

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

Foster parents should be able to meet minimum standards for Family Foster Homes which 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 through the Reorganization Act of 1972. The standards must be adhered to in the approval of homes, which will be used for children in foster care. When unusual situations make it advisable to waive one or a minimal number of requirements, only the Regional Director, has the authority to grant such a waiver and to provide written assurances that the home can provide for the care and needs of a child. Documentation of any exception to the Minimum Standards must be on file in the foster parent's record.

1. Skills and Abilities

Foster parents and agency staff work together as a team with a shared and common goal of permanency planning for children; the primary goal for most children is family reunification. As a team member, the family will face many challenges. Foster parents are expected to provide continuity of care while helping a child repair the effects of earlier life experiences. Foster parents must evidence the maturity, stability, fitness, skills and competency to successfully protect, nurture, and meet the developmental needs of children; support the agency's established case goals and Permanency Plan for child(ren) placed in their care. Foster parents need to have a number of specific skills:

a. **Understanding of the Impact of Fostering**

The foster parent must be able to identify their individual and family strengths and needs, and communicate these to the agency. Foster parents should recognize how the addition of a new family member can affect family relationships (including the extended family), life styles and support systems. The foster parent should understand their role in fostering and know the kinds of children whose needs they can best meet.

b. **Teamwork and Communication**

The foster parent must be able to communicate with the child, the agency, community foster staff, birth parents and other foster/adoptive parents who may have different outlooks because of different experiences, ages and cultures. Families will be able to understand and fulfill their roles and responsibilities in working with children, birth families, the agency and community. They must work in partnership to help children be reunified with birth families, be adopted or move into independent living.

c. **Parenting Abused/Neglected Children**

Foster parents must be able to effectively parent children who have been abused, neglected, abandoned and/or emotionally maltreated. Families must help children develop a positive self-concept and identity, recognizing that past experiences and losses may have contributed to poor self-image and identity-confusion. They must help children understand and deal with the past in non-judgmental ways which make them feel good about who they are. Families must know how to access outside assistance as necessary to meet a child's needs.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

d. Understand Grief, Loss and Attachment Issues for Children in Care

Children removed from their birth families experience profound losses and need help in managing their grief. Foster parents must have resolved their own losses and be able to anticipate the effects of future losses on the family. Since children who have experienced loss often have difficulties in attaching, families will need to understand attachment issues and be able to use specific techniques to help.

e. Understand, Prevent and Manage Misbehaviors

Children in placement use many behaviors that reflect the physical and emotional pain they have experienced. Foster families must understand the feelings, the reasons behind the behaviors and be able to help children get their needs met in ways that make children feel lovable, capable, worthwhile and responsible. Foster parents must understand the reasons for and adhere to the policy prohibiting physical discipline/corporal punishment.

f. Support Primary or Birth Family Connections

Families must help children maintain and develop relationships that keep them connected to the past, the source of their identity and self-esteem. Since most children are reunified with their birth families, acceptance of parent/child visitation and return to birth families as soon as possible is critical.

g. Provide a Safe, Nurturing and Healthy Environment

Recognizing that children in foster care are vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation, foster parents must be able to protect children from maltreatment. In addition, foster parents must provide a healthy and safe environment for children, following all state and local health and safety regulations. Close supervision of all children is necessary, but especially so for infants and young children, both when awake and asleep, and any other children/youth whose activities must be closely monitored.

2. Criminal Records Check

Any adult (age 18 and over) residing permanently or temporarily in the home and having access to children, must inform the approving agency of any criminal indictments or convictions. A criminal records check including GCIC and NCIC finger printing must be performed and the outcomes documented. Repeat criminal record check, including fingerprinting, is required at least every (5) years at the time of the Annual Re-evaluation for all current foster parents and adults (age 18 and over) residing in the home.

3. Income

The foster parent must complete a financial statement and verification (check stubs, Federal Income Tax Return from the previous year, statement from employer, etc.) of income. The foster parent is expected to have income sufficient to maintain their family excluding the amount of the per diem received for any child(ren) in foster care.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

4. Age

Resource parents must be at least ten (10) years older than the child to be placed and if unmarried, at least 25 years of age.

5. References

At least three references must be obtained for the applicant. References may be obtained via in-person interview, telephone contact or letter. One of the three references must be from an extended family member not residing in the home. Applicants must secure an additional reference from the previous or current employer if they are or have been employed in a job situation that involves children (school, day care center, group residential care or intensive residential care facility, etc.). Additional references may be requested if conflicting, ambivalent or inadequate response are received from those initially requested.

6. Environmental Inspection

A statement that an approved environmental inspection has been completed on homes that are not on county/city water and/or sewage systems is required. Additionally, the *Water Well Standards Act* requires that, "*The upper terminal of the well shall be protected by a sanitary seal or cover to prevent entrance of pollutants to the well.*" Negative reports from sampling of the wells without the upgrade can be construed as "safe" nevertheless with an advisory that the upper well terminus should be upgraded into compliance as soon as possible. Until the well is brought into full compliance with the Act, annual re-testing is required.

A statement that the utility bills, etc. were viewed and the home is on county/city water and/or sewage system should be accomplished if an environmental inspection is not applicable.

7. Gas Heaters

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.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

8. Safety Considerations

- Smoke alarms must be present in the home and functioning.
- Firearms must be locked away from children. Ammunition should be kept locked and stored separately from firearms.
- Homes having a swimming pool must meet all community ordinances to operate a pool. The pool must be fenced with a gate, which is kept locked to prevent unsupervised access by children.

9. 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 Regional Director. However, any issues or concerns related to any pets should be thoroughly discussed and documented during the assessment process.

10. Health

A physical examination and history must be completed and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or public health department within twelve (12) months of the date of approval of the Family Assessment. Must include TB screening and a comprehensive drug screen report conducted and signed by a qualified health professional (includes testing for marijuana/cannabinoids (THC), cocaine, amphetamines / methamphetamines, opiates, and phencyclidine (PCP)).

Adults and children 16 years of age and older living in the home shall have a health statement and tuberculin test results (skin test or chest x-ray).

A health statement must be obtained on all children in the home under 16 years of age and must be dated no more than 12 months before approval of the family assessment.

Foster parents must have a medical examination completed by medical personnel at least every (5) years, which will be checked at the time of the Annual Re-evaluation. Use of Form 36, Medical Report, is required.

Foster parents with a diagnosed health problem must have a physician's health statement annually. Foster parents age 65 and older must have a physical examination annually. Use of Form 36 is only required at five year intervals.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

11. Pre-service Training

Foster parents of the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and of other agencies approved to serve DFCS children, must have 20 hours of pre-service training/preparation. The training must include appropriate methods of discipline and must emphasize that corporal punishment is prohibited.

12. Continued Parent Development

Foster parents must acquire at least 10 hours of Continued Parent Development (CPD) annually. CPD should be relevant to the type of children being placed in the foster home. Required CPD topics for the first year will include CPR and First Aid.

13. Appropriate Utilization of Foster Home

No more than six (6) children under the age of 16, including the children of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home.

No more than two (2) children under two (2) years of age, including the children of the foster family, may be placed in a foster home.

Only bedrooms shall be used as sleeping space for children.

Each non-related child must have a separate bed.

A maximum of two (2) children may sleep in a double or larger bed if they are siblings and are of the same sex.

No child shall sleep in a bed with an adult.

A child over one (1) year of age cannot sleep in the bedroom of an adult.

A maximum of three (3) children to share a bedroom is preferable. The suitability of children sharing a room should be assessed based on the background/history of the children.

Children age five (5) years and older and of different sexes shall not share a bedroom.

14. Face-to face contact

At least monthly, agency staff shall have face-to-face contact with children in foster care and their foster parent(s). At least bi-monthly, these face-to-face contacts with children and foster parents must occur in the foster home.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FAMILY FOSTER HOMES

15. Family Day Care

A foster parent may be a Family Day Care provider for a maximum number of six (6) children. Thus, the parent child ratio can never be greater than 1:6 at any time. The number often will have to be less than six due to the number, ages and needs of the children in foster care placed in the home.

16. Employment Outside the Home

A single foster parent or both foster parents can be employed outside the home if childcare is provided and if able to meet the needs of the children in foster care.

17. Religion

Children in foster care should have opportunities for religious, spiritual and/or ethical development.

18. Drivers License

Foster parents are *expected* to have a valid Georgia driver's license, car and insurance. A part of the foster parent partnership expectation is that they will assist the case manager with providing transportation for children placed in their home. This cannot occur when a foster parent is unlicensed. If the county department determines that the lack of transportation is an issue that can be managed effectively, the home can be approved with no waivers necessary. This should be noted in the home evaluation so that appropriate placements can be made.

19. Foster Home Approval

Foster parents must be an approved foster home resource for only one agency, but may accept children from another agency with prior approval from their original approving agency.