

**441—125.4(237) Approval procedure.**

**125.4(1) Application.** Applicants for an initial approval to become a kinship foster home shall submit the Kinship Foster Care Approval Application forms directed in rule 441—125.2(237).

**125.4(2) Record checks.** Prior to approval of an application for kinship foster care, applicants shall pass the record check procedures identified in rule 441—125.7(237).

**125.4(3) Home study.** The recruitment and retention contractor shall complete a kinship foster care home study.

*a. Process.* Information for the home study is gathered primarily through a face-to-face interview with the identified kinship caregiver(s) in the home. Tribal agencies may also be involved in conducting home studies for American Indian and Alaska Native children. 42 U.S.C. §671(a)(26)(B) as amended to August 1, 2025, provides that any receiving state must treat any tribal home study report as meeting the requirements imposed by the state for the completion of a home study.

(1) The contractor shall hold at least one face-to-face interview with the applicant(s) with one of the interviews taking place in the applicant's home.

(2) A physical assessment of the home is required. The contractor shall use a Kinship Foster Care Home Study form to assess the physical structure of the home to verify it is safe for the child.

*b. Caregiver assessment.* The kinship caregiver shall be assessed to evaluate the caregiver's ability to meet the needs of the court-ordered placed child. The assessment will include the following criteria:

(1) The applicant's ability to provide for the child's physical, medical, and emotional needs; to respect the child's ethnic and religious identity; and to support the child's overall well-being.

(2) The safety of the child in relation to any animals that live on the applicant's property.

(3) Knowledge of the child's situation, the caregiver's relationship with the child, the child's family and knowledge of the child's situation and department involvement.

(4) Agreement to abstain from using physical forms of discipline.

(5) Understanding of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard and how to successfully apply the standard.

(6) The caregiver's willingness to access resources and additional supports needed for placement stability to meet the needs of their family and the child placed in their care.

(7) The caregiver's and other household members' current health status, including current prescription medications.

(8) The caregiver's previous or current challenges with mental health, substance use or both and the potential impact it may have on the caregiver's ability to care for the child.

(9) Assessment of whether previous violence was experienced in the caregiver's home and how it has been addressed.

(10) The caregiver's willingness and ability to ensure the child's attendance at school; appointments for medical, dental, and vision; activities; and to ensure family interactions with parents and siblings.

(11) Assessment of the caregiver's ability and willingness to commit to the child, to work with the department, and to be considered as a long-term permanency option.

(12) Understanding of household composition, who has access to the child, other adults and children in the household, relationship status of household members and family dynamics.

(13) Description of the caregiver's available formal and informal supports to ensure child safety and well-being.

*c. Physical home assessment.* The physical home assessment shall assess the following areas of the applicant's home and address necessary steps to mitigate concerns when identified:

(1) General description of the dwelling, including the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, and shared areas of the home.

(2) Determination of any signs of home infestation by rodents, insects, or other pests.

(3) Existence of external hazards, such as accessibility of pools/hot tubs, nearby bodies of water, railroad tracks, waste materials, or contaminated water.

(4) Existence of internal hazards that pose a risk of harm created by the physical structure of the home, such as broken or missing stairs, exposed wires, large holes in the floor, broken windows, or other physical hazards.

- (5) Accessibility of hazardous materials or items in the home or on the property and the means to make them inaccessible to the child in an age-appropriate way or used with appropriate supervision.
- (6) Evaluation of a child's access to the following:
  - 1. Firearms and projectile weapons.
  - 2. Medications.
  - 3. Strong or toxic chemicals, such as detergents, bleach, and gasoline.
  - 4. Tools, machinery, farm equipment, lawn mowers, and trampolines.
  - 5. Potable water.
- (7) Evaluation of the sleeping arrangements for children placed in the home, including:
  - 1. Planned sharing of sleeping spaces.
  - 2. Where children will have privacy to change clothes.
  - 3. If supports are needed to provide beds, bedding, or establish opportunities for privacy.
  - 4. Discussion of safe sleeping practices for children aged one and younger.
- (8) Ability to ensure the child's access to age-appropriate personal hygiene (bathing, brushing teeth, wearing clean clothing).
- (9) Ability to protect the child in an age-appropriate manner from pets or animals.
- (10) Age-appropriate safe seat restraints (car seat, seatbelt, etc.) in personal vehicles used to transport the child.
- (11) Ability to provide the child ongoing access to adequate, nutritious, age-appropriate food, including the ability to keep perishable items cold.
- (12) Understanding of the child's dietary needs related to cultural/religious traditions, medical needs, and allergies.
- (13) A plan for fire safety, including an escape plan and smoke detectors.
- (14) Ability to create a safety plan that includes the ability to contact emergency services for assistance within a reasonable distance (neighbor's home, local business, etc.)
- (15) Description of support mechanisms needed for the caregiver to address any barriers to meeting the physical needs of the home to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and steps taken to address the needs during the approval process.

*d. Written report.* The recruitment and retention contractor shall prepare a written report of the caregiver assessment. This assessment shall include a recommendation for approval or denial of the application and any other pertinent information in making the recommendation. The home study shall be maintained in the kinship caregiver's record maintained by the department.

**125.4(4) Decision and notice of action.** The department will use the home study and the recommendation of the recruitment and retention contractor to approve or deny a caregiver for kinship foster care.

- a.* The department will notify the family of the decision in writing.
- b.* If the department does not approve the home study, a notice will be issued according to the provisions of 441—Chapter 16 and state the reasons for that decision as listed in rule 441—125.3(237).
- c.* A denial may be appealed pursuant to the provisions set forth in 441—Chapter 7.

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