to the Ontario forms.

Home Safety Checklist: During the homestudy, your social worker will complete a home safety checklist to ensure it is safe for children.

Additional Documents: These may include a marriage certificate, divorce certificate, guardianship letter, a letter to the authorities in the child's country stating your reasons for adopting from there (if applicable), photographs of you and your home, etc. Some countries also require a psychological/psychiatric assessment.

*Your agency and/or your adoption practitioner will ensure that you complete and submit the correct forms in order to complete your adoption dossier/paperwork.



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