

Abrazo Homestudy Standards

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND PROVIDE TO YOUR HOMESTUDY PROVIDER TO ENSURE ACCURACY & TIMELINESS:

In order to adopt a child in Texas, you are required to complete a homestudy, which must be on file with an approval by Abrazo before you can match with a birthparent or take placement of a child in Abrazo's care. Since we are licensed in Texas and this is where placement is made, your homestudy must not only meet your state's requirements, but also all of those required for Texas. Some states, such as Texas, allow certified social workers with M.S.W. credentials (but not necessarily affiliated with an adoption agency) to complete these studies, in which case you may contract with any certified (M.S.W.) social worker with applicable credentials and experience to have your homestudy done. If you live outside of Texas, your state may require that you have your homestudy done through a licensed adoption agency within your state (as is the law in North Carolina, New Jersey, Georgia and Wisconsin.) The fees charged for homestudies are negotiated between you and the homestudy provider, and are independent of Abrazo's agency fee structure.

Home studies approved by Abrazo must meet all Texas standards and include five (5) in-person contacts held on at least three (3) separate days. There must also be an interview with each child aged three or older, and with any other persons (domestic staff, boarders, relatives) living with the family in that home or working on the premises. The interview process must include; at least one separate interview with each applicant and two or more additional interviews with the adoptive applicants, jointly and as a family group. Each interview must be documented and the format (individual, joint, home visit) clearly identified by date. The homestudy must include documentation of least one visit to the home when all members of the household are present, during which an inspection of the home is conducted. Additionally, each study must include verification of contacts made by the homestudy worker (by phone, visit or letter) with each adult (or noncustodial) child of each adoptive applicant (whether said offspring is in the home, financially dependent or not) as applicable. These interviews do not necessarily have to all be done on different days, however, the entire homestudy process may not be completed in less than 72 consecutive hours: visits must span a minimum of 3 different calendar dates. (For example, one individual. interview and one joint interview may be done on Monday, another individual. interview and joint interview on Tuesday, and the home visit with all household members on Wednesday.)

If your homestudy is complete, the study must meet Texas standards or it may have to be supplemented with an "addendum," which addresses any topics not included in the original study. If your homestudy does meet Texas standards but the visits occurred more than twelve months ago, you will need to have an additional face-to-face visit in the home with individual and joint interviews between the homestudy worker and all household members, to update the original study issue by issue (as listed below) so that so it fits our state requirements and is current.

Listed below are the twenty-five (25) topical categories that must be specifically cited in every home study or update in order to meet Texas' and Abrazo's requirements, as of January, 2012. Proper and timely completion is the responsibility of each adoptive applicant and their homestudy provider. (Abrazo accepts no liability for any ramifications of incomplete or outdated reports, which may result in placement delay, cancellation or revocation and/or added costs or related penalties.)

1. **Dates** of each interview/visit (at least five face-to-face contacts for couples, three for singles).
2. **Applicant's feelings about their parents and childhood**, including any history of abuse and/or neglect and their resolution of such experiences.
3. **Quality of their marital and family relationships** in relation to the family's ability to provide an adoptive home, including social worker's assessment of the stability of the marriage (including strengths and problems and how these issues will relate to an adopted child), a copy of the marriage license or declaration of marriage, confirmation that both spouses are petitioning to adopt, previous marriages, divorces or deaths of former spouses, and assess relationships between other children.
4. **Expectations for adopted children**, including:
 - a. Plans for ongoing education about adoption and positive exposure to birth information
 - b. Feelings about and sensitivity towards birthparents as well as receptivity and/or plans for ongoing relationships with birthfamily members; and assessment of applicants sensitivity to and acceptance of child's relationships with birthsiblings, and applicants reactions to child's feelings about birthparents and possibility of future contact between child and birthfamily.
 - c. Expectations of the child for the immediate and distant future, flexibility of these expectations in relation to the child's actual needs and abilities, and extent expectations are formalized into plans.
 - d. Values, feelings and practices in regards to child discipline and care, including social worker's evaluation of the adoptive parents' discipline styles and techniques, and their ability to recognize and respect differences in children and use discipline methods that suit the particular child rather than relying on corporal punishment.
 - e. Include assessment of applicants knowledge of child development and child care experience.
5. Applicants' expressed **motivation for adoption** and the social worker's evaluation of their intentions.

6. **Documentation of the prospective parents' ages** and affirmation that their age is appropriate to the anticipated needs and best interests of the child/ren they seek to adopt.
7. Verification that the adoptive applicants have **sufficient income and management ability** to care for an adopted child and meet his or her basic material needs, including **documentation of their financial status, debt load/assets, employment history, post-placement employment plans, and insurance coverage.**
8. **History of prospective parents' residence and citizenship status**, including:
 - a. Length of time spent at each **residence over the past 10 years (including: street, city, state, zip)**,
 - b. Assessment of availability **community resources** to meet the needs of children,
 - c. **Citizenship** of the parents and whether legal or illegal immigrants in relation to home stability,
 - d. Verification that the **physical environment of the home** is appropriate for good childcare,
 - e. Documentation that **basic home health/safety standards** have been discussed.
9. **Verification of prospective parents' fertility status**, in relation to unresolved feelings about infertility and parental ability to accept and parent a child not born to them.
10. Review of the **attitudes of the extended family concerning adoption**; the extent, if any, that they will be involved in the child's life; and their attitudes towards adopted children and acceptance of the adoption plan.
11. **Results of FBI fingerprinting, state criminal history and child abuse registry checks for all household members over 13.**
12. Confirmed completion of **three personal reference checks** personally conducted by social worker.
13. Social worker's **evaluation of the physical, mental and emotional health status** of all persons living in the home including substance abuse history in relation to the family's ability to assume parenting responsibilities and provide an adoptive home, social worker must observe persons for any indication of problems and follow-up with professional evaluation when indicated, documenting information obtained through observations or through a physician's statement, also include verification that there is a plan in place to ensure the child will be raised in a stable and consistent environment to adulthood (guardianship plan).
14. **Sensitivity to and feelings about children who may have been subjected to abuse, neglect, separation from, and loss of their biological family** if the applicants are considering the adoption of children other than newborns.
15. **Review of attitudes about religion**, including adoptive parents:
 - a. church involvement,
 - b. willingness to provide a child opportunity for religious and spiritual development, and
 - c. guarantee health protection and have no parental religious beliefs that prohibit certain medical treatment.
16. **Affirmation of family's intent to honor diversity and maintain the cultural/ethnic identity** of a child from a different background, and have a specified plan for exposure to child's ethnic community and integration of cultural tradition into family lifestyle.
17. Review of **support systems** available to adoptive family and **assessment of what support** they may receive from these resources.
18. **Language(s) spoken** by each adoptive applicant.
19. **Proof of vaccinations** and any needed treatments for pets in the home.
20. **Applicants ability to work with/accept specific kinds of behaviors and backgrounds and the limitations of the prospective family to provide a nurturing environment**, including citation of *specific* behaviors, backgrounds, special needs status or other characteristics the family *cannot or will not accept*.
21. Confirmation of applicants' **readiness to adopt, emotionally and financially** as well as **documentation of the number, race, age and sex (if applicable) of the child(ren) for whom the home is approved** (Note: should be as broad as possible; later expansion of criteria will require additional replacement addendums at family's expense).
22. **Review of any disabilities of the prospective parents and evaluation** in relation to their adjustment to the disability and limitations imposed on prospective parents' ability to care for a child.
23. **Telephone # for official entities (i.e. state licensing) where complaints regarding homestudy may be filed.**
24. **Background information from child-placing agencies or social workers that previously verified this home** for foster care or adoptive placement, including a copy of that home screening, any record of deficiencies and their resolutions, and current fire and health inspections.
25. **Verification that the homestudy worker's credentials include a master's degree** in social work or human services and 3+ years of child-placing experience with licensed foster care or adoption agency (must be included in the body of the homestudy).

Reference letters, physicals and lab tests, criminal checks, and financial documentation must only be updated every twelve months. In accordance with licensing standards **all** required information and completed reports must be received and approved before formal "matching" or placement activities can commence. If you have further questions or need referrals to qualified homestudy providers, please contact Abrazo. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation with these requirements.