

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(10) Foster Care	Effective Date:	May 2024
	Policy Title:	Promoting Normalcy for Children in Foster Care		
Policy Number:	10.14	Previous Policy #:	10.14, 14.18, 14.26	

CODES/REFERENCES

O.C.G.A. § 49-5-8.1 Short-term Respite Care of Child in Foster Care; Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Sections 471(a)(10), 471(a)(24), 475(10), and (11)

Public Law (PL) 113-183 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) will:

1. Ensure each child in foster care has ongoing opportunities to engage in age and developmentally appropriate activities (i.e., extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities). This includes young adults 18 years of age and older participating in the extended foster care program. *The term age or developmentally appropriate means:*
 - a. *Activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally appropriate for a child based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group; and*
 - b. *In the case of a specific child, activities or items that are suitable for the child based on the developmental stages attained by the child with respect to cognitive, emotional, physical and behavioral capacities of the child.*
2. Actively encourage the input of parents regarding the type of activities in which they would like their children to participate, and include parents in the decision making whenever possible.
3. *Allow caregivers to apply the reasonable and prudent parenting standard (RPPS) when determining whether to allow children in foster care under the responsibility of the state to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.*
 - a. *In this context, ‘caregiver’ means a foster parent with whom a child in foster care has been placed or a designated official for a child caring institution (CCI) in which a child in foster care has been placed.*
 - b. *RPPS is defined as the standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child.*
 - c. This includes activities such as clubs, school and community sports, school field trips, youth group activities, service organizations, birthday parties, sleepovers, outings with peers, driver’s education, in-state vacations with the caregiver’s family or other families, summer and school break camps.
 - d. This includes assessing and approving the plan of supervision for children and youth engaging in activities while not under the direct supervision or oversight of the caregiver.

- e. A caregiver's decisions regarding a child's participation in activities must not be contrary to a pre-existing court order or impact parent/child reunification activities such as visitation.

EXCEPTION: Major decisions that have a significant effect on the life of a child in foster care require approval from the County DFCS and/or juvenile court (see Practice Guidance: Exceptions to Caregiver Decision-Making).

- 4. *Ensure prospective foster and adoptive parents are adequately prepared with the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of a child. As necessary, such preparation shall continue after placement of the child and includes knowledge and skills relating to the RPPS for the participation of the child in age or developmentally appropriate activities, including knowledge and skills relating to the developmental stages of the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities of a child and applying the standard to decisions such as whether to allow the child to engage in social, extracurricular, enrichment, cultural and social activities, including sports, field trips and overnight activities lasting one or more days and involving the signing of permission slips and arranging transportation for the child to and from extracurricular enrichment and social activities.*
- 5. *Ensure the standards for family foster home and CCIs permit use of the RPPS.*
 - a. *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.*
 - 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 one official who, with respect to any child placed at the CCI, is designated to be the caregiver who is authorized to apply the RPPS 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 RPPS in the same manner as prospective foster parents are provided the training pursuant to paragraph 471(a)(24).*
- 6. *Ensure the standards for family foster homes and CCIs include policies related to the liability of foster parents and private entities under contract by the state involving the application of the RPPS 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 RPPS.*
- 7. Allow children in foster care the opportunity for spiritual development in accordance with the wishes of the children and their parent(s).
- 8. Require caregivers to keep records of a child's participation in activities and significant decisions and share them with the child's Social Services Case Manager (SSCM)/CPA staff during regular contacts.
- 9. Obtain written authorization from the child's parent(s) (if termination of parental rights has not occurred) and/or the Juvenile Court before a child in DFCS custody travels outside of the State of Georgia or outside of the United States. The written authorization for the travel shall include authorization for the caregiver to obtain emergency medical treatment for the child.

EXCEPTION: Children whose placement borders another state whose proximity makes traveling across the state line part of the caregivers' normal routine.

PROCEDURES

DFCS/CPA/CCI staff will:

1. Review the RPPS with caregivers.
 - a. Promote caregivers' understanding of how to apply it to decisions regarding children and youth participation in extracurricular, social enrichment, cultural, and social activities.
 - b. Document discussions of the RPPS with caregivers in Georgia SHINES within 72 hours of occurrence.
2. Discuss with children, parents, and caregivers any activities in which children are currently participating or are interested in participating.
 - a. Assist, as needed, with identifying age and developmentally appropriate activities that would promote a child's personal and social growth.
 - b. Identify the resources needed to support a child's participation in activities (e.g., financial, transportation, physical examinations, instrument, lessons, etc.).
 - c. Identify any barriers to participation and find appropriate solutions.
 - d. Address any issues or concerns about children participating in religious activities with the caregivers.
 - i. To the extent possible, allow children to attend their own place of worship and support participation by the parents.
 - ii. Consult with parents before allowing their children to participate in significant religious rituals and activities (e.g., baptism).
 - e. Review the caregivers' records and document the child's participation in activities in Georgia SHINES.
3. Discuss with caregivers the opportunities each child placed in the home has been provided to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities. Help caregivers find solutions to any identified barriers to participation.
4. Ask caregivers to provide advance notice of plans for the child to travel out-of-state or out-of-country to ensure there is adequate time to obtain consent from a parent or the juvenile court.

NOTE: If the parent and/or the juvenile court does not authorize the travel, arrange for a temporary placement (respite care) for children during the time the caregiver is away (see policy [14.18 Resource Development: Supervision of Children](#)).

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Promoting Normalcy for Children in Foster Care

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act contains provisions to promote normalcy for children in foster care. This means allowing children and youth in foster care to experience childhood and adolescence in ways similar to their peers who are not in foster care. Children in foster care should have opportunities to participate in activities that are appropriate to their age and stage of development, and promote personal and social growth, self-esteem, and independence. Caregivers are responsible for making routine, day-to-day decisions regarding the ongoing care and maintenance of children placed in their home. When applying the reasonable and prudent parenting standard, the goal is to promote normalcy for children in foster care to the fullest extent possible. Participation in extracurricular and other childhood activities is important to the child's social and emotional well-being and promotes the development of valuable life skills.

Extracurricular, Cultural, and Social Activities

Participation in age-appropriate activities helps children to develop their social, emotional and

intellectual skills. Children should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, band, choir, 4-H and other school clubs, field trips, etc.), cultural activities (e.g., museum exhibits, dance recitals, plays, etc.) and social activities (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, martial arts, bowling, movies, etc.). Unfortunately, some children in care may not have had previous experiences with engaging in such activities before entering foster care. Consequently, some may require special assistance with learning how to participate appropriately in such activities. When appropriate, a child's parents should be allowed to participate in events and activities that occur in their child's life. This is in keeping with the concept of partnership parenting wherein foster parents work with a child's parents to help enhance the parents' parental capacities and provide them with parenting opportunities while their children are in foster care. Just like the children in foster care, some of their parents may not have ever had previous experience with participating in many events or activities with their children. Engaging the parents outside of court rooms and DFCS offices can help build positive working relationships and help parents experience the joy of parenting that may have been overshadowed stress and the trauma of having their children removed from their custody.

Spiritual Development

Parents of children in foster care retain certain residual rights, even though DFCS holds temporary custody. Determining their child's religious affiliation is one of these.—When appropriate, parents should be allowed to participate in religious activities that occur in their child's life. Given that foster parents could hold personal spiritual beliefs that differ from those of children, or the parents of children placed in their home, careful consideration must be given to this issue during the placement selection process. By considering potential conflicts ahead of time, agencies may avoid placement disruptions or placing children in homes where neither they nor their foster parents feel comfortable engaging in the spiritual practices of their choice.

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard

When applying this standard, a caregiver must consider what is age or developmentally appropriate for a particular child. In other words, the caregiver must know what activities are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity. Since many children in foster care experience developmental delays as a result of maltreatment or early childhood trauma, caregivers must determine what is suitable for each child based upon the developmental stages attained by the child with respect to cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities.

Depending on where a child is developmentally, it may not be reasonable or prudent to allow the child to participate in certain activities or the child may require a higher level of supervision than another child of the same chronological age. In some instances, a child may lack the capacity to perform certain tasks that another child might be able to perform. Thus, knowledge of a child's individual capacities and good judgment are required to successfully apply this standard. For instance, when determining whether to allow youth 14 years of age and older to be left under their own supervision for short periods of time (e.g., an hour after school or when foster parents are attending to short-term personal matters) caregivers must ensure the youth do not have physical, mental, or emotional issues that inhibit their ability to function for a short period of time independent of a caregiver. In addition, caregivers must ensure youth are aware of procedures to be taken in case of an emergency and have access to emergency contact numbers for the caregiver and other approved contacts (e.g., relative, neighbor, or friend). If a caregiver or other entity under contract with DFCS acts in accordance with this standard when

approving a child's participation in an age or developmentally appropriate activity, immunity from civil liability exists. Nevertheless, caregiver's decisions regarding such activities cannot be contrary to a pre-existing court order.

Exceptions to Caregiver Decision-Making

Major decisions that have a significant effect on the life of a child in foster care require approval from the County DFCS and/or juvenile court. Some decisions should be made in consultation with a child's parent(s) as well, especially if parental rights have not been terminated. Examples of major decisions include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Changing a child's school, school attendance, IEP, or participation in a GED program.
2. Changing a child's psychotropic or other prescribed medication (including initiating or stopping) or altering the administration of medication (e.g., dosage, frequency, etc.).
3. Authorizing children to have major medical procedures.
4. Changing a child's court-ordered visitation plan (e.g., date, location, supervision, etc.).
5. Stopping children from visiting their siblings.
6. Drastically altering a child's appearance (e.g., cutting and/or applying chemicals to the child's hair, body piercing, tattoos, etc.).
7. Changing a child's religion.
8. Allowing a child to engage in religious ceremonies (e.g., Baptism, Confirmation, etc.).
9. Stopping a youth from participating in the DFCS Independent Living Program (ILP).
10. Authorizing a youth to obtain a driver's license.
11. Authorizing a youth to travel out-of-state; and/or
12. Granting a youth approval to date.

Below are examples of things that are non-negotiable, and caregivers may not do:

1. Return children to the caregiver from whom they were removed (e.g., parents, adoptive parents, relatives, legal guardians, etc.) without court approval.
2. Violate the DFCS discipline policy.
3. Violate a court order.

FORMS AND TOOLS

N/A