

	<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>	Home Closure		
	<b>Policy Number:</b>	14.23	<b>Previous Policy #:</b>	1015.35

**CODES/REFERENCES**

N/A

**REQUIREMENTS**

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall permanently close the home of approved caregivers under the following circumstances:

1. Following a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect, unless a waiver is granted by the appropriate State Office department for the home to remain open in order to facilitate permanency for a specific child;
2. Following an unsubstantiated case of child abuse or neglect if, based on all known information, there are concerns about the appropriateness of a caregiver to provide care for children in DFCS custody.
3. Following any violation of Foster Care Policy that has a direct impact on the safety and well-being of a child in the home;
4. Following a second Discipline or Serious Foster Care policy violation, unless a waiver is granted by the appropriate State Office department for the home to remain open in order to facilitate permanency for a specific child;
5. Following a second policy violation for failing to obtain the required hours of Continued Parent Development;
6. When a family is unable or unwilling to demonstrate caregiver protective capacity and is not amenable to change, corrections, or DFCS intervention (e.g., refuses to sign a Corrective Action Plan); and
7. When the home fails to meet the Safety and Quality Standards despite directives for corrective measures and opportunity for correction.

DFCS shall assess the need to close an approved home under the following circumstances:

1. The home has consistently refused to accept placements;
2. The caregiver has requested closure;
3. The home has been determined to be inappropriate (based on re-evaluation or reassessment) to provide care and services on behalf of the target population of children and families being served; and
4. Caregivers have relocated and have failed to notify the County DFCS of the move for a period of six months or more.

DFCS shall send a letter to the family within 10 days of a face-to-face meeting describing the reasons for closure and the official closure date. If the face-to-face meeting is not possible, DFCS will document the reason no face-to-face meeting was conducted.

## PROCEDURES

### **Upon the decision that an approved home is to be closed, the local DFCS will:**

1. Conduct a face-to-face meeting to discuss the reason(s) for closure and determine if there are special supportive services needed to assist the family in bringing closure to any unresolved issues around the removal of the children or the agency's role and responsibility.
2. Send a letter to the family within 10 days of the face-to-face meeting describing the reasons for closure and the official closure date. The letter will include the County Director's/Designee's availability to meet with them, an explanation of the grievance process, and a statement regarding whether or not the closure of the home is related to a grievable issue.
3. Notify caregivers that closure due to substantiated child abuse and/or neglect in their home is a non-grievable issue. If requested, the County Director/Designee may meet with caregivers to afford them the opportunity to be heard.
4. Reassess caregivers that have been inactive for a period of six months due to the request of the caregivers and provide notification (verbal and written) if the caregivers have been determined to be unable to meet the needs of children entering care.
5. Document the home closure and required Director/Designee approval in the Contact Detail in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES).
6. Notify the State Permanency Unit when an approved adoptive home is closed.
7. Request the foster parent(s) to complete the Foster Parent Exit Survey
  - a. Provide the web address. (See Forms and Tools section)
  - b. Explain that the local DFCS is not involved in with exit survey process.

## PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Some caregivers will depart from DFCS due to circumstances unrelated to the foster care program. DFCS should use this opportunity to explore with the caregivers any recommendations or suggestions they are willing to share regarding the foster care program as well as other ways they may be of service to DFCS. The closure of an approved home should be carefully considered and conducted in a manner that recognizes the family's contributions to the foster care program. Whenever possible, the decision to close a home should be mutually determined by the County DFCS and the caregivers. Counties should consult their Regional Adoption Coordinator (RAC) as needed. When the recommendation for the closure of a home is received from the State Office, the County DFCS should notify the State Permanency Unit of the actual date of closure within two business days.

### **Closing a Home following an unsubstantiated Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation**

An "unsubstantiated" case disposition is not indicative of reported allegations being unfounded or untrue. The "unsubstantiated" case disposition simply indicates there was not a preponderance of evidence to support an allegation of maltreatment. Therefore, after carefully considering all known information, DFCS may still have concerns about the appropriateness of a foster home to provide care for children in DFCS custody. In accordance with DFCS Safety and Quality Standards, approved caregivers must demonstrate the maturity, stability, fitness, skills, and competency to successfully protect, nurture, and meet the developmental needs of children. When there are concerns about a caregiver's ability to do so, DFCS has a responsibility to consider all known information that

impacts child safety and well-being. This may result in DFCS exercising its discretion to close the foster home to ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of children in DFCS custody.

### **Homes with a history of refusing or ejecting placements**

When reassessing inactive homes for closure, the assessment must include a discussion with the caregivers around their ongoing motivation and commitment, the needs of the children entering care, and the ability of the caregivers to provide care based on these needs.

### **Exit Meeting at Termination of Service**

Homes may be closed voluntarily at the request of the caregiver or involuntarily due to failure to meet agency expectations regarding good practice in child welfare. Caregivers are a valuable source of information for improvement of DFCS policy and service delivery to children and families. They can also help the agency strengthen its collaboration on behalf of children with community stakeholders. Consequently, when the decision is made to close a home, the DFCS County Director/Designee will:

1. Send a letter to the caregiver within 10 days of the closure indicating the reasons for closure and the effective date;
2. Indicate in the closure letter, the desire to conduct an exit meeting with the family at a scheduled date and time; and
3. Address the following areas in the exit meeting with the family:
  - a. The appreciation DFCS has for the family's contribution as a member of the foster care team;
  - b. The DFCS role as mandated protector of children in foster care;
  - c. The primary reason the family decided to discontinue foster, if applicable;
  - d. What, if anything, DFCS might have done differently that would have prevented the foster home closure;
  - e. Description of the family's overall experience with DFCS; and
  - f. Recommendations or suggestions for improvement the family may be willing to share.

<b>FORMS AND TOOLS</b>
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[Foster Parent Exit Interview](#)