Introduction

The Unified Home Study is used for most types of home studies, i.e., emergency (exigent), initial licensing, re-licensing, relative (planned), non-relative (planned), adoptive, and Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children home studies. The Unified Home Study (UHS) is progressive, in that it can expand and change based on the home and the child’s situation. For example, a case manager completes the UHS when conducting a study of a relative’s home for placement of a child. The same home study is built upon for licensing if the relative later requests to be licensed as a foster parent. The study can then become an adoptive home study if the foster family applies to adopt. Regardless of the type of home study, the assessor should do a full evaluation of the family.

The intent of a home study is to assess a potential foster or adoptive family’s strengths and needs, and to ensure they meet all the requirements for a child to be placed with them. Provided a family meets all of the requirements in statute and administrative code, the purpose of the home study is not necessarily simply to identify issues that would prohibit them from becoming licensed or having a child placed in their care. It can be used to identify how the Department or contracted provider can support the family to help them successfully parent any child placed in their care.

Remember that the content and protocol for the Unified Home Study must follow requirements in Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code. The UHS simply provides a consistent way to create and document home studies in the official system of record (FSFN).

Each part of the Unified Home Study can be completed to comply with differing standards required by statute and code.

The Unified Home Study has six different types as follows:

1. Emergency Placement (exigent circumstances, mainly CPI placements)
2. Initial License for Foster Home (including ICPC)
3. Re-License
4. Adoption
5. Relative (planned placements)
6. Non-Relative Placement (planned placements)

This User Guide provides directions for each section to be completed. In FSFN Release 2, the information available to be completed will depend upon the box selected for type. However, it is important to note that except for the Re-License home study, there is very little difference in the amount of information that can be collected for each type of home study. The Re-License home study simply will update any information that has changed.
Please note that there is no home study option listed above for **“Parent Placement, Non-reunification.”** Parents, regardless of whether removal parent or other parent to whom the Department might look to release a child, are NOT providers and should never be entered in FSFN under the UHS process as a provider.

If at any time it is determined the child’s safety cannot be managed in the household with an in-home safety plan, the investigator shall first determine if release to the child’s other parent would be detrimental to child safety, and if not, shall seek such safety action as a first course.

Prior to release of the child to the other parent, the investigator or case manager shall conduct an “Other Parent Home Assessment” by completing the following actions:

1. Verify legal parental relationship by examining a birth certificate, child support order, official record of child support payments, or other official government document indicating legal parental status.
2. Complete a modified home study of the other parent’s household to determine the household composition, gather demographics of all household members, conduct a home visit, and complete any background screening requirements;
3. Assess to determine the other parent’s and any adult household members in a significant caregiver role adult functioning and protective capacities;
4. Assess to determine the other parent’s willingness and ability to provide supervision and protection in alignment with the Department; and
5. Ensure that the release of the child to the other parent does not represent a rebuttable presumption of detriment as defined in s.39.0139, and thus pose a threat of danger to the child.

To capture the modified “Other Parent Release” home studies in FSFN:

1. Complete child abuse records checks through a thorough review and analysis of information from FSFN.
2. Complete the criminal background checks through Maintain Case page and analyze information.
3. Document the level of assessment and recommendations in Case Notes, under “Other Parent Release-Home Study.”

**Identifying Information**

**Counselor Name:** Enter the name of the individual completing the Home Study.

**Child(ren)'s Name:** Enter the name(s) of the child.

**Investigation Number:** Enter the investigation number. In the system, this will be pre-populated.

**Date Home Study Conducted:** Enter the date the home visit was conducted in order to complete the home study. This could be the initial home visit in some instances; for licensing, two home visits are required, so the date entered would be that of the second (or later) home visit.

**Child(ren)'s relationship to caregiver:** Enter the relationship; if no relationship enter Not related.
**Purpose of Home Study**

Place a mark by the purpose of the home study. For example, if the home study is being completed for an emergency placement, mark emergency placement. **If for an ICPC placement, complete the initial licensing home study version and check the box next to ICPC in Section VI. APPROVAL/DENIAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

**Section I: Demographics**

**A. Contact/Identifying Information:**
Complete or enter the information as requested for each caregiver in the home.

**B. Contact Information.**
This part captures information about the inquiry into becoming a foster parent or adoptive parent. The licensing specialist or the case manager completes this part. In FSFN Release 2, this is captured on the Person Provider Inquiry Members Tab page in FSFN or Person Provider page in FSFN and will pre-populate.

Capturing the date of initial inquiry and if the inquiry happened as a result of a recruiting event will help the department understand what recruitment efforts are most successful. Documenting initial time of inquiry also will help the department track the length of the licensing process, from start to finish.

**C. Other Household Members**
Complete or enter the information requested for each member of the household who are not caregivers. This information should include all biological and adoptive children, as well as any other individual living in the home, regardless of relation or non-relation. The person must furnish their SSN; ask to see the SSN card or other official document with the person’s SSN. If they are not US citizens, refer to the list of documentation of residency included at the end of this guide.

**D. Placements**
Complete or enter the information requested regarding any other children who are or have been placed in the home by the Department or another agency. In the electronic version of the home study, FSFN will pull this information in for you. Key for completing this section is capturing the dates of placements and exits to show placement stability and any disruptions for previous placements.

**E. Non-resident Children (of Caregivers)**
Complete or enter the information requested regarding any children of the caregivers (minors and/or adults) who do not reside in the home.
F. Persons identified to provide temporary back-up care for the family.
Complete or enter the information requested as provided by the caregivers. CPIs should request this information during emergency placement. Staff completing this section after an emergency placement must require the caregivers to identify temporary backup caregivers and contact information for these individuals. If the caregiver does not know anyone who can provide temporary back-up care, staff will connect the caregiver to resources to help identify at least one temporary care provider.

Please note that temporary back-up caregivers are not limited to those individuals identified in the home study. The caregiver may choose temporary care providers for children other than those listed on the home study.

Section II: Background/Qualifications

A. Background checks.
Complete all background checks as required by statute and rule. If there is a clearance issue, make notes and provide details. Include dates of screenings, checks, and results. Indicate if there are any disqualifying offenses.

(Note: In FSFN, all of this is NOT part of the HS ‘page’ because ALL background screenings are part of the Prior Intakes and Investigations/Referrals Tab and the Background Check Information Tab. At no time is anyone required to document something already contained in the system. Any exceptions or disqualifiers are listed on the Background Check Information tab.

Do not include SSNs anywhere on the home study; verification should be done by examining an official document listing the SSN of the individual. Examples of official documentation include: Social Security card, insurance policy, passport, or other official government document listing identifying information including SSN.

If additional background checks not listed are done, include the specific check and all information.

Regular visitors to the home should have a background check. Regular visitors are those individuals who are frequently in the home, and will have unsupervised contact or supervision with the children.

Informal/infrequent babysitters do not have to be background screened. Please refer to the memo dated March 5, 2013 regarding “Normalcy, Babysitting, Vacation, and Emergency Care for Children in Out-of-Home Care” for further guidance on babysitters.

B. Clearance concerns could include problems with fingerprints that delay results, a charge that has to be researched, etc.

C. Needs further review indicates there are charges in one or more of the background screenings that are not disqualifying offenses, but merit further review to determine whether placement is appropriate.
Section III. Assessment and Home Study

This is your assessment of the prospective caregiver. To inform your recommendations, it is crucial to gather information in a number of assessment areas to analyze and evaluate your overall recommendation for placement, licensure, re-licensure or adoption. The assessor completing this information could be a number of individuals, including the CPI, case manager, licensing specialist, adoption specialist.

Discuss each assessment domain with the prospective caregivers, and document for each. It is important that prospective caregivers provide thorough responses and information so that you can synthesize and document the information accordingly. Request details of family history, physical environment, health issues, ability to work with the professional team supporting the child, etc. Use the sample questions provided in the UHS Assessment Prompts (attached) as a reference. These questions do not limit what can be asked. If there is a question that requires a more thorough evaluation than sample questions provided, the assessor should continue questioning until the answer is complete and useful for evaluating the caregiver’s ability in that area.

Section IV: Narrative Family Assessment

Assess the additional domains with the prospective caregiver to form a deeper understanding of the foster family home. This section includes an assessment of the caregiver’s attitudes, comments from household members, parenting experience, and any other factors that are significant to understanding the family’s functioning. Topics to be fully addressed in this section include motivation (to care for children), education and employment, family life, and the household physical environment. For an ICPC placement: address relevant information in the “Motivation” section and check the box next to “ICPC” in section VII. APPROVAL/DENIAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS. For adoptions, include the child-specific study here.

Section V: Financial Security, Resources and Child Care Arrangements

Gather and complete all requested income and expense information. For income other than employment, only include funds from reliable sources (i.e., do not include a monthly contribution from a friend or family member unless it is a legally binding arrangement such as child support or written loan repayment agreement). Note specific supports needed for the family to successfully support a child in care.

Section VI. Prospective Caregiver Attestation and Acknowledgement

All prospective caregivers must sign. This page is intentionally separate from the approval/denial page; it is not to be connected as part of the approval/denial by the evaluating agency. The attestation and acknowledgement is simply verification from the caregiver(s) that they have provided the best, most complete, and truthful information to the best of their knowledge and ability.
Section VII. APPROVAL/DENIAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Staff should indicate the license action taken (approved, denied, etc.) and provide reasons for any denial. The applicable box should be checked. Special conditions for the home must be noted. If denied and the assessor recommends an improvement plan to meet licensing/placing requirements at a later date, include details of the improvement plan, the timeframe for completing it, and how it will be evaluated.

B. CPI and case manager signatures are required for the home study to be complete and valid. Other agency signatures, such as CBC and Child-Placing Agency, are determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on who is conducting the home study. The licensing specialist and licensing supervisor must sign for initial license and re-license.

Section VIII. ATTACHMENTS

Include reference forms, photos, and any other attachments here.