



# Florida Department of Children and Families

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## FSFN Utilization Position Paper – Unified Home Study

June 15, 2018

A “FSFN Position Paper” defines how a child welfare business process is supported with FSFN functionality. This position paper was developed to support the Department’s “FSFN System Adoption Initiative” conducted in 2016-2017 and was vetted with CBC/Lead Agencies to reach consensus on baseline standards for the use of FSFN.

### I. Policy Overview

Florida Administrative Code, Florida Statute, and Children and Families Operating Procedures outline the expectations and requirements for the placement of children. These requirements include the need to adequately assess all potential caregivers, whether the caregiver is the “non-maltreating” parent, relative/non-relative, licensed caregiver, or a prospective adoptive parent. References include links for the reader’s convenience.

**Florida Statutes** related to home studies for the placement of children in out of home care:

[Section 39.5085\(2\)\(b\), F.S., Relative Caregiver Program](#)

[Section 39.521\(2\)\(o\), F.S. Home Study Requirements at Disposition](#)

[Section 409.175 F.S., Licensure of Family Foster Homes, etc.](#)

[Section 63.092 F.S.- Adoptions](#)

**Florida Administrative Code:**

[65C-13 Foster Care Licensing](#) governs the Substitute Care of Children including requirements for the home study assessment.

[65C-16, Adoptions](#) governs adoptions including the requirements for adoption home studies.

[65C-28.004, Placement Matching](#)

[65C-28.005, Changing Placements](#)

[65C-28.011, Criminal, Delinquency and Abuse/Neglect History Checks for Release to a Parent, Placement with a Relative and Non-Relative and Approval of Informal Safety Management Providers](#)

[65C- 28.012, Other Parent Home Assessment and Home Studies for Relative and Non-Relative Placements](#)

### Operating Procedures

CFOP 170-1 Chapter 5: Unified Home Study

CFOP 170-1 Chapter 6: Requesting and Analyzing Background Records

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## II. Practice Overview

The “Unified Home Study” is intended to provide for the assessment of a common set of requirements that must be met when the department places a child into someone’s home, whether a relative/non-relative, foster care or adoption home. Similar to the family assessment process, the Unified Home Study should be an on-going assessment of a substitute care provider to determine their ongoing ability to care for the children placed in their care. Any type of home study provides for the gathering and assessment of information to determine:

- If anything in the caregiver(s) or household member’s background history presents a current concern or disqualifies them from providing care
- If the caregiver(s) will be able to provide a safe and nurturing environment
- If the physical environment provides for safe and reasonable accommodations for the child
- If caregiver(s) possess adequate financial resources to care for the child
- Whether the caregiver will require further supports and training

The specific requirements for each type of home study are defined in statutes and administrative code. When the placement is an emergency and a child is already in a family made arrangement or is being placed with a relative/non-relative, the information must be gathered to complete the Unified Home Study (UHS), Emergency Placement, by the worker responsible for the emergency placement. The information will be documented using the FSFN UHS functionality within two business days, unless there is a shelter hearing and documentation of the home study is required by the court. The UHS must be approved by a supervisor prior to placement for all other home study types. (Note: If child is released to a non-maltreating parent, the approved Other Parent Home Assessment must be scanned into FSFN and attached to the Case Note type, “Other Parent Home Assessment.” See CR453)

## III. Florida Safe Families Network Utilization

All home studies must be completed in FSFN using the Unified Home Study (UHS). The UHS serves as the primary decision support tool when placing a child outside of a parent’s home. Background checks involving the Hotline’s Criminal Intelligence Unit can be directly requested through the UHS. The worker will indicate in the Criminal Background Check Request group box by selecting the radio button for either emergency placement or planned placement.

- Emergency background checks occur when exigent circumstances exist and the child must be placed within 72 hours.
  - Case Managers must only use the emergency background check option when it is a true emergency and the child has to be placed with another relative/non-relative caregiver quickly.
- Planned background checks occur when exigent circumstances do not exist and the child does not need to be placed within 72 hours.

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The UHS document can be printed, signed and a copy can be made available for caregiver and the hard file. All home studies will be reviewed, signed and dated by the family, the worker who completed it, and the supervisor. The date completed box should contain the date of the last signature obtained by all parties listed above.

#### Unified Home Study, and Emergency & Relative/Non-Relative:

- The UHS must be completed by the worker assigned to complete the home study and approved by a supervisor in FSFN. When the provider address or household composition changes, the home study must be updated and re-approved. Attachments needed to support the decision to approve or deny the home study should be attached to the FSFN-UHS home study page for Attachments.
- The copy feature is available in FSFN and may be used by the Child Welfare Professional when adding additional information to the Initial Unified Home Study that was completed initially.
- Required attachments to a home study must be attached to the FSFN-UHS home study page for attachments.

#### Unified Home Study, Foster Home Licensing

- Each UHS must be completed by licensing staff with the CBC, subcontracted agency, or other licensed child placing agency prior to the submission of the file for DCF approval and licensure.
- It is best practice for prospective foster parent(s) to be entered as Person Provider Inquiry while they attend parent preparation training. Once the prospective parent(s) have successfully completed training, they can then be converted to a Person Provider.
- Licensing staff may approve the UHS after DCF reviews it so that they can incorporate any changes which were requested by DCF regional licensing staff. The supervising agency shall immediately complete the approval process after the DCF review process is complete.
- When the licensed foster home changes location, household circumstances change, annual summaries for 3-year licenses or they experience any other changes specified by code, the Non Adoption Addendum must be completed and re-approved.
- Required attachments to a home study must be attached to the FSFN-UHS home study page for attachments.
- FSFN offers the availability of a copy function in the UHS. It is best practice to use this feature only on elements of the home study, such as the foster parent's education, which have not changed during the licensing year. When completing a re-licensure study it is important to address all the items that have changed in the home and all topics relevant to the foster parent's experience over the previous year of licensure. The Narrative tab must be updated by licensing staff to assess how the family was impacted by the placement of children.
- The Licensing and Relicensing Checklists shall be completed in FSFN and be used in place of the Licensing Standards Checklists for initial licensing, re-licensing and attestations.
- All required documents used to complete the assessment in the UHS shall be uploaded in FSFN.
- All licensing and relicensing home studies are considered complete when all necessary signatures are acquired and the UHS is approved in FSFN by the assigned worker and the Supervisor.
- All approved home studies should have an outcome of application withdrawn, approved-meets requirements, approved-review comments, denied-created in error, denied- criminal disqualifier, denied- FSFN disqualifier or denied- review comments.

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#### Unified Home Study, Adoption Home Study

- UHSs must be completed by a staff person with the CBC, subcontracted agency, or other licensed child placing agency prior to the adoptive placement of the child. Adoption home studies are valid for one year after the approval date.
- Adoption home study approvals are the date that the supervisor approves (completes) the document in FSFN, not the date the supervisor signs the Word document.
- Required attachments to a home study must be attached to the FSFN-UHS home study page for attachments (i.e. signature pages).
- All approved home studies should have an outcome of application withdrawn, approved-meets requirements, approved-review comments, denied-court approved, denied-created in error, denied- criminal disqualifier, denied- FSFN disqualifier or denied- review comments.
- While FSFN offers a copy function, discretion must be used when applying that function to the adoption home study. When copying an adoption home study, areas where there has been a significant changes regarding the prospective adoptive must be updated.

Adoption home studies should not be considered approved until the supervisor completes the second level of approval in FSFN and a completion date is entered. The supervisor's signature on the hard copy of the UHS should not be considered the approval date.

The [Center for Child Welfare FSFN](#) page provides many resources including the following:

- The [Topic Paper for Provider Guide](#) provides details on the designs of these pages in FSFN.
- The [User Guide for Unified Home Study](#) provides in-depth guidance for users and includes screenshots.
- The [User Guide for Provider Inquiry](#) provides in-depth guidance for users and includes screenshots.
- The ["How Do I... Guide" for Unified Home Study](#) provides specifics steps, tips and guidelines to complete work in the FSFN system.
- The ["How Do I... Guide" for Person Provider](#) provides specifics steps, tips and guidelines to complete work in the FSFN system.