



## **Common Questions from Adoptive Parents**

*Q. Who do I call after the adoption finalization if I have questions or need help?*

A. If you have questions or need help during the first six (6) months after your child's adoption finalizes, contact the Adoption CSW who handled your case prior to finalization. If your adoption has been finalized for more than six months, contact the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' Post Adoption Services Unit at (800) 735-4984. A PAS social worker will process AAP inquiries and handle concerns or questions.

*Q. I am an adoptive parent and I am moving. Who do I call to make sure the AAP checks are sent to our new address?*

A. If you have not received an AAP check, or have a change of address, call the AAP Hotline at (800) 697-4444. Also call this number when you are having problems like your child's Medi-Cal card is not working.

*Q. My child's adoption was finalized three months ago, and we still haven't received her birth certificate. How do we get a copy of it?*

A. You are automatically sent one (free) certified copy of your child's new birth certificate after the adoption is final. However, the "automatically" part can take approximately 10 - 13 months due to a backlog. If you've been waiting at least eight months, you can call the California Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records at (916) 445-2684. You can also visit their website at [www.cdph.ca.gov](http://www.cdph.ca.gov).

The county clerk of the California Superior Court granting the adoption is required to complete the Court Report of Adoption (VS44) and send a certified copy of the Report along with a certified copy of the Adoption Order to the California Office of Vital Records. The new birth certificate will be prepared by the vital records office in the child's state of birth. If your child was born in another state, the California Office of Vital Records will forward the Report to the vital records office in the child's state of birth so they can prepare the new birth certificate. If your child was born in another state, you may be required to pay a nominal fee for issuance of the new birth certificate. (The California Office of Vital Records \$20 registration fee is waived for foster care adoptions for children born in California.) If your child was not born in California and you have not received the birth certificate, call The Alliance or the pro bono attorney who assisted you with the adoption and we can contact the vital records office in the state where your child was born.



*Q. How do we apply for a Social Security Number for our adopted child?*

A. At your local Social Security Office, complete an *Application For A Social Security Card* (Form SS05). You will need to show them original documents proving your child's U.S. citizenship, age, and identity. You will also need to show them documents providing your identity and your relationship as parent of the child (as you are signing the application on the child's behalf). If your child is age 12 or older, he or she must appear for an interview at the Social Security office, even if a parent or guardian will sign the application on the child's behalf.

- For proof of U.S. Citizenship, the Social Security office can accept only certain documents. These include a U.S. birth certificate, U.S. consular report of birth, U.S. passport, Certificate of Naturalization or Certificate of Citizenship.
- For proof of your child's Age, you must present your child's birth certificate if you have it. If not, the Social Security Office can consider other documents, such as your child's passport, to prove age.
- For proof of your child's Identity, the Social Security office can accept only certain documents. These include a U.S. passport, an adoption order, a hospital record, a religious record, or school identification card.
- For proof of your identity, the Social Security office will ask to see your U.S. driver's license or identification card, U.S. passport, or they will accept other documents such as an employee ID card, school ID card, marriage document, health insurance card, U.S. military ID card, or adoption order.

All documents must be either originals or certified copies. They may use one document for two purposes (such as use your child's passport as proof of both citizenship and identity; or, may use your child's birth certificate as proof of age and citizenship). However, you must provide at least two separate documents.

*Q. What if I need a Social Security card now, and I have not yet received the new birth certificate for my adopted child?*

A. For proof of your child's U.S. citizenship, age and identity, in lieu of the new birth certificate, you can show the Social Security office your child's U.S. passport if he or she has one. If not, you should show your Adoption Order, which includes the information regarding the child's name, date of birth and place of birth (i.e., in



the United States). Along with that, you should show your Adoption Agreement, which includes your name(s) as the adoptive parents, your child's original birth name, and your child's new name after the adoption. You can also show the Adoption Request for this purpose as well as the DCFS Consent and Joinder to the Adoption. If you have a copy, you can also show the child's original birth certificate for proof of U.S. citizenship, along with the adoption documents. Ask for a supervisor when you go to the Social Security Office, who may have more knowledge and authority to approve your application with the Adoption Order as your proof. Also, you may contact Cynthia Billey at The Alliance who can provide you a letter to take with you to the Social Security office requesting that they accept the Adoption Order as proof of the child's citizenship, age and identity.

*Q. How do I apply for an Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number?*

A. If you are unable to obtain a Social Security Number (SSN) for your adopted child due to delays with the new birth certificate in time to file your tax return, you can apply with the Internal Revenue Service for a temporary adoption taxpayer identification number (ATIN) that can be used for federal income tax purposes. To apply for an ATIN, fill out IRS Form W-7A, Application for Taxpayer Identification Number for Pending U.S. Adoptions, click here: <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw7a.pdf>. An ATIN is a temporary nine-digit number issued by the IRS to individuals who are in the process of legally adopting a U.S. citizen or resident alien child but who cannot get an SSN for the child in time to file their tax return. You may be able to use an ATIN on your tax return to take the following tax benefits based on the child: dependency exemption, credit for child and dependent care expenses, adoption credit, child tax credit. Please consult your accountant or a tax preparer for advice in your individual situation.

*Q. How do I apply for a U.S. passport for my adopted child?*

A. To apply for a passport for a child under age 14, adoptive parents need to fill out Application Form DS-11 (<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/100004.pdf>) and submit it to a passport acceptance agency along with proof of the child's U.S. citizenship and evidence of the child's relationship to the parents/guardians. For proof of citizenship, you will need to submit either a certified U.S. birth certificate or a previous fully valid U.S. Passport. For proof of relationship, you will need to submit either a certified U.S. birth certificate (with parents' names) or Adoption Order (with adopting parents' names). Each parent must submit their own identification (i.e., valid driver's license passport, etc.) and both parents must



appear together and sign the application form. Go to <http://www.state.gov> for more information.

As with applying for a Social Security card, if you have not yet received your child's new certified birth certificate, you can try submitting the Adoption Order along with the Adoption Agreement and DCFS Consent and Joinder to the passport agency as proof of the child's U.S. citizenship as well as your relationship to the child. If you have a certified copy of the child's original birth certificate, you can submit that along with the Adoption Order and Adoption Agreement showing a change in the child's name after adoption. The Adoption Order contains the child's name, adoptive parents' name(s), child's date of birth, and place of birth, all sufficient to prove the child's U.S. citizenship and the parents' relationship to the child. However, it is possible that the passport agency will not accept the Adoption Order alone for purposes of proof of citizenship and will require either the original or new birth certificate or a previous valid U.S. passport.

*Q. Are there any tax benefits available to parents adopting children from foster care?*

A. Yes. There is a federal adoption tax credit, which is an amount that is subtracted from the adoptive parent's tax liability. The maximum credit - \$11,390 for 2007 - is allowed for the adoption of a child with "special needs." If you adopted a child from the foster care system and are receiving AAP for your adoptive child that means DCFS has already determined that your child has "special needs" and you qualify for this tax credit. If your federal adjusted gross income is over \$210,820, you do not qualify to receive this tax credit. You have five years in which to claim the tax credit. For more information, please confer with a tax consultant and/or the IRS at (800) 829-1040 or [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

If you have no federal tax liability in the year your child was adopted, you should still submit a claim for the tax credit, because you might have a federal income tax liability in the ensuing for years. The adoption tax credit must be claimed in the same year a child's adoption finalizes. Also you should be aware that you do not have to document any expenses to be able to qualify for the entire \$11,390 tax credit for each child that you adopt in 2007. If your child's adoption finalized before 2007 and you did not claim the adoption tax credit, you can still submit an amended tax return to qualify for the credit.

*Q. I recently received a notice in the mail from DCFS about recertification of my adopted child's AAP benefits. What should I do with it?*



A. You need to respond to the notice immediately. The notice encloses the state AAP 3 form (<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/AAP3.pdf>) that DCFS is required to send you every two years after the adoption assistance agreement was signed to recertify your continued need for AAP benefits. You must complete and return the AAP 3 Form immediately. If you do not return the AAP 3 form to DCFS within two weeks of the date it was mailed, DCFS may take action to terminate your AAP benefits. You should check the appropriate boxes indicating that you are legally responsible for the support of the child, and you are supporting the child; and indicating either that you continue to need AAP benefits for the child at the current level or that you are requesting an increase in the AAP benefit because the needs of your child have changed. If your child's needs have changed and you want to request an increase in the AAP benefits, you may check the appropriate box and complete Section I of the form indicating the needs of the child and circumstances of the family. Make sure to sign and date the form. If you have any questions about the notice you have received in the mail from DCFS, you should call the PAS Intake Line at 800-735-4984 or call The Alliance for Children's Rights for assistance.

*Q. Am I eligible to receive an age-related increase in my child's AAP payments?*

A. Yes, your child may be eligible for an age-related increase in their AAP grant. Every child who is receiving AAP at the basic rate is eligible to receive an age-related increase when s/he reaches the following ages: 5, 9, 12, & 15. These increases are not automatic. You must submit your request in writing to your DCFS adoption worker (if you have not yet completed the adoption) or call the AAP/Foster Care Hotline at 1-800-697-4444.

*Q. When will my child's AAP payments terminate?*

A. AAP terminates on your child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, even if your child is still enrolled in high school. Your child's AAP benefits may be extended to age 21, only if your child has a documented mental and/or physical disability for which s/he is receiving services from a licensed professional. If you think your child does qualify for an extension of his/her AAP benefits past their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, call the PAS Intake line at 800-735-4984 to request an extension.

*Q. My adoptive child's therapist is recommending that my child receive in-patient services in a Residential Treatment Center facility. Will AAP pay for the cost of Residential Treatment for my child?*



A. Yes, there is funding available from AAP that will cover the cost of your child's stay in certain Residential Treatment Centers (RTC) if that RTC meets specific qualifying guidelines. You may contact the PAS hotline for more information. Your entire AAP benefit will be forwarded to the RTC during your child's stay at the RTC and will be reinstated to you once he/she returns to your care.

*Q. I/we live in California but outside of Los Angeles County and I/we are having trouble locating a health care provider that accepts Medi-Cal. What can I do?*

A. If you live in California but outside of Los Angeles County, and you need information regarding health care providers, child psychiatrists, and/or mental health professionals who will accept your child's Medi-Cal insurance, contact a representative from the *Value Options* program at 1-800-236-0756 for a list of providers in your area.

*Q. Is my adopted child eligible for the Independent Living Program (ILP) services?*

A. Children who were in foster care and adopted after the age of 16 are eligible for services from the Emancipation/ILP Program. Such services could include high school graduation expenses; education-related and work-related costs; financial aid workshops; housing assistance; job placement & training; life skills training; reimbursement for some physical & mental health services costs that are not funded by Medi-Cal, including costs for classes or services related to parenting skills, nutrition, drug & alcohol use. At times, some of these services & resources may not be available due to limited funding. The Emancipation program receives a set budget every year from state and federal government sources. Please be aware that services and resources are distributed according to need and not as an entitlement. For more information, call the Emancipation Program at (213) 351-0100 or see their website at [www.ilponline.org](http://www.ilponline.org)

*Q. What if my adopted child wants to search for his or her birth parents or siblings?*

A. Despite having wonderful adoptive families, many children who are adopted grow up and desire to search for their birth families. Most adoption support groups encourage adoptees to include their adoptive family in their search. Sometimes the adoptee does not realize that their parents may possess information about the birth family. Many adoptive parents want to emotionally support their adult child as they navigate through the search process. Some advice to adoptive families is to support the adoptee in doing their search, help them understand that



it is perfectly normal to want to know about every aspect of their background, and acknowledge that they are not looking for parental replacements but for the very beginning of their story.

If a birth parent tells their child's CSW that they would like to have contact with their child after their child reaches adulthood, the birth parents may submit a notarized *Consent for Contact* form and have it placed in their child's case file. If, after their child turns 18, he or she wants the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services Post-Adoption Services to assist them in locating and reuniting with their birth parents, he or she can contact PAS and submit the same form. This form allows the PAS worker to disclose the name and phone numbers of the birth Parent(s) to their adult biological child and vice-versa. The form is available on-line at <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/pdf/AD904.PDF>.

DCFS' PAS Unit is also able to facilitate reunions between sibling adoptees who have reached the age of 21 years. If an adoptee wants assistance from PAS in reuniting with their sibling(s) who were also adopted, they must submit a notarized *Waiver of Confidentiality* form to PAS. Once PAS receives these notarized forms from all parties, the PAS worker can facilitate a sibling reunion. These forms are also available on-line at <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/pdf/AD904A.PDF>.