

ADVISORY GROUP VIRGINIA'S ADOPTION HOME STUDY PROCESS UNIFORM APPROACH IN OTHER STATES

The purposes of the home study process include:

- Educate and prepare the adoptive family for adoption;
- Gather information about the prospective parents that will help a social worker match the family with a child whose needs they can meet; and
- Evaluate the fitness of the adoptive family.

In order to achieve the above purposes, states have passed laws and regulations that address the following:

- Who must be included as a part of the home study
- What person or entity can conduct a home study
- What are the qualifications for adoptive parents
- What are the elements of a home study (interview, references, health records, background checks)
- Timeline for completion of a home study and at what point is an update or new home study required
- Post-placement study requirements

To address the elements of a home study, certain states have mandated a uniform home study format known as Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) which is the Consortium for Children's standardized home study methodology.

SAFE began in 1989 in California, however the current tools and effort to disseminate a uniform approach across states began after 2003 when the Consortium for Children received a grant to expand Safe implementation and evaluate its performance. The SAFE preformatted home study report provides the person conducting the home study with a uniform model for either matched or unmatched families. In addition the SAFE report contains a psychosocial evaluation component that looks at a family's strengths and issues of concern.¹

Wisconsin:

In 2015, Wisconsin Act 378 was signed by the Governor. It required the state's Department of Children and Families to establish a standardized assessment for licensing a home for foster care and approval of adoption. This requirement applies to all county and private child placing agencies. The SAFE home study assessment was selected by the Department and its use will go into effect on October 1, 2016.²

Rhode Island:

Rhode Island: As part of a policy change, in the fall of 2015, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families began to solicit bids from vendors to provide the SAFE home

¹ http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/teleconferences/Structured_Analysis_Family_Evaluation.pdf.

² http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/memos/num_memos/DSP/2016/2016-04.pdf.

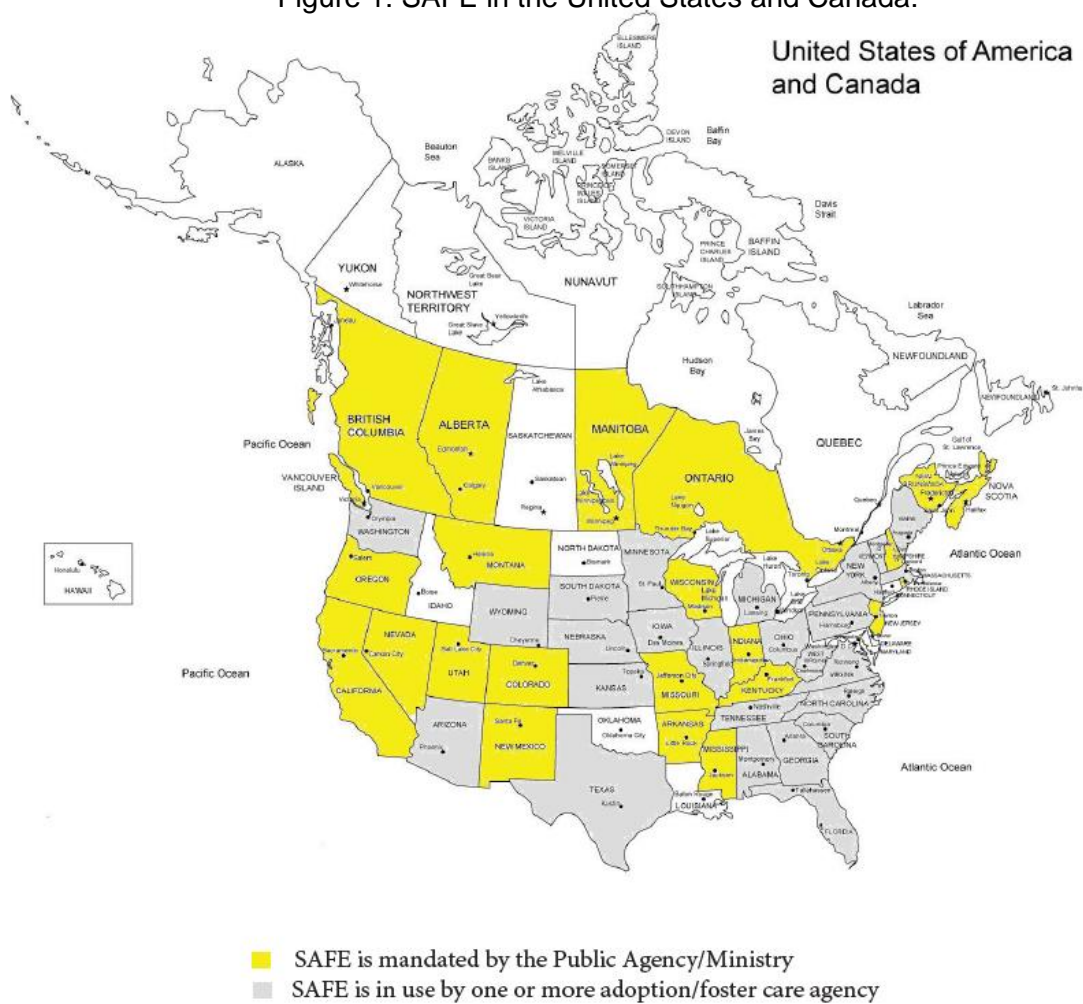
study format to assist in home study approvals done by the department.³ Previously, home study formats would vary from vendor to vendor selected by the department. This new vendor arrangement does not apply to licensed child placing agencies.

Mississippi:

Starting in 2012, the Mississippi Division of Family and Children Services started to pursue the SAFE format for all home studies conducted by the Division. The recruitment and interviewing of foster care families is done by regional offices. Mississippi encourages private child placing agencies to use the SAFE format, however it is not mandated.⁴

Figure 1 below shows where SAFE is used in the United States and Canada by a public agency.

Figure 1: SAFE in the United States and Canada:



One potential benefit of the growing use of SAFE is that it helps facilitate inter-jurisdictional placements by creating uniformity.⁵

³ <http://www.purchasing.ri.gov/RVIP/StateAgencyBids/7549987.pdf>.

⁴ http://www.mdhs.state.ms.us/media/245289/fcs_aprs2012.pdf.

⁵ Crea, Thomas M. Barth, Richard P., *Child Welfare*. Home Study Methods for Evaluating Prospective Resource Families: History, Current Challenges, and Promising Approaches, Volume 86, Issue 2, January 2007.