

## 3. Assessment Considerations during the Assessment of an Applicant

---

Certification is an assessment process. A home study for the purpose of either substitute care and/or adoption is a thoughtful analysis of all the information gathered via interview, observation, collateral contacts, and background checking. Continuously assess whether the applicant(s)'s functioning is such that he/she will be able to meet the safety, permanency, health and well-being needs of children in care.

Use the Oregon SAFE home study tools to identify the areas of an applicant's life and/or functioning that require further evaluation. The psycho-social inventory (PSI) and the desk guide structures the analysis through identified areas of the applicant's life after each interview is conducted. Complete a PSI for the applicant(s) after each interview. Those areas that receive a Desk Guide Rating (DGR) of 3 or higher are the areas needing further inquiry until sufficient information is obtained to confidently score each psycho-social factor.

### **Procedure:**

- Gather and assess applicant history including childhood experiences, family-of-origin functioning, abuse/neglect experienced or perpetrated by the applicant as a child and/or adult, criminal history, mental health history, work history and relationship history (including previous marriages, domestic partnerships, and/or significant relationships). In assessing historical events, learn as much factual information as possible and evaluate what the information tells him/her about the applicant's functioning.
  1. Review, when applicable, police reports, child welfare reports, court documents, treatment records, or mental health records.
  2. Gather collateral information from references and possibly from family members, adult children, or others who have knowledge of the applicant and his/her history. If the references are unable to speak to the personal characteristics/history of both applicants, consider requesting more references who can do so.
  3. Ask the applicant to describe:
    - a. What occurred?
    - b. Why they believe they made the choices they did?
    - c. What was occurring in their lives that impacted their behavior?
    - d. What is different in the present time?

- e. How they have grown personally through the experience.
4. Interview the applicant in a way that does not imply blame about events in his/her life over which he/she had no control, such as a history of being abused.
5. Determine how and to what extent the historical experiences impact the applicant's functioning. Consider the following:
  - a. How well is the applicant currently functioning and how well has he/she functioned over time? Such things as stable residency, stable employment, stable relationships, stable financial management, strong coping skills, and good physical and mental health may be indicators of healthy overall functioning.
  - b. Does the applicant demonstrate good decision-making and judgment? Do his/her decisions tend to result in positive outcomes? Does the applicant make decisions impulsively or after considering possible consequences?
  - c. What are the applicant's relationships with family members, significant others, children, friends, and community members like? Do these relationships appear to be mutually supportive and healthy?
  - d. How is the applicant's parenting style and skill level impacted or influenced by historical experiences?
  - e. Does the applicant suffer any physical or mental health issues that are or may be related to the historical experiences?
6. Consider if and to what extent current and/or historical drug/alcohol use/abuse impacts the applicant's present functioning. Some considerations are:
  - a. Does the applicant have any drug/alcohol-related arrests/convictions as a result of his/her use? If so, what were the circumstances? Is there evidence that the applicant's behavior changed as a result of these arrests/convictions?
  - b. Does or has the applicant missed work due to his/her use or even lost a job as a result of his/her use?
  - c. Has the applicant ever been told by a family member or friend that his/her drug/alcohol use was a problem?
  - d. When does the applicant use drugs/alcohol and what else is occurring at the time? What influences or stresses are related to drug/alcohol use?
  - e. How do other people in the applicant's life describe his/her use of drugs/alcohol?
7. Request the completion of the CF 1258, Mental Health Information, by the applicant's therapist or treating psychiatrist, if applicable. This may be appropriate when:
  - a. The applicant is prescribed a psychotropic medication for a diagnosed mental health condition.

- b. The applicant discloses that he/she is treated by a mental health professional.
  8. Assess how criminal history, including arrests, charges, and convictions, impact the applicant's ability to provide for the safety, wellbeing, permanency, and health needs of a child in the Department's custody. Consider the following:
    - a. The severity and nature of the crime. Was it a person-to-person crime? Was it a violent crime or a sexual offence?
    - b. The number of criminal offenses. Is the criminal history limited to one or few incidents or is there a long-standing pattern of behavior?
    - c. The circumstances surrounding the crime. Who was involved? What was occurring in the applicant's life at the time that may have impacted his/her decision?
    - d. The applicant's explanation of the crime. Is the applicant open about the crime? Does the applicant have some insight about his/her behavior at the time? Does the applicant take responsibility for his/her behavior?
    - e. The facts supporting the conviction or pending indictment or that indicate the applicant made a false statement about the crime. What does the police report or other court records indicate?
    - f. The relevancy, if any, of the crime or false statement to the applicant's ability to be a foster parent or other person in the household. How does the crime relate to safe parenting? How does it relate to the applicant's ability to work cooperatively with a State agency and community partners?
    - g. Intervening circumstances relevant to the responsibilities and circumstances of the applicant's ability to care for a child, such as;
      - How long has it been since the crime occurred?
      - How old was the applicant at the time?
      - Did the applicant receive any rehabilitative services as a result of the crime and if so, what evidence is there that he/she changed his/her behavior as a result?
      - Did the applicant commit more crimes after receiving services?
      - Was the conviction set aside?
      - Do references and/or other collateral sources, knowing the criminal history, recommend the applicant as a foster parent?
9. After completing the assessment of criminal history, determine whether to seek management approval of criminal history for the purpose of continuing with the certification process. This decision is made by the certification supervisor and Program Manager, at a minimum. Branch staff can also consult with a Foster Care Coordinator.

10. Assess child abuse/neglect history in which the applicant was either alleged or founded to have committed an act of child abuse or neglect.
  - a. When the applicant has an unfounded allegation of child abuse/neglect and/or Closed at Screening reports (or similar dispositions from another state), consider whether there is a pattern of behavior while not abuse or neglect, indicative of poor decision making, poor coping skills, ineffective parenting, or dysfunctional family relationships.
  - b. When the applicant has a founded allegation of child abuse/neglect (or similar disposition from another state), consider the following questions to determine whether to seek management approval:
    - What was the severity of the abuse/neglect?
    - What were the circumstances surrounding the abuse/neglect?
    - How long ago did the abuse/neglect take place?
    - How old was the applicant at the time?
    - Was the victim child the applicant's own child?
    - Did the applicant have an open child welfare case as a result and were his/her children in substitute care?
    - Did the applicant receive services and is there evidence that his/her protective capacity increased?
    - Was there a pattern of abusive/neglectful behavior and, if so, for how long?
    - What does the applicant say about the abuse/neglect?
  - c. When the applicant has an unable to determine allegation of child abuse/neglect (or similar disposition from another state), consider the following:
    - What was the reason for the disposition? Was the Child Protective Services worker unable to locate the family or was there conflicting information that resulted in the disposition?
    - What were the circumstances surrounding the abuse/neglect?
    - How long ago did the abuse/neglect take place?
    - How old was the applicant at the time?
    - Was the alleged victim child the applicant's own child?
    - Was there a pattern of unable to determine dispositions?
  - d. Consult with the certification supervisor, program manager, and, if necessary, the Foster Care Coordinator to determine whether to seek approval to continue the assessment given the applicant's child welfare history.
11. Assess the applicant's relationship history when he/she has had prior significant relationships. Questions to consider:

- a. How and why did the previous relationship(s) end?
- b. What is the nature of the applicant's relationship with ex-partners now, particularly if the relationship(s) resulted in children?
- c. What did the applicant learn about him/herself from previous relationships?
- d. Is there a pattern of unhealthy or abusive relationships?
- e. Is the applicant able to consider how his/her own behavior in a previous relationship may have contributed to it ending?
- f. Is the applicant able to work through conflict and/or challenging times in a relationship?
- g. What is different about the applicant's current relationship (if applicable) from previous ones?

- **Personal Characteristics**

Base the assessment of personal characteristics on observations and collateral information in addition to personal report from the applicant. Look beyond what the applicant says about him/herself and watch for how the applicant interacts with others and responds during the assessment process. An assessment of an applicant's personal characteristics includes consideration of the following characteristics and how his/her level of competence in these areas impact parenting:

1. Communication style. An applicant's communication style will impact how he/she interacts with children placed in the home, how she/he interacts with other adults in front of the children, and how well he/she is able to work with the Department and other service providers. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the applicant an active listener with good content tracking?
  - b. Does the applicant have clear verbal and nonverbal communication?
  - c. Is there congruence between verbal and nonverbal communication?



It may be that an applicant is unable or unwilling to engage in the discussion of his/her personal history. It is important to recognize that a person's initial reaction to the assessment process is not necessarily indicative of a failure or inability to cooperate. This type of thorough discussion of past events is difficult for most people. Openly acknowledge that it is difficult to discuss past events while stressing the importance of doing so as part of the assessment process. Explore ways in which an applicant might engage in the process. Is more relationship-building needed first? If the applicant is untruthful or is unwilling or unable to discuss the history even after attempts to engage them in the process have been made, the certifier consult with your supervisor about whether to proceed.

- d. Is the applicant able to make him/herself understood?
2. Commitment/responsibility levels  
Foster parenting requires a high level of commitment and responsible decision-making and behavior. Consider the following:
  - a. Does the applicant have a sense of personal responsibility and cooperation?
  - b. Is there evidence that the applicant is dependable and follows through with commitments?
  - c. Does the applicant take responsibility for his/her actions?
3. Problem solving abilities  
Foster parents with strong problem-solving abilities will have more success both in parenting special needs children and in working with the professionals who provide services to them. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the applicant able to solve problems in a manner that produces the desired outcomes?
  - b. Does applicant demonstrate an ability to resolve conflict?
  - c. Is the applicant proactive or does he/she procrastinate or avoid problem solving?
4. Interpersonal relationships  
The way in which an applicant relates to adults and children in his/her life may be an indicator of the kind of relationships he/she is able to develop and nurture with children placed in the home. Consider the following:
  - a. Does the applicant maintain close relationships over time?
  - b. Does the applicant demonstrate empathy?
  - c. Does the applicant reach out to friends/family for support and conversely provide support to others?
5. Health/physical stamina  
Parenting requires good health and physical stamina. The challenge of dealing with a chronic or serious health problem puts a lot of stress on a person/family and can impact how they function. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the applicant able to keep up with children physically?
  - b. Does the applicant seek appropriate medical treatment?
  - c. Does the applicant's health condition(s) impact his/her functioning and if so, how?
  - d. Does the applicant take medications that might have side effects which do or could impact the applicant's functioning?
  - e. Does the applicant's physician recommend the applicant as a foster parent, considering health conditions and impact on his/her functioning?

**6. Self-esteem**

The evaluation of the applicant's self esteem informs the certifier the level of support the applicant may need. When the applicant's self-esteem is regulated in

large part by external sources, such as praise for his/her activities, it may inform the certifier about the applicant's motivation or ability to cope when faced with a challenging child. Consider the following:

- a. Is the applicant able to form an accurate assessment of his/her own strengths and limitations?
- b. Is the applicant's self worth regulated by external or internal sources?
- c. Does the applicant take pride in his/her accomplishments and/or talents?

**7. Acceptance of differences**

If an applicant demonstrates an inability to accept differences in race, religion, or values, he/she may have difficulty accepting and supporting children who are different from him/herself. Consider the following:

- a. Does the applicant have an understanding of varying world views, values and belief systems?
- b. Does the applicant engage in stereo typic thinking?
- c. Is the applicant sensitive to and respectful of the customs, values and belief systems of others that differ from his/her own?

**8. Coping skills**

Coping skills can impact a person's parenting, judgment, and behavior. Consider the following:



Medical Marijuana: Oregon law allows limited use and growing of of medical marijuana. For more information on Oregon's Medical Marijuana Program (OMMP) refer to <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/ommp/index.shtml>. 1. In some circumstances, an applicant with a medical marijuana card may be approved to be a certified caregiver. Ask for a copy of the medical marijuana card to verify authenticity with the OMMP. Consult with the certification supervisor and seek central office consultation if, after consulting with the supervisor, additional direction is needed. The assessment considers (as with other medications) the medical diagnosis requiring the use of medical marijuana, and answers the following questions. Can the applicant provide safety and well-being for a child with the medical condition and the use of marijuana? Where and how does the applicant use the medical marijuana? What is the plan to assure any child placed in the applicant's home would not have access to the medical marijuana or be subjected to any second hand smoke? Does the applicant's doctor have any concerns about this applicant's ability to provide safety and well-being for a child?

- a. How does the applicant cope with the stress of everyday life?
- b. How does the applicant function in stressful situations?
- c. How has the applicant dealt with challenging situations in the past?

9. Impulse control

Low impulse control can impact an applicant's functioning in many ways. It can result in inappropriate disciplinary actions, addictive behavior, or other types of behavior that impact the conditions of the home environment. Consider the following:

- a. Is the applicant able to delay his/her own gratification? What evidence supports your assessment?
- b. Is there evidence that the applicant thinks things through objectively and considers consequences before acting?
- c. What ability does the applicant have to control detrimental impulses? Behaviors such as gambling, binge eating, and substance abuse may be possible indicators of low impulse control.

10. Mood

It is important to evaluate the applicant's disposition as well as the consistency and range of his/her mood. Consider the following:

- a. Is the applicant typically optimistic and relaxed?
- b. Do the applicant's changes in mood seem congruent with events taking place? Is his/her mood consistently flat or exaggerated regardless of the situation?
- c. Does the applicant seem engaging and approachable?

11. Anger management/conflict resolution skills

An assessment of anger management includes how easily the applicant is aroused to anger, how the applicant deals with his/her anger and how the applicant behaves toward the person with whom he/she is angry. Consider the following:

- a. Does the applicant experience intense, angry feelings often or infrequently?
- b. Is the applicant able to endure angry feelings while controlling behavior?
- c. Is the applicant able to express anger in a manner that does not cause physical or emotional harm?
- d. Does the applicant have a capacity to forgive?
- e. Does the applicant have the ability to resolve?

12. Personal judgment

Determine an applicant's personal judgment based on historical information, collateral information, and observations during the home study process. Consider the following:

- a. Does the applicant have the ability to make decisions objectively and understand particular facts of a situation?
- b. Does the applicant exhibit socially appropriate behavior within cultural context?
- c. Does the applicant have the ability to make good decisions about who to trust?
- d. Does the applicant trust people too early in relationship?



13. Adaptability

Determine the applicant's ability to adjust to change and take on new challenges. Consider the following:

- a. Does the applicant seem flexible and open to new experiences? What types of previous experiences does he/she have in which he/she needed to adapt quickly?
- b. How has the applicant dealt with new situations in the past?
- c. How does the applicant deal with changes during the home study process?

In very rare circumstances, outside evaluations such as psychological evaluations, mental health assessments, drug/alcohol assessments, or domestic violence assessments are helpful in informing the assessment process. Always consult with your supervisor and, if needed, your foster care coordinator, in determining whether an outside evaluation is needed. It is important that the Department seeks only diagnostic information and information about how an applicant's condition impacts his/her functioning. The Department does not ask the evaluator to recommend whether an applicant should be a foster parent, or what services could be provided to make him/her safe as a foster parent. It is the role and responsibility of the Department to use the diagnostic information from the evaluation to in the determination whether the applicant meets certification standards.

• **Marital/Domestic Partner Relationship/Cohabiting Couple**

When assessing a couple, pay close attention to the dynamics of the relationship and how the relationship impacts overall functioning and parenting. When there are historical or present issues within the relationship, evaluate how the issues impact functioning, parenting, and the dynamics of the household. Base the assessment of the relationship between the applicants on observation and the applicants' description of the relationship. Interview them both individually and together. Watch how they interact with and respond to one another.



Domestic Partner refers to a relationship between a same-sex couple who have registered with the State of Oregon as domestic partners under the Oregon Family Fairness Act. This legal status affords each member of the couple all of the state-level rights and responsibilities associated with marriage. Cohabiting Couple refers to a couple, whether same sex or opposite sex, who live together in an intimate relationship as if married but are not married and have not entered a registered domestic partnership in Oregon.

1. Conflict Resolution

No couple is without conflict. Lack of conflict is not necessarily evidence of a strong relationship. The couple's ability to work through conflict in a mutually satisfactory manner is. Consider the following:

- a. Is the couple able to deal with conflicts directly and in a timely manner?
- b. Does the couple allow for health expression of anger?
- c. Does the couple have similar values, expectations, goals and beliefs that enhance their ability to solve conflict?

2. Emotional Support. Assess the extent the couple can count on each other for emotional support. Consider the following:

- a. Are they sensitive and responsive to each other's emotional needs?
- b. Do they express feelings to and in front of each other?
- c. Are they available to each other in time of need?

3. Their attitudes toward one another. The feeling each applicant has about the other is demonstrated both verbally and behaviorally. Consider the following:

- a. Does the couple have loving and respectful interactions with each other?
- b. Is there recognition of each other's personal strengths and abilities?
- c. Do they enjoy each other's company?
- d. Does the couple speak of and to each other with high regard?

4. Their Communication. Assess the applicants' ability to listen to one another, express opinions, and ability to use communication as a parenting tool. Consider the following:

- a. Are communication patterns mutually satisfying, honest, direct, and forthright?
- b. Is there good two-way verbal clarity?

- c. There is congruence between verbal and non-verbal communication?
  - d. Does the couple listen to one another with interest and respect?
5. The balance of power within the relationship. Power/control issues impact relationships and families. Assess the balance of power in a relationship through observation and interview. Consider the following:
  - a. Do the applicants work cooperatively with each other?
  - b. Do the applicants each have a sense of competence that is not dependent upon the other behaving in a helpless manner?
  - c. Does the couple share decision making and responsibility for managing the household including rules, finances, etc.?
6. The stability of their relationship. Assess the current and long term stability of the relationship. Consider the following:
  - a. Is each partner firmly committed to the relationship with a high degree of confidence that the relationship will endure?
  - b. Is there a high degree of mutual trust? Has that trust been tested in the past either by infidelity or other acts of dishonesty and if so, how did the couple move on and build trust again?
  - c. Is there a healthy balance of dependence and independence?
7. Sexual compatibility. Assess the degree of satisfaction, warmth, and intimacy the couple derives from their sexual relationship. Consider the following:
  - a. Do the applicants enjoy a mutually satisfying sexual relationship?
  - b. Is there sensitive attention paid to each other's need for intimacy?



When discussing sexual compatibility, it is important for the certifier to put the applicants at ease as much as is possible. If the certifier appears uncomfortable with the topic, the applicants' own anxiety will be exacerbated. Treat the topic in a neutral manner, discuss it in a matter-of-fact non-judgmental way, and explain why it is assessed. Sexual incompatibility can be extremely detrimental to a relationship if not addressed openly between the couple. The certifier does not need to know details of the applicants' sexual relationship. Instead, assess whether they believe they are incompatible, whether they are open with one another, how they resolve the issue, the importance in their relationship, and whether there are more damaging issues such as infidelity.

- c. Does the sexual aspect of the relationship add to the overall trust, satisfaction, and intimacy that the couple experiences?

- **Applicant's Minor Children**

The assessment of the applicant's children will vary depending upon the age of the children and whether they live in the home. When the minor children do not live in the home, the assessment includes the reasons that the children do not live in the home. When they live in the home, whether it be full time or part time as part of a custody arrangement, assess each child's functioning and attitude about having foster children placed with their family. Conduct at least one home visit in which all of the family members are present, observe how the children behave and the interaction with siblings and parents. If age-appropriate, interview the children to gain information regarding their interests, perceptions of their parents, and readiness to accept foster children into the home. Consider the following:

1. Is behavior age and developmentally appropriate?
2. What is the extent of each child's health, educational, or mental health needs and whether the applicants are capable of meeting those needs. When appropriate, request a signed Release of Information to obtain:
  - a. School records
  - b. Medical records
  - c. Treatment records
  - d. Juvenile Court, when there is reason to believe the minor has juvenile records.
3. Is each child well-adjusted and adaptable?
4. Does a child's behavior pose a threat to the safety, health, or well-being of others?
5. Does a child appear to have a secure attachment to their parents?
6. Does a child have any drug and/or alcohol involvement?
7. Is each child prepared for the arrival of a new child or children into the family?

- **Applicant's Adult Children Living in the Home**

Adult children are a good resource of information concerning the applicant's functioning and parenting abilities. Assess the functioning of the applicant's adult children and how the applicant's relationship with and parenting of adult children either did or did not impact their current level of functioning. When adult children live in the home, assess each adult child as an "other in the home." The assessment of adult children in the home, and for all other adults in the home, includes but is not limited to:

1. Criminal history checks, including fingerprinting, and assessment of criminal history.
2. Child welfare background checks and assessment of abuse/neglect.

3. The anticipated level of participation in the care of the foster children.
  4. Readiness to accept foster children into the family/home, and level of support to the applicants.
  5. Each adult's functioning and the impact on family functioning.
  6. Use of alcohol or other drugs
  7. Whether behavior poses a threat to the safety, health, or well-being of others.
- **Applicant's Adult Children Living Outside the Home**

When the adult children live outside of the home, the assessment relies more on what the applicants say about their children than on direct contact with the adult children. The certifier is not required to contact them, he/she has the ability and authority to do so. Gaining the adult children's perspective on the applicant's overall functioning and parenting abilities informs the assessment greatly. Situations in which contacting the adult children are considered include but are not limited to:

    1. The receipt of a negative reference.
    2. The applicant is estranged from his/her adult children.
    3. The applicant has child abuse/neglect history.
    4. The applicant has a mental health or drug/alcohol history that may have impacted parenting.
  - **Extended Family Relationships**

Assess the applicant's extended family relationships, how the applicant functions in a family system, what he/she expects from and creates in a family system, the level of support he/she receives from family, and how the applicant's family system and functioning impacts his/her own functioning, relationships, and world view.

    1. Family cohesion. Assess family members' ability to maintain emotionally connected and supportive interpersonal relationships without being overly involved enmeshed with one another's lives. Consider the following:
      - a. Does the applicant have healthy family emotional connections in which the family relates with warmth, caring, and support?
      - b. Are there clear, yet permeable family boundaries that create a sense of belonging to the family as well as connectedness to the outside world?
      - c. Do family members maintain a proud identification with ethnic/cultural identity?
      - d. Is healthy individuation of family members supported?
    2. Family adaptability. Assess the family's ability to adapt to change without being too rigid or too flexible. Consider the following:

- a. Does the family readily make necessary adjustments to accommodate new circumstances and/or relationships?
  - b. Is the communication within the family respectful, clear, and well received?
  - c. Is the family ready, willing and able to respectfully accept differences and embrace new family members?
  - d. Are family decision making and conflict resolution processes fair and effective?
  - e. Are family roles, rules and expectations realistic, clear and adjustable?
  - f. How does the applicant function in her/his childhood family and make efforts to behave differently in her/his own family?
3. The applicant's relationship with his/her own extended family. Assess the applicant's present relationship with extended family members including the character of the relationships maintained and the level of emotional and/or tangible support the extended family is willing to provide. Consider the following:
- a. Are there close and comfortable relationships with the applicant's own extended family?
  - b. Are contacts with the majority of extended family members characterized by caring, support, flexibility, understanding, compromise, and acceptance of differences?
  - c. Are there extended family members that live in close proximity to the applicant ready and willing to provide support to the applicant?
  - d. Do the extended family members pose a threat to the safety, health or well-being of children and how what is the applicant's plan to protect a child from any threat?
4. If applicable, assess each applicant's relationship with his/her partner's extended family. These relationships are assessed primarily through interview with the applicants but may come from references or other collateral contacts as well. Consider the following:
- a. Are relationships close, supportive, respectful, comfortable, and enjoyable?
  - b. Are relationships characterized by interactions that are positive even though there may be differences in lifestyle, beliefs, values, etc, they do not interfere with established, predominantly healthy relationships.
- **Physical/Social Environment**  
Assess the physical environment through observation and the social environment through observation and interviews. When physical areas need improvement, assess the applicant's response to feedback as well as his/her effort to remedy the issue. Take into consideration the age and characteristics of children for whom the applicants are interested in providing care.

1. The cleanliness and maintenance of the home. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the home exterior and property well kept, is some maintenance required, or is it extremely run down?
  - b. Is the home interior clean and comfortable, slightly cluttered, or dirty with pronounced, offensive odors?
  - c. Does the home interior reflect consistent care and attention, are some minor repairs in order, or are there signs that it has received virtually no upkeep (i.e.; heater does not work, problem with mold, or substantial renovation is required in order to be habitable)?
2. The home is a safe environment. Consider the following:
  - a. Are there any safety issues noted on the Safety Checklist Home and Surroundings?
  - b. Is the applicant safety conscious?
  - c. Is the applicant knowledgeable about child safety issues?
3. The condition of the furnishings, play areas, and clothing. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the home adequately furnished with clean, sturdy, and functional furniture?
  - b. Does the applicant understand the need for and provide proper clothing, toys, and equipment that are age appropriate for the children being considered?
4. The applicant's finances. Assess the applicant's financial history and current finances. An unstable financial history does not preclude one from becoming a foster parent. However, it might be indicative of a pattern of decision making or behavior that the certifier needs to explore. The applicant must support themselves financially separate from foster care payments. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the applicant's income reliable and sufficient to meet his/her family's needs?
  - b. Is the applicant able to budget, organize and spend money wisely?
  - c. Does the applicant manage debts and live within means?
5. The applicant's support system. Assess the applicant's emotional and tangible support available from non-family members and community resources. Consider the following:
  - a. Does the applicant have friends who are supportive and helpful and live in close proximity?
  - b. Does the applicant have a plan for baby sitting and/or respite care?
  - c. Does the community provide adequate, affordable resources?



There may be an occasion when an applicant has authorization from the Oregon Health Authority to grow marijuana for up to four medical marijuana cardholders. View the garden and the placard that is required to be displayed at the garden by OMMP. The placard authorizes the person to grow the marijuana. Your assessment considers the safety of the home environment and answers the following questions: How will the applicants ensure that the child or young adult will not have access to the marijuana at any time? What, if any, security measures do the applicants use to prevent others from stealing the marijuana? Are the security measures safe for children? How is the marijuana processed and delivered? Do the patients come to the home or does the applicant meet them somewhere else? Would the applicant involve the children in any part of the process (from grow to harvest to delivery)? Consider the answers to these questions along with other information learned during the assessment process and consult with the certification supervisor and, if needed, the Foster Care Coordinator.

#### 6. **Household Pets**

Assess the presence of household pets. Consider the following:

- a. Are the pets treated well by the family members?
- b. Does the applicant provide appropriate shelter, diet, grooming, and veterinary services for the pet?
- c. Are the pets comfortable with children?
- d. Does the pet behave in a predictable and safe manner around people, particularly children?
- e. Is the pet an unusual pet than may pose unique threats to children (i.e.: snakes, pit bulls)?

- **Parenting Skills**

Assess the applicant's parenting skills including both general parenting and specialized parenting. Interview the applicants and observe them with their own children. When applicants are not parents, assess based on the applicants report. Gain additional information from references or family members if the applicant has been around other people's children. Discuss whether the applicant appears to be gaining competencies from participation in training with the Foundations trainer. Consider the following:

1. The applicant's knowledge of child development.
  - a. Does the applicant have a realistic knowledge base regarding child development?
  - b. Does the applicant have realistic expectations throughout each developmental stage?
  - c. Does the applicant provide a stimulating environment that facilitates healthy child development?
2. The applicant's observed or reported parenting style.
  - a. Is there good parent responsiveness? How would the applicant respond to various child behaviors?
  - b. Does or will the applicant effectively incorporate a balance of both warmth and control into his/her parenting style?
  - c. Does or will the applicant acknowledge and reinforce child's positive behaviors?
3. The applicant's disciplinary methods.
  - a. Has the applicant ever used physical discipline or does he/she plan to?
  - b. How will discipline be administered consistently and predictably?
  - c. How will discipline methods be well thought out and appropriate?
4. The applicant's supervision of children.
  - a. Are the applicant's children appropriately supervised? If he/she does not have children, what does he/she envision regarding supervision?
  - b. How will the applicant choose substitute childcare with caution, ensuring that substitute caretakers are responsible and sensitive to the needs of the child?
  - c. How will childcare arrangements be stable?
5. The applicant's learning experiences. Assess the applicant's investment in the child's social and academic development based on the applicant's functioning with his/her own children or, if there are no children, on what the applicant reports he/she intends to do and what others say about the applicant. Consider the following:
  - a. Is the applicant directly involved in his/her own children's learning experiences? What is the applicant's plan for involvement with the foster children?
  - b. How will the applicant be involved in school (checking homework, meeting with teachers, participating in IEP meetings)?
  - c. How will the applicant directly and indirectly help a child to attain expected developmental tasks and social communication skills?

6. The applicant's role as a parent. Assess the applicant's level of comfort with and confidence in his/her role as a parent. Consider the following:
  - a. Does the applicant demonstrate or verbalize confidence in his/her parenting abilities?
  - b. Is he/she positive and enthusiastic about parenting?
  - c. Does he/she seem comfortable around children?
  - d. Is he/she open to learning new parenting skills?
  - e. Does he/she see the humorous aspects of parenting, enjoy children, and have fun in their presence?
7. The applicant's interactions with children. Assess the applicant's ability to cope with conflict, provide structure, and encourage positive interaction among children. Consider the following:
  - a. Does the applicant have a good understanding of the developmental stages which impact a child's relationships?
  - b. Is the applicant attentive to children's relationships by encouraging the sharing of experiences and belongings?
  - c. How will the applicant create individual time for each child as well as time for children to interact together?
  - d. Will the applicant encourage verbal conflict resolution among children?
8. The applicant's communication with children. Assess the applicant's ability to convey clear verbal and nonverbal messages and actively listen to a child. Consider the following:
  - a. Does the applicant have good ability to communicate at child's level of understanding?
  - b. Is the applicant an active listener?
  - c. Does the applicant have good ability to interpret a child's nonverbal messages?
9. The applicant's ability to provide basic care. Consider the following:
  - a. Will the applicant meet children's grooming need?
  - b. Will the applicant provide a healthy diet?
  - c. Will the applicant provide provision of basic child health care needs such as applying sun-screen, preventing second-hand smoke exposure, or providing age-appropriate exercise?
  - d. Will the applicant consistently provide the child with medical and dental check-ups?
  - e. Can the applicant effectively recognize medical symptoms for him/herself and/or children already in his/her home?

10. The applicant's understanding of child play. Assess the applicant's understanding of the value of play and ability to engage in play with the child. Consider the following:
  - a. How does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the importance of play, both alone and with others, for healthy child development?
  - b. Is the applicant able to provide an environment that encourages playfulness?
  - c. Does the applicant have the ability to provide a balance between structured and unstructured play activities?

- **Specialized Parenting Skills**

The assessment of specialized parenting skills may reveal that the applicant does not possess competency in specialized parenting skills, or parenting children with special needs, unless he/she has parented a special needs child, had some sort of experience with the foster care system, or has some sort of experience with children with special needs. Again, discovering how well the applicant is integrating the Foundations topics into his/her thinking about these topics will assist the certifier in assessing this area. Consider the following:

1. The applicant's expectations of foster parenting.
  - a. Does the applicant have realistic expectations of foster parenting?
  - b. Is the applicant emotionally prepared to provide unconditional love to a child who may be unable to reciprocate?
  - c. Does the applicant have an awareness of his/her own limitations in understanding of the challenges of child placement?
  - d. Is the applicant ready to learn?
2. The applicant's understanding of the effects of abuse and neglect on children. Assess the applicant's ability to comprehend and manage the special dynamics resulting from child abuse and/or neglect.
  - a. Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of how a child's normal emotional and physical development may be gravely impacted by the abuse and/or neglect he/she experienced?
  - b. How does the applicant intend to manage the challenging child behaviors associated with abuse and/or neglect?
  - c. Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the unique issues, dynamics, behaviors, and skills needed to parent a child who has been sexually abused?
3. The applicant's understanding of the effects of separation and loss on children.
  - a. Does the applicant have an understanding of the behavioral and emotional effects of separation and loss for children?

- b. How does the applicant intend to help a child manage his/her grief over separation from and/or loss of his/her family of origin?
    - c. Does the applicant have an understanding of the effects of separation, multiple foster care placements, disrupted adoptions, etc?
  4. The applicant's ability to provide structure, consistency, routine, and predictability.
    - a. Does the applicant already have well-established and easily maintained daily routines?
    - b. Does the applicant have an understanding of the role that structure plays in helping a child deal with the traumatic effects of abuse/neglect and foster care placement?
    - c. Does the applicant have the ability to offer consistent parental expectations, behaviors, and reactions?
  5. The applicant's ability and willingness to use therapeutic and educational resources.
    - a. Is the applicant ready to be a strong advocate for a child?
    - b. Is the applicant ready and willing to effectively utilize therapeutic and educational resources?
  6. The applicant's understanding of importance and complexity of birth and/or sibling relationships, and birth parent issues.
    - a. Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the need to be responsive to appropriate birth sibling contact?
    - b. How would the applicant facilitate a positive ongoing relationship between the child and his/her siblings?
    - c. What are the applicant's attitudes toward birth parents?
    - d. Is the applicant ready to talk with children about their birth parents and accurately portray the strengths and limitations of a child's birth parents?
- **Child Specific Assessments**

When the applicant is requesting placement of a specific child/young adult or sibling group, assess whether the applicant has the skills and ability to meet the needs of the children/young adults being considered. As you consider all of the elements of general parenting and specialized parenting listed above, do so in the context of what you know about the child being considered for placement. In addition, familiarize yourself with the child's case plan, permanency plan, concurrent plan, visitation plan, and supervision plan in order that you can best assess the applicant's ability to follow and support these plans. Consider the following:

  1. What are the child's medical, dental, educational, developmental, and mental health needs?

2. What are the child's behavioral and supervision needs?
3. Does the child have a Supervision Plan and Level of Care?
4. What does the CANS assessment indicate about the child's strengths and needs?
5. What are the child's needs for contact and relationship with parents, siblings, and extended family?
6. What are the child's permanency needs?
7. What is the case plan for the child?

- **Evaluation and Mitigation**

Mitigation is the process by which the certifier evaluates all of the information gathered during the home study process. Evaluate how the changes in the applicant's life and/or behavior that sustains, reduces or erases the level of concern registered by the final desk guide rating. Take into account considerations independent of the Desk Guide through certifier observation, assessment, and judgment. Consider the likelihood that any issue that received a final desk guide rating of 3, 4, or 5 would (not could) have an adverse effect on safe and effective family functioning and parenting.

- To evaluate all the information you have gathered, when using the mitigation process include:
  1. A clear statement of the issue of concern, including:
    - a. To what degree the concern impacts the applicant and those around him/her.
    - b. The frequency at which the concern takes place or impacts the applicant.
    - c. The severity of the concern.
    - d. Whether the concern is historical, current, or both.
    - e. The context in which the concern took or takes place.
  2. Evaluate and document the following:
    - a. To what degree has the applicant resolved the issue?
    - b. In what ways has the applicant adapted his/her behavior?
    - c. What is the strength of the applicant's resolution or adaptation?
    - d. How much energy is required by the applicant to sustain the resolution or adaptation?
  3. Consider what evidence exists that supports the evaluation. The evaluation may include but won't necessarily be limited to the following:
    - a. Does the applicant demonstrate behaviors that support the evaluation?
    - b. What do other people who know the applicant report about the issue?
    - c. Does the applicant maintain relationships that support the evaluation?

- d. Are there indicators that the applicant is functioning in a manner that sustains stability in employment, relationships, housing, etc?



When determining that an issue cannot be mitigated to a lower rating than the final desk guide rating determine whether and how to proceed with the applicant. Unchanged mitigation ratings are not necessarily grounds for a denial of an application. They may, however, impact placement matching, capacity decisions, the training plan for the applicant, etc. Sometimes unmitigated concerns will be severe enough to warrant a denial. Consult with the supervisor throughout the home study process and again during mitigation (assessment/evaluation of the information) to determine the course of action. In addition, the supervisor may choose to consult with the Foster Care Coordinator.

- **Writing the home study**

Once you have completed all interviews, gathered all collateral and background information, final desk guide ratings, and mitigation ratings, begin writing the home study that documents your assessment. When writing the home study:

1. Pay attention to the narration instructions provided in each section of the Oregon SAFE home study.
2. Use behaviorally specific language that provides clear description.
3. Reference the source of any information you cite.
4. Present all essential and critical information.
5. Avoid generalizations.
6. Avoid labels.
7. Narrate the strengths of the foster family in a concise manner.
8. Fully narrate any concern that received a final desk guide rating of 3 or higher.
9. Fully narrate your critical analysis for mitigation scores and evidence for such scores.

## Role of the Supervisor

### The supervisor's role

The role of the supervisor in the assessment process is crucial. The supervisor is available to the certifier for clinical consultation after each home study interview if necessary. At the very least, items that require mitigation should be discussed between the supervisor and the certifier. When the certifier and supervisor need additional consultation, the supervisor may contact the Foster Care Coordinator for their district.

- During and at the conclusion of the assessment process, the supervisor:
  1. Ensures that any relative applicant who is 18, 19 or 20 years of age has been approved by the child welfare program manager. Things to consider include maturity, family history, financial and residency stability, and the applicant's relationship to the child.
  2. Consults with the certifier and ensures appropriate assessment regarding a request for criminal history exception or other management approval.
  3. Consults with the certifier regarding an applicant who has any abuse/neglect history. The supervisor reviews the history, makes an informed judgment whether the family can provide a safe environment for the child, and advises the assigned certifier on proceeding with the assessment process.
  4. Ensures the certifier keeps a caseworker informed on any application for a child specific certificate.
  5. Reviews all information obtained during the assessment of the applicants.
  6. In expedited certifications, ensures that emergency criminal history checks and child welfare history checks have been completed and results of those checks have been assessed.
  7. Reviews and approves or ensures appropriate management approval of criminal history exceptions prior to certification. Some crimes require approval by the child welfare program manager, district manager or the DHS Assistant Director for DHS Child Welfare.

**Note:** If the supervisor cannot access management in order to have a criminal history exception request reviewed and approved, an expedited certification cannot proceed.

8. Reviews and approves or ensures appropriate management approval of child abuse history background checks prior to certification;
9. Approves the home for placement of a child; and

10. In expedited certifications, ensures receipt of all documentation for a 180 day certificate and a plan for the ongoing assessment of the family.
11. Ensure the certifier's ongoing assessment of the family proceeds quickly and the family is issued a 2-year certificate as soon as possible.
12. On rare occasions, the supervisor will need to approve an extension of the 180 certificate. When approving an extension of a 180 day Certificate of Approval, the certification supervisor must discuss the delays with the certifier, determine the actions that need to occur, and develop a time line to complete the certification process and issue a 2-year certificate.
13. When reviewing the completed home study, and issuing a Certificate of Approval for the two-year period, the certification supervisor must:
  - a. Review all assessment activities.
  - b. Assure the applicant meets certification standards.
  - c. Assure any required exception has been made for any criminal history and any required Management Approvals have been obtained.
  - d. Review the home study to determine the study documents the family's knowledge, skill, and ability to meet the safety and well-being needs of a child placed in their home.
  - e. Approves the certificate in OR-Kids.



## References and Forms

### OAR

- Child Welfare Policy II-B.1.1 Responsibilities for Certification and Supervision of Foster Parents, Relative Caregivers and Approval of Potential Adoptive Resources  
[http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/manual\\_2/ii-b11.pdf](http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/manual_2/ii-b11.pdf)
- Child Welfare Policy I-G.1.4 Criminal History  
[http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/manual\\_1/i-g14.pdf](http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/manual_1/i-g14.pdf)

### Forms

- CF 1260A Application for Approval to care for a child in DHS custody  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE1260A.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE1260A.doc)

- CF 0332F Certified Family Certification/Approval Information  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE0332f.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE0332f.doc)
- CF 117 Request for Management Approval for Specific Rules  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE0117.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE0117.doc)
- CF 1255 Applicant Reference  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE1255.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE1255.doc)
- CF 979 Safety Checklist Home and Surroundings  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE0979.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE0979.doc)
- CF 0010A CAF Request for Translation Services  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE0010a.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE0010a.doc)
- CF 1291 Family Financial Report  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE1291.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE1291.doc)
- CF 1257A Medical Report A  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE1257a.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE1257a.doc)
- CF 1257B Medical Report B  
[http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD\\_DOCS/CE1257b.doc](http://dhsresources.hr.state.or.us/WORD_DOCS/CE1257b.doc)