

The Homestudy Process, or “What Is Real?”

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The word “homestudy” can cause some people to feel threatened or intimidated because your home is a reflection of yourself. When a stranger comes to “evaluate” your home, especially when the outcome determines whether you can fulfill your dream of becoming a parent, the stakes are high. Your anxiety level can be high as well.

As a social worker who has done homestudies for more than 10 years, I often forget that the individuals on the other side of that door are sometimes anxious about my visit. But from my perspective, I am going to the home of someone special, someone who wants to become a parent. They want to share their life, resources, time, and love with a child who needs the same. I look forward to homestudies because nine times out of 10, I meet the most wonderful people—people who are willing to jump through hundreds of hoops, fill out reams of papers, consider their motives and beliefs, and then wait for a long time to fulfill their dream.

Doing a homestudy helps ensure that the proposed adoption will be a positive and rewarding experience for all. If a couple or individual knows about the adoption process, parenting, the rewards and demands of raising children, and is really ready for this lifelong commitment, the homestudy process is merely an exchange of information between the social worker and the prospective adoptive parents. All parties have the same goal in mind: to make the adoption successful for everyone. To accomplish this, the family must be “REAL” with the social worker. Honesty is crucial.

Elizabeth Mondulick and Doug Brandow, of Eugene, Ore., were anxious about their first visit with their social worker, but in the end found little to be worried about.

“I was more nervous than Doug about the social worker’s visit,” says Elizabeth. “It was very emotional, the thought of having a stranger in your house and not knowing what she would ask, what she was looking for, and also knowing we were being evaluated as prospective parents. I spent a lot of time putting everything in place in my house trying to make it look neat. You tend to think of the “Social Worker” as just a name, a faceless person and you feel a lot of pressure. But then you see she’s just another person like you.”

The homestudy visit is not a “white-glove” examination of the insides of your refrigerator or underneath your beds. It is an extensive dialogue on many topics, including 1) why you want to adopt and what you know about adoption; 2) what you believe and know about parenting; 3) your personal history (or “What you bring to this picture?”); 4) your financial situation; 5) your marital status and its strengths and weaknesses; 6) your religious beliefs and values; and 7) an assessment of the suitability of your home and neighborhood for raising children. After realistically examining these topics, all you need to do for the homestudy visit is prepare to be real with the social worker.

If a prospective adoptive couple is using adoption to try and save a shaky marriage, more than likely the opposite will happen, and everyone loses. If a family is already strapped for time, energy, money, or problem-solving skills, then surely the addition of a dependent, demanding, trying, and costly child is not a good plan. Prospective adoptive parents who try and “fake” their way through this process are destined for disaster—not only for themselves but also for the child. Sometimes during the homestudy process the social worker makes the discovery that the prospective adoptive parents are REALLY not ready to adopt and parent a child. Parents are hurt when this happens, but ultimately everyone will be better off because it may prevent disaster.

Those people who are ready to parent will go through the homestudy process more in tune with their own situation and find the visits with the social worker a kind of connection to their child before the baby comes home.

“Especially after the first visit, everything was much easier,” recalls Elizabeth. “From that point on, a continuity was established in our contact with our social worker, and we just got to know each other through that process. We were going through a lot of other family things as we were waiting for our referral, and she was very sympathetic to our situation, not so much as a counselor, but as a good ear, someone with whom I could share my thoughts. It was so nice to have her checking in with us during that time. And when we finally received the first news and pictures of our daughter, it was wonderful to share the joy of that event with her as well.”

Parenting is an awesome responsibility. Accepting the responsibility for protecting, providing for, nurturing, loving, and teaching one of *god's special creations* how to become a happy, well-adjusted adult is a big deal. It's scary, challenging, tiring, and phenomenally rewarding (and so is a homestudy). But there's one major difference. The homestudy is time-limited, but your responsibility as a parent is not. The homestudy is just one step in that awesome process. It too can be scary, challenging, tiring, and phenomenally rewarding (especially once the social worker leaves!). But it's nothing compared to the task you are about to undertake in becoming a parent.

So if you're ready, if you want to give of yourself to one of those very special creatures, if you want to learn and learn and learn forevermore all you can about being the best parent you can be, then fear not. The fear of the homestudy is usually much worse than the actual homestudy itself. Remember, you don't have to be perfect, you just have to be real.