



GUIDE · CALIFORNIA

After the decree: your post-adoption checklist

Birth certificates, Social Security, passports, insurance, wills, benefits and records: the practical steps that follow a finalised adoption, in the order most families take them.

Current as of September 2026 · General information for families in California, not legal advice.

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In the first 30 days

- ☐ Order certified copies of the Adoption Order. Most families need three or more.
- ☐ Add your child to your health insurance. Employer group plans must generally let you enroll a child within 30 days of an adoption or placement for adoption, and Covered California offers a 60-day special enrollment period. If you added the child at placement, check that the record shows the child's new name.
- ☐ Check your leave. California Paid Family Leave can pay benefits while you bond with a child within the first year after placement, and the California Family Rights Act can protect your job during that time if you qualify.
- ☐ Tell your child's doctor, school and childcare provider about any change of name or parent details.

Birth certificate and identity documents

New birth certificate

For a child born in California, the California Department of Public Health issues a new birth certificate after it receives the report of the adoption, and there is a fee. The original is sealed. For a child born in another state, that state's vital records office issues the new certificate. For a child born abroad and adopted or readopted in California, ask us about a California record of foreign birth.

Social Security

Apply for a corrected card in your child's new name, or a first card if your child does not have a number, using form SS-5 with a certified copy of the Adoption Order and proof of your child's identity and

citizenship.

Passport

Apply for a passport in your child's new name. Children under 16 must apply in person on form DS-11, usually with both parents present or a signed consent form (DS-3053) from the parent who cannot attend. Bring a certified copy of the Adoption Order as evidence of parentage.

Citizenship, for intercountry adoptions

Most children adopted abroad by a U.S. citizen become citizens automatically once they live in the United States as lawful permanent residents in the citizen parent's legal and physical custody. Children who arrived on an IR-3 or IH-3 visa should receive a Certificate of Citizenship automatically. If yours has not, or your child arrived on an IR-4 or IH-4 visa, apply on form N-600 after the readoption.

Money and taxes

- **Federal adoption tax credit.** Qualified adoption expenses may earn a federal credit, claimed on IRS Form 8839. The maximum amount, and how much of it can be refunded, change over time, so check the form instructions for the year you claim. Special rules apply to children with special needs.
- **California adoption costs credit.** If you adopted a child from the custody of a California public agency, you may be able to claim 50% of qualifying costs, up to \$2,500 per child ([Cal. Rev. & Tax. Code § 17052.25](#)).
- **Adoption Assistance Program.** If your child receives payments, tell the county about any change of address or circumstances, and ask for a review if your child's needs change.
- **Employer benefits.** Some employers reimburse adoption costs. Ask your human resources team.

We are not tax advisers. Please speak to a tax professional about your own return.

Wills, guardians and beneficiaries

In California, an adopted child inherits from and through the adoptive parents just as any other child does ([Cal. Prob. Code § 6450](#)). In most cases the inheritance link to the birth parents ends, with some exceptions, including in certain stepparent adoptions ([Cal. Prob. Code § 6451](#)). The rest of your planning does not update itself:

- ☐ Update your will or trust to name your child, and nominate a guardian in case something happens to you.
- ☐ Update beneficiary designations on life insurance, retirement accounts and bank accounts. These pass outside a will.
- ☐ If your child has a disability or receives means-tested benefits, ask about a special needs trust before leaving assets to them directly.

Contact agreements and records

- **Contact agreements.** If you have a court-approved Contact After Adoption Agreement, follow it and keep a simple record of letters, photographs and visits. If a dispute arises, the law requires a good-faith attempt at mediation before either side asks the court to enforce, change or end the agreement. A breach never undoes the adoption ([Cal. Fam. Code § 8616.5](#)).

- **The court file is confidential.** Without a court order, only the parties, their attorneys and certain agencies can inspect it ([Cal. Fam. Code § 9200](#)).
- **Information for adoptees.** Adult adoptees can ask the California Department of Social Services, or the agency that handled the adoption, for non-identifying background and medical information, and California has a consent-based system for sharing identifying information between adoptees and birth relatives ([Cal. Fam. Code § 9203](#); [Cal. Fam. Code § 9204](#)).
- **Keep your child's story safe.** Store the order, court papers, letters from the birth family and photographs together, for the day your child asks.

If your child is Native American

Adoption does not end a child's tribal membership or eligibility. Keep the tribe's contact details and your child's enrollment records, and follow any agreement made with the tribe. Federal law gives an adult adoptee of Indian heritage the right to information needed to establish tribal membership ([25 U.S.C. § 1917](#)).

Support for your family

Support does not end at the decree. Ask your agency or county about post-adoption services, and if you adopted a relative, the [California Kinship Navigator](#) can help. If you need someone to talk to at any hour, call or text 988.

Sources

- [Cal. Fam. Code § 8616.5](#)
- [Cal. Fam. Code § 9200](#)
- [Cal. Fam. Code § 9203](#)
- [Cal. Fam. Code § 9204](#)
- [Cal. Prob. Code § 6450](#)
- [Cal. Prob. Code § 6451](#)
- [Cal. Rev. & Tax. Code § 17052.25](#)
- [IRS: About Form 8839](#)
- [Social Security Administration: number and card](#)
- [U.S. Department of State: passports for children under 16](#)
- [USCIS: Form N-600](#)
- [California EDD: Paid Family Leave](#)
- [25 U.S.C. § 1917](#)

This is general information about California law as of September 2026. It is not legal advice, and reading it does not create an attorney–client relationship. The law changes and every family's situation is different, so please get advice about your own circumstances before acting on it.