

Orphan Home Study Tip Sheet for Adoption Service Providers and Prospective Adoptive Parents (Non-Hague)

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) receives many questions about documentation and specific material that needs to be included in the home study for orphan cases. While USCIS is not able to specifically advise as to the exact language that should be included in an orphan home study, this tip sheet provides adoption service providers and prospective adoptive parent(s) (PAP) guidance for the areas that have triggered the most questions.

All names and information provided in this tip sheet are fictitious and should not be used as a basis for specific cases. Remember that the tip sheet is simply a guide to help you meet USCIS requirements while completing the home study.

Tips to Avoid a Processing Delay

1. The home study must be completed by an individual or agency licensed or otherwise authorized to conduct adoption home studies. The home study should be completed and reviewed by an individual or agency licensed or authorized in the State of the orphan's proposed residence. If the child is adopted abroad, however, the home study preparer may be licensed anywhere in the United States. If the adoptive parents also reside abroad, the home study may be prepared by an individual or agency authorized to complete home studies in that country, but an agency licensed in the United States must review the home study before it is submitted to USCIS. See 8 CFR 204.3(b) (definition of "home study preparer") and 204.3(e)(8) for specific information about who may complete and review a home study.
2. The home study must be signed no more than 6 months before submission to USCIS, *unless it has been updated by a home study preparer*, and will include a complete evaluation of the PAP's ability to adopt a child. The home study preparer should include the following information:
 - a. Identity information on the PAP and members of their household;
 - b. Identity of any other adult members of the household and their date of birth; and
 - c. Any other identity requirements that must be included in the home study according to your State requirements. Check with your State adoption authorities.
3. Include a summary of contacts that the preparer has had with the prospective adoptive family and state the number of interviews and visits, the participants, and date and location of those contacts. In order to meet the USCIS requirement, we require at least one in-home visit.

An example format follows:

Contacts with the Family	Adoption Agency Pre-Adoption Workshop/Couple Interview - February 15, 2008, Adoption Agency Headquarters
	Initial Home Visit/Couple Interview- February 20, 2008
	Individual Interview with Susan Smith- February 20, 2008 - local restaurant
	Individual Interview with Bradley Smith - February 20, 2008 - local restaurant
	Observed Emma Smith in Home - February 20, 2008

"The home study preparer first interviewed Bradley and Susan Smith at the home study preparer's office in City X, State Y, on December 1, 2008. The home study preparer first interviewed them together for about half an hour, and then met with each of them separately for about 15 minutes.

The home study preparer then interviewed them again at their home in City Z, State Y, on December 8, 2008. No other individuals were present for this home visit. There are no other members of their household."
4. If the preparer intends to recommend approval of the case, the home study preparer must identify the specific characteristics of the child for which this family is approved to adopt. It is best to provide an assessment of the suitability of the PAP to the *most serious degree* of medical, psychological or mental needs, and age requirements for which they

are prepared to parent. If the home study restricts the recommendation only to specific conditions, these should be listed.

Sample Wording:

“This worker recommends approval of Mr. and Mrs. Smith to adopt one female child, age 0-4 years at time of referral, from Country X. I also recommend Mr. and Mrs. Smith for the adoption of one child with special needs (describe).”

OR: “The Smiths are recommended to adopt a child with minor medical needs limited to the following: low birth weight, heart defect or murmur, webbed fingers or toes, club foot, cleft lip and/or palate, or issues that can be assisted with orthopedic intervention.”

OR: “The Smiths are recommended to adopt a child who has Down's syndrome or delayed motor and mental development.”

5. The home study should also include a medical assessment of both the prospective adoptive mother and father and any adult member of the household. This assessment should address the physical, mental, and emotional health of the PAP and any adult member of the household. The summary in the home study should cover the following information:

Sample Wording # 1:

“Bradley Smith was examined by his physician, Dr. John Rhoades, on February 22, 2008. Bradley was found to be in good physical and mental condition and is free of communicable diseases. Dr. Rhoades has indicated no history of physical, mental, emotional health, or behavioral issues. This report was reviewed by this worker, and the above findings are as stated. It is this worker's assessment that Bradley is emotionally, physically, and mentally stable and will provide a loving home for any child placed in this family. No referrals to medical or mental health professionals were made.”

“Susan Smith was examined by her physician, Dr. Amy Rhoades, on February 22, 2008. Susan was found to be in good physical and mental condition and is free of communicable diseases. Dr. Rhoades

has indicated no history of physical, mental, emotional health, or behavioral issues. This report was reviewed by this worker, and the above findings are as stated. It is this worker's assessment that Susan is emotionally, physically, and mentally stable and will provide a loving home for any child placed with this family. No referrals to medical or mental health professionals were made.”

Sample Wording # 2:

“Mr. and Mrs. Smith are both in good health. Neither have any medical issues that would affect their ability to adopt and parent a child.” (State basis for such conclusion.)

6. The home study should also address information relative to the PAP's finances. This assessment should include the following:

- a. Description of the applicant's income, financial resources, debts, and expenses; and
- b. Statement identifying what evidence was considered to verify the source and amount of income and financial resources.

Sample Wording:

“According to the Form 1040 Income Tax submitted by Bradley and Susan Smith for 2007, their adjusted gross income was \$100,000. They have monthly expenses of \$2,400, including a mortgage and debts. This leaves abundant monthly income to care for an additional child. The Smiths meet or exceed State X financial guidelines for adoption. The Smith home is valued at \$220,000 with a mortgage balance of \$150,000. The family has savings of \$10,000 and IRA/401K worth \$400,000. Bradley has a life insurance policy worth \$125,000, and Susan has a policy worth \$100,000.”

7. The home study must address a summary of counseling given to the PAP in preparation for international adoption and any plans for post-placement counseling. This would also include a discussion of the processing, expenses, difficulties, and delays associated with international adoptions.

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8. The home study must include a detailed description of the living accommodations where the PAP currently resides, or where the child will reside with the PAP if they intend to move.

Sample Wording:

“Bradley, Susan, Ngoye, and Emma have recently moved into a newly developed residential area that was built within a top-rated school district. The development has a diverse population of ethnicity, including a family from Country X.

The home consists of 3,500 square feet of living space. The first level of the home contains an open foyer, living room, formal dining room, office, ½ bath, eat-in kitchen, and a family room with a fireplace. The second level of the home contains the laundry room, master bedroom and bath, three bedrooms, and one shared bathroom. One of the bedrooms belongs to Ngoye and Emma, and one has been decorated as the nursery for their new sister from Country X. The third bedroom is the guest bedroom. The basement contains a bathroom, movie/game room, an additional bedroom, and a craft/playroom. The home also has an attached three-car garage and a large fenced-in backyard.

Each level of the home is fully equipped with smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers. This home also has access to public utilities, shopping, local fire and police departments, medical services, major roadways, and recreational and cultural activities.

This home exceeds the State requirements for safe and suitable accommodations for a child.”

9. If the PAP wishes to adopt a child with a disability or special needs, the home study must contain a discussion of the preparation, willingness, and ability of the applicant to provide proper care for a child with a disability or special needs.

Sample Wording - Known special needs condition of a child:

“Bradley and Susan are seeking to adopt one female child from Country X, age 0-4 years with mild to moderate special needs. Child X, who was born on June 1, 2007, has the special need of congenital heart

defect, or atrial septal defect. The Smith's have reviewed the child's medical records and consulted with medical professionals, including those who work in the field of international adoption medicine. Having done the research on this medical condition, they feel well prepared to parent a child with this special need and would like pursue the adoption of this child.”

Sample Wording - Unknown special needs of an unknown child:

“Bradley and Susan are seeking to adopt one female child from Country X, age 0-4 years with mild to moderate special needs. Both Bradley and Susan have experience and training working with children with various special needs. Bradley and Susan have the preparation, willingness, and ability to parent a child with special needs.”

10. The home study should include a summary of the results of child abuse registry checks in the State where the family currently resides. Child abuse registry checks must be completed for the PAP and any additional adult member of the household 18 years of age or older.

Sample Wording:

“In order to comply with the requirements, the appropriate child abuse registries were checked. A computer search of State X's Child Abuse and Neglect Registry on March 26, 2008, for Bradley Smith revealed no record. A computer search of the Department of Family and Protective Services Central Registry Abuse/Neglect Database for State X on March 27, 2008, revealed no record or reports on Susan Smith (Jones). No records were found under either her maiden or married name.”

11. The preparer must ask each PAP and any additional adult household member if he or she has a history of abuse and violence. The response to each question below must be included in the home study. **This information and any arrest and or conviction must be disclosed to the preparer and to USCIS.**

- a. Do you have a history of alcohol, drug, or substance abuse, even if it did not result in an arrest or conviction?

- b. Do you have a history of sexual and/or child abuse, even if it did not result in an arrest or conviction?
- c. Do you have a history of domestic violence, even if it did not result in an arrest or conviction?

Sample Wording:

“A computer search of the State X State Criminal Archives revealed no record for Bradley Allen Smith or Susan Erin Smith (Jones). In response to direct questions from this worker, Bradley and Susan each stated they do not have histories of substance abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, or domestic violence, even if such history did not result in an arrest or conviction. Bradley and Susan individually replied “no” to the following questions:

- a. Do you have a history of alcohol, drug, or substance abuse, even if it did not result in an arrest or conviction?
- b. Do you have a history of sexual and/or child abuse, even if it did not result in an arrest or conviction?
- c. Do you have a history of domestic violence, even if it did not result in an arrest or conviction?

Bradley and Susan are aware that a single incident of sexual abuse, child abuse, or domestic violence is sufficient to constitute a “history” of abuse and/or violence.”

- 12.** The home study preparer must ask each PAP and any additional adult household member whether or not he or she has previously been rejected as a PAP or has been the subject of an unfavorable home study. Each individual's response to this question must be included in the home study report.

If the PAP or an adult household member has been rejected or been the subject of an unfavorable home study, the reasons must be explained. If the PAP or any additional adult member of the household did have a previous home study completed, and the results were unfavorable, a copy of the unfavorable home study should be submitted, if available, as supporting documentation to USCIS as with Form I-600A.

Sample Wording:

“In response to a direct question from this worker, Bradley indicates that he has never previously been rejected or had an unfavorable home study completed.

In response to a direct question from this worker, Susan indicates that she has never previously been rejected or had an unfavorable home study completed.

In response to direct question asked by this worker, both Bradley and Susan responded “no” to the following question:

Have you ever been rejected as a PAP or been the subject of an unfavorable home study?”

- 13.** If the home study preparer approves the PAP to adopt, he or she must specifically state that the PAP has been approved to adopt a child and include a discussion of the reasons for such approval. The discussion must address: 1) the number of children for which they are recommended to adopt at the same time, 2) whether there are any specific restrictions to the adoption based on age or gender or other characteristics of the child, and 3) if they are approved to parent a child with a disability or special needs that is distinctly described.

Sample Wording:

“Mr. and Mrs. Smith are approved to adopt one female child, age 0-4 years from Country X. The family is approved for a child with minor to moderate special needs, including, but not limited to, cleft lip and palate, thalassemia, partial hearing loss, webbed fingers or toes, congenital heart defect, ASD, or a child who is a Hepatitis B carrier. It is my pleasure to recommend that Country X place such a child with the Smith family of State X, USA.”

- 14.** The home study must include a summary of the home study preparer's authority to conduct home studies. This should include the license number, if any, or authorization of the home study preparer as an adoption service provider. The preparer's attestation must have an original signature.