

	<p>Division of Family and Children Services Child Welfare Manual</p>	<p>Chapter: 1015.41 Foster Homes Effective Date: April 1, 2012</p>
		<p>Previous Policy #: N/A</p>

POLICY TITLE: GRADUATED INDEPENDENCE: Supervision of Older Youth
POLICY NUMBER: 1015.41

CODES

REQUIREMENT

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), Room Board Watchful Oversight (RBWO) providers and caregivers shall permit youth ages 14 and older to participate in a written graduated independence plan when appropriate.

The Graduated Independence Plan (GIP) allows youth 14 and older in DFCS custody that are assessed by DFCS and the RBWO provider to be reliable and competent to participate unsupervised in age-appropriate activities for short periods of time. This may include but is not limited to participation in school and community activities, or when the caregiver is attending to personal matters of brief duration such as grocery shopping. The youth must have demonstrated the skill and maturity to be left unsupervised. The GIP must be designed based on the youth's individualized circumstances.

NOTE: A GIP can be initiated (requested) by the youth, caregiver, DFCS SSCM and the RBWO provider.

PROCEDURE

Upon request to initiate a GIP, the DFCS Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) and the RBWO provider (as applicable) shall:

1. Assess the youth's appropriateness for a Graduated Independence Plan (GIP):
 - a. Discuss the consideration of the GIP with the caregiver to include:
 - i. The caregiver's perspective regarding the youth's adjustment and stability in the placement.
 - ii. The youth's reliability and maturity level.
 - iii. The caregiver's capacity to manage the GIP.

NOTE: For DFCS foster parents, the Resource Development (RD) staff should be engaged in assessing this area.

- b. Review recent assessments to include the Casey Life Skills Assessment (CLSA), mental health assessments, CCFA, etc.
- c. Consult with the youth's CASA/GAL, therapist, counselor, probation officer, and any other relevant parties that can provide guidance or specific parameters in the development of the GIP.

- d. Consider the youth's history of responsible behavior and their ability to safely and appropriately care for themselves independent of a caregiver. Other important criteria to consider include the following:
- i. Stability and adjustment to current placement.
 - ii. Current and historical behaviors related to judgment, maturity, reliability, and trustworthiness.
 - iii. Current and historical emotional/psychological stability.
NOTE: Discuss the GIP parameters with youth's therapist if there are concerns.
 - iv. History of running away and other status offenses¹.
 - v. Current and historical delinquent behavior.
NOTE: If youth is DJJ involved, discuss the GIP parameters being considered to ensure that there are no conflicts with probation requirements.
 - vi. Current and historical alcohol and substance abuse issues.
 - vii. Youth's gender and relationship of other children in the home to the youth (for GIPs related to staying in the home unsupervised.)
NOTE: Youth must not be utilized to supervise other children in the home.)
 - viii. Number of youth present in the home (and their relationship with each other (for GIPs related to staying in the home unsupervised.)
 - ix. Current and historical behaviors related to sexual acting out, sexual offenses, etc.
NOTE: For youth that are designated sexual offenders with a relapse prevention plan, the treating therapist must approve any plan for the youth to participate in a GIP.
 - x. Current and historical school performance (academic and behavioral).
 - xi. Safety of the home environment (firearm safety, water safety, any other potential hazards, etc.).
 - xii. Youth's understanding of what constitutes an emergency; and, when and who to call in such situations.
Youth's ability to readily access the caregiver or other identified person (s) should the need arise.
2. If the youth is assessed to be appropriate for the GIP, in consultation with the DFCS and RBWO supervisor, a GIP should be developed with the youth and caregiver. GIPs involving DFCS foster parents should also include the RD staff. For reunification cases, the parent should also be involved in the development of the GIP.
- a. The GIP establishes in writing all permitted freedoms, expectations, parameters and grounds for terminating the agreement.

¹ Status offenses are acts that are considered offenses solely because the offender is a child under the age of 18. The current Georgia juvenile code refers to these children as "unruly children." Examples of status offenses include truancy, curfew violation and running away behaviors.

NOTE: The terms of the GIP must be discussed with the youth, including the permitted freedoms, expectations and parameters including grounds and process for terminating the GIP.

- b. The GIP must be signed by all parties (youth, caregiver, DFCS SSCM, RBWO provider, DFCS Supervisor and parent if a reunification case).

NOTE: The GIP is effective only upon the signature of all parties involved.

- c. The youth must be provided with a copy.
- 3. If the GIP is initiated by the RBWO provider:
 - a. Invite the DFCS case manager to participate in the development of the plan.
 - b. Document the DFCS case manager and Supervisor's agreement with the plan and obtain their signatures.
 - c. Provide a copy of the GIP to the DFCS case manager.
 - 4. The GIP shall be incorporated into the youth's Written Transitional Living Plan (WTLP), and the RBWO provider's Individualized Service Plan (ISP).
 - 5. The DFCS SSCM must upload the GIP in SHINES, External Documentation.
 - 6. The GIP shall be updated at a minimum of every six (6) months (in conjunction with the WTLP or ISP), or sooner, should the youth circumstances or needs change.
 - 7. The GIP is subject to termination by DFCS, RBWO and caregiver if the youth violates the agreement.
 - a. Terms for termination of the GIP must be included in the agreement.
 - b. When termination of a GIP is requested, a meeting shall be held to include the youth, caregiver, RBWO provider, DFCS (SSCM and RD) to discuss the reason (s) for termination, whether GIP can be modified, and expectations in order to implement a new GIP in the future.

NOTE: The caregiver may suspend the GIP pending the outcome of the meeting when safety concerns exist.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Graduated Independence

Learning to be responsible for one's self develops a sense of normalcy, personal responsibility, independence, confidence in personal abilities and self-control. Developing such independence skills is a rite of passage that supports normal adolescent development. Independence or unsupervised time should be gradually increased (Graduated Independence) to help the youth test their own skills as well as build trust and confidence with caregivers in their ability to follow rules and expectations. DFCS staff, RBWO providers and caregivers must be reasonably assured that youth approved for Graduated Independence are appropriate to participate.

Whether being facilitated by a DFCS case manager or RBWO provider, development of a Graduated Independence Plan must be done in consultation with and approved by the DFCS supervisor. The GIP should be included in the child's service plan and WTLP.

For youth in family foster care, caregivers play an important role in the success of the GIPs. Caregivers must assure that youth are aware of procedures to be taken in case of an emergency and can access the caregiver through emergency contact numbers, and others such as approved nearby relative, neighbor or case manager.

Assessing Youth's Appropriateness for GIP

Each youth's journey to independence often takes different paths. For example, some youth easily follow curfews, educational commitments, social commitments, etc; while other youth may have intermittent periods of inconsistency, or may have been historically inconsistent, but have demonstrated consistent progress recently. The GIP can provide a sense of normalcy for a youth in DFCS custody, as it establishes freedoms and parameters for such freedoms based on the youth's individual level of maturity and capability. When determining whether a youth is appropriate for the GIP, it is especially important to consider the youth's individualized history of responsible behavior, consistency, and progress. While the aforementioned examples demonstrate different histories of responsible behavior and consistency, a youth in each situation could be determined appropriate for the GIP, even though the freedoms allowed and the parameters established may differ based on the youth's individual history.

REFERENCES

Graduated Independence Plan (FORM)