



March 29, 2019

Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2019-03

To: County Departments of Family and Children Services
DFCS District Directors
DFCS Regional Directors
State Office Staff

From: Tom C. Rawlings, Division Director
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "m", is placed above the "From:" line.

Re: Child Welfare Policy Manual: Family First Prevention Services Act: National Model Standards for Foster Family Homes

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce updates to the Child Welfare Policy Manual resulting from provisions of Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) involving model standards for foster family homes.

Discussion

The Division of Family and Children Services is responsible for the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children served. When children are in out-of-home placements, their health and safety are of paramount concern. Having safety and quality standards ensures caregivers have the capacity to care for the child in foster care, and ensures that the physical home of each caregiver is appropriate and safe. The FFPSA directed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to identify reputable model standards for foster family homes. Consequently, Georgia has modified its safety and quality standards (SQS) for foster family homes to be consistent with the national model standards identified by HHS. The model standards strike a balance between allowing for individual circumstances, while establishing minimum requirements to ensure for the safety and wellbeing of children in foster care. The following policies have been updated to incorporate these provisions as well as updated provisions regarding the waiver of non-safety standards for relative/fictive kin foster homes:

14.01 Safety and Quality Standards

1. Organizes the safety and quality standards into eight categories.
 - a. Foster Home Eligibility

- b. Foster Family Home Health and Safety
 - c. Foster Home Capacity
 - d. Foster Home Sleeping Arrangements
 - e. Emergency Preparedness, Fire Safety, and Evacuation Plans
 - f. Transportation
 - g. Training
 - h. Foster Parent Assurances
2. Incorporates new terminology for DFCS Resource Development (RD) staff [i.e. Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Specialist (CRRS)].
 3. Establishes 21 years of age as the minimum age for a caregiver, and 18 years of age for a relative/fictive kin caregiver.
 4. Requires caregivers to be able to communicate with the child, DFCS/Child Placing Agency (CPA), health care providers, and other service providers.
 5. Requires at least one applicant in the home to have functional literacy (e.g. ability to read medication labels) to ensure at least one caregiver reads and writes at the level necessary to participate effectively in the community in which they live.
 6. Requires all household members to disclose current mental health and/or substance abuse issues.
 7. Requires all children who are household members to be up to date on immunizations unless the immunizations are contrary to the child's health as documented by a licensed health care professional.
 8. Requires all household members who will be caregivers of infants to have an up-to-date pertussis (whooping cough) vaccination unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed health care professional.
 9. Requires all household members who will be caregivers of infants and children with special medical needs to have an up-to-date annual influenza vaccination unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed health care professional.
 10. Reinforces that the maximum number of foster children permitted to be cared for in a foster family home is six, but now allows that number to be exceeded for any of the following reasons:
 - a. To allow a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the child of the parenting youth;
 - b. To allow siblings to remain together;
 - c. To allow a child with an established meaningful relationship with the family to remain with the family; and
 - d. To allow a family with special training or skills to provide care to a child who has a severe disability.
 11. Emphasizes that caregivers must provide a safe sleeping space including sleeping supplies; requires all children in the home to be treated equitably, meaning foster children must have sleeping arrangements similar to other household members.
 12. Requires caregivers to have emergency preparedness plans and items in place as appropriate for the home's geographic location. Caregivers must post a written

evacuation plan in a prominent place in the home (e.g., on a refrigerator or family bulletin board), and review it with the children.

13. Requires caregivers to have reliable, legal and safe transportation. Reliable transportation includes a properly maintained vehicle or access to reliable public transportation.
14. Requires that any privately-owned vehicle (owned by caregiver, caregiver's family or friends) used to transport a child in foster care be operated by someone with a valid driver's license, insurance and registration.
15. Requires caregivers and their guest not to smoke in the foster family home, in any vehicle used to transport the child, or in the presence of the child in foster care.

14.04 Waiver of Non-Safety Approval Standards for Relative/Fictive Kin Foster Homes

1. Renames policy 14.4 to Waiver of Non-Safety Approval Standards for Relative/Fictive Kin Foster Homes.
2. Adds that the waiver of non-safety standards is also applicable for fictive kin to become foster parents.
3. Identifies the approving authority for waiver requests. Waivers regarding DFCS relative/fictive kin foster homes are now approved by the DFCS Regional Director. Waivers regarding CPA relative/fictive kin foster homes are approved by the DFCS Director of the Office of Provider Management (OPM).
4. Identifies the non-safety standards most commonly waived in Practice Guidance and provides guidance for what to consider when requesting a waiver.
5. Incorporates new terminology for DFCS Resource Development (RD) staff [i.e. Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Specialist (CRRS)].

16.08 Room Board and Watchful Oversight (RBWO)

1. Clarifies that non-safety standards regarding CPA relative/fictive kin foster homes must adhere to the guidelines in policy 14.04 Waiver of Non-Safety Approval Standards for Relative/Fictive Kin Foster Homes.

Implementation

This policy update is effective upon the release of this manual transmittal and is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>.

Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to policy [1.3 Administration Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies](#) for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Please direct questions regarding this policy release to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at PPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov.