

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL		
	Chapter:	(10) Foster Care Services	Effective Date: August 2014
	Policy Title:	Changes in Placement	
	Policy Number:	10.3	Previous Policy #: 1009.11-1009.16

CODES/REFERENCES

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-215

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall minimize the number of placement moves for children in foster care and only move children for permanency, placement with siblings or when their needs cannot be addressed in their current placement due to safety or well-being concerns.

DFCS shall ensure children remain in their current school when changes in placement occur to ensure educational stability. The child's school shall be notified of the change in placement. (See [Educational Needs](#))

DFCS shall arrange pre-placement visits for children, whenever possible, to minimize trauma in their transition from one placement setting to another.

DFCS shall conduct a home visit to the placement within seven (7) calendar days of a child in foster care experiencing a placement change.

DFCS shall complete and submit the [Amerigroup Notification Form \(E-Form\)](#) to notify the Revenue Maximization (Rev Max) Unit, Amerigroup, and the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) of a child's change in placement within 24 hours of the change.

DFCS shall notify Babies Can't Wait (BCW)/Children's 1st of any placement change within 24 hours if the child is receiving BCW/Children's 1st services.

DFCS shall notify service providers who are involved in service provision with the child (ren) of a change in placement to ensure continuity of services.

DFCS shall ensure any plan for a trial home visit is approved by the court prior to placement of the child and that the trial home visit shall not last longer than six months, unless there is a court order extending the visit beyond six months.

DFCS shall provide placement resources 10 business days written notice of the agency's intent to remove a child placed in their home/facility unless a safety concern to a child exists.

DFCS shall provide the court with no less than five days advance notification of any placement

change. DFCS shall also provide notification and an opportunity to be heard to the following:

1. Children age 14 and older;
2. Parents, unless parental rights have been terminated;
3. Guardians or other legal custodians;
4. Persons/agency with physical custody of the child;
5. Guardian Ad Litem (GAL);
6. All attorneys of record.

NOTE: A [respite care](#) placement does not count as a placement move; however, if the child is moved to “respite” and there is no plan to return the child to the original placement; or it is determined later the child cannot return to the original placement, this is considered a placement move and thus, appropriate notification must occur.

DFCS shall remove a child immediately if the child’s health or welfare is endangered and provide notification to the court and attorneys of record, within 24 hours of the placement change.

PROCEDURES

When the County Department makes the decision to change a child’s placement for permanency, sibling placement or due to the child’s needs, the SSCM will:

1. Provide the placement resource with a written 10 business day notice of intent to move the child.

NOTE: The court, parent(s) and other required parties must be notified at least five days in advance of any move. If the placement resource is a foster parent, include an explanation that:

- a. During this 10 day notice period, a foster parent has the opportunity to consider the move and if desired, waive the 10 day waiting period for the move;
- b. If the foster parent believes that the move is not in the best interest of the child, the foster parent may file a grievance. See [Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Grievance Procedure](#). The child may not be moved until the grievance is resolved.

NOTE: A return to the birth family or a court ordered placement is not a grievable issue.

- c. If the potential move is due to a decision to terminate parental rights and locate a permanent placement for the child, follow the [DFCS Foster Parent Adoption Consideration](#) process.
2. Conduct a home visit with the current placement resource and child and discuss:
 - a. The change in placement, including when it will occur, why it is occurring and how the move will occur;
 - b. Any feelings and/or concerns the child may have related to the move;
 - c. Any questions the child or placement resource may have;
 - d. How the child and placement resource can maintain a relationship when it is in the child’s best interest;
 - e. The current placement resource’s ability to participate in a pre-placement visit to assist the child in the transition to the new placement.
3. Discuss the placement change with the parents and schedule a pre-placement visit.
4. Notify the court and others of the [change in placement](#) via the [Notice of Change of Placement](#) form.
5. Relocate the child to the new placement and update the Placement Log in Georgia SHINES, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System.

6. Notify Rev Max, Amerigroup and DCH of the placement change via the [E-Form](#).
NOTE: Amerigroup will assess the child's access to the primary care physician (PCP), dental home and behavioral health services. If the PCP, dental home or behavioral health services no longer meet geographic access standards, the child may be reassigned a new services provider.
7. Document all conversations and efforts related to the placement move in the Narrative section of the Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES within 72 hours of occurrence;
8. Conduct a [purposeful visit](#) in the home of the new placement resource within seven (7) calendar days of the child's placement to assess the child's safety, the child and placement resource adjustment to the placement and any needs/concerns of the child or placement resource.

When the placement resource notifies the SSCM of a possible disruption, the SSCM will:

1. Immediately schedule a face-to-face meeting with the placement resource and the child to discuss all issues/concerns and conduct a safety assessment.
2. Schedule a placement change meeting with the family and support team.
3. Evaluate with the placement resource the reasons for possible disruption.
4. Make all needed referrals for supports and services to the child and placement resource to prevent disruption based upon the information obtained during the meeting. Depending on the urgency of the need, service referrals will be made within one to five business days.
5. Accept the placement resource's 10 business day notice of desire to terminate the placement, if the placement does not stabilize, but the child is assessed to be safe.
6. Continue to provide services to stabilize the placement pending the child's removal from the home or facility.
7. At any point the child is deemed unsafe, immediately contact the Resource Development case manager and/or Permanency Social Services Supervisor (SSS) to make arrangements to move the child to an alternative location.
8. Ensure the new placement resource allows the child to remain in the same school. (See [Educational Needs](#));
9. Review and update the Diligent Search information in Georgia SHINES.
10. Conduct a private conversation with the child and request information on any relative who may be contacted regarding becoming a placement resource.
11. In consultation with the SSS, carefully evaluate and determine the most appropriate, least restrictive placement for the child and begin a search for a new placement that will meet the child's needs without compromising safety.
12. Engage the child in a pre-placement discussion and schedule a pre-placement visit.
13. Discuss the placement change with the parent(s) and invite them to the pre-placement visit.
14. Notify the court and others of the [change in placement](#) via the [Notice of Change of Placement](#) form.
15. Provide the child an opportunity to say good-bye to the foster parent and foster parents family or any facility staff and peers.
16. Relocate the child by the end of the 10 day notification and update the Placement Detail page in Georgia SHINES. If the relocation does not occur within 10 days, document the placement resource's willingness to maintain the placement and diligent efforts to secure another placement.
17. Notify Rev Max, DCH, and Amerigroup of the placement change via the [E-Form](#).

18. Document all efforts to locate alternative placements in the Narrative section of the Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES.
19. Conduct a [purposeful visit](#) in the home of the new placement resource within seven (7) calendar days of the child's placement to assess the child's safety, the child's and placement resource's adjustment to the child's placement and any needs/concerns of the child or placement resource.

At the initial placement and each subsequent placement, the SSCM will provide the placement resource with copies of the following:

1. [Agreement Supplement](#), signed at the time of placement; it provides written and dated confirmation of the child's placement into the home;
2. [Foster Child Information Sheet](#) which provides information concerning the child's needs and/or preferences;
3. Medical and educational records that are currently available;
4. The child's Life Book;
5. The child's portion of the current case plan.

NOTE: If the resource is a facility, they should receive the [RBWO Placement Agreement](#) instead of the Agreement Supplement.

Whenever a child in DFCS custody changes placement, the SSCM will:

1. Provide proper notification to all required parties via the [Notice of Change in Placement](#) form.
2. After diligent efforts to obtain current addresses, if a current address is not known for the parent(s), guardian(s) or custodian(s), send the notification to the last known address.
3. Send a copy of the notification to the Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG) representing the County Department on matters pertaining to the child.
4. If changes to the case plan or permanency plan result from the child's change in placement, ask the SAAG to request a hearing for the purpose of changing the case plan. (See [Case Planning](#) regarding changes to the case plan/permanency plan).
NOTE: A child 14 years of age or older, parent, guardian, legal custodian, person or agency with physical custody, GAL, and any attorney of record may also request a hearing in order for the court to consider the change in placement and any changes to the case plan or permanency plan resulting from the change in placement.
5. Request the SAAG to remind the court of the hearing deadline as a hearing must be held within five days after the notice of a change in placement is received.
6. Contact the Office of General Counsel if problems arise related to the time of the hearing.
7. If the County Department determines that at any time during this process the child is not safe in the placement, including prior to a scheduled hearing being held, move the child immediately and notify the court and attorneys of record, including the SAAG, within 24 hours of the placement change.
8. If no hearing is requested 10 calendar days after the notice is mailed, move the child to the new location.
9. Notify Rev Max, DCH, and Amerigroup within 24 hours of the placement change via the [E-Form](#);
10. Conduct a [purposeful visit](#) in the home of the new placement resource within seven

(7) calendar days of the child's placement to assess the child's safety, the child's and placement resource's adjustment to the child's placement and any needs/concerns of the child or placement resource.

Whenever a hearing is requested as a result of the notification of a change in placement, the SSCM will:

1. Staff the case with the SAAG and be prepared to testify in court;
2. Once the hearing is held, unless the court rejects the changes in the case plan needed for the new placement and requests another recommendation for placement, move the child to the new placement;
3. If the court rejects the recommended placement, reconsider the planned placement change, whether the placement change is necessary; and if appropriate, offer the court an alternative placement for the child, taking into consideration the court's concerns regarding the original recommended placement;
4. Document any recommendations ordered by the court for a new case plan, permanency plan or placement in the Narrative section of the Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES;
5. In consultation with the SSS, follow-up on any recommendations by the court and take the necessary actions to comply with the court order, including, but not limited to, updating any case plans or permanency plans in Georgia SHINES.

Prior to recommending a [trial home visit](#), the SSCM will:

1. Ensure that **court approved** overnight and unsupervised visits have occurred in order to gradually transition the child back into the home.
2. Ensure that any safety concerns have been sufficiently alleviated/resolved and the child's safety can be ensured in the home.
3. Conduct a face-to-face meeting with the parents and child (when age and developmentally appropriate) to discuss the planned home placement. The discussion should include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - a. An explanation of what it means for the child to be on a trial home visit and that DFCS is still legally responsible for the child;
 - b. The feelings and concerns the parent(s) or child may have about the child returning home;
 - c. Any needs the parents may have before the child is returned to the home, including financial, supportive, etc. and the services that will be utilized to help address those needs;
 - d. Information on the Office of Family Independence (OFI) services that may be available including childcare;
 - e. Plan of supervision, including who, besides the parents, may act as a caregiver for the child;
 - f. Appropriate discipline practices and DFCS' discipline policy;
 - g. Plan to address educational, medical or mental health needs;
 - h. The importance of notifying DFCS in case of any emergency such as an illness, injury, accident, runaway, etc; and the contact information for the people that should be notified;
 - i. How the SSCM will continue to be involved including required purposeful visits;
 - j. Any updates needed on the case plan to ensure the child can be safely maintained in the home and confirmation that court approval is needed before the

child can be placed back in the home.

4. Staff with the SSS to get approval to request a trial home visit from the court.

Once the SSS has granted permission for the SSCM to request a trial home visit, the SSCM will:

1. Submit a Legal Action Request to the SAAG requesting a court hearing for approval of a trial home visit.
2. Update the Family Plan and Child Plan in Georgia SHINES to include specific goals and steps that are needed to maintain the child safely in the home.
3. Obtain approval from the court to return the child to the physical care of the parents.
4. Engage the foster parents and/or facility staff in the transitioning of the child back home including:
 - a. Asking them to return the child and his belongings and/or at least meet the SSCM at the home of the parents when the child is returned;
 - b. Determining ways the foster parent or facility staff can maintain contact with the child and/or parents and support the child's placement back into the home;
5. Transition the child back into the home of the parents.
6. Notify Rev Max, DCH, and Amerigroup of the placement change via the [E-Form](#) within 24 hours.
7. Conduct a home visit within 24 hours of the child's return to assess the child's safety, the child's and family's adjustment to the child's return and any needs/concerns of the child or family. (See [Conditions for Return](#))

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Placement Changes

When the child experiences a disruption in placement and must be moved to another placement, careful planning and preparation must occur to assist the child through another loss. Pre-placement preparation eases the child's transition and lessens his/her fear and confusion. Whenever possible, the SSCM, foster family/placement resource and parents should all be involved in the placement process. Taking the time to engage in pre-placement efforts better ensures that an appropriate match between the child and the provider has been made, and reduces the likelihood of unnecessary movement of the child while in care.

Placement moves experienced by a child may revive earlier feelings associated with past separations and entry into foster care. Helping a child express his or her feelings and concerns, as well as find appropriate ways to grieve, will make the placement transition smoother. The SSCM or other trusted adult should encourage the child to discuss his/her feelings regarding the placement move and allow the child to have some input. Although the placement decision belongs to DFCS, the child may have suggestions on placement options or ideas that would help ease the child's apprehension regarding changing placements.

Respite Care

Respite care placements are intended to be temporary in nature, therefore the child should return to his/her original placement within a short period of time. (See [Supervision of Children](#) for a definition of respite) If a child is moved to a "temporary" placement until a more permanent placement is located, this temporary placement is not considered a respite placement but a placement change; thus, notification requirements apply. When because of unusual

circumstances during a respite care placement, it becomes clear that the respite care placement is going to become the child's new placement or another placement is going to become the child's new placement, then notice must be given. DFCS SSCM's should provide placement change notification as soon as they become aware a child is changing placements or a child cannot return to his/her original placement.

Trial Home Visits

A trial home visit should never be attempted unless the placement is expected to be successful. It will require careful planning and preparation prior to and following the transition. Each family will have a different reaction to the knowledge that the child is returning home on a trial home visit; thus, the amount of preparation and planning needed for a trial home visit will vary with each family. When planning a trial home visit, consideration must be given to the following:

1. The age of the child;
2. Number of siblings that will be returning with the child;
3. The length of time the child was in foster care;
4. The special needs of the child, if any;
5. The reason the child entered care and the child's possible fear of a recurrence of maltreatment;
6. Any new household members (i.e. boyfriend, girlfriend, other family) since the child entered care;
7. The relationship between the child and the placement resource and how this can be maintained if in the child's best interest;
8. The quality of the relationship between the parents and child;
9. The quality of extended family support;
10. The parent's cooperation, protective capacities and progress on their case plan;
11. Other support services that may be needed.

The child should be encouraged to share his/her feelings about the return home with a trusted adult, such as the placement resource, SSCM, behavior aide, therapist, etc. The SSCM should discuss safety with the child and what the child should do if the child feels unsafe.

Georgia Families 360°

On March 03, 2014, DFCS transitioned from a standard fee-for-service Medicaid program to a statewide Medicaid Care Management Organization (CMO) through Amerigroup Georgia Managed Care Company. The transition impacted children in DFCS custody and children receiving Adoption Assistance (AA) as they became members of a new program called *Georgia Families 360°* which is separate from *Georgia Families*, the general Medicaid program administered by the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH). *Georgia Families 360°* is designed to provide coordinated care across multiple services and focus on the physical, dental, and behavioral needs of member children. The program is designed to ensure each member has a medical and dental home, access to preventive care screenings, and timely assessments. It also seeks to ensure medical providers adhere to clinical practice guidelines and evidence-based medicine.

Amerigroup Care Coordination Teams (CCT) and Care Managers

Each *Georgia Families 360°* member is assigned to a regional Care Coordination Team with a specified Care Manager. The CCT members are Masters level staff, the majority of whom hold a professional license to practice in their respective field. The CCT completes a Health Risk

Screening (HRS) on youth in care to identify medical and/or behavioral needs. The CCT is responsible for coordinating the health components of the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA), including the initial physical assessment, dental screening, and trauma assessment. Care Managers are the primary partner for identifying and making referrals for needed services. They ensure each youth has an individualized care plan that addresses both physical and behavioral health needs. They work with community agencies to ensure appropriate services are provided. They provide education to foster and adoptive parents.

Amerigroup Notification Form (E-Form)

DFCS communicates with Amerigroup, Rev Max, and DCH utilizing an electronic notification form (E-Form). It is the primary means for communicating information about a member enrolled in [Georgia Families 360°](#). The E-Form must be completed and sent to Amerigroup, Rev Max, and DCH within 24 hours of a youth entering foster care. It should be completed thoroughly to include demographic information, medical information, placement information, the identified CCFA provider and other referrals (e.g., Babies Can't Wait). The E-Form is also used to report updates such as placement changes, a youth exiting care, etc. If there is information not available at the time of the initial referral to Amerigroup, submit an E-Form (update) as soon as the information is obtained. Accurate and timely communication with Amerigroup and Rev Max is vital to the Medicaid eligibility determination and the assignment of a [CCT](#) and service providers. Important decisions regarding the assignment of primary care providers and referrals are made based upon the information submitted on the E-Form.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Agreement Supplement](#)

[Foster Child Information Sheet](#)

[Notice of Change in Placement form](#)