

TRIBAL HOME STUDIES

The Basics and Beyond

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CHILD WELFARE CONSULTING, LLC

What is a Tribal Home Study?

Child welfare professionals conduct home studies of prospective foster or adoptive parents to evaluate if they are suitable to temporarily, or permanently, care for children.

Home studies:

- include a written assessment (not a biography),
- contain the “story” of a family while meeting tribal, state and/or federal requirements,
- provide an opportunity to educate the family on foster care and adoption, and
- develop worker-foster/adoptive parent relationship.

Who to Interview

- Applicant(s) together and individually
- Minor children in the home
- Adult children in the home
- Other adults in the home

Interview Tips

- Ensure privacy so interviews cannot be overheard
- Interview in comfortable space
- Schedule your next visit before leaving

Cultural Considerations

- Tribes have unique cultures
- Each family experiences tribal culture in their own way
- Worker should pick up on nonverbal cues
- Humor may be used by applicant to express difficulties or cover pain
- Distrust in tribal or state workers
- Protective of their family and story
- Consider ceremonial involvement and experiences for a child; smoking tobacco, piercing ceremonies, etc.
- Non-Native families caring for tribal children
- Each person, regardless of ethnicity, has their own unique culture



Possible Home Study Categories

- Motivation
- Childhood
- Relationships
- Discipline Beliefs
- Children
- Religious/Spiritual Beliefs
- Training
- Employment and Finances
- Physical and Emotional Health
- Culture
- Placement Preferences
- Home Safety Check
- Child Welfare and Criminal History
- Child Care Plans
- Education Background
- School District
- References
- Summary/Recommendation



Motivation and Purpose

Applicants share why they applied to become a foster or adoptive parent

- “We are unable to have any more children. We feel like we have so much love to give.”

For kinship it may seem obvious, but they have their own perspectives

- “I wanted to care for my niece because I was raised in foster care. I want her to live with family and not in group homes like me. Her mother needs help, and I am happy to support her.”

Address expectations about placement

- “You mentioned that you only want placement of a child who is legally free for adoption. Last year in this state, 96% of the foster children who were adopted were adopted by their foster parents.
- “Your interest is in fostering one male child under the age of one. While we respect your family decision making, having specific preferences can be limiting and we want you to be aware of how that can impact how often you are contacted for placement compared to other families.

Childhood



- A person's childhood can shape their life and provide insight into their perspectives on life
- What was your early childhood like?
- Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
- Did your family spend time together?
- What activities did you participate in as a family?
- Who met your developmental needs?
- What were unhappy memories? Scary or traumatic events?
- What were your best memories?

Family Relationships

- Interpersonal relationships are assessed to examine an applicant's ability to develop, maintain, and sustain those relationships
- Forgiveness and flexibility in relationships can be identified
- Relationships are examined for safety issues
- You explained the reason you have a strained relationship with your mother is due to her past abuse of prescription medications, but you still have your children ride the bus to her home after school every day. Please tell me more about that.



Intimate Relationships

- The applicant's marriage or relationship is assessed for stability and safety. Ask a variety of questions to better understand the relationship
- What are the strongest parts of your relationship?
- What struggles do you currently have?
- What are struggles you faced in the past? How did you overcome those?
- Describe the worst argument you ever had and how it was resolved.
- How do you make decisions?
- What are your shared interests, hobbies, and activities?
- For single individuals, ask about social life and dating life

Discipline

- Applicant's ability and willingness to care for children from hard places is assessed
- What stresses you out about managing a child's behavior?
- How did/do you discipline your own children? How will you discipline a foster child?
- What are your concerns about caring for a foster child who may act out behaviorally to express himself or herself? How will you handle behavior that may seem odd and out of place?
- Necessary to examine if they can provide the necessary nurturing, discipline, and guidance appropriate for the age and functioning of the child
- Experienced parents may be prepared for typical struggles, but may not be fully equipped or willing to care for children dealing with the trauma of being abused and neglected

Children of Applicants

- An applicant's relationship with their minor and adult children should be examined
- Ex: Dakota has applied to become a foster parent. He is healthy, financially stable, and has experience in working with traumatized children. He appears to be an excellent person to care for children. He reported he has an eleven-year-old son he does not visit. When the child was two years old, Dakota separated from the child's mother. He has paid child support since the separation but has had no visitation. Dakota reported he has not sought any visitation or custody. His reasoning was because he was immature at the time and moved on with his life.
- Ask parents about their child's strengths, skills, struggles, medical history, school information, criminal involvement, their thoughts on foster care and adoption, etc.



Religious and Spiritual Beliefs

- Each family has their own unique religious or spiritual beliefs with various levels of involvement
- Important to assess because of each foster child's beliefs
- Take time to research specific beliefs you are unfamiliar with
- Applicants may have certain beliefs which cannot be respected due to medical emergencies or parental requests. Prepare to discuss and explain

Example: A medical emergency happens to a foster child. The foster child requires a blood transfusion. The foster family does not believe in this type of medical intervention.

Finances

- A summary of gross income, net income, and cost of expenditures will be listed. These are typically listed in home studies as monthly.
- Applicants should be able to financially support their own family without the help of a foster care maintenance payment. This should be assessed prior to initiating the home study.
- Ex: Taylor's take-home monthly income is \$2,000.00, with \$1,400.00 of that in employment income and \$600.00 in child support for his seventeen-year-old daughter. His monthly expenditures calculate to \$1,500.00. His daughter turns 18 next month and child support will end.
- History of bankruptcy may also be addressed to assess financial stability and lessons learned from past financial decisions

Child Welfare History, Criminal History, and Civil Records

- Know tribal, state, and federal laws for child welfare and criminal records checks
- Check history in current and previous states of residence per policy but also if a need to do so is identified
- Include explanations of child welfare, criminal and civil records in the applicant's own words
- Ensure all verbal or written statements have been crosschecked with your records and findings
- Even though your agency forms ask about arrest history, ask again during the interviews for assurance

References

- References are contacted to gather information about the applicant's fitness to become a foster or adoptive parent
- Reference relationships may include relatives, friends, school professionals, behavioral health professionals, adult children, and employers
- The number of references needed depends on agency preference
- Can be completed via phone, mail, or email

Summary and Recommendation

- A summary and recommendation of the home study is included at the end of the document
- Summarize the applicant's strengths, skills, and abilities
- Kateri has a sincere motivation to become a foster parent. She is a special education teacher, trained on helping children with special needs. She has taught many foster children in her twenty years as an educator. She shows compassion for families involved in the child welfare system. Kateri reported she is willing to have a relationship with a foster child's biological family. She stated, "I understand the importance of the parent-child relationship. I will do my part in helping a child maintain their family connections." It is recommended Kateri be approved as a foster parent for up to two children in tribal or state custody.
- Include weaknesses and areas of concern, if applicable
- Not all families receive a recommendation for approval



Interviewing Methods

Engaging the Family

- Each interviewer-interviewee relationship is unique
- Share the plan and purpose for interviewing
- Ensure a comfortable setting
- Appear non-judgmental
- Compliment the home
- Acknowledge the family pets



Closed-Ended Questions

Elicits specific responses, such as yes or no

- What is your date of birth?
- How long have you been married?
- How many children do you have?
- What school district do you live in?

Open-Ended Questions

Allows for a broad range of information including feelings, emotions, and perceptions both positive and negative

- Tell me about your childhood.
- Why are you interested in becoming a foster parent?
- What are your views on discipline?
- Describe your relationship with your parents.

Interviewer follows up on answers when needed

- You said you and your wife struggled with finances in the past. Tell me more about that.
- You said your relationship with your brother is fine. What does that mean?

Tough Questions

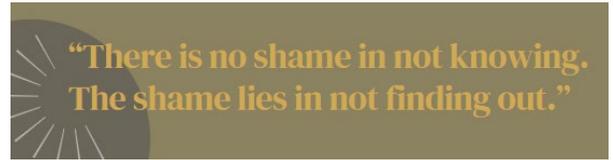
- Emotional topics must be discussed, such as abuse and other trauma, to assess if an applicant can help a child who has faced trauma
- Interviewer must help guide and support the interviewees if they struggle or appear uncomfortable answering, while still gathering needed information

Redirection

- Redirection may be needed to keep the conversation on track
- Summarize to end the conversation and move forward
- I loved hearing about your tractor. That was so interesting. Now we are going to discuss your health history.
- Now that we have discussed your relationship with your step-father, we are going to talk about your relationship with your siblings.

Confrontation

- Confrontation is necessary when an interviewee is resistant to answering questions or not being honest
- “You appeared to be irritated when I asked about your relationship with your ex-wife. Is there a reason for this?”
- You are not wanting to discuss the reason you attended mental health counseling last year. I want to respect your feelings, but I also need more information about this to assess your application. I will also need to complete a reference with your therapist as required by policy.



Concluding the Home Study Process

- Define a process for applicant review of the home study as well as tribal agency approval
- Home studies are reviewed by multiple professionals and agencies over time. These may include state child welfare agencies, contracted foster care agencies, attorneys, state courts, tribal courts, and other related partners or agencies

Home Study Scenario Videos

- [Home Study Scenario 1](#)
- [Home Study Scenario 2](#)
- [Home Study Scenario 3](#)
- [Home Study Scenario 4](#)
- [Home Study Scenario 5](#)
- [Home Study Scenario 6](#)

Resources

- How to Screen Foster and Adoptive Parents Workbook
 - Purchase: https://www.amazon.com/Screen-Adoptive-Foster-Parents-Professionals/dp/0871014157/ref=sr_1_fkmrnull_2?keywords=how+to+screen+foster+and+adoptive+parents&qid=1555605091&s=books&sr=1-2-fkmrnull
- Adoptive and Foster Parent Screening: A Professional Guide for Evaluations
 - Purchase: <https://www.amazon.com/Adoptive-Foster-Parent-Screening-Professional/dp/0415952689>
- Home Study Requirements for Prospective Foster Parents
 - <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/homestudyreqs.pdf>
- The Adoption Home Study Process
 - https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_homstu.pdf
- Background Checks for Prospective Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Caregivers
 - <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/background.pdf>



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