

# **STRUCTURED ANALYSIS FAMILY EVALUATION (SAFE)**

Speakers

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## **Introduction to Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE)**

In 1989, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Adoptions Branch became concerned about the quality of home studies being done in their Adoption Program. Families were being studied utilizing antiquated home study methodologies that were skewed toward infant adoption and did not address the strengths/skills and issues of concern required to parent children from the public child welfare system. Another concern of CDSS was the lack of comprehensive and uniform information gathering instruments as well as an in-depth psychosocial evaluation of applicant families.

In 1990 the CDSS Adoptions Branch formed a work group in an effort to develop a more comprehensive home study methodology that would address the needs of all children who were being placed in out of home care (foster and adoption). The work group consisted of child welfare workers, policy specialists, University researchers, private adoption and foster care agencies and CDSS staff.

Much work was done to identify a home study methodology that was evidence-based. The Work Group found that there was a dearth of research pertaining to home studies. Uniform information gathering tools were developed based on research from the Georgia Tech University and the University of Texas. In 1991, "Structured Adoption Family Evaluation" was implemented statewide in California's Independent Adoption Program.

In 1993 SAFE was introduced to public child welfare agencies in California to study families who were adopting children already in their home. Ultimately SAFE was revised and its application expanded to include foster care licensure, kin adoption and the study of both matched and unmatched families and the name was changed to Structured Analysis Family Evaluation. Rob Marvin, LCSW of California's Policy Bureau, chaired the SAFE initiative for the State of California.

In 2002 Mr. Marvin retired from the State of California and brought SAFE (with CDSS approval) to Consortium for Children (CFC) a private, non-profit agency. CFC spent two years refining and fine tuning the instrument.

In 2004 CFC was awarded a Federal Adoption Opportunity Grant to implement the use of SAFE in 7 of the United States and the Cherokee Nation. Currently SAFE is being used in 13 States, 10 Native American Tribes and three Canadian Provinces to

evaluate applicants for adoption, foster care and kin placement. SAFE is also being used by 4 Canadian Provinces: Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Ontario.

Although **based** entirely on research SAFE is in the early stages of being researched. Dr. Richard Barth, Dean of the School of Social Work of the University of Maryland, has headed the research team evaluating both the tool and its implementation. Early findings have been positive (see 2007 Adoption Issue of the Child Welfare Journal –Child Welfare League of America).

### **Overview of Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) – A Uniform Home Study**

SAFE provides home study practitioners with unique information gathering tools, analysis tools and procedures that enable them to accomplish home studies in an efficient, uniform manner and yet produce a more in-depth, concise and comprehensive report than a traditional home study. The end result is a uniform home study report that not only contains factual descriptive and identifying information about an applicant but also contains a comprehensive psychosocial evaluation that identifies specific family strengths and addresses issues of concern. The SAFE home study also enhances the child placement process in that it illuminates the strengths and resources of a family with great specificity.

### **Five components of Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE)**

- SAFE Practice Values
- SAFE Questionnaires
- SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and SAFE Desk Guide
- SAFE Pre-formatted Home Study
- SAFE Compatibility Inventory

## **I. SAFE Practice Values**

The overall integrity and validity of SAFE is directly related to adherence to eight CORE practice values.

1. Because families are valuable resources for children, the SAFE home study process strives to be inclusive, not exclusive.
2. The psychosocial evaluation is a key component of a SAFE home study.
3. SAFE incorporates a psychosocial evaluation cycle that recognizes family strengths and identities and addresses issues of concern.
4. SAFE is built on the belief that families and individuals have the capacity for positive change.
5. The social work interview is the foundation of good social work practice and an essential part of a SAFE home study.
6. In order to effectively accomplish a SAFE home study, practitioners must be aware of and understand how personal biases influence their perceptions and determinations.
7. SAFE home studies should never be accomplished without the benefit of supervision or consultation.
8. Applicants are advised at the beginning of a SAFE home study process that they will have an opportunity to receive or to read a copy of their final written home study report.

## **II. SAFE Information Gathering Tools**

SAFE uses sophisticated, user friendly and yet seemingly simple questionnaires. The questionnaires are designed to support, supplement and facilitate, not supplant, the social work interview.

The SAFE information gathering tools are specifically targeted to:

- Promote more truthful responses
- Promote increased disclosure
- Facilitate focused interviewing
- Promote information gathering uniformity
- Provide for optimal framing of questions
- Memorialize answers
- Save time for family and worker

**SAFE Questionnaire I:** Questionnaire I provide the home study practitioner with a wealth of information that formerly was gathered laboriously through the autobiography and follow-up process. Questionnaire I *replaces the Autobiography* so entrenched in traditional home studies. The questionnaire contains pointed, closed-ended questions and provides a variety of possible answers for consideration. The use of this questionnaire gives the family the opportunity for reflection and introspection, saves valuable worker time and gives the worker more accurate information as a starting place and focus for the interview.

**SAFE Questionnaire II:** Questionnaire II is designed to systematically and uniformly cover key critical and personal areas of family functioning. Because this questionnaire deals with very sensitive information, it is completed by the applicant(s) in the presence of the home study worker. The use of Questionnaire II over the past 18 years has resulted in increased disclosure of vital, personal information. Because of the effectiveness of this questionnaire, social workers must be prepared to handle very emotionally charged issues that they may have consciously or subconsciously avoided in the past.

**SAFE Family Reference Form:** The Family Reference Letter is to be sent to the references named by the applicant(s). It is formatted in a similar manner and asks some of the same questions as Questionnaires I and II. The Reference Form provides a user-friendly manner for individuals providing a reference to provide an Agency with important information about a family without drafting a lengthy and intimidating narrative.

### **III. SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and Desk Guide**

**SAFE Psychosocial Inventory:** The Psychosocial Inventory and Psychosocial Inventory Desk Guide provide social workers with a structured method to process and analyze the information they have gathered and evaluate family functioning. The Psychosocial Inventory contains 69 psychosocial factors, which are grouped into nine sections: The Psychosocial Inventory factors are rated on a five-point scale that measures each factor on a positive to negative continuum. The ratings are based on criteria set forth in the Desk Guide.

**The nine sections of the Psychosocial Inventory are as follows:**

1. History
2. Personal Characteristics
3. Marital/Domestic Partner Relationship
4. Others living or frequently in the home
5. Extended Family Relationships
6. Physical/Social Environment
7. General Parenting
8. Specialized Parenting
9. Adoption Issues (For adoption home studies only)

**SAFE Desk Guide:** The Desk Guide provides specific criteria to rate each psychosocial factor on the Psychosocial Inventory. Rating the factors in this manner enables the evaluator to accurately identify both family strengths that need to be acknowledged and issues of concern that need to be addressed. The SAFE Desk Guide ensures uniform evaluation of applicant families from worker to worker.

**IV. Preformatted Home Study Report**

The SAFE preformatted home study report templates provide social workers with a uniform model to accomplish their home study reports. There are two preformatted reports: 1) child specific home study; and 2) multipurpose home study. The templates for these home study reports are provided to the jurisdictions implementing SAFE on the [SAFEhomestudy.org](http://SAFEhomestudy.org) web site. Each SAFE jurisdiction is asked to modify the generic home study report to fit their laws, rules and regulations during the SAFE implementation process.

**V. SAFE Compatibility Inventory**

In the early days of adoption and foster care the field tried to “match” children and parents attempting to approximate appearance, heritage, backgrounds and other myriad conditions. Current practice is really looking at compatibility – are an applicant’s strengths compatible with child’s needs. The SAFE Compatibility Inventory provides child welfare professionals with an instrument that will help determine if an applicant can meet the physical, emotional and educational needs of a child. The use of this instrument is optional for jurisdictions implementing SAFE.

## **SAFE and Parent Preparation Classes**

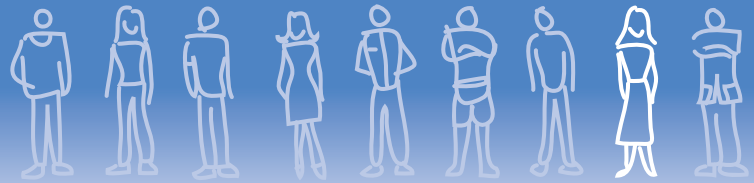
Consortium for Children believes that Parent Preparation Classes and the home study are two very different phenomena and while related are not the same thing. Parent Preparation Classes are a mutual evaluation process for both a child welfare agency and applicants. They are conducted for the purpose of educating prospective adoptive and foster parents about the sorts of children in the child welfare system, and providing them with some information on how to parent children with various degrees of mental and/or physical disability. Parent Preparation Classes also provide applicants with information on the rules and regulations that govern adoption and foster care in their jurisdiction. It is a time that allows applicants to make an informed decision about whether they want to proceed with adoption or foster care. It is also an opportunity for an agency to familiarize themselves with applicants and decide whether they want to continue to work with a family.

A Home Study, while being collaborative, is an investigative tool for a child welfare agency. It is the process through which the child welfare agency determines whether an applicant is ready willing and able to foster or parent a child and what sort of child they are capable of parenting.

SAFE is compatible with all Parent Education Classes (PRIDE, MAP, ACT, etc.)

# SAFE

Structured Analysis Family Evaluation



Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) is Consortium for Children's standardized home study methodology that has revolutionized the way that both public and private child welfare agencies study and evaluate prospective adoptive, kin and foster families. SAFE aids home study practitioners in performing a thorough, structured and uniform evaluation of families who have applied to foster or adopt.

## SAFE IS COMPOSED OF FIVE SPECIFIC COMPONENTS:

### I. SAFE Practice Values

SAFE is built on a foundation of eight practice values. The integrity and validity of the SAFE home study process is dependent upon adherence to these SAFE Practice Values.

### II. SAFE Information Gathering Tools

SAFE utilizes uniquely designed questionnaires that promotes uniform information gathering, facilitates focused interviewing and saves time for both the applicant family and social worker. These questionnaires provide for optimal framing of questions as well as provide an accurate record of an applicant's answers. Research has shown that questionnaires promote more truthful responses and increased disclosure of critical, personal information that is so vital to an effective home study.

### III. SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and Desk Guide

The SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and SAFE Desk Guide provide a structured framework for the home study practitioner to perform a thorough psychosocial evaluation of an applicant family. The Psychosocial Inventory contains 68 psychosocial factors that are considered uniformly by every worker for every applicant family.

The SAFE Desk Guide defines each of the 68 psychosocial factors found on the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and provides examples that guide the home study practitioner in identifying both family strengths as well as issues of concern. The SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and SAFE Desk Guide support the home study practitioner in developing a thorough psychosocial evaluation of the applicant family that is ultimately incorporated into the final home study report.

### IV. SAFE Preformatted Home Study Report

While uniform in format and content, SAFE Home Study Templates are modified for every SAFE jurisdiction to reflect their unique regulations and rules. The templates assist the home study practitioner in recording, analyzing and memorializing the information, assessments and evaluations derived during the home study process. The SAFE Home Study Templates provide for ease of use in cross-jurisdictional placements as information is found in the same placement and order from one jurisdiction to the next.

### V. SAFE Compatibility Inventory

The SAFE Compatibility Inventory uses a similar format to the SAFE Psychosocial Inventory and aids child placement workers in considering whether a child's needs are compatibility with an approved applicant family.

SAFE provides a structured methodology as well as state of the art tools for social workers to describe, evaluate and strengthen families in a uniform, comprehensive and sensitive fashion.

