

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	March 2015
	Policy Title:	Home Safety		
	Policy Number:	14.19	Previous Policy #:	1015.19

CODES/REFERENCES

Taylor v. Ledbetter, 818 F.2d 791 (11th Cir. 1987)
 O.C.G.A. § 31-19-1 (The Rabies statute)
 O.C.G.A. § 40-8-76.1 (Use of safety belts in passenger vehicles)

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and any licensed Child Placing Agency (CPA) shall ensure the safety and well-being of the children in foster care placements.

All medication prescribed to children in foster care shall be administered only as directed by the prescribing physician, administered only by authorized adults, and stored and transported in the original containers.

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with DFCS established safety guidelines regarding water safety:

1. Caregivers 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 shall adhere to the following general water safety guidelines:
 - a. Know or learn how to swim. Swimming requirements are to be completed by caregivers during the first 60 days of approval. Swimming requirements for previously approved homes are to be completed within one year of the effective date of this policy. Water safety requirements for homes with newly acquired swimming pools are to be completed by caregivers within 60 days.
 - b. Complete the required CPR and First Aid training prior to 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 must be renewed and be current at each foster home re-evaluation.
 - c. 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.
 - i. 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.
 - ii. 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.
- d. Enroll children in care, age three years and older, in a swimming class within one year of the date of placement.
 - i. The class must be taught by a certified instructor and, if necessary, re-taken until the child learns to swim.
 - ii. DFCS will reimburse the caregiver for the cost of the class.
 - iii. The caregiver must inform the SSCM if a child is unable to complete the required swimming course for any reason. The SSCM must make caregivers aware of any known physical/corporal or emotional challenges of the child that would impact his/her ability to complete the course.
 - iv. 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.
- e. Ensure that the swimming pool or waterfront area meets any local and/or state ordinances.
- f. Ensure that the swimming pool and surrounding area are properly maintained and free from danger.
 - i. Wading or "Kiddie Pools" must be used according to the manufacturer's instructions and maintained in a manner that safeguards the lives and health of young children.
 - ii. Wading or "Kiddie Pools" must be emptied and stored away when not in use to prevent the accumulation of water and other unsanitary debris.
- g. 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.
- h. Equip the swimming pool with lifesaving and flotation devices, such as reaching poles and ring buoys.
- i. 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.
- j. Ensure the inaccessibility of in-ground or above-ground swimming pools by isolating the pool from the home with a fence or through the use of a pool safety cover.
 - i. The fence must be at least four feet in height, surround all sides of the pool, and have a gate that locks. The side structure of an above-ground pool may be used to meet the fence requirement.
 - ii. The fence must have no vertical or horizontal openings that are more than four inches wide and be constructed in such a manner that a young child cannot climb through or under the fence.
 - iii. The side structure of an above-ground pool may meet the fence requirement if any steps or ladders are removed to make the pool inaccessible when not in use.

- iv. Pool safety covers must meet American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) Standards and must be installed, used, and maintained according to manufacturer's specifications. Pool covers must be kept free of standing water and be completely removed when the pool is in use.
2. Specified safety measures must be documented in the narrative of the foster home study or foster home record.

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with the following safety guidelines regarding motor vehicles:

1. Caregivers are required to transport every child under eight years of age in a federally approved child safety seat that is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Caregivers are required to transport children 12 years and under in the rear seat of the vehicle, with seat belts buckled up to protect young children from air bag injuries.
3. Caregivers are prohibited from allowing children and youth under the age of 18 to ride in 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, caregivers must contact the child's SSCM and comply with all agency policy regarding the driving of motor vehicles by youth in placement.
5. 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.
6. Caregivers must never leave children under the age of 12 years or children who are medically, emotionally, psychologically, or behaviorally challenged unattended in motor vehicles.

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with the following safety guidelines regarding firearms:

1. All firearms in the home must be kept under lock and key and inaccessible to children at all times. As an added safety measure, any commercially available, reliable gun-safety mechanisms (e.g., trigger guard lock.) 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. Keys to locked storage devices are to be kept in the possession of an adult or reasonably secured from children.
4. Caregivers must never allow children in care to handle any type firearm (see Firearm Safety in practice guidance for a possible exception to this safety guideline).

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with the following safety guidelines regarding animals:

1. Monitor children when they are around animals.
2. 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.
3. Comply with Georgia law requiring all dogs, cats, and ferrets be vaccinated for rabies.
 - a. Re-immunizations are required either annually or triennially depending on the

vaccine.

- b. Foster homes with exotic animals or wildlife (e.g., chimpanzees, snakes, raccoons, large mammals, etc.) will require a health and suitability statement from a veterinarian and approval by the County Director.
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.
8. Carefully review the Foster Parent Manual for information regarding animal safety.

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with the following guidelines regarding fire safety:

1. Gas heaters in the 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 homes.
2. Working carbon monoxide detectors are to be installed on the sleeping level in all homes.
3. Smoke alarms must be installed and operable on each level of the home outside sleeping areas.
4. Each home must have an operable ABC rated fire extinguisher (see Fire Safety in practice guidance for additional information about types of fire extinguishers).

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with DFCS established safety guidelines regarding bicycle safety:

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

DFCS and CPAs shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with the following guidelines regarding general environmental safety:

1. The approved 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 must be stored out of the reach of children.

DFCS and CPA staff shall consistently remind caregivers to provide close supervision of children playing with toys that have the potential to cause personal injury or injury to others (e.g., BB guns, air guns, sling shots, bows and arrows, etc.). Such toys come with warnings and age restrictions that need to be followed to ensure proper safety precautions are taken.

PROCEDURES

The Resource Development (RD) Case Manager will review the Caregiver Child Safety Agreement with all approved families and obtain their signatures at the following times:

1. Prior to approval of the initial Family Evaluation;
2. At the time of the annual home re-evaluation; and
3. Whenever there are child safety concerns (i.e., discipline or foster care policy violations, etc.).

To ensure the overall safety of the children in approved homes, RD and Social Services Case Managers (SSCM) will:

1. Become familiar with the Safety and Quality Standards (SQS) for approved homes and review them periodically with caregivers (see policy [14.1 Resource Development: Safety and Quality Standards](#)).
2. Inform caregivers of any observed violations of the SQS, 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. Document all discussions and recommendations with the caregiver in the Contact Summary in Georgia SHINES
3. Notify the Supervisor in writing of any violations of SQS observed during home visits and the outcome of any discussion with the caregivers regarding observations (see policy [14.22 Resource Development: Policy Violations](#)).
4. Provide follow-up to ensure the home's compliance with SQS.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

When children are placed outside the home for various reasons of abuse and/or neglect, their health and safety are of paramount concern. It is the responsibility of DFCS, CPAs, and approved caregivers to take all measures within their power to reduce threats to any child's safety while in an out-of-home placement. The safety of the child must become as much a priority for the child in the home of an out-of-home placement provider as it is in the home of the birth parent. Caregivers need to be assisted in employing injury prevention strategies that promote the safety of the children placed in their home. DFCS must provide caregivers with easy access to child safety seats and bicycle helmets. Expenses incurred by caregivers in meeting agency approval requirements are reimbursable. Caregivers are required to obtain prior approval before incurring costs that require reimbursement.

Water Safety

Accidental drowning and motor vehicle accidents are among the leading causes of unintentional fatalities for children and youth ages 0-24 months. Caution must be exercised when placing children in homes that have swimming pools or waterfront property. The age, special needs, and number of children in a home should guide decisions around placement in such homes. The local DFCS should assist caregivers in locating resources for free swimming lessons. If free resources are not available, reasonable expenses should be allowed. The key to preventing water accidents is supervision. Although this policy specifically refers to in-ground and above-ground pools and waterfront property, families with family hot tubs and spas must take substantial safety measures to ensure the safety of children placed in the foster home.

Motor Vehicle Safety

Children should have reasonable opportunities to engage in play and wholesome recreational activities. When responding to a caregiver's request for guidance, the SSCM should take into 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 (e.g.,, no use of public roads, daytime riding only, no racing or hot-rodding) and other safety measures, such as helmets, seat belts, flotation devices, and any other manufacturer's recommended safety gear.

Extra caution must be exercised when allowing a child less than 18 years of age to operate or ride as a passenger on a motorcycle, a motorbike, an all-terrain vehicle (ATV), 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.

Firearm Safety

Firearms claim the lives of an inordinate number of children each year. Consequently, DFCS takes a very conservative approach to firearm safety. Prior to entering foster care, many children experienced trauma associated with violence, including gun violence. These children need a living environment that evokes feelings of peace and safety. Some may have strong emotional reactions when in the presence of a firearm. Being in the presence of someone carrying a weapon may evoke feelings of being held captive or guarded. Some children in care already struggle with these feelings after being involuntarily removed from their birth family. DFCS does not want to do anything to exacerbate this problem. Consequently, even foster parents with permits to carry weapons are expected to refrain from doing so in the presence of children in foster care. Doing so is a violation of foster care policy, which requires firearms and ammunition to be stored separately under lock and key.

Under limited circumstances, particular children may be allowed to handle firearms. Youth ages 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 caregiver or other approved adult. The caregiver/ approved adult is also required to be in compliance with Georgia hunting license requirements. Georgia requires completion of a hunter education course (including safety guidelines) for all persons born after January 1, 1961. **The County Director/Designee must give 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.**

Animal Safety

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, caregivers must take reasonable safety precautions when children are around pets. Serious consideration should be given to the type/breed of pets and their history of violence or aggressiveness toward people when assessing safety factors in the foster home. 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.

Fire Safety

Fire extinguishers should be inspected regularly to ensure effectiveness. A local fire department would be a good resource for this service. Fire extinguishers with a Class A rating are effective against fires involving paper, wood, and plastics. Fire extinguishers with a Class B rating are effective against flammable liquid fires. Fire extinguishers with a Class C rating are suitable for fires in “live” electrical equipment. The recommended multi-purpose dry-chemical extinguisher contains a dry chemical suitable for use on ordinary combustibles, flammable liquids, or electrical equipment. It is red in color and ranges in weight from five pounds to twenty pounds. It will have a label indicating that it may be used on class A, B, and/or C fires.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Caregiver Child Safety Agreement](#)

[Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Wildlife Resources Division](#)