



September 15, 2020

Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2020-07

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

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

Re: Child Welfare Policy Manual: Chapter 14 Resource Development: Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE)

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce updates to the Child Welfare Policy Manual incorporating the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) home study mode for foster and adoptive homes.

Discussion

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing of the children it serves. In order to meet this responsibility DFCS must complete a thorough and unbiased study of families seeking to become or remain foster or adoptive families. The home study helps to determine if a family is ready, willing and able to serve as a suitable and safe placement resource for children. A thorough home study is a critical analysis of families that provides a truthful view of a family's strengths and issues of concern as well as what children a family can parent successfully. Without this critical analysis, families might have children placed with them that push them beyond their emotional and physical abilities. This can result in placement disruptions, policy violations or maltreatment in care. Thus, a well done home study protects both children and caregivers alike.

To that end, Georgia is implementing use of the SAFE home study methodology. SAFE is a structured home study methodology that allows child welfare agencies to effectively and systematically evaluate prospective families for foster and adoptive placement. Use of the SAFE model supports a uniform evaluation process that is fair to all applicants. The structured nature of SAFE mandates a step-by-step process throughout the home study. The final step of SAFE creates a template to evaluate an applicant's strengths and areas of concern. This allows focus on real issues of concern rather than things that do not

impact an applicant's ability to function or parent. As part of the transition to the SAFE model, the following sections of Chapter 14 Resource Development have been updated.

14.10 Initial Family Evaluation

1. Requires that all components of the initial family evaluation follow the SAFE model.
2. Requires the SAFE Home Study be completed by a Home Study Practitioner (HSP) who is certified in the SAFE model.
3. Requires the initial family evaluation process be supervised throughout by a supervisor who is certified in the SAFE model and has successfully completed the SAFE Supervisor Training.
4. Requires all home study interviews be conducted in the applicant's home.
5. Adds detailed procedures for Social Services Supervisors (SSS) including meeting with the HSP following each home study interview and routinely assessing the foundational skills of the HSP (engagement and forensic interviewing skills; analytical and evaluation skills; and writing skills) and providing the education and support necessary to help the HSP strengthen skills as needed.
6. Provides practice guidance regarding the components of a SAFE home study, home study interviews, and mitigation.

14.13 Family Re-evaluation

1. Requires that all components of the family re-evaluation follow the SAFE model.
2. Requires the family re-evaluation be completed by a HSP who is certified in the SAFE model.
3. Requires the re-evaluation process be supervised throughout by a supervisor who is certified in the SAFE model and has successfully completed the SAFE Supervisor Training.
4. Requires all home study interviews be conducted in the applicant's home.
5. Adds detailed procedures for SSS including meeting with the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Specialist (CRRS)/CPA Resource Development (RD) Staff to review the results of the safety screenings, criminal history records checks and Caregiver Home Inspection Safety and Compliance Checklist.
6. Adds practice guidance regarding updating a SAFE Home Study and supplemental verifications (e.g. verification of income, immunization records for household members under 18 years of age, etc.).

Additional policy updates to Chapter 14: Resource Development

14.01 Safety and Quality Standards

1. Adds practice guidance regarding immunization that highlights the prevailing medical opinion that the benefits of immunization far outweigh potential risks.
2. Adds practice guidance emphasizing that all household members who will be caregivers for children birth to two years of age or children with special medical needs are also required to have certain vaccinations.
3. Includes in practice guidance that the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (GAAAP) and the Georgia Immunization Program (GIP) do not support placement of children in foster households in which members are not fully

immunized as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). In addition, the GAAAP and GIP do not support the use of alternate immunization schedules or delaying immunizations citing that no scientific data have shown that delaying vaccination is beneficial to infants or children.

14.07 Inquiries and Information Sessions

1. Updates policy to reflect that inquiries from prospective foster and adoptive parents are no longer processed via the Homes for Georgia's Kids (HGK) Inquiry Information Line. Instead, inquiries are processed via the Foster Georgia Inquiry Line (1-877-210-KIDS [5437]) or the Foster Georgia Website (www.fostergeorgia.com).
2. Requires that Information Sessions be made available each calendar month.
3. Lists procedures for how the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) State Office Inquiry Response Team processes inquiries with and without webinar attendance.
4. Incorporates the engagement of Caregiver Navigators and Kinship Coordinators.
5. Updates practice guidance to reflect that persons interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents should not have to wait more than 14 calendar days to attend an Information Session. This is a change from 30 days.

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 PPPUnit@dhs.ga.gov.