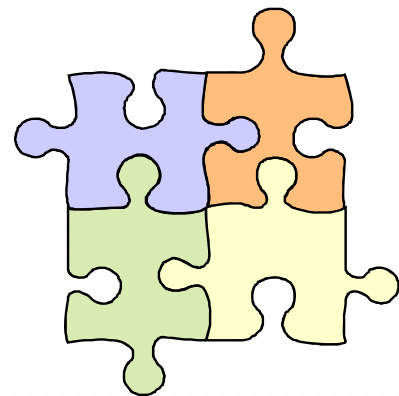


# Psychosocial Assessment for International Adoption

## Guidance Document

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October 2007

Report prepared in collaboration with the **Ordre des psychologues du Québec**,  
the **Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux du Québec**,  
the **Directors of Youth Protection** and  
the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale)

For a copy of this document,  
call (514) 873-5226  
or send an email to: **[adoption.quebec@msss.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:adoption.quebec@msss.gouv.qc.ca)**  
or write to:

Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale  
Suite 1.01  
201 Crémazie Boulevard East  
Montreal, Quebec H2M 1L2

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The masculine gender, when used in this text,  
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## INTRODUCTION

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A psychosocial assessment of a person wishing to adopt a child domiciled outside Quebec is required by the Quebec Civil Code and the conditions of this assessment are put forth in the Youth Protection Act. A psychosocial assessment allows the authorities in charge of the adoption, both from Quebec and from the child's country of origin, to make sure that the adoptive parent is able to satisfy the physical, mental and social needs of the child, and to act in his best interests and with respect for his fundamental rights as required by international law.

The legislation regarding international adoption states that it is up to the *Ordre professionnel des psychologues du Québec* and the *Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux du Québec*, along with the Directors of Youth Protection and the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux to define the basic criteria of a psychosocial assessment. The law also specifies that these criteria must be made public.

This document reflects the legislator's intention to state and explain these criteria, in order to guide the adoptive parent through the assessment process with the professional who will perform the psychosocial assessment.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSESSMENT PREREQUISITES

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### Choosing the child's country of origin

Do you fulfill the requirements of the country where you wish to adopt? Do you fulfill Quebec's eligibility criteria?

The approved international adoption organizations and the Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale can inform the applicant about requirements, which differ from one country to another, regarding the age of parents, the minimum number of years of marriage, the presence of biological or adopted children in the family, the eligibility of single people and other factors. They may also answer questions concerning the total cost of the adoption process and the necessary duration of the trip to the child's country of origin, among others.

The applicant must also get information about countries' requirements regarding the progress reports that need to be provided after the child's adoption. The requirements vary from one country to another, some requiring follow-up until the child reaches eighteen years of age.

### Opening an adoption file

After choosing the country in which you wish to adopt a child and the organization with which you will carry out the procedure, you must sign a contract with the latter and fill out an application form to open an adoption file using a form which will be given to you.

Once the organization has forwarded the application to the Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale, you will receive a letter confirming that your adoption file has been opened.

**The professional evaluator will require that you present this letter to him at your first meeting.**

### Choosing an evaluator

In general, the Director of Youth Protection or the person whom he appoints will carry out the psychosocial assessment of a person who wants to adopt a child domiciled outside Quebec. Generally, you must contact the Youth Centre in your area to begin the assessment process.

In certain cases, the law allows you to choose an evaluator from a list prepared by the *Ordre des psychologues du Québec* and the *Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux du Québec*. In the following cases, however, you must contact the Youth Center in your area:

1. You wish to adopt in a country where the *Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* ("Hague Convention") is in effect.
2. The country in which you wish to adopt does not make an adoption-related decision before the child is moved to Quebec.
3. The country in which you wish to adopt requires that the assessment be carried out under the supervision of a government authority.

It is recommended that you verify with the Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale or the approved organization whether you may choose your evaluator or whether you need to contact the Youth Center in your area.

It should be noted that your psychosocial assessment may need to be entirely redone if, after being assessed by a private practice professional, you decide to change the country in which you wish to adopt a child and this country requires that psychosocial assessment be carried out under the supervision of a Youth Center.

You will be required to pay for the services provided by the professional at the current rates. If you change your original request, for example by changing the country of origin or the child's age category, there will be additional costs proportional to the support services requested.

The professional orders are equipped with mechanisms intended to ensure the public's protection by supervising the related professional practices. If you are not satisfied with the professional services of your evaluator, do not hesitate to speak with him about it. If you do not come to an agreement or if you have any questions concerning the way the evaluator proceeded, you should contact the professional order. If you believe that the evaluator did not conduct himself in a professional manner, you may lodge a complaint with the professional order.

For any service provided by the Youth Center, **you also have the right to lodge a complaint** which will be processed by a person designated by the establishment.

### Update of the psychosocial assessment

It should be noted that your psychosocial assessment may need to be entirely redone if, after being assessed by a private practice professional, you decide to change the country in which you wish to adopt a child and this country requires that psychosocial assessment be carried out under the supervision of a Youth Center.

In addition, during the adoption process, any material change in your personal or family situation (e.g. pregnancy, job loss, separation, divorce, death, new cohabitation, illness) could also lead to an update of the psychosocial assessment, depending on the change's potential significance or impact with regard to the proposed adoption.

## Costs

You will be required to pay for the services provided by the professional at the current rates. If you change your original request, for example by changing the country of origin or the child's age category, there will be additional costs proportional to the support services requested.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSESSMENT

The social worker or the psychologist who undertakes the psychosocial assessment must analyze various aspects of your personality, your life as a couple, if applicable, and your social relationships. This is no mere formality, but an analysis of your parenting capacity.

To perform his work according to established standards, the evaluator must meet with you individually and pay a visit to your residence in order to obtain a complete picture of your home life. The psychosocial assessment may also constitute a development process and help you to think seriously about your life process.

This assessment is thus an essential step in your adoption project. The evaluator will have to come to a conclusion about your ability to carry out your adoption process.

The State that entrusts a child to international adoption assumes a heavy responsibility and must make sure that it does so without fear and in the child's best interests. In addition, by agreeing to implement the *Hague Convention*, Quebec has committed itself, under the terms of article 15 of this International Convention, to setting up measures to guarantee that the parenting ability of applicants is professionally confirmed; hence the importance of the psychosocial assessment.

## Motivation

Even before dealing with the tangible aspects of an adoption, it is important to consider the motivation behind any such process. Questioning is essential. Why do you wish to adopt a child? For what reasons are you inclined towards international adoption? There are surely conditions or concrete circumstances encouraging you to adopt. Are you

able to identify them? What are the sociocultural influences, psychological reasons or physical conditions that justify your desire to adopt? You must try to identify these reasons to better understand the motivation behind your desire to adopt.

By adopting, you become the second parent of a child: you must understand your role, accept it and feel at ease. You must reflect upon the real expectations that you have of a child; there is always a difference between the "ideal" and "real" child; the child you dream of and the one you will be entrusted with. You must be honest with yourself.

## Personal history

Entrusting a child to adoption constitutes a major concern for the State of origin given the abandonment, rejection, even mourning for the biological family, experienced by the child. It is thus important for the State to make sure that the future well-being of the child will be all the more protected and ensured.

For this purpose, while reviewing your adoption project, the evaluator will study your material circumstances as well as your moral and psychosocial situation. This assessment will enable the persons in charge of the adoption, both in Quebec and in the child's country of origin, to make sure that you have sufficient material means and are in good health, physically and psychologically, factors which will promote the adopted child's full development.

### Psychosocial Assessment Schedule Basic Requirements

#### 1<sup>st</sup> section: Purpose of the project

1. Presentation of the application.
2. Evaluator's clarifications and adjustments.
3. Purpose of the project.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> section: Applicant's personal history and parenting skills

4. Socioeconomic and cultural situation.
5. Personal history analysis of each spouse.
6. Development of the conjugal relationship.
7. Parent-child relationships (if applicable).
8. Parenting skills relating to international adoption.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> section: Discussion with the applicant

9. Effects of carrying out the adoption project.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> section: Presentation of conclusions and recommendations

##### 10. Conclusion and recommendation:

- 1° Summary of the analysis and professional opinion.
- 2° Recommendation regarding the assessed project and considerations relative to welcoming an older child, a sibling or a child with special needs.

The assessment also makes it possible to observe the sociocultural setting in which the child will grow up. The appointed evaluator will invite you to speak about your



personal experiences, your relationship with your parents and other members of your family, your education, the difficulties you have encountered and your main professional achievements.

In short, he will recreate your personal history in order to help you discover its significant stages as well as the people and relationships that may influence your adoption project.

### Conjugal relationship

You will also have to agree to reveal the type of interpersonal relationship that you have with your spouse, the degree of satisfaction that you draw from it, your ability to communicate with your partner as well as your fertility problems, if, and their impact on your emotional and sexual life.

Whether you are married or live alone, an analysis of the way you satisfy your emotional needs and of your support network is essential. The evaluator must measure the latent risks of physical and sexual abuse with regard to children. With the child's best interests always in mind, the evaluator must detect signs of such abuse, in your personal history or in your current emotional behaviour, including the expression of your sexuality.

With regard to heterosexual couples living in common law or homosexual couples, neither the Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale nor the approved organizations in international adoption can unilaterally submit such files to countries of origin without checking their eligibility with the foreign authorities. It should be noted that few or no countries are open to this type of request. In any case, the psychosocial assessment must mention the type of relationship that exists.

### Parenting skills

If you already have children, the assessment is an opportunity to review the family dynamics in your home, to question yourself about your children's attitudes and behaviour and about their support for your international adoption project, because such a decision requires a commitment from all members of the family.

Whether or not you already have children, you will have to question yourself about your ability to connect with the child of another couple and to assume responsibility for revealing his origins to him, which would eventually enable him to reconnect with his biological parents. You will have to envision yourself as a parent who will be responsible for the physical, emotional, social and intellectual needs of a child who will go through various stages of development before

reaching adulthood. You must also consider the significance of adopting a child from another country.

In addition, you must examine various possibilities, including, for example the age of the child. Would you accept a child over three years of age? Would you agree to adopt two or more siblings (brothers, sisters)? Would you be ready to accept twins? You should also reflect on your capacity to accept a handicapped child or one whose health could require medical treatment. It is also necessary to think about the nature and the seriousness of the handicap that you will have to face as well as your ability to accept it.

In short, the ideal child is not always the child that will be entrusted to you. The child that you will adopt has already suffered from rejection. It is necessary for you to think of the difficulties that may arise. It is difficult to conceive of an adoption failing. And yet, there are adopted children who are rejected by adoptive families. You must acknowledge your strengths and limits. You must understand that the child you will adopt needs to be accepted for who he is and not only for who you wish him to be.

## EFFECTS OF CARRYING OUT THE ADOPTION PROCESS

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You must also understand that you should anticipate the reactions of your family, friends, colleagues and even your neighbourhood to the arrival of your child. It is necessary to prepare yourself to face the foreseeable and unforeseeable difficulties of this event in your life. Moreover, in the majority of cases, your child will make your status as an adoptive parent obvious everywhere you go. Are you ready to cope with this? How will you react when you have to confront this reality on a daily basis? Will you be able to prepare your child to deal with his differences and help him answer the questions he will be asked?

### Sociobiological history search and international reunions

Do you know that the new Quebec Civil Code entitles an adopted person of full age or an adopted minor of 14 years of age or over to obtain information enabling him to find his biological parents if they have consented thereto? The same applies to biological parents of an adopted **child provided he, once adult, agrees beforehand**. The Quebec Civil Code also gives an adopted minor of less than 14 years of age the right to obtain information allowing him to find his biological parents if they, as well as his adoptive parents, have agreed to it beforehand.

How will you react to the possibility of a sociobiological history search that can lead to a reunion between your adopted child and his biological parents?

## DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED

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The professional or the Youth Center will ask you to submit certain original documents to support your adoption request. These documents will be returned to you once they have been reviewed by your evaluator. You will also need them to complete your adoption file. These documents include:

- ❖ A letter attesting to the opening of a file at the Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale (to be presented at your first appointment).
- ❖ A medical certificate.
- ❖ A certificate of Good Conduct from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Sûreté du Québec.
- ❖ Income Statements.
- ❖ A solvency certificate.
- ❖ Reference letters.

This list may be longer depending on requirements of the child's country of origin.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The evaluator must send you his recommendations concerning your adoption project. You will then know if you should or should not pursue your project. The best interests of the child who is up for adoption are at stake.

Whether the adoption recommendation is favourable or unfavourable to your process, the Secrétariat à l'adoption internationale will require the complete psychosocial assessment report. Three types of recommendations can stem from this psychosocial assessment :

- 1° the **acceptance of** your adoption project enabling you to proceed with the preparation of your file.
- 2° the **deferral** of your adoption project, because the evaluator noted certain difficulties relating to the achievement of your process and asks that you overcome them before proceeding.
- 3° the **refusal** of your adoption project, because it does not correspond to a desirable living process, either for you or for the child, in consideration of his best interests.

