



Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) Policy

Division of Safety and Permanence

July 2024

Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) Home Study Assessment

Introduction

The SAFE home study assessment is a standardized home study developed by the Consortium for Children. The SAFE home study assists agencies in performing a thorough, structured, and uniform evaluation of families who have applied to become foster or adoptive parents. The SAFE home study assists in identifying and addressing both strengths and areas of concern that may impede functioning, as well as parenting.

Use of a standardized home study assessment is one of the tools agencies use in documenting the analysis of the determination as to whether or not a prospective foster or adoptive home is fit and qualified for caring for children placed in out-of-home care. Consideration must be given to the importance of matching a prospective foster or adoptive home with a child whose needs can be met in that home. The home study determines if a family is ready, willing, and able to become a suitable and safe placement resource for a child or children using the criteria of safety, permanence, and well-being.

In addition to the requirements for completing the SAFE home study assessment, agencies shall also comply with requirements pursuant to [Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 56](#), Foster Home Care for Children; [Wis. Admin Code ch. DCF 51](#), Adoption of Children with Special Needs and Preadoption Preparation Training; and [Wis. Admin Code ch. DCF 54](#), Child Placing Agencies, as applicable.

Applicability

Use of the SAFE home study assessment is required for all foster care licensing in Wisconsin and as the evaluation to determine the suitability of the home for a child who is the subject of an adoption.

The requirement for a standardized home study applies to all public and private adoptions in Wisconsin, whether the child is a U.S. or foreign citizen, but does not apply to an adoption by a stepparent for which other screening standards are required under current law.

This policy applies to all counties, child placing agencies, and the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS) prior to issuing a foster home license or adoption approval. Agencies may only provide home study approval within their statutory authority pursuant to [Wis. Stats. s. 48.57 \(1\) \(hm\)](#).

Agencies shall assure that all actions of either the agency or contracted provider staff comply with this policy.

Definitions

“Home Study Practitioner” is the child welfare professional or licensor who is completing the home study components and writing the home study report for foster care licensure and/or adoption approval and has also completed the mandatory training requirements.

SAFE Home Study Assessment Components

The home study process is broad and goes beyond evaluating family dynamics. The SAFE home study assessment has three components that shall be utilized when administering the assessment:

- Information Gathering Tools
- Structured Analysis Tools
- Preformatted Home Study Report

SAFE home study practitioners shall utilize these three components when administering the SAFE home study. Each component is described in more detail below. For additional information on the SAFE home study process, review *Appendix A, SAFE Home Study Flow Chart*, and *Appendix B, SAFE Supervisor Flow Chart*.

Information Gathering Tools

The SAFE home study process utilizes the following information gathering tools to support the SAFE interview with families:

- SAFE Questionnaire I
- SAFE Questionnaire II
- Reference Letters
- Home Study Interview

Home study practitioners are required to administer each of these tools, which are explained further below.

SAFE Questionnaire I

SAFE Questionnaire I reviews a variety of areas that are related to family history and functioning. Home study practitioners shall administer Questionnaire I using the following guidelines:

- Provide Questionnaire I to the foster home or adoptive home applicant(s) to complete and return to the agency prior to the first interview. Typically, this will be provided with the foster home or adoptive home application.
- Questionnaire I shall be administered to each applicant; it may also be administered to other members of the household, if the agency chooses.

SAFE home study practitioners shall review the completed Questionnaire I in preparation for the home study interviews.

The template for Questionnaire I is available for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#). The template is only available to individuals who have completed the two-day initial SAFE training.

SAFE Questionnaire II

SAFE Questionnaire II reviews issues or behaviors amongst the applicant(s). Home study practitioners shall administer Questionnaire II using the following guidelines:

- Questionnaire II shall not be provided or mailed to the applicant(s) ahead of time.
- Questionnaire II shall never leave the home study practitioner's sight or control.
- Questionnaire II shall be administered directly by the home study practitioner in a private setting with all applicants present and together.
- Questionnaire II shall be administered to all applicants; it may also be administered to other members of the household if the agency chooses.
- Applicants shall not communicate with each other or the home study practitioner while completing Questionnaire II.
- Home study practitioners shall interview each applicant privately and individually immediately after the administration of Questionnaire II. The SAFE training provides practitioners with resources and information to assist in their interviews.
- The template for Questionnaire II is available for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#). The template is only available to individuals who have completed the two-day initial SAFE training.

Reference Letters

Ch. DCF 56 Admin. Code requires reference letters in accordance with the applicant's level of care certification, which are required as part of the SAFE home study process. References shall be administered for each applicant as required under Ch. DCF 56 Admin. Code.

Reference letters shall be mailed to the individuals who will be providing the reference; they shall not be given to the applicant to provide the letter to the individuals. Reference letters shall be returned directly to the agency.

The template for the Reference Letter is available for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#). The template is only available to individuals who have completed the two-day initial SAFE training. Agencies may use the Reference Letter template provided by the Consortium for Children, or they may use their own agency-specific reference letter.

Home Study Interview

The home study interview is considered the most important aspect of the SAFE home study process. The Information Gathering Tools noted above shall be used to develop questions to ask the applicants in the home study interviews. Interviews shall be age and developmentally appropriate and include the use of interpretive services, as needed.

Applicants:

A minimum of three interviews are required per applicant. If the home is a two-parent home, a minimum of four interviews are required, as the second interview shall be completed with each applicant separately.

- First interview: Introductory interview with all applicants.
- Second interview: Questionnaire II and applicant history. Conducted with each applicant individually and privately.
- Third interview: Marriage and/or support interview with all applicants.

Other Household Members:

All household members shall be interviewed. If there are any other household members, such as children or others residing in the home, additional interviews are required.

Documentation

The agency shall document and maintain original copies of the completed Information Gathering Tools in the applicant's file.

Agencies shall only release the Information Gathering Tools to the applicant for which they reference (i.e. agencies shall not release one of the Information Gathering Tools to applicant one, if they are referencing applicant two).

There are additional recommendations related to the home study interviews, which include:

- All home study interviews occur in the applicants' home.
- No interview takes longer than an hour and a half.
- At least 7 days pass between home study interviews.

Structured Analysis Tools

The SAFE home study format also provides home study practitioners with structured analysis tools to assist the evaluation of the applicants. SAFE uses the Psychosocial Inventory and SAFE Desk Guide to complete a psychosocial evaluation that is incorporated into the home study report. The Psychosocial Inventory and SAFE Desk Guide are complimentary tools that support and guide the home study process. Home study practitioners shall use both of these tools during the home study process.

Psychosocial Inventory

The Psychosocial Inventory contains psychosocial factors to be considered by the home study practitioner when completing the home study. The Psychosocial Inventory reviews any issues, behaviors, and events that have occurred in an applicant's history and determines if they currently impact an applicant's functioning or ability to parent.

SAFE Desk Guide

The SAFE Desk Guide defines each factor of the Psychosocial Inventory and provides criteria to guide the home study practitioner in rating the applicants' strengths and issues of concern.

Preformatted Home Study Report

The SAFE home study process provides a preformatted home study report that assists the home study practitioner in writing the home study.

The home study report is organized into five sections:

- Information about the applicants;
- An introduction to the applicants;
- The Psychosocial Evaluation;
- Conclusions and Recommendations; and
- Signatures of the applicants, the home study practitioner writing the home study, and the supervisor approving the home study.

Applicants shall be provided the opportunity to review the home study report. Applicants shall sign the home study report once it has been reviewed. If an applicant chooses not to sign the home study report, the agency shall attach documentation to the home study report that states the applicant had the opportunity to review and sign the home study report and chose not to do so.

Timeframe

The home study report shall be completed prior to the agency rendering a decision on the application as described in Ch. DCF 56.04(5) Admin. Code.

Documentation

The Department of Children and Families has a SAFE home study template approved by the Consortium for Children which incorporates other licensing requirements per Ch. DCF 56 Admin. Code. Agencies shall document the results of the home study for initial licensure/approval and renewal on this template, which is available to agencies through eWiSACWIS, the Department's website, or for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#).

Additionally, child placing agencies shall provide a copy of the completed and signed home study report to the Department of Children and Families for documentation in eWiSACWIS using the following form:

- [DCF-F-CFS2386-E Foster Home Information for eWiSACWIS](#)

Initial Home Study Report

Agencies with access to eWiSACWIS shall document the initial home study report in eWiSACWIS prior to the issuance of a foster home license or adoption approval.

Agencies without access to eWiSACWIS shall document the initial home study report in the home provider file. Agencies may access the home study report at the following links or for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#):

- [DCF-F-CFS2402B-E Multipurpose Home Study Report - Couples / Single](#)
- [DCF-F-CFS2402A-E Multipurpose Home Study Report - Couples / Single \(With Instructions\)](#)

Home Study Report Update/Recertification

Agencies with access to eWiSACWIS shall document the home study report update/recertification in eWiSACWIS prior to the issuance of a foster home license or adoption approval.

Agencies required to provide home study report updates to the Council on Accreditation (COA), shall provide the updated home study report in the SAFE format.

Agencies without access to eWiSACWIS shall document the home study report update/recertification in the home provider file. Agencies may access the home study report at the following links or for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#):

- [DCF-F-2623B-E Multipurpose Home Study Update / Recertification](#)
- [DCF-F-2623A-E Multipurpose Home Study Update / Recertification \(With Instructions\)](#)

For more information and guidance on writing a SAFE home study update/recertification see *Appendix C, Directions for Using the SAFE Update*.

International Adoptions

The Consortium for Children has a home study report available that is specific to international adoptions. The international adoption home study report is Hague compliant. The template for the international adoption home study report is available for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#). The template is only available to individuals who have completed the two-day initial SAFE training.

There are two versions of each type of home study report available, which are listed above. Both versions contain the same content; however, the home study reports with instructions will include additional information to guide the home study practitioner when writing the report. Agencies without access to eWiSACWIS may choose to use whichever version they prefer, with or without instructions.

If agencies require additional agency-specific information in the home study report, the agency may include this information in an addendum to the home study report. Additionally, if agencies require a notary on the home study report, the notary may be included in the signature page of the report or in an addendum to the report.

Compatibility Inventory

The SAFE Compatibility Inventory provides a systemic and comprehensive method to identify an applicant's compatibility with a child or children to be placed in their home. The Compatibility Inventory evaluates an applicant's strengths and resources and the child's needs. The Compatibility Inventory can be either child specific or for a future placement.

The template for the Compatibility Inventory is available for download on the [Consortium for Children's website](#). The template is only available to individuals who have completed the two-day initial SAFE training.

Agencies may utilize the Compatibility Inventory, if the agency chooses, or agencies may utilize provider characteristics as required in the [Documentation Requirements for Foster Care Providers in eWiSACWIS](#) policy. Additionally, agencies may utilize the Information to Out-of-Home Care Providers Part A & B forms as set forth in Ch. DCF 37 Admin. Code.

Technical Assistance

The Consortium for Children will provide agencies with technical assistance as they complete the SAFE home study process. The Consortium for Children will provide the following technical assistance:

- SAFE Resource Center, which provides support articles, information about SAFE, and other helpful resources. The SAFE Resource Center can be accessed at the [Consortium for Children's website](#).
- Clinical and technical support, which provides agencies with a free 40-hour a week help desk. SAFE clinical and technical support may be contacted at the SAFE help desk, (415) 491-2418 or on the [Consortium for Children's website](#).

Mandatory Training Requirements

Use of the SAFE home study assessment requires that anyone who will be administering and approving the SAFE home study attend mandatory training. Agencies shall not begin using the SAFE home study format until both the agency's home study practitioner and their supervisor, have attended the mandatory SAFE training.

There are two mandatory SAFE trainings, depending on the person's job function at their agency: Two-day initial SAFE training and the SAFE supervisor's training.

Two-Day Initial SAFE Training

The two-day initial SAFE training provides participants with an overview of the SAFE instrument and teaches participants about the process and format of the SAFE home study and home study updates. Additionally, all participants will receive the SAFE Desk Guide, Workbook, access to all of the SAFE forms and templates, and continued technical and clinical support.

The two-day initial SAFE training is required for:

- All home study practitioners who will be licensing a home for foster care and/or approving a home for adoption.
- All supervisors who will be approving the SAFE home study report.

If a new staff person is hired to license foster homes and/or approve prospective adoptive homes, that person shall not begin utilizing the SAFE assessment until they have received the two-day initial SAFE training. Instead, they shall assist their supervisor and/or a home study practitioner who has completed the initial SAFE training in completing the SAFE home study assessment, such as assistance with the interviews, SAFE Questionnaires, and writing the home study report. However, they shall not complete any of these functions without direct supervision from their supervisor and/or a home study practitioner who has completed the initial SAFE training.

The supervisor has the responsibility to prepare any new staff to perform SAFE home studies between the time they are hired and when they are able to attend the initial two-day SAFE training. Supervisors shall refer to their SAFE workbook to familiarize the new practitioner with the SAFE format and requirements.

SAFE Supervisor's Training

The SAFE supervisor's training is targeted at supervisors who are responsible for the ongoing supervision of home studies. This is a one-day training which provides guidance as to how to supervise SAFE in the most effective manner. Participants are asked to bring their SAFE Desk Guide with them to the supervisor's training.

All participants of the supervisor's training are required to complete the SAFE two-day initial training prior to completing the supervisor's training. Supervisors need to have an understanding of the SAFE instrument, which they receive in the two-day initial training. Without understanding the instrument and process, it would be challenging to the supervisor to adequately approve and supervise the SAFE home study. Additionally, supervisors need to have their own sets of materials (i.e., the SAFE Desk Guide & Workbook), as well as access to the SAFE forms and templates; participants only receive these materials at the two-day training.

The SAFE supervisor's training is required for:

- All supervisors who will be approving the SAFE home study.

If a new supervisor who will be approving the SAFE home study is hired, that supervisor shall not approve the SAFE home study until they have received the two-day initial SAFE training and SAFE supervisor's training.

There is also an Optional SAFE Booster Training. The SAFE booster training is not a required training. However, it is available to all home study practitioners and their supervisors who have completed the two-day initial training but would like a refresher on the SAFE process. All participants of the booster training shall have completed the two-day initial training. Participants are asked to bring their SAFE Desk Guide with them to the booster training. The booster training will review:

- Improvements and updates that have been made to SAFE,
- How to administer Questionnaire I and II,
- How to use the SAFE Desk Guide and Psychosocial Inventory,
- The SAFE Mitigation Process,
- How to write a SAFE Home Study, and
- Support and resources that are available to SAFE Home Study practitioners.

The Department recommends that agencies have more than one supervisor and more than one home study practitioner trained in the SAFE home study assessment to avoid any difficulties or disruption in approval of foster homes and prospective adoptive homes should there be staff turnover. The Department will provide SAFE training at least annually.

Documentation

Agencies accepting placement of children from public child welfare shall document verification of all completed SAFE training through PDS Online unless the training preceded the establishment of PDS Online. Documentation shall be provided on completed training, if requested under Ch. DCF 54 Admin. Code.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

SAFE

BEFORE FIRST HOME STUDY INTERVIEW

Administer Questionnaire I*

(Include in Packet with Application, etc.)

Review Questionnaire I and Application – highlight what “makes you curious.”
Develop Questionnaire Harvesting Sheet

Review with Supervisor prior to First Home Study Interview. Prepare Interview Work Sheet.

First Home Study Interview with Applicants.

*If applicable, provide Applicants with the SAFE Compatibility Inventory

Structured Analysis – Assign Desk Guide Ratings using “/” marking
*Reminder: You must rate according to the Desk Guide.

Submit Psychosocial Inventory to Supervisor for Review.

Second Home Study Interview with Applicants (This can be the Questionnaire II Interview.)
REMEMBER Questionnaire II* never leaves your “Sight or Control” and you must interview the Applicants individually IMMEDIATELY after you administer the Questionnaire.

Structure Analysis – Assign Desk Guide Ratings using “\” marking
*Reminder: You must rate according to the Desk Guide.

Submit Psychosocial Inventory to Supervisor for Review.

Continue this process of Interview and Structured Analysis until Interviews are complete.
After the final Interview mark the Psychosocial Inventory using the Desk Guide with “High Confidence” ratings.

*If applicable, collect completed SAFE Compatibility Inventory

Put the Desk Guide aside and begin the Mitigation Process.

Return to all Ratings of 3, 4 or 5 and determine whether you should sustain, reduce or erase the rating.

Meet with Supervisor to Review your Mitigation Ratings and your Mitigation Theories.

Write the Home Study using the Home Study Report.

*Questionnaire I and II MUST be administered to all applicants. You MAY administer the Questionnaires to others in the home or family (it is up to the individual Home Study Practitioner and/or their Supervisor).







Directions for Using the SAFE Update

Converting a non-SAFE Home Study to the SAFE Format

Review the initial non-SAFE study and subsequent updates and documents looking for information that "makes you curious" and needs further clarification and understanding.

Use the SAFE Harvesting Sheet and record the things that "make you curious" from the original Home Study and supporting documents.

Administer SAFE Questionnaire II in the same manner you do for a SAFE Home Study (administer together and interview immediately after).

After the interviews, go through the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and use the SAFE Desk Guide to assign Desk Guide ratings using a SAFE back slash (/).

Review your ratings of 3, 4 and 5 and determine if the issues, behaviors or events can be Sustained, Reduced or Erased (mitigated). Assign mitigation ratings and place them in the mitigation column.

Use the SAFE Update Report and follow the narration directions.

Materials Required:

- ☐ SAFE Psychosocial Inventory
- ☐ SAFE Questionnaire II
- ☐ SAFE Update Report

Updating a SAFE Home Study

Review all of the initial Home Study and all updated documents.

Transfer the SAFE Desk Guide Ratings of 1, 3, 4, or 5 (not 2s) and their Mitigation Ratings from the original SAFE Home Study to the Update Psychosocial Inventory in the column indicated on the Inventory (ex. 5/2 - final SAFE Desk Guide Rating 5 mitigated to a 2).

Administer the Update Questionnaire in the same manner you do Questionnaire II (administer together and interview immediately after).

After the interviews, go through the SAFE Update Psychosocial Inventory and use the SAFE Desk Guide to assign ratings using a SAFE back slash (/). You are only assigning SAFE Desk Guide ratings to issues, behaviors or events that have changed since the last Evaluation (Home Study or Update).

Review all of your ratings of 3, 4 and 5 and determine if the issues, behaviors or events can be Sustained, Reduced or Erased (mitigated). Assign mitigation ratings and place them in the mitigation column.

Use the SAFE Update Report and follow the narration directions.

Materials Required:

- ☐ SAFE Update Psychosocial Inventory
- ☐ SAFE Update Questionnaire
- ☐ SAFE Update Report