

# Home Study Guidebook



This guide has been developed to provide guidance including the general types of questions and information that needs to be gathered in the development of a home study.

Department of Health & Human Services

**DHHS**

N E B R A S K A

## I. PERTINENT INFORMATION

Ensure every part in this section has been completed.

## II. HOME STUDY OUTLINE / GUIDE

Many of the sections present information that should be included in the form of a question that the author of the home study would ask.

### 1. Family Background

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Where is your birthplace (city and state), who is your family of origin (names, ages and current location) to include parents, siblings. Describe the quality of relationships between family members (past and present). Include description of relationship between parents/primary caregivers. How would you describe your childhood? Describe all tribal heritages, affiliations, memberships, enrollments or registrations. What is your religion and willingness to accept foster children of other religions, including how they will ensure foster children of a different religion get to religious services? How would you describe your parents' parenting style? Would you describe your parent(s)/caregivers as nurturing? What type of discipline did your parent(s)/caregivers use? What were the family rules? Who enforced the family rules? Were consequences used? Please explain what types of consequences were used during childhood and how you feel about the consequences used. Were there any childhood/adolescent experiences that you would describe as traumatic? Explain any history of mental health disorders or substance abuse with any family member of origin and impact on you as child/adult. How were these dynamics managed and addressed by the family? Was professional help sought?

### 2. Current Family Composition

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Who are your current family members and/or significant others (name, ages and relationship to the applicant). Describe the quality of relationships between family members and significant others in your life. Describe the applicant's significant relationships/marital history. Give dates of marriage(s) and divorce(s). If divorced, describe circumstances of the divorce(s). (For adoptive home study, copies of current marriage certificate and all divorce decrees need to be in the file.) If not currently in a marriage, is the applicant involved in any relationship that might affect a child? Describe how applicant makes decisions and resolves differences. If applicable, describe the applicant's present relationship with ex-partners. How would the applicant feel, and what would s/he do, if the child becomes a disruptive influence on his/her marriage/relationship? Has the applicant ever been separated from his/her present partner? What were the reasons and how were they resolved?

### CHILDREN:

Describe all the children in the home including name, ages, grade level, academic performance, special needs, personality, likes/dislikes, health, responsibilities in the home and school adjustment. Children's Tribal Affiliations: If any biological or adopted child has tribal affiliation(s), describe the relationships with the child's tribe(s), including participation in cultural activities. Describe any adult child/ren in or out of the home including where they reside and their current relationship with the applicant. Describe any behaviors of the child/ren in the home that may affect a child placed in that home. If the applicant/s has/have minor children who are not living with them, please explain why. What is the applicant/s on-going contact with these children? Have any of the applicant/s children been involved with the juvenile court



system? How do the applicant/s children (including adult children) feel about having additional children brought into the home? Has the applicant ever experienced the death of a child? If so, what were the circumstances?

#### OTHER ADULTS LIVING IN THE HOME:

Identify any other persons living in the home or on the property. Will they be involved in the parenting, care taking and/or supervision of the child? Will they have any responsibility for transporting children? (If so, verify that they have a valid driver's license and insurance). All background checks need to be completed on any other adult living in the home and the results need to be documented in this section.

Consultation Point needs to occur with Supervisor to determine what other questions need to be addressed in this section.

### 3. Self-Awareness

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: How would you describe yourself? Who did you consider your family when you were growing up? How did you feel about your parents and how did that change as you grew into adult hood? How did you feel about your siblings and how did that change as you grew into adult hood? Which parent did you feel closest to and why? Why do you think there isn't this same feeling with the other parent? Did you have any significant relationships with adults outside of your parents? Why were they important to you? How does your childhood impact your adult life and choices? How will your culture impact your ability provide foster care? How will the child's culture impact your ability to provide foster care? What coping strategies do you use when experiencing stress? How would a child/adolescent know you are stressed? What would that look like? What coping strategies do you use when experiencing frustration? How do you express anger? How would a child know you are angry? What would that look like? How do you manage conflict? How do you manage/express grief? What fears or worries do you have with providing foster care? What fears or worries do you have with the child's behavior? Who would you talk to about your fears and worries regarding foster care /adoption? Do you feel you are prepared for the responsibility of caring for children? What concerns do you have about caring for children? What are your family's interests, hobbies?

### 4. Physical and Behavioral Health

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Describe the overall physical health of you and your family members. Describe any conditions any family member is receiving for on-going medical care from a physician. Describe any substance use (alcohol and non-prescribed drug use) by each family member to include substance of choice, frequency of consumption. Has anyone told you or a family member that drinking is a problem or that you drink too much? Does anyone in the family have history of substance abuse? Are you or is anyone in the family currently receiving treatment for substance abuse? Include whether treatment was residential or outpatient, length of treatment, outcome of treatment, involvement with a sponsor, and use of support groups i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous and/or current place with recovery. Describe the current use of tobacco products by all family members. Do you have any concerns about your physical ability to provide care for a child? Is anyone in the family currently receiving treatment for a major mental health disorder? Is the individual compliant with their recovery plan? Describe any history of domestic violence. Has anyone in the applicant's immediate family had a restraining, anti-harassment or protective order filed against him or her, or on his/her behalf? If not, how has the applicant resolved the situation? Is there any domestic violence issues within the extended family that

could pose a threat to a child placed in the home? Describe any criminal history. What was the outcome?

### 5. Parenting

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Share your beliefs about how children should be disciplined? Describe how you parent and discipline style? Do you think the age of the child influences the type of discipline a parent should use? How much of your current parenting style did you learn from your parents? What or whom has influenced your current parenting style the most? If you have adult children, how would they describe your parenting style? Have you ever been criticized for your style of parenting (explain)? Have you ever been complimented on your parenting style (explain)? What are the major similarities between your parenting style and the other adult(s) parenting style (who live in the home)? What are the major differences? How would you describe someone who is an effective/successful parent? Does the discipline you use when you are angry look different from the discipline you use when you are not angry, describe? Do you believe physical discipline is an effective way to change/manage behaviors? Under what circumstances? How has your childhood impacted your parenting as an adult? How does any previous trauma you have experienced influence your parenting? What fears/worries do you have about parenting? How much parenting experience do you have? Describe any CPS history your family has experienced.

Questions for Home Study Renewals (*only*): How would you describe the foster care experience, how has providing foster care been so far? Was it what you expected? Describe any challenges and joys you have experienced in providing foster care? Have you had and placement holds or had any allegations? Describe any continued contact you have with former foster children? Do you think you have been successful?

PLEASE REVIEW THE DHHS DISCIPLINE POLICY with ALL ADULTS LIVING IN THE HOME. THE DISCIPLINE POLICY IS SIGNED and DATED BY ALL ADULTS LIVING IN THE HOME. THE PRIMARY CARETAKING ADULTS HAVE A COPY OF THE DISCIPLINE POLICY. ENSURE THE SIGNED POLICY IS ATTACHED TO THE HOME STUDY.

### 6. Motivation to Foster/Adopt Child(ren)

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: What is your motivation for exploring foster care /adoption? Are there any infertility issues? How are you coping? How will you work to maintain the child's relationships with other significant people in their life, i.e. birth parents, siblings, teachers, friends, tribal representatives, other foster parents? Describe the applicant's skills and ability to parent a special needs child? Do you know about the Federal guidelines for parenting time and how will you support those guidelines? Describe your understanding of the Agency and service providers involved and assesses your willingness to cooperate with Agency representatives and service providers. Have there been any past issues? How would you support a child's need to remain connected to their birth family and extended family? Will your family support an open adoption? Describe your interest in caring for American Indian or Alaska Native children, keeping children connected to safe and appropriate extended family and their tribes.

## 7. Ability to Meet the Child's Social, Emotional, Educational and Physical Healthcare Needs:

### A. Child's Social Development:

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Social development refers to the process by which a child learns to interact with others around them. As they develop and perceive their own individuality within their community, they also gain skills to communicate with other people and process their actions. Social development most often refers to how a child develops friendships and other relationships, as well how a child handles conflict with peers. Explain your role with supporting a child's social development? How would you go about supporting a child's social development? How would you learn about the social needs of a child? Describe your interest in caring for American Indian or Alaska Native children, keeping children connected to safe and appropriate extended family and their tribes. Describe your willingness to teach American Indian or Alaska Native children about their culture and participation in cultural activities. How will American Indian or Alaska Native children's cultures be incorporated into the family if an American Indian or Alaska Native child is in the home?

### B. Child's Emotional Development:

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Emotional development refers to the child's ability to identify and understand their own feelings, accurately read and understand the feelings of others, manage the way they feel, shape the way they behave, develop empathy for others, and build and keep good relationships with friends, family and others. Explain your role with supporting a child's emotional development? How would you support a child's emotional development? How would you learn about the emotional needs of a child?

### C. Educational Needs:

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Positive, stable school experiences enhance a child's well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment, economic self-sufficiency and their ability to contribute to society. For American Indian or Alaska Native children, how will they be educated about their tribes, cultures and rights? What role can you play with helping a child experience academic success? How might you become informed about a child's educational needs? How can you partner with the child's school? School(s) that the child(ren) in the home attend and the school that the foster/adopted child will attend. If applicable, special education services available to students in the identified school(s).

## 8. Support Systems

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Who do you consider to be your primary source of support? Please identify your family's formal and informal supports. Are you comfortable reaching out to those who can provide support? How often are those who provide support to you available? On average, how often do you reach out to those who provide you support? How do you generally go about solving problems?

## 9. Employment, Education and Military

In this section please include the following information regarding each applicant: What is the highest level of education/grade level you completed, include: High School attended? College attended? Was a Degree Obtained? Who is your employer; length of time with employer, nature of work, # of hours worked each week and work schedule. Describe your previous work history if with current employer < 3 years; do you have vacation and sick time



available? Who will provide child care while you are at work? Are you currently or formerly with the military? Include: how many years, rank, discharge status, deployment eligible?

**Household Information**

1. Current Living Arrangements/Description of Home

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicants' current living arrangements: Describe the home environment. (For example, is it chaotic, peaceful, busy, organized, warm and welcoming, etc.?) Include a description of the home, including the number of rooms, the sleeping arrangements, is the home handicapped accessible and the housekeeping standards. Describe the neighborhood. Is the home in a rural, urban or other setting? Describe the community resources available, including medical, counseling, educational services. Describe the cultural diversity of the community. How does the applicant think a child of a different race would be treated within the community? Are there appropriate areas for children to play, and toys that encourage growth and development? Describe indoor and outdoor play areas. Describe the property including any out buildings, and tell how they are used (check the inside of outbuildings. Are there safety issues in the home, or surrounding neighborhood, that would affect children? Are there any hazards? For example a wood stove, electric fences, pools, water?) What is the safety plan? Are there weapons in the home? If so, how and where are they stored? Are there medications in the home? Where are they stored? Describe all pets. How do they interact with children? Does the applicant/s have any dietary preferences? (i.e. Vegetarian, Kosher, etc.)

2. Transportation

In this section please include the following information: List each vehicle used by the family including the make/model/year and number of working seatbelts. Who is your insurance carrier(s)? Do you have car seats? Have the car seats been installed properly? How do you know the car seats are installed properly? Were the car seats installed by a trained installer? Include: who/when/where? Does your family need information on community resources to assist with proper car seat installation? Will others be assisting you with transporting children? Explain responsibility of primary caretakers to ensure car seats are used and properly installed.

3. Finances

In this section please include the following information regarding the applicant: Gather the following financial information to assess and understand that the applicant has the ability to financially support a foster child/adoptive child.

A. Income:

|                      | Applicant/Caregiver Name | Applicant/Caregiver Name |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Current Gross Income |                          |                          |
| Current Net Income   |                          |                          |
| Social Security      |                          |                          |
| Child Support        |                          |                          |
| Alimony              |                          |                          |
| Disability           |                          |                          |
| Unemployment         |                          |                          |
| Veteran's Benefits   |                          |                          |

|                   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Workman's Comp    |  |  |
| Pension           |  |  |
| Assets            |  |  |
| Additional Income |  |  |

B. Forms of Assistance:  NA

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| SNAP-food stamps   |  |
| WIC                |  |
| General Assistance |  |
| Other              |  |

C. Household Expenses/Monthly:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Housing (Rent / Mortgage)                                |  |
| Utilities (electric, water, gas, etc.)                   |  |
| Medical Insurance  |  |
| Cable/Phone/Internet                                     |  |
| Vehicle (payment and insurance)                          |  |
| Loan and or credit card(s)                               |  |
| Medical/insurance not-covered                            |  |
| Living expenses (groceries, gasoline, and entertainment) |  |
| Child Care   |  |
| Other  |  |

### III. REFERENCES

References must be obtained for each applicant according to policy and/or regulation. This section of the home study must include the identified strengths and areas of concerns as reported by the references.

The information reported in the references must be taken into consideration when conducting your evaluation and making your recommendation. If three positive references are unable to be obtained, a supervisor staffing is required and the outcome documented with the recommendation.

### IV. MEDICAL REPORT OF APPLICANTS

Each applicant must submit a signed Health Information Report (HIR), *unless* the applicants are kin or relative and not licensable.

Part "A" of the Health Information Report must be completed by all adult applicants and adults in the household who are/will be caretakers for children in placement.

Part "B" of the Health Information Report must be completed when the applicant is taking most any prescription medication. The *only* exceptions would include: Birth Control, allergies, time-limited antibiotics, cold, or other temporary conditions.

Part "B" must be completed by a Health Practitioner, Medical Doctor, RN, or Physician's Assistant

## V. EVALUATION

The evaluation section is a critical component of the home study. In this section the home study evaluator must provide his/her analysis of all the information gathered to draw conclusions that identify the family's strengths, needs and recommendations.

## VI. RECOMMENDATION

Ensure a recommendation of approval or disapproval has been provided, along with a supporting summative statement for the recommendation.

Indicate the types of children the applicant(s) are willing to foster or adopt. This section is not applicable if the kin is not licensable.

## VII. SIGNATURES

Ensure all signatures have been obtained on the home study.

## VIII. HOME STUDY ADDENDUM

Applicants must have all the background checks and clearances completed. (National criminal history, Nebraska state patrol, Adult/Child Abuse/Neglect central register/y, State Patrol Sex Offender, Google and social media, Department for Motor Vehicle (DMV), and Law Enforcement)

Adult/Child Abuse/Neglect Register checks must be completed on each applicant in any other states they have lived within the past 5 years.

If there are any other adults age 18 or over living in this home, complete the background checks and clearances for them as well. If there are any children residing in this home age 13 and over, complete a Nebraska Child Abuse/Neglect Central Register check and a Nebraska Adult Abuse/Neglect Check, and State Patrol Sex Offender Check for each child.

Document the results of those additional checks and clearances in the same format as the applicant information.

If the background checks indicate a central register/y finding, felony conviction, sex offender registry finding, or any other criminal history record per policy an approval status form is required before the home study can be approved.

