

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	September 2015
	Policy Title:	Safety and Quality Standards (SQS)		
	Policy Number:	14.1	Previous Policy #:	1014

CODES/REFERENCES

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Sections 471 (a) (10), 471 (a) (22), and 472 (c) (1) Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-183)

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall establish and maintain standards for foster family homes and child caring institutions (CCI) which are reasonably in accord with recommended standards of national organizations concerned with standards for such institutions or homes, including standards related to admission policies, safety, sanitation, protection of civil rights and which shall permit use of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard (see policy [14.26 Resource Development: Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard](#)). The standards so established are applied by the State to any foster family home or CCI receiving funds under Titles IV-E or IV-B. The standards shall require, as a condition of each contract entered into by a CCI to provide foster care, the on-site presence of at least of at least one official who, with respect to any child placed at the CCI, is designated to be the caregiver who is authorized to apply the reasonable and prudent parenting standard to decisions involving the participation of the child in age or developmentally-appropriate activities, and who is provided with training in how to use and apply the reasonable and prudent parenting standard in the same manner as prospective foster parents are provided the training pursuant to paragraph 471(a)(24).

The standards for family foster homes and CCIs shall include policies related to the liability of foster parents and private entities under contract by the state involving the application of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard to ensure appropriate liability for caregivers when a child participates in an approved activity and the caregiver approving the activity acts in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parenting standard.

DFCS may allow waivers of non-safety standards (as determined by the State) on a case-by-case basis in relative foster family homes for specific children in care (see policy [14.4 Resource Development: Waiver of Non-Safety Approval Standards for Relative Foster Homes](#)).

DFCS shall develop and implement standards that ensure children in foster care placements in public or private agencies are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

DFCS shall ensure all approved caregivers and their household members meet the established Safety and Quality Standards (SQS). The standards apply at initial approval, reevaluation, and throughout all times the home remains open. This includes homes affiliated with Child Placing Agencies (CPA). To attain and maintain Full Approval Status, caregivers must:

- a. Demonstrate the maturity, stability, fitness, skills, and competency to successfully protect, nurture, and meet the developmental needs of children;
- b. Support the agency's established case goals and permanency plan for child (ren) placed in their care;
- c. Be a U.S. citizen or Permanent Legal Resident (see policy [14.11 Resource Development: Initial Family Evaluation Components](#));
- d. Be at least 10 years older than the child to be placed, if married;
- e. Be at least 25 years of age, if unmarried;
- f. Have no substantiated Child Protective Services (CPS) history;
- g. Meet the Criminal Records Check background requirements as described in policy [14.2 Resource Development: Criminal Records Checks](#);
- h. Abstain from the use of illegal drugs and misuse of prescription drugs and alcohol;
- i. Have sufficient income to maintain their family excluding the amount of the per diem received for any child(ren) in foster care;
- j. Meet health requirements for all household members, including current immunizations for household members under the age of 18;
- k. Be certified in CPR and First Aid;
- l. Have at least three positive character references;
- m. Complete an IMPACT Information Session;
- n. Complete approved pre-service training;
- o. Meet the requirement for continued parent development (CPD);
- p. Have reliable transportation;
- q. Have a home environment that is clean, free of environmental hazards, and provides a livable atmosphere;
- r. Meet standards for appropriate utilization of the home;
 - i. No more than six children under the age of 16, including the children of the caregiver, shall be placed in a foster home. The parent-child ratio may never exceed 1:6 at any time.
 - ii. No more than two children under two years of age, including the children of the caregiver's family, shall be placed in the home.
 - iii. Only bedrooms shall be used as a sleeping space for children.
 - iv. Each non-related child must sleep in a separate bed.
 - v. A maximum of two children may sleep in a double or larger bed. The children must be siblings and must be the same gender.
 - vi. No child shall sleep in the bed with an adult.
 - vii. A child over one year of age shall not sleep in the bedroom of an adult.
 - viii. No more than three children shall share a bedroom. The suitability of children sharing a room should be assessed based on the background/history of the children.
 - ix. Children five years of age and older shall not share a bedroom with a person of the opposite sex.
- s. Support the religious and spiritual beliefs of a child's birth family;
- t. Comply with the standards in the Foster Parent Manual;

- u. Comply with requirements for supervision of children;
- v. Comply with requirements for discipline of children;
- w. Follow the medication management protocol;
- x. Have functional smoke alarms on each floor of their home, a carbon monoxide detector on the sleeping level of their home, and a fire extinguisher;
- y. Meet all safety guidelines in regard to fire safety, water safety, firearm safety, gas heaters, unvented fuel-fired heaters, pet inoculations, etc. (see policy [14.19 Resource Development: Home Safety](#)); and
- z. Have a Family Evaluation (initial and subsequent) approved by the DFCS County Director/Designee or Child Placing Agency Director/Designee.

DFCS shall ensure any exception to the Safety and Quality Standards is documented in the Foster/Adopt (FAD) Stage and Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System.

DFCS and CPA Directors shall not approve prospective foster or adoptive homes that do not meet the agency's Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).

PROCEDURES

The Resource Development (RD) team will:

1. Continue to monitor active placement resources to ensure compliance with SQS.
2. When unusual situations make it advisable to waive any of the SQS, submit a waiver request to the State Foster Care Services Director or Designee via the state waiver mailbox: dfcs-waivers@dhs.ga.gov.
3. Document any exception to the SQS in the FAD Stage and on the Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Having safety and quality standards ensures children are placed in safe home environments and receive the high quality of care they deserve. Caregivers and DFCS work together as a team with a common goal of helping children achieve permanency. Caregivers will face many challenges as they seek to provide continuity of care while helping a child repair the effects of earlier life experiences. To do this type of work, caregivers need to have a number of specific skills:

Understanding the Impact of Fostering

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

Teamwork and Communication

Caregivers must be able to communicate with the child, the agency, birth parents and other foster and adoptive parents who may have different outlooks because of different experiences, ages and cultures. Families must 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.

Parenting Abused/Neglected Children

Caregivers 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 nonjudgmental ways, which helps children feel good about who they are. Families must know how to access outside assistance as necessary to meet a child's needs.

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. Caregivers 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 with attachment, families will need to understand attachment issues and be able to use specific techniques to help.

Understand, Prevent and Manage Misbehaviors

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

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 visitations and the goal of returning children to birth families as soon as safely possible is critical.

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, caregivers must provide a healthy and safe environment for children, following all state and local health and safety regulations.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Adam Walsh State Contact List](#)

[Georgia Department of Corrections – Find an Offender](#)

[Sexual Offender Registry](#)

[Board of Pardons and Parole – Inmate Tentative Parole Month Look-up](#)