



♥ A Licensed Adoption Agency ♥ 1-800-GO-ADOPT ♥ www.heartofadoptions.com ♥ info@heartofadoptions.com ♥

Dear Prospective Adoptive Parent(s),

Thank you for choosing Heart of Adoptions, Inc. to complete your **Domestic Adoption Home Study**. If you are looking to adopt from the Foster Care System, please reach out to the Home Study Coordinator below before proceeding. We are pleased to share in your expectations for a successful adoption. Heart of Adoptions, Inc. is a full service, licensed adoption agency located in the state of Florida. It is our goal to provide professional and quality adoption services to families hoping to build their family through adoption. Some of the services we provide adoptive families include:

- Home Studies
- Post- Placement Supervision
- Adoption Placement Services
- Interstate Compact Services
- Counseling
- Adoption Education
- Experienced Staff

We understand that adopting a child can be overwhelming and emotionally challenging at times. Our knowledgeable staff is available to walk you step by step through the adoption process as you complete the necessary forms for your home study. One of our highly trained caseworkers will complete your home study and after your child comes home, we will provide any legally required post placement supervision visits to ensure that you and your new child are doing well and assist with any needs. Your caseworker will provide you with guidance and support, as well as referrals for any additional services that your family may request.

To begin the homestudy process, please complete the registration form at the bottom of the "Hoping to Adopt" page and check the option for "Home Study Only" (link is below) where you will then receive your login and password directly from My Adoption Portal (also referred to as: MAP). [https://www.heartofadooptions.com/hoping-to-adopt/](https://www.heartofadoptions.com/hoping-to-adopt/) If you receive an error message when you attempt to log in and/or register, stating you already have an account please use your email address and the password "adopt1" (all lowercase, no spaces, and without the quotes) but you should change the password once you get into the program to begin everything. If you have any problems with this, please reach out to the agency to assist you.

♥ Main Office: 418 West Platt Street, Suite A, Tampa, Florida 33606 ♥ Tel: (813) 258-6505 ♥ Fax: (813) 254-9058

Additional offices:

Coconut Creek ♥ Gainesville ♥ Jacksonville ♥ Jupiter ♥ Merritt Island ♥ Naples ♥ Orlando ♥ Pompano Beach ♥ St. Petersburg
♥ West Palm Beach ♥ Winter Haven ♥

Our home study fee is \$1,700 (or an expedited home study fee of \$2,000), plus the educational fee of \$100 for the online general adoption classes, and travel. Travel fees begin at \$50 per visit and this payment should be included when you submit the payment for the home study. The typical timeframe for the home study process is eight weeks or less. Please refer to the Domestic Home Study Agreement in MAP to determine what the travel fee would be according to your location. In addition to the general adoption educational classes, please note newborn adoptions required specific newborn adoption classes, in which the information is found within the MAP task “Adoption Education Instructions” – under the specific Education Block.

As you provide information and complete required forms, you will be asked to either mail them directly to Heart of Adoptions Inc., or in most cases, save the documents to your personal web portal account at www.MyAdoptionPortal.com. MAP is a safe and secure environment for adoptive families to work with our agency throughout the entire adoption experience. MAP includes our electronic forms, alerts to keep you on track with your home study requirements, and a complete document management system with upload, download, and print capabilities. Once all the documentation is received, the timeframe for the home visit is approximately two weeks with another two weeks to receive the approved home study report.

If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to contact our Home Study Coordinator, Shannon Gayden, at (813) 515-9997. To help ensure you always receive important correspondence from her, we ask that you add [Sgayden@heartofadooptions.com](mailto:Sgayden@heartofadoptions.com) to your “safe senders” list for any email accounts that you provide to us.

We look forward to meeting your family soon and wish you much success on your adoption journey!

Warmly,

Meredith Shepard, MS
Executive Director

HEART OF ADOPTION, Inc.

HOME STUDY CRITERIA & DISQUALIFIERS

(Based on F.S. Chapter 63 & F.A.C. 65C-16)

I. REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE ADOPTION HOME STUDY

A. Required by Florida Statute §63.092

A home study must include at minimum:

1. Interviews-Helps assess motivations, parenting attitudes, stability, readiness.

In-depth interview with each prospective adoptive parent.

Interviews with other household members as needed.

Evaluation of existing children (if any) and whether adding a child is feasible (impact on family).

2. Background Checks-To ensure no history of abuse, neglect, or criminal behavior that endangers children.

Required for all adult household members, and minors ages 12 and over:

Criminal background check (FDLE + FBI fingerprints).

Florida child abuse registry check (§39.0138).

Local law-enforcement checks.

Out-of-state abuse/neglect and criminal checks for anyone who has lived outside Florida in the last 5 years, as well as from any state where you were a foster parent.

3. Home Environment Assessment-To ensure home is safe, sanitary, adequate space, suitable for child's needs. To avoid overcrowding, overburdening, or destabilizing the family unit.

Inspection of the physical home.

Evaluation of safety, cleanliness, space for children, fire safety, pets, and overall living conditions.

4. Financial Stability Determination-To ensure parents can provide for basic needs and stability.

Review of income, employment, expenses, debts, stability of resources.

The minimum poverty income guidelines must be met for the total number of family members you will have once the adoption occurs.

5. Health and Medical History-To ensure no condition (serious chronic illness, mental/emotional instability) that could impair parenting or child safety.

Physical and mental health of each applicant.

Documentation of any illness, disability, or condition that may affect parenting ability.

Must obtain medical clearances from your primary provider as well as any specialists (oncologist, psychiatrist, etc.) regarding the ability to provide parenting basics.

6. Motivation & Readiness to Adopt

Evaluation of intent, expectations, understanding of permanency, and emotional readiness.

7. Training/Education-To ensure applicants are informed, prepared, and have access to community and adoption-related support.

Applicants must receive adoptive parent preparation covering:

Child trauma, loss, grief, and attachment.

Adoption process, legal risks, and post-adoption supports.

Open adoption considerations (if applicable).

8. Social & Family Functioning Assessment

Relationship and marital stability.

Parenting style, discipline philosophy, family dynamics.

Support systems (extended family, community, childcare).

II. ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FROM 65C-16 (DEPARTMENT RULES)

1. Housing Requirements (65C-16.005)

Adequate bedroom space & sleeping arrangements.

Safe storage of medications, firearms, hazardous materials.

Working utilities, safe living conditions, and overall household stability.

2. Emotional & Mental Health Requirements (65C-16.005)

No untreated or unstable mental health conditions that could impair parenting.

If receiving treatment, it must be stable, well-managed, and documented.

3. Physical Health Requirements

Must be physically capable of caring for a child.

Chronic conditions must be stable and not pose risk.

4. Family Relationship & Marital Stability

For couples, stability is assessed through:

Length of relationship

Communication patterns

History of separations/conflict

Support of both partners for adopting

Single parents as well as same sex couples are eligible.

5. Cultural & Heritage Support

Families must demonstrate willingness to:

Respect and support the child's racial, cultural, or ethnic background

Maintain sibling connections when appropriate

6. Parenting Capacity

Ability to handle behaviors, trauma histories, educational needs, medical or special needs.

7. Pets & Environmental Safety

Pets must be non-aggressive and vaccinated.

No unsafe environmental hazards.

III. DISQUALIFIERS FOR APPROVAL

These come from F.S. 63, F.S. 39.0138, and 65C-16.

A. Automatic ("Statutory") Disqualifiers

If an applicant or adult household member has one of the following, the home study must be denied:

1. Disqualifying criminal offenses

(Per §39.0138 and incorporated into §63.092) Includes, but not limited to:

Any felony child abuse, neglect, or abandonment

Domestic violence battery or aggravated battery

Homicide, manslaughter

Sexual battery, molestation, exploitation, child pornography

Kidnapping, human trafficking

Violent felonies (armed robbery, assault with deadly weapon)

Manufacturing or trafficking controlled substances

Arson

Certain felony drug offenses within the last 5 years

Any crime against a child or vulnerable person

2. Verified history of child abuse or neglect

If the applicant or household member has a verified finding on the abuse registry.

3. Active addiction

Unmanaged or active substance abuse that compromises parenting.

4. Severe unsafe home environment

Including:

Structural hazards

Unsanitary conditions

Unsafe animals

Violations of fire/code safety

5. Refusal to allow full background checks

B. Discretionary (Agency-Based) Disqualifiers

The agency has the responsibility and discretion to evaluate and determine the suitability of the home taking into account and consideration the physical home as well as the background and abilities of the prospective adoptive parent applicants.

1. Unstable Mental or Physical Health

Any condition not stable or not adequately treated.

2. Unsafe or Inadequate Housing

Overcrowding, hazardous situations, or housing instability. Unsuitable living conditions:

housing that does not provide adequate space, safety, hygiene, privacy, or overall environment needed to support a child's well-being.

If the household is already overcrowded (too many children already, whether biological or adopted) or the addition of a new child would create undue burden on the family's capacity to provide proper care.

3. Unresolved Child Welfare History or Verified Findings

Prior foster disruptions or adoption dissolutions require explanation & remediation but are not automatic disqualifiers.

Verified findings in the **child-abuse/neglect registry** for any household member

4. Unresolved Legal Issues

Recent arrests, ongoing criminal proceedings.

5. Financial Instability

Inability to meet basic needs or chronic crisis-level financial issues.

6. Relationship Instability or High Conflict

Frequent separations, domestic disputes, or lack of support from both partners.

7. Failure to Cooperate

Not completing paperwork, interviews, or training.

Providing false or inconsistent information.

8. Other

If the family already has other children (birth or adopted), and adding another child would overburden the family's capacity (time, resources, attention) creating risk for neglect or inability to meet child's needs.

For prospective adoptive parents who are current or former foster parents: if their licensing or foster-parent file shows prior care or supervision concerns, violations, or other negative findings that may lead to denial.

IV. SUPPLEMENTAL FINDINGS THAT MAY DELAY APPROVAL

Need for follow-up regarding mental health treatment or evaluations.

Need for parenting classes or additional training.

Home repairs or safety improvements needed.

Background check clarifications (out-of-state, alias names).

Pending medical documentation.

V. HOME STUDY VALIDITY & TIMELINES

Valid for 1 year from date of approval.

Must be updated if major changes occur (new household member, relocation, job loss, etc.).

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