



## Adoption Frequently Asked Questions

**1. How can I meet with ICA in person?**

We meet with people on a one-on-one basis and provide them the same information that we would give over the phone or via email. If you would be interested in this you can contact us to set up a time.

**2. Is ICA accredited with the COA and Hague compliant?**

ICA has been a statewide licensed organization since 1990. ICA also received Hague accreditation in 2008 and adheres to the highest standards of international and domestic adoptions and services.

**3. Does ICA work with people outside of their local area?**

The fees for local and out-of-state families are the same and vary depending on the adoption program that is chosen, not resident location. We work with people all over the country; although that means people in other states do not always get to meet us face-to-face, we still guide and assist via phone, email, and fax throughout the entire adoption process. Regardless of your location or residence in or out-of-state, we always encourage expedient effective communication with our families.

**4. How should I go about choosing an agency?**

Choosing an agency is very important and can be complicated. There are many wonderful agencies, and choosing one is a very personal decision. We encourage all families to do some homework and to ask as many questions as possible. A good match depends as much on the programs offered as the personality compatibility between the agency/organization and the parents. ICA is very open and non-competitive in nature. In fact, we believe that the more information you have the better decision you will make in regard to the agency you choose.

**5. What kind of scenarios do children available for adoption come from?**

Children who are available for adoption come from many different situations and environments. Some children may have been abandoned at birth or at a very young age, while other children experienced the loss of one or both

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parents due to sickness or poverty later on in life.

**6. Are children available for adoption healthy?**

There are no guarantees in adoption. We seek the healthiest children we are able to find. It must be clarified that with any adoption, children are referred to as "healthy" if they are not known to have a significant medical/emotional condition. Healthy children often have effects of inadequate parenting and then of institutionalization which can include malnutrition, delayed development and other minor medical conditions. Many of the effects of institutionalization diminish after a child is placed in a home and receives love, attention, medical care and proper nutrition. Children with repaired medical conditions may also be considered healthy. Children with special needs are also available in all of our programs.

**7. What are the age ranges of the children being adopted?**

Children are being adopted at a variety of different ages from 6 months to 15 years old with international adoptions and 0 to 17 years old with domestic adoptions.

**8. At what age is a child available for adoption considered an "older child?"**

The age range of younger and what is considered an "older child" is determined by the country of origin. Often times the age is 4 years or older, but again this is established by the parameters set by the child's country of origin.

**9. Is it possible to specify the age and gender of the child I wish to adopt?**

In most countries and domestically this is possible however the country or county retains the right to determine the appropriate age difference between the adoptive parents and the child. Very often parents desire to adopt a specific age and gender that may or may not be readily available in certain countries or counties.

**10. Can I adopt if I already have children?**

A few countries have restrictions on the number of children in the family, but there are a number of possibilities for families with children at home already.

**11. Can I adopt more than one child at a time?**

Yes, in some countries. Siblings are often adopted together and this can usually be done at the same time. Some countries allow the adoption of

unrelated children at the same time and some countries only allow the adoption of siblings. Please discuss this with our Intake staff. ICA prefers that when you are adopting two or more non-related children that you wait 6 months between placements before proceeding.

**12. Can we adopt out of birth order?**

ICA does not prohibit adoptive families from adopting out of birth order however your home study provider or social worker may have restrictive policies or recommendations about birth order. Families are many times evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

**13. Do I need to be an American citizen to adopt a child through ICA?**

It is required that at least one of the parents be an American citizen for the adoption to be legitimately processed through the US. The adoption is based on the qualification of the parent who is a US citizen.

**14. Is there an age criteria to adopt?**

Each country and program has its own age criteria and its own parental eligibility guidelines. Some will allow parents in their 50's to adopt. Generally you must be between the ages of 25 and 42 years old for those adopting 0 – 3 months old.

**15. Are there any restrictions for people who are divorced?**

Divorced applicants are eligible to apply. Married couples are required to be married for at least 3 years before adopting.

Please review our agency's Adoptive Family Criteria for a complete listing of ICA adoption requirements.

**16. Are there requirements for the health of the parents?**

ICA has some requirements regarding health. There is a physician's form in our guidelines which lists everything we require your doctor to evaluate. Generally, each country and county will not refer children to individuals with infectious diseases. If this is a concern to you please speak with our intake staff regarding the specific criteria upon which your health status will be evaluated.

**17. Can I adopt if I've had/have cancer or other similar medical issue?**

Every country has unique rules and requirements regarding health issues. Please contact our Intake staff for more personalized information. Health

issues may not automatically preclude you from adopting but each situation must be addressed on a case-by-case basis. With international adoptions all medical information must be fully addressed and documented in your home study as well as other adoption related documents. Full disclosure is required.

**18. Can I adopt if I take anti-depressants?**

If you are currently taking any prescription medications or if you have any medical conditions, please call or email our Intake staff to discuss your specific case so we can help you determine your eligibility. If you are taking a prescription medication for any psychological diagnosis, including depression, we need to know prior to beginning the adoption process. These medical issues are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

**19. Can I adopt if I have a criminal record, been arrested etc., even if I believe it has been expunged?**

If you have an arrest record or prior criminal charges please discuss this with the Intake staff. While it does not automatically preclude you from adopting, each situation must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. With international adoptions all criminal issues must be fully addressed and documented in your home study as well as other adoption related documents. Full disclosure is required. Generally speaking, any criminal record should not be within the last ten years.

**20. What if we get pregnant during our adoption process?**

ICA asks that couples experiencing the joy of pregnancy put their adoption on hold for a time. You can stop your adoption process and resume the process at least 6 months after the birth of your child. This gives you a chance to adjust to your new baby before bringing home an adopted child that will require more of your time and attention.

**21. What are my first steps in the adoption process?**

1. Complete and sign the Preliminary Adoption Application and applicable Fee Agreement for your adoption plan. Send it into ICA along with requested supportive documents. The first portion of the ICA program fee is payable (if applicable). If you are having problems with this payment please contact us.
2. Initiate your home study.

3. Initiate the Dossier and USCIS paperwork (for international adoptions only).

You will not adopt alone. From your first phone call, through every step of your adoption, our staff will provide you with detailed guidance, resources and support. We'll take you by the hand to lead you through the process, assisting you with every aspect of your adoption.

## **22. What is a home study?**

A home study is an assessment of your family and home to determine your mental, emotional and physical abilities to provide a loving, stable environment for a child. ICA will help you understand and prepare for the home study.

## **23. Will ICA conduct the home study?**

ICA is fully licensed in California to conduct your home study. Individuals living in California should contact the ICA office for information regarding a home study. Individuals living outside California are encouraged to use one of our partner agencies.

If you live outside of California: When looking for a home study agency ask for a cost estimate for only a home study. Be sure to ask what their estimate includes and what it does not include. Most countries and States require 3 or more post placement reports so when you are getting price quotes make sure the agency includes the price for the post placement visits in their quote. In most metropolitan areas, home study/post placement reports total approximately \$2,000 - \$4,000. Most of all, you should choose an agency who is responsive and with whom you feel comfortable. You will have a professional relationship with them for a number of years, both during the adoption process and afterwards. Once you have been approved we can then step in and process the international component of the adoption.

## **24. The home study sounds intimidating, can we still adopt if we live in humble surroundings?**

A home study by a licensed social worker is a requirement in any foreign or domestic adoption. The home study is to determine whether there is a safe place for a child to live. The size or furnishings of your house or apartment is not the issue. The home study seeks to document for the authorities that you

are able to provide a loving stable environment. It is also a process to assure that you, as a family, are fully prepared for the task of parenting an adopted child.

**25. How long does it take to complete the adoption?**

The average time for most families is within 9 months to 2 years (with some cases falling outside each range). This can vary depending primarily on the program chosen, events and changes, or available children with the families' pre-selected criteria. The home study process, wait for a referral, court proceedings in the foreign country, or matching referral domestically, are normally the most time consuming aspects of adoption. In the case of pre-identified placements (i.e. relative adoptions, or the adoption of a child that participated in a hosting program with the family), the time it takes to complete the adoption may be shorter.

**26. What is the "referral wait time" of a child?**

The referral wait pertains to the time between the completion of your home study (and dossier documents, if adopting internationally) and receiving specific information about a child. The more flexible your requirements are the shorter the wait. If you are open to either a boy or a girl of varied age, and/or sibling sets, a child/ren may be referred to you sooner. In the case of a pre-identified placement (i.e. relative adoptions, or the adoption of a child that participated in a hosting program with the family), the child is already identified.

**27. Is it OK to decline the referral of a child?**

The most important thing is that the child you accept into your family is wanted and loved. If you decline a referral that appears to meet the criteria you have provided, we will discuss this with you and your family.

**28. Will I have to travel to my child's birth country?**

Yes, in most cases. Some countries will allow one spouse to travel or return home early and some countries will permit a child to be escorted from their homeland. Traveling provides you the opportunity to learn about your child's culture and enable you to understand your child better. Many families document, film, and scrapbook, their entire trip. In years to come you can share the exciting and touching memories that are uniquely yours.

**29. Do I need to learn a foreign language?**

No. Many of our families have never traveled internationally and are fluent in only one language. ICA will inform you of all your travel needs and in country contacts and proceedings at your pre-travel orientation before you leave. If you are adopting an older child internationally we highly encourage the use of translators and/or other foreign language tools.

**30. Can I adopt even if I think an international adoption sounds too complicated?**

It is complicated but ICA helps hundreds of families adopt every year. An ICA staff member will guide you through every step, from document collection to travel. We provide very extensive documentation and a high level of support. Even if you never visit our offices, we will know each other well by the end of the process. Helping you is our job, we take it seriously, and we enjoy it. ICA also has domestic adoption programs available.

**31. Who will be my contact person at ICA?** You will work with a social worker and/or case manager throughout your adoption. Our social workers and case managers are professional, well trained and very knowledgeable about our adoption programs. A social worker will help you with document collection in completing your home study and post placement reports. A case manager will help you with document preparation and dossier, provide you with information about your child, help with travel arrangements and lodging, and oversee the adoption process in the child's birth country.

**32. What is a post-adoption or post-placement report?**

All countries and states require periodic reports and pictures on each child for several years after the adoption. These are sent by the parents or by a social worker, through the agency, to the foreign courts or county officials. The reports assure them that the children are healthy, loved and well taken care of. These reports continually reassure the courts or governing authority that they have made a decision in the best interest of the child. Post-adoption reports are thus crucial to the continuation of international adoption in almost all countries as well as domestically. They give you a chance to reflect on your child's adoption and your child's development and help assure that international adoptions will continue to be an option for both orphans and adoptive families. Countries or states will usually require 3 or more of the reports be written by a social worker.

### **33. How much will it cost?**

The major factor that affects the cost of your adoption is the type of adoption (international or domestic) and the adoption program you choose to participate in. With international adoptions, contributing factors to the cost of your adoption are: (a) the legal structure of the foreign country and (b) the requirements of travel. An international adoption is quite a complicated legal process. You will be working with foreign governments, the USCIS department, county and state authorities, as well as the federal level state department. You will also need police reports, medical reports and social service evaluations. There are many people who spend a lot of time working to adequately prepare the legal procedures for the adoption process.

Our domestic America's Orphan program is FREE (i.e. no agency costs) and you receive financial support monthly from the State until the child is 18 years old.

We do all we can to keep our fees as low as possible, consistent with the level of support our clients and our profession demand. Our fees for both international and domestic adoptions are fully disclosed flat rates, and in our Fee Agreements which are specified to adoption type and program. We are available to discuss our fees with you as well. Please contact our accounts payable department.

Our Fee Agreements will provide a complete breakdown of the costs involved. We include estimates for every cost you will encounter. Money you pay to other entities, not to us, are still included in our estimate so that you can know realistically all the costs you will be responsible for during the adoption.

### **34. What financial assistance is available for prospective parents?**

Most adoptive parents have asked this question and been pleasantly surprised at the amount of assistance available. Almost everyone who is willing to put forth the extra effort can find some type of financial assistance either through donations from family and friends, grants, or even low percentage rate loans. We would be happy to supply your family with our adoptive family Financial Assistance Resources list. As of July 1, 2010 Adoptive families are also now eligible for a \$13,170 tax credit upon final order of your adoption. The Hope for Children Act (H.R. 622) is legislation to increase the adoption tax credit from \$10,000 to \$13,170. This is a



reimbursement of \$13,170 from the federal government for your adoption expenses. This in effect can reduce your adoption expenses.

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The Hope for Children Act makes an adoption tax credit and an exclusion from income of amounts provided through an employer adoption assistance program permanent law. This allows a tax credit for allowable expenses up to \$13,170 in adoptions that have not been completed through the Waiting Child Program. A \$13,170 tax credit for each adoption of a child with special needs. This also allows an exclusion from gross income of amounts up to \$13,170 for qualified adoption expenses for adoptions not completed through the Waiting Child Program or up to \$13,170 for adoptions of children with special needs paid by an employer to an employee through an adoption assistance program. This phases out the allowable amounts for both the credits and the exclusion between adjusted gross income of \$150,000 and \$190,000.

**35. How do I know if I earn enough money to adopt?**

Surprisingly, most of the adoptive families at ICA are average American families. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services minimum income requirement for parents adopting internationally is based on the number of people in the family, plus the number of children adopted, and is 125% of the Poverty Line. The figures are listed on Form I-864P, Poverty Guidelines, and found on the web site of Department of Homeland Security.

**36. Is the Preliminary Application Fee refundable?**

The Preliminary Application fee is refundable up to \$400.00 within 30 days. The purpose of sending in the preliminary application and paying the application fee of \$500.00 is for our Intake/Social Services Department to determine eligibility for the country, county, and adoption program in which you are applying for an adoption. There are several steps and much time that goes into determining eligibility. If you are denied for some reason, additional resources are investigated and offered as alternative options.

**37. I want to adopt, but I'm unsure as to what type of adoption or adoption program is best for me. What should I do?**

Many families are unsure as to which adoption type or adoption program to pursue. At ICA we understand and are committed to aiding you in your decision, as well as making your adoption as smooth and time efficient as possible. That's why we recommend, to our undecided families, signing-up for our America's Orphans domestic program. The program will open a case file for your family, and give you a head-start on the adoption process. During this time you will begin: adoption parent training, which will further educate you and aid in your decision. We will be able to bring other opportunities to your attention such as hosting an international or domestic orphan and/or newborn adoptions. The America's Orphan program is FREE. That's right, FREE! There are no complications in switching your adoption type and/or program should you desire.

**38. I cannot adopt now. Is there another way I can help the children?**

Yes, there are many ways you can make an impact in a child's life outside of adoption. ICA sponsors a variety of humanitarian aid programs for the children in need around the world. These programs range from hosting to gift packs and from volunteer work to donations. Please contact the ICA Intake staff and find the best way for you and your family to get involved.