



One step that is required of every adoptive parent before they adopt a child is the adoption home study. This is an official report that states whether prospective adoptive parents are fit to raise a child. The report is written by a social worker who meets the couple multiple times, including one visit to their house, and investigates their medical, family, criminal, emotional and home background. The purpose of the home study is to help the court determine whether the prospective adoptive parents are qualified to adopt a child. Only the court, your agency/lawyer and possibly yourself will ever view the final home study report.

The home study can be one of the more stressful parts when preparing to adopt, but it does not need to be. It can be stressful because the home study requires a lot of legwork to collect all the necessary documents and a lot of your time to be interviewed by the social worker. Doing all of this can bring up a lot of feelings that prospective adoptive parents may not have been expecting. From my personal experience of doing three adoption home studies and knowing many others who have also been through the process I can say that these feelings are normal for most all prospective adoptive parents.

## **Fear**

What if our social worker doesn't think we are good enough? What if I answer a question wrong? What if my house isn't clean enough when she comes to inspect it? Since I come from such an unstable family why would the social worker think my home will be any different? Being afraid about the home study seems to be the overriding feeling for most couples beginning the process.

A lot of people are fearful about ?failing? their home study. This rarely happens. I have only heard of this happening if the couple did not tell the truth to their social worker during the investigation. For example, if the wife told the social worker she had not been arrested and then her criminal background checks says otherwise, then she may not have her home study approved. For this reason, I strongly recommend for you to tell the entire truth, no matter how inconsequential you think the information may be. Even if you were cited for being publicly intoxicated back in your wild college days, mention it to your social worker. It's best to be honest up front rather than later encountering difficulties when trying to explain why you lied.

It's also not worth it to be afraid about what questions you'll be asked as most all of the questions will be about you or topics you are very familiar about. How did you two fall in love? How many siblings do you have? What are your plans for childcare? What qualities will make your partner a good parent? My husband, Paul, and I were very surprised how easy the questions were. We both found it very interesting to hear each other's responses as some of the topics were one we didn't often discuss. The interview process truly felt like mini-marriage counseling sessions to us and we got a lot out of it.

As for whether your family background can deter a social worker from ?passing? you, you should expect questions on these sensitive topics. If your father was abusive, then the social worker may ask what you have personally done to emotionally heal yourself. It's fine if your family history is not ideal as long as you show you are taking steps to change the future for you and your new child.

One common fear is that your house has to be huge, be perfectly clean and look like a child already lives there. This is the farthest thing from the truth. The social worker only needs to know that you have a safe house which has room for a child. I know people who had a one bedroom apartment and passed their home study. They clearly stated how the crib was to be placed next to their bed and that was

acceptable by the social worker. At the time, they did not have a baby crib, baby toys, childproof covers on the outlets or anything else needed for a baby. That is normal for couples when they have their home study done. Why would they have baby items when they don't have a baby?

Some couples are fearful to do the home study because they do not want to get a nursery ready which could remain empty for months or years. That could be emotionally difficult for a prospective adoptive parent. A nursery is not a home study requirement so a couple should not feel pressured to put one together if they don't want to. I know that it would have been very hard for me to assemble a nursery only to have it as a reminder that we did not have a child yet. Yet other women I know found great joy putting together their nursery because it was a reminder that a child was to be coming soon.

As for the cleanliness of your house, it needs to be presentable but not ?white glove? clean. Don't be afraid that the insides of your closets and your oven will be inspected because they won't. It is not worth spending days cleaning every nook and cranny of your home before the social worker's visit. Giving it a good ?once over? cleaning should be adequate. A lot of couples use this opportunity to take pictures of their clean rooms to put into your adoption profile which may be required by your agency/lawyer.

## **Unfairness / Anger**

How come a 15 year old girl can get pregnant and keep her baby (no questions asked) but I have to go through the home study process before I can parent? Why do I have to get personal references as to whether I'll be a good parent yet there are abusive parents out there who keep on having and keeping children? What makes this social worker so special that she is the one who judges if I can have a child in my house? And why do I have to PAY her to judge me?

These questions, plus many more, are ones that I hear in my Adoption Support Group over and over. Most of the couples are afraid of voicing them because they think it could cause them to "fail" their home study. I believe it's normal for them to question the fairness of the adoption process. Ideally, it would be perfect if the "good" people didn't need the home studies and they were only required of the "bad" people. But that's the problem. No one knows who the good or bad people are. Therefore, it's better to assume that all prospective adoptive parents need to be investigated for the sake of their future child's safety.

Paul had a lot of anger about the unfairness that we had to do the home study. He knew we were good people so why did we have to have fingerprint background checks, collect our financial papers and get personal references? My response to him was to just accept that it's just the way it is so just stick it out and do his part. I reminded him over and over that the home study was not for us but for the child. A child needs a safe and secure home and the home study is our way to prove that we can provide that. Keeping in mind the original purpose of the home study helped relieve some of Paul's anger.

I hear a lot of women talk about how unfair it is that just because their body failed them by not providing a successful pregnancy they now have to justify that they will be a good parent. I know I was mad at my body and had a lot of the emotions from my infertility days resurface when we did our first home study. I really had to look inside myself and accept that I had to step out of the infertility world and put my emotions into the adoption world. It wasn't easy after enduring years of infertility treatments but I had to let go of that anger in order to be open to the joy of adoption.

As for your social worker, she is not trying to "fail" you. She is only documenting that you can provide a stable and loving home to a child. A good social worker will be helpful and polite during your conversations. If you don't know the answer to a question then she will work with you on figuring out the answers. For example, if you are asked, "What will you do for discipline?" you may not have an answer. She may then ask both of you how you were raised and if you thought it was effective. Talking situations out with the social worker may bring up good topics for you and

your partner to discuss in the future. You are not only paying for your social worker to write an official home study report, but you are paying her to help you in your adoption process.

## **Relief**

I meet many couples who are very relieved to be doing their adoption home study. They know this is the first of many steps that will lead them to a child. If they previously experienced infertility then they are used to preparing for a cycle without an absolute guarantee that they would become pregnant. With adoption, they know know the success rate is 100% of becoming parents if they are willing to stick with it. So the couple is relieved that their time and effort spent on the home study will not be a waste.

A lot of women, including myself, felt a huge relief when doing the home study. This is because during infertility treatments I always felt a lot of pressure on me and my body as I was stuck with needles, took medicine, received ultrasounds and took pregnancy tests. Paul often told me how helpless he felt because he knew I had to take the brunt of the treatments and he couldn't do it for me. But with adoption, especially during the home study phase, the husband can do at least 50% of the work, if not more. There was no reason Paul couldn't help fill out paperwork or help collect the necessary forms. Paul was happy that he could take such an active role in the process. It truly felt to me as if a huge weight had been lifted off of my shoulders once we started the home study.

Overall, there are plenty of emotions tied to the home study. You can enter the home study process full of resentment or you can be excited that you are making the commitment to adopt a child into your heart and in to your home. You can be fearful that you aren't going to come across as a good potential parent or you can be honest with your social worker and use her as a valuable resource to find help regarding your parenting concerns.

There may be many emotions that you experience during the adoption process that you never expected to feel. If they don't arise during the home study then they may surface elsewhere along your journey to parenthood. You can't choose what you feel but you can choose how you react to them. Talk about your feelings to your loved ones or to others in the adoption community. You will hopefully find lots of support which, in turn, you can then use to support other prospective adoptive parents down the road.

Danielle I. Pennel

Three Yellow Roses

[www.threeyellowroses.com](http://www.threeyellowroses.com)