



Community Based Care: Hardee, Highlands & Polk Counties

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## Operating Policy & Procedure

<b>Series:</b>	Operations: Adoptions
<b>Policy Number:</b>	5-201
<b>Policy Name:</b>	Recruitment and Evaluation of Adoptive Applicants
<b>References:</b>	Florida Statute 39.0138, 39.521, F.A.C. 65C-16.005, Central Region Adoption Applicant Review Committee Protocol (AARC) (dated 5/2/2017)
<b>Origination Date:</b>	September 1, 2015
<b>Revised Date:</b>	July 1, 2020; December 5, 2016

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### Policy:

Heartland for Children (HFC) recruits, evaluates and assesses adoptive applicants for their appropriateness and readiness to adopt and meet the needs of a child who has experienced trauma.

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### Procedures:

#### 1. Child Study

A social study is completed on a child who has a goal of adoption and/or is available for adoption. The social study involves careful observation, identifies, and assesses the current and potential needs of a child, which includes the following:

- Developmental milestones
- Birth family background
- Birth family medical history
- Actual and potential impact of the trauma of abuse, neglect or abandonment
- Prior psychological or psychiatric evaluations/recommendations
- Educational history
- Interviews with caregivers, relatives and other adults involved with the child
- Interviews with the child, siblings and other children in the home

The child social study is one tool used in selecting families who will be able to meet the physical, emotional, social, educational and financial needs of a child, while safeguarding the child from further loss and separation from primary caretakers.

#### 2. Adoptive Parent Recruitment

Family members, foster parents, former caregivers, and other adults with a connection to the child are considered as prospective adoptive parents or as a resource for the child, and are appropriately involved in the child's placement.

HFC takes a proactive, intensive approach to recruiting adoptive parents for children with special needs who are under our care. Prospective adoptive parents may be married or single, already a parent or never a parent, an apartment renter or a homeowner, a person of modest means or wealth. Prospective adoptive parents must have the ability to love a child, to provide for the basics for a child and to make a lifelong commitment. No person shall be denied the opportunity to become an adoptive parent based on race, color or national origin. Recruitment is conducted in a responsive, respectful, and ethical manner.

If space is limited in scheduled Adoption 101 Classes, slots in the classes will be assigned using the following priority order:

- Persons with an existing relationship with a specifically identified special needs child waiting for adoption, or that child's sibling
- Persons who have expressed an interest in adopting a specifically identified special needs child waiting for adoption, or that child's sibling
- Persons who have explicitly stated their willingness to adopt special needs children available for placement through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or its designee

All applicants are treated equitably and are informed about what services will be available and when. HFC refers families who are only interested in adopting infants and children with no special needs to outside agencies.

### **3. Family Preparation and Adoption Home Study Process**

HFC provides the Adoption 101 Training for prospective adoptive parents. The Adoption 101 Training prepares the family for adoption and allows them the opportunity to assess themselves and their family as they explore and learn about adoption challenges and parenting skills needed to successfully parent the children available for adoption from foster care. The Adoption 101 Training for prospective adoptive parents includes but is not limited to the following:

- Emotional Regulatory Healing
- Dependency System
- Achieving Permanency for Children
- Post Adoption Services
- Culture & Diversity, Connections, and the Biological Family
- Sibling Visits
- Preparation for Home Study Process
- Trauma Informed Care
- Adoption clinical Issues
- Diana Screen
- NEO Personality Inventory – 3 Assessment
- Trust Based Relational Intervention

Adoption Home Studies involve an evaluation of the prospective parent's health, finance, child rearing experience, marital status, income, criminal background, abuse history, housing, references, cultural sensitivity and willingness to support the child's cultural ties, and interest in adoption. As part of the home study process for working parents, the willingness and ability of the prospective adoptive parents to make arrangements to be with the child during the transition period must be considered. A minimum of five (5) written references shall be required. Only one (1) reference may be obtained from an employer and only one (1) of the references may be obtained from a relative. All other references must be obtained from persons who either: 1) have observed the applicants in situations that give some indication for their capacity for parenthood, or 2) who as the result of their relationship to the applicant, possess documentation or knowledge of the applicant's capacity for parenthood. All references shall be provided directly to the agency person conducting the home study by the person providing the reference. HFC's Adoption Specialist visits the prospective adoptive parent's home to ensure it is an appropriate environment for rearing a child. The Home Study includes the age range and type of

children the prospective parents want to adopt. The aim of this evaluation is to select families who will be able to meet the physical, emotional, social, education and financial needs of a child, while safeguarding the child from further loss and separation from siblings and significant adults.

During the Adoption 101 Training, HFC's Adoption Specialist completes the Abuse Hotline, Criminal Records Check (Local, FDLE and FBI) and Adam Walsh Background Check (if a prospective parent has lived in another state within the last 5 years). HFC's Adoption Specialist generally completes the Adoption Home Studies within 45 days of the prospective family successfully completing the Adoption 101 Classes. Some barriers, which are outside of HFC's control to completing the Adoption Home Studies timely include, but are not, limited to:

- Family has not completed the required homework and/or provided the required documents (marriage license, divorce decree, references, income verification, required information on all household members, etc.)
- Family is in the process of moving to another residence
- Family has experienced a recent change of employment and/or a loss of employment
- Family health concerns which requires additional information
- Marital Concerns

HFC's Adoption Specialist provides the Case Managers with a copy of the Adoption Home Study within five (5) business days of approval.

The needs and strengths of both the adoptive parents and children are thoroughly assessed during the matching process.

#### **4. Adoption Review Committee**

HFC has established an Adoption Review Committee, which consists of at least three (3) people who have completed the Department of Children and Families (DCF) adoption competency training.

One member of the Committee shall be a DCF staff person, preferably with adoption expertise, who has knowledge of the applicant's national and state criminal history and child abuse and neglect history when at least one of the following applies:

- Recommended denial of a home study
- A DCF staff person has knowledge of national criminal results, state sealed or expunged criminal results or child abuse and neglect history results that are unknown to the CBC agency

The committee is available to provide consultation and assistance to the adoption case manager on any child-specific adoptive home study in which the case manager or supervisor are recommending denial or when adoption case situations exist which present challenging issues including multiple adoptive applicants for a child/sibling group. Requests for committee review may be made by the adoption case manager, the DCF or the CBC agency. The request for committee review must be made in writing and forwarded to HFC's Adoptions Program Manager. While the committee is available to review any challenging case, cases with the following issues, except as set forth below, must be referred to the committee:

- Multiple families who have approved home studies have applied to adopt the same child
- Health concerns of an adoptive applicant Abuse History with verified or not substantiated findings of abuse, neglect, or abandonment (non-disqualifying felony conviction) Criminal History except as outlined below
  - In cases in which the required criminal history checks pursuant to Sections 39.0138 and 39.521, F.S., reveal that the applicant(s) have been convicted of crimes specified in Section 39.0138(2), F.S. their application must be denied; a referral to the Adoption Applicant Review Committee will not be required and the applicant must be advised that he or she cannot be approved

- If the criminal history check reveals that the applicant was convicted of a law violation listed in Section 39.0138(3), F.S., within the last five years, the applicant cannot be considered for approval, until five (5) years after the date of conviction; after five (5) years have passed, the applicant shall be referred to the Adoption Applicant Review Committee if the applicant submits a new Adoptive Home Application, CF-FSP 5071, incorporated in 65C-16.004(6), F.A.C.
- Cases in which the applicant is a current or former foster parent and the review of the foster parent file reveals that there have been care and supervision concerns or a violation of licensing standards

The review committee chairperson will convene the committee within 30 days of receipt of the request and provide all necessary written documents to the committee members prior to the committee convening. Upon Conclusion of the Adoption Applicant Review Committee's recommendation on the applicant's ability to move forward in the adoption process, the chairperson will issue a written recommendation to HFC's COO and CEO within 10 days of the committee's decision to approve the applicant. HFC's CEO or designee will provide the applicant with written notification of the decision to approve within 10 business days of the decision. If the recommendation is to deny the applicant, the report will be submitted to both the Regional Family Safety Program Office and HFC's CEO, or designee. The Regional Family Safety Program Office and HFC's designee will provide feedback/input within 10 business days. HFC will submit the AARC packet in accordance with the Central Region AARC Protocol (dated 5/2/2017) which shall include, but not limited to: Reason for an AARC; Reason for approval or denial; Clear picture of placement history with the potential adoptive parent (if any) and how has the life of the child been during the placement; Clear picture of criminal history for all parties; Professional recommendations; The alternative to the adoptive placement if the recommendation is for a denial. The Assistant Regional Legal Counsel or designee shall provide the applicant with written notification of the decision to deny the application, within 10 business days of the decision. The written notice must include the reason for the denial, and must advise the applicant of his or her judicial option for review of the denial pursuant to Chapter 120, F.S.

The county of jurisdiction shall complete all Adoption Applicant Review Committee staffings on any child or any home study related to the child. If the county of jurisdiction cannot complete the staffing due to a conflict, request shall be made, in consultation with the regional managing director or designee, to transfer the staffing to another county.

Approved by:

  
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Teri Saunders, GEO

7/1/20  
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Date