CERTIFICATION/APPROVAL PROCESS FOR FOSTER ADOPTIVE PARENTS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Original: June 2018 | Updated: July 2018

📌 **Denotes new questions through 7/31/18**

I. NOTIFICATION TO THE FIELD

Q1: In addition to the ADM release, how have voluntary agencies (VAs) been made aware of changes? Can the pre-recorded WebEx be shared with VAs?

> **A1:** VAs receive the same notification as local districts. The pre-recorded WebEx was also shared with VAs.

Q2: Will OCFS be providing any training on the new forms/process?

> **A2:** OCFS will continue to evaluate the need for additional training on the new forms/process. LDSSs and VAs can continue to submit questions to the foster boarding home application mailbox at FBHApplication@ocfs.ny.gov and/or reach out to their appropriate regional office.

II. TIMING/USE OF NEW FORMS

Q1: If the certification or approval process is not complete by the end of July 2018, do applicants have to fill out the new application in addition to the Final Assessment?

> **A1:** All FBH's in inquiry status on or before the release of the ADM (April 16, 2018) must have a completed home study by August 16, 2018 [within 4 months of the application-18 NYCRR 443.2(c)] utilizing the old forms and process. Any inquiries that were made on or after April 16, 2018 must be completed utilizing the new forms and process.

Q2: Is there a way to save each form individually?

> **A2:** Each form is listed separately on the OCFS website and may be saved individually.

Q3: Can forms be e-mailed to applicants?

> **A3:** Yes, however, 18 NYCRR 443.2(b) requires that agencies provide application OCFS- 5183B and medical report forms OCFS-5183C at the time of the initial interview or orientation. This must be done in addition to emailing.

Q4: Not having input these types of forms to CONNECTIONS before, will they be copy-and-paste line by line, question by question, or will the entire form be uploaded?

> **A4:** The only form that will be input into CONNECTIONS is the *Final Assessment and Determination* (OCFS-5183K). At this time, the entire OCFS-5183K will be copied and pasted into the Home Study Narrative section in CONNECTIONS. The user can choose to fill out the form prior to copying and pasting into CONNECTIONS or once it is pasted into CONNECTIONS. When the CONNECTIONS changes go live, the template will automatically be in the Home Study Narrative section and the home finder will complete it with in CONNECTONS.

Q5: When I complete the home study under other – it is just cut and paste the *Final Assessment and Determination* OCFS-5183K? Then a copy is signed by the foster parent and kept in their file. The *Household Composition and Relationships* (OCFS-5183F) is just written and kept in my FAD file on the family or do I enter that somewhere also?

> **A5:** The *Final Assessment and Determination* (OCFS-5183K) is a summary and assessment of the information gathered from the *Household Composition and Relationships* (OCFS- 5183F). The OCFS-5183K is pasted into CONNECTIONS, and a signed copy is kept in the foster parents file. The OCFS-5183F is kept in the foster parents file and is not entered into CONNECTIONS.

Q6: What is the expectation for counties who emergency certifies or approves relative resources and the new process?

> **A6:** The process has not changed; these new forms will be required.

III. TRAINING

Q1: Do fingerprints need to be completed and returned prior to the prospective parents attending MAPP training? Sometimes it takes a while for the results to come back.

> **A1:** No, applicants can attend MAPP training before the fingerprints are returned.

Q2: Must all the documents for approval or certification be completed before the applicant can move forward to MAPP training? Some of the documents, like medical, take time to get back and they are under strict timeframes to get the folks completed and certified/approved.

> **A2:** The documents do not need to be completed before training. The process can occur concurrently.

Q3: Are we requiring *only* the primary foster parent (applicant 1) to complete MAPP training and subsequent annual foster parent training to maintain their licensure? During our annual audit conducted by ACS, we are asked to ensure that if there is a significant other in the household (i.e. paramour, spouse, etc.) that this "secondary foster parent" (applicant 2) must also complete the MAPP training and attend annual foster parent training to maintain their licensure. The new forms do not require this. Judges in New York City will delay an adoption if there is a question of a legal marriage and the person is not a foster parent. Please clarify.

> **A3:** Each certified or approved foster parent must be trained. As per current practice, if foster parents are legally married, we are requiring both parents to take MAPP and to become foster parents.

Q4: Smaller agencies are struggling with the inquiries and then having a class of enough folks to have a training. How do they handle receiving an inquiry when they will not have a large enough class for several months? This will impede on the timeframes.

> **A4:** LDSS/VAs must respond to an inquiry within 10 days of inquiry. It is at the discretion of the LDSS/VA when the orientation will be held.

IV. INQUIRY

Q1: If the family is reaching out to various agencies, how may this process work best, since there should only be 1 record in CONNECTIONS for the family?

> **A1:** "After responding to an applicant's inquiry, the LDSS or VA must open the Foster and Adoption Development (FAD) home in "Inquiry Status" in CONNECTIONS. If the home exists in CONNECTIONS and is in Inquiry, Applicant or Accepted-Active status in another district/voluntary agency, you will need to speak with the foster parent(s). Under no circumstances should you recreate the home. A decision needs to be made about whether the home will remain with the current agency or be transferred to the agency now processing the inquiry." (See CONNECTIONS Step-by-Step Guide Training for FAD Caseworkers.)

Q2: Are the Districts allowed to open the Inquiry Status during Phase/Step II-Initial Interview or Orientation? Based upon the number of inquiries and lack of follow up by the applicants, the Districts report their inability to open FAD home in "Inquiry Status" during Phase/Step 1-Inquiry. The Districts report combining phase I & II and opening the "Inquiry Status" at phase II. For example, one District reports to determine the number of applicants participating in GPSII/MAPP, conducting Inquiry and Orientation 10 days before a GPSII/MAPP class begins.

> **A2:** LDSSs and VAs may open the FAD home either at the time of Inquiry or after the applicant(s) attend the orientation. When you open the home in Inquiry status in CONNECTIONS, you can then search to see if this home was open previously in another LDSS or VA and you can see the history of the home.

V. INITIAL INTERVIEW OR ORIENTATION

Q1: Applicant and all household members 18 years of age or older would need to be entered into CONNECTIONS prior to generating the Resource ID and Person IDs needed for criminal history forms. Would it be feasible and permitted for an agency to provide the application, as well as all the accompanying documents, and inform them that fingerprint forms would be sent to them following the orientation if they choose to go to the next step?

> **A1:** 18 NYCRR 443.2(b) requires that agencies provide application (OCFS-5183B) and medical report forms (OCFS-5183C) at time of the initial interview or orientation. Agencies must also advise applicants of the requirements of the SCR, SEL and criminal history checks. The Request for NYS Fingerprinting Services (OCFS-4930ASFA) can be given to the applicant(s) after the initial interview or orientation.

Q2: The cost of fingerprinting is $120.00 per person. Is the expectation that Home Finder's provide the prospective F/A parents the documents to get finger printed at the orientation/initial meeting?

> **A2:** This is addressed on page 7 of 16-OCFS-ADM-20. The agency has discretion on when to provide the documents with the recommended practice being when there is reasonable certainty that the applicant will complete the certification or approval process.

VI. <u>SELF-ASSESSMENT (OCFS-5183A)</u>

Q1: If an agency wishes to update the Self-Assessment more than two times, how would they capture this?

> **A1:** Agencies can use the template as many times as needed and can add reassessment dates as needed

Q2: The Self-Assessment is like our Inquiry. We also conduct a face-to-face application review with each applicant; so, completing the self-assessment would be somewhat redundant to also completing an inquiry and application.

> **A2:** The Self-Assessment should be provided to family members to complete. You may replace your existing forms with these new forms.

Q3: On the Self-Assessment form, it indicates that the initial assessment needs to be completed "prior to the application". Does this mean before the application is provided to the family or when the application is received?

> **A3:** The Self-Assessment form is given to applicants at time of interview or orientation and can be completed throughout the process.

Q4: At what point does the applicant need to sign, specifically if the agency is filling out the form with the family? After the initial and then again after the reassessment or once during the last assessment?

> **A4:** The Self-Assessment should be signed any time it is completed; it can be used one time or more than one time, depending on supports needed by the family, etc.

VII. <u>APPLICATION (OCFS-5183B & C)</u>

Q1: The ADM says that we should be giving the families the application forms at our orientation meetings. This is very different than our practice. Our families do not want to be typical foster homes, and come to us with the intention of adopting from the outset. They rarely have any experience at foster parenting, let alone regular parenting. We spend a lot of time, over the course of weeks, teaching them about the characteristics of the children and how the process works - really a very elongated orientation. And as a matter of fact, many families drop out of training, or finish it and then never apply.

> **A1:** 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(3) requires "authorized agencies operating a foster family boarding home program to provide application and medical report forms to persons interested in the program at the time of the initial interview or the orientation meetings." Families interested in adoption only can apply for approval as adoptive parents through the standards set forth in 18 NYCRR Part 421.

Q2: Can we give the families the new application, if they decide to adopt, at the end of that process, rather than at the beginning? If the goal is to let the families know what the application looks like, can we show them samples without actually asking them to take them home?

> **A2:** 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(3) requires "authorized agencies operating a foster family boarding home program to provide application and medical report forms to persons interested in the program at the time of the initial interview or the orientation meetings." Families interested in adoption only can apply for approval as adoptive parents through the standards set forth in 18 NYCRR Part 421.

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Q3: What constitutes a completed application?

A3: A completed application consists of a:
- review of CONNECTIONS history to determine if the applicant previously held a foster parent certification or approval;
- completed and signed *Foster-Adoptive Parent Application* form (OCFS-5183B);
- signed sworn criminal conviction statement;
- completed *Application to Adopt* (OCFS-5183C) - if applying for foster care **and** adoption
- Foster-Adoptive Applicant Medical Report (OCFS-5183D);
- Safety Review Form (OCFS-5183E); and
- verification of employment references is completed when the application and all accompanying documentation

Q4: Under financial information section, the application notes verified by W-2's or 1040. Is it a requirement that the agency have this on file? Many jurisdictions require this type of information/documentation at time of an adoption.

A4: For foster parent certification/approval or dual certification, per 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(12) (iv) agencies are required to elicit information regarding income on the application, however it is at the discretion of the agency whether they want additional documentation of the foster parent's income.

Q5: Can the Adoption Only questions at the end of the *Foster-Adoptive Parent Application* (OCFS-5183B) be asked to every applicant, whether foster care, dual, or adoption only.

A5: These forms are for foster parent certification/approval or dual certification. The statement should read "for dual applicants only." The form will be modified.

Q6: Under **References**, if an applicant is self-employed, what would qualify as a work reference?

A6: 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(13) (ii) requires that applicants must provide the "names, addresses, and where applicable, telephone numbers of references who can verify the applicant(s) employment history, work record, and qualifications. A self-employed applicant may use a client, co-worker or employee as a reference.

Q7: If an applicant is self-employed, is it allowable to request a W-2 or other financial information to verify employment?

A7: 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(13) (ii) requires that an agency establish a procedure to review and evaluate the backgrounds of and information supplied by applicants for certification or approval, which includes a statement or summary of the applicant's employment history. Therefore, it is at the agencies discretion how they choose to verify an applicant's employment, including, but not limited to requesting the applicant to provide a W-2.

Q8: The Application must be filled out by both spouses (if married) but much of the information would be the same (i.e. current household composition, financial/budget information, references, etc.). Since we conduct a face-to-face with each applicant(s) to assess the applicant/motivation/content of application why would each person have to complete a separate application?

A8: 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(12) requires an agency to utilize the application form OCFS-5183B, *Foster-Adoptive Parent Application*, to elicit information including, but not limited to age, health, physical functioning, income, marital status, employment of the

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applicants, etc. While some of the required information may be the same for both spouses, most of the information requested is specific to the individual applicant.

Q9: On page four of the *Foster-Adoptive Parent Application* (OCFS-5183B) it asks, "Do you operate a family-type home for adults" – not sure what this is referring to?

> **A9:** A family-type home for adults (FTHA) is an adult care facility established and operated for the purpose of providing long term residential care, room, board, personal care, and/or supervision to adults who are unrelated to the operator. Foster boarding homes may be dually certified as a family-type home for adults.
> See 18-OCFS-INF-02 for more information on this.

Q10: In 5183B – FOSTER-ADOPTIVE PARENT APPLICATION, p. 2, there's a question about boarders/renters. It's my understanding that no foster home can have boarders (unless it's a separate apartment within the house); So why is this being asked?

> **A10:** No certified or approved foster parent may rent rooms to lodgers or boarders **unless** permitted by the authorized agency which certified or approved the home [18 NYCRR 443.3 (a)(14)]. For example; if a foster parent is dually certified as a Family Type Home for Adults or charges an adult child rent to reside in the home.

Q11: Can a home be opened if only one adult (parent) in the home becomes certified as a foster parent? For example, one parent is in the military and stationed overseas, not to return for an extended period of time.

> **A11:** In the example provided, the person presently in New York State may be certified or approved as part of the foster home application process. If a person later enters the home, such as a spouse returning from military service, this person must be evaluated as another foster parent. [Section 443.10(c)] If there are two parents in the home, both must be evaluated as foster parents.

Q12: Nowhere in the directive does it talk about collecting supporting documentation – i.e. backup statements for income/expenses, birth and marriage certificates, proof of citizenship, etc. Is this part of some previous directive that still stands, or is this not necessary? We have always done it, but I don't know if this was an agency decision, or a state mandate.

> **A12:** 18 NYCRR 443.2 (f) requires agencies to develop a record for each foster parent which includes but is not limited to the documentation identified in this section. It is up to the agency to determine what documentation to collect and retain to evaluate the information received in the Application.

Q13: In the prior application we asked applicants to explain why they wish to board children in their home, and asked them to describe the home (number of bedrooms, etc.) and to give clear directions to their home. These areas are absent on the new form 5138B.

> **A13:** The questions about motivation to provide foster care are included in the Self-Assessment form (5183A) and the Home Study (5183F). The Safety Review form (5183E) asks for a physical description of the home including a floor plan. This package does not include a request for directions to the home.

Q14: Is this application also being used for kin/fictive foster parents? How will the process work with kinship foster care; on the current process we are able to make some exceptions for relative foster homes. Will that be the case with new foster homes? If so, what items/forms/requirements can exceptions be made for?

> **A14:** This application is intended to also be used with certified foster homes and relative foster homes and the process for kinship foster care has not changed.

Q15: If a family stops the process of certification/approval for some reason and later decides to start the process again, does the LDSS/Agency start the entire process over again, i.e. fingerprints, medicals, etc.

> **A15:** An application for certification or approval that has been pending for six months due to failure of the applicant to provide information requested or to cooperate with the approval or certification process will be considered expired. This expiration will require a new application and clearances for those prospective foster parents who still seek certification or approval [18 NYCRR 443.2(c)(6)].

Q16: If a FBH was previously closed, but would like to reopen, does the LDSS complete a new application and complete the entire process?

> **A16:** Before an LDSS or VA may reopen a foster home, a new application must be included, which includes all required clearances and record checks, an update of the home study, a physician's written statement concerning the foster family's health or a physician's report of a medical exam that was completed within the past year, and an oral review of the evaluation with the foster parent before a new certificate or approval is issued [18 NYCRR 443.10(b)].

Q17: There are many people who do not go forward with attending MAPP and do not become F/A parents which means they will be putting out a lot of money for fingerprinting that may not come to fruition. Can Home finder's wait until the first MAPP class to submit fingerprints as at this point they would know they are committed?

> **A17:** This is addressed on page 8 of 16-OCFS-ADM-20, the agency has discretion on when to provide the documents with the recommended practice being when there is reasonable certainty that the applicant will complete the certification or approval process. Applicants and other adults are not charged a fee for fingerprinting.

VIII. MEDICAL REPORT (OCFS-5183D)

Q1: My understanding, is that because the wording under 18 NYCRR 443.10(a)(3) regarding reauthorizations states "a written statement from a physician about the foster family's or relative family's health…" that a medical form/physician statement is required for all household members at certification and every two years minimally. I want to be sure that I'm understanding that moving forward it is agreed that only applicants will need completed medical forms?

> **A1:** 18 NYCRR 443.10(a)(3) requires a written statement about the "foster family's or relative family's health" which is "conforming to the standards set forth in this Part." The operative standard in 18 NYCRR Part 443 relating to health is 18 NYCRR 443.2(c)(1)(ii) which requires that "each member of the household must be in good physical and mental health and free from communicable diseases." The regulation goes on to require "(a) written report…on the health of the family, including a complete physical examination of the applicant, must be filed with the agency initially and biennially

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thereafter."

This means a complete physical examination is only required of the foster parents, but a written report is required every two years on the health of the family, which extends beyond the foster parents. Such report needs to address whether each member is in good physical and mental health and free from communicable disease. An additional medical form is being created to capture medical information about additional household members.

Q2: Should we use the new the *Foster-Adoptive Applicant Medical Report* (OCFS-5183D) on- going to meet the bi-annual requirement?

A2: Yes, the *Foster-Adoptive Applicant Medical Report* (OCFS-5183D) can be used for the bi-annual requirement.

Q3: Previously, there were two separate forms for prospective foster/adoptive parents and for adoptive parents. Does the new medical form cover both and eliminate the two previous separate forms?

A3: The *Foster-Adoptive Applicant Medical Report* (OCFS-5183D) is to be used for individuals who are applying to be dually certified/approved as foster/adoptive parents of foster parent only. LDSS-0571 is utilized for adoption only.

Q4: Additional information is sometimes requested of the applicant(s) to further expand the assessment of medical issues that may impact parenting (i.e. pain management, or if the patient goes to a specialist for treatment for something like seizures, cardiac care, etc.), mental health issues (i.e. request for a reference from the counselor, psychiatrist, psychologist, etc.) or substance abuse assessment (i.e. if the person has a history of substance abuse, DWI's, etc.). The general medical form often leads the agency to identify areas in need of further assessment and how it may impact parenting. Some agencies are requesting these assessments if issues or concerns come up during the assessment process. Is this allowed?

A4: During the certification or approval process, if information becomes known to the agency or county which would prompt for additional information such as past substance abuse evaluation or mental health assessment, it is within the agencies responsibility to request the information to address the quality of care being provided to children in foster care. 18 NYCRR 443.2(c)(1)(ii) also references the production of medical reports in addition to the written medical report addressed above. This is where it is important to analyze information provided by prospective foster parents, openly discuss the information and use critical thinking skills on a case by case basis. However, to routinely request prospective foster parents undergo these types of evaluations as part of the process to become certified is not within regulations and would not be supported by OCFS.

Q5: We have always included a separate form for mental health providers; is this required? We have requested references from mental health providers if applicants have or had recently had mental health services; are we able to continue to use our own form for this purpose?

A5: Home finders working with applicants to become foster and/or adoptive parents can explore the mental health of the applicant on OCFS forms 5183D and 5183F. If there are concerns about an applicant's mental health status, it is the obligation of the home finder to further explore this with the applicant.

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Mental health assessments are not required to become a certified foster/adoptive parent, however, if the applicant is presenting with concerns, the agency needs to further explore the concerns to ensure the safety of any potential children being placed in their home. [18 NYCRR 443.2(c)(1)(ii)]

If after OCFS 5183D and 5183F is completed and further information is needed to assess the appropriateness of placement of a child into an applicant's home, yes, the agency may use its own form to obtain additional information needed to assess if an applicant can adequately care for children in the home. It is up to each individual county/agency to develop an internal process for home finders on how to proceed with gathering additional information.

Q6: Is the expectation that the new foster parent medical form be used for the foster parent medical recertification every two years or is this form only to be used for the initial foster parent certification and then the agency should continue using our old forms for the medical recertification?

> **A6:** The expectation is that OCFS-5183D will be the same one used for recertification.

Q7: The new medical form is for the Applicant only and not for any household member, although all household members require a medical in order for the foster home to be certified/approved in CONNECTIONS.

> **A7:** A full physical examination is only required for foster parent applicants. A written report on the health of the additional household members must be included (Please see June 2018 Q&A's Section VIII, Q2). A new Section 2 has been added to the OCFS-5183D in order to fulfill this requirement for other household members residing with a prospective foster-adoptive parent. A separate Section 2 must be filled out for each household member. [18 NYCRR 443.2(c)(1)(ii)]

IX. SAFETY REVIEW FORM (OCFS-5183E)

Q1: Is it acceptable to use the *Safety Review Form* (OCFS-5183E) and the *Foster-Adoptive Applicant Medical Report* (OCFS-5183D) with homes currently in process?

> **A1:** Yes.

Q2: Is there a standardized floor plan form, or is this form developed at the agency's discretion?

> **A2:** OCFS 5183E form requires a written description of the home and an attachment of the floor plan. The floor plan is at discretion of the agency.

Q3: Weapons – One of the agencies found an OCFS Firearm assessment OCFS 0292, which is used by Family Boarding Care Facility. Is there anything like this available for Foster/Care Adoption?

> **A3:** Not at this time.

Q4: Are working smoke detectors required on each level of a foster home?

> **A4:** Yes. While 18 NYCRR 443.3(a)(13) requires that there must be one working smoke detector in the foster home, 18 NYCRR 443.3(a)(2) requires that the foster home be in substantial compliance with all applicable provisions of state and local laws, ordinances, rules and regulations concerning health and safety. The Residential Code

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of New York State (RCNYS) section 317.1.1 requires smoke alarms to be installed in each story within a home.

Q5: Home Finders are concerned with some of the questions, including pool safety, weapons, and the final statement "Home is in substantial compliance with all applicable provisions of state, local laws and ordinances, rules and regulations concerning health and safety." They do not feel qualified to say that all the local laws and ordinances are being followed and do not feel they have the knowledge about these areas. They expressed a fear of liability. Please clarify.

> **A5:** Requirements relating to compliance with health, safety (which would include pools) and weapons are regulatory mandates that have not changed with the certification/approval process set out in 18-OCFS-ADM-07. 18 NYCRR 443.3(a)(2).

Q6: Why doesn't question IV-G include window?

> **A6:** Regulations do not expressly require that a bedroom have windows.

Q7: Are the Districts mandated to use OCFS Firearm assessment OCFS-0292?

> **A7:** No. OCFS-0292 is a form used for homes certified by OCFS and is not applicable to and should not be used for foster homes certified or approved by the LDSS or VA.

X. HOME STUDY PROCESS/FORMS (OCFS-5183F – H)

Q1: What does the Home Study consist of?

> **A1:** The Home Study consists of multiple components which include:
>
> - the completion of the Household Composition and Relationships (OCFS-5183F),
> - completion of the required trainings,
> - a completed Genogram,
> - verification of personal references (OCFS-5183H),
> - SCR clearance results, (where applicable) out-of-state SCR inquiry results, Staff Exclusion List checks, and FBI and New York State criminal history records check results for the applicant and any persons(s) 18 years of age or older residing in the home of the applicant(s), and
> - Safety assessments resulting from the results of the above referenced clearances, inquiries and checks.

Q2: Are there educational requirements to complete the Home Study?

> **A2:** The person completing the Home Study does not need to have specific educational requirements beyond what is required of a LDSS or VA employee.

Q3: Will we be allowed to send the paper home studies to other agencies in New York to make inquires, or will we simply give the other agencies our family's name and have them look up the family in CONNECTIONS? And can we print out the home study and send it to out-of-state agencies?

> **A3:** This process has not changed. You can still send the paper home study to another agency. With consistency in the forms, the process should be more user-friendly.

Q4: Is the whole home study still supposed to be written as a narrative? Should the home study be written in a narrative form, or just cover the several areas presented in the Household Composition and Relationships Form (5183F)?

> **A4:** Each question asked in the *Household Composition and Relationships Form* (OCFS- 5183F) must be answered on the form in a narrative format.

Q5: Typically, I would write the home study in one document using headings to separate the sections. Some of the forms are unclear as to how this should be formatted. Are we filling in the boxes and that is now the home study?

> **A5:** Yes, each question asked in the *Household Composition and Relationships Form* (OCFS-5183F) must be answered on the form in a narrative format. This is one of the forms that constitute the Home Study (See Q1.)

Q6: On the top of the Psychological Interview it states that the "responses should be provided in a narrative format in the space provided below." If they need to be answered on the form, do all other responses need to be on the forms?

> **A6:** All the questions in the five sections of the *Household Composition and Relationships Form* (OCFS-5183F) must be answered on the form.

Q7: Will there be a discipline agreement added?

> **A7:** Regulations do not require a discipline agreement to be completed by a foster parent, however 18 NYCRR 441.9 does outline the types of discipline that are prohibited.

Q8: Can agencies continue to use their own Home Study templates if all the same information is covered?

> **A8:** Agencies must use the *Household Composition and Relationships Form* (OCFS-5183F) for their home studies.

Q9: When a home is transferred from another agency, what parts of the home study are required to be completed?

> **A9:** When a fully certified or approved foster home is transferred from one LDSS or VA to another, the foster parents file should be transferred with them. An Interim Home Study in CONNECTIONS must also be completed. The LDSS or VA will also need to contact the OCFS Criminal History Review Unit to change the agency code for the fingerprint results in order to receive any subsequent arrest information from DCJS.

Q10: The forms appear to be for the "home finder" to complete, while interviewing the applicants, some of them individually (two forms for one couple). Is the home finder supposed to answer in the first person: "I grew up in a large household, but my wife was an only child.", **OR** in the third person: "Joe said that he grew up in a large household, but that his wife was an only child."?

> **A10:** That decision is at the discretion of the LDSS or VA.

Q11: With the changes to the new application, are the GPSII/MAPP profiles still being required?

> **A11:** GPSII/MAPP profiles are not a requirement of OCFS and the GPSII/MAPP home study templates are no longer available in CONNECTIONS.

XI. REFERENCES

Q1: Can the two applicants use the same references or do they need separate ones?

> **A1:** As long as the person providing the reference addresses each applicant individually, the person providing the reference can submit one document including both applicants.

Q2: Do we need to get three references for each foster parent applicant? We are asking as each applicant has to have their own application and we wondered if that now means that we have to obtain six references if it is a two-parent home?

> **A2:** 18 NYCRR 443.2(c)(1)(v) requires that each applicant must have three references. The references can be the same references as long as the reference addresses each applicant.

Q3: Is the form that was provided (OCFS-5183H) required to be used as an employer reference form also, or just for personal references?

> **A3:** OCFS-5183H is only to be used for personal references.

Q4: How many personal references and employment references is an applicant required to provide?

> **A4:** An applicant must provide at least three personal references [18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(13)

(iii) and 443.2(c)(1)(v)] and at least one name, address, and where applicable, telephone number of references who can verify the applicant's employment history, work record and qualifications [18 NYCRR 443.2 (b)(13)(ii) More than one reference may be necessary to address all of the information required under 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(13)(ii).]

Q5: Is there a specific form or prescribed way to obtain employment references?

> **A5:** No. 18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(13) requires each agency to establish a procedure to review and evaluate the backgrounds of and information supplied by applicants, this includes contacting references who can verify the applicant's employment history, work record, and qualifications. How this is done is at the discretion of the individual counties or agencies.

Q6: Regarding personal reference; we came across a situation where a judge was a reference and he said that he does not think he can fill out the form. Are there certain people precluded from being a reference?

> **A6:** OCFS regulations do not preclude anyone from being a personal reference, other than relatives of the applicant. Personal references must be able to attest to the applicant's character, habits, reputation and personal qualifications [18 NYCRR 443.2(b)(13)(iii)]

XII. FOSTER PARENT AGREEMENT WITH AUTHORIZED AGENCY (OCFS-5183J)

Q1: I see that the FP Agreement has three signature slots. Can a home now have more than two FP?

> **A1:** Certified or approved foster homes can have more than two foster parents.

Q2: Number 9, on OCFS-5183J refers to "natural parents." Foster parents are trained to not use the terms "natural parents" or "biological parents." They are trained in OCFS-approved MAPP classes to use the term "birth parents." Can "natural" be changed to "birth" on number 9?

> **A2:** The "natural parent" language is how it is written in regulation.

Q3: The Agreement form is very short compared to our four-page Agreement form. Item number 13 states *to bring the children for bi-weekly visits* – visits are 2-4 times a week so this is very misleading to our applicants. If we must use the OCFS Agreement form, we will also have to use our Agreement form as it speaks to what the requirements and expectations of a foster parent in NYC.

> **A3:** The agency must use the OCFS agreement form but is free to discuss requirements and expectations with the foster parent where visitation is more frequent (note: not all visitation is ordered bi-weekly or multiple times a week, the standard is to assure the best interest of the child.)

XIII. FINAL ASSESSMENT AND DETERMINATION (OCFS-5183K)

Q1: The *Final Assessment and Determination* (OCFS-5183K) and the *Household Composition and Relationships Form* (OCFS-5183F) seem redundant so it's unclear as to why both would need to be completed for each applicant.

> **A1:** The *Household Composition and Relationships Form* (OCFS-5183F) is used to capture information about the applicant(s). The *Final Assessment and Determination* (OCFS-5183K) should not be a reiteration of the OCFS-5183F rather a way to apply critical thinking skills to assess and summarize each area discussed in the OCFS-5183F and to identify strengths, considerations and supports needed in each area.

Q2: When an addendum is required, is the agency/county required to update/complete all the information, just what is applicable, or just utilize the category for transfer to provide information (i.e. agency transfer). What specifically is needed to be completed for the addendum process.

> **A2:** If changes are required to a foster parent's home study (for example, age range or gender, capacity, criminal record results) the LDSS or VA only needs to complete Section III of the Interim Home Study in CONNECTIONS (Final Assessment and Determination). The LDSS or VA must explain the changes in the appropriate section of Section III.

Q3: Under the regulatory requirement section, should there be a question(s) addressing clearances, SEL and criminal history?

> **A3:** This information is captured in CONNECTIONS and users are unable to certify or approve the home without this information being completed.

Q4: Outside of the addendum/update option, it appears the initial Final Assessment and Determination form is not capturing the final assessment, including capacity, program recommendations, number of children, etc. Is there another place where this is to be captured?

A4: Currently capacity, number of children and number of beds, is captured in CONNECTIONS (FAD). Additional information can be captured under section IV of the Final Determination and Assessment form.

Q5: Final Assessment and Determination vs. Home Study - The first question asks if the foster parent is over the age of 21. If they were not over the age of 21 they wouldn't get past the inquiry stage. These questions are redundant to completing a written home study assessment. An applicant would not make it to the end of the certification process if they didn't quality; they would have been discontinued after the inquiry, orientation, application review or during MAPP training. Clarification is needed.

A5: The Final Assessment and Determination form is the only form that will be in CONNECTIONS regarding the licensing and approval process. Section I of this form was designed to capture the activities completed to date to verify compliance with the regulatory requirements. This form will be accessible for oversight and monitoring purposes and for sharing with other agencies upon request.

XIV. ADOPTION RELATED

Q1: In order to adopt a child from foster care, must the adoptive parent also be certified or approved as a foster parent?

A1: No, there is no requirement that an adoptive parent also must be certified or approved as a foster parent in order to adopt a child from foster care.

Q2: What is the difference between an "approved foster parent" and an "approved adoptive parent"?

A2: A foster parent who meets all home study standards, receives a letter of approval if they are a relative within the second or third degree of the parent or stepparent of a foster child and is then referred to as an "approved foster parent". An adoptive parent who meets all the home study standards is always referred to as an "approved adoptive parent" whether or not they are related to the child.

Q3: Under the Application to Adopt – why are the options limited (i.e. if a family is open to adopting children of ALL ethnicities, language or religion)? How can this be captured?

A3: The Application to Adopt (OCFS-5183C) has guidance at the top of the application which states:

NOTE: Select ALL acceptable characteristics. You may choose more than one entry in each area.

Q4: What documents contained within the referenced ADM are required to be handed in to NY ICPC by the NYS LDSS & Voluntary Agencies conducting foster home certification for an Interstate Compact request? The ADM contains forms designated OCFS-5183, A through K. Which of those eleven form attachments should be included in the final home study and placement determination turned in by the NY local to NY ICPC?   NY ICPC requires this information so that we can disseminate correct information to our locals, who currently are not clear on what they need to send us. Counties are struggling with making the new home study "fit" for an ICPC case. Guidance may be helpful.

> **A4:** The OCFS ICPC Unit is working on a guidance document at this time to be posted on the OCFS ICPC webpage at:
>
> - https://ocfs.ny.gov/adopt/interstate_compact_Placement_of_Children.asp

Q5: The issue was raised that the judges/courts need to be informed regarding the changes to the home study, as each court/judge tends to request different items at time of adoption.

> **A5:** Court specific requirements regarding a home study are addressed in an addendum to the home study.

XV. CONNECTIONS RELATED

Q1: For the past several years our procedure is that Home Studies were done in Connections but then printed out and then the supervisor would approve them or suggest corrections etc. After I signed off on the home study and all the required signatures were obtained the home study would be put into the foster home record.

The home study was never officially submitted or approved by me in Connections but rather a hard copy was approved by me. My question is: since these existing home studies were never approved in Connections, will they "disappear" in the computer in July when the former forms will no longer be available?

> **A1:** Any home studies previously completed in CONNECTIONS are available by going through the event list.

Q2: If a family begins the process (prior to the application phase) and then resumes the process months or years later, how would this be captured on the Connections check list? Is there the capability to put more than one date for various stages?

> **A2:** If the home has been reopened you would put the current dates on the checklist. If the home has been closed/no work done for months or years things could have changed and you would want to reflect the new information.

Q3: Can we still pull up old information from the Event list?

> **A3:** Yes, this is the same process as before.

Q4: How long do we keep an inquiry open in Connections?

> **A4:** Currently there is no edit in the CONNECTIONS application to close an Inquiry status FAD home. 18 NYCRR 443.2(6(ii) states that an application for certification or approval as foster parents is expired if it has been pending for six months or more. It is up to the FAD home finder to close these homes after this time frame. However, per 18 NYCRR 421.11(j) hard copy of records must be retained for 12 months after the last communication.

XVI. ERRORS IN FORMS

Q1: There are errors in the Agreement between numbers 12 and 13 and there is an unnumbered paragraph 9.

> **A1:** This is an error and will be corrected.

Q2: On page 1 under marital status, which box should be checked if the applicant is 'Separated'?

> **A2:** The application will be revised to include "Separated".

Q3: On page 2 under *Household Members*, the application only asks for full name, DOB, and relationship to applicant. There are no fields for gender, race/ethnicity or religion. CX asks that this information be put into the FAD, and those filed were on the old application form.

> **A3:** This is basic demographic data used to enter a person into CONNECTIONS and should be collected. Any field with a red asterisk is required information. This information will be added to the application for other household members.

Q4: The application itself does not contain the question for the applicant's social security number which is necessary to complete the SEL clearance. Was this done on purpose so that each applicant had to fill out an SEL check paper? I would think this would need to be added to the application.

> **A4:** The Social Security Number (SSN) is required for a SEL check. A SEL check is required for the applicant and all other adult household members. SSN will be added to the application.