



# HOMESTUDY PROCEDURES

## Inquiry Process

Adoption by Gentle Care shall respond to adoption inquiries within 48 business hours and shall provide the following information:

1. A link to the JFS form 01675 “Ohio Adoption Guide”.
2. A description of Title IV-E federal adoption assistance and state adoption subsidy programs, including eligibility requirements and the application process.
3. How to obtain an application for adoption.
4. A copy of the adoption policy, or summary of the policy, as required by rule 5102:2-48-05 of the Ohio Administrative Code.
5. Information on requirement for criminal records check.
6. The foster care/adoption homestudy assessment process.
7. Information regarding the state adoption assistance loan program.
8. MEPA Complaint Procedures: Policy on Complaints of Alleged Discriminatory Acts (5101:2-33-03).
9. ODJFS “Fact Sheet Adoption”.

## Out of State Inquires

- If the inquirer resides out of state and has an approved homestudy, Adoption by Gentle Care will provide the inquirer a link to the JFS form 1675 Ohio Adoption Guide.
- If the family has identified a child they are interested in, Adoption by Gentle Care will provide to the family the telephone number to the custodial agency.
- If the inquirer resides out of state and does not have an approved homestudy, Adoption by Gentle Care will provide the inquirer a link to the JFS form 1675 Ohio Adoption Guide. Adoption by Gentle Care will also inform the inquirer that they will need a completed and approved homestudy from their state of residence in order to adopt an Ohio waiting child.

## Application Process

Adoption by Gentle Care will accept all applicants who submit a completed ODJFS form 1691. See the agency Application Process narrative and form, plus the agency policy on “Joining Foster Care/Adoption Application and Home Study Assessment/Approval Policy” for additional information.

Adoption by Gentle Care offers assistance in completing the application and securing all required documents and information.

Adoption by Gentle Care can terminate the homestudy process if all required documentation is not submitted within one year of the receipt of the initial or revised ODJFS form 1691.



## Homestudy Process

Once the adoptive family has completed and returned the ODJFS form 1691 to the agency, the homestudy process will commence within 30 days of the date the agency receives the ODJFS form 1691 “Application for Child Placement.” The assessment will be completed within 180 days of the date it is started. If the agency fails to commence an assessment within 30 days or complete the assessment within 180 days, Adoption by Gentle Care will document the reasons why it was unable to meet one or both of these requirements in the adoptive family’s record. Commencement of a homestudy means, at a minimum, scheduling an appointment to interview the applicant or assuring that the applicant has been informed of the necessary materials required for the assessor to complete the homestudy.

The homestudy is a cooperative effort between Adoption by Gentle Care and the applicants to assess the applicant’s ability to parent a child successfully. (For details about the process see the Homestudy Procedure Outline). The homestudy consists of two meetings which are held in the applicant’s home. Once all documents have been received and requirements met, the homestudy process will be complete and the applicants will be notified by letter regarding final approval. The homestudy is valid only in Ohio for two years from approval. Updates to the homestudy must be completed every two years.

Adoption by Gentle Care’s policy is to require the adoptive family’s attendance and participation at the mandatory Training and Education seminar, as this is an important and integral part of the overall homestudy assessment and approval process. As such, Adoption by Gentle Care will, within 30 days of receipt of the adoptive family’s ODJFS form 1691 “Application for Child Placement,” notify the family of the next available date for the Training and Education seminar, and invite them to attend this session.

Adoption by Gentle Care works with adoptive couples in every county and community across Ohio. To complete the homestudy process, the agency utilizes a number of qualified Licensed Social Workers (all of whom are state certified Adoption Assessors), who themselves are located in various communities throughout Ohio. Agency Social Workers go directly to the home of each adoptive couple, wherever the couple may reside in the state, to personally meet with them to complete the homestudy. Each Social Worker uses the same procedures when conducting the homestudy, so that adoptive couples are assured of receiving the same thorough homestudy process, no matter where they may reside in Ohio.

Completion of the homestudy and written notification to the applicant of the approval or denial will be provided within 180 days of the date of the completed application was submitted which initiated a homestudy for any applicant seeking a special needs child.



Completion of the homestudy and written notification to the applicant of the approval or denial will be provided within 12 months of the date the completed application was submitted if not seeking a special needs child.

The following is some information which is required for a homestudy:

1. As part of the homestudy interviews, all members of the household should be interviewed face to face if over the age of 4 years. The interview with all household members can be a joint interview or separate interviews.
2. JFS form 1653 Medical Statements and the fire inspection report, JFS form 1200, cannot be over 6 months old from the date of approval.
3. References – ODJFS now requires only 3 references; however, Adoption by Gentle Care requires 4 non-relative references. Each reference must be personally contacted, as well as any agency which previously did a homestudy for the adoptive family. These contacts must be documented in the narrative section of the homestudy. A written release must be signed by the adoptive applicants before any agency or person is contacted.
4. Documentation that the residence satisfactorily meets all safety standards.
5. Adoption by Gentle Care requires proof of current marital status and proof of Ohio residence for five years for all applicants and all adult household members.
6. Adoption by Gentle Care requires applicants to submit ODJFS form 1681, financial statement, regarding the applicant's income, assets, and financial responsibilities.
7. Adoption by Gentle Care requires applicants to submit a credit report dated within 90 days of the homestudy approval.
8. Child abuse clearances are required on all adult household members.
9. State of Ohio BCI and FBI criminal background checks are required on all adult household members prior to an approved homestudy.
10. Applicants must submit license and vaccination records for each pet.
11. Updates and amendments – The homestudy must be updated and amended until the adoption is finalized. In other words, if the homestudy expires between placement and finalization, it will need to be updated. If an amendment or update would have been needed if there had not been a placement, it will now also be needed between placement and finalization.



# HOMESTUDY PROCEDURE OUTLINE

## Referral to Agency

- Date applied to agency
- Reaction to application process

## Number, Place, and Dates of Interviews

- Type of child desired
  1. Age
  2. Acceptable handicaps
  3. Nationality
  4. Religion
  5. Reasons for preferences

## Motive of Applicants

- A. Reasons for wanting to adopt
- B. Attitude concerning adoption and reaction to sharing this in interview

## Background

- A. Husband
  1. Identifying data
  2. Description
  3. Personality
  4. Health
  5. Parents and Siblings
  6. Childhood and adolescent experiences
  7. Adult relationships
  8. Education
  9. Activities, interests, and hobbies
  10. Employment
- B. Wife (Same as Husband)

## Courtship and Marriage

## Descriptions and Adjustment of Other Children in the Home

## Family's Social Network

- A. Friendships
- B. Social activities
- C. Religion

## Readiness for Adoption

- A. Resolution of infertility, of validity of decision not to have a biological child
- B. Parenting an adopted child

## Finances

## Description of Home

### Evaluation

- A. Emotional maturity and stability/mental health
- B. Capacity to give and receive affection
- C. Ability to provide for a child
  1. Financial
  2. Health
  3. Emotional
  4. Educational
  5. Parenting skills
  6. Social support for child
  7. Physical environment
- D. Stability of marriage

### Paperwork Requirements

- A. ODJFS application (JFS form 1691)
- B. Income tax return
- C. Financial statement (JFS form 1681)
- D. Credit Report
- E. Letters from employers
- F. References
- G. Criminal record check (BCI/FBI)
- H. Local criminal record check
- I. Abstract of traffic record from BMV
- J. Adoption by Gentle Care medical release
- K. Medical statement (JFS form 1653)
- L. Health insurance information
- M. Letter from insurance company
- N. Marriage certificate/divorce decree
- O. Letter from child care class
- P. Infant CPR certification
- Q. Profile
- R. Program acceptance acknowledgement
- S. Booklist/questionnaire
- T. Certification of residency
- U. Emergency contact numbers
- V. Fire inspection
- W. Pet Vaccinations/Records
- X. JFS 1673 (pages 1-4)
- Y. JFS 1673-A (pages 1-5)
- Z. Proof of Auto Insurance

## Recommendations



An adoptive couple may already have an approved homestudy from another agency, whether through an Ohio agency or out of state agency. If so, this homestudy will be reviewed by Adoption by Gentle Care to ensure that all Ohio adoption regulations and requirements are met. Once reviewed and approved by Adoption by Gentle Care, the homestudy will be treated in exactly the same manner as if the agency itself had completed it and will be used as an integral part of matching the adoptive couple with the prospective birth parent(s). Specifically, Adoption by Gentle Care will ensure that a homestudy from another agency, whether in state or out-of-state, is in full compliance with all Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) regulations.

## **Notification of Homestudy Update**

Not less than 90 days or more than 120 days prior to the expiration of a homestudy or a 2-year update, the adoptive family should be notified on the JFS form 1331 “Notice of Expiration and Reapplication for a Foster Home Certification or Adoption Home Study Update/Amendment”. If the adoptive parents fail to apply for renewal within 30 days of the date of the notification letter, the homestudy will lapse upon the expiration date, the record shall be closed and the applicant’s must reapply through the initial homestudy process.

## **Homestudy Update Procedures**

**Adoption by Gentle Care shall amend the adoptive homestudy if:**

- Any of the following have occurred since the last homestudy approval date: change in marital status of the adoptive applicant, change in health status of the adoptive applicant, finalization of the adoption of a child, birth of a child, death of a household member, criminal conviction of an adoptive applicant, change in number of adult household members, or the adoptive applicant has moved.
- The adoptive applicant or adoptive home has also been certified as a family foster home. The agency shall follow recertification procedures outlined in the rule 5101:2-5-24 of the Administrative Code.

**When updating the adoptive homestudy report the assessor shall:**

- Conduct a face-to-face interview with the adoptive applicant, which shall take place in the home of the applicant.
- Assess any family changes since approval of the adoptive homestudy, which may affect the ability of the applicant to successfully parent an adoptive child.
- Collect supporting documentation, which shall include, but not be limited to:
  - Current child abuse check
  - Current credit report
  - One reference
  - Pet vaccination and license records



- Complete ODJFS form 1385 which addresses all information obtained during interviews and review of documentation provided by the applicant. The completed form shall be attached to the original homestudy.
- The agency will attach the following documents to the 1385 update form:
  - The most recent medical statements (1653). If the agency decides it is necessary a new medical statement (1653) can be required. It is not mandatory.
  - One reference from a professional or a personal reference.
  - Any additional reports the agency decides are necessary, such as a physical, psychiatric or psychological exam.
  - If the agency decides it is necessary, a new fire inspection report. It is not mandatory.
  - If the agency decides it is necessary a new safety audit form, 1348 should be done. Well water tests can also be updated.
  - If there have been substantial changes in the adoptive parents financial circumstances, a new 1681 financial statement shall be completed.
  - If the agency decides it necessary a credit report and pet vaccination records.
- The update shall include a summary report regarding the result of the Ohio child abuse registry search.
- The only requirements the state insists on are one reference, and a new child abuse check. Adoption by Gentle Care requires a BCI and FBI check as well. State law requires a BCI and FBI check every 4 years. The agency shall require a BCI and FBI be obtained within 60 days of the effective date if the records are more than 4 years old. A new child abuse registry check must be obtained on the adoptive parents and every adult member of the household for all updates.

Note: All applicants who are denied the opportunity to continue to work with Adoption by Gentle Care have the right to request in writing a review of the decision by Adoption by Gentle Care not to work with them.

## **Agency Notification**

You must notify Adoption by Gentle Care if any of the following changes occur in your household, and within the timelines indicated. If these ODJFS rules are not followed accurately, your homestudy could lapse or become invalid.

An approved adoptive parent must notify the recommending agency within ONE HOUR if any of the following circumstances occur involving the adoptive child whose adoption is not finalized.

- A serious illness or injury involving medical treatment for the child.
- Death of the adoptive child.
- Unauthorized absence of the adoptive child from the home.



- Removal of the adoptive child from the home by any person or agency, other than the placing agency, or attempts at such removal.

An adoptive parent must notify the recommending agency within 24 HOURS or the next working day if any of the following occur prior to the finalization of the child. This also includes the time between the approval date and the actual placement of the child in the home.

- A change in the marital status of the adoptive parent.
- Any serious illness or death of an adopted parent(s) or household member.
- The finalization of an adoptive child placed by a different agency.
- A change in the number of household members through birth or kinship who is under 18.
- A change in the number of adults residing with the approved adoptive parent (not including an existing household member reaching the age of 18).
- A criminal charge or conviction of any approved adoptive parent or other adult household member(s).
- A significant change in financial status or income, which would include the loss of a job or having a new job paying significantly less or more than the job they had at the time of the homestudy.
- Change of address or relocation.

New child household members residing with the adoptive parent shall have a JFS form 1653 medical statement completed within 60 days of becoming a household member.

If an infant is born to an adoptive parent, the agency should document that the adoptive parent and prenatal care and is receiving periodic medical exams from a physician, the mother must have a JFS form 1653 medical statement completed within 90 days of the date the infant became a household member.

Household members turning 18 shall have BCI and FBI checks initiated within 10 working days of the date they turn 18.

New adult members of the household residing with the approved adoptive parent shall have a JFS form 1653 medical form completed within 60 days of becoming a household member

Upon notification of the approved adoptive parent moving to a new residence, a safety audit shall be completed within 10 working days of the notification.

A fire safety inspection must be conducted within 90 days of the change of address.

Please keep this list so you can refer to it and the timelines, if any above circumstances should change in your home. Again, failure to notify the agency, following the time frames above, could cause your homestudy to lapse or become invalid, thus delaying placement or finalization.





Please contact the Social Worker who completes your homestudy if any of these changes occur so she can add an addendum to your homestudy as soon as possible. If you have any questions regarding the above rules, you can also contact the Social Worker who completes your homestudy.

## **Sharing and Transferring Adoptive Homestudies**

The following definitions apply for the purpose of this rule:

“Sharing an adoptive homestudy” – This means forwarding an approved homestudy to an agency for consideration of potential adoptive matches.

“Transferring an adoptive homestudy” – This means releasing the approved homestudy and all related materials to another agency. Upon acceptance of the receiving agency and the execution of the JFS form 1334 “Recommendation for Transfer or a Foster or Adoptive Home,” the sending agency is relieved of all the responsibilities related to the approved adoptive family.

If the adoptive family has signed an authorization for release of information, the agency shall make the homestudy available for sharing or transferring.

The agency shall release the homestudy and related materials, including the JFS form 1530 “Multiple Children/Large Family Assessment” within 15 days after the request was made. A reasonable charge is allowed.

The receiving agency shall not approve the transfer request until the following information is received and approved by the agency.

- Three new personal references, who are not related to the prospective adoptive parent and do not live with the prospective adoptive parent.
- A new criminal record is obtained reviewed and approved by the assessor for all persons eligible for a criminal check residing in the home.
- A new safety audit is conducted to verify the home meets all current safety standards.
- Documentation of the assessor’s decision to recommend approval of the transfer request.  
The prospective adoptive parent and the sending agency are sent a written notice within 5 working day of the decision.

If an incomplete homestudy is received from an agency, the receiving agency shall notify the sending agency in writing within 10 days from the date of the receipt of the incomplete home study. The written notification shall indicate the information needed for the homestudy to be considered to be complete. The sending agency should respond within 15 days from the receipt of the written notification from the receiving agency.

Upon acceptance of the transfer of an adoptive homestudy, the JFS form 1334 shall be completed and signed by both the sending and receiving agencies.





## **Joint Foster Care/Adoption Application and Homestudy Assessment Process**

All applicants have a right to a Joint Foster Care/Adoption Homestudy; however, Adoption by Gentle Care does not offer a joint study. Only adoption services, not foster services, are provided. Adoption by Gentle Care shall refer any family who wants a joint study to an agency who provides joint studies.

### **Adoption Application Process:**

Applicants are accepted from all families who have submitted their JFS form 1691 “Application for Child Placement.” Adoption by Gentle Care encourages and welcomes a diverse mix of applicants so that the birth parents we work with will have families representative of the broader community from which to choose. Adoption by Gentle Care maintains a list of families who are of various ages, religions, geographical locations and professions. Birth Parents working with Adoption by Gentle Care select the adoptive family themselves. All applicants, regardless of the agency program they have applied for, go through the same training and education process.

All families go through the exact same process when asked to indicate what race they are open to on their application. At the end of the homestudy, the Social Worker reviews JFS form 1691, “Application for Child Placement,” (page 4, paragraph entitled “Type of Child Will Consider”) with the family, plus JFS form 1673A, “Child Characteristics Checklist for Foster Care and/or Adoption.” All families are treated the same in this process.

### **Homestudy Assessment/Approval Process:**

Adoption by Gentle Care offers Training and Education meetings approximately 3-6 times a year. This is an orientation meeting for adoptive couples to learn about the agency, the adoption process, meet the staff, and have their questions answered. They also hear a birth parent speak who has placed a child through Adoption by Gentle Care. Families are invited to this meeting after being informed their application has been accepted and are on the Adoption by Gentle Care waiting list for training. They are generally invited to attend in the chronological order applications are received. At the Training and Education seminar, they are asked to complete required paperwork and return it to their assigned social worker. At that time, the homestudy meetings are scheduled. If the agency is in need of families, the homestudy meetings are scheduled before the adoptive couple attends the Training and Education seminar. The adoptive couple is approved as soon as the homestudy meetings are complete and they have completed and submitted all required paperwork. The adoptive couples complete their paperwork at their own pace.