



December 11, 2017

Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2017-15

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

From: Virginia Pryor, Interim Director
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Re: Child Welfare Policy Manual:
10.1 Foster Care: Placement of a Child
10.3 Foster Care: Changes in Placement
10.4 Placement Resources
10.24 Foster Care: Trial Home Visit
Enhanced Relative Rate Application and Agreement

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce policy changes related to placement of a child in foster care including adherence to placement preferences for a child subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA); changes in placements; placement resources; trial home visits; and the Enhanced Relative Rate Application and Agreement.

Discussion

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children served. DFCS strives to make continuous improvements in the outcomes for children and families through ongoing assessments and enhancements in child welfare policy and practice. The following policy sections have been updated or created to support this effort.

10.1 Foster Care: Placement of a Child

1. Requires adherence to the placement preferences of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), if the child is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe; or eligible for membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe, and is the biological child of a member/citizen of a federally recognized Indian tribe.
2. Requires making efforts to place a child entering foster care with their sibling, including placement with a sibling already in foster care.

3. Adds procedures for supervisory guidance and oversight in making placement decisions.
4. Removes information related to pre-placement visits that is now incorporated in policy 10.3: Foster Care: Changes in Placement.

Policy 10.3 Foster Care: Changes in Placement

1. Changes the timeframe previously required for DFCS to notify placement resources of any planned placement change from ten business days to no less than five business days, aligning DFCS' policy with Georgia law (O.C.G.A. §15-11-215).
2. Remove procedures that allows the foster parent to waive the DFCS placement change notification period.
3. Requires adherence to ICWA placement preferences when a placement change is necessary for a child who is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe; or eligible for membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe, and is the biological child of a member/ citizen of a federally recognized Indian tribe.
4. Requires DFCS to obtain ten business days notice from placement resources, when they are requesting to have a child removed from their home. This was previously in the procedures section of the policy.
5. Adds procedures for the Resource Development Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) to provide support to the DFCS foster parent(s) and/or to identify placement options, upon notification of a possible placement disruption.
6. Adds procedures to convene a placement change meeting to prevent placement disruption and plan for the placement change if the child must change placements.
7. Adds procedures for supervisory guidance and oversight of placement changes.
8. Adds requirements and procedures for pre-placement visits.
9. Removes procedures related to foster parent grievances as all grievance related information is contained in policy 14.17 Resource Development: Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Grievance Procedure.
10. Removes provisions for trial home visits which is now in a new policy section 10.24 Foster Care: Trial Home Visit. Trial home visits are not considered a placement change.

10.4 Foster Care: Placement Resources

1. Requires conducting a diligent search throughout the child's duration in foster care to identify relatives and other committed individuals who can participate in the care and placement of the child.
2. Requires adherence to the placement preferences of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), if the child is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe; or eligible for membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe, and is the biological child of a member/ citizen of a federally recognized Indian tribe.

3. Removes the requirement regarding policy violation assessments on placement resources, as it has been incorporated in policy 14.22 Resource Development: Policy Violations.
4. Adds procedures to explore the potential caregiver's (non-custodial parent, relative or fictive kin) willingness and ability to care for the child and their siblings, when the child is part of a sibling group.
5. Adds procedures for supervisory guidance and oversight when exploring and selecting a placement resource for a child.

10.24 Foster Care: Trial Home Visit

1. Establishes a comprehensive process for determining if a family has made sufficient progress towards resolving or mitigating safety concerns prior to consideration of a trial home visit.
2. Requires assessing effective parenting behaviors and the quality of the interactions during visitation to determine readiness for a trial home visit.
3. Requires planning with the parent, guardian or legal custodian to ensure the needs of the child are met during the trial home visit. This includes planning for the child's educational, medical, mental health and child care needs.
4. Requires safety screenings all caregivers and adult household members prior to the trial home visit.
5. Requires criminal records checks (CRC) of all caregivers and adult household members prior to the trial home visit.
EXCEPTION: CRC are not required on the parent, guardian or legal custodian from whom the child was removed to initiate a trial home visit.
6. Requires obtaining court approval of the trial home visit.
7. Adds procedures and practice guidance for preparing the child, parent, guardian or legal custodian and the placement resource for the trial home visit to minimize trauma. This includes convening a family meeting or Family Team Meeting for the development of a plan to transition into the trial home visit.
8. Requires establishing and conducting purposeful and collateral contacts with the child, family, and collaterals throughout the trial home visit period.
9. Requires maintaining sibling visitation during the trial home visit period when siblings of the child remain in a foster care placement.
10. Adds procedures for supervisory guidance and oversight of the trial home visit process.

Enhanced Relative Rate Application and Agreement

1. Adds that the agreement becomes effective upon the approval signature of the County Director/Designee.
2. Incorporates that payments will be initiated the first day of the month following the approval of the agreement.

Implementation

This policy update is effective upon 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 your regional Field Program Specialist. Regional staff shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov.