

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	March 2015
	Policy Title:	Initial Family Evaluation Components		
	Policy Number:	14.11	Previous Policy #:	1014, 1015

CODES/REFERENCES

Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) shall ensure all initial family evaluation components are completed prior to granting full approval of a prospective caregiver.

DFCS shall conduct caregiver safety screening on all prospective foster or adoptive parents before they may be finally approved for placement of a child (see policy [14.3 Resource Development: Caregiver Safety Screening at Initial and Re-evaluation](#)).

DFCS shall require a Criminal Records Check (CRC) for all applicants and their current household members.

DFCS shall require a medical evaluation for all applicants and their current household members as well as current immunizations for household members under 18 years of age.

DFCS shall require all applicant medical, drug, and safety screening to be conducted within the 12 consecutive months prior to final approval of the Family Evaluation.

DFCS shall attest that each applicant home has been assessed according to policy requirements and that the household meets the Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).

DFCS shall include a recommendation for approval or disapproval of each applicant home within the written evaluation.

PROCEDURES

The County/Regional Resource Development (RD) or CPA will:

1. Initiate an assessment of each applicant after receipt of their application.
2. If applicants were approved in other states, do the following to confirm the training hours and begin collecting information for the Family Evaluation:
 - a. Obtain a Release of Information;
 - b. Contact the other state in writing;
 - c. Obtain a description of the training content and number of hours earned as part of pre-service and in-service hours;
 - d. Request a copy of the family's initial evaluation and any subsequent

evaluations;

- e. Request a written recommendation from the state as to the capabilities and protective capacities of the family (Upload into Georgia SHINES).
3. Utilize a minimum of three in-home consultations to gather information, with the first consultation occurring prior to pre-service training.
4. Make observations and have open, honest discussions with applicants.
5. Conduct individual interviews with each household member and at least one family interview that includes all household members.
6. Ensure the written evaluation reflects utilization of all information gathered through interviews, verifications, documentation, and forms.
7. Verify the applicant's income to confirm the applicant has sufficient income to maintain their family excluding the amount of the per diem received for any child in foster care. Verification may include check stubs, Federal Income Tax returns from the previous years, a statement from their employer, redacted bank statements showing deposits, etc.
8. Obtain the County Director's approval of extenuating circumstances that hinder completion of the Family Evaluation within the eight-week timeframe. (DFCS only)
9. Send a written explanation, signed by the County Director/Designee, to all families whose Family Evaluation will not be completed within the eight-week timeframe. Indicate the reason for the delay and a projected timeframe for completion. (DFCS only)
10. Notify applicant families in writing within five business days of the final approval decision. (DFCS only)
11. Enter all appropriate changes/updates under the FA Home tab in Georgia SHINES as soon as the information becomes available to the agency. (DFCS only)
12. Document all contacts with the family under the Contact/Summaries tab in Georgia SHINES (DFCS only).

Required Safety Screening

See policies [14.3 Resource Development: Caregiver Safety Screening at Initial and Re-evaluation](#) and [14.2 Resource Development: Criminal Records Checks](#).

Age Requirement

1. Married applicants must provide a copy of their birth certificates to verify that they are at least 10 years older than the child to be placed.
2. Unmarried applicants must provide a copy of their birth certificate to verify that they are at least 25 years of age.

Citizenship Requirement

Each applicant must provide a copy of their birth certificate, naturalization papers, U.S. passport or Permanent Resident Alien Form ("Green Card").

Medical and Drug Screening

1. All household members must be medically evaluated. The primary and secondary parent, as applicable, must be drug screened. The medical evaluation must be conducted and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or public health department within 12 months of the date of approval of the Family Evaluation.
2. The primary and secondary parent (as applicable) must complete a comprehensive

medical exam, including a screening for Tuberculosis (TB) via blood or skin test. The exam must be documented using the Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report.

3. An applicant may be screened out if the certifying medical official endorses that the applicant's or other household member's health condition poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Direct threat is defined as a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by modifications in policy, practice, or procedures. When direct threat is the justification for the screening out of individuals with disabilities, the decision must be based on individualized assessments that rely on current medical evidence or the best available objective evidence in determining:
 - a. The nature, duration and severity of the risks;
 - b. The probability that potential injury will occur;
 - c. Whether reasonable modification in policies, practices, or procedures will mitigate the risk; and
 - d. The actual abilities and inabilities of the prospective adoptive or foster parent.
4. If the certifying medical official endorses that the primary or secondary caregiver (as applicable) has any medical, cognitive or other condition that will affect caring for a child or has an on-going medical condition, the applicant will be required to be medically re-evaluated at each annual re-evaluation until the condition is resolved.
5. The primary and secondary parent (as applicable) must complete at least a six panel drug screen. Applicants are to be drug screened for Marijuana/Cannabinoids (THC), Cocaine, Amphetamines/Methamphetamines, Opiates, Ecstasy, and Phencyclidine (PCP). It must be conducted and signed by a qualified health professional or laboratory. An applicant must be screened out if positive results are reported for any illegal drug.
6. Household members other than the primary and secondary caregiver must be medically evaluated using the Other Household Member Medical Evaluation Report.
 - a. If a household member is age 18 years or older, a TB screen via blood or skin must be conducted.
 - b. If a household member is under 18 years of age, he/she must be current with regard to immunizations.

Required References

1. Obtain at least three character references either in writing, in person, or via telephone call and document the manner in which the reference was obtained.
2. If references are not obtained in writing, the assessor must document the reference in written form.
3. Contact every birth child residing outside of the household for a reference.
 - a. Obtain permission from the caregiver prior to such contact.
 - b. If permission is not granted or if a birth child refuses to provide a reference, reasons must be reviewed with the caregiver and used as part of the assessment conclusion.
 - c. Birth children living in the caregiver's home are part of the household being evaluated and do not count as one of the three required references.
4. Contact at least one relative not residing in the home as one of the required three references. Secure a reference from each member of a married couple so that all references are not from just the mother or just the father.

5. Obtain a reference from an applicant's previous or current employer if the applicant is or has been employed in a job situation that involves children (e.g. school, daycare center, group residential care, or intensive residential care facility, etc.) within the past five years. Utilize the Employer Reference Form.
6. If an applicant has previously served as a foster or adoptive parent, obtain references from the former county/agency. Utilize the Prior Service Reference Form.
7. Obtain additional references if conflicting, ambivalent or inadequate statements are received from those initially requested.

Appropriate Utilization of the Home

1. No more than six children under the age of 16, including the children of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home. The parent-child ratio may not exceed 1:6 at any time.
2. No more than two children under two years of age, including the children of the caregiver's family, shall be placed in the home.
3. Only bedrooms shall be used as a sleeping space for children.
4. Each non-related child must sleep in a separate bed.
5. A maximum of two children may sleep in a double or larger bed. The children must be siblings and must be the same gender.
6. No child shall sleep in the bed with an adult.
7. No child over one year of age shall sleep in the bedroom of an adult.
8. 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.
9. Children five years of age and older must not share a bedroom with a person of the opposite sex.

Environmental Standards

1. If a home is not on county/city water and/or sewage systems, a statement is required confirming that an approved environmental inspection has been completed within the preceding 12 months.
2. If an environmental inspection is not applicable, a statement that the utility bills were viewed and that the home is on county/city water and/or sewage system is required.
3. Homes with water wells must comply with the Water Well Standards Act.
 - a. The upper terminal of the well shall be protected by a sanitary seal or cover to prevent entrance of pollutants to the well.
 - b. Negative reports from sampling of the wells without the upgrade can be construed as "safe" with an advisory that the upper well terminus should be upgraded into compliance as soon as possible.
 - c. Annual re-testing is required until the well is brought into full compliance with the Act.
4. Gas heaters in the home must be vented.
5. Unvented, fuel-fired heaters equipped with oxygen depletion safety shut-off systems may be operated in foster homes. Homes with these types of heaters may be approved for placement of no more than three unrelated children.
6. Smoke alarms must be present and functioning on all levels of the home.
7. Working carbon monoxide detectors must be installed on the sleeping level of the home. **NOTE:** This is required for homes approved after the effective date of this policy. Homes approved prior to the effective date of this policy must be in compliance

- by the time of their next reevaluation.
8. Firearms must be stored under lock and key away from children with ammunition stored under lock and key in a separate location from firearms.
 9. Homes with a swimming pool must comply with all community ordinances for operating a pool. The pool must be fenced with a gate that is kept locked to prevent unsupervised access by children. The fence must be at least four feet high.
 10. All animals must have vaccinations required by Georgia law.
 - a. Dogs, cats, and ferrets must be vaccinated for rabies;
 - b. Re-immunizations are required either annually or triennially depending on the vaccine;
 - c. Homes with exotic animals (e.g., chimpanzees, snakes, raccoons, large mammals) will require a health and suitability statement from a veterinarian and approval by the DFCS Regional Director;
 - d. Issues or concerns related to any pets must be thoroughly discussed and documented during the assessment process.

Transportation

1. Advise caregivers that they are expected to assist DFCS with providing transportation for children placed in their home.
2. Verify that caregivers who operate vehicles have a valid Georgia driver's license and valid automobile insurance.
3. If the County Department determines that the lack of transportation is an issue that can be managed effectively, the home may be approved with no waivers necessary. This should be noted in the Family Evaluation so that appropriate placements can be made.

Adoption Exchange Family Registration

1. Utilize the Adoption Exchange Family Registration to register adoptive parents with the Adoption Exchange. If there is a child already identified for the applicant, the child's county and name should be provided on the form.
2. Place the IMPACT Family Evaluation Family Approval and Adoption Registration Cover Letter on top of the Family Evaluation to serve as a cover letter when registering a family as an approved adoptive resource.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Applicants complete a Caregiver Placement Preferences form, which lists applicants' preferences regarding the number and characteristics of children they would like to have placed in their home. What is approved at the conclusion of the Family Evaluation may differ from an applicant's preferences. However, the final recommendations **may not** exceed the number of children requested by the applicant. The final recommendations should also be congruent with the applicant's desires regarding the types of special needs or other characteristics they feel they can successfully manage. The Caregiver Placement Preference form may be updated throughout the assessment process. However, to avoid multiple changes, it is recommended that it be completed at the last in-home consultation.

If approved, applicants may be reimbursed for certain expenses incurred during the approval process. The guidelines are in Field Fiscal Services' COSTAR manual located at <http://ffs.dhs.ga.gov/ffs/manuals/costar/index.php>.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Adoption Exchange Family Registration](#)
[Adoption Exchange Family Registration – Instructions](#)
[Adult Household Member Screening Request Information](#)
[Caregiver Child Safety Agreement](#)
[Caregiver Placement Preferences](#)
[Caregiver References List](#)
[Child Protection Services History Request](#)
[Employer Reference Form](#)
[HIPPA Notice of Privacy Practices](#)
[Financial Statement for Resource Parenting](#)
[Financial Statement for Resource Parenting - Spanish](#)
[IMPACT Family Evaluation Family Approval and Adoption Registration Cover Letter](#)
[Other Household Member Medical Evaluation Report](#)
[Prior Service Reference Form](#)
[Prospective Caregiver Application](#)
[Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report](#)