

Client Policies

Client Policies apply to Carolina Adoption Services and its subsidiary ABC Adoption Services. All references to CAS shall also apply to ABC. Please note that some policies are applicable to international adoption cases only.

Eligibility

Applicants' Age: Applicants must be at least 25 years old. Carolina Adoption Services (CAS) follows the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) guideline that married couples where one spouse is under 25 years of age may apply for services if the couple has been married at least 2 years. CAS follows the age requirements for adoptive parents as determined by adoption law in each sending country.

Child Abuse/Neglect: Applicants with a substantiated history as a perpetrator of child abuse or neglect are automatically disqualified. Applicants who were victims of abuse, neglect, domestic violence and/or other traumatic events should demonstrate how they overcame the effects of such behaviors so that their children will not be negatively impacted by resultant behaviors. CAS will likely request a psychological evaluation.

Applicants who plan to adopt internationally will be required to provide, for the home study agent, child abuse and criminal clearances for all states and countries of residence since the age of 18 years. For domestic adoptions, clearances must go back 7 years.

Criminal Records: Applicants with histories of arrest or conviction must disclose this in the application process and be prepared to discuss this in the home study process. Even distant, juvenile, or expunged criminal records must be disclosed. Applicants with a criminal record must provide a copy of the court disposition of their case. In addition, they need to write a detailed letter of explanation both of the event and how rehabilitation has occurred. A letter from rehabilitative services is obtained if such services were used. This information must be shared with USCIS in order to obtain approval. A decision is made on an individual case basis. Some countries will not place with an applicant who has a criminal record.

Applicants on parole or probation will not be accepted until they have completed probation and satisfied all requirements of the court. CAS cannot work with clients who have substantiated child abuse complaints filed against them or who are having continuing problems with drugs and/or alcohol. Clients with histories of felony convictions or multiple criminal charges will be considered on a case-by-case basis during the application process.

Disruptions: Applicants with a previous disrupted adoption should wait 2 years before re-applying. They must provide evidence of completed counseling in order to be considered for placement. Adoption Committee approval is needed before starting either a home study or adoption process after a disruption has occurred. It is possible that USCIS or the foreign country may not approve the family for another placement in these types of cases.

Duty to Disclose: In preparation for an adoption, clients are required to give true and complete information to the home study preparer. Clients must disclose other relevant information, such as any history of physical, mental, or emotional health problems; any arrest, conviction, or other adverse criminal history, whether in the US or abroad, even if the record of the arrest or conviction or other adverse criminal history has been expunged, sealed, pardoned, or the subject of any other amelioration; disclose any history of substance abuse or sexual abuse, child abuse, and/or family violence as a victim or perpetrator; and pending investigations. Clients must notify the home study preparer and USCIS of any event or information that might warrant submission of an amended or updated home study.

Health - Physical and Emotional: Applicants need to exhibit adequate health to parent a child. Minimally, their doctors must be able to state that clients are in good health, are able to parent a child, and have normal life expectancies. Applicants with chronic physical or mental health conditions, or with a life-threatening illness in their past, must discuss the conditions before applying and must submit medical letters from their treating physician. Cases are evaluated individually to assess the applicant's ability to function as a parent. Submitted letters become part of the permanent case record. Country-specific health policies have precedence over CAS policies.

Applicants undergoing treatment, currently or previously, for mental health issues shall provide a report from their psychiatrist, licensed psychologist and/or licensed therapist noting conditions, treatment, prognosis and recommendations. When possible, an agency form is used for this purpose, with prior written releases signed by the applicant. CAS reserves the right to request psychological testing at the client's expense; the results become part of the permanent case record. Psychotherapy and counseling are positively viewed and are an asset to individual/marital growth and development. Clients who experience physical or mental health issues during the adoption process must report those issues to CAS; the agency and placing country will evaluate the client's ability to continue the process.

Inactivity: In cases where there has been a period of inactivity for more than 90 days, CAS will close the case. Applicants may re-open their case without an additional application fee anytime within 12 months following the closing of the case.

Internet Usage: Clients should be wary of the reliability of information posted on adoption bulletin boards and shared in adoption web forums and blogs. In addition, clients should be aware that the Internet is accessible to everyone, including foreign government officials, and should be careful not to post negative or damaging information. Clients should thoughtfully consider, when posting on the Internet, what they would want their future son or daughter to read someday about their country, heritage, adoption, etc., and what the clients would want the officials and citizens in their child's birth country to discover about their adoption experience.

CAS requires that clients password-protect their personal websites and adoption blogs for the sake of personal safety and privacy. CAS requires that clients restrict information shared about the child they are referred to non-identifying information while they are still in the adoption process. The child's information is confidential and only intended for the Clients before the adoption is finalized. CAS recommends the use of personal journals or scrapbooks rather than internet blogs or discussion forums.

Marital Status: CAS welcomes both married couples and single parents, although some countries require that adoptive parents be married. A prior marriage is not usually a deterrent to placement. The strength of the current relationship is the primary concern. Couples must generally be married at least two years by the time of child placement, allowing adequate time for individual adjustments to marriage.

Multiple Applications: CAS cannot work with clients who are seeking adoptive placements through other placing sources.

Non -Discrimination Statement: Carolina Adoption Services does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other status or condition protected by law.

Pregnancy: CAS normally does not accept applications from persons who are actively involved in infertility treatment. Should a pregnancy occur while in the adoption process, families should notify their social worker. Such cases are normally put on hold for 90 days and then reviewed. CAS will not generally place with pregnant couples.

If the case is later closed, it may be reopened at the family's request within 12 months without any additional application charge. When an outcome is pregnancy loss or stillbirth, the social worker and family will reach a decision on when the family is ready to proceed with adoption. If agency priorities, policies, guidelines, or fees have changed while a family has been "on hold," those in effect at the time of reactivation will apply. Applicants who become parents may apply again whenever they meet the requirements of a country program.

Same Sex Couples: While we rely on information provided to us by clients regarding their personal circumstances, the placing country may or may not infer the applicant's sexual orientation based on the description of who lives in the household and their roles and relationships in parenting the child. Some countries do require that sexual orientation be discussed in the home study and the client may be required to submit a statement re: their sexual orientation as part of their dossier. CAS staff may not knowingly misrepresent information about applicants, their household or family members, or the roles of household and family members. CAS helps applicants assess their risks and probabilities for being accepted for placement by a placing country. In international and domestic home study, post-placement, finalization and re-finalization cases, CAS policies and procedures must adhere to the laws of the local jurisdictions in clients' states of residence.

Single Applicants: Single applicants must provide evidence of a strong support system. Single applicants must provide information re: opposite sex role models for the child to be adopted. They must also name married couples as guardians; singles may be named as long as a married couple is named as back-up. Single applicants may only adopt one child at a time, but can adopt additional children sequentially, based on approved home studies. While many countries allow for single women to adopt, it may be difficult to find a country permitting adoption by single men.

Substance Abuse/Domestic Violence: Applicants with a history of drug/alcohol abuse, or criminal histories related to alcohol or drug use, must demonstrate that long-term rehabilitation has occurred. This may be documented through letters from a therapist or a rehabilitation center. In cases where no professional treatment was used, the client is required to have an evaluation done by a certified substance abuse counselor. A letter from the latter shall become part of the permanent record. USCIS has requested that any incident involving substance abuse, domestic violence as well as child or sexual abuse that has occurred in an applicant's past be documented in the home study. If information about an incident comes to light following submission of a study to USCIS, that information must be included in an amendment, and the amendment must be forwarded to USCIS, the foreign country and becomes part of the study.

Child-Related Policies

Behavior Management and Child Safety: Prior to the placement of a child, CAS requires that prospective adoptive parents familiarize themselves with and agree to abide by standard behavior management guidelines and child safety procedures and adhere to any applicable State regulations regarding the same.

Child Care Plans: The adequacy of child care plans is evaluated for each family. Generally, in the adoption of one child, families are requested to abide by the tenets of the Family Leave Act - that is, enabling one parent to be in the home for up to the first twelve weeks after placement. When older children, children with special needs, or sibling groups of two or more children are placed, parents are expected to stay at home for a longer period (preferably one year) to accommodate the needs of each child to adjust to each other as well as to the parents. The CAS Adoption Committee will consider waivers for child care plans for sibling placements. Couples must wait 12 months after arrival of the child before another child can be placed in the home.

Discipline: Corporal punishment, or the infliction of pain or discomfort, may not be used by adoptive parents. Prohibited actions include, but are not limited to, hitting with any part of the body or with an implement, pinching, pulling, shaking, binding of a child, forcing him to assume an uncomfortable position, or locking the child in a room or closet.

Firearms and Ammunition: Firearms and ammunition in the home shall be stored separately, and under lock and key. The keys shall be stored out of the reach of children and separately from both firearms and ammunition. It is the expectation of the agency that children do not have access to weapons or other hazards.

Gender Preference: Families are encouraged to be open to a child of either gender. Some countries do not allow families to request a child of a specific gender, except under special circumstances. While some country programs allow a gender preference, families should be prepared for a longer wait if they specify a gender preference. CAS reserves the right to close applications in particular programs to families open only to the placement of a specific gender child; this is done if the wait for children of one gender is becoming too long.

Immunizations: Clients shall follow the immunization schedule recommended by their pediatrician for the child they adopt.

Number of Children: CAS follows NC foster care guidelines regarding the number of children placed with a family. NC foster care guidelines limit the number of children in the household to 5. Exceptions may be made for sibling placements. Families requesting waivers to this policy should contact their Program Coordinator or the Director of Social Work Services to request consideration by the CAS Adoption Committee.

Out of Birth-Order Adoptions: CAS generally discourages families who already have children in the home from adopting other children out of birth-order. Families requesting waivers to this policy should contact their Program Coordinator or the Director of Social Work Services to request consideration by the CAS Adoption Committee. Additional education regarding this issue will be required of families if a waiver is granted.

Pets: Pets in the home shall have up-to-date immunizations and pose no threat to children as verified by a veterinarian.

Reporting of Serious Injury, Death, or Illness: Serious medical, physical, mental or emotional incidences, and potential dissolution must be reported to the agency within 24 hours of the occurrence. These include, but are not limited to, suicide or suicide attempt, abusive treatment and activity by an adult or child, critical injuries or death, and placement in out-of-home or residential treatment facility.

Sibling Placements: A child placed in an adoptive family should have a minimum of one year difference in age from any other child present in the family or planned to be in the family, either through birth or adoption. Families should wait until the finalization of the first adoption before beginning the process to adopt another child. CAS will not typically refer a child for placement into a family where there is a pregnancy or involvement in another adoption plan. There must be a one year period of time between the additions of children to a family – either through birth or adoption.

Generally, two unrelated children cannot be adopted at one time. Requests for waivers to this policy may be presented, in advance of a referral, to the CAS Adoption Committee.

In the past, waivers have been granted only in rare circumstances for married couples where one parent will be home

with the children for at least one year following placement. These couples must also demonstrate an ability to meet the special demands of multiple child placements and have completed the prescribed educational process. The homestudy worker must be able to recommend the family for such a placement after careful assessment during the homestudy process.

Married couples may adopt sibling groups of two or more children at the same time from some countries, with advance permission from the CAS Adoption Committee. Married couples must show evidence of adequate educational preparation and childcare arrangements with sufficient financial and emotional resources. They must have contact with other families who have adopted siblings and resources identified for various needs that can be anticipated. Families who adopt sibling groups, older children, or children with special needs must have special preparation/education prior to placement of the child(ren). They should expect to have one parent home for at least one year after placement.

Agency Requirements

Changes in the Family's Situation: Families must keep CAS informed of any significant changes in their situation at all times prior to completion of their adoption. CAS should be informed of changes such as, but not limited to: health problems, arrests or convictions, child abuse allegations and investigations, changes in employment and income, a move, pregnancy, changes in the numbers of household members, etc. USCIS also requires that these types of changes be reported to them in the form of a home study amendment or update. The filing of additional USCIS documents may also be required. There are additional fees for the preparation of home study amendments and updates as well as filing charges for some USCIS documents.

Client/Staff Relations: CAS strives to maintain a highly professional staff not only possessing appropriate education and experience, but holding a deep commitment to providing excellent, courteous service to clients. Our professional Code of Ethics requires that staff use "accurate and respectful language in all communications to and about clients." Similarly, agency clients are expected to adhere to the same standards. Clients should interact with staff in an appropriate, respectful and courteous manner. Instances of derogatory, insulting, or profane language will be immediately reported to the staff member's Supervisor for further action. Termination of services can result if difficulties are not resolved. In such cases, the agency fee, as outlined in the Service Agreement, is not subject to refund.

Complaints/Grievances: Clients who are not satisfied with services of CAS have the right to a complaint/grievance process. Initially, clients should try to resolve the issue with their case worker. If not satisfied they may contact the Supervisor. If the issue remains unresolved they should submit concerns in writing to the Executive Director. Should the complaint involve the Executive Director the issue should be address to the Chairman of the Board of Directors. Complaints should receive a response within 30 days. Should the complaint remain unresolved the client may contact the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors and a response will be provided within 30 days. If not satisfied, the client may utilize mediation or arbitration to resolve the issue. All clients may receive additional details regarding the complaint or grievance policy upon request. CAS will never take action to discourage the Client from making or expressing a complaint. CAS does not discourage the Client from providing information in writing, interviewing, answering questions, or expressing their opinions about the performance of the agency to an accrediting entity.

Dossier: Families work with their country Program Coordinator to prepare a group of documents known as a "dossier" as required by the foreign country to process an adoption. A family may have a dossier in only one country at a time. Under certain circumstances, the CAS Adoption Committee may permit concurrent dossiers to be submitted to two countries.

Educational Preparation: Families adopting internationally must accrue a minimum of 10 hours of pre-adoption education prior to completion of the home study and the recommended 30 hours of adoption preparation prior to placement of the child. Some countries may have additional or specific training requirements. CAS offers educational programs and online resources to families. Local service agencies and support groups also provide educational preparation to families. Clients must submit verification of education to CAS.

Home Study (Pre-Placement Assessment): A home study can only be accepted from a licensed child-placing agency. Some countries require that the home study be completed only by a Hague-accredited agency. A home study prepared by independent contractors are not accepted. CAS provides guidance to local service agencies so that all home study reports meet CAS requirements.

Due to Hague Convention Universal Accreditation Act regulations, CAS may accept a home study only from a licensed agency with whom CAS has a formal, signed inter-agency agreement. This applies to families who are adopting from a Hague Convention country. CAS may not accept a home study from an agency that has been denied Hague Convention Accreditation, or has had their Hague Convention accreditation revoked or denied at re-accreditation.

Prospective adoptive parents are required to report any significant changes in the family situation that occur after completion of the home study to both the home study and placing agency. This USCIS-required duty to disclose is ongoing through the adoption process and failure to do so carries a penalty of perjury. Such changes may include: medical issues, changes in employment or income, an arrest or conviction, substance abuse, the addition of a household member, etc. If there are questions about whether or not a situation should be reported, please check with the involved agencies.

Inactive Programs: A program may become inactive or close due to changes in the foreign government's policies on adoption, revision of adoption laws, etc. If the situation does not resolve in a reasonable timeframe, the Board of Directors, upon recommendation of the Executive Director, may close a program. If a family's case becomes inactive and their dossier paperwork has been expired for 6 months, they will be contacted. The family must then decide between the following options: 1) to update their paperwork within 30 days, 2) to switch to another country, or 3) to close their case. Under certain circumstances, clients may submit a \$1,000 Deposit Fee to reserve a slot in a new or inactive program that is expected to become active.

Insurance Coverage: CAS is insured according to licensing and accreditation regulations and guidelines. The agency meets or exceeds minimum required coverage amounts.

Medical Evaluation of Referrals: Families are strongly encouraged to seek professional help in evaluating child referral information from professionals who specialize in international adoption.

Post-Adoption Reports: Families will be required to complete post-adoption reports as required by CAS, their domestic placing agency and/or the placing country. The number of reports required is determined by the placing country, agency and/or state.

Referrals: Through discussion with the home study worker and program coordinator, families set expectations for the child to be placed. Generally, if a family declines 3 referrals considered appropriate based on their parameters, the family's case may be considered by the CAS Adoption Committee. If the family appears to have unrealistic expectations, the family may consider other country options. CAS reserves the right to close any case at any time. The official child referral is only made to families with an approved home study. Client acceptance of a referral is considered official upon receipt of the required funds and signed acceptance agreement. Families should be aware that some countries may close their case should they decline a referred child.

Right to Information: Clients may have a copy of their home study (pre-placement assessment) provided all fees for such report have been paid to the agency for the services rendered. Should a home study result in a “non-approval,” a written explanation of the agency’s decision will be provided to the family within 5 working days of non-approval decision.

United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (CIS): In international adoption cases, clients are responsible for the filing of their I-600A or I-800A with USCIS. It is also the client’s responsibility to be aware of when their CIS approval and fingerprints expire and make sure they are updated upon expiration of such documents.

CAS Policies Relating to Hague Convention Cases

When using CAS as your placing agency the Hague Convention and Universal Accreditation Act (UAA) defines CAS in this situation as being the “Primary Provider”. As a Hague Accredited primary provider, CAS has the capacity, when appropriate, to provide the following 6 Hague Adoption Services:

1. Identifying a child for adoption and arranging an adoption;
2. Securing the necessary consent to termination of parental rights and to adoption;
3. Performing a home study and reporting on prospective adoptive parents or a background study and report on a child;
4. Making non-judicial determinations of a child’s best interests and of the appropriateness of an adoptive placement;
5. Monitoring a case after a child has been placed with prospective adoptive parents until final adoption.
6. Assuming custody of a child and providing childcare or any other social service, when necessary, because of a disruption pending alternative placement.

Items number 5 & 6 above apply only in those countries in which the adoption is not full and final in the country, such as Uganda. CAS always follows state and regulatory guidelines.

Referrals of Children Available for Adoption in Inter-Country Cases: (Hague Regulation 96.49(k)): Carolina Adoption Services shares all available medical, developmental, and psychosocial information regarding available children, and the biological family, with prospective adoptive parents prior to placement. It is totally the decision of the client to accept or not accept a particular referral. Agency staff offers ongoing support as the client takes as much time as necessary to decide whether or not to accept the referral. CAS will not withdraw a referral until the prospective adoptive parent(s) have had two weeks (unless extenuating circumstances involving the child’s best interests require a more expedited decision) to consider the needs of the child and their ability to meet those needs, and to obtain physician review of medical information and other descriptive information, including videotapes of the child if available. As available, CAS will obtain and include in the case file of the adoptive family information regarding the prospective adoptee and siblings.

Provision of Medical and Social Information in Incoming Cases: When Carolina Adoption Services provides information on a child available for adoption to an adoptive family for consideration, the information shall be subject to the following:

1. **Minimum of Two Weeks Notice of Referral Information:** Carolina Adoption Services shall provide to prospective adoptive parents a copy of the child’s medical records (including, to the fullest extent practicable, a

correct and complete English-language translation of such records) as early as possible, but no later than two weeks before either:

- a. the adoption or placement for adoption, or
- b. the date on which the prospective adoptive parent(s) travel to the Convention country to complete all procedures in such country relating to the adoption or placement for adoption, whichever is earlier.

2. **Copy of Original Record (Not Only Summary):** When any medical record provided is a summary or compilation of other medical records, CAS will include those underlying medical records in the records provided pursuant to paragraph (a) if they are available.
3. **Translations:** CAS will make every effort to provide the prospective adoptive parent(s) with any un-translated medical reports or videotapes or other reports and provides an opportunity for the client(s) to arrange for their own translation of the records, including a translation into a language other than English, if needed.
4. **Reasonable Efforts to Obtain Specific Additional Information:** Carolina Adoption Services will make reasonable efforts, or require its supervised provider in the child's country of origin, to obtain additional available information, including in particular:
 - a. The date that the Convention country or other child welfare authority assumed custody of the child and the child's condition at that time;
 - b. History of any significant illnesses, hospitalizations, special needs, and changes in the child's condition since the Convention country or other child welfare authority assumed custody of the child;
 - c. Growth data, including prenatal and birth history, and developmental status over time and current developmental data at the time of the child's referral for adoption; and
 - d. Specific information on the known health risks in the specific region or country where the child resides.
5. **Medical Reports from Non-Government Officials (Hague Regulation 96.49(e)):** If Carolina Adoption Services provides medical information, other than the information provided by public foreign authorities, to the prospective adoptive parent(s) from an examination by a physician or from an observation of the child by someone who is not a physician, Carolina Adoption Services shall use reasonable efforts to include the following:
 - a. Doctors' Information - The name and credentials of the physician who performed the examination or the individual who observed the child;
 - b. Date - The date of the examination or observation; how the report's information was retained and verified; and if anyone directly responsible for the child's care has reviewed the report;
 - c. ID of Medical Professionals - If the medical information includes references, descriptions, or observations made by any individual other than the physician who performed the examination or the individual who performed the observation, the identity of that individual, the individual's training, and information on what data and perceptions the individual used to draw his or her conclusions;
 - d. Health History- A review of hospitalizations, significant illnesses, and other significant medical events, and the reasons for them;
 - e. Test History - Information about the full range of any tests performed on the child,

including tests addressing known risk factors in the child's country of origin; and
f. Current health information.

6. **Reasonable Efforts for Additional Information:** Carolina Adoption Services shall use reasonable efforts, or requires its supervised provider in the child's country of origin who is responsible for obtaining social information about the child on behalf of Carolina Adoption Services or person to use reasonable efforts, to obtain available information, including in particular:
- a. Birth Family - Information about the child's birth family and prenatal history and cultural, racial, religious, ethnic, and linguistic background.
 - b. Placement History - Information about all of the child's past and current placements prior to adoption, including, but not limited to any social work or court reports on the child and any information on who assumed custody and provided care for the child; and
 - c. Siblings - Information about any birth siblings whose existence is known to Carolina Adoption Services or person, or its supervised provider, including information about such siblings' whereabouts.
7. **Documentation of Reasonable Efforts:** Where any of the information listed in paragraphs (d) and (f) of this section cannot be obtained, CAS or person documents in the adoption record the efforts made to obtain the information and why it was not obtainable. CAS or person continues to use reasonable efforts to secure those medical or social records that could not be obtained up until the adoption is finalized.
8. **Doctor Contact Information:** Where available, CAS will provide information for contacting the examining physician or the individual who made the observations to any physician engaged by the prospective adoptive parent (s), upon request.
9. **Photos and Videos:** CAS will ensure that videotapes and photographs of the child are identified by the date on which the videotape or photograph was recorded or taken and that they were made in compliance with the laws in the country where recorded or taken.
11. **Full Disclosure:** Carolina Adoption Services will not withhold from or misrepresent to the prospective adoptive parent(s) any available medical, social, or other pertinent information concerning the child(ren).

I have received, read, and will adhere to the client policies of Carolina Adoption Services, Inc.

Print Client Name

Client Signature

Date

Print Client Name

Client Signature

Date