

# Commissioner's Designated Format for Completion of an Adoption and Foster Care Study

**All county and 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 Completion of 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 or child placing agency.

**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

Foster care licensure has requirements in addition to completion of 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
- 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.

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.

**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.

## 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 the agency to fully understand the prospective foster/adoptive parent's experiences, assessing strengths and needed supports. If the prospective foster/adoptive parent has specific concerns regarding these questions, it is encouraged to discuss them openly with the agency 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.

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.

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

### 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 the 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 an agency 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.

#### **Period of validity for a home study is as follows:**

- An adoption only home study is valid for one year.
- An 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. The agency may choose to allow the 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 the interview, 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 adoptions 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**

This assessment of a prospective family's strengths and needs should accurately reflect their current functioning and capacity for development of 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, 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.

## 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 and/or adoption, or TPLPC may have on current relationship.

## Child(ren) in the home

Complete the table by listing children currently living in the home. Describe the child(ren), including their:

- Physical and personal characteristics
- 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 foster/adoptive child
- Plan for child care and substitute care
- Emergency support system.

## 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, 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, including:

- Hopes and concerns of each family member related to foster/adoptive parenting.
- Applicant's motivation to foster and/or adopt, or accept a transfer of permanent legal and physical custody of a child.
- 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 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.
- 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.

In pre-kinship placements, the Paths to Permanency Handbook should be reviewed and discussed with families.

## 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?
- 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.

## Family finances

This section summarizes a discussion with an applicant 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, social services, or law enforcement agencies, and individuals for personal references regarding an applicant. Information provided by references is confidential.

## Agency credentials and signatures

Case work 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 the Home Study Assessment 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. An applicant 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, may be issued

only by the Minnesota Department of Human Services commissioner. [Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.16, subd. 1(a)] Any variance issued must be indicated in the 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: Foster care 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 an applicant 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 Adoption

### ■ Training plan

The study must include a summary of preparation and training.

### ■ Adoptive and foster parent history

The study must document responses from prospective adoptive parent(s) and any adult living in the home if they have been the subject of an unfavorable home study, including reasons a previous study was not approved and a copy of the unfavorable study.

### ■ Personal history

Applicant's health: Physical, mental, and emotional capacities of applicant to parent children.

### ■ Other individuals living in the home

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

## 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.

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 the 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
- How foster or adoptive parenting has impacted the family
- Lessons learned
- Review of all placements
- 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 social worker's comments, concerns, or recommendations.

#### Changes in family composition

This section lists changes in the 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**

Case work 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 home study, including those for international adoptions.

### **Foster care only: Foster care 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