

	<b>GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL</b>			
	<b>Chapter:</b>	(14) Resource Development	<b>Effective Date:</b>	March 2015
	<b>Policy Title:</b>	Initial Family Evaluation Outline		
	<b>Policy Number:</b>	14.12	<b>Previous Policy #:</b>	1014

### CODES/REFERENCES

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Section 471(a) (20) (B)  
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 the initial written comprehensive evaluation includes all components of the following Initial Family Evaluation (IFE) outline:

#### General Information

1. Assessor's name, title, and county or agency affiliation;
2. Date the home study began and approval/disapproval date (date the Director/Designee signed the evaluation);
3. Date of initial inquiry and date of Information Session;
4. Name of pre-service training and start and end date of pre-service training for primary and secondary caregiver (if applicable); and
5. Dates of each in-home consultation and who was interviewed on each date.

#### Directions to the Home

Provide directions to the home using the County DFCS Office (and the CPA if applicable) as a starting point.

#### Household Demographics

For each household member, include full name, date of birth, age, ethnicity, and contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses. Include occupation, employer (or source of income), education level, annual income, marital status, and household role in relation to the primary caregiver(s). List the names and species of any pet(s).

#### Safety Screening Results

1. Document the results of the Criminal Records Check (CRC), Georgia and other state's CPS history, Pardons and Parole (PP), Department of Corrections (DOC), and Sex Offenders Registry (SOR) for every member of the household age 18 years and older. List each adult's name, the date of the screen, and whether or not they are eligible to proceed based on criteria established in the following policies: [14.2 Resource Development: Criminal Records Checks](#) (which are based on federal and state statutes), [10.7 Foster Care: Placement/Re-placement Safety Screenings](#), and [14.3 Resource Development: Caregiver Safety Screening at Initial and Re-evaluation](#).

2. Summarize any findings from the CPS screening, PP, DOC, and SOR for each adult.
3. Document the assessed need for additional or expanded Safety Screening.
4. Document that an applicant is either “eligible to proceed as of (date of screening)” or “ineligible to proceed as of (date of screening).”

**NOTE: Do not list or summarize any information from the Criminal Records Check.**

**Sample:**

	GCIC	NCIC	GA DFCS-CPS	Other State's -CPS	PP	DOC	SOR
Primary Caregiver : John Doe	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 8/1/2013	N/A	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013

John Doe did not have a CPS, CRC, PP, DOC or SOR record.

	GCIC	NCIC	GA DFCS-CPS	Other State's -CPS	PP	DOC	SOR
Secondary Caregiver: Jane Doe:	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 8/1/2013	N/A	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013	Eligible to Proceed as of 9/1/2013

Jane Doe did not have a CRC, PP, DOC or SOR record. The Georgia CPS screen revealed two unsubstantiated investigations that involved her two nephews who lived with her briefly in 1999. The youth were unruly and refused to adhere to curfew. The reports did not reveal any protective capacity concerns regarding Mrs. Doe.

**Motivation**

Document the applicants’ initial reasons for wanting to become foster and/or adoptive parents. Include the length of time they have been considering foster care and/or adoption. Include their stated reasons for deciding to commit to foster care and/or adoption after participating in pre-service training. Discuss any differences or changes in their motivation. Discuss which type of caregiver service is of interest to applicants and their understanding of the program’s expectations. Summarize the Reasons for Fostering Checklist results. Identify the strengths and challenges of the results.

**Prior Service History**

Discuss any prior foster or adoptive service history from the Prior Service Report Form. Include the dates of service and reason(s) for termination or closure.

**Caregiver History**

Current Household Status: Begin by providing a description of the current household status, including all current residents and their role/relationships, then proceed with a description of the primary and secondary caregiver (as applicable) using the categories below.

**Address each section below separately for the Primary and Secondary Caregiver, as applicable.**

Description: Describe the applicant’s appearance (include height and weight) and personality. Provide details about the applicant’s educational background, work history, and present employment. Include the applicant’s citizenship and length of time at current

residence.

Childhood: Present the applicant's description and feelings about his/her childhood, including the way he/she was disciplined and his/her feelings about it. Address both the happiest and most traumatic memories of his/her childhood and his/her overall feelings regarding his/her childhood. Discuss the applicant's birth order, his/her relationship with siblings (past and present), and which sibling(s) he/she feels closest to. Does the applicant believe all siblings were treated equally and fairly? How was sex education handled in the applicant's family of origin? Include the effects on the applicant's current feelings and how he/she would handle (or has handled) this with his/her own child (ren). Include the applicant's description and feelings about his/her parents or parent figures. (Include information about absent parents, if appropriate.) Describe the quality of his/her parents' marital relationship, support/nurturance, and decision-making. Address the effects his/her parents had on his/her life.

Previous Marital/Significant Relationships: Include discussions of previous significant relationships and all marriages and/or partnerships. Include discussions of children by previous marriages, partnerships and/or significant relationships, parental visitation, and child support. How were the relationships ended and/or resolved? Include date and place of divorce(s), or death of spouse, if applicable.

History of Child Abuse and Neglect: Discuss whether the applicant has any history of child abuse (physical and sexual) and neglect. If so, discuss the impact of this experience.

History of Drug and Alcohol Use: Discuss whether the applicant has any history of drug or alcohol use. If so, discuss how it was resolved. (Address these issues regarding other members of the family if appropriate.)

Medical Evaluation: Discuss any disabilities and physical and mental concerns that affect the applicant's ability to care for a child. Summarize the results of the Social Readjustment Rating Scale and Sensitive Issues Inventory. Discuss whether or not an annual medical evaluation will be required based on the results of the Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report.

### **Family Interaction**

Children in the Home: Include a brief summary of the physical (health) statement, immunization status, and assessor observations of the general well-being for each child living in the home in relation to the family's ability to provide foster and/or adoptive care. Ask children how they are disciplined, what the rules are in the family, their opinions/perceptions of the family's decision to foster/adopt, etc. (Report their perceptions, your own, and your observations of the children's interaction with parents.)

Single Parents: For single applicants, discuss their single-parent support system. Describe the applicant's significant relationships with both men and women.

Couples: For married couples, describe the applicants' interactions as husband and wife or as partners. Describe the history of the relationship, including how they met, their courtship, and decision to marry or commit. Report the date and place of marriage. Discuss any separations and/or marital counseling. Address their decision-making processes (including financial), how they handle disagreements, their support for and nurturance of one another,

and their individual feelings about themselves as spouses. Discuss the effects of adding a child to the home. Describe the strengths and needs of their marriage, including their perceptions and your own. Describe other emotional support systems of each applicant.

Caregivers as Parents: Describe the applicants' interaction as parents. Address their decision-making processes, their agreements about parental discipline, their disagreements and how they are resolved, their support for one another as parents, and any other issues of possessiveness, excessive control, and so forth. Include the applicants' feelings about themselves as parents. How do the applicants describe each of their children? Describe the realism of the applicants' expectations of each of their children and the foster and/or adoptive children. Summarize information regarding adult or other children living outside the home, including and any relevant past relationship issues.

Infertility Issues: Discuss applicants' condition of infertility, their feelings about infertility, how infertility was and/or is handled, and how this has been resolved.

Family Operations: Discuss expectations, responsibilities, division of labor, nudity, privacy, etc. Discuss family rules, roles, and boundaries. Explain how family members handle stress and express negative feelings. Be specific. Include examples of statements and behaviors that support your assessment. Reflect on the results from the Available Time Scale.

- i Other Household Members: Discuss other household members, including any who reside in the home part-time (e.g., grandparents, college children, exchange students, and part-time or full-time help). Also include the results of Drug Screen, Health Statement, CPS history, Sexual Offender's Registry, Pardons and Parole and the Department of Corrections and GBI/FBI criminal history checks of each person 18 years of age and older in the home.
- ii Parenting role of other household members: Discuss the role of other household members in the home and whether or not they will serve as substitute caregivers, and if so, how often. Discuss how prepared other household members are to care for children, if they plan to serve as a substitute caregiver.

Extended Family: Describe the applicants' interaction with their extended family and the community. Describe the applicants' relationships with members of their extended family, friends, neighbors, church, and community. Discuss the attitudes extended family members have toward the applicants becoming foster and/or adoptive parents, including their degree of acceptance.

Religion: Describe the family's religious background and practices. Discuss the family's ability to accept religious practices other than their own. Also discuss the family's willingness to take a child to a place of worship of his or her own choice.

## **Home Environment**

Neighborhood and Home: Describe the income level, age group, and racial makeup of the neighborhood residents as well as the general property maintenance. Address the applicants' home and neighborhood as an environment for childcare, including the adequacy of space for children to play both inside and outside.

In the description of the applicants' home, include specific sleeping arrangements and

physical descriptions of the foster and/or adoptive child(ren)'s room(s). Discuss the number of rooms and types of beds in each room that will be used for children placed. Include any impact additional children will have on the sleeping arrangements of current family members and their reaction to the changes. Discuss if current family members and potential placements will have adequate space to utilize common areas. Discuss how the family will share bathrooms and if the number of bathrooms seems reasonable to accommodate an increased family size. Include observations of the home environment as it relates to:

- a. Soundness of physical dwelling (address all visible/known dangers: roofing, porches, steps, doors, windows, flooring, etc.);
- b. Cleanliness (clothing, furnishings, waste: garbage, trash, animal feces, etc.);
- c. Appearance of electrical wiring system, fixtures and outlets;
- d. Appearance of gas lines and heating/cooking appliances;
- e. Availability and condition of running water indoors;
- f. Availability and condition of toilet facilities indoors;
- g. Appearance of household furnishings; and
- h. Presence and appearance of external storage facilities and/or environmental hazards:
  - i. Equipment/vehicles (including operable/inoperable and/or unlocked);
  - ii. Adequacy of fencing/gates; and
  - iii. Access to busy streets and/or highways.

Safety Issues: The applicants' knowledge of basic safety issues must be discussed, including firearm, automobile, and water safety issues. Discuss the applicants' plan regarding swimming and wading pools, ponds, lakes, trampolines, and any concern identified during the assessor's observation of the home environment. If firearms are present, all necessary precautions must be taken (firearms and ammunition must be kept separate from each other and in locked compartments at all times). Discuss the applicants' plan to keep medications out of children's reach and how these plans meet Safety and Quality Standards. Confirm that the Caregiver Child Safety Agreement was reviewed and signed.

Tobacco Use in Home: Discuss whether or not anyone in the household smokes and if smoking is allowed in the home. If so, discuss where smoking is allowed and if any changes will be made once children are placed in the home.

### **Employment and Income**

Employment: Discuss the current and most recent types of employment held. If an applicant was employed in a child caring capacity, discuss what type, when, and the reason for termination(s). Discuss the hours of employment and what impact, if any, work hours will have on the placement of infants, school age children, and older youth.

Income: List total income for each applicant, sources, and frequency of pay (see form Financial Statement for Resource Parenting). Based on the number of children expected to be placed, use the expenses guide to discuss how the applicants' income does or does not support that they have the financial sufficiency to manage initial placement expenses and re-occurring expenses on a reimbursement basis. Discuss evidence of the family's current financial stability, such as proof of current utility or mortgage/rent payments.

Adoptive Only: Address the applicants' ability to support a child without Adoption Assistance, if they seek placement of a child with a non-special needs determination.

## **Separation and Loss**

Address the applicants' understanding of the dynamics of separation, child placement and significant losses. Address how these have been managed and/or resolved by applicants during their lives. You may include stages of grieving. Examples: the deaths of friends or relatives, the death of a child, miscarriages, infertility, experiences of victimization, loss of job, children leaving home, health losses, and natural disaster. How have the applicants' own losses equipped them to help an adoptive and/or foster child work through his or her losses? Discuss the applicants' ability to communicate with and help a child deal with his or her out of home placement and/or adoption. Discuss the applicants' ability to help children grieve by accepting feelings of denial, anger, and depression.

## **Caregiver Protective Capacities**

Ability to Meet Child Vulnerabilities: Discuss the applicants' protective capacities as a caregiver. Discuss the applicants' understanding of the dynamics of child abuse and neglect. Address the applicants' sensitivity to and feelings about children who may have been subjected to abuse and/or neglect; and who are dealing with being separated from their biological family. Include the applicants' understanding of how these issues and feelings will affect them as well as the children they will foster and/or adopt. Include the applicants' ability to help children with their experience of abuse and neglect and the availability of community resources to meet the needs of the children.

Ability to Support Educational Stability: Discuss applicants' commitment to assisting youth with educational stability by providing transportation, participating in school conferences, assisting with homework, etc. List the school zones for which the applicants are zoned and to which schools they can provide transportation (This may also be expressed by a radius of miles within which the applicants are willing to drive in order to support youth remaining in their home school).

## **Partnership Parenting**

Birth family Connections: Discuss the applicants' acceptance of the (prospective foster or adoptive) child's feelings about his or her birth family and the applicants' ability to help the child deal with these feelings. Describe the applicants' ability to support the child's relationship with his or her birth family, including extended family. Include the degree of support for contacts between the child and his or her siblings and other birth family.

Describe the prospective foster parents' feelings, willingness, and ability to work with birth families toward reunification, including methods used to support this plan. Reflect on results from the Foster Parent Role Performance Scale and Receptivity to Birth Family Connections Scale.

Describe the prospective adoptive parents' expectations about any ongoing relationship with a child's birth family and their ability to support a child's search for his/her birth family. If this is an adoption by a relative or relative foster care, address the relative's:

1. Plan for protecting the child from exposure to the conditions from which the child was removed;
2. Thoughts and feelings about the child's parents and other members of the child's family;

3. Frequency of contact with the child's parents; and
4. Attitudes towards parental visitation and contact.

Describe the applicants' sensitivity to and feelings about the child's need to stay connected to people (other than birth parents) who have been important in the child's life (e.g., foster parents, teachers, friends, siblings).

### **Behavior Management and Discipline** (Reflect on actual experience in each area)

Knowledge of Child Development: Discuss the applicants' knowledge of child development. Discuss the applicants' child-care experience if they have no children.

Discipline: Describe the ways in which the applicants were disciplined as children and their feelings about the discipline they received. Discuss the applicants' values (parenting philosophy) regarding child discipline and care. Describe the applicants' current methods of disciplining children. If their current disciplinary practices are incompatible with DFCS discipline policies, explain how they plan to reconcile their practices with DFCS policies. Include the applicants' ability to support DFCS discipline policy.

Behavior Management: Discuss the applicants' ability to manage the behaviors of children who have been sexually or physically abused and/or neglected. Explore the applicants' abilities to manage specific behaviors, such as sexual acting out, aggression, abusive language, etc. Discuss the applicants' ability to manage a child's behavior associated with separation and loss.

### **Child Supervision and Childcare**

Describe the applicant's knowledge/experience related to child supervision. Address the applicants' plans for child care (if both are employed) and their plans for any babysitting needs during emergency or occasional outings.

### **Partnership with DFCS**

Explore the applicants' understanding of their role as caregivers in partnership with DFCS and their ability to advocate for the child's needs. Describe the applicants' ability to accept and act on recommendations from DFCS. Discuss applicants' understanding and acceptance of the frequency of home visits by DFCS (both announced and unannounced). Discuss applicants' understanding that DFCS must be informed of any changes in the household status including members moving in/out, and changes in employment or income. Discuss applicants' personal support network, including potential substitute caregivers and natural helpers.

### **Pre-Service Training/Continued Parent Development Plan**

Describe the applicants' participation in pre-service training. Discuss what the applicants' feel they learned from IMPACT FCP training. Describe the continued parent development plan agreed to by the applicants during their pre-service training. Identify the self-reported continuing education need addressed by the plan. If you have already described the need elsewhere in the home study, make only a brief statement here. Discuss the applicants' willingness to participate in post-adoption services when appropriate (adoption only). If the person writing the home study did not conduct the applicants' pre-service training, include feedback from the trainer regarding the applicants' participation as well as any other observations made by the trainer.

## **Attachments and Verifications**

### Family Evaluation Documentation

List the copies of documents reviewed or provided for the Family Evaluation.

### Confirmation Statements

Confirmation Statements are statements in the body of the written evaluation confirming that results, documents, or visual inspections, as applicable, were conducted and deemed satisfactory to meet the Safety and Quality Standards (SQS). Each of the following confirmation statements must be included in the narrative or indicated as not applicable:

1. Citizenship/Legal Residence: A copy of birth certificate, naturalization papers, US passport, or Permanent Resident Alien Form ("Green Card") has been provided.
2. Driver's License and Insurance (If applicable): The applicant has a valid State of Georgia driver's license and proof of insurance in order to transport children.
3. Marital Status: A statement declaring the applicant's marital status.
4. Smoke Alarms: Functioning smoke alarms are present on each level of the home
5. Fire Extinguisher: A functioning ABC rated fire extinguisher is present in the home.
6. Carbon Monoxide Detector: A functioning carbon monoxide detector is located on the sleeping level (s) of the home.
7. Home Environment: The home meets utilization standards for the number and description of children recommended for placement. The home was observed to be clean and free of hazards and provides a livable atmosphere.
8. Immunizations: All household members under 18 years of age are current with immunizations.
9. Pet Inoculations: (Name/breed/type pet) has been inoculated for rabies as required by state law.
10. Firearms: All firearms are secured (list location and how secured); **or** there are no firearms in the home.
11. Gas Heaters: Gas heaters are vented to avoid fire and health hazards.
12. Unvented Fuel-Fired Heaters: All unvented fuel-fired heater are equipped with an oxygen depletion safety shut off.
13. Swimming Pool: In-ground and above ground swimming pools are secured as required by policy.
14. Water/Sewage: The utility bills were reviewed and the home is on county/city water and/or sewage system; **or** the home does not use the county/city water and/or sewage system, and an approved environmental inspection has been completed.
15. Ongoing Training: Applicants agree to comply with the continuing education requirement and will complete 15 hours of additional training annually. Applicants understand that continuing education must begin within 60 days of their approval date.
16. CPR and First Aid Certification: The applicants have completed CPR and First Aid training, and their certification is current.
17. References: The minimum number of required references was received and was acceptable.

## **Caregivers' Placement Preferences**

Discuss the applicants' responses on the Caregiver Placement Preferences Form. Discuss

the type of placements the applicants feel that they are best qualified to foster and/or adopt (from their perspective). Discuss the applicants' preferences in working with birth families. Discuss what type of Partnership Parenting activities they would be most comfortable offering. Discuss how the placement preferences are related to motivation.

## **References**

List the references provided by the applicants on the Caregiver References List form. If a listed reference was not used or did not provide a reference, indicate why. If additional references were required, explain why (e.g., an employment reference was needed because the applicant works at a daycare center).

For each reference received, list from whom it was received, their relationship to the applicant(s), and a summary of the reference. Discuss how any ambivalences or ambiguities were resolved.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### Conclusion

Considering all information gathered during the assessment and training process, summarize key information that highlights the protective capacities and challenges of the applicants, both individually and as a couple (if applicable). If any other household member will be serving as a substitute caregiver, discuss their protective capacities and challenges as well.

### Recommendations

State a specific recommendation to approve or deny the application, along with information from the Family Assessment that supports the recommendation. Address how any challenges described above will be addressed and how protective capacities may be increased.

Discuss any differences between the applicants' Caregiver Placement Preferences Form selections and the assessor's recommendations. Describe the number, gender(s), age(s) and special needs and/or disabilities, and behaviors the applicants are best qualified to parent (e.g., sexual acting out, withdrawal, hyperactivity, noted emotional problems needing counseling, noted mental delays or retardation, minor to severe medical problems, etc.). Identify any special abilities or qualifications of the applicants. Discuss behavior, background, special-needs status, or other characteristics of children the applicants cannot accept for placement.

### Attestation Statement

"I attest that this Family Assessment was completed by a qualified assessor, the applicant(s) meet the Safety and Quality Standards, and all attachments, verifications, and processes for approval have been completed."

## **Required Signatures (Electronic signatures in Georgia SHINES are acceptable)**

Resource Development Case Manager

Resource Development Supervisor

DFCS /CPA County Director or Designee and Official Approval Date

## **PROCEDURES**

### **The certified assessor will:**

1. Utilize information gathered from interviews, documentation, references, screening, participation in pre-service training, and other sources to conduct a holistic review of prospective caregivers.
2. Formally document the above referenced information in the Initial Family Evaluation.
3. For prospective adoptive parents, include the applicants' plans regarding the child's name. Document information about the child if this is an adoption by a relative or if it is a child-specific foster or adoption case:
  - a. Child's name, age, general health, and any specific medical problems;
  - b. Child's history of previous placements and a description of the current placement;
  - c. Child's school adjustment (At a minimum include the child's grade level, academic performance, and potential conduct problems);
  - d. Child's feelings about the relative and/or potential caregiver and the amount of past and current contact with the relative; and
  - e. Any observations of the child's interactions with the relative and/or potential caregiver.

## **PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

N/A

## **FORMS AND TOOLS**

N/A