

	DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(14) Resource Development	Effective Date:	
	Policy Title:	Initial Family Evaluation Components		
Policy Number:	14.11	Previous Policy #:	1014, 1015	

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

DFCS and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) shall ensure all initial family evaluation components are completed prior to granting full approval of a prospective caregiver.

DFCS shall check any child abuse and neglect registry for information on any prospective foster and adoptive parent and any other adult living in the home for such information, before the prospective foster or adoptive parent may be finally approved for placement of a child, regardless of whether foster care maintenance payments or adoption assistance payments are to be made on behalf of the child:

1. *DFCS shall check any child abuse and neglect registry it maintains for such information.*
2. *DFCS shall request any other state in which any prospective parent or their adult household members have resided since age eighteen (18), to check any child abuse and neglect registry maintained by such other state.*
3. *DFCS shall comply with any such request to check its child abuse and neglect registry that is received from another state.*

DFCS shall require a Criminal Records Check (CRC) and medical statement for all applicants and their current household members. When youth in the household reach 18 years of age, this must be completed within thirty (30) calendar days of the youth's 18th birthday. The medical evaluation for all new adult household members must include a TB test.

DFCS shall require all applicant health, drug, and safety screening to be conducted within twelve (12) months of the completion of the Family Evaluation.

DFCS shall include a recommendation for approval or disapproval of each applicant home within the written evaluation, and provide written notification to applicants regarding their approval status within five (5) business days of the approval decision.

DFCS shall track changes in the household of approved caregivers and maintain current information regarding each home in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare information System (Georgia SHINES).

PROCEDURES

The County/Regional Resource Development (RD) or CPA will:

1. Initiate an assessment of each applicant after receipt of their application.
2. Utilize a minimum of three (3) in-home consultations to gather information, with the first consultation occurring prior to pre-service training.
3. Make observations, and have open honest discussions with applicants.
4. Conduct individual interviews with each household member and at least one family interview that includes all household members.
5. Ensure the written evaluation reflects utilization of all information gathered through interviews, verifications, documentation and forms.
6. Attest that each applicant home has been assessed according to policy requirements and that the household meets the Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).
7. Verify the applicant's income to confirm the applicant has sufficient income to maintain their family excluding the amount of the per diem received for any child in foster care. Verification may include check stubs, Federal Income Tax return from the previous years, a statement from their employer, etc.
8. Submit a completed, written Family Evaluation with all applicable documents and verifications to the County Director/Designee for approval far enough in advance for the *entire* approval process to be completed *within six (6) weeks from the final IMPACT FCP session or final in-home consultation* (whichever occurs last). **Note:** The County Director/Designee has ten (10) business days to review and make the approval decision, which is part of the six (6) week timeframe.
9. Obtain the County Director's approval of extenuating circumstances which hinder completion of the Family Evaluation within the six (6) week timeframe.
10. Send a written explanation, signed by the County Director/Designee, to all families whose Family Evaluation will not be completed within the six (6) week timeframe. Indicate the reason for the delay and a projected timeframe for completion.
11. Notify applicant families in writing within five (5) business days of the final approval decision.
12. Enter all appropriate changes/updates under the FA Home tab in Georgia SHINES as soon as the information becomes available to the agency.
13. Document all contacts with the family under the Contact/Summaries tab in Georgia SHINES.

Required Safety Screening ([See policy 14.3 Caregiver Safety Screening](#))

The RD Case Manager will obtain screenings from the following databases:

1. Criminal Records Check (CRC) through the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC); repeated every five (5) years from the date the Family Evaluation is approved
2. Child Protective Services (CPS) Records (Georgia SHINES, IDS Online Master Index, PSDS, IDS Placement Central, and County Master Files), including Foster and Adoptive Home Policy violations
3. Child Abuse and Neglect Registry in any other state the applicant has resided since age 18
4. Sexual Offenders Registry
5. Board of Pardons and Parole
6. Department of Corrections

Age Requirement

1. Married applicants must provide a copy of their birth certificates to verify they are at least ten (10) years older than the child to be placed.
2. Unmarried applicants must provide a copy of their birth certificate to verify they are at least twenty-five (25) years of age.

Citizenship Requirement

Each applicant must provide a copy of their birth certificate, naturalization papers, passport or Permanent Resident Alien Form ("Green Card").

Medical and Drug Screening

1. Caregivers must complete a comprehensive medical review, including a screening for Tuberculosis (TB), and a drug screen. The comprehensive medical reviews and health screens must be completed and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or public health department within twelve (12) months of the date of approval of the Family Evaluation.
2. Caregivers must have a medical examination completed at least every five (5) years.
3. Caregivers must utilize the Comprehensive Medical Report (Form 36) for the initial medical examination and those completed every five (5) years.
4. Caregivers with a diagnosed medical condition that may impact their ability to care for a child must obtain a health statement from the treating physician on an annual basis.
5. The drug screen must include a test for Marijuana/Cannabinoids (THC), Cocaine, Amphetamines/Methamphetamines, Opiates, Ecstasy, and Phencyclidine (PCP). It must be conducted and signed by a qualified health professional or laboratory. The report must show no evidence of illicit drug use was detected for an applicant to be considered for approval.
6. Other adult household members must complete a health screen, and TB screen (If age 18 years old or over). The TB screen may be conducted via skin test or chest x-ray.
7. A health statement must be obtained on all children in the home under sixteen (16) years of age and must be dated no more than twelve (12) months before approval of the Family Evaluation. TB screening is not required for children.
8. Other household members must utilize the Health Statement (Form 36-A).

Required References

1. Obtain at least three (3) character references either in writing, in person, or via telephone call and document the manner in which the reference was obtained.
2. If references are not obtained in writing, the assessor must document the reference in written form.
3. Contact every birth child residing outside of the household for a reference
 - a. Obtain permission from the caregiver prior to such contact
 - b. If permission is not granted or if a birth child refuses to provide a reference, reasons must be reviewed with the caregiver and used as a part of the assessment conclusion.
 - c. Birth children living in the caregiver's home are part of the household being evaluated and do not count as one of the three (3) required references.
4. Contact at least one relative not residing in the home as one of the required three (3) references.

5. Obtain a reference from an applicant's previous or current employer if the applicant is or has been employed in a job situation that involves children (e.g. school, daycare center, group residential care or intensive residential care facility, etc.) within the past five (5) years.
6. If an applicant has previously served as a foster or adoptive parent, obtain references from the former county/agency.
7. Obtain additional references if conflicting, ambivalent or inadequate statements are received from those initially requested.

Appropriate utilization of the home

The RD case manager must ensure:

1. No more than six (6) children under the age of sixteen (16), including the children of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home. The parent-child ratio may never exceed 1:6 at any time.
2. No more than two (2) children under two (2) years of age, including the children of the caregiver's family, shall be placed in the home.
3. Only bedrooms shall be used as a sleeping space for children.
4. Each non-related child must sleep in a separate bed.
5. A maximum of two (2) children may sleep in a double or larger bed. The children must be siblings and must be the same gender.
6. No child shall sleep in the bed with an adult.
7. No child over one (1) year of age sleeps in the bedroom of an adult.
8. No more than three (3) children shall share a bedroom. The suitability of children sharing a room should be assessed based on the background/history of the children.
9. Children five (5) years of age and older do not share a bedroom with a person of the opposite sex.

Environmental Standards

1. If a home is not on county/city water and/or sewage systems, a statement is required confirming that an approved environmental inspection has been completed within the preceding twelve (12) months.
2. If an environmental inspection is not applicable, a statement that the utility bills were viewed and the home is on county/city water and/or sewage system is required.
3. Homes with water wells must comply with the Water Well Standards Act.
 - a. The upper terminal of the well shall be protected by a sanitary seal or cover to prevent entrance of pollutants to the well
 - b. Negative reports from sampling of the wells without the upgrade can be construed as "safe" with an advisory that the upper well terminus should be upgraded into compliance as soon as possible.
 - c. Annual re-testing is required until the well is brought into full compliance with the Act.
4. Gas Heaters in the home must be vented.
 - a. Unvented, fuel-fired heaters equipped with oxygen depletion safety shut-off systems may be operated in foster homes. *Homes with these types of heaters may be approved for placement of no more than three (3) unrelated children*
 - b. Working carbon monoxide detectors must be installed in homes with gas heaters. It is good practice for homes with gas appliances (i.e. stove, fireplace, and water heater)

5. Smoke alarms must be present and functioning on all levels of the home.
6. Firearms must be stored under lock and key away from children with ammunition stored under lock and key in a separate location from firearms.
7. Homes with a swimming pool must meet comply with all community ordinances for operating a pool. The pool must be fenced with a gate that is kept locked to prevent unsupervised access by children. The fence must be at least four (4) feet high.
8. All animals must have vaccinations required by Georgia law.
 - a. Dogs, cats, and ferrets must be vaccinated for rabies
 - b. Re-immunizations are required either annually or triennially depending on the vaccine
 - c. Homes with exotic animals (e.g. chimpanzees, snakes, raccoons, large mammals) will require a health and suitability statement from a veterinarian, and approval by the DFCS Regional Director
 - d. Issues or concerns related to any pets must be thoroughly discussed and documented during the assessment process

Transportation

1. Advise caregivers they are expected to assist DFCS with providing transportation for children placed in their home.
2. Verify that caregivers who operate vehicles have a valid Georgia's driver's license, and valid automobile insurance.
3. If the County Department determines that the lack of transportation is an issue that can be managed effectively, the home may be approved with no waivers necessary. This should be noted in the Family Evaluation so that appropriate placements can be made.

Adoption Exchange Family Registration

1. Utilize the Adoption Exchange Family Registration Form 401 is to register adoptive parents with the Adoption Exchange. If there is a child already identified for the applicant, the child's county and name should be provided on the form.
2. Place the Family Assessment Checklist/Family Approval and Adoption Registration Cover Letter (Form 6036) on top of the Family Evaluation to serve as a cover letter when registering a family as an approved adoptive resource.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Applicants complete a Placement Preference Form, which lists applicants' preferences regarding the number and characteristics of children they would like to have placed in their home. What is approved at the conclusion of the Family Evaluation may differ from an applicant's preferences. However, the final recommendations **may not** exceed the number of children requested by the applicant. The final recommendations should also be congruent with the applicant's desires regarding the types of special needs or other characteristics they feel they can successfully manage. Applicants may update their Placement Preference Form throughout the assessment process. However, to avoid multiple changes, it is recommended that the form be completed at the last in-home consultation.

If approved, applicants may be reimbursed for certain expenses incurred during the approval process. The guidelines are in the COSTAR manual located at <http://167.193.156.254/FFS/manuals/costar/index.php>.

FORMS AND TOOLS

- Form 13 Notice of Privacy Practices (DFCS Only)
- Form 29 DFCS Child Safety Agreement
- Form 35 Prospective Parent Application
- Form 36 Comprehensive Medical report Pending
- Form 36-A Household Member Health Statement Pending
- Form 44 Financial Statement
- Form 401 Adoption Exchange Registration Form (Adoption Only)
- Form 404 Criminal Records Check
- Form 6036 Family Assessment Checklist/Family Approval and Adoption Registration Cover Letter
- Form XX CPS Screening Form Pending
- Form XX Placement Preferences Pending
- Form XX Prior Service Report Form Pending
- Caregiver References List
- Employer Reference (as applicable)
- Prior Service Reference (as applicable)
- General Reference Form
- Family Assessment Questionnaire
- Couples Questionnaire (as applicable)
- Single Applicant Questionnaire (as applicable)
- Children's Questionnaire (as applicable)
- Casey Scales
 - i Availability Time Scale
 - ii Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test
 - iii Foster Parent Role Performance Scale
 - iv Receptivity to Birth Family Connections Scale
 - v Reasons for Fostering Checklist
 - vi Social Readjustment Rating Scale
 - vii Sensitivity Issues Inventory
- IMPACT Leader Trainings and overview trainings: www.ga.score.com