ADOPT-050-INFO How to Adopt a Child in California

General Information on Adoptions

Before you begin

Seek legal advice about your family's options before beginning any adoption. Every family is different and adoption may not be necessary for some families. Visit the Self-Help Guide to the California Courts adoption page to get copies of adoption forms, look for organizations that provide legal help with adoptions, and learn how to complete the adoption process on your own if you do not have a lawyer: selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/adoptions.You can also get copies of adoption forms at your local court clerk's office.

What type of adoption will you be filing? In California there are several kinds of adoptions. This information sheet provides steps for the following types:

- Stepparent and domestic partnership
- Stepparent and domestic partnership confirmation of parentage
- Independent
- Agency (within the United States) and includes:
  - Agency placement or agency joinder
- Intercountry

For more information and definitions on these types of adoptions, see selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/adoptions.

What department or agency will be handling your home study or investigation?

In most adoptions, a home study or an investigation will be necessary.

- For independent adoptions
  - A regional office of the Department of Social Services (DSS).
  - An adoption agency.
  - For an independent adoption of a newborn, you must also choose an adoption service provider (ASP).

    The ASP is an individual or an adoption agency licensed and certified by the State of California. Their role is to explain to the birth parent their rights in the adoption process (before "placing" the child with you) and to witness the signing of documents and consent.

    There is a listing of all providers who have been licensed as an ASP on the California Department of Social Services website. You can see the list by agency or the list by individual. The ASP will charge a fee. You must pay the fee as the adoptive parent.
  - For more information on a home study or ASP, see selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/independent-adoption/placed.
- For stepparent adoptions, the court investigator or a privately hired, licensed clinical social worker or other appropriate licensed individual will be handling your home study or investigation. See selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/stepparent-adoption.

If you need more information about what office or agency can conduct your home study, you can visit the California Department of Social Services website. Find out what paperwork they will need from you and when it must be sent to them once you file your *Adoption Request.*

Documents needed in addition to the *Adoption Request*

For most adoptions, the adopting parent, their legal representative, or the agency will be required to obtain additional signed forms or certified documents. These documents can include:

- Consent or relinquishment for adoption
- Death certificate (if applies)
- Other court orders
- Waiver of notice or denial of parentage

In certain situations additional court proceedings may be necessary. These may include:

- Petition freeing the child from parental custody and control and an order. (Note: This is a separate court action.)
- Petition to terminate parental rights of an alleged parent and an order. (Note: In some courts, this can be filed within the adoption case but in other courts it is a separate court action.)

Each of the above are specific procedures which must be followed based on the determination of the status of the parent. If this is an agency adoption, the agency will obtain the above information for the court.

This paperwork is needed to complete your adoption home-study or investigation.

The status of a parent is based on the relationship of that parent to the child and other factors. For definitions and more information about status of parent and what additional involvement or paperwork is needed, go to selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/adoptions.

Stepparent/Domestic Partner Adoptions

If you wish to adopt the child of your spouse or domestic partner, you may be eligible for a stepparent adoption. There are two types of stepparent adoptions. Answer these questions to figure out which process is right for you:

→ Were you in a union with the child's legal parent **at the time the child was born** and are you **still in a union** with the legal parent? (A "union" means a marriage, a California registered domestic partnership, or a registered domestic partnership or civil union from another state that is legally equivalent to a marriage.)

→ Did your **spouse or domestic partner give birth to the child** or was the child born through a **gestational surrogacy process** brought about by one or both of you?

If you answered no to **either** question, complete the items below for a **stepparent/domestic partner adoption**.

If you answered yes to **both** questions, complete the items below for a **stepparent adoption to confirm parentage**.

(1) Fill out court forms

• ADOPT-203	*Stepparent Adoption Request*	This tells the judge about you and the child you are adopting.
• ADOPT-210	*Adoption Agreement*	This tells the judge that you and the child, if 12 or older, agree to the adoption. Fill it out, but do not sign it until the judge asks you to sign it.
• ADOPT-215	*Adoption Order*	The judge signs this form if your adoption is approved.
• ICWA-010(A)	*Indian Child Inquiry Attachment*	This lets the judge know that you have asked whether the child may be an Indian child.
• ICWA-020	*Parental Notification of Indian Status*	One form is required for each birth parent. This shows that the child's parents have been asked about potential Indian status.

Additional Forms for Stepparent Adoption to Confirm Parentage

• ADOPT-205 (or an equivalent declaration)	*Declaration Confirming Parentage in Stepparent Adoption*	This tells the court how you conceived your child and whether there are any other parents. Only use this if you are seeking a stepparent adoption to confirm parentage. See above for more information on this type of adoption. Both the birth parent and the adopting parent must complete a separate declaration.
		-OR-
• ADOPT-206 (or an equivalent declaration)	*Declaration Confirming Parentage in Stepparent Adoption: Gestational Surrogacy*	This tells the court how you conceived your child and whether there are any other parents. Only use this if you are seeking a stepparent adoption to confirm parentage because the child was conceived through a gestational surrogate and was born outside of California, and the state where the child was born only allowed one intended parent to be named as a legal parent on the child's birth certificate.

2 Take your forms to court

Take the completed forms to the court clerk in the county where you live. The court will charge a $20 filing fee (set by Health and Safety Code section 103730). Or take the forms to your lawyer or adoption agency, if you are using one. If there is no hearing, form ADOPT-210 must be signed in front of the court clerk or a notary.

Note: In a stepparent adoption to confirm parentage, no investigation or hearing is required unless ordered by the court for good cause. Sign form ADOPT-210 in front of a notary or the court clerk when you file the forms and a judge will review your request. If the paperwork is complete and you meet the requirements, the judge will sign the *Adoption Order* (form ADOPT-215) and the adoption is complete. You and your attorney will receive copies. If the judge orders an investigation and hearing, go to the next steps.

3 An investigation is completed

In most stepparent adoptions an investigation or a report must be completed before the final hearing. This will be completed by either someone you identified in the request or who was ordered by the court. To begin the investigation you will be required to send the *Adoption Request* and supporting documentation to the investigator. A home visit may also be required.

4 Go to court on the date of your hearing

Bring:

- The child you are adopting;
- Form ADOPT-210;
- Form ADOPT-215;
- A camera, if you want a photo of you and your child with the judge *(optional);* and
- Friends/relatives *(optional).*
- California Department of Social Services form VS-44 may be needed, see selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/stepparent-adoption/prepare-lodge-forms.

Independent or Agency Adoptions in the United States

If this is an independent or agency adoption in the United States, complete items 1 through 4 below.
Note: The rights of the existing parents usually terminate with adoptions. In an independent adoption, if the existing and adopting parents agree, the rights of the existing parents do not have to be terminated. See Family Code section 8617(b).

1 Fill out court forms

• ADOPT-200	*Adoption Request*	This tells the judge about you and the child you are adopting.
• ADOPT-210	*Adoption Agreement*	This tells the judge that you and the child, if 12 or older, agree to the adoption. Fill it out, but do not sign it until the judge asks you to sign it.
• ADOPT-215	*Adoption Order*	The judge signs this form if your adoption is approved.
• ADOPT-230	*Adoption Expenses*	This lets the judge know what payments were made that relate to the child you are adopting.
• ICWA-010(A)*	*Indian Child Inquiry Attachment*	This lets the judge know that the required questions have been asked to determine whether the child may be an Indian child.
• ICWA-020*	*Parental Notification of Indian Status*	One form is required for each birth parent. This shows that the child's parents have been asked about potential Indian status.

*The agency or adoption service provider is responsible for getting these forms completed and making them part of the adoption file for adoptions under the Welfare and Institutions Code; other evidence, including court orders regarding ICWA may be necessary.

2 Take your forms to court

Take the completed forms to the court clerk in the county where you live. The court will charge a $20.00 filing fee (set by Health and Safety Code section 103730). Or take the forms to your lawyer or adoption agency, if you are using one.

3 The social worker writes a report

In most adoptions, a social worker writes a report. This report gives important information to the judge about the adopting parents and the child. The social worker will ask you questions. You may have to fill out forms. You may be required to pay a fee for this report. The social worker will file the report with the court and send you and your attorney a copy. When you get the report, ask the clerk for a date for your adoption hearing.

4 Go to court on the date of your hearing

Bring:

- The child you are adopting;
- Form ADOPT-210;
- Form ADOPT-215;
- Form ADOPT-230;
- A camera, if you want a photo of you and your child with the judge *(optional);* and
- Friends/relatives *(optional).*

Intercountry Adoptions

If this is an intercountry (international) adoption, complete items 1 through 6 below.
Note: You must follow this process to adopt your child under California law, even if the adoption was previously finalized in a foreign country. If the child's adoption was finalized in a foreign country, you must file the *Adoption Request* within the earlier of 60 days of the child's entry to the United States, or the child's 16th birthday.

1 Fill out court forms

• ADOPT-200	*Adoption Request*	This tells the judge about you and the child you are adopting.
• ADOPT-210	*Adoption Agreement*	This tells the judge that you and the child, if 12 or older, agree to the adoption. Fill it out, but do not sign it until the judge asks you to sign it.
• ADOPT-215	*Adoption Order*	The judge signs this form if your adoption is approved.
• ADOPT-230	*Adoption Expenses*	This lets the judge know what payments were made that relate to the child you are adopting.
• ICWA-010(A)	*Indian Child Inquiry Attachment*	This lets the judge know that you have asked whether the child may be an Indian child.
• ICWA-020	*Parental Notification of Indian Status*	One form is required for each birth parent. This shows that the child's parents have been asked about potential Indian status.

2 Postadoption or postplacement visits and reports

If the child's adoption was finalized in a foreign country, there will be at least one postadoption visit provided by the international adoption agency. The report of this visit must be submitted to the court as described below. If the child was born in a foreign country and placed with a California family for adoption in this state, the adoption agency must provide postplacement supervision with up to four visits. These reports are also provided to the court.

3 Attach documentation

If the child's adoption was finalized in a foreign country, you must attach the following documents to your *Adoption Request*:

- A certified or otherwise official copy of the foreign decree, order, or certification of adoption that reflects finalization of the adoption in the foreign country;
- A certified or otherwise official copy of the child's foreign birth certificate;
- A certified translation of all required documents that are not written in English;
- Proof that the child was granted lawful entry into the United States as an immediate relative of the adoptive parent or parents;
- A report from at least one postplacement home visit by an intercountry adoption agency or a contractor of that agency licensed to provide intercountry adoption services in the state of California; and
- A copy of the home study report previously completed for the international finalized adoption by an adoption agency authorized to provide intercountry adoption services, in accordance with Family Code section 8900.

4 Take your forms to court

Take the completed forms and any required documents to the court clerk in the county where you live. The court will charge a $20.00 filing fee (set by Health and Safety Code section 103730). Or take the forms to your lawyer or adoption agency, if you are using one.

5 Provide a copy of the forms and documents

If the child's adoption was finalized in a foreign country, provide a copy of the forms and documentation you filed with the court to any adoption agency that provided services to you for your international adoption.

6 Go to court on the date of your hearing

Bring:

- The child you are adopting;
- Form ADOPT-210;
- Form ADOPT-215;
- Form ADOPT-230;
- A camera, if you want a photo of you and your child with the judge *(optional);* and
- Friends/relatives *(optional).*

Inquiry and Notice Under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

☐ The child and other people in the child's life (parents and extended family members, see definition below) must be asked specific questions in order to determine whether the child may be an Indian child. The *Indian Child Inquiry Attachment* (form ICWA-010(A)) should be attached to the *Adoption Request*. In agency adoptions, it is the responsibility of the agency to ensure that this inquiry is conducted and that the form is made part of the adoption file. In independent adoptions, the adoption service provider, CDSS Regional Office, or delegated county adoption agency is responsible. For more information about the duty of inquiry, see form ICWA-005-INFO.

☐ Extended family member is defined by law or custom of the Indian child's tribe or, if no law or custom, must be a person who is 18 years or older and who is the Indian child's grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister, brother-in-law or sister-in-law, niece or nephew, first or second cousin, or stepparent. (25 U.S.C. § 1903(2)(2).)

☐ A completed version of *Parental Notification of Indian Status* (form ICWA-020) for each birth parent should be attached to the *Adoption Request*, OR it should be shown that a good faith attempt was made to provide the form to each birth parent, the Indian custodian, or guardian of the child and inform them that they are required to complete and submit the form to the court. In agency adoptions, it is the responsibility of the agency to ensure that this form is provided to the birth parents and made part of the adoption file. In independent adoptions, the adoption service provider, CDSS Regional Office, or delegated county adoption agency is responsible.

☐ If there is **reason to believe** that the child is or may be an Indian child, additional inquiry is required. For more information about the duty of inquiry, see form ICWA-005-INFO.

☐ If, at any time during the proceeding, there is **reason to know** that the child is an Indian child, notice must be provided of the adoption request to the child's tribe or tribes, parents, Indian custodian, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, using *Notice of Child Custody Proceeding for Indian Child* (form ICWA-030). This form must be served by registered or certified mail, with return receipt requested.

- Reason to know a child is an Indian child means that (1) a person having an interest in the child, including the child, informs the court the child is an Indian child; or (2) the child, the child's parents, or Indian custodian lives on a reservation or in an Alaska Native village; or (3) any person, tribe, or organization informs the court that it has discovered information indicating that the child is an Indian child. The court must proceed per rule 5.481(b)(3) of the California Rules of Court.

☐ If it is determined that the child **is an Indian child** or this is a tribal customary adoption, see Adoption of an Indian Child, below.

Adoption of an Indian Child

If you are adopting an Indian child, fill out and bring to court the following additional forms:

☐ *Adoption of Indian Child* (form ADOPT-220); and

☐ *Parent of Indian Child Agrees to End Parental Rights* (form ADOPT-225).

If this is a tribal customary adoption, a copy of the tribal customary adoption order must be attached to the petition (form ADOPT-200) and the order (form ADOPT-215).

Note: An Indian child who has reached the age of 18 and who was placed for adoption, may apply to the court which entered the final order or decree. That court shall inform that child of their tribal affiliation, if any, of the child's biological parents and provide such other information as may be necessary to protect any rights flowing from the child's tribal relationship. [25 U.S.C. § 1917]

"Open" Adoption and Use of *Contact After Adoption Agreement* (Family Code Section 8616.5)

If you want your child to have contact with their birth relatives after the adoption, you can use *Contact After Adoption Agreement* (form ADOPT-310). This form describes the kind of contact the birth relatives will have with your child after the adoption is finalized. If you use this form, fill it out and file this form with the court before the finalization hearing or order of the court. A file-marked copy of this agreement must be provided within 30 days of filing to all adult parties to this agreement and any licensed agency that placed the child or consented to the adoption, and the child, if age 12 or older.

Important: This is a voluntary agreement and is not required for the finalization of the adoption. If you chose to use this form, it will become part of the adoption file and will be enforceable by the court.

The adoptive parent or parents, the child, and the child's birth relatives can agree to continuing contact without using this form, but unless that agreement is in writing and attached to the *Contact After Adoption Agreement* (form ADOPT-310) it may not be enforced by the court if it is not followed.

Birth relatives are birth parents, siblings, and other birth relatives. For Indian children, this can also include the child's Indian tribe.

For your protection and privacy, please press the Clear button after you have printed the form.

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