

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	March 2015
	Policy Title:	Discipline and Behavior Management		
	Policy Number:	14.20	Previous Policy #:	1015.20 - 1015.23

CODES/REFERENCES

Taylor v. Ledbetter, 791 F.2d 881 (11th Cir.1986)

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Placing Agencies (CPA) shall prohibit approved caregivers, school systems, and any other caregivers for children in DFCS custody from using physical/corporal or emotional punishment as a method of disciplining children in foster care.

DFCS and CPAs shall prohibit caregivers for children in DFCS custody from using parenting practices that demean, humiliate, degrade, create anxiety/fear, and deny children their basic right to be reared in a manner that is instructive, firm, nurturing, and humane. This includes name-calling, criticism, or deprecation of a child's racial/ethnic heritage and socio-economic station in life.

PROCEDURES

The Resource Development (RD) and/or Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) and CPAs will:

1. Ensure all approved caregivers have a copy of the Caregiver Child Safety Agreement and adhere to the agency's discipline policy.
2. Share any known behavior issues the child may have with the caregivers and any behavior management techniques that have been successful with the child in the past.
3. Respond promptly to concerns expressed by caregivers regarding managing the behavior of a child placed in their home/facility, and identify appropriate resources to assist in the implementation of effective discipline techniques.
4. Recognize high stress factors within the placement setting home and offer appropriate services to help maintain a safe, nurturing environment.
5. Provide school principals written notification of the identity of a child in foster care, including a statement that corporal punishment is prohibited as a means of discipline or correction. This (confidential) statement is provided at the time of enrollment.

NOTE: School administrators should be reminded to keep all matters pertaining to the child confidential.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Discipline and Punishment

The 1989 U.S. District Consent Decree, Taylor vs. Ledbetter, guides the DFCS Discipline Policy. The Decree provides that any **physical/corporal or emotional punishment to a**

child in foster care is prohibited. Physical/corporal punishment is defined as the deliberate infliction of pain to the body of the individual. Emotional punishment involves deliberate actions toward a child that produce, hurt, fear, anxiety and any other negative emotions in a child.

The Department acknowledges that parenting is extremely challenging. The responsibilities of caring for children in agency custody are great and require an understanding of each child's needs. Caregivers are required to know the difference between discipline and punishment. Disciplinary approaches should be based on the child's age and particular needs as well as the circumstances. It is more important to use positive reinforcement than punishment to manage behavior.

Discipline establishes a standard of behavior. It is training that seeks to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior. It should be a **constructive** process that helps a child learn to control his/her own behavior (self-discipline). On the other hand, punishment focuses on controlling behavior through use of coercive means (i.e., force, dominance, harsh penalties). Caregivers may have used some forms of physical/corporal and emotional punishment with their own children. However, it is necessary to remember that children reared in a nurturing family where their needs are consistently met may be able to tolerate punishment in a different way than children removed from their families where they experienced severe abuse and neglect. Children entering foster care usually feel at least one and often all of the following:

1. Negative attention is better than no attention;
2. The natural response to frustration, disappointment, anger, etc. is violence or verbal abuse;
3. Any form of physical action by a care taker may lead to severe abuse, creating fear and mistrust;
4. They are not loveable, which is reinforced by physical/corporal punishment and verbal demeaning; and/or
5. They are the reason their family is not together and deserve punishment.

Discipline within the School System

As an agency charged with the well-being of children, DFCS has a responsibility to advocate for the adoption of policies which are in the best interest of children who have been traumatized due to acts of neglect and abuse. Therefore, DFCS staff should advocate with school systems for the abolition of corporal punishment as a method of disciplining children in care. Some schools, in keeping with state laws relating to this issue, may require a statement from a licensed medical doctor stating that corporal punishment is detrimental to a child's mental or emotional stability.

Application of the DFCS Discipline Policy

The DFCS Discipline Policy applies to all children in DFCS custody regardless of placement type.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Foster Parent Manual](#)