Interstate Adoption Guidance: Questions to Ask Before You Travel for Placement

Adopting a child from another state brings a layer of complexity that many families do not expect. You may have found a match, completed a home study, and felt ready to move forward. But crossing state lines with a child who is not yet legally yours requires careful planning. Each state has its own laws, and the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) governs how children move between states for adoption. Without proper preparation, you could face delays, extra trips, or even a disrupted placement. The key is to ask the right questions before you pack your bags.

What Does the Interstate Compact Require Before Travel?

The ICPC is a legally binding agreement among all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Its purpose is to ensure that a child placed across state lines receives the same protections and services they would receive in their home state. Before you can bring a child into your home, both the sending state (where the child currently lives) and the receiving state (where you live) must approve the placement. This process involves paperwork, home study reviews, and sometimes additional background checks. Traveling before receiving ICPC approval can jeopardize the entire adoption.

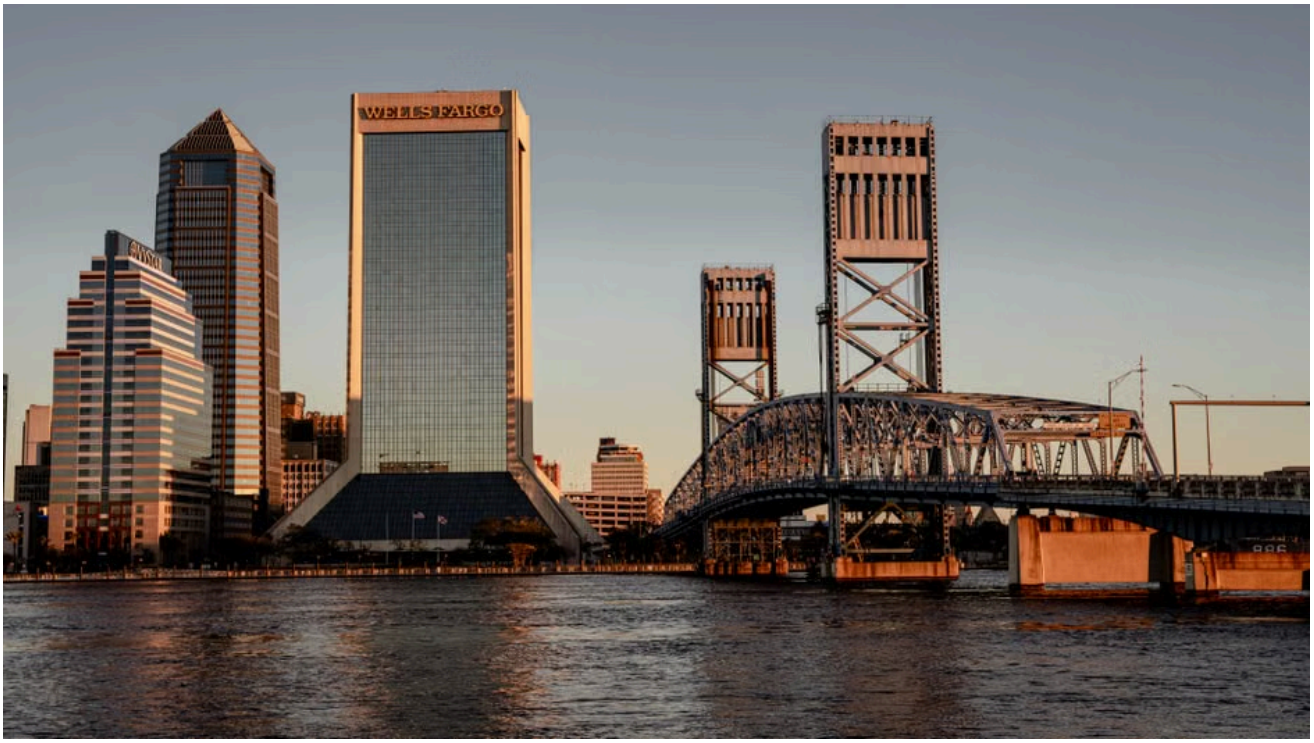
Ask your adoption agency or attorney whether ICPC approval has been granted. Do not assume that a verbal okay is enough. Written approval from both state compact offices is required before you can physically take the child across state lines. Some families travel to the child's state, wait for approval, and then return home. Others bring the child on a temporary basis under specific conditions. Know which scenario applies to your situation before you buy a plane ticket.

Who Has Legal Authority Over the Child Right Now?

Before you travel, clarify who holds legal custody and what rights the birth parents have. In some adoptions, the birth parents have already relinquished their rights. In others, the process is ongoing, and the child may be in the legal custody of a state agency or a foster care system. Understanding the current legal status helps you know what documents you need and what risks remain.

For example, if the birth mother has not yet signed a formal consent, you may be traveling to a state where the revocation period lasts longer than in your home state. Florida adoption law, which governs adoptions finalized in Florida, has its own timeframe for consent revocation. But the child's birth state may have different rules. Ask your legal team how the birth state's laws

interact with Florida's requirements. This is especially important if you plan to finalize the adoption in Florida after the placement.



Has the Home Study Been Approved by Both States?

Your home study is the foundation of the ICPC process. The sending state will review it to ensure your home meets their standards, not just Florida's. Even if a Florida agency approved your home study, the child's home state may request additional information. Some states require a separate home study update or a letter from your local agency confirming that you are still eligible. Delays often happen because the home study is missing a signature, a date, or a specific attachment.

Ask your caseworker whether the home study has been sent to the ICPC office in the sending state and whether it has been accepted. Do not assume that one state's approval automatically transfers to another. Each state has its own set of requirements. A home study that works for Florida may not satisfy a more stringent state like New York or California. Get confirmation in writing before you schedule travel.

What Happens If the Placement Falls Through While You Are Away?

No one wants to think about a placement falling apart, but preparing for that possibility can save you from a legal and emotional nightmare. If you travel to another state and the birth parent changes their mind, or if a legal issue arises, you need to know what happens to the child and what your obligations are. In some cases, the child may need to return to foster care

or to a relative in their home state. In others, you may be asked to keep the child temporarily until a new plan is made.

Talk to your attorney about contingency plans. Ask whether you would be allowed to return home with the child if the adoption does not proceed. Also ask about financial responsibility for the child's care during the interim. Some states require the receiving family to cover all costs until the child is placed elsewhere. Understanding these risks helps you make an informed decision about whether to travel at all.

Do You Need a Temporary Placement Agreement?

In some interstate adoptions, the child may be placed with you on a temporary basis before the ICPC is fully approved. This is more common in identified adoptions where the birth mother and adoptive family have an ongoing relationship. A temporary placement agreement outlines the terms under which the child stays with you, including who pays for medical care, who makes educational decisions, and what happens if an emergency arises.

Ask your agency whether a temporary placement agreement is appropriate for your situation. If so, have it reviewed by an attorney who understands both the sending state's laws and Florida adoption law. A poorly written agreement could create confusion later, especially if the placement becomes permanent. Make sure the agreement includes a clear timeline and a process for transitioning to a permanent placement once ICPC approval comes through.

What Travel Documents Will You Need?

When you travel to pick up a child, you may need more than a diaper bag and a car seat. Some states require a notarized letter from the birth parent or the agency authorizing you to travel with the child. Others require a medical release form or a copy of the ICPC packet. If you are flying, the airline may ask for proof that you have legal authority to transport the child. Check with your airline and with the child's home state about required documents.



Keep copies of all paperwork in your carry-on bag, not your checked luggage. This includes the ICPC approval letter, the home study, the birth parent's consent forms, and any temporary custody orders. If you are stopped at an airport or a state line, having these documents on hand can prevent a stressful situation. Also ask whether the child's birth state requires a specific form for medical consent or for crossing state lines. Some states have strict rules about taking a child out of the county where they were born.

For families working with a Florida-based attorney, resources like jacksonvilleadoptionattorney.com can help clarify which documents are needed for a smooth interstate move. They can also coordinate with legal counsel in the child's home state to ensure nothing is overlooked.

How Will Court Jurisdiction Work After Placement?

Once the child is living with you in Florida, a court must finalize the adoption. But which court has jurisdiction? In most cases, the child must reside in the receiving state for a certain period before the local court can assume jurisdiction. This waiting period, often six months, is designed to ensure the placement is stable and that the family is ready to proceed.

Ask your attorney whether the sending state will retain jurisdiction until finalization, or whether jurisdiction will transfer to Florida after a set time. This affects where you file paperwork, which

judge hears the case, and what laws apply. Some states require the adoptive parents to return to the child's home state for the final hearing. Others allow the adoption to be completed in Florida, provided the ICPC requirements have been met. Knowing this upfront helps you plan for time off work, travel expenses, and court appearances.

What Are the Residency Requirements in Your State?

Florida, like many states, has its own residency requirements for adoption finalization. You must typically live in Florida for a certain period before you can file a petition for adoption. If you travel to another state to pick up the child, the clock starts when you return home with the child. Make sure you have proof of residency, such as a Florida driver's license, utility bills, or a lease agreement. Some courts also require that the child has been in your physical custody for a minimum number of days before the final hearing.

Ask your adoption agency or attorney whether your specific Florida county has any additional local rules. Some counties may require a post-placement report or a follow-up home visit before the finalization hearing. Knowing these details in advance prevents last-minute surprises.

Have You Planned for Medical and Insurance Needs?

Before you travel, confirm that your health insurance will cover the child from the moment they are placed with you. Some policies require you to add the child within a certain number of days, while others do not cover a child until the adoption is finalized. Ask your insurance provider for written confirmation of coverage. Also find out whether the child's birth state has a Medicaid program that may continue temporarily after placement. Some states provide transitional medical assistance for children adopted from foster care, but the rules vary widely.



Carry a list of the child's known medical needs, allergies, and medications. If the child has a chronic condition, ask the sending agency for a medical summary and a supply of any prescriptions. It is also wise to identify a pediatrician in your area who accepts new patients and is familiar with adoption-related medical issues. Having this information ready before you travel reduces stress and ensures the child receives continuity of care.

Stay Organized and Communicate Clearly

Interstate adoption requires coordination among multiple parties: your agency, the child's agency, attorneys in both states, the ICPC offices, and sometimes the courts. Miscommunication is common. To avoid it, keep a written timeline of every step, including dates when documents were sent and received. Use email for important communications so you have a record. If you are working with a Florida adoption attorney, they can serve as a central point of contact. Resources such as jacksonvilleadoptionattorney.com offer guidance that helps families stay on track from matching through finalization.

Ask your agency for a checklist specific to your adoption. No two interstate placements are exactly alike. The questions above provide a starting point, but your situation may require additional steps. The more you ask before you travel, the smoother the process will be. A well-prepared family is a confident family, and that confidence benefits the child who is about to join your home.