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A Family for Every Child

Adopting as a military family

Starting the Process

The following are some suggestions on how to get started on your adoption journey:

- Visit a Family Resource Center near your installation to find out about family support groups that you may participate in
- If you are an overseas military family, talk with your installation's school, legal assistance, or medical clinic personnel who are often familiar with local resources and services.
- You may also review Adopt Us Kid's comprehensive adoption guide *Wherever My Family Is: That's Home!*
- Military Money's website gives a quick rundown on laws, guidelines and resources families should be familiar with.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway also provides a general fact sheet that covers adoption in general.

The Department of Defense's (DoD) has a program called the Exceptional Family Member Program, which is designed to help families with a special needs member during the before, during and after stages of transfer or PCS orders. Please keep in mind that the military defines special needs differently than adoption professionals working in the foster care system. The military defines special needs to include "physical or mental disabilities, or severe illness", while adoption professionals consider special needs to cover "children who are older, part of a sibling group, or of an ethnic or cultural minority". You may learn more about the Exceptional Family Member Program on their site Military One Source.To learn more about how special needs is defined in the foster care system, please see Child Welfare Information Gateway's fact sheet on special needs adoption.

Adoption Laws

U.S. adoptions are governed by state laws. Families who are seeking to adopt a child from another state will need to comply with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), which allows the transfer of a child or sibling group from one state to another. Your adoption worker and agency should be familiar with ICPC requirements,

and will be able to answer any questions you may have. You may also visit Child Welfare Information Gateway's site on state laws.

For military families who are stationed overseas, you may contact a legal assistance office or the Judge Advocate General to gather information on laws, policies, and agreements that the U.S. has with countries where military personnel are stationed. In addition, you should also learn more about the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), a treaty between a host country and another nation that has troops stationed in that country. This treaty affects the relocation of children from one country to another.

The Home Study

All families seeking to adopt from the foster care system must have a current home study that approves them to adopt. The following are a couple of ways that a military home study may differ from a non-military home study:

- As a military family you will need to get background checks completed for every state and country you have lived in.
- An overseas military family must have a home study completed by a licensed U.S. adoption agency. Two U.S. agencies that do home studies for overseas military families are Adopt Abroad and Voice for International Development and Adoption. In addition, the International Social Service has social workers in 140 countries where the U.S. has military personnel. ***NOTE: A Family for Every Child is not endorsing any of these agencies. We encourage you as the family to research each agency and explore all your options before making an informed decision on which agency will best meet your needs.**

Change of Station or Deployment

If you have a permanent change of station (PCS) or deployment, some of your home study documents may transfer to another agency closer to your new home or installation. Some agencies may require their own forms and protocols, however, so double check with your current agency and your new agency when moving. If you are being deployed, keep your command informed about your adoption journey to make sure that all essential documents are completed on time and delivered. It may also be beneficial to have appropriate powers of attorney in place for any deployed service member.

Before a child is allowed to move to another state, the ICPC for that child will need to be approved. Once the child is legally adopted, the family may move freely to different states. Please keep in mind that the ICPC process may take months to complete, with factors including the child's legal status and the agency themselves.

Timeline

On average, the home study may take 3 months to complete. For some families it can take longer. The time it takes to have a child placed in your home will also vary, and can be as long as 2 years. Some children may need a longer transition period than others, requiring more pre-placement visits. Transition plans will be based on the child's needs and the agency's policies. If you are an out-of-state family or an overseas family, visits with the child in their home state may be necessary. The time between being identified as a placement to the time of finalization can feel like the longest stretch yet, so be

realistic and patient. Take the time to prepare your home and your family for your new child.

Military Leave

Under the Family Medical Leave act military families are not eligible for leave. However, some legislative changes allow service members to be eligible for up to 21 days of non-chargeable leave with the adoption of a child. If both parents are in the military however, only one parent may take leave. You may learn more about non-chargeable leave in the Department of Defense Leave and Liberty Policy Procedures handbook, on page 17. For a more concise version, refer back to Military Money's site.

Adoption Costs

Adoption costs can vary from $0 if you adopt from foster care with a public agency, to upwards of $40,000 if you adopt without using an agency. There are a few options to help with the cost of adoption that you should become familiar with:

- **Adoption Reimbursement program**: An active duty military member who incurs adoption expenses for a child under the age of 18 may be reimbursed up to $2,000 per child, with a maximum reimbursement to one service member of $5,000 in any calendar year. Only one member of a dual military couple may be reimbursed for the expenses related to the same child. If both partners are members of the military, they may not receive reimbursement totaling more than $5,000 in any calendar year. The adoption must be finalized before the benefits are paid. You must submit your request for reimbursement **no later** than one year after the adoption is finalized.
- **Adoption Subsidies:** Depending on the child's needs, there may be adoption subsidies available. The amount of the subsidies will vary by the child's needs.
- **Tax Credit:** Military families are also eligible for an adoption tax credit. The Adoption Learning Partners organization offers a free course on the adoption tax credit. You do have the option, however, of paying $25 to receive your certificate of completion at the end, but the course itself is free.

For more information on adoption costs, check out Child Welfare Information Gateway's cost of adoption booklet.

For more information on adoption subsidies, check out Child Welfare Information Gateway's booklet on adoption assistance.

Post-Adoption Resources

To receive medical coverage, a child must be enrolled in DEERS **prior** to finalization. More details about access and eligibility may be found on the TRICARE site, or by contacting patient affairs personnel at specific medical treatment facilities.

Contact your closest family service center for more information regarding adoption reimbursement and other benefits.

Other Resources

Finding and Using Post Adoption Resources

Parenting Your Adopted Preschooler

Parenting Your Adopted School-Age Child

Parenting Your Adopted Teenager

Selecting and Working with a Therapist Skilled in Adoption

Parenting a Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused

Adoption Support Groups

Source

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_milita.cfm