

# ***Foster Care Services: Foster Homes***

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1015

## FOSTER HOMES

### TYPES OF FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

1015.1

#### *Requirement*

The county department develops family foster homes for children and youth who have the capacity to participate in familial experiences within a family-like setting. These include the following:

- ***Regular Foster Homes*** – are non-relative foster home placement resources designed for the temporary placement of children and youth that can function within a family-like setting. The vast majority of family foster homes are “regular homes.”
- ***Relative Foster Homes*** – are just as the name implies. They are relative homes that have been developed and approved as foster homes for the placement of relative children. Relative placements, when appropriate, are the placements of choice for children and should be carefully explored by the county department, starting at the point at which custody is received.
- ***Adoptive Homes*** – are homes that are approved for the foster care placement of a specific child for whom the established goal is adoption. The county department may approve as adoptive homes at the completion of IMPACT. Such placement resources must demonstrate the skills required in carrying out the role and responsibilities of an adoptive resource. Adoptive homes must meet the regular standards of care required for approved family foster homes and any conditions specified in that approval. (See Section 1004.2, Placement Resources).

1015.1

#### Practice Issues

Child welfare advocates view family foster care as the most appropriate and least restrictive setting (family-like) for most children in out-of-home placements. The type placement selected for a particular child is driven by the overall goal of the placement and the placement needs of the child and family. Foster/adopt placements are generally viewed as the placement of choice for the future. This type placement allows for both the foster and adoptive placement with the same placement resource, thus, greatly reducing duplication of casework services required and curtailing the overall permanency process.

### TYPES OF APPROVAL

The requirements to obtain approval as a foster home are outlined in 1014.25. Initial Full Approvals require the signature of the County Director. Subsequent approvals as a result of re-

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evaluations or conversions (to an adoption study) do not require the signature of the Regional Director with the exception of Re-evaluations initiated as a result of safety issues. See matrix below:

Type of Approval	Requires Regional Director Signature
Initial Full or Special Approval	No
Temporary Approval prior to initial Full Approval	No
Conversions	No
Annual Reevaluations	No
Reevaluations initiated because of safety concerns	No
Addendum to approved studies as a result of changes in marital status	No

1015.2

### ***Requirement***

The County Director assigns all foster homes (Regular, Relative and Foster-Adopt) an initial approval type of Full Approval or Special Approval. The County Director also assigns Temporary Approvals and all subsequent Full and Special Approvals.

### **1015.2 PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. The county recruits and approves all foster homes, with the exception of relatives, for its use only within the boundaries of the county.
2. *Regular Foster Homes (RFH)*, *Relative Foster Homes (REL)* and *Foster/Adopt (F-A)* homes must meet the same requirements for foster home approval.
3. *Full Approval* is granted any foster home (RFH, REL, F-A) that meets the Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes (See Appendix B) and requirements of the IMPACT Family Evaluation (see 1014.25).
4. *“Special Approval”* is granted a foster home (RFH, REL, F-A) when any of the following circumstances occur in an otherwise “approved” home:

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- An unrelated person resides in the foster home.
- The foster parent provides family day care in the foster home.
- A foster home has more than six (6) children under the age of 16 in the home, including the foster parents' own children, in order to keep a sibling group together.
- A foster home has more than two (2) children under the age of two years old.
- A room other than a bedroom is used for sleeping space.
- A DFCS foster or adoptive home is dually approved as a foster/adopt home for the purpose of placement of a child on foster-adopt status. (See Section 1004.5 Placement Resources.)
- A DFCS foster home is approved as an adoptive home by a private child-placing agency or the foster home of a private child-placing agency is approved as an adoptive home by DFCS.

5. Temporary Approvals at initial approval should be used judiciously and only to meet the needs of an identified child. Temporary Approval is granted a foster home (RFH, REL, F-A) when, at a minimum, the following requirements are met/completed:

- Form 35 Application to Foster or Adopt
- At least one family consultation is conducted and written summary completed.
- 10 hours of IMPACT are completed (or approved regional level waiver [see 1014.3.2] ).
- Screenings done and results received for: GCIC (fingerprints), CPS check, Sex Offender Registry, Pardons and Parole, Department of Corrections, and child abuse/neglect registry in any other state that the prospective foster parent/adult household member has resided in within the past five years.
- Form 36, Medical Report, and the comprehensive drug screen requirements are met.
- A minimum of 2 personal references are contacted and results documented.

6. Temporary Approvals other than at Initial Approval(Change in foster parent marital status, addition of new household members, at re-evaluation) are possible under certain circumstances.

- If the foster parent marries, the home may remain in full approval status for 120 days while the new spouse complies with all approval requirements (See Foster Care Manual 1015.5.1). If all approval requirements are not met within the 120 days, the foster home must be placed in temporary approval status on the 121<sup>st</sup> day until all requirements are met.
- When a new adult begins residing in the foster home, GCIC and NCIC fingerprint checks are required to be obtained on the new household member(eighteen years and older). For those counties that do not have access to Live Scan, it may take

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significant time to receive the GCIC and NCIC fingerprint card results. Every attempt should be made to use Live Scan to expedite this process. If the results are not received within 120 days, the home must be placed in temporary approval status on the 121<sup>st</sup> day. (see 1015. 5.1 for other requirements of new household members).

- If the home is placed on a corrective action plan for any violation of the foster care discipline policy, cleanliness of the home or other situations, that in the judgement of the caseworker and supervisor if not corrected, could pose a safety issue for the child, then the home will need to be placed on temporary approval status during the duration of the corrective action plan.
- If the re-evaluation is not completed timely, the home must be placed in temporary approval status from the expiration of the current approval period throughout the approval of the new evaluation. Example; Home is approved on May 10, 2005 and approval will expire on April 30, 2006, re-evaluation is not completed until July 1, 2006. Home will need to be in temporary approval status from May 1, 2006 through June 30, 2006.
- At re-evaluation, if medical statements for foster parents/new household members and/or NCIC and GCIC fingerprint checks for foster parents /adults eighteen and older are due and not provided, the home must be placed in temporary approval status( from the expiration of the current approval until these documents are obtained) Discretion should be used in not allowing an inordinate period of time to pass before obtaining the required information.

The County Director may independently grant one (1) Temporary Approval at initial approval (See term of approval in 1015.3.)

- The first (1<sup>st</sup>) request for an extension requires *consultation* with the field program specialist *prior* to approval by the *County Director*.
- A second (2<sup>nd</sup>) request for extension of the Temporary Approval may be requested only under highly unusual or compelling circumstances and requires that written justification for the request be sent to the Family Services Director at the state office.

When a foster home is in "Temporary Approval" status, the state cannot claim IV-E reimbursement for any IV-E eligible child placed in the home. Economic Support and Accounting must always be notified promptly of the approval status of foster homes in order to ensure appropriate reimbursement (IV-E or IV-B).

### TERM OF APPROVAL

#### 1015.3

#### *Requirement*

The agency exercises consistency in granting approval.

The County Director grants initial Full and Special Approvals not to exceed 12 consecutive calendar months including any time spent in Temporary Approval status.

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The County Director grants Temporary Approvals not to exceed three (3) consecutive calendar months.

## 1015.3 PROCEDURES

1. The initial date of Full or Special Approvals is the date the County Director approves the foster home (see 1014.24.1). The termination date of Full Approval or Special Approval is the last day of the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive calendar month following that approval. The anniversary dates for Full approval always remain the same (unless a re-evaluation is initiated before the expiration date).

**Full Approval example:** The foster home is approved May 10. Counting May as month #1, April 30 of the next year would be the last day of the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive month. Thus, the anniversary dates are May 1<sup>st</sup> – April 30<sup>th</sup> and remain consistent throughout the approval of the home.

2. For Temporary Approval at initial approval, the termination date is the last day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive calendar month. Once the home goes into Full or Special Approval status, the time spent in Temporary Approval status is deducted from 12 months to arrive at the anniversary date, which will then remain consistent.

**Temporary Approval at initial approval example:** The foster home receives Temporary Approval on May 10<sup>th</sup>. The home receives Full Approval on July 13<sup>th</sup>. The Full Approval dates would be July-April 30<sup>th</sup>. Example 2: The foster home receives Temporary Approval on May 10<sup>th</sup> with an extension through October 31<sup>st</sup>. Full Approval is granted October 17<sup>th</sup>. The Full Approval dates would be October-April 30<sup>th</sup>.

## APPROVAL ACTIONS

### 1015.3.1

#### *Requirement*

Ensure that written notification of approval is provided to the foster parent, updates to the IDS Placement Central database and the Initial Approval Data (Form 0-17) are accomplished.

### 1015.3.1 PROCEDURES

1. Establish a tracking system to monitor foster home approvals (number, type, the expiration of approvals, and the changes in approval circumstances related to age, sex, number of children, etc.)
2. Enter the requested information about the foster home provider(s) in IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL. Complete Form 0-17 and file in the foster parent record. Provide the following information in a letter of approval to the foster parent/relative within 10 working days:
  - a. Classification of the Home: (Regular Foster Home, Relative Foster Home and

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Foster/Adopt Home).

- b. Type of Approval: (Full, Special or Temporary).
- c. Initial and Expiration Dates of Approval.
- d. Number, age and sex of children for which the home is approved.
- e. Special needs of children the family will consider.
- f. File a copy of the letter of approval in the foster home record.

3. If not previously done at the completion of IMPACT, complete the following:

- Explain the contents of Form 38 (Agreement Between the County Department and the Foster Parent). Obtain necessary signatures. File original copy in the foster home record.
- Provide the foster parent with a copy of the Foster Parent Manual and the Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Grievance Procedure.

### **CHANGES IN APPROVAL STATUS**

1015.4

#### ***Requirement***

Foster homes must be in an approval status at all times. Any change in the approval specifications of the home is documented on form O-18, Change in Foster Home Status, and filed in the foster home record. This form serves as documentation of any change in the status of the home.

1015.4 PROCEDURES

#### ***Types of Approval***

Form O-18, Change in Foster Home Status, is completed when the foster home requires a change in type of approval (full, special, temporary, etc.) Complete and submit to the County Director/designee for *prior* written approval. Check each type of approval being granted the home. (In emergency situations, prior approval may be obtained verbally and confirmed in writing within five [5] working days.) Update IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL to reflect the type of approval. File form O-18 in the foster home record as indicated at the end of Section 1015 "Maintaining the Foster Home Record." If the type of approval changes from either full or special to temporary or back to full or special, the Resource Development Case Manager must notify the case manager and supervisors of the children via the Form 713 of the change. The

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case manager of the children will be responsible for notifying Revenue Maximization of the change in approval type to allow Revenue Maximization to complete the Form 529 to determine whether or not the home is a IVE reimburseable placement.

### ***Term of Approval***

Form O-18, Change in Foster Home Status, is completed when the foster home requires a change in dates of approval (i.e., following the re-evaluation of the home or any other situation that affects the term of approval. Complete form O-18, and submit to County Director/designee for approval. File form in foster home record.

### ***Sex, Number and Age of Children and Level of Care***

If the foster home requires a change in the approval circumstances for the sex, number and/or ages of the children served, or the level of Care provided, complete form O-18 reflecting the change and submit to the County Director/designee for prior written approval. File a copy of form O-18 in the foster home record. (In emergency situations, prior approval may be obtained verbally and confirmed in writing within five (5) working days.) Update IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL if the number of children served (beds) changes. Check all applicable levels of care provided by the home.

### ***Type of Foster Home***

If there is a need to change the *type of foster home* designation (Regular, Relative, Foster/Adopt) complete form O-18 reflecting the change and submit to the Director/designee for approval. The original copy of form O-18 is filed in the foster home record. Update the IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL form to reflect changes where applicable.

Note: Any reversal or change in the approval status of the home requires the completion of form O-18, including required signatures and date. One section of the form is completed for each situation (may involve several changes ). File in foster home record with the *latest* form on top.

### **1015.4 PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. A foster family is approved as a foster home resource for only one agency. A child from another agency may not be accepted in a foster home without prior approval from the original approving agency. The state regularly uses private agency foster homes for the placement of DFCS children.
2. Federal regulations mandate that any child receiving per diem must be in an approved foster home or licensed IFC facility.

### **CHANGE IN FOSTER PARENT MARITAL STATUS**

### **1015.5**

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### ***Requirement***

Foster parents are required to notify the agency immediately of impending changes (engagement, marriage, divorce or separation) in their marital status and when the change actual occurs (marriage, divorce or separation).

County agencies must complete the pre-service requirements of a new spouse within 120 days of the agency's notice of the new spouse residing in the household.

### **1015.5 PROCEDURE**

#### ***Marriage***

- 1. The Case Manager conducts a home visit to ascertain the continued safety, emotional well-being and stability of children placed in the home.**
- 2. Form 35, a Criminal Records and local CPS check, Sexual Offender's Registry, Pardons and Parole and Department of Corrections screens are completed immediately.**
- 3. The spouse must complete pre-service preparation (IMPACT) as outlined in Section 1014.**
- 4. Form 36, Medical Report, and drug screen are accomplished.**
- 5. Ensure that the requirements outlined in 1014.25 IMPACT Family Evaluation, are completed as soon as possible. A Summary and Recommendation is completed along with the IMPACT questionnaire and self-report forms, references and other verifications and requirements are submitted for approval to the County Director. The new spouse must obtain agency approval as a foster parent.**
- 6. The foster home remains in full approval status for the first 120 days of receiving verbal or written notice (document in the foster parent record) regarding the new spouse's residence in the home. The home goes into Temporary approval, if all approval requirements have not been met, on the 121<sup>st</sup> day following receipt of a verbal or written notice.**
- 7. The Case manager completes IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL data input requirements to reflect the change in status of the foster home.**

#### ***Divorce/ Separation***

- 1. When the agency is made aware of any marital discord in the foster home, support may be provided to the family by referring them to marriage counseling or for Wraparound Services.**
- 2. Discuss with foster parents the effect of the impending divorce or separation on the children placed in the home. The emotional well being of children placed in the home must be assured.**
- 3. Complete a re-evaluation of the home should the foster parents become divorced or separated to assure the foster parent's continued ability to provide care for the child(ren) in the home.**
- 4. Provide emotional support to the foster parent caretaker and make referrals for individual**

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counseling, if appropriate.

5. Verification of the divorce should be obtained and filed in the foster home record.

### **NEW ADULTS RESIDING IN THE HOUSEHOLD**

#### **1015.5.1**

##### ***Requirement***

Foster parents are required to inform the agency of any change (increase/decrease) in household membership by the next working day. Criminal records checks (screenings and fingerprints: see 1014.25) are completed on the new *adult (18 years and older)* at the time the individual is added to the household or immediately following the county's awareness. Form 404 is completed and signed. Although the processing of the criminal records check (CRC) may take up to 6-8 weeks or more, the home remains in full/special approval status for the first 120 days, if all other qualifications are met. If the background checks are not received within the 120 days, the foster home must be placed in temporary approval status on the 121<sup>st</sup> day. A health statement is required (see 1014.25) and a summary should be added to the foster home evaluation incorporating the new household member.

### **PLACEMENTS REQUIRING SPECIALIZED FOSTER CARE SERVICES**

#### **1015.6**

##### ***Requirement***

Children requiring specialized foster care services are placed in foster home settings that can accommodate their parenting needs.

#### **1015.6 PROCEDURES**

1. Consideration is given to the complexity of the child's needs; the degree of services required; and the skills, experience and support networks of the foster family in placing children whose needs require specialized foster care services.
2. The limitation on the number of specialized foster care placements in any given foster home is determined by the needs of the children, the number of other children in the home and their levels of need as well as the skills and capacity of the foster parents.
  - Ideally, no more than one (1) specialized foster care eligible child, if the agency's pool of foster home resources allow for this.
  - The maximum number of specialized foster care eligible children receiving services in any one foster home is three (3). Any exceptions (waiver requests) to this policy should be directed to the Regional Director.
  - Specialized foster care funding will not be considered for children placed in foster homes that have more than six children, including the foster parents' birth, foster and adoptive children.

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3. Foster parents providing specialized foster care services demonstrate specific skills and abilities in addition to those outlined in IMPACT. These include the following:
- Literacy skills- the ability to read and comprehend information relative to the diagnosed needs of the child and an understanding of the roles and responsibilities required in the provision of services to children with medical or emotional/behavioral needs.
  - Employment- the availability of the foster parent on a full-time basis to provide care. Any exception to this requirement is left to the discretion of the agency director and should be well documented in the parent's and the child's record.
  - Transportation- the foster parent's ability to access reliable transportation due to the frequency of visits to the various health care professionals providing services to the child.
  - Environmental conditions- at a minimum, a *smoke-free* home environment for children receiving *medically fragile care*. Depending upon the child's diagnosis, other restrictions may apply, including a home that is temperature controlled, animal free and the absolute maintenance of utilities for children who depend upon technologically controlled equipment.
  - Pre-Service Training- additional training beyond IMPACT as required by the child's special needs. First Aid and CPR training by certified instructors are completed prior to the placement of a child requiring Specialized foster care Services.
  - Continued Parent Development Training- the completion of at least 10 hours of continued parent development training annually, with emphasis on some area of special needs parenting (see 1014.28) .
  - Respite- the ability to access planned and emergency respite care by trained providers.
  - Record Keeping- the ability to maintain records relative to the child's condition, response to intervention, progress, relapses and any other information deemed important to the child's treatment plan.

### **1015.6 Practice Issues**

Requests for the initial funding of specialized foster care eligible children are submitted to the Provider Support Unit in a timely manner. *All subsequent requests for specialized foster care funding should be initiated at least three months prior to the expiration of the eligibility period in order to complete the required paper work and obtain the required documentation from the various service providers.* More specific information regarding the requirements of homes providing specialized foster care services may be obtained from the Provider Support Unit.

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## USE OF A FOSTER HOME IN ANOTHER COUNTY

1015.7

### *Requirement*

When a placement resource for a child is not available within the county, the county department may consider seeking an appropriate foster home in a county in close proximity.

## 1015.7 PROCEDURES

### *Legal County*

1. Document efforts to place the child within the county. Consult with the Supervisor about locating an appropriate placement in a county in close proximity.
2. Contact other counties to locate a suitable home. If one is selected, make placement plans with the county that will be supervising the home.
3. Forward to the boarding county pertinent case record documents necessary for supervising the child; e.g., Case Plans, Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment, health records, Medicaid card, school records, etc. Provide such information prior to placement, if possible. Otherwise, furnish the information within 14 calendar days of the date of placement.
4. Initiate Form 6, *Placement Agreement Between County Departments* within 14 calendar days.
5. Maintain on-going case management and case planning responsibilities with appropriate service activities for the child and parent.
6. Maintain frequent communication with the boarding county. Request *quarterly* documentation of the dates and nature of contacts with the child and foster parent. (This may be accomplished with summary reports or *legible* copies of case narratives {452's}. More frequent documentation can be requested as the case situation dictates.
7. Pay the per diem and follow the policies of the boarding county for State non-reimbursable expenses.
8. Assume primary responsibility for assuring that periodic reviews and court hearings are conducted in a timely manner. The boarding county provides written and/or verbal information relative to the child's needs, progress and status of placement as requested by the legal county.
9. Continue to report the child in IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL/TCM/AFCARS. Send a copy of the Form 451 to the boarding county. Stop billing Medicaid for TCM services for the case. Update the demographic information (DOB, ethnicity and family structure) on the foster parents from the boarding county.

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### ***Boarding County***

1. Supervise the child in placement, using appropriate community resources to meet the child's needs.
2. Assist the legal county, as needed/requested, to achieve the permanency plan.
3. Provide input/information regarding the child's needs, progress and status of child's placement (verbal and/or written) to the legal county as needed or requested for periodic reviews, court hearings, staffings and similar circumstances.
4. Review Form 526, the monthly Foster Care Invoice, for accuracy and completeness. Submit the invoice to the legal county for payment.
5. Initiate IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL Form 590 to indicate that the child resides in the boarding county. Bill Medicaid for TCM services for the child if all billing criteria are otherwise met.
6. Relate the foster parent's DOB, ethnicity and family structure to the legal county for the AFCARS update.
7. Provide the legal county with *quarterly* documentation of the dates and nature of contacts with the child and foster parent. (This may be accomplished with summary reports or *legible* copies of case narratives {452's}.) Legal counties may request more frequent documentation if the circumstances of the placement dictate.

### **FOSTER PARENT MOVES TO ANOTHER COUNTY**

1015.8

#### ***Requirement***

When a foster parent is planning a move to another county, the decision to move the child with the foster family requires the prior approval of the County Director/designee and the mutual agreement of the new county. The foster home is supervised by the new county.

1015.8 PROCEDURES

#### ***Current County***

1. Discuss with the foster parent whether he/she desires to continue providing foster care.
2. If the foster parent wants to continue, notify the new county of residence, providing the address as soon as it is known.

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3. Notify any other legal county with children placed in the foster home to determine placement plans.
4. Prepare a summary on the foster home, indicating the family's experience in providing foster care. Be available for consultation or staffings regarding the family as appropriate.
5. Transfer the foster home record to the new county. Maintain original fingerprint cards. Include a statement in the file that the fingerprints remain on file in the current county.
6. Instruct the foster parent to notify the new county within 14 calendar days of their move.
7. See Section 1017 (ICPC) for procedures prior to a foster parent's move out-of-state with a child in care.

### ***New County***

1. Evaluate the living arrangements (prior to the actual move, if possible).
2. Update the foster home study, ensuring that the home meets Minimum Standards and requirements for approval. Submit the update to the County Director/designee for approval.
3. Notify the previous county of residence if and when Full or Special Approval is given. (If there is a delay in obtaining Full Approval in the new county, IV-E FC cannot be paid during this time. Once Full or Special Approval is given, the child may return to being IV-E reimbursable.)
4. Notify Economic Support and Accounting of any changes in the approval status of the home so that IV-E payments can be made appropriately.
5. Update IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL to reflect change in county, address, and phone number etc. Add a note in the comments section that the foster parent moved to the new county.
6. Provide supervision of the foster home.

### **1015.8 PRACTICE ISSUES**

The decision to move a child with the foster family is carefully weighed and guided by the proximity of the new county and the on-going service needs of the child, including the legal status and permanency plan indicated. All parties work expeditiously to effect the approval of the home.

### **COUNTIES JOINT USE OF A FOSTER HOME**

#### **1015.9**

#### ***Requirement***

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In *rare* instances, when county departments have a need to share a foster home, the involved County Directors/designees approve the joint utilization of a foster home by more than one county department.

### **1015.9 PROCEDURES**

The approving county department develops a written plan for the joint use of a foster home, delineating the responsibilities of each county in relation to areas such as:

- Methods of communication between county departments;
- Utilization of beds and spaces;
- Equality in paying for non-state reimbursable items;
- Procedures for the placement of children; and
- Supervision of the children placed.

### **1015.9 PRACTICE ISSUES**

Most foster homes are utilized by one county DFCS agency. The joint use of a foster home by more than one county occurs most often in situations where placements are needed for the medically fragile child or other situations involving unusual placement needs. The county that developed and approved the foster home and in which the home is located, provides supervision for the home and, thus, counts the foster home in IDS PLACEMENT CENTRAL.

## **FOSTER PARENT TRANSFERS FROM A GEORGIA CHILD-PLACING AGENCY**

### **1015.10**

#### ***Requirement***

Foster parents who chose to transfer from a licensed Georgia Child-Placing Agency (CPA) to a local DFCS county office must meet the Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes. The Office of Regulatory Services (ORS) licenses and monitors Child-Placing Agencies based on Official Georgia Annotated Code. Therefore, CPA foster parent intake, training and evaluation may differ from DFCS policy.

### **1015.10 PROCEDURES**

1. The foster parent must complete Form 35 and sign release of information (Form 5459) which will be provided to the CPA.
2. Utilizing Form 5459 contact the Child-Placing Agency in writing and request a copy of the family evaluation, any subsequent evaluations, pre-service training certificate, annual training hours documentation, policy violations or corrective actions, a recommendation as to the capabilities of the foster family, and confirmation that the

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family is active and in good standing with the CPA.

3. Schedule the foster parent for an IMPACT orientation.
4. Upon receipt and review of the CPA foster home record, determine if the fingerprints (reflected on the printout provided by ORS to private agencies) and physical/corporal are current (within 5 years). If either were not completed within the last five years, it must be repeated. If the foster parent is older than 65 years or has a documented physical/corporal ailment and the physical/corporal was not completed within the last 12 months, the physical/corporal should be repeated. Use of Form 36 is required.
5. Complete drug screen requirements.
  6. Complete at least one family consultation. Ensure that the required attachments and verifications (see 1014.25 Section II-K and Section III) are met and reflected in a summary/addendum to the CPA family evaluation. Submit the family evaluation for approval (see 1014.24).

### **1015.10 PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. It is incumbent upon DFCS to ensure that transferring families meet the Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes. Although DFCS is not required to rewrite the family evaluation, it must be ascertained and documented that the information contained within the evaluation accurately reflects the family's present situation and abilities.
2. Child-Placing Agencies are not required to utilize IMPACT for pre-service training. Certificates of pre-service training from GPS:MAPP, PRIDE , PATH or Treatment Parent Readiness Training are acceptable pre-service trainings. Any other pre-service trainings will require a waiver from the Regional Director or the foster parent can attend IMPACT.
4. If the foster parent decides to transfer to DFCS prior to their approval with a CPA, then standard intake and approval procedures in 1014 apply.
  5. If information obtained from the CPA indicates that the foster parent has been voluntarily inactive for less than five years, follow the procedures in 1015.10. If the information indicates that the foster parent has been inactive for more than five years or was not in good standing with the CPA or the CPA refuses to release requested information, follow the intake and approval process in 1014.

### **FOSTER PARENT PROVIDING FAMILY DAY CARE**

#### **1015.11**

##### ***Requirement***

Foster parents give notice to the agency prior to operating a family day care in their home. A foster parent who desires to provide family day care is assisted by the Case Manager in carefully

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evaluating the effect on children who are or may be placed in the foster home.

### **1015.11 PROCEDURES**

1. Discuss with the foster parent the effects of day care in relation to each child placed in the foster home. Consider such issues as:
  - The age of the child.
  - The special needs of the child.
  - The frequency of birth parent/child contacts.
  - The effect of birth parent contacts on the child.
  - The length of time the child has been in foster care.
  - The permanency plan for the child.
  - The child's adjustment to and sense of security in the foster home.
2. Consider the effects of day care on future placements of other children in the home. Identify the type of child appropriate for placement.
3. Should the decision be made to allow the foster home to provide family day care, submit a written summary to the County Director/designee, which justifies the provision of family day care. Obtain authorization and change the approval type to "Special Approval." (See 1015.2 for additional instructions.)
4. Place a copy of the written summary for Special Approval and authorization in the foster home record.

### **1015.11 PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. Children in foster care have experienced separation from their families and resulting anxieties. Observing other parents and children separating and reuniting daily can be traumatic for already vulnerable children.
2. It is possible that day care for children known to the foster child may be less stressful, such as providing day care for children who:
  - Are relatives of the foster parent.
  - Live in the neighborhood.
  - Attend the same school, church, etc., as the child.
  - Are in families who are friends of the foster parent.
3. Agency staff may not use an approved foster home to provide family day care for their own

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children due to conflict of interest.

4. If a DFCS foster home which also holds an ORS child care license or provides family day care is closed because of serious policy violations or substantiated CPS investigations, ORS should be notified.

### **MAXIMUM NUMBER IN A FAMILY DAYCARE HOME**

**1015.12**

#### ***Requirement***

The maximum number of children for whom family day care can be provided in a foster home is six (6).

**NOTE:** If the foster parent provides family day care for more than two (2) children for pay, the foster parent must be registered with the Office of Regulatory Services (ORS).

**1015.12            PRACTICE ISSUE**

The decision on the number of children for whom a particular foster home can provide family day care is based on the above issues in 1015.10 as well as the number of children who would be in the home from the time school is out until the children in day care leave.

When a placement requiring Specialized Foster Care services is made in a foster home that provides in-home day care services, the limitations on the number of children that may be in the home at any given time is determined by the requirements in 1015.6.

A foster/adopt home may provide in-home day care for no more than two infants when an infant is placed on foster/adopt status in the home.

### **ADVERSE PLACEMENTS EFFECTS IN A FAMILY DAYCARE HOME**

**1015.13**

#### ***Requirement***

If the county department determines that a child is adversely affected by a foster parent providing family day care services in the home, a decision is promptly made concerning the removal of the child (or children).

**1015.13            PROCEDURES**

**37816.** Consider the following questions in deciding whether or not to move a placed child:

- What areas of the child's functioning are being negatively affected in the home?
- What would be the effect of moving the child to another placement?
- Which possible placement resources could meet the needs of the child?

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- What type child is appropriate for future placements?
2. Meet with the foster parent and discuss face-to-face the above areas of concern.
  3. Involve the foster parent in making the choice of (1) not providing family day care and the child (or children) remaining in the home; or (2) providing family day care and the child (or children) being moved.

### **PERSONAL CARE HOMES PROVIDING FOSTER HOME CARE**

#### **1015.14**

##### **Requirement**

A family may not be approved as a foster home resource when their primary place of residence (the home into which the child is to be placed) is used as a Personal Care Home or is located on the same property as the Personal Care Home.

*NOTE:* Personal Care Homes are homes licensed by the Office of Regulatory Services to provide residential services to adults who require varying degrees of supervision and care, and are required to meet standards as established by the rules of the Department of Human Resources/Division of Public Health.

#### **1015.14 PROCEDURES**

1. Families inquiring to provide foster care services are notified at the point of inquiry or orientation, or the earliest point thereafter, that their home cannot be approved as a foster home for children in DFCS custody while their primary place of residence is licensed and/or used as a Personal Care Home.
2. If a foster home is licensed as a Personal Care Home at any time following the effective date of this policy, any children placed in the home will be removed and the foster home closed.
3. A Personal Care Home provider, who closes their home for such business, may be approved as a DFCS foster home, provided all other agency requirements are met.
4. Notify any approved DFCS foster home that was licensed as a Personal Care Home prior to the effective date of this policy that additional children would not be placed in their home while their place of residence continues to be licensed as a Personal Care home.

*NOTE:* Any children currently placed in the foster home are staffed individually to determine the most appropriate and least restrictive placement for the child. A waiver must be requested from the State Social Services Section Director at 2 Peachtree St. NW, Suite 18-100, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142.

#### **1015.14 PRACTICE ISSUES**

Most customers residing in Personal Care Homes are in this environment because they have

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needs, which require 24-hour supervision. Of primary concern is the potential risk to children who are placed in the same facility with adults who may have special emotional and psychological challenges. In addition, the agency must avoid placing children in foster home situations that are questionable as to whether they are receiving the required care and attention of their caretaker due to the competing demands of other services being provided in the home. There are certain rights guaranteed to the residents of these facilities that cannot be waived and which may create some liability issues both for DFCS and the personal care provider. (See the office of Regulatory Services Rules and Regulations for Personal Care Home Providers, 290-5-35.18)

### **SELECTION AND USE OF A FOSTER HOME**

**1015.15**

#### ***Requirement***

The foster parent and the Case Manager/Supervisor make a mutual decision regarding the suitability of a placement for the child. The placement should be based on the child's best interest and the potential of the foster parent to work with the agency and the birth parent, as well as the location of the foster home in relation to the child's family's home.

**1015.15**

#### **PROCEDURES**

- 1. Select the placement for the child by matching the characteristics of the child with:**
  - the approval terms of the home; and
  - the type child the foster parent has indicated is suitable for placement.
- 2. Discuss the child's behavior and possible reactions to placement with the foster parent.**
- 3. Discuss the permanency plan for the child and visitation between the parent and child.**
- 4. Provide the foster parent with the following at placement, or as soon as possible thereafter:**
  - Form 40 Agreement Supplement
  - Form 469 Foster Child Information Sheet
  - Emergency Intake Form
  - Current Case Plan (including WTLP if youth is 14 or over)
  - Updated medical and educational information (if not already included in the Case Plan)
  - Medicaid authorization, if available
  - A copy of the child's Social Security card, if available.

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## **INITIAL PLACEMENT**

**1015.16**

### ***Requirement***

The Case Manager recognizes that the initial child placement in a newly approved foster home is a critical time for the foster parent. Additional services to support the foster parent in his/her role are required.

## **1015.16 PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. The foster family's relationship to the county department and the perception of being supported by the agency is strongly influenced by the initial placement in a newly approved home.
2. A recently approved foster family needs more frequent contacts by the Case Manager in adjusting to the initial placement.
3. The foster parent is encouraged to communicate openly about the experience of foster parenting and the effects on the foster family.
4. The foster parent may have questions or need clarification about information previously discussed during IMPACT. Annual training hours should be initiated within 60 days of the approval date to assist with continuing development and group support. (See 1014. 29)

## **EMERGENCIES IN THE FOSTER HOME**

**1015.17**

### ***Requirement***

County DFCS agencies provide foster parents a procedure for contacting Case Managers or other agency staff when an emergency arises in the foster home.

## **1015.17 PROCEDURES**

1. The foster parent is provided with a telephone number for contacting Case Managers and/or other key DFCS staff when an emergency occurs during or after regular working hours.
2. The foster parent contacts the agency immediately or as soon as possible when any of the following or similar situations occur:
  - The child leaves the foster home without permission or runs away. See 1011.16.
  - The child becomes seriously ill or is seriously injured and requires immediate medical attention. (The foster parent is instructed to take the child to the

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hospital emergency room if the physician cannot be reached for advice. The agency or birth parent, if applicable, will need to complete any authorization forms or obtain any required court order for payment and hospital records.

- The child gets into serious trouble with the school, law enforcement or others.
  - The child's birth parents, relative or other unauthorized person attempts to remove the child from the foster home.
  - There is a serious illness or significant change in the foster home.
  - The child is sexually victimized.
3. The Case Manager or other designated DFCS staff responds to emergencies occurring within the foster home immediately or as indicated by agency protocol.
  4. Provide a copy of narrative documenting the emergency for the foster home file.

### **RESTRICTIONS ON FOSTER PARENT DECISION-MAKING REGARDING CHILD**

1015.18

#### ***Requirement***

Foster parents are responsible for making day-to-day decisions regarding the on-going care and maintenance of the child. Agency consultation and approval, however, are required prior to foster parents making any *major* decisions regarding the child or the foster care situation.

1015.18 PROCEDURES

1. The foster parent seeks consultation and approval from the Case Manager before making major decisions that have a significant effect on the life of the child. These may include, but are not limited to the following:
  - A change in school
  - Youth's employment
  - Religious practices (baptism, confirmation, etc.)
  - Drastically altering the child's appearance (cutting, applying chemicals to child's hair; ear piercing, body piercing, etc.)
  - Obtaining driver's license
  - Obtaining birth control
  - Dating
2. The Case Manager involves the birth parent in the decision making process whenever parental rights have not been terminated.

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## SPECIAL SAFETY ISSUES IN FOSTER HOMES

1015.19

### *Requirement*

Foster parents maintain a home environment that ensures the safety and well being of the children placed in their care. Foster parents are required to comply with the following safety requirements for children in foster care placement.

1015.19 PROCEDURES

### *DFCS Foster Home Safety Agreement*

The foster parent is required to sign the DFCS Foster Home Safety Agreement (See Form 29 in appendix N). The Case Manager reviews the DFCS Foster Home Safety Agreement with foster parents and obtains their signature(s) of agreement and approval at the following times:

- During the initial approval of the home at the time *Form 38 Agreement Between Family and County DFCS* is signed.
- At the time of the foster home re-evaluation.
- Whenever child safety concerns are at issue (discipline or foster care policy violations, etc).

### *Safe Supervision*

*Note:* For the purpose of this section on *Safe Supervision*, *supervision* refers to in-home or out-of-home, unreimbursed childcare; *occasional care* means care provided *once* a week or less with no more than three occurrences regardless of the timeframe ; *routine care* means care provided more than once a week, usually at designated times; *short-term care* means less than *four hours*.

Responsible supervision of children in care is required at all times. The Child Protective Services standards regarding the supervision of children in the homes of their parents or relatives are not applicable to children in foster care placement. Standards of care for children in placement are stricter due to the uniqueness of their situation, past experiences and the need to ensure their safety in out-of-home placements. This is the primary basis for the pre-service preparation and in-service training program (Continued Parent Development) for foster families.

The foster parent provides or arranges for care and supervision appropriate to the child's age, level of development and individual needs. A plan is established by the foster parent for the care and supervision of the child, as needed, by a *competent* and *reliable adult* in their absence due to *employment, training, or for personal situations*.

Policies and procedures regarding childcare needs during *training* or *employment* may be found in 1011.11 and 1011.12.

The following applies to *unreimbursed* substitute caregivers.

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- ***Substitute caregivers providing occasional, short-term, in-home/out-of-home*** childcare are not required to undergo CPS screenings. However, upon completion of the third occurrence of care for any foster child having been placed in the home (regardless of timeframe), the “occasional” provider becomes “routine” and is subject to the requirements below.
- ***Substitute caregivers providing routine*** in-home/out-of-home childcare are required to complete Form 316 and submit to CPS screenings, Sexual Offender’s Registry, Pardons and Parole and Department of Corrections screening prior to providing care for the child.

Foster parents must be reasonably assured that any substitute caregiver possesses the necessary *skills* to manage the parenting and/or special needs of the child left in their care and is aware of and agrees to follow agency guidelines regarding supervision, discipline and other safety needs of the child.

Children are not left in the care of other minors. Persons providing reimbursed or non-reimbursed care for children must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older

### ***Supervision of Older Youth***

Generally speaking, reliable and competent youth, 13 years and older, may be left under their own supervision under certain circumstances and for short periods of time so as not to jeopardize their safety and well-being. At this stage in their lives, many youth are able to benefit from experiences that foster a sense of responsibility, independence and self-control. Situations requiring youth to be home alone after school hours or when foster parents are attending to short-term personal matters are acceptable within the limitations indicated.

The primary factor to consider in determining if youth may be left alone is their ability to function for short periods of time independent of a caretaker. The foster parent assures that the youth is aware of procedures to be taken in case of an emergency and has access to emergency contact numbers, including their own and a nearby relative, neighbor or friend. Other important criteria to consider include the following:

- Length of time in the Home.
- Judgment and level of maturity or development.
- Demonstration of dependability, responsibility and trustworthiness.
- History of emotional/psychological stability.
- History of running away and other status offenses.
- History of delinquent behavior.
- History of alcohol and substance abuse.
- Number of youth present in the home and their relationship with each other.
- Gender, number and the relationship of the youth to be left alone.
- History of sexual acting out.
- School performance.
- Safety of the home environment (firearm safety, water safety, any other potential hazards, etc.).

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- Youth's ability to readily access foster parent or other identified person should the need arise.

The foster parent and Case Manager together determine the feasibility of leaving older youth alone in the foster home for short periods of time.

### ***Respite Care (see also 1016.32)***

Respite is a support service for foster parents who require some "time away" from their parenting responsibilities and may involve overnight care or day care. Children in DFCS approved foster homes and Private Agency foster homes are eligible for this service. Respite is paid at the child's current per diem rate, not to exceed five (5) days per fiscal year (taken individually or consecutively) for *day respite* and five (5) days per fiscal year for *overnight respite*.

Respite care (under Concurrent Per Diem) may also be used to support foster parent attendance at approved conferences when overnight or extended care may be needed. Note: Please refer to 1016.16 (concurrent per diem) when a foster parent's attendance at an approved conference is overnight or extended care is needed. These instances do not impact a foster parent's respite balance.

See 1016.32 Fiscal for details regarding the requirements for Respite care and procedures for claiming reimbursement.

### ***Day Respite***

Day respite is designed for less than 24-hour childcare that allows foster parents to deal with short-term situations of being away from home for such personal matters as hair appointments, unexpected family illness and similar circumstances. The respite care provider must meet the same requirements as Supplemental Supervision providers. (See 1011.11).

### ***Overnight Respite Care***

This type respite care is designed to give foster parents a needed break from parenting for such purposes as vacation, hospitalization, or any other circumstance that makes the foster parent unable to provide for the child's care in the home. The approved DFCS or Private Agency foster home must meet the DHR Minimum Standards for Foster Homes. See 1016.32 Fiscal for procedures and instructions to claim reimbursement.

**Note:** Due to their unique needs, children in foster care placement require the on-going care and supervision of caregivers who have undergone preparation and training adequate to meet their needs. Inherent in the process of "becoming" a foster parent is the understanding of and agreement with the impact that this experience will have on the life of the child and of the foster family.

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## ***Violation of Supervision Requirements in Foster Homes***

Foster parents are made aware of the consequences of improper or inadequate supervision of children placed in their homes. Corrective Action measures are implemented or closure of the home may be necessary if there are serious risk factors to the child as a result of improper or inadequate supervision.

Foster parents must keep the agency informed of any changes in parental contact not approved by in the visitation plan.

## ***Water Safety***

Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related deaths across the nation to children ages one through fourteen. With this sobering statistic in mind, counties must take extra precaution when making placements in foster homes that have swimming pools or waterfront property. Any mobile child is a potential victim. As a result, the age, special needs and number of children in the home should guide decisions around placement in such foster homes.

Foster parents whose primary or alternate place of residence (vacation or country home, etc.) is equipped with an in-ground or aboveground swimming pool, or is situated on waterfront property are required to adhere to the following guidelines:

### **General Water Safety Guidelines**

1. Know or learn how to swim. Swimming requirements are completed by foster parents during the first (1<sup>st</sup>) year of approval. Swimming requirements for previously approved homes are completed within one year of the effective date of this policy. Water safety requirements for homes with newly acquired swimming pools are completed by foster parents within one year of acquisition.
2. Complete the required CPR and First Aid training during the first year of approval. All previously approved foster homes that have not completed CPR and First Aid training are required to complete these courses as a part of the annual continued parent development requirements. CPR and First Aid certification should be kept current.

Complete training in a basic water rescue class during the first year of approval or as soon as the course is made available in the county, or is within reasonable driving distance. A basic water rescue is designed to teach recognition, prevention and response to water emergencies using non-swimming rescue methods. These type classes are generally offered by the Red Cross, community centers or aquatic centers.

3. Provide some form of *written verification* (this may be in the form of a signed statement, letter, certificate, etc. from the instructor) upon completion of the swimming, First Aid, CPR and Basic Water Rescue requirements.
4. Provide a *signed statement*, in the absence of official verification, affirming previously acquired *swimming skills, if applicable*, or the previous completion of a *Basic Water Rescue course*.

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5. Enroll children in care, three (3) years and older, in a swimming class within one (1) year of the date of placement. The class must be taught by a certified instructor and, if necessary, is re-taken until the child learns to swim. The foster parent informs the Case Manager if a child is unable to complete the required swimming course for any reason. Case Managers must make foster parents aware of any known physical/corporal or emotional challenges of the child, which would impact their ability to complete the course.
6. Provide written documentation that children in the home have satisfactorily completed a swimming course that is taught by a certified swimming instructor or a signed statement affirming their observation of the child's previously acquired ability to swim.
7. Ensure that the swimming pool or waterfront area meets any local and/or state ordinances.
8. Ensure that the swimming pool and surrounding area are properly maintained and free from danger.
9. Provide a cordless or pool phone, cellular phone, or poolside phone jack to eliminate the need to leave children unattended while answering the telephone indoors.
10. Equip the swimming pool with lifesaving and flotation devices such as reaching poles and ring buoys.
11. Provide direct adult supervision in the swimming pool or water area at all times. **CLOSE ADULT SUPERVISION IS THE KEY TO ENSURING ADEQUATE WATER SAFETY FOR CHILDREN. EVEN IF A CHILD KNOWS HOW TO SWIM, CLOSE ADULT SUPERVISION IS MANDATED!**
12. Ensure the inaccessibility of *in-ground or aboveground swimming pools* by isolating the pool from the home with a fence or through the use of a pool safety cover. See appendix O-19.

### ***Safety Guidelines for In-ground Pools***

- The fence must surround all sides of the pool, must be at least four (4) feet in height and must isolate the pool from the home. The fence should have no vertical or horizontal openings that are more than four (4) inches wide and should be of such structure that a young child cannot climb through or under the fence. The fence must have a gate that locks. See Appendix O-19.
- Pool safety covers must meet ASTM Standards (See Appendix O-19) and must be installed, used and maintained according to manufacturer's specifications. Pool covers are kept free of standing water and are completely removed when the pool is in use.

### ***Guidelines for Aboveground Pools***

- The side structure of an aboveground pool may be used to meet the fence requirement.
- Where an above-ground pool structure is used as a fence, or where the fence is mounted on top of an aboveground pool structure, the pool is made inaccessible when not in use by at least one of the following: 1) securing with a pool safety cover that meets ASTM Standards (See Appendix O); 2) by removing or making the steps or ladder inaccessible; 3) by surrounding the steps or ladder with a small fence that meets the above fencing

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guidelines. See Appendix O-19.

### ***Guidelines for Wading or “Kiddie Pools”***

- Wading or “kiddie” pools should be used according to manufacturer’s instructions, and maintained and used in a manner that safeguards the lives and health of young children. These small pools should be emptied and stored away when not in use to prevent the accumulation of water and other unsanitary debris.

### ***Guidelines for On-property Ponds***

- Homes with on-property swimming ponds must comply with the above General Water Safety Guidelines 1-12.

**NOTE:** Families who were previously approved, or who have already begun the process of approval (in training or home study process) prior to the effective date of this policy may continue under the guidelines which were in effect prior to the effective date of this policy. Previous guidelines permitted a waiver from the County Director for the use of alarms, sensors and locks if the pool was not isolated from the home with a fence and locking gate.

If any foster family acquires a swimming pool or *replaces* a fence that surrounds an existing pool after the effective date of this policy, the water safety guidelines contained in this policy will apply.

Homes approved after the effective date of this policy must comply with all water safety requirements contained in this policy for in-ground and aboveground pools and on-property swimming ponds. Families are made aware of this water safety requirement prior to beginning pre-service preparation or training.

Although this policy specifically refers to in-ground and above ground pools and waterfront property, families with *family hot tubs* and *spas* are required to take *substantial safety measures* to ensure the safety of children placed in the foster home. Specified safety measures should be *documented in the narrative of the foster home study or foster home record*. Supervision is key in preventing water accidents.

### **Motor Vehicle Safety**

Ensure foster parents’ awareness and understanding of the following requirements regarding motorized vehicles and safety helmets:

1. Foster parents are required to transport every child placed in their care, under age 6 years, in a federally approved child safety seat that is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
2. To protect young children from air bag injuries, foster parents are required to transport children 12 years and under in the rear seat of the vehicle, with seat belts buckled up.
3. Foster parents are prohibited from allowing children and youth under the age of 18 to ride in

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the bed of a pickup truck. The County Director/designee may provide *waivers* when children wish to participate in parades, hayrides and similar events.

4. Prior to allowing a child to operate a motor vehicle, foster parents must contact the child's Case Manager and comply with all agency policy regarding the driving of motor vehicles by youth in placement.
5. Foster parents are required to take extra precaution in allowing a child under 18 years of age to operate or ride as a passenger on a motorcycle, a motorbike, an all terrain vehicle, a high-speed water craft or other similarly motorized vehicles. These high-speed vehicles can be particularly challenging to operate; therefore, reasonable care and caution should be applied when considering a child's participation in such activities.

*Note:* In responding to a foster parent's request for guidance, the Case Manager takes under consideration the child's psychological, medical and developmental needs. Determine the type and safety of the vehicle and its suitability for the child, as well as the vehicle operators and supervision plan. Discuss any restrictions (i.e., no use of public roads, daytime riding only, no racing or hot-rodding) and other safety measures as helmets, seat belts, flotation devices and any other manufacturer's recommended safety gear. Children should have reasonable opportunities to engage in play and wholesome recreational activities.

6. All children in care, regardless of age, must be individually secured (one child to a seat belt) by an appropriately fitting seat belt when being transported in a motorized vehicle.
7. Foster parents must never leave children 12 years and younger or children who are medically, emotionally, psychologically, or behaviorally challenged unattended in motor vehicles.

### **Bicycle Safety (Helmet)**

1. Foster parents must provide a safety helmet for any child who is operating a bicycle or is riding as a passenger on a bicycle on a road, bicycle path or sidewalk. Helmets are also required for children when operating or riding as a passenger on other types of vehicles (excluding an automobile), i.e., all-terrain vehicles, motorbikes, small motor craft, etc.
2. Foster parents are required to provide helmets that are properly fitted and securely fastened.

### **Fire Arm Safety**

1. All firearms in the foster home are kept under lock and key and are inaccessible to children at all times. As an added safety measure, any one of the reliable gun-safety mechanisms available commercially (trigger guard lock, etc.) may also be used. See Foster Parent Manual for a list of the types of gun safety devices that may be used.
2. All ammunition should be locked away and stored in a separate location from firearms in the home.
3. \*Foster parents never allow children in care to handle any type firearm.

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4. Keys to locked storage devices are to be kept in the possession of an adult or reasonably secured from children.

**\*NOTE:** Youth ages thirteen (13) years and older, who have successfully complied with all applicable hunting license requirements for Georgia, may engage in hunting activities, while under the *direct supervision* of the foster parent or other approved adult. The foster parent/adult is also required to be in compliance with Georgia hunting license requirements. Georgia requires completion of a hunter education course (includes safety guidelines) for all persons born after January 1, 1961. The County Director/designee gives prior approval, taking under consideration the psychological and emotional capacity of the child as well as any developmental or behavioral needs. If parental rights have not been terminated, prior written approval must be obtained from the birth parent.

### **Animals**

Georgia law requires that all dogs, cats, and ferrets be vaccinated for rabies. Re-immunizations are required either annually or triennially depending on the vaccine. Foster homes with exotic animals or wildlife (chimpanzees, snakes, raccoons, large mammals) will require a health and suitability statement from a veterinarian, and approval by the County Director. However, any issues or concerns related to any pet (type, size, quantity etc...) should be thoroughly discussed and documented during the assessment and re-evaluation process.

### **Dog Safety**

1. Children are the primary victims of dog bites. Dogs with which the child is familiar usually inflict such bites. In the absence of substantive dog safety laws in Georgia, foster parents are required to exercise reasonable safety precautions when children are around pets. Foster parents are required to take the following measures to protect the children placed in their home:
2. Monitor children when they are around animals.
3. Refrain from bringing into the home, after approval, any type or breed of animal that has a known history of violence and/or aggressiveness toward people. The Case Manager gives serious consideration to this issue when assessing safety factors in the foster home.
4. Safely secure animals that have a history of violence and/or aggressiveness toward people in a cage, fence or other similar enclosure.
5. When acquiring a pet for the home, choose a breed or type that has, at the least, a history of being people-friendly.
6. Provide opportunities and instruction to children in care regarding safe socialization with people-friendly breeds of animals.
7. Report immediately to the agency any acts of violence toward a child in care or others by an animal in the foster home.

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8. Carefully review the Foster Parent Manual for information regarding animal safety.

### **Fire Safety**

1. Gas heaters in the foster home must be vented to avoid fire and health hazards. However, unvented, fuel-fired heaters equipped with oxygen depletion safety shut-off systems may be operated in foster homes. As noted in the requirements for the initial approval of the home, such homes are approved for the placement of no more than three (3) unrelated children or in an approved Relative Foster Home. Working carbon monoxide detectors must be installed in these homes. However, it is a good safety practice that all homes with gas appliances (stove, fireplace and water heaters) have carbon monoxide detectors.
2. Working smoke alarms must be installed in the home. Ideally, smoke alarms should be located on each level of the home and outside sleeping areas.

### **General Environmental Safety**

1. The foster home and surrounding property must be kept reasonably clean and uncluttered, properly maintained, and free of safety and health hazards, and uncontrolled rodents and insects.
2. All hazardous substances including, but not limited to, flammable and poisonous substances, medications and industrial cleaning supplies are stored out of the reach of children.

### **Minimum Standards**

To ensure the overall safety of the child, foster homes are required to meet the Minimum Standards for DFCS Family Foster Homes that were initially established by the State Board for Children and Youth and incorporated into the policy of the Board of the Department of Human Resources. To ensure compliance with these standards, Case Manager implements the following:

1. Review the Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes found in Appendix B of the Social Services Manual.
2. Inform the foster parent of any observed violations of the Minimum Standards requirements, especially those that pose a risk or potential risk to the health and safety of the child in the home and, if possible, provide measures for correction.
3. Notify the Supervisor in writing of any Minimum Standards violations observed during foster home visits and the outcome of any discussion with the foster parent regarding observations. File a copy of written report in the foster home record.
4. Provide follow-up to ensure the foster home's compliance with Minimum Standards requirements.

1015.19 PRACTICE ISSUES

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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When children are placed outside the home for various reasons of abuse and/or neglect, their health and safety are of paramount concern to the State. It is the responsibility of the foster parent, or other caretakers, and the agency (Case Manager and/or Supervisor) to take all measures within their power to reduce the level of risk to the child while in care. The safety of the child must become as much a priority for the child in placement as it is in the home of the birth parent.

Accidental drowning and motor vehicle accidents are among the leading causes of unintentional fatalities for children and youth ages 0-24. Children are the number one victims of dog bites, and firearms claim the lives of an inordinate number of children each year. Given the seriousness of these statistics, foster parents must be guided in changing any attitudes or behaviors that put the child's safety at risk and acquiring injury prevention strategies that promote the safety of the children in their care.

The county department will assist the foster parent in locating resources for free swimming lessons. If free resources are not available, reasonable expenses should be allowed. County departments provide foster parents with easy access to child safety seats and bicycle helmets. Expenses incurred by foster parents in meeting agency approval requirements are reimbursable. (See Section 1016 Fiscal.) Foster parents are required to obtain prior approval before incurring costs that require reimbursement.

### **VISITING RESOURCES**

#### **1015.19.1**

##### ***Requirement***

Visiting resources provide social or cultural experiences of short duration (not to exceed two consecutive days or a weekend) to a child with whom a relationship has been determined to be positive and significant, and does not interfere with permanency for the child. A decision to arrange/approve visiting resources must be in the best interest of the child.

Once a visiting resource has been identified, an assessment of the resource must be completed prior to any visit occurring.

#### **1015.19.1 PROCEDURES**

- 1. Arrange a face-to-face contact with the visiting resource. (If the resource is planning to care for the child in his or her own home, this contact must be made in the person's home.)**
- 2. Discuss the following areas and summarize on Form 452 (or on a separate sheet of paper) as a "Visiting Resource Evaluation."**

## ***Foster Care Services: Foster Homes***

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- **Identifying Information**
  - **(Name, sex, age (at least 18 years of age), address, telephone number, Social Security number)**
  - **Health Status**
  - **Environment (address as a topic for Out-of-Home providers, only)**
  - **(Clean, hazard-free, vented heaters, sufficient space, working smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, etc.)**
  - **Criminal Records Check including screening through the Department of Corrections, Sexual Offender Registry and Board of Pardons and Parole and CPS records.**
  - **(Must have a fingerprint check, as well as any other adult (s) residing in the home if the contact is to take place in the home.)**
  - **Understanding of Child Development**
  - **Knowledge of DFCS Discipline Policy Discussion of DFCS Discipline Policy (1 copy provided to resource and 1 copy attached to assessment**
  - **Number, Sex and Ages of Children in the Home with Child in Foster Care**
  - **(Determine that the person is able to care adequately for another child.)**
  - **Other Adults Who Will be Present**
  - **General Plan for Visiting Resource Contacts (frequency, activities..)  
Purpose of visit for child (include how it will be beneficial to the child and what activities will be completed,)**
  - **Approval or Non-Approval**
  - **CMS signature and approving authority's signature (County Director/designee) including date**
3. **Continue to monitor for appropriateness of the visiting resource no less frequently than once every six months.**

### **1015.19.1 PRACTICE ISSUES**

Visiting resources mentor and provide support for children in care through positive, supportive contacts. A thorough assessment of the resource, plan for contacts and assurance that the contacts are in the best interest of the child must be documented and approved.

# ***Foster Care Services: Foster Homes***

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## **DISCIPLINE AND OTHER POLICY VIOLATIONS**

1015.20

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The 1989 U.S. District Consent Decree, *Taylor vs. Ledbetter*, guides the Division of Family and Children Services Discipline Policy. The Decree provides that any physical/corporal or emotional punishment to a child in foster care is prohibited. Physical/corporal punishment is defined as any deliberately inflicted pain to the body of the individual. Emotional punishment involves the deliberate actions toward the child that produce, hurt, fear, anxiety and any other negative emotions in a child. Foster parents are required to know the difference between punishment and discipline. Discipline is instruction--a standard of behavior, which is maintained consistently and with authority. It is a learning process for children. Discipline should help a child reach a goal of controlling his or her own behavior and acquiring self-discipline.

Punishment on the other hand is one means of enforcing discipline, usually the least effective means. Foster parents may have used some forms of physical/corporal and emotional punishment with their own children. It is necessary to remember, however, that children reared in an accepting and loving family that is able to meet their needs tolerate punishment in a different way than children removed from their families because of severe neglect and abuse. See appendix N-1 *Taylor vs. Ledbetter*, the U.S. District Court Consent Decree involving the prohibition of improper punishment of foster children and the investigative and response time requirements. Children entering foster care usually feel at least one and often all of the following:

Negative attention is better than no attention at all;

The natural response to frustration, disappointment, anger, etc., is physical/corporal or verbal violence;

Any form of physical/corporal action can lead to severe abuse, creating fear and mistrust;

They are not lovable, which is reinforced by physical/corporal hurt and verbal demeaning; and

They are the reason the family is not together and deserve punishment.

Additional inappropriate and prohibited parenting practices include those behaviors that demean, humiliate, degrade, create anxiety and fear, and deny children their basic right to be reared in a manner that is instructive, firm, loving and humane. Foster care policy further prohibits name-calling, the criticism or deprecation of a child's racial/ethnic heritage and socio-economic station in life. The adequacy of safety measures relative to the home environment and the on-going maintenance and supervision of the child are all factors to be considered when assessing the home's ability to meet Foster care policy requirements that govern the care of children in out-of-home placement.

## **PLACEMENTS AFFECTED BY THE DISCIPLINE POLICY**

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## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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1015.21

### ***Requirement***

Implicit in the fact that the agency has legal custody of a child is the assurance that the child will be protected. Additional responsibility is assumed when children in legal custody are placed in the care of agency resources. Agency policies governing the discipline of children in care apply to children in DFCS approved foster homes and also include the following:

- Children in adoptive placements, until the court finalizes the adoption.
- Children, who are in the legal custody of another state, but are in foster or adoptive placement in Georgia through Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) procedures.
- Children placed in private agency foster, adoption and foster-adopt homes.

Note: Although private agencies are governed by the standards of the Office of Regulatory Services, they are required to adhere to the disciplinary policies and guidelines established by DFCS when providing care for children who are placed in their foster homes.

- Whenever the agency becomes aware of a disciplinary policy violation in a private agency foster home, the agency requests a staffing with the private agency director/designee to determine the suitability of the home for continued placement of DFCS children.

1015.21      PRACTICE ISSUES

When a child enters care, or as soon as feasible thereafter, the assessed needs of the child are shared with the foster family. The Case Managers involved in the foster home have the responsibility to respond to any concerns expressed by the foster parent regarding a child's behavior or other identified needs. When the foster parent requests assistance in managing the behavior of a child placed in the home, the Case Manager identifies appropriate resources to assist in the implementation of effective discipline techniques. When high stress factors are observed within the foster family, there is some discussion by the Case Manager with the foster family and appropriate services offered. This is documented in the case record. A safety plan for foster parents is not an option following the substantiation of the abuse or neglect of a child in foster care.

### **METHODS OF DISCIPLINE IN DFCS FOSTER HOMES**

1015.22

### ***Requirement***

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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Foster parents and other approved placement resources for children in agency custody may not use physical/corporal or emotional punishment as a method of disciplining children in their care nor authorize any other individual or agency to administer such punishment as a method of discipline for any child in DFCS custody.

### **1015.22 PRACTICE ISSUES**

The Department acknowledges that foster parenting is extremely challenging. The responsibilities of caring for children in agency custody are great and require an understanding of each child's needs. Foster parents are required to know the difference between discipline and punishment. Disciplinary approaches should be based on the child's age, particular needs and the circumstance. Any physical/corporal or emotional punishment of the child is prohibited. It is more important to use positive reinforcement than punishment to control behavior. Foster parents may consult with the child's Case Manager if professional assistance or advice is needed in dealing with specific problem behaviors. See Appendix N-2, Discipline Guidelines and Acceptable Alternatives to Punishment for more specific guidelines and directives regarding disciplinary practices in foster homes. Case Managers may consult additional resources for information regarding behavior management.

### **DISCIPLINE OF THE CHILD WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM**

#### **1015.23**

##### ***Requirement***

Corporal punishment is not an acceptable method of disciplining children in DFCS foster care placement. The Case Manager informs the school principal in writing of the identity of the child in foster care and a statement that corporal punishment is prohibited as a means of discipline or correction. This (confidential) statement is provided to the principal at the beginning of the school year when the child is being enrolled in a given school. School administrators should be reminded to keep all matters pertaining to the child confidential.

**NOTE:** Some schools, in keeping with state laws relating to this issue, may require a statement from a licensed medical doctor stating that corporal punishment is detrimental to the child's mental or emotional stability.

### **1015.23 PRACTICE ISSUE**

As an agency charged with the well-being of children, we have a responsibility to advocate for the adoption of policies which are in the best interest of children who have been traumatized due to acts of neglect and abuse. Therefore, DFCS staff should advocate with school systems for the abolition of corporal punishment as a method of disciplining children in care.

### **REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN FOSTER HOMES**

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## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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1015.24

### **Requirement**

When a report is received by Placement staff regarding the inappropriate treatment of a child in a DFCS home, the allegations are immediately reviewed by the Placement or Resource Development Supervisor and forwarded to the CPS Supervisor for immediate screening if there is any indication or suspicion of possible abuse or neglect.

The County Director and other appropriate staff are immediately informed of the report. See "Child Protection Chapter 2100" of the Social Services Manual for more specific directives regarding allegations of abuse and neglect in DFCS foster homes.

Following the initial investigative contact by CPS, the Placement or Resource Development Case manager contacts the foster parent to explain what the next step will be and provides support, clarification and any other service which will not compromise the integrity of the CPS investigation and the safety of the child.

At the conclusion of a CPS investigation of a DFCS foster home, the Concurrence Letter from the Social Services Section Director is filed in the DFCS foster home record.

Foster parents may have an Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) advocate present at all portions of investigations of abuse and neglect at which an accused foster parent is present (see Foster Parent Grievance Procedure, Appendix B). CPS investigations including applicable response timeframes are not impacted by the presence or absence (if requested by the foster parent) of advocates. Foster Parents are provided with a "Notification of Rights" brochure at the initial CPS investigation meeting (see CPS 2106) which informs them of their right to an advocate and instructions on requesting an advocate.

### **FOSTER PARENT POLICY VIOLATIONS**

1015.25

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Violations of foster care policies are actions by a foster parent that breach any foster home approval policy or procedure but do not constitute abuse or neglect. While generally less severe than an allegation of abuse or neglect, violation of policy may be sufficient grounds for closing a foster home or other action. DFCS Placement Staff are responsible for assessing discipline and foster care policy violations. Allegations that rise to the level of abuse or neglect are referred to Child Protective Service staff for investigation (see CPS 2106).

Foster care policy violations are divided into two categories: *Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Violations* and *Low Risk Foster Care Policy Violations*.

*Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Violations* include those acts or situations by the caregiver that pose an immediate or potential risk to the safety or well being of the child in care. These may include, but are not limited to, inappropriate disciplinary measures (both physical/corporal and emotional), violations of supervision or any other safety requirements that pose serious risk factors to the child.

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

**Low Risk Foster Care Policy Violations** do not pose a direct or immediate risk to the safety and well being of the child. This includes the following or similar infractions:

- Lack of required annual in-service training hours.
- Inappropriate utilization of foster home (see Minimum Standards).
- Lack of cooperation in assuming partnership role with the agency in meeting the needs of the child.
- Inappropriate disclosure of confidential information regarding the child.
- Inappropriate use of *acceptable* disciplinary practices (extended periods of discipline, i.e. time out, etc.,)
- Inappropriate assignment of chores or work responsibilities.
- Any, non-disciplinary related violation of foster care policy that does not pose a direct or immediate health or safety risk to the child in the home or that has.

### **DISCIPLINE OR OTHER SERIOUS FOSTER CARE POLICY VIOLATIONS STAFF NOTIFICATION**

1015.26

#### ***Requirement***

The agency establishes a written internal office procedure to assure that identified staff are notified when the county receives a report of a discipline or other serious foster care policy violation involving a child placed in an agency approved foster home.

1015.26      PRACTICE ISSUES

Notification--Because timeliness is a factor in the investigation of these reports, it is important that foster care staff is immediately aware of the report. What is initially thought to be a serious foster care policy violation may in actuality require a CPS referral. CPS response times for foster home investigations is immediate to 24 hours. (See CPS 2106.5)

At a minimum, procedure for notification regarding a discipline or other serious foster care policy violation should include the County Director and other appropriate administrative staff, CPS and Placement Supervisor(s), the child's Case Manager, and the Resource Development Case Manager and Supervisor, if applicable.

When the child is in the adoption process, the county also notifies the adoption Case Manager and Supervisor, if different from the Resource Development staff and the Regional Adoption Coordinator (RAC). The child is considered to be in the adoption process when Forms 33 or 37 have been signed and the adoption has not yet been finalized.

**NOTE:** It is the responsibility of the Supervisor to carefully evaluate any foster care policy violation by a DFCS approved foster home to determine the appropriate response time as it relates to the seriousness of the offense or the timely referral of suspect cases to the CPS Supervisor. Consultation with the CPS Supervisor and/ or Field Program Specialist or Regional Director may be appropriate in some cases. Any report that is suspected to include child abuse is *immediately* reported to the CPS Supervisor.

# ***Foster Care Services: Foster Homes***

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## **DISCIPLINE AND OTHER SERIOUS FOSTER CARE POLICY VIOLATIONS ASSESSMENT**

1015.27

### ***Requirement***

Alleged disciplinary or other serious foster care policy violations in DFCS foster homes are received and reviewed by a Supervisor and assigned to the Social Services Case Manager for assessment.

Assessment conclusions are either “supported” or “unsupported”. A supported conclusion means that the concerns in the report have been validated through interviews, observations and collateral resources as warranted. An unsupported conclusion means that the concerns in the report cannot be validated.

### **1015.27 PROCEDURES**

1. The assessment of a foster home for reported disciplinary and other serious foster care violations is conducted in a timely manner (within thirty-six (36) to seventy-two (72) hours of the receipt of the referral by the Placement/Resource Development Supervisor). The urgency of the complaint serves as a guideline for response time.
2. The assigned Case Manager schedules a visit in the foster home to assess the circumstances and validity of the report. This requires close observation and assessment of the situation, in conjunction with interviewing the foster parent, the child, and other children in the home.
3. The Case Manager provides an opportunity for the foster parent to thoroughly respond to the complaint.
4. Contact is made with collateral resources as warranted.
5. Provide the foster parent with a verbal summary of the preliminary findings at the conclusion of the assessment.
6. The results of the assessment for a Disciplinary or Other Serious Foster Care Policy Violation are recorded using the format outlined in Appendix N-7, “Format for Report of Policy Violation(s) in DFCS Approved Foster Homes. A copy of the report is placed in the child’s and the foster parent’s file.
7. Any evidence or suspicion of abuse or neglect in the foster home is immediately reported to the Placement Supervisor, who immediately relays this information to the CPS Supervisor

# **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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## **DISCIPLINE AND OTHER SERIOUS FOSTER CARE POLICY VIOLATIONS AGENCY ACTION**

1015.28

### ***Requirement***

A DFCS approved home is placed on *hold (no additional placements made)* while being assessed (1015.27) for a Disciplinary or Other Serious Foster Care Policy Violation and, if substantiated, may experience any or all of the following consequences:

- Removal of the child(ren)
- A CPS investigation
- Corrective Action Plan
- Temporary or Permanent Closure of the Home

1015.28      PROCEDURES

1. Assessment conclusions are either “supported” or “unsupported”. A supported conclusion means that the concerns in the report have been validated through interviews, observations and collateral resources as warranted. An unsupported conclusion means that the concerns in the report cannot be validated.
2. If the assessment conclusion is unsupported, the home may remain open.
3. Circumstances under which a foster home *may* be closed even though there has been an unsupported assessment conclusion:
  - The family refuses to cooperate with the agency in completing the assessment.
  - Other issues regarding the child’s safety and well being in the home are of concern.
4. When it is necessary to relocate children due to foster care policy violations, the ten-day notification to the foster family of the impending removal of the child from the home is waived.
5. Closure of the home is required when:
  - Following *any* violation of Foster Care Policy that has a direct impact on the safety and well being of the child or poses serious risk factors for the child in the home.
  - Following a *second violation* of the Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Policy Violation.
  - When the family is not amenable to change, correction or DFCS intervention.

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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6. If the assessment conclusion is supported, the home *may* remain open and a Corrective Action Plan developed, agreed upon, signed by all participants and instituted under the following circumstances:

- Following an initial Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Policy Violation that does not have a direct impact on the safety and well-being of the child.

7. In those instances where a CPS investigation does not substantiate abuse or neglect and the home is cited for a Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Policy violation, serious consideration may still be given to the closure of the home following the first violation.

### **1015.28 PRACTICE ISSUES**

Unless policy requires that the foster home be closed, the County Director should consider the following factors in considering whether or not to allow a foster home to remain open:

- the severity of the incident.
- the patterns and parenting history demonstrated by the foster parents.
- the personality of the child involved.
- the willingness of the foster parents to look at alternative approaches to correct the problem or change the undesirable behavior; (i.e., training or counseling).
- the quality of the relationship between the foster parents and the child in care.

All of these factors should also be considered in moving through a plan of corrective action with the family.

### **CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN**

#### **1015.29**

##### ***Requirement***

The purpose of the Corrective Action Plan is to support caretakers in the development and utilization of more appropriate methods of meeting the needs of children in care and to clarify the agency and the foster parent's role in preventing further violations of the foster care policy, thus ensuring the safety and well-being of the child in the home. The CAP serves as a supportive rather than a punitive intervention.

A Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is implemented following an initial Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Policy violation that does not have a direct impact on the safety and well-being of the child or when repeated citations for Low Risk Policy Violations require the implementation of a more formal Corrective Action Plan to address the lack of compliance with standards and guidelines.

#### **1015.29 PROCEDURES**

1. The Case Manager implements the Corrective Action Plan within three (3) working days of

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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the completion of the staffing/consultation following the assessment of the foster home.

2. After assessing and identifying the problem, the Case Manager uses the Corrective Action Plan to create a plan to change the behavior. Results are measurable, tangible, and time-limited, and are documented in the foster home case record. The plan may be adjusted if needed.
3. IMPACT modules can be used as a part of the Corrective Action Plan (see 1014.11).
4. The Corrective Action Plan is mutually completed by the Case Manager and foster parent (s). It is signed by the Case Manager and *both foster parents (if applicable)*. The Corrective Action Plan is approved and also signed by the County Director to ensure that liability and safety issues have been adequately addressed.
5. A copy is given to the foster parents and a DFCS copy is filed in the foster home record.
6. At least *two* monthly in-home visits per month are required during the corrective action period. Unannounced visits may be specifically used as a part of the CAP.
7. If the foster parent refuses to sign the Corrective Action Plan in agreement, the foster home is closed.

*Note:* The Case Manager provides clarification to the foster parent regarding the benefits of their involvement in the Corrective Action Plan and the implications of their refusal to sign or cooperate with the plan.

8. The Corrective Action Plan is completed within a *six-month period*. Upon completion of the objectives, the date is recorded, as indicated, on the Corrective Action Plan. The Corrective Action Plan is filed in the foster home record.

In keeping with the policy procedures outlined in 1015.28, the number of Corrective Action Plans that may be developed for a family is one (1).

9. See Appendix N-4 for an outline of the Corrective Action Plan and procedures for completing. The Corrective Action Plan is not used as a safety plan. Foster parents are not clients. If safety of children in the foster home is an issue, action is taken to expedite their removal and consideration given to closure of the foster home.

### **REPORTING ASSESSMENT DETERMINATION TO THE STATE OFFICE**

**1015.30**

#### ***Requirement***

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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The County Director forwards a report of the policy violation assessment conclusion to the DFCS Social Services Section Director within ten (10) workdays of reaching a decision.

### **1015.30 PROCEDURES**

1. The County Director submits a report to the Social Services Section Director within ten (10) working days of the conclusion of the assessment. This report follows the format and procedures outlined in Appendix N-5, N-6 and N-7, and is forwarded to the Social Services Section Director at 2 Peachtree Street NW, suite 18-100, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.
2. The Social Services Section Director, with the assistance of the Program Planning and Policy Development Unit, reviews the assessment data and issues a concurrence/non-concurrence memorandum (N-9) to the County Director following this review. If the child is in the adoption process, the response to the county also reflects the Office of Adoption's concurrence/non-concurrence with the county's decision.
3. The Program Planning and Policy Development Unit may contact the county office to request more information if the report does not contain enough information to support the findings.
4. If the Social Services Section Director disagrees with the county's decision, the Section Director will issue a detailed letter of explanation and instructions to the County Director.
5. Either the Social Services Section Director or the county may request a staffing to discuss any conflicts between the parties.
6. Copies of the above reports are filed in the foster home record.

### **1015.30 PRACTICE ISSUES**

The Division and local county departments share responsibility for the safety and well being of all children in agency custody. Nowhere is responsibility greater than when children are placed in agency- approved placements. The procedures are established to provide an intra-agency system of documentation to support decision-making in all cases of discipline or other foster care policy violations.

### **DISCIPLINE AND OTHER SERIOUS FOSTER CARE POLICY VIOLATIONS STAFFING FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT**

#### **1015.31**

##### ***Requirement***

- The county department holds a staffing or consultation and makes a decision within *48 hours* following completion of the assessment to determine whether the child(ren) should be removed from the home.

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### **1015.31 PRACTICE ISSUES**

The staffing/consultation will include the Placement Supervisor, the child's Case Manager and the foster home Case Manager (if applicable), at minimum. The adoption Case Manager and Supervisor will also be included if the child is in the adoption process. Other staff may be involved based on the nature and implications of the violation including the RAC and Field Program Specialist. The purpose of the staffing is to share the results of the assessment, evaluate the need to remove the child(ren) from the home and jointly develop a plan of action. The County Director/designee approves the plan. The findings and recommended plan of action are shared with all staff involved.

### **FOSTER PARENT APPEAL OF DECISIONS**

#### **1015.32**

##### ***Requirement***

Decisions made as a result of Child Protective Services investigations and Discipline or other Serious Foster Care Policy violations are not grievable under the *Foster Parent Grievance Procedure*.

### **LOW RISK FOSTER CARE POLICY VIOLATIONS IN DFCS APPROVED HOMES**

#### **1015.33**

##### ***Requirement***

The Case Manager or Resource Development/Placement Supervisor, through the use of direct consultation and support strategies, address Foster Care Policy violations that do not pose a direct or immediate risk to the child in the home with the foster parent.

**Note:** Policy violations that do not pose a direct or immediate risk to the safety and well being of the child may include the following or similar infractions:

- Lack of required annual in-service training hours.
- Inappropriate utilization of foster home (see Minimum Standards).
- Lack of cooperation in assuming partnership role with the agency in meeting the needs of the child.
- Inappropriate disclosure of confidential information regarding the child.
- Inappropriate use of *acceptable* disciplinary practices (extended periods of discipline, i.e. time out, etc.)
- Inappropriate assignment of chores or work responsibilities.
- Any, non-disciplinary related violation of foster care policy that does not pose a direct or immediate health or safety risk to the child in the home.

### **1015.33 PROCEDURES**

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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1. Contact is made with the foster parent within five (5) working days following the receipt or knowledge of the violation. Depending upon the nature of the situation or complaint, contact may be made by telephone or in the foster home.
2. Communicate the exact nature of the complaint or concern and provide an opportunity for the foster parent to respond.
3. If applicable, discuss the concerns with collateral resources, including the children in the home.
4. Provide verbal feedback to the foster parent regarding findings and provide guidelines and supportive strategies for correction (may be verbal or written).
5. Document on form 452 the results of numbers 1-4 and *file in the foster home record*.
6. Follow-up during monthly visitation with foster parent and/or child to determine progress. Request that other Case Managers with children in the home make observations and provide feedback.
7. Repeated citations for low-risk policy violations will require the implementation of a more formal Corrective Action Plan to address the lack of compliance with standards and guidelines.

Note: Recurring, low-risk or non-serious foster care policy violations may be an indication of more serious issues in the foster home and, thus, should never be minimized in terms of their significance to the overall well being of the child or quality of the home. Strong consideration should be given to the closure of homes that persist, despite repeated agency intervention, in maintaining "borderline" foster care standards.

### **REMOVAL OF THE CHILD FROM THE FOSTER HOME**

1015.34

#### ***Requirement***

The county department removes the child at any time safety cannot be assured in the foster, foster/adoptive, or adoptive home.

1015.34      **PROCEDURES**

1. The decision to remove a child is made as soon as it is determined that a child is at risk for further maltreatment.
2. The Case Manager's Supervisor or other administrative staff must give approval if a decision

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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is made to remove the child.

3. The agency immediately locates a suitable, alternative placement for the child.
4. The Case Manager displays professional integrity and respect for the caregiver(s) when removing children from the home.

### **CLOSING A FOSTER HOME**

**1015.35**

#### ***Requirement***

Whenever possible, the decision to close a foster home is mutually determined by the county department and the foster parent. If the foster parent is unable to make a decision to close the home, the Case Manager consults with the Supervisor and arrives at a decision.

**1015.35 PROCEDURES**

1. Foster homes are permanently closed when the following circumstances have been substantiated:
  - 1
    - Following *any* violation of Foster Care Policy that has a direct impact on the safety and well being of the child or poses serious risk factors for the child in the home.
    - Following a *second violation* for a Discipline or Other Serious Foster Care Policy violation.
    - When the family is not amenable to change, correction or DFCS intervention.
    - Failure to meet the Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes (following directives for corrective measures and opportunity for correction).
    - Refusal by foster parent to complete a Corrective Action Plan.
  2. In a face-to-face meeting, discuss the reason(s) for closure and determine if there are special supportive services needed to assist the family in bringing closure to any unresolved issues around the removal of the children or the agency's role and responsibility. Foster parents are to be commended for the positive contributions they have made to the foster care program.
  3. If the home is being closed due to the finding of a Child Protective Services investigation, and the County Director does not pursue a waiver of home closure, the foster family is informed that substantiation of abuse or neglect in a foster home is a non-grievable issue. The County Director/designee will meet with the foster parent to afford them an opportunity to be heard, if requested. Foster Parents have no further process for review of the CPS determination.

## **Foster Care Services: Foster Homes**

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4. If a foster home has been inactive for a period of 6 months or more at the foster parent's request, the home is reassessed/re-evaluated and determined inadequate to care for the type children who enter foster care. The foster parents will be notified verbally and in writing of the reason for closure. The reason for closure should be explained and based on the Minimum Standards for Fostering.
5. Within 10 working days of the face-to-face contact, send a letter describing the reasons for closure, notifying the family of the closing date. Indicate in the letter, the County Director/designee's ability to meet with them and an explanation of the grievance process, or a statement regarding whether or not the closure of the home is related to a grievable issue. (See Foster Parent Manual, Appendix C. Grievance Procedures).
6. The status of the foster home is properly updated in the data system by the Case Manager and notification of closure provided to the County Director/designee. For foster/adopt and adoptive homes, the State Adoptions Unit shall also be notified of the closure utilizing Form 401 marked closure noting the date and reason for the closure.
7. When recommendation for the closure of the home is received from the DFCS Social Services Section Director, the county submits the actual date of closure to the division's Social Services Director in a timely manner.

### **1015.35 PRACTICE ISSUES**

Some foster parents will depart from the agency due to circumstances unrelated to the foster care program. The agency should use the opportunity to explore with the foster family recommendations or suggestions regarding the foster care program they may be willing to share, as well as other ways they may be of service to the agency. The closure of a foster home should be carefully considered and done in a manner that recognizes the family's contributions to the foster care program. The agency has the responsibility of developing and clarifying the foster parent's role, and agency standards and requirements.

### **RE-EVALUATION OF THE FOSTER HOME**

#### **1015.36**

##### ***Requirement***

The Foster Home Re-evaluation is a formal written summary of the overall quality and functioning of a foster home and is usually conducted before the current foster home approval expires. The evaluation of foster homes is an on-going process between the Case Manager and the foster parent and may be conducted, if circumstances require, at any point during the approval period. The re-evaluation summary is completed using the standard DFCS Foster Home Re-evaluation report as outlined in Appendix--O 13 and is submitted for the County Director review and approval. Any additional county information may be attached to this form.

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Foster Home Re-evaluation procedure is also applicable to re-opening foster homes, which have been voluntarily closed for less than five years.

### **1015.36                      Procedures**

1. Develop an in-house or other tickler system that identifies *well in advance* foster home re-evaluations that are due (i.e., the last day of the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive calendar month following the date of approval. See 1015.3).

*Note:* The re-evaluation process (*gathering information and assessing strengths and needs*) of the home begins at least *three months* prior to the due date. This allows the Case Manager to initiate proceedings for medical or criminal record updates, if applicable.

2. Provide prompt notice to foster parents regarding the need for any medicals or CRC's for household members.
3. Devise a simple format to be used in surveying Case Managers who have supervised placements in the home during the period being evaluated as to the quality of care and maintenance provided by the foster parent, and any areas of concern.

### **AREAS INCLUDED IN THE RE-EVALUATION**

#### **1015.37**

##### ***Requirement***

The foster home re-evaluation represents a comprehensive review of the overall quality and functioning of the foster home.

### **1015.37                      Procedures**

#### ***Areas to be Included in Re-evaluation***

1. Whenever possible, include all members of the family in the discussion. If it is a two-parent home, include both the foster mother and the foster father.
2. Include the children who have been in placement during the past year and the foster parent's interaction with these children and ability to meet their needs.
3. Gather basic data to determine present household status, including significant information on current household, health, and employment and financial status.
4. Require proof of current motor vehicle license and insurance. Include a verification statement that the documents were reviewed and current.
5. Examine the need for supplemental supervision to continue, if applicable.
6. Address the safety of the home environment, assessing carefully the foster home's maintenance of safety and minimum standards requirements. Review and have foster parents

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initial, as indicated, the *DFCS Foster Parent Child Safety Agreement (Form 29)* at each re-evaluation.

7. Address the relationship between the agency and the foster parent, including the foster parent's ability to accept supervision.
8. Discuss the effects of children leaving the home and the ability of the foster parents to prepare them for leaving.
9. Discuss the foster parent's ability to continue parenting the type children for which they were approved.
10. For foster-adopt homes, discuss efforts to identify children for placement, if applicable.
11. Evaluate the foster parent's strengths and needs as they relate to the following:
  - Making informed decision to continue fostering (Knows the rewards and challenges faced by their family as a result of fostering and have made a definitive choice to continue/discontinue fostering.)
  - Teamwork and Communication (Demonstrated ability to work with the family, agency and community partners to meet the needs of the child.)
  - Parenting Abused/Neglected Children (Demonstrated ability to understand children's needs and issues; ability to help child form a positive image of self, roots, culture, etc)
  - Understanding Grief, Loss and Attachment Issues for Children in Care (Demonstrated ability to help children identify and manage losses and form healthy relationships.)
  - Understanding, Preventing and Managing Misbehaviors (Demonstrated ability to provide appropriate behavior management based on child's age, development and needs.)
  - Supporting Primary or Birth Family Connections (Demonstrated encouragement and support of significant connections for a child.)
  - Providing a Safe, Nurturing and Healthy Environment (Provided a healthy, safe and nurturing family environment; met child's medical, dental, psychological etc...needs)

Request additional information from staff members who supervised children in the foster home during the period being evaluated.

**NOTE:** Information is solicited from Case Managers who have supervised children placed in \_\_\_\_\_ the home during the period being evaluated. This input from Case Managers should be \_\_\_\_\_ gathered prior to the foster home visit for possible discussion with the foster parent.

12. Review the past year's disciplinary practices and issues.
13. Provide assurances that the required parent development hours have been completed for the year or are scheduled for completion during the calendar year; identify the topics covered and additional parenting skills needing to be developed.
14. Provide recommendations for the classification of the home, type of approval, number, ages of children and special needs/characteristics, dates of approval.

### **FOSTER PARENT RE-EVALUATION INPUT**

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1015.37.1

### ***Requirement***

In addition to re-evaluations reflecting a comprehensive review of the overall quality and functioning of the foster home, re-evaluations are also an opportunity for foster parents to formally share concerns, needs, strengths, determine the impact that fostering has had on their family, evaluate services provided by DFCS and to decide whether or not to continue fostering. Thus, input from the foster parent is a critical and required part of the re-evaluation process.

Section 2 of the DFCS Foster Home Re-evaluation Form 0-13 is completed by the foster parent or, if requested by the foster parent, with the Case Manager's assistance.

1015.37.1      Procedures

### ***Foster Parent Re-evaluation Input***

1. Foster parents describe their reactions to providing foster care and the impact on the foster parent and other family members.
2. Foster parents address the stresses and benefits, as well as their role in the child's foster care experience over the past year.
3. Foster parents provide their perception of the support the agency has offered, of the supervisory contacts and of the foster parent's role as a member of the foster care team.
4. Foster parents provide input regarding training needs and issues.
5. Foster parents provide views about birth parents, contacts with birth parents and parent/child visits during the past year.
6. Each foster parent signs and dates the form.

### **CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK**

1015.37.2

### ***Requirement***

Criminal Records Check (GCIC and NCIC fingerprinting) for foster parents and all household adults (18 and over) are required at least once every five (5) years after the initial approval, *at the time of the re-evaluation*. A *Consent for Criminal Records Check* (Form 404) is obtained.

1015.37.2      Procedures

1.      ***Unreadable fingerprints*** must be submitted to GCIC and NCIC for processing *twice* before a

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waiver can be granted for a “name check only” (with birth date and Social Security Number) due to unreadable prints. The Regional Director has waiver approval authority for unreadable prints, those of the elderly or disabled who reside in otherwise approved homes and any other CRC waivers. The waiver is filed in the foster home record documenting the approval for policy waiver.

2. *Current household* (non-foster care) members, including adoptees, who turn 18 years old during the approval period must have a CRC completed by the next re-evaluation due date. If the household member turns 18 *less than 90 days prior to the re-evaluation due date*, the CRC is due within 90 days of the 18<sup>th</sup> birth date. The home remains in approval status if all other qualifications are met.

(Example: The re-evaluation due date is August 1, 2003. A son turns 18 on June 10, 2003 [less than 90 days of the re-evaluation due date]. The CRC is due by September 8, 2003.)

3. Document the satisfactory outcome for the foster parents and all adults, age 18 and over, residing in the home as part of the foster home re-evaluation. (See Chapters 1014.45 and 1016 for steps involved in obtaining and processing the fingerprint check and evaluating any safety concerns.) At re-evaluation, if the criminal records check results are not received, the home must be placed in temporary approval status from the expiration of the current approval until the results of the fingerprint checks are received.

### **HEALTH REQUIREMENTS**

#### **1015.37.3**

##### ***Requirement***

Foster parents must have medical evaluations completed every five years. A *physician's statement* is required on an annual basis if a foster parent has a diagnosed health problem that infers with their ability to care for children (lifting, walking, maneuvering, cognitions) or effects life expectancy or if the foster parent is age 65 years or older.

#### **1015.37.3 Procedures**

1. Annual physician's statements required for foster parents with health problems or are age 65 years and older do not require use of Form 36. TB testing is not report is not required under normal circumstances.
2. Medical examinations required at five year intervals as a part of the Foster Home Re-evaluation require use of Form 36.
3. Require a physician's statement on any new household member, including TB for those aged 16 years and older.

### **RE-EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT**

#### **1015.34.4**

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### ***Requirement***

#### **Re-evaluation Summary Report**

1. The Case Manager completes Section 1 of Form O-13.
2. Additional county-related topics/areas not included in Form O-13 should be completed on a separate attachment. The supplemental information should be entitled, "Addendum to DFCS Foster Home Re-evaluation," and attached to Form O-13.
3. Determine if the foster home will continue to serve children in out-of-home placement by mutual discussion with the foster parent.
4. Make a joint decision about the types of children most suitable for placement, including age, sex, special needs and number if the home is to continue.
5. The foster parent completes Section 2 of Form O-13 and returns it to the Case Manager.
6. The foster parent's input on Section 2 should be reflected in the case manager's written summary.
7. The re-evaluation report is compiled in the following order and stapled together:
  - Form O-13 Sections 1 (Completed by Case Manager )
  - Any county addendum
  - Form O-13 Section 2 (Completed by foster parent)
  - DFCS Form 29 Foster Parent Child Safety Agreement
  - Verifications (CRC, Medicals,...)

### **APPROVAL OF ANNUAL RE-EVALUATION**

1015.37.5

### ***Requirement***

1. Submit the DFCS Foster Home Re-evaluation summary and attachments to the County Director for approval prior to the expiration of the current approval. The Regional Director's signature is not required for re-evaluations unless it was completed to address safety concerns.
2. Obtain the County Director's written approval via Form O-13 of the following:

Type of Approval (Full, Special or Temporary).

Classification of Home (Regular Foster Home, Relative Foster Home or Foster/Adopt).

Age, Sex, Number, and characteristics of children for whom the home is approved.

Specialized Foster Care (Medically Fragile or Severely Emotionally Disturbed)

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**Beginning and Expiration Dates of Approval.**

**Signatures of evaluator, supervisor and Director**

3. Foster parents are provided with a copy (personally or by U.S. postal service) of the approved DFCS Foster Home Re-evaluation (Form 0-13).
4. File the original copy of the re-evaluation report in the foster home record.
5. For foster/adopt homes, a copy of the annual foster home reevaluation and the Adoption Form 401 shall be submitted to the Adoption Exchange, State Adoptions Unit to update the family's adoption approval.
6. Update form O-18, Change in Approval Status (If the only change in the home's status is the approval period, form O-18 still needs to be completed).

### **RESOURCE DEVELOPER CONTACT STANDARDS**

**1015.38**

#### ***Requirement***

Dedicated Resource Developers (RD) should have (1) face-to-face contact with the foster parent at least quarterly. Additionally, RD staff should have at least (1) phone contact with the foster parent at least quarterly. (See Contact Standards For Children in Care at 1011.15 and 1014.31).

**1015.38 PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. RD staff should maintain a supportive and monitoring relationship with foster families.
2. RD staff may be called upon to support foster families during change or crisis related to their own families or as a result of fostering.
3. RD staff directly support DFCS' efforts to retain foster families by maintaining meaningful contacts, advocacy, providing information and referral, and training.
4. Non-dedicated RD staff (who also perform other functions) should follow the contact standards located in 1011.15 and 1014.31.

### **MAINTAINING THE FOSTER HOME RECORD**

**1015.39**

#### ***Requirement***

The foster home record is organized as required in Chapter 70 of the Social Services Manual and

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contains on-going documentation of significant issues and circumstances arising in the home.

1015.39

### **PROCEDURES**

1. **Face Sheet --DFCS Foster Home Initial Approval Data.** The Face Sheet format in Appendix O-17 is completed and placed in the front of the foster home record, following Form 450. This document provides a profile of the foster home upon *initial approval* and serves as a point of reference for any changes in the initial approval status of the home.
  - Complete the Face Sheet as outlined in Appendix-O, *Instructions for Completing Foster Parent Data sheets O-17 and O-18.*
  - Place the face sheet in the record behind form 450 (Basic Information Sheet)
  
2. **Change in Foster Home Status form- (See Appendix O-18)** A section is completed whenever there is a change in approval status. Form O-18 follows the Face Sheet (O-17) in the foster home record. Only one section of the form is completed for each situation requiring a change or changes in status.
  - Complete the change in approval status sheet as outlined.
  - Any change in approval status should be clearly documented in the foster home record on Form O-18.
  
3. **Documentation – The following should be documented in the foster home record or copies of narratives (452,s) reports, etc. provided for the foster home record by Case Managers.**
  - Significant issues regarding the care and maintenance of children in the home.
  - Monthly face-to-face contacts in the foster home .
  - Change in *approval status or term of approval.*
  - Violation of Foster Care Policy.
  - Corrective Action Plans.
  - The *Concurrence Letter* from the Division Social Services Section Director regarding the results of a CPS Investigations.
  - Significant changes in the foster home.
  - Issues regarding violation of the Minimum Standards.
  - Unplanned removal of a child from the home.
  - Closure of the foster home.
  - Significant contributions by the foster parent to the overall effectiveness of the foster care program.
  
3. **Follow the organizational guidelines for the foster parent manual found in Chapter 70 of the Social Services Manual.**

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### THE FOSTER PARENTS BILL OF RIGHTS

1015.40

#### ***Requirement***

DFCS staff must comply with mandates contained within The Foster Parent Bill of Rights which became law on July 1, 2004. It provides twenty-three rights for DFCS foster parents. The law covers issues such as non-discrimination, distribution and disclosure of information, financial reimbursement and the right to have input into case planning for children. It also includes a provision for advocates who can provide support to foster parents during child protective services investigations or through the grievance process.

A new formal grievance procedure has been established to help foster parents who believe their rights have been violated. The grievance procedure is a three-step process which begins at the county level and if necessary proceeds to the State Division Director and the newly created State Mediation Committee.

A detailed explanation of the Foster Parents Bill of Rights and Grievance Procedure is located in Appendix B.