

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(10) Foster Care	Effective Date:	August 2014
	Policy Title:	Introduction		
	Policy Number:	10.0	Previous Policy #:	1001.1, 1001.2, 1001.3, 1001.4

MISSION

Georgia's Foster Care Program functions to strengthen families, protect children from further abuse/neglect, and assure every child has a permanent family. When it is necessary for children to experience out-of-home placements due to safety threats in their own homes, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is committed to ensuring their safety and well-being.

GOALS

1. Ensure the safety of children in care and reduce child vulnerabilities.
2. Enhance caregiver protective capacities so caregivers are able to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.
3. Promote expedited permanency for children in custody by:
 - a. Assessing the needs of the child, the birth family and the relative/foster/adoptive family;
 - b. Ensuring the safety, stability and security of children;
 - c. Helping to rebuild families where possible;
 - d. Minimizing placement disruptions;
 - e. Meeting the needs of children and families to prevent reentry into care;
 - f. Meeting the unique developmental needs of children from birth to age five (5) years of age;
 - g. Meeting the needs of older youth to assure successful transitions from care into independent living.
4. Preserve family relationships and connections for children.

Children from birth to 21 years of age are eligible to receive foster care services. Eligible youth who reach the age of 18 while in care will receive Extended Youth Support Services (EYSS) through age 21, unless they choose to opt out. Youth who decide to opt out and exit care between the ages of 18 and 21 may be able to resume EYSS on a case by case basis.

Public Law 96-272 enacted in 1980, requires "reasonable efforts" to preserve and reunify families. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89) establishes **safety, permanency and well-being** goals for children served in the nation's child welfare system and requires that if a child cannot be safely returned within 12 months of removal "reasonable efforts" to finalize the permanency plan for the child must be made. Georgia's child welfare practice focuses on these goals as paramount when developing and implementing case plan goals, providing services to children and families, and making placement and permanency decisions.

To achieve these goals, DFCS must work closely with the judicial system and with community

partners to achieve permanency and well-being outcomes for children in foster care. Both Federal and State law specify compressed time frames for judicial hearings, periodic reviews and decisions that are intended to move children through the child welfare system. As a result, it is anticipated that children will spend less time in foster care and will experience fewer placement disruptions. Therefore, Georgia's Foster Care Program will fulfill the purpose for which it is designed by providing temporary, out-of-home care for children whose own families are unable to provide appropriate care and protection due to diminished caregiver protective capacities.

DFCS utilizes principles of family centered practice when engaging families and children. Within the family centered practice model, the **caregiver** has the responsibility to:

1. Collaborate with DFCS in developing written case plans, including concurrent permanency plans to help their child secure a safe and permanent home;
2. Partner with DFCS to mitigate safety threats which led to the removal of the child from the home;
3. Maintain contact with their children through regular visitation;
4. Inform their DFCS Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) about significant changes, such as a change of address, telephone number, job, income, health or marriage circumstances, as well as changes in relationships, household composition (including unrelated adults), etc.;
5. Actively participate in planning for their child at court hearings, periodic reviews and meetings with local DFCS staff, etc.; and
6. Pay child support on behalf of their child in care, including medical coverage (if available to the parent).

DFCS has the responsibility to:

1. Ensure the safety of each child in care;
2. Treat all caregivers with dignity and respect;
3. Ensure all individuals collaborating with DFCS in the receipt or provision of services receive excellent customer service;
4. Assist each caregiver in understanding the seriousness of foster care placement and the child's need for a permanency decision to be finalized within 12 months;
5. Inform the parent that parental rights could be terminated should reunification not occur in an expeditious manner;
6. Participate with the parent in developing written case plans designed to achieve permanency for children in care;
7. Provide services to parents to enhance diminished protective capacity that necessitated foster care placement;
8. Arrange regular visits between the parent and child at places and times agreed upon with the parent;
9. Share information with the parent about the child's well-being and experiences during placement;
10. Inform the parent of any major illnesses of the child;
11. Make every effort to contact the parent prior to the child undergoing surgery;
12. Partner with the caregiver in planning for the child by having regularly scheduled meetings;
13. Recommend the child be returned to the parent when the circumstances which made foster care placement necessary have been ameliorated to the point where the child will

be safe in the home; and

14. Enter and update all case information in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES) to assure effective tracking of all children in foster care.

All children require a wide variety of services to promote their health, well-being and safety. Due to the life experiences of children who enter care, most will have one or more needs that require immediate attention and sometimes ongoing care and treatment. Foster care provides an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the child's needs, and respond to those identified needs which may require a combination of short-term and long-term interventions. Exposure to intensely traumatic events may require ongoing treatment long after the child returns home or to another permanent option. The SSCM must be knowledgeable and resourceful in developing and utilizing resources to enable children to achieve the highest level of functioning possible during their transition to permanency.