

Guidance for Completing the Commissioner's Designated Adoption and Foster Care Study Format

All county and private/non-profit child-placing agencies are required to complete adoption and foster care home studies and updates using the commissioner's designated format.

For child welfare practice, the commissioner's one study format for foster care and adoption is intended to facilitate concurrent planning and reduce barriers to timeliness and permanency.

The designated format is a home study assessment that summarizes information gathered during the initial home study and annual update process. Below are the three forms that must be completed to be compliant with the required Commissioner's Designated Format for completing an adoption and foster care study:

- Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Application ([DHS-4258A](#))
- Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Individual Fact Sheet ([DHS-4258B](#))
- Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Home Study Assessment ([DHS-4258D](#)) or Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Assessment Update ([DHS-4258E](#)).

I. Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Application Instructions ([DHS-4258A](#))

The application is completed by prospective foster and/or adoptive parent(s), including relative custodians, and submitted to a county social services or child-placing agency. **The prospective foster and/or adoptive parents in the home must be applicants.** The purpose of the home study process is to assess the capacities and abilities of prospective adoptive and foster families. The assessment must accurately reflect the adults living in the home who have or will have the responsibility of parenting the foster or adoptive child. An individual in the home who has or may have the responsibility of a parent in the family must not be considered a household member for the purpose of approval for child foster care licensure and/or adoption of a foster child. Any deviation from this practice will either affect or delay permanency. [Minn. Stat., section 260C.215, subd. 4] Permanency may be impacted if the

II. Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Individual Fact Sheet Instructions ([DHS-4258B](#))

The individual fact sheet includes questions of a personal nature. The purpose of this information is to allow an agency to fully understand a prospective foster/adoptive parent's experiences, assessing strengths and needed supports. If a prospective foster/adoptive parent has specific concerns regarding these questions, they are

Foster care licensure has requirements in addition to completing a home study. Other forms that are required include:

- Complaint and Grievance Procedure
- Drug and Alcohol Policy
- Discipline Policy
- Child Foster Care Addendum
- Foster Parent Agreement form ([DHS-0139](#))
- Statement of Intended Use
- Home Safety Checklist
- Emergency Procedures.

A study may be completed for the purpose of:

- Foster care and adoption of a child or siblings in foster care
- Adoption of a child or siblings in foster care
- Domestic infant adoption
- International adoption
- Other.

foster care license and/or approved adoption home study does not accurately identify the parents in the home.

An application must be completed for an initial home study and home study update, which includes relative or pre-kinship placements. The application collects information about the applicant(s) and all household members. An agency that receives an application must make contact with, and provide information on, next steps. All information on the application must be addressed. Any areas not addressed by an applicant must be completed by the applicant or agency staff may assist the applicant.

Note: An applicant may have the right to withdraw an application under certain circumstances. Contact a Minnesota Department of Human Services Family Systems licensor for more information.

encouraged to discuss them openly with agency staff completing the home study.

An Individual Fact Sheet must be completed by:

- The applicant(s)
- Adult household members age 18 and older

- Any new adult household member who moves into a licensed foster home or home with an approved adoption study.

Completed Fact sheets must be submitted with the application for an initial foster care or adoption home study, adoption home study update, or foster care re-licensure.

III. Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Home Study Assessment Instructions (DHS-4258D)

A home study assessment must be completed for an initial foster care license or adoption.

The home study assessment documents information gathered throughout the study process, including:

- Orientation and/or training
- Required background studies
- Assessment visits that include interviews with applicant and others
- Summary of information received from references
- Collection of collateral information.

The home study is an individual assessment of a prospective foster/adoptive family's capacity to foster and/or adopt, or care permanently for a child (in the case of a permanent relative custodian). Each section is outlined below, with suggested topic areas to address during agency interviews. An assessment also allows agency staff to identify and consider needed services and family supports to ensure stability and permanency.

Home study assessment information provides county and child-placing agencies with information needed to determine if a prospective parent/custodian is an appropriate match for a foster or adoptive child. Minnesota Statutes require individual placement decisions be made based on best interests of a child. A child foster care license or approved home study does not guarantee a child will be placed in the home. National resources are available on completing the home study process with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) prospective foster and adoptive families. The following resources may be helpful for agency staff and prospective foster families as they work together to complete a home study:

- The Home Study Assessment Process: LGBT Prospective Foster and Adoptive Families, National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
- https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/faq_lgbt.pdf "Frequently Asked Questions from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents, Child Welfare Information Gateway.

AdoptUSKids provides support to LGBTQ families who are seeking to foster or adopt children from foster care. To talk with an adoption specialist call 888-200-4005, or email LGBTsupport@adoptuskids.org.

Foster children of any age living in a home do not complete an Individual Fact Sheet. Applicants must report health assessment information on behalf of their minor children living in the home on one of their Individual Fact Sheets.

Period of validity for a home study is as follows, an:

- Adoption only home study is valid for one year.
- Initial foster care/adoption home study is valid for one year. An exception to this would be for an applicant who has previously been licensed for child foster care or for a relative (as defined in Minn. Stat., section 260C.007, subd. 27) caring for related children. An agency may choose to allow a home study and foster care license to be approved for a maximum of two years.

Information included in a home study may be subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act and/or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Additional information about specific sections of the home study form include the following topic areas.

Recommendation

Based on interviews, collateral contacts, background study, and other information gathered and assessed during the home study process, a caseworker is expected to select one of four recommendations:

- Approval for child foster care licensure and adoption of a foster child
- Approved for domestic, infant or international adoption
- Not approved for adoption
- Denial of foster care license.

When an applicant is approved for foster care, meeting the requirements for foster care licensing, they met or exceeded the standards for an approved adoption home study for a child under guardianship of the commissioner. This dual recommendation is the foundation of a combined home study format for foster care and adoption that facilitates concurrent planning and timely permanency.

When a family's interest and preference is foster care only, indicate that preference in the text box under the recommendation, including the reasons a family was approved and the type of child(ren) for whom they wish to provide care. Information should accurately reflect a family's intentions and readiness by noting that while an applicant is not yet ready to commit to adopting a child, if they change their mind, they meet the standards for adoption. Do not select "not approved for adoption" as the professional recommendation when the only basis for that recommendation is a family's readiness to commit to adopting a foster child, or the permanency goal is Transfer of Permanent Legal and Physical Custody (TPLPC).

A prospective family's understanding and concerns about permanency planning, adoption issues or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody should be described in detail in the permanency planning section of the home study assessment.

Family strengths and needs

Assessment of a prospective family's strengths and needs should accurately reflect their current functioning and capacity for developing skills necessary for successful foster or adoptive parenting and should consider:

- Motivation and expectations
- Personal maturity
- Stability and quality of interpersonal relationships
- Resilience, coping skills and stress management
- Openness of family system
- Parenting skills and hands-on parenting
- Perspective and empathy
- Commitment and responsibilities.

Training plan

Describe the training plan developed with an applicant. The plan should build on the identified family strengths and address needs to enhance skills and improve capacity to be a foster or adoptive parent, or relative custodian. Include training opportunities such as skill development, education and experimental activities.

The final page of the document summarizes completion of required foster care training. Minnesota Statutes do not require an applicant to complete specific training for approval of an adoption study, but many adoption agencies require training as part of their process.

Adoptive and foster parent history

If applicable, summarize applicant's previous adoptive or foster parent history, including:

- Results of previous application or home study
- Number of years applicant has provided foster care
- History as a foster or adoptive parent.

Personal history for applicant one and applicant two

A separate history summary must be completed for each applicant. This section summarizes an applicant's personal history, including:

- Date and place of birth, ethnicity
- Childhood family life experiences, including nurturing and discipline
- Education, employment, and significant relationships, including marriages, traumas, losses, and successes
- Health, including physical, mental, and emotional capacities to parent
- Life experiences, including issues related to abuse, fertility, grief and loss, or family discord
- Hobbies, talents and future goals
- Health, including physical, mental, and emotional capacities to parent
- Chemical health.

If an applicant or license holder discloses that they use prescription medicine (e.g., medical cannabis, Oxycontin, seizure medication, psychotropic medication, etc.), it is expected that this would be addressed. Areas to consider are side effects of the medication, use of medication as prescribed, and impacts medication has on their ability to complete daily tasks, including care for children, etc.

If an applicant or license holder discloses use of marijuana or other illegal substances, or recent chemical use problems, a chemical health evaluation should be requested. Based on evaluation results, a chemical use problem variance may be considered, or denial of a license application or revocation of license.

Relationships

This section summarizes an applicant's current relationship and relationship history, including:

- Current and previous significant relationships
- Current relationship legal status (if applicable)
- Description of strengths and needs in current relationship
- Communication style and problem-solving strategies in current relationship
- Assessment of the impact (positive or negative) foster care, adoption, or TPLPC, may have on the current relationship.

Child(ren) in the home

Complete the table by listing children currently living in the home who are not foster children. Describe the child(ren), including their:

- Physical and personal characteristics, including any health concerns and whether their immunizations are up to date
- Attitude and feelings regarding the foster/adoption plan, and how a new placement may impact them.

Other individuals living in the home

If applicable, list other adults who live or stay in an applicant's home.

Children, including adult children, living out of the home

If an applicant has children who do not live in the home, include information about each child, including age; quality of relationship with applicant; attitude about adoption, foster care or TPLPC; and how often child visits.

If an applicant has adult children living out of the home, these individuals may be good resources for providing information on an applicant's parenting skills.

Personal characteristics and resilience

A separate personal characteristics and resilience summary must be completed for each applicant.

This section highlights and summarizes an applicant's personal characteristics and stress management techniques, including their:

- Relationship with others, including ability to express and process emotions

- Tolerance of others, willingness to help others, and ability to set aside their own needs
- Ability to deal with stressful situations, including specific strategies used to cope with stress
- Flexibility, including an ability to adjust to the unexpected or unknown
- Ability to make and keep commitments.

Support system

This section highlights and summarizes an applicant's support system, including:

- Current support system (formal and informal).
- Plan to prepare extended family/friends/support network for the arrival of a child.
- Plan for child care and substitute care.
- Emergency support system.
- Who in the applicant's family, extended family or community will best understand the needs the applicant may have caring for a child who has experienced trauma, demonstrates behavioral problems or experiences developmental delays?
- Who in the applicant's family, extended family or community will best understand the needs the applicant may have caring for a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and/or questioning child?

Parenting skills and hands-on parenting

This section summarizes an applicant's parenting skills, including their:

- Capacity to supervise a child.
- Description about how they were parented and by whom.
- Parenting skills and experiences, including previous parenting or caregiving responsibilities.
- Knowledge of child development.
- Parenting methods, including supervision, behavior management and nurturing, and discipline techniques.
- Description of role as a "hands on" parent. (Who plays with child? Who helps child with homework? Who reads to child?)
- Ability to parent a child with special needs, willingness to learn new techniques and skills, and flexibility to adapt family life to meet a child's needs.
- Willingness to adhere to normalcy and prudent parenting standards.

Adoptive and/or foster parenting

This section summarizes discussion with an applicant about their desires and concerns related to adoptive or foster parenting. Identifying information about any foster children living or to be placed in the home must not be included in this section, even in child-specific home studies. When reviewing adoptive or foster parenting in a child-specific home study, the child's needs must be addressed without using identifying information.

The discussion should include the following information:

- Hopes and concerns of each family member related to foster/adoptive parenting.
- Applicant's motivation to foster and/or adopt, or transfer of physical custody of a child.
- Type of care an applicant would like to provide (foster care, adoption, respite).
- Type of child an applicant would like to care for (age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, level of child's needs, or of a specific child) and number of children.
- How has the applicant prepared to parent a child who has experienced trauma, demonstrates behavior problems or experiences developmental delays?
- How has the applicant prepared to parent a child to support their developing identity, sense of belonging or membership in a cultural group? This would include child's ethnicity and race, faith/spirituality, gender identity, socio-economic factors, sexual orientation, and traditions or practices.
- Applicant's understanding about the importance of communication with the agency during placement to parent, support child's development, and find services for child's changing needs.
- Feelings related to parenting another person's birth child, as well as an assessment of prospective family's ability to empathize with grief and loss experienced by a child, their birth parents, and extended birth family.
- Applicant's experience with birth parent(s) who have had a child in out-of-home placement, and how applicants connected with them.
- Applicant's understanding of support services and how to access those services as a foster/adoptive parent or relative custodian, as well as an applicant's willingness to do so.
- Applicant's ability to meet special challenges of foster care and/or adoption, or TPLPC, including partnership with birth parent(s) and agency staff; making a commitment to care for a foster or adoptive child; comfort level with teamwork; and their ability to work within child welfare system guidelines.

What do they anticipate their role to be in reunification?

- Describe the applicant's feelings about loss and what coping strategies they would find helpful in the event a child must leave their home?
- Applicant's ability to adjust their family's established routines and practices to meet the special needs of a child.
- Space available in home to add a child.
- Type of care an applicant desires to provide (foster care, adoption, respite, etc.)
- Type of child an applicant desires (age, sex, race/ethnicity, level of child's needs, and number of children) and how applicant is prepared to parent this type of child.

Permanency planning

This section highlights and summarizes discussion with an applicant about the process of concurrent permanency planning, including their:

- Understanding of the legal aspects of child welfare, including parental rights and roles, and process of concurrent permanency planning in the child welfare system
- Understanding of the importance of preserving a child's connections and family history through visitation and contact, and how this relates to a child's identity and development
- Ability to support reunification and likelihood of a child's return to the birth parents or other relatives
- Understanding of attachment theory and how multiple moves affect a child's sense of trust, stability and behavior
- Understanding of adopted children's long-term needs and applicant's ability to provide for these needs.

Provide all prospective foster and adoptive families with "Paths to Permanency Handbook" <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-7024A-ENG> to review and discuss during home interviews.

Family life

This section summarizes a discussion with an applicant, children in the home, and other household members, about a family's daily routine, system of organization and lifestyle, including:

- Daily routine: Describe adult's work hours, children's school hours, family transportation, typical evening activities, etc.
- Chores in the home assigned to children.
- Family rules: Explicit and implicit, and how these expectations are communicated to family members.
- Organization: Explain how the family makes decisions and ensures shopping, cooking and cleaning are done, and explain how social activities are planned.
- Mealtime expectations/routines and any special diet the family follows.
- Fun: Explain the social and recreational activities the family enjoys together.
- Does the family observe celebrations and holiday activities?
- Does the family observe religious and spiritual practices?
- What are expectations/routines regarding personal hygiene and health care, including religious or personal beliefs about immunizations or other health care practices.?
- What has been done in preparation for sharing their life with a foster/adoptive child?
- How and which boundaries are set and observed in the family?
- Ability to support religious and cultural values and practices of a child that may be different from their own.
- Detailed description of the home, including space available for a foster or adoptive child.

Family finances

This section summarizes a discussion with applicants about family finances, including:

- Confirmation that information about Northstar Care for Children benefits and foster care processes and payments have been provided to applicant
- Review of Paths to Permanency ([DHS-7024A](#)) to provide an overview of legal issues and financial supports about adoption and custody options for relative and foster families
- Description of applicant's income, financial resources, debts and expenses
- How applicant is able to financially support a child and maintain a stable household.

Summary of collateral contacts and information

This section summarizes information from other agencies or individuals contacted as part of the assessment, including other foster or adoption placements, social services provided, or law enforcement involvement, and other individuals for personal references regarding an applicant. Information provided by references is confidential.

Agency credentials and signatures

Casework by a licensed private agency must be supervised by a licensed independent social worker (LISW) or licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW). Supervision of case work includes reviewing and approving each written home study, including home studies for international adoptions.

Additional requirements for home study assessments for foster care variances

A variance from Minnesota foster care standards may be requested in circumstances that do not jeopardize the health or safety of a child. Applicants must request a variance in writing to the county or private agency licensing a home. A licensing agency has legal authority to issue most variances; however, some variances, including dual licensure, maximum age, chemical use problems, and background study disqualifications, are issued only by the Minnesota Department of Human Services commissioner [Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.16, subd. 1(a)]. All variances issued must be indicated in the home study, with an alternative plan to ensure safety of a child. This information should be documented under the summary of collateral contacts and information section.

Foster care only: Training record

This section summarizes trainings completed by foster care applicants during home study assessments to meet state and federal requirements. Some of these sections may not apply to individual applicants. If it does not apply, or a variance has been approved, check not applicable or not required.

Minnesota Statutes do not require applicants to complete specific training for approval of an adoption study, but many adoption agencies require training as part of their process.

Additional requirements for the home study assessment for international adoptions

■ Training plan

■ Other individuals living in the home

Any adult members of the household must be interviewed and assessed, including their capabilities to parent. All individuals living in the home must also be screened for abuse and violence, previous rejection for adoption, or prior unfavorable home studies.

■ Parenting skills and hands-on parenting

If an adoption study approved prospective adoptive parent(s) to parent a disabled or special needs child, this fact must be clearly stated.

■ Adoptive and/or foster parenting

The study must include a summary of counseling provided, and plans for post-placement counseling.

■ Family life

The study must include a detailed description of the home, and a determination if the living accommodations for a child meet applicable state requirements.

■ Family finances

The study must also include a description of family income, financial resources, debts and expenses.

■ Summary of references, collateral contacts, and other relevant information

The home study must include documentation of inquiry regarding history of abuse and/or violence, including screening and verification of background study, and checking child abuse registries, evidence of rehabilitation, duty to disclose and document verifications.

IV. Minnesota Adoption and Foster Care Home Study Assessment Update instructions [\(DHS-4258E\)](#)

The Home Study Assessment Update summarizes new information about an applicant(s) and all household members since the initial home study or previous adoption home study update or foster care re-licensure was completed.

Each update section is outlined below, suggesting topic areas to address during update interviews. The update allows an agency to identify and consider needed ongoing services and family supports to ensure stability and permanency.

Period of validity of home study updates is as follows:

- The home study assessment update and foster care license may be approved for one year, or a maximum of two years
- If the foster parent is licensed for a period of two years, an annual licensing evaluation must be completed in the off-year.

In addition to the required updates based on period of validity, an agency may update home studies as needed, but must update in the following circumstances, a change:

- In employment status, if it significantly impacts the family's availability or type of care they can provide
- Of residence
- In history of arrest, child abuse, substance use, or domestic violence
- In family composition, including relationship status; a temporary change may not require a home study update.

In some instances, an adoption home study update or additional information may be necessary if there is a

change in the number of children, or characteristics (such as age and/or gender) of the child(ren) the applicant intends to adopt.

Additional information about specific sections of the form are listed below.

Recommendation

Recommendation, family strengths and needs, and training plan

For information on completing these sections of the Home Study Assessment Update, refer to instructions outlined for the original Home Study Assessment on pages two and three. The instructions for the original home study apply to a Home Study Assessment Update. However, these sections should also include an assessment of any changes that have occurred since the original home study was completed.

Training and experiences to enhance foster/ adoptive parenting

This section summarizes training an applicant completed, including:

- Information about training and number of hours completed
- Applicant's level of satisfaction with training, and explanation of how training enhanced family's skills or abilities.

The final page of the document summarizes completion of required training of a foster care applicant. Minnesota Statutes do not require an applicant to complete specific training for approval of an adoption study, but many adoption agencies require training as part of their process.

Adoptive and foster parent history

Family's experience with foster care or adoption since the initial study or most recent update

This section summarizes an applicant's experience with foster care or adoption, including:

- Foster or adoptive children placed in the home (identifying information about foster children must not be included).
- How foster or adoptive parenting has impacted the family.
- Lessons.
- Review of all placements.
- Did the applicant attend court hearing(s) for a child placed in their home? Did they have the opportunity to be heard during the hearing, if they requested?
- Satisfaction with services received from the placing agency.
- Satisfaction with services received from the licensing agency.
- Review of grievances the family may have experienced with the licensing and/or placing agency, and outcomes.

Describe how foster/adoptive parenting has impacted the family, including:

- How an applicant describes each child in the home, including their adjustment and needs
- Changes an applicant has observed in the family
- How applicant expects child(ren) to adapt to the addition of another child, and specific issues applicant will need to address with each child, if applicable
- How each child in the household describes the way their relationship with other family members has changed since the last foster or adoptive child placement, if applicable
- How each child in the household feels about their position or role in the family
- Each child's understanding of fostering or adopting another child, if applicable, and how they feel about it
- Agency caseworker's comments, concerns, or recommendations.

Changes in family composition

This section lists changes in household members, including:

- Marriage or divorce of applicant
- Adult children living or staying in the home
- Minor children living or staying in the home
- Adult household members moving into or out of the home.

Changes in family resources or residence

This section summarizes changes in a family's employment, income, and physical home, such as:

- Loss of or change in job
- Moving to a new home or community

- Significant change in applicant's income, financial resources, debts, and/or expenses.

Changes in family health status

This section summarizes changes in family member's health condition, diagnosis, health care, or limitations due to health status.

Experienced losses or traumas in a family and how they were addressed

This section describes how a family addresses losses and traumas experienced, such as:

- Death of a family member, extended family member, or close friend
- Life-threatening or chronic medical issue of a family member, extended family member, or close friend
- Ending of a significant relationship
- Loss of a pet.

Describe additional supports that were requested by a family, or are needed

This section lists services and supports requested or needed by a family to increase capacity to foster or adopt a child. Potential services and supports include:

- Training on specific special needs topics
- Respite care
- In-home or in-office therapeutic services
- Support groups.

Foster care only: Review of foster care and agency agreement

This section summarizes a review of the Agreement Between Foster Parents and Placement Agency ([DHS-0139](#)), documents how foster parent has demonstrated capacity to carry out their responsibilities, and provides feedback about a foster parent's experience of an agency's fulfillment of its responsibilities.

Agency credentials and signatures

Casework by a licensed private agency must be supervised by a licensed independent social worker (LISW) or licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW). Supervision of casework includes reviewing and approving each home study, including those for international adoptions.

Foster care only: Training record

This section summarizes trainings completed by foster care applicants during home study re-assessments to meet state and federal requirements. Some of these sections may not apply to individual applicants. If it does not apply, or a variance has been approved, check not applicable or not required.

Minnesota Statutes do not require an applicant to complete specific training for approval of an adoption study, but many adoption agencies require training as part of their process.

Adoption and foster care policy references

Minnesota Rules, parts: 2960.3050-3100, including:

- 9545.0805
- 9560

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 245A

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 245C, section 245C.03

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 259, sections:

- 259.41
- 259.53
- 259.57

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 260C, sections:

- 260C.212
- 260C.215

8 CFR, part 204, subpart A, section 204.3

22 CFR, parts 96-48, 97, 99