

S-255 ASSESSMENT OF A POTENTIAL FOSTER FAMILY -MODIFIED



Version 5 effective October 20, 2008 (modified April 1 2019)

(previously FA-07)

Policy

Applications for candidates wishing to become foster parents must receive a prompt response. Individuals making a request must be met with at their residence as soon as possible, no later than 21 days in order to begin the assessment of their candidacy. Under normal circumstances, an assessment meeting all requirements must be completed within 60 days (depending on the availability of basic training).

Valoris must not place a child in a foster home unless it has been approved following an assessment that meets the requirements of both the Ministry and the Agency.

Valoris participates in the provincial study entitled "Looking After Children" and stays current on parenting practices that favour child development. We are seeking individuals who do the following: use positive parenting practices, attend extra-curricular activities, encourage reading, and become involved in their community.

The Agency will refuse requests by candidates where one of the individuals has been found guilty of a criminal act of neglect or abuse of a child or an adult.

The Agency will refuse requests by individuals with a history or who is suspected of abuse or neglect of a child following a Child Protection Investigation.

Candidates will have to provide references as required by the SAFE assessment module, including criminal reference check with vulnerable sector screening.

In addition to the Ministry's requirements regarding firearms, the Agency requires that a candidate who possesses a firearm have an appropriate owner's permit, as required by law.

The Agency requires that foster parents have access to a vehicle in good condition and that they be insured in the amount of \$1,000,000. During the assessment process, the worker can ask parents and other drivers in the family to provide a driver's abstract from the Ministry of Transportation if there are concerns.

At the outset of the process, candidates must sign a confidentiality agreement regarding the information that they will receive about the children and their families. This obligation is perpetual and remains in effect even after the foster parents close their foster home.

The worker will meet with the candidates to share the results of the assessment following the decision to reject or approve their request.

Other documents such as supplementary references, certificate of good driving record, references from a specialist, could be required.

Procedure

1. Initial meeting with the candidates

The assigned worker will contact the family within 7 days to set up a meeting and will send them an application form by mail. The worker completing the assessment will meet with the candidates as soon as possible, no later than 21 days following their request, to explain the requirements of the evaluation process and the mandatory basic training program.

The worker will visit the family's residence to ensure that they are welcoming and pose no danger to the child's health or safety. The worker will ensure that the physical environment conforms to safety standards and request that parents make any necessary changes (such as providing a safe crib, potable water test, vaccination of pets).

During the home visit, the Child Welfare Worker conducts an assessment of the following:

- (i) the common living areas of the home,
- (ii) the room where the child placed in foster care will presumably sleep
- (iii) the land around the home,
- (iv) the play space used by children within the proposed foster home.

The Child Welfare Worker takes note of the recreational facilities located within walking distance of the home.

The Worker records the details of the household visit, the location of the home and the date and time of the visit. The physical inspection is documented on the Home Safety Checklist, which is signed by the candidates. A copy of this form is kept on file.

The worker will give the candidates forms to be completed and request that they prepare the required paperwork. The worker will also obtain the required references (a minimum of 3) and the written consent of all adults residing in the foster home to perform a criminal record verification as well as a child welfare agency record check.

The worker will have the candidates sign the confidentiality agreement. All adults in the household must sign this consent form during the assessment process.

2. References

References are kept in the foster family's file and are confidential. This confidentiality must be maintained at all times, especially when the references received for the candidates are negative. References are removed from the file prior to the file's review by a foster parent.

Medical references provided by the family physician must be based on a complete examination of the candidates within the past six months. Costs associated with a medical examination will be reimbursed after presenting a receipt, once the assessment will have been completed and approved. A nurse practitioner can also provide a medical reference.

The worker may also request a medical reference for other adults or children in the family.

3. Criminal Record

In the event that an adult has a criminal record of a nature other than violence towards children or adults, the Supervisor responsible for assessing foster families will evaluate the candidate's eligibility by considering the nature and date of the offence, the penalty imposed, subsequent conduct and any possible risks or danger to a child that could be placed.

4. Health and Safety

Checkup

Valoris obtains a written statement from a physician, an individual approved by the local medical officer of health, or an authorized registered nurse regarding general health status of the proposed foster parent (s) and those living in the proposed foster home and the illnesses, disabilities or handicaps they have and the potential impact of these problems on providing care.

Firearms, Crossbows: The worker confirms that the storage of firearms meets legislative requirements by obtaining a copy of the owner's permit and ensuring that weapons and ammunition are contained in a locked area.

Use of Tobacco: The Agency avoids placing children under six years of age in a foster home where tobacco is regularly consumed. The Agency encourages foster parents to smoke outside of the residence.

Proof of Insurance: Candidates must provide proof of insurance coverage for their vehicles in the amount of \$1,000,000, as well as insurance on their lodging or its contents, if they are renting. The candidates must use the form provided to advise their insurance broker of their status as a foster family.

Vaccination of Household Pets: Household pets must be vaccinated each year for rabies and other diseases that are transmittable to humans. Foster parents must provide a certificate of vaccination each year during their annual review.

During the home visit, the following elements are evaluated and these must be in conformity. The home and grounds must be maintained in a manner that supports the safety and well-being of the children, must be clean and demonstrate that the equipment and furnishings in the home are in good condition. It is necessary that :

- the common living areas of the home, include spaces designated for living, eating, preparing and storing food, sleeping and bathing areas;
- there is play space used by children inside the foster home;
- the home is equipped with means to maintain heat in the habitable rooms;
- the presumed bedroom of the child has a window. No bedroom shall be located in a building separate from the rest of the foster home, in an unfinished attic or basement, in a stairwell or in a vestibule.
- the land around the home, recreational facilities are located within walking distance of the home.

- **If there is a pool on the home's lot, it complies with all municipal by-laws and all public health requirements that apply to swimming pools.** The Foster parents must ensure that the installation of their swimming pool meets current municipal requirements. These municipal requirements cover the installation of a fence, railing, sidewalk, patio, guardrails, and automatic safety latches on doors that access the pool.

If, however, worker feels that a child's safety might be at risk, the candidates may be required to implement safety measures above and beyond the municipal requirements. These measures may include the installation of a wall or guardrail to heighten the sidewalls of an above ground pool, automatic safety latches, an automatic closing mechanism, an alarm system or other devices, particularly when the pool is directly accessible by the patio door or another door of the house.

All doors and safety barriers that provide direct access to the pool must be kept locked when the pool is not in use or unsupervised. Foster parents or other individuals assigned by the foster parent must supervise children in the pool or pool area at all times.

5. Personal Characteristics of Family Members

During the assessment process, the worker must meet individually and in a group session with all individuals over six years old living in or regularly frequenting the residence. The following topics will assist in the assessment of the family's strengths and weaknesses, and are essential in facilitating a proper match between a child and a foster family:

- *Personal information about family members:* the family's composition, language spoken in the home, religion and religious practices, education, culture, employment, finances, interests and hobbies, community involvement, talents and accomplishments, tobacco use, drug use, past or present history of alcohol abuse, ability to adapt to change and deal with stress;
- *Motivation:* Each family member's motivation for becoming a foster family; consent of the children (including adults outside of the home); reaction of the immediate family, neighbours and other community members; perception of their future role and full understanding of the care provided by a foster family; a full understanding of the past history and needs of a child in care; understanding of the child on behalf of the parent and their willingness to work with and make the child feel welcome; commitment for the duration of the child's placement and agreement to cooperate in the return to the child's parents where possible; desire to cooperate with the Agency and other professionals; concerns.
- *Family Dynamic:* relationships among family members; good communication skills, use of a democratic processes for problem-solving and decision-making; strong couple relationship; shared values and beliefs; dramatic events in their life; available support network.
- *Parenting Skills:* experience or skills in raising their children or other children; ability to provide basic care to a child; availability to accompany and encourage a child in school and extra-curricular activities; ability to provide the required disciplinary framework without the use of corporal punishment; ability to recognize and reward the child's accomplishments and progress; ability to communicate with children and professionals involved; realistic expectations regarding the child's behaviour; healthy attitude toward sexuality and ability to provide sexual education to children and

adults; open-mindedness toward and acceptance of difficult behaviour; ability to be positive role models for the children; ability to be affectionate, to show and receive affection; willingness to receive training and develop new parenting skills.

6. Mandatory Basic Training

During the assessment process, candidates must attend mandatory basic training; their children and other boarders are also invited to participate.

7. Acceptance or refusal of application

Prior to approving a foster family, the worker must have all of the following documents on file:

- Criminal record verification including vulnerable sector screening for all adults living in or regularly frequenting the residence;
- Medical references for both parents and others, as required;
- The number of references required by SAFE (a minimum of 3);
- Physical inspection (including certificate of vaccination for pets, potable water test, and weapons permits, as required);
- Driver's abstract for each parent and other drivers in the family, if deemed necessary;
- Proof of insurance for automobiles and residence;
- Confidentiality agreement signed by the parents and, as required, other adults in the family;
- Photos of the residence and family members;
- Certificate of participation in the basic training program.

The Supervisor will review the assessment with the worker in order to determine the family's strengths and weaknesses, and will either accept or refuse the candidates' application. Together, they will make recommendations for future placements (with respect to age, gender and special needs), the number of children that can be accepted and the foster family's classification. They will also determine the family's requirements for support and subsequent training.

The Supervisor responsible for approving foster families may refuse a request for any of the following reasons:

- Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Ministry and the Agency;
- Possession of a criminal record relating to the abuse of a child or an adult, or of another serious nature;
- Lack of experience or skills required to properly care for a child;
- Evidence of marital problems, mental health issues, alcohol abuse, drug use, delinquency or problems with their children;
- Lack of commitment from all family members or a potentially negative effect of a placement on one or more members of the family.

8. Meetings to discuss the assessment

As required, the worker will meet with the candidates to share the results of the assessment following the decision to approve or refuse their request.

Approval of the family: The worker will explain the "Foster Service Agreement" form to new foster parents and obtain their signatures. This service agreement covers the roles and responsibilities of the foster parents and the Agency. The foster parents agree to inform the Agency immediately if a family member or a resident is found guilty of a

criminal act, or if a driver in the family loses his/her license. The worker will request that the foster parents provide a void cheque to the Agency to allow for direct deposit of their pension when they receive their first child in care.

Foster parents who are approved will also receive an identification card.

Refusal of the application: The worker will clearly explain, verbally and in writing, the reasons for the refusal to the candidates. Candidates who object to this decision will be advised of the procedure to follow to file a complaint and, if desired, will receive a copy of the assessment.

9. Positioning on the Pension Chart

The pension chart considers both the foster parents' experience and their training.

The Supervisor and the worker assess the equivalent experience of foster parents for another Agency, as well as their relevant training, in order to determine the per diem allocated to the foster parents when a child is in their care.

The Supervisor may recognize relevant training sessions received during the two years prior to the opening of a foster home; a college or university degree is equivalent to three levels of training, or may be calculated pro rata for each course taken towards a degree. The Supervisor may recognize up to a maximum of eight levels on the training chart.

10. Documentation

The details of the household visit, the location of the home and the date and time of the visit are recorded in the file.

The worker performing the assessment will complete "Disposition E" form to approve or refuse the foster family.

The documentation of the foster family's assessment must be completed within one month of the approval or refusal of their request. The assessment must be signed by the foster parents, their worker and the responsible Supervisor, and retained in their file. Foster parents will receive copies of the assessment and the confidentiality agreement.

The newly approved foster family is added to the network of foster families; they will receive all correspondence, invitations or information for foster parents in the language of their choice. The Foster Parents Association is advised of the name and coordinated of all newly approved foster families.

11. Subsequent requests by refused candidates

Subsequent requests made by candidates having already been assessed will only be reviewed if the candidates can clearly demonstrate that the reasons cited for the initial refusal have favourably changed.

Definitions

Parents : The term "parents" includes biological and adoptive parents, stepfathers, stepmothers and any other person who is responsible for a child before Valoris intervenes.

References

- Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017
- Ontario Regulation 156/18: General Matters Under the Authority of the Minister
- RH-113 : Employees Wishing to Become a Residential Resource;