

# Families United Network, Inc.

*Prospective Adoptive Parent Handbook Information*

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Date revised: 4/17



## Office Locations:

South Central, PA  
Mechanicsburg Office  
Located in Cumberland  
County

Central, PA  
Mount Joy Office  
Located in Lancaster County

Harrisburg, PA  
Harrisburg Office  
Located in Dauphin County

Northeastern, PA  
Scranton Office  
Located in Lackawanna  
County

Northern, PA  
Montoursville Office  
Located in Lycoming County

Western, PA  
Pittsburgh Office  
Located in Allegheny County

North Western, PA  
Erie Office  
Located in Erie County

***“Dedicated to Strengthening  
Families”***

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## **Adoption Overview**

### ***A. A Brief History of Families United Network, Inc.***

Families United Network, Inc. is a state licensed 501 (c) 3 non-profit social service agency. The agency was founded in 1996 and initially provided foster care services to children and families throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Today, Families United Network Inc., is a well-respected leader in child welfare and continues to provide quality foster care services, domestic and international adoption, and operates community residential facilities for adolescent boys and girls. Families United Network, Inc. is an accredited organization through the Council on Accreditation including Hague Accreditation.

#### ***Mission Statement***

*Families United Network, Inc. is dedicated to strengthening families by providing children and youth with a safe, nurturing, community environment through a continuum of services, which focuses on reunification or permanency.*

### ***B. Council on Accreditation and Hague Accreditation:***

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is an independent accreditor of the full continuum of community-based behavioral health care and social service organizations in the United States and Canada, and is one of the three leading accreditors of such service providers. Over 1500 organizations – voluntary, public and proprietary, local and statewide, large and small have either successfully achieved COA accreditation or are currently engaged in the process.

COA is widely recognized by states and national organizations as an accrediting body with the capacity, scope, and ability to contribute significantly to the improvement of the behavioral health and social service delivery systems. Originally known as an accrediting body for family and children's agencies, COA has earned public recognition from mental health and substance abuse organizations.

Families United Network, Inc. received the initial full accreditation in April of 2007 and Hague accreditation in February of 2008. The process is completed and is renewed every four years to maintain compliance. In the process of preparing for accreditation the agency examined itself internally and each of the programs and practices offered to clients. Improvements and adjustments have been made to address the standards required by the Council on Accreditation. Specifically, the agency implemented a plan for Continuous Quality Improvement. Stakeholder involvement is very important in any CQI process. As parents, you are an active member of the team and your involvement is sought in many ways.

## ***C. Motivations to Become Adoptive Parents:***

Deciding to become an adoptive parent is a very big step for any family to make. Deciding to let another child, family, and group of professionals into your life can be overwhelming. It takes a special person and/or family to agree to make the commitment. The most important step in deciding to become an adoptive family is first realizing that it must be a family decision. Adoptive families must make a 100% commitment to the child/children. If any member of the family is not in agreement, there will be conflicts in the future. Problems are likely to arise in the existing relationship between the parent and the child or between the married couple and will interfere with the ability to provide a safe, secure, and loving environment for a child placed into your home.

Families must evaluate carefully why they want to be an adoptive family. There are many children who need homes for foster care or adoption. If a family has the proper motivation to help a child, they can be successful.

The following is a list of several motivations that are common among some applicants. All of these reasons are not appropriate. Please review and consider, yourself, what your true motivations are in making this decision. If any of the items below are you motivation stop the process now and re-evaluate your decision.

- For a playmate for my child.
- Raising a child will help our marriage.
- Adding a child will make me feel loved and complete.
- Because my spouse really wants another child.
- Because we cannot have any of our own children.
- To increase my income.
- To be an at-home mother full time.

Most successful families are motivated by the commitment to provide a forever family to a child who does not have one. This motivation also requires you to have a strong sense of commitment.

True commitment means being able to look for solutions to save a placement even when it becomes difficult or painful emotionally. Being aware that as the adults, you must do what is best for a child is of ultimate importance. The willingness to learn new parenting styles



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and skills greatly enhances a family's ability to maintain their commitment.

## ***D. Adoption Options Summary***

Prospective adoptive parents have many different options when deciding which direction to pursue in the field of adoption. A family's time of research and exploration can often be overwhelming especially as they may not know which direction they want to take. The following information is only a summary meant to help identify the different options a family may have. For further information, please visit [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) and refer the Child Welfare Information Gateway which has a variety of resources for families to explore.

### **1. Domestic Adoption:**

Children adopted domestically are children who become available from any state within the United States for adoption. Children adopted within the US may have a higher likelihood of locating the birth families if the child decides to search as an adult. There is also the likelihood of an "open" adoption, which includes some degree of contact between your family and the child's birth family after the adoption. Expenses for a domestic adoption can vary greatly depending on the type of service that is used to identify a potential available child.



Families interested in learning more about "Open Adoption", can refer to the Factsheet for Families by visiting [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm).

Families can investigate the possibility of adopting an infant or adopting a child from the foster care system. The main difference between these two types of adoption depends on the characteristics of the available children and the expense of the adoption process.

**Infant Adoption:** Many families are interested in adopting a healthy infant often with a background similar to their own. This is a very common interest and the waiting time can vary greatly. Some agencies have waiting lists, while other agencies engage in the activity of including the birth family to help select the adoptive family. Fewer children are available for this type of adoption since the interest is very high. The cost for an infant adoption can range greatly. Our agency will work with families who are interested in using Families United Network, as your placement agency, or we can provide only the home study and post adoption services. **For families using FUN as your placement agency, please contact the agency directly for additional information. The agency only accepts a limited number of families into the program. The fees begin at \$19,500. The average number of children placed has been one annually.**

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**Foster Care Adoption:** Families United Network, Inc. is an approved affiliate with the State Wide Adoption and Permanency Network in the state of Pennsylvania. For years, Families United Network, Inc. has been able to aid families in the adoption of their foster children and help match families with available children. Available children in the foster care system can usually be referred to as “special needs adoptions”. Children that fall under this category are over the age of 5, part of a sibling group, and/or part of a minority group. Most children have already spent time in the child welfare system as a foster child. Many foster families decide to adopt, but when this does not occur, the children become available to adopt. In the state of Pennsylvania there are many children available for adoption with a variety of unique characteristics and needs. Families flexible in their interests are encouraged to consider this form of adoption to provide permanency to those children desperately looking for homes. Foster care adoption fees are generally provided through a public agency or available for a modest fee. Federal and state subsidies are sometimes available to assist families adopting a child with special needs. However, this could vary from state to state.

## 2. Inter Country Adoption

Intercountry Adoption refers to the adoption of a child from outside the United States. These children must meet the eligibility of orphan status. In many countries, the birth parents have either died or “abandoned” the children. Strict immigration requirements apply to adoptions of children from other countries. It is important to choose a licensed, knowledgeable organization for intercountry adoption because the process is often lengthy and complex. Expenses for this type of adoption also vary greatly depending on the amount of travel that is needed, and the location of the child. Families could spend \$20,000 to over \$50,000 for an international adoption. To learn more about different countries please visit [www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption](http://www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption) .

Families United Network, Inc. is not a placement agency but can work with you to provide your home study and post adoption/placement services.



*Children with special needs are also available internationally. Families willing to consider these children are always in need.*

## **E. Culture Diversity**

Culture is a way of life that affects every human being. Culture consists of values, beliefs, and rules of conduct, therefore, culture determines the way we think, feel, act, perceive the world, and respond to situations. As resource parents, we must all realize that cultural differences exist and we must be willing to discuss these differences, similarities, and provide an understanding to better serve our children and families.

There are many things we can do to increase our awareness of different cultures and provide a comfortable, safe environment for the clients we serve. In summary, the following ten tips are suggested:

1. Hold the assumption that no matter what culture a person comes from people are basically good.
2. Relate to individuals without placing them in a stereotype.
3. Recognize that your own knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs are valid only for yourself. Show empathy for other points of view and try to put yourself in the other person's shoes.
4. Be aware of discrepancies between what people say and what people actually mean. For example, many people from different cultures say "yes" just to be polite, but it does not mean they agree.
5. Avoid making moralistic and evaluative judgments in encounters with others. For example, what makes sense to the people of one culture may not make sense to other people.
6. Be honest and start discussions with subjects that are non-threatening. There may be some taboo topics. Making sexual references or talking about politics are frowned upon in some cultures.
7. Communicate respect, positive regard, encouragement and sincere interest in the other culture. When a child is placed into a home, we must go out of our way to understand where the child came from and the things that may help the child adjust to the new surroundings.
8. Avoid binary thinking. Things are not only black and white. There are many gray areas. This encourages tolerance for each other.
9. Be comfortable being different from other people and laugh about your mistakes.
10. Cultures are not right or wrong, just different.

## ***F. Child Placing Resources:***

When a family decides to pursue an infant adoption, either domestically or internationally, they will have to identify the means to find an available child and to finalize the adoption. There are many different options for families, with a variety of advantages and disadvantages among each. Families can decide to work with a licensed agency, an attorney (sometimes called "independent adoption"), or an unlicensed adoption facilitator (if allowed by state laws). Licensed private agencies must meet state standards for licensure and have more oversight to ensure quality services. Unlicensed agencies and facilitators often do not have the same state oversight and consequently there may be more financial and emotional risk for adoptive and birth families using these services.

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## **1. Licensed Private Agency-Primary Provider:**

A family may work with a licensed private agency as the primary provider in their adoption. A family can research the different providers and work with agencies within the state of PA or elsewhere in the United States. When a family is working with an agency from outside of the state of Pennsylvania they will need to identify a local agency such as Families United Network Inc., to complete the Home Study Services.

Special Note: Families United Network, Inc. can also act as a placement agency but only for a domestic infant placement or in the placement of a child through the child welfare system, such as a foster to adopt and/or SWAN adoption. **All families interested in international adoption will need to identify another child placing agency.**

## **2. Independent Adoption:**

In an independent adoption attorneys assist families in the adoption process. A family may have identified an available child on their own, and in many cases have direct contact with the birth family. Families pursuing an independent adoption will also need a home study completed before they are able to finalize the adoption. Families United Network, Inc. is able to complete the Home Study Services needed for the family when completing a domestic adoption independently. **However, for all families adopting internationally, families must have a primary provider identified.**

## **3. Facilitated/Unlicensed Agency Adoption:**

A facilitator is a person who links prospective adoptive parents with expecting birth mothers for a fee. Adoption facilitators are unregulated in many states; families often have little recourse should the plan not work out as expected. Some states do not permit adoptions by paid facilitators. Families will have to identify an attorney to finalize their adoption and again be in need of Home Study Services. Families United Network, Inc. is able to complete the Home Study Services needed for the family. Facilitators can be very professional and successful. However, families are recommended to research them carefully.

In the past, many families used facilitators to assist them in international adoption cases. However, families must also identify approved primary providers to complete the international adoptions.



## Home Study Services

### **A. Home Study Services:**

A Home Study Report is required for all adoptions. This process has three purposes: 1. to educate and prepare the adoptive family for adoption; 2. to gather information about the prospective parents that will help a social worker match the family with a child whose needs they can meet; and 3. to evaluate and approve the adoptive family.

Most families are working with an additional agency that is either acting as the primary provider for the international adoption, or the placement agency for a domestic adoption. Some of these agencies will have their own specific requirements but most requirements are very similar across the country. Families United Network, Inc. will contact your primary provider or placement agency to confirm the style of the home study and documents needed. There may be situations where information overlaps between Families United Network and your placement agency or there may be additional items that your placement agency requests. We will work together to identify these areas to make the process as easy and as timely as possible.

*Disclosure: Families are informed and must understand that under penalty of perjury it is his and her duty to disclose all information under 8 CFR 204.311(d). Families must notify the home study preparer of any new event or information that might warrant submission of an amended or updated home study.*

*In response to direct questions, families must disclose any history of physical, mental, emotional health issues and or behavioral problems to the home study preparer. Families are aware that a single incident of sexual abuse, child abuse, or family violence is sufficient to constitute a "history" of abuse and /or violence. Families will be asked if either has a criminal arrest and/or previous conviction or other adverse criminal history in the United States or abroad, even if the record has been expunged, sealed, pardoned or the subject of any other amelioration:*

To begin your home study with Families United Network, Inc. follow the steps below.

#### **1. Step One-Pre Application:**

All families interested will receive a Description of Fees, a Powerpoint Presentation explaining the process, a copy of our Grievance Procedure, a Retainer Agreement, and an Application. These items along with a deposit must be obtained prior to beginning the home study process.

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## **2. Step Two-Prior to the Home Interview:**

Once you have submitted the application you will receive an informational email and a handbook explaining the items needed step by step. Your case worker will be contacting you to schedule your home interviews. Several items that may take a while to collect are outlined at this point to assist your family in getting started.

## **3. Step Three-Prepare for the Home Visit:**

The home study worker will visit the family to begin the interview process. The interview process can take a total of 3 to 4 hours. The interview can be completed in one home visit or multiple home visits. Many additional contacts will be held with the family throughout the process over the phone or in person depending on the location of the home. Several documents will be collected and are summarized and explained in the handbook that is provided to each family.

## **4. Step Four-During the Home Visit:**

Once the home study visit begins, the worker will review agency forms with you to review and sign. A home inspection is also completed at this home visit.

## **5. Step Five-Post Home Visit:**

Once the first home study visit has been completed you will need to take time to collect the following items. You can always complete these items earlier if you are able. However, please be aware that the home study cannot be signed until every item has been collected.

### ***B. Training:***

Families United Network, Inc. requires families to participate in adoption training education. This is completed through a variety of resources. The training is completed by the family during the home study process and completed prior to the completion of the home study report. Additional training may be required from the placement agency specifically for international adoption. However, most often the training offered by Families United Network is accepted as training in full. Additional training is recommended for all families after the home study is completed and prior to the placement of the child(ren).

## ***C. Agency Steps:***

The agency completes several steps for the family during the home study process. Often times the family does not have to concern themselves with these steps unless a problem develops. If a family has any record that may occur from the steps completed below they are asked to disclose this information in advance. Records that may be identified below are not always cause for a disapproval but failure to disclose information in advance can give cause for a disapproved home study. Families with any type of history must be prepared to explain the situation and provide additional information if needed. The following steps are completed by the agency:

### **Pennsylvania State Police Clearances:**

#### **Motor Vehicle Clearances:**

#### **Prothonotary Clearance:**

#### **Bankruptcy Clearance:**

#### **County Clearance**

#### **Past Agency Involvement:**

## ***D. Agency Specific Documents:***

Families adopting internationally may find some differences that are required from their placement agency. It is impossible to anticipate what these differences may be. Families must review the information provided by the placement agency and make sure this information is shared with your Families United Network worker. The most common differences can include the following:

*Notarized forms:* Many forms may need to be notarized such as the health statements, references, employment letters, and possibly more. If this is the case, Families United Network will accept a photo copy so that the original notarized forms can stay with the family to submit to their placement agency.

*Local Police Clearance letter:* Families United Network will normally complete a reference clearance from your local police department. But some placement agencies will not accept our clearance report and instead require a letter on letter head from your local police department indicating you have no record.

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***Mental Health Assessments:*** There are just a few countries that require a family to have a full mental health assessment prior to the completion of the home study. Please verify if this is needed in advance as it may take some time to schedule and obtain the results

## ***E. Home Study Finalization:***

After all of the home study elements are completed, the agency staff will prepare the home study report and forward it to you for review. At that time you must review the home study and make any needed corrections. Pay close attention to names and birth dates as they are most familiar to you just in case there was a typing error. In some situations the placement agency will also review the home study prior to final printing.

Once you are completely satisfied with the home study report and have proofed the report carefully, a final report will be prepared and printed. Once a family has paid for the complete price of the home study they will receive at least four original reports each signed and notarized. 1 copy is for the family, 1 copy is for your USCIS application (for international families only), 1 copy for your dossier (international families only), and 1 copy for the placement agency. If a placement agency has different instructions we will comply with the request.

Once the home study is complete and you have received your copy you will be able to prepare your dossier and application to USCIS. You must contact your placement agency for details and instructions. Families United Network can give you advice but is not directly involved or experienced in the next international steps.

## **Resource Information for Families**

Families United Network, Inc. is able to provide families with added information to assist them in the adoption process due to its extensive experiences with foster care and adoption services that have been provided to families over the years. This information is also helpful to families adopting domestically and internationally, as parenting skills and adoption information overlap, regardless of the type of adoption a family pursues. The information provided is not exclusive or exhausted. Many resources are available to families. The following information is a summary of information that is provided to all families working with Families United Network, Inc.



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## **A. *Post Adoption Services:***

Once a child is placed into a home the family will receive a minimum of three post adoption visits in their home. Post adoption visits are desired to evaluate the adjustment of the placement and answer any questions a family may have about the adoption process. In the event a family is in need of services, the social worker will identify resources for the family to explore.

### **1. Reports:**

The number of post adoption visits and reports varies from state to state; and from country to country. In all situations, families are required to participate in three visits as part of the Home Study Services. If further visits and reports are required they can be provided at the cost of \$300 a visit. In some cases a state or a country may not require post adoption visits and reports, however, to meet the policies of Families United Network, Inc. and the state of Pennsylvania three must be completed within 6 months to a year after the placement of the child.

Families United Network will comply with the requirements of the sending state or country and prepare the post placement reports. These reports often require the family to provide 8 to 10 photographs. Most times the family can email these photographs to the agency directly, and the agency will forward them along with your post placement report to your placement agency. In some situations, families must provide a printed copy of the photographs instead of electronic copies. The placement agency will give you the exact instructions.

### **2. Disruption or Dissolved Adoption:**

A disruption is a term commonly used when a placement ends prior to a family completing the finalization process. The term dissolved is a term commonly used when a finalized adoption ends. In both of these situations the adoptive family had decided to give the child up. This is a very sad situation and one that we never want a family to experience. If at any time a family is having second thoughts about the adoption process it is best to stop the adoption prior to the placement of the child.

Most commonly, families that find themselves in these situations are families who have decided to adopt an older child or special needs child. The child may develop behaviors that the family is unwilling to accept and they seek to disrupt or dissolve the adoption. This causes even more damage to the child emotionally. Families that decide to adopt older children or children with special needs must examine their motivations carefully. Families must anticipate that behaviors can always be unexpected, and difficult. Even the best parents and the best families may have birth children who act out and become very difficult. Yet the family would never dream of terminating their rights and giving the child away. However, with an adoptive child some families feel this is the best option if

things are not working out. We encourage families to think this through prior to deciding to adopt a child. Families must be willing to commit to the child no matter what the circumstances that may develop. It may not be easy, sometimes things may not get better quickly, but if you decide to adopt a child you must treat them as you would your own birth child.

### **3. SWAN Post Adoption Services:**

The state of Pennsylvania offers free post adoption services for any child who was adopted either domestically or internationally. If a family is experiencing problems they are encouraged to contact SWAN at 1-800-585-7926. These services are free of charge and available until the child reaches the age of 18. They can request assistance either from Families United Network, or any other agency that offers the service. A worker will be assigned and visit the family to assess the situation. Families can qualify for case management services, respite services, and or group counseling. Most commonly used are the case management services. These services provide the family with a worker who will research and assist the family in identifying services, counseling, or set up other resources to assist the family.

Too many times, families wait to contact SWAN when they may be in crisis. SWAN services are not designed to handle a crisis situation. For that reason, families are encouraged to contact SWAN for assistance prior to a crisis.

### ***B. Financial Resources:***

Financing an adoption can be very overwhelming for many families. In an effort to help families access funding information, our agency has compiled a list of available funding sources to help families pay for adoption related expenses. This list is ever changing and it is impossible to keep up with the changes. However, please refer to this list as a place to start your research. Additional information is available on the internet. New resources may become available as others may no longer be available.

#### **1. Potential Resources:**

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| Cadman Foundation                                | <a href="http://www.cadmanfoundation.org">www.cadmanfoundation.org</a><br>Funding to Christian married couples |
| Resources4adoption.com                           | Resources4adoption.com<br>Online resources   |
| Family Legacies Merged with LifeSong for Orphans | <a href="http://www.familylegacies.us">www.familylegacies.us</a><br>Loans for Christian families               |
| LifeSong for Orphans                             | <a href="http://www.lifesongfororphans.org">www.lifesongfororphans.org</a><br>Loans and fundraising support    |
| National Endowment for Financial Education       | Google "How to make adoption an affordable option"   |
| Ours By Grace or Shepherd's Crook                | <a href="http://www.theshepherdcrook.org">www.theshepherdcrook.org</a>   |

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| Abba Fund                             | <a href="http://www.abbafund.org">www.abbafund.org</a><br>low interest loans  |
| Gift of Adoption Fund                 | <a href="http://www.giftofadoption.org">www.giftofadoption.org</a><br>potential grants  |
| A Child Waits Foundation              | <a href="http://www.achildwaits.org">www.achildwaits.org</a><br>low interest loans  |
| Founding Family                       | <a href="http://www.foundingfamily.org">www.foundingfamily.org</a><br>potential grants  |
| God's Grace Adoption Ministry         | <a href="http://www.ggam.org">www.ggam.org</a><br>potential grants for Christian couples  |
| Show Hope                             | <a href="http://www.showhope.org">www.showhope.org</a><br>potential grants for Christian families   |
| Seas of Faces Foundation              | <a href="http://www.seaoffaces.org">www.seaoffaces.org</a><br>potential grants for Christian families<br>adopting from developing countries |
| Life Insurance Policy                 | Contact your life insurance company,<br>some families borrow against their policy   |
| Adoption Tax Credit                   | Contact your local tax income agent or<br>check the IRS website for current info  |
| Employee Adoption Assistance Benefits | Inquire with your employer for possible<br>benefits or contact 1-800-TO-ADOPT   |
| Military Families                     | Active duty personnel may qualify for<br>reimbursement of some expenses   |
| Community Fundraisers                 | Some families organize their own<br>fundraisers to raise and earn money   |
| United Way International              | Contact <a href="http://liveunited.org/">http://liveunited.org/</a> for<br>information about possible assistance                            |
| The National Adoption Foundation      | <a href="http://www.nafadopt.org">www.nafadopt.org</a><br>potential grants and loans  |
| Personal Loans                        | Please contact your local bank or credit<br>union for information regarding personal<br>loans.  |

## 2. **Frequently Asked Questions:**

*Can we/I apply for loans and grants at the same time? How much of a loan should we/I ask for while still applying for grants? What if I secure loans funds prior to be approved for a grant or vice versa?*

Yes, a family can apply for both loans and grants at the same time. We recommend when applying for both to always ask for max loan funds as there is more competition for grant money. If you did receive grant money after securing a loan you could possibly utilize the grant funds to pay down the balance of your loan. Grant money is typically issued to the adoption agency; however, if your balance is paid with the agency, they should issue a refund check for the overpaid

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amount. The funds can also be utilized for travel expenses. This information is subject to change and we suggest checking with a Certified Public Accountant regarding these topics.

## ***C. Lifebook Development:***

A lifebook is an ongoing child-friendly recording of a child's experiences. In common terms this is the family scrapbook and/or baby book. By the use of pictures, documents, photographs, and writings, children can recapture their past and begin to understand their birth story. If a family can include information known about the birth family and/or the country of origin this information can assist a child as they grow and develop.

Children, who are not being adopted as an infant, may have a lifebook that has already been started by either the birth family, orphanage or the foster family. The term lifebook may not be used, as different agencies may refer to this information in different terms. In some cases, this information is passed onto the adoptive family which can be very valuable to help explain the adoption process to the child and share with them their birth story as they grow.

Families who are adopting domestically may have the opportunity to participate in an open adoption. If that is the case a photo of the birth mother, birth family can be very helpful. Some adoptive parents are able to meet the birth parents and gain added information that can be shared with the child in the future. However, some adoptions are closed adoption and little information may be known. However, families may be able to request the social worker obtain non identifying information that can be shared with the child in the future. This information may include the parent's favorite color, food, music, interest, likes, dislikes, etc..

If adopting internationally families may be able to collect photos and information from the child's orphanage. If that is not possible, the next best thing that a family can do is to gather information about the orphanage and the child's caretakers, and as much cultural information as possible.

Some adoptees have many questions about where they came from, while others are not interested. You will not be able to anticipate the types of questions your child may have, so plan as best as you are able.

## ***D. Infant Crib Safety***

In an effort to support our mission, Families United Network, Inc. understands the importance of infant crib safety. Safe sleeping environments can significantly reduce the risks of Sudden Infant Death (SIDS). Below is a list of simple guidelines parents should follow to ensure safety in their child's crib. These guidelines have been developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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- Always place your baby on his or her back for every sleep time.
  - Always use a firm sleep surface. Car seats and other sitting devices are not recommended for routine sleep.
  - The baby should sleep in the same room as the parents, but not in the same bed (room-sharing without bed-sharing).
  - Keep soft objects or loose bedding out of the crib. This includes pillows, blankets, and bumper pads.
  - Wedges and positioners should not be used. (Please note: The use of any of these items it should be under the direction of a doctor.)
  - Pregnant woman should receive regular prenatal care.
  - Don't smoke during pregnancy or after birth.
  - Offer a pacifier at nap time and bedtime.
  - Avoid covering the infant's head or overheating.
  - Do not use home monitors or commercial devices marketed to reduce the risk of SIDS.
  - Infants should receive all recommended vaccinations.
  - Supervised, awake tummy time is recommended daily to facilitate development and minimize the occurrence of positional plagiocephaly (flat heads).

Free materials regarding safety in the crib can be ordered for you by Families United Network, Inc. staff. Families can also visit the following websites for further information regarding infant crib safety.

- [www.cribsforkids.org](http://www.cribsforkids.org)
- <http://www.sleepinsafetygrowinstyle.org>
- <http://www.safekids.org>
- <http://www.cpsc.gov>
- <http://www.keepingbabiesafe.org>

In June of 2000, Pennsylvania enacted the Infant Crib Safety Act which states that no commercial user shall manufacture, retrofit, sell, contract to sell or resell, lease, sublet or otherwise place in the stream of commerce, a full-size, non-full size crib, or play yard that is unsafe for any infant using the product.

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Cribs and other items are considered unsafe if:

- corner posts that extend more than 1/16-inch above end panels;
- slats more than 2-3/8 inches apart;
- a mattress support that releases easily from corner posts;
- cutout designs on the end panels;
- tears in mesh or fabric;
- missing or loose screws, bolts, or hardware;
- sharp edges, points, or rough surfaces on wood surfaces that are not smooth and free from splinters, splits or cracks.

Any violation of this act can result in a fine of up to \$1,000.

## ***E. Treatment Services:***

Many children may be in need of additional support. Their needs will vary widely. Referrals for service are usually done through the local school district, local County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Unit, or through the primary care physician.

### **1. Agency Assessments:**

Upon the placement of a child, a family may request a formal assessment be completed as one source of reference. The formalized assessment tool used by our agency is the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBC) by ASEBA. The Achenback System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA) uses an integrated set of rating forms for all ages. This approach offers a comprehensive approach to assess adaptive and maladaptive functioning. This tool is recommended for use after a family has had a child in their care for 6 months, and is only available for children ages 5 years or older. For children younger than 5 the assessment tool of Ages and Stages can be used to assess the child's basis development and emotional level.

Families will be given the results of the evaluations for reference. These assessment tools are only offered as assistance to families and not meant to replace any additional formal assessment provided by mental health or health care professionals. Families are encouraged to contact their family physician to review the medical information concerning the child.

### **2. Individual Counseling:**

Many children are in need of individual counseling. Some parents get false impressions about counseling and believe it can be a magic fix and get angry if a child's behavior becomes worse once counseling starts. It is important for adoptive families to understand that a child's need to see a counselor is important for a number of reasons. First, it is a way to access more intense services a child may need. Oftentimes, a child must first see an individual counselor to determine the need for increased services. A

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second reason individual counseling is important is that it allows an objective outside party to talk with the child. This person can add insight and help teach both the child and family skills to aid them in the adjustments needed for a successful placement. Common misconceptions concerning counseling may be as follows:

- a) My child is not talking to the counselor so it is a waste of time. Remember that it takes time for a child to build a relationship with a counselor. Many counselors are used to children who refuse to talk, and have ways to break through those barriers, but it may take time.
- b) The counseling is making the behavior worse. This may be true for a period of time. The saying, "it gets worse before it gets better" is true. Children who are suffering emotionally do not know how to communicate their feelings, so they act out in ways to get our attention. Just because a child is acting out after counseling is not a reason to end counseling. On the contrary, the counseling may be addressing important issues in order for the child to continue to progress.
- c) My child has no relationship with this counselor. Although this may be true, one must remember a relationship cannot be built after only a few sessions. Often, a family will feel the counseling is not working and they will stop scheduling the appointments. This, in turn, disrupts the relationship that was starting to build. Counseling appointments must be routine (bi-weekly) and ongoing over a length of time. Many children do not start to feel comfortable with a counselor until they have been seen for over 6 months.

### **3. Therapeutic Staff Support:**

Often referred to as wrap-around services; it usually involves an individual titled a Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS). This person can hold a variety of roles and it may depend on the service provider as to the type of TSS worker that is assigned to a child. This TSS may go to school with a child to redirect the child to pay attention, not act out, re-teach, etc. The TSS worker may participate in play therapy or some other type of therapy that is beneficial to the child and the family. Oftentimes, the TSS worker works directly in the home or school where the child lives. The parents (foster or adoptive) interact during the contact to continue to learn more about the child and the behaviors or disabilities that interfere with learning and adjustment. Children who qualify for TSS generally receive a specific number of hours of service each week. The waiting list for TSS services can be extensive at times. There are not enough workers available in this field and sometimes resources to pay for services are weak. TSS workers are also prone to have a high rate of turnover in the field. TSS can be very helpful to families and children, but it is important to understand the difficulties that can occur.

### **4. Group Counseling:**

Children (especially older children) may qualify for group counseling. Group counseling is a group of individuals that are all receiving services for a similar reason. It may be a group discussion about loss and grief or a group of abusers, etc. This type of counseling

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can be very successful and should be considered as an option for service if appropriate for any child in your home.

## **5. Support Groups:**

Families who have experienced seminal events often can be found in support groups. These support groups can be found through searching internet resources, or through research into your local areas resources. Support groups may consist of those families who have adopted, and/or those families dealing with specific special needs. Some support groups may be formal or informal only conversing through phone or internet chat rooms. Families are warned that many support groups may be run independent of qualified professionals and are not always an accurate source of legal or medical information.

## ***F. Notice of Privacy Practices for Protected Health Information:***

This notice describes how medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.

### **How Families United Network, Inc. Uses and Discloses Your Health**

**Information:** Families United Network, Inc. provides a broad range of services through a wide variety of social services programs. If you receive services from a Families United Network, Inc. program, the Families United Network, Inc. program may use your protected health information and disclose it to other health and human services programs to:

- a) Plan and provide your care and treatment
- b) Communicate with health care professionals who care for you
- c) Describe the care you receive
- d) Obtain reimbursement from private insurers or other government programs
- e) Verify that services billed were actually provided
- f) Educate health professionals
- g) Inform public health officials charged with improving healthcare
- h) Administer Families United Network, Inc.'s programs which provide public benefits, and/or health or human services
- i) Assess and improve the services provided and the outcomes achieved
- j) Pay for services you receive
- k) Inform you about other public programs and services

Families United Network, Inc. and its programs will not use or disclose your protected health information except as described in this notice, or otherwise authorized by law.

**Your Health Information Rights:** You have the right to:

- a) Request a restriction on certain uses and disclosures of your protected

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- health information
- b) Obtain a paper copy of this Notice of Privacy Practices upon request
  - c) Inspect and copy your protected health information
  - d) Request amendments to your protected health information
  - e) Obtain an accounting of disclosures of your protected health information
  - f) Request communications of your protected health information by alternative means or at an alternative address
  - g) Revoke your consent to use or disclose protected health information to the extent that it has not already been relied upon
  - h) File a complaint to Families United Network, Inc. and/or the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service if you believe your privacy rights have been violated.

**Families United Network, Inc. Program Duties:** Families United Network, Inc. social services programs each have a duty to:

- a) Maintain the privacy of your protected health information
- b) Provide you with a notice as to our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to protected health information we collect and maintain about you
- c) Abide by the terms of this notice
- d) Notify you if we are unable to agree to a requested restriction
- e) Accommodate reasonable requests you may have to communicate health information by alternative means or at an alternative address
- f) Provide an accounting of disclosures of your protected health information

Families United Network, Inc. or any of our social services programs may change its privacy practices and make the new privacy practices effective for all protected health information we maintain. Should our privacy practices change, we will mail a revised notice to the address you have supplied us.

**For More Information or to Report a Problem:** If you have questions and would like additional information, you may contact:

Thomas A. Neuhard, CEO at Families United Network, Inc.,  
276 Ashler Manor Drive, Muncy, PA 17756.  
Telephone: 1-800-326-8309  
Email: [tneuhard@families4kids.org](mailto:tneuhard@families4kids.org)

If you believe your privacy rights have been violated, you can file a complaint with (Privacy Officer) Thomas A. Neuhard, CEO or with the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. There will be no retaliation for filing a complaint.

**Examples of Disclosures for Treatment, Payment and Health Operations:**

*We will use your health information for treatment.* For example: Information

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obtained by a nurse, physician, psychiatrist/psychologist, or other member of your healthcare team will be recorded in your file used to determine the course of treatment that will work best for you.

*We will use your health information for payment.* For example: A bill may be sent to a county Children and Youth Agency or any private or public source of health coverage you have identified. The information on or accompanying the bill may include information that identifies you, as well as your diagnosis, procedures, and supplies used.

*We will use your health information for regular child welfare operations.* For example: Members of a quality assurance team may use information in your file to assess the care and outcomes in your case and others like it. This information will then be used in an effort to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of the services we provide.

## **Others who may receive your health information**

*Business Associates.* There are some services provided in our organization through contracts with business associates. When these services are contracted, we may disclose your health information to our business associate so that they can perform the job we've asked them to do. However, we require the business associate to appropriately safeguard your information.

*Research.* We may disclose information to researchers when the information is de-identified or when their research has been approved by an institutional review board that has reviewed the research proposal and established protocols to ensure the privacy of your health information.

*Funeral Directors:* We may disclose health information to funeral directors to carry out their duties, as required by law.

*Public health.* We may disclose your health information to public health or legal authorities charged with preventing or controlling disease, injury, or disability.

*Correctional institution:* Should you be an inmate of a correctional institution, we may disclose to the institution or agents thereof any health information necessary for your health and the health and safety of other individuals or for the administration of the institution.

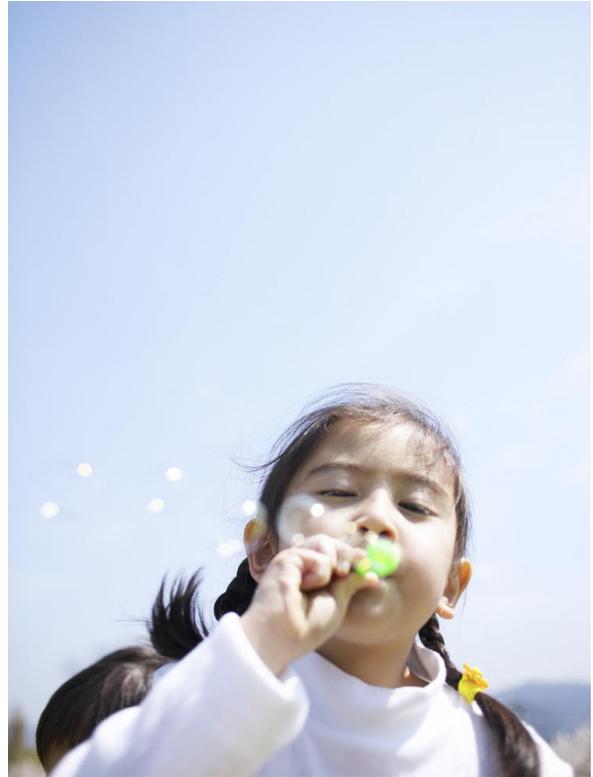
*Law enforcement.* We may disclose health information for law enforcement purposes.

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## **G. Multiethnic Placement Act:**

The multiethnic Placement Act was adopted in 1994 and was legislated to promote the best interest of children. This is accomplished through three initiatives: decreasing the length of time that children wait to be adopted, preventing discrimination in the adoption or foster placement of children (based on race, color or origin), and facilitating the identification and recruitment of resource parents who can meet children's needs.

All staff with Families United Network, Inc. attends cultural diversity training throughout their employment with the agency. Training is also available to families and staff in a self-study program through [www.fosterparent.com](http://www.fosterparent.com), as well as, the Competency Based Training program provided throughout Pennsylvania.



## **H. Nondiscrimination Statement:**

Families United Network, Inc. does not discriminate in regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin, age, or sex.

## **I. Fee Schedule:** (For more detail and explanation, contact the agency directly)

### **Home Study Services and Post Adoption Fee: \$2550**

- This home study fee is for families in need of a domestic home study. **Home Study Fees include the price of 10 hours of training, 3 post placement reports, 1 addendum, state police, and FBI clearances.**

### **Home Study Services and Post Adoption Specialized Fee: \$2700**

- This home study fee is for families in need of an international home study. **Home Study Fees include the price of 10 hours of training, 3 post placement reports, 1 addendum, state police, and FBI clearances.**

### **Domestic Infant Adoption Initial Fee: \$15,000**

- Domestic fees have many components. Contact the agency for a detailed list.

## **Refunds:**

Fees paid directly to Families United Network, Inc. by its client families charged on a fee for service basis. Clients are billed for services just prior to work on each unit commencing. This minimizes the need for refunds. In the unlikely event that an adoption decree is denied prior to this agency's completion of a fully paid, in process unit of service, and due to no fault of the client family, partial refunds may be provided.

Post Adoption Refund: In the event a family moves out of state, they will be required to locate a new agency to complete their post adoption services. Upon this agency receiving proof of each post adoption visit, the family will receive a refund of \$275 for each report. Refunds are only available for the three reports that would have been included in the initial charges to the client family but not completed. In the event that a client family halts the adoption proceeding, through no fault of the agency or Supervised Providers, there is no obligation to refund any previously paid fees.

## ***J. Grievance Policy:***

**Policy –Adoption:** Any birth parent or prospective adoptive parent may file a grievance regarding treatment by agency staff and/or agency supervised providers when he or she believes that compliance with Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption (Convention), Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (IAA), State Wide Permanency and Adoption Network, (SWAN), state or federal laws have been violated. A grievance may also be filed in regard to aspects of the program, privacy and/or confidentiality concerns, living conditions, violations of specific child rights, discipline, prejudice pertaining to race, religion or national origin, or any other matters that relate to the child or family's involvement with the agency or staff. Grievances may be filed without fear of retaliation.

## **Procedure**

- A. During the orientation process, every prospective adoptive family is given a copy of the grievance procedure and signs a statement acknowledging receipt of this procedure. A copy of this statement is maintained within the client case record.
- B. To file a grievance, an individual must complete the five sections of the Grievance or Appeal Notification form and submit it to one of the following: Families United Network employee, County Caseworker, Juvenile probation officer, mental health caseworker, Guardian ad Litem, attorney or court appointed special advocate (CASA worker). The party receiving the grievance notification form shall submit the grievance to the Families United Network program or office supervisor serving the family's child within 2 days of receipt. After initial review, the Families United Network designee will acknowledge receipt of the grievance on the Grievance or Appeal Receipt form and send it to the filing party within 2 business days of receiving it.
- C. The adoption program Supervisor and an assigned staff member review the complaint and investigate the incident within two (2) business days of receipt of the

written grievance. A written summary of the data and events related to the grievance is prepared by the Supervisor during this process and documented in the family or child's file, as appropriate. Fact finding interviews will be conducted with any third parties who have firsthand knowledge of the event(s).

- D. Based on the investigation, written summaries and interviews with all relevant parties, the Supervisor will make a determination no later than 7 business days from date of receipt of the formal written grievance.
- E. The Supervisor will notify the filing party of the outcome by providing them with the completed Grievance or Appeal Decision form no later than seven business days after receipt of the formal grievance. A written copy of the decision will be placed in the family file and a copy will be forwarded to the Executive Director. A central file of all grievances, investigations and outcomes will be maintained in the office of the Executive Director. Copies of the completed decision form are provided to the individuals the filing party chose to receive a copy of their Grievance or Appeal Form.
- F. If the filing party is dissatisfied with the outcome, he/she may complete a Grievance or Appeal Notification Form and submit it to the Executive Director. The Executive Director acknowledges receipt of the appeal in the Grievance or Appeal Receipt form completed and returned to the filing party within 2 business days of receiving it. The Executive Director will review the original written summaries and conduct further interviews, as indicated. Involved parties will be informed of the determination of the Executive Director via the "Grievance or Appeal Decision" form within seven business days of receipt of the appeal as submitted on the Grievance or Appeal Notification Form. A copy of the completed Grievance or Appeal Decision form is provided to all the individuals the family chose to receive a copy of their Grievance or Appeal Notification Form.
- G. If the filing party is dissatisfied with the decision of the Executive Director, they may submit a final appeal to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) using the Grievance or Appeal Notification Form. The CEO acknowledges receipt of the appeal in the Grievance or Appeal Receipt form completed and returned to the filing party within 2 business days of receiving it. The Executive Director presents the case to the CEO. The CEO makes the final ruling and writes a final written determination in the Grievance or Appeal Decision form. That determination is provided to the filing party within seven business days of receipt of the formal appeal as submitted on the Grievance or Appeal Notification Form. A copy of the completed Grievance or Appeal Decision form is provided to all the individuals the family chose to receive a copy of their Grievance or Appeal Notification Form.
- H. If a family has a complaint about an accredited/approved agency or person providing adoption services in accordance with the Hague Convention and it involves the Hague Convention, the Inter-country Adoption Act, the Federal regulations (22 CFR 96, 97, 98), and or a Hague Convention adoption case; complaints can be made by accessing the U.S. Department of State website.  
<http://adoptionusca.state.gov/HCRWeb/WelcomeForm.aspx>. Download the available

form and submit to the U.S. Central Authority, U.S. Department of State, 2201 C Street, NW Washington, DC 20520; 202-736-9080.

## ***J. Client Rights Policy:***

**Policy:** Families United Network, Inc. policy states that every client be informed of specific rights as outlined by the Department of Public Welfare and applicable state and federal laws. No client may be deprived of specific or civil rights. Rights may not be used as a reward or sanction. Client rights are reviewed and signed by each client, 7 years of age or older. Procedures to file grievances and properly report violations of a client's rights are included in our agency grievance policy which is reviewed by each client.

**Procedure:** Upon the initiation of services, the assigned Families United Network, Inc. staff will review the Child Rights and Responsibilities form with the client, if they are 7 years of age or older, and have him/her sign the form verifying that this information has been reviewed and that they understand their rights.

### **A. Specific client rights include:**

1. A client may not be discriminated against because of race, color, religious creed, disability, handicap, ancestry, sexual orientation, national origin, age or sex.
2. A client may not be abused, mistreated, threatened, harassed or subjected to corporal punishment.
3. A client has the right to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
4. A client has the right to be informed of the rules of the agency.
5. A client has the right to communicate and visit privately with his attorney and clergy.
6. A client has the right to receive service in a manner that is non-coercive and protects the person's right to self-determination.
7. A client has the right to practice their religion or faith of choice, or not to practice any religion or faith.
8. A client has the right to participate in decisions regarding the services provided.
9. A client has the right to discuss any complaints following the Families United Network, Inc. Grievance Policy.
10. A client has the right to access a Families United Network employee 24-hours a day; 7 days a week.
11. A client has the right to refuse any service, treatment, or medication, unless mandated by law or court order. A child will be informed of the consequences of such refusal which could result in the termination or discharge from the program.
12. A client has the right to confidentiality and privacy except in cases where the proper authorities must be notified about any child abuse, criminal activity, or about any person's threat to harm themselves or others.

### **B. Client Responsibilities & Expectations:**

1. Treat others with courtesy and respect.
2. Participate in services.
3. Call if you need to cancel an appointment.

4. Obey all court and agency rules.
5. Provide information to the agency including changes in the client's life, including address or telephone number, work, marital status, health, or changes in the household.
6. Inform the agency of any safety concerns or problems as they arise.
7. In the event a client is uncooperative or fails to meet the appropriate responsibilities and expectations, their need for further services will be re-evaluated. This may result in a discharge or termination of services with Families United Network, Inc.

**C. Families United Network, Inc. Responsibilities:**

1. Assess the client's needs
2. Plan for appropriate services
3. Make referrals for services as needed/recommended
4. Protect confidentiality
5. Report abuse to authorities
6. Keep, release, and destroy records as required by law
7. Testify in court and or prepare court documents as required
8. Ensure a child's safety at all times
9. Plan for a permanent home for children
10. Involve clients in the service plans and development

## ***K. Checklist for Family:***

| <b>Completed Forms to Send to your Caseworker</b>  | <b>Sent</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Casey Home Assessment Protocol (CHAP) Forms  |             |
| Any Placement Agency Specific information or documents (as needed)                               |             |
| Birth Certificates   |             |
| Car Inspection Verification  |             |
| Certificate of Net Worth   |             |
| Child Abuse Clearance and CPS Training   |             |
| Child Abuse Policy   |             |
| Training Certificates – Because They Waited (basic 10 hour course)                               |             |
| Training specific to the country of international adoption or a general topic for domestic cases |             |
| Training Certificate on Child Protective Service Law-Mandated Reporting                          |             |
| Confidentiality Policy   |             |
| Consent to use PHI   |             |
| County Reference Acknowledgement   |             |
| Car Insurance  |             |
| Car Registration   |             |
| Drivers License  |             |
| Home Insurance   |             |
| Discipline Policy  |             |
| Disclosure Statements  |             |
| Divorce Decree   |             |
| Employment Verification Letter   |             |
| Family and Home Photographs  |             |
| FBI Clearance  |             |
| Firearms Policy  |             |
| First Aid Training   |             |
| Grievance and Client Rights  |             |
| Guardianship Statement   |             |
| Health History Forms   |             |
| Health Statements  |             |
| Home and Safety Checklist  |             |
| Letter of Intent – if needed   |             |
| Marriage Certificate   |             |
| Mental Health Statement if needed  |             |
| Out of State Child Abuse Clearance   |             |
| Paid in Full   |             |
| Tax Returns for the past three years   |             |
| Pennsylvania State Police Clearance  |             |
| Pet Vaccination  |             |
| Photo/Video/Audio Release  |             |
| Post Placement / Adoption Agreement  |             |
| Medical Insurance verified for Child   |             |
| Release of Information – For the County Children and Youth                                       |             |
| Release of Information – For the local Police Departments  |             |
| Release of Information -.For any other affiliations  |             |
| Social Security Statements   |             |
| References –Three more if required by the placement agency                                       |             |
| Training Education Statement   |             |
| Water Test Results   |             |