

	<b>GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES</b> <b>CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL</b>		
	<b>Chapter:</b>	(10) Foster Care	<b>Effective Date:</b> August 2014
	<b>Policy Title:</b>	Case Planning	
	<b>Policy Number:</b>	10.23	<b>Previous Policy #:</b> 1007- 1007.4

## **CODES/REFERENCES**

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-2, § 15-11-200, § 15-11-201, § 15-11-202, § 15-11-203  
Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Sections 471(a)(16); 475(1); 475 (1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E), (F) and (G); 475(5)(A),(D) and (H)  
Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Sections 475(A)(i) and (ii)  
45 CFR Parts 1356.21(g), 1356.21(g)(1), (2), (3), (4) and (5)

## **REQUIREMENTS**

*To meet case plan requirements under Title IV-E, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) has established and disseminated policy and procedures for staff to determine the appropriateness and necessity for placement of a child into foster care.*

*DFCS shall work collaboratively with the identified family, children, providers, and family supports to develop a written case plan to address the issues that caused a child to enter foster care. The case plan for each child:*

- 1. Is a written document which is a discreet part of the case record, in a format determined by DFCS, which is developed jointly with the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child in foster care and has a projected date of completion;*
- 2. Is developed within 30 days of the child's entry into foster care;*
- 3. Includes a description of the circumstances that resulted in the child being placed under the jurisdiction of the court and in foster care (e.g., reasons for removal);*
- 4. Includes a description of the services offered and provided to prevent removal of the child from the home and to reunify the family;*
- 5. Includes an assessment of the strengths and needs of the child and family and the type of placement best equipped to meet those needs;*
- 6. Includes a description of the type of home or institution in which the child is placed;*
- 7. Includes a discussion of the safety and appropriateness of the placement and how DFCS plans to carry out the judicial determination made with respect to the child;*
- 8. Includes specific time-limited goals and related activities designed to enable the safe return of the child to his or her home, or, in the event that return to his or her home is not possible, activities designed to result in permanent placement or emancipation;*
- 9. Includes assignment of specific responsibility for accomplishing the planned activities and the projected date of completion of the case plan objectives;*

10. *Includes a plan for assuring the child receives safe and proper care, and services are provided to the parent(s), guardian or legal custodian, child, and placement provider in order to improve the conditions in the parents', guardian's or legal custodian's home to facilitate the child's safe return to his/her own home or the permanent placement of the child, including a discussion of services that have been investigated and considered and are not available or likely to become available within a reasonable time to meet the needs of the child or, if available, why such services are not safe or appropriate;*
11. *Includes a plan for assuring services are provided to the child and placement provider to address the needs of the child while in foster care;*
12. *Includes a discussion of the appropriateness of the services provided to the child under the plan and the date time-limited services will be terminated;*
13. *Includes a schedule for visitation between the child, his/her siblings and any other appropriate relatives and an explanation if no visits are scheduled;*
14. *Where appropriate for a child 14 years old or over, includes a written description of the programs and services which will help such child prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living;*
15. *During the 90-day period immediately prior to the date on which the child will attain 18 years of age or prior to the child's planned exit from foster care (if the child opts out of exiting at age 18), a DFCS case manager and, as appropriate, other representatives of the child will provide the child with assistance and support in developing a transition plan that is personalized at the direction of the child, includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and work force supports and employment services, includes information about the importance of designating another individual to make health care treatment decisions on behalf of the child if the child becomes unable to participate in such decisions and the child does not have, or does not want, a relative who would otherwise be authorized under State law to make such decisions, and provides the child with the option to execute a health care power of attorney, health care proxy, or similar document recognized under State law, and is as detailed as the child may elect;*
16. *Documents the steps to finalize a placement when the case plan goal is or becomes adoption or placement in another permanent home. When the case plan goal is adoption, at a minimum, such documentation shall include child-specific recruitment efforts such as the use of Tribal, State, regional, and national adoption exchanges including electronic exchange systems to facilitate orderly and timely in-State/Tribal service area and inter-State/Tribal service area placements;*  
**NOTE:** *Georgia has opted out of the Title IV-E Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program requirement;*
17. *Includes a discussion of how the case plan is designed to achieve a safe placement for the child in the least restrictive (most family-like) setting available that is in close proximity to the parent(s), guardian or legal custodian when the case plan goal is reunification and*

*a discussion of how the placement is consistent with the best interests and special needs of the child;*

- 18. If the child has been placed in a foster family home or child-care institution a substantial distance from the home of the parent(s), guardian or legal custodian in a different state, or outside of the Tribal service area, sets forth the reasons why such a placement is in the best interest of the child;*
- 19. If the child has been placed in foster care in a State or Tribal service area outside of the State or Tribal service area in which the child's parent(s), guardian or legal custodian are located, assures that an agency case manager on the staff of the State or Tribal service area in which the home of the parents, guardian or legal custodian of the child is located, of the State or Tribal service area in which the child has been placed, or of a private agency under contract with either such State/Tribal agency, visits the child in such foster home or institution no less frequently than every six (6) months and submits a report on the visit to the State or Tribal agency of the State or Tribal service area where the home of the child's parent(s), guardian or legal custodian is located;*
20. Shall comply with O.C.G.A. § 39-4-4, the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) when an out-of-state group home placement is recommended or made. In addition, documentation of the recommendation of the multidisciplinary team and the rationale for such particular placement shall be included. The case plan shall also address what in-state services or facilities were used or considered and why they were not recommended;
21. If applicable, includes a statement that reasonable efforts have been made and a requirement that reasonable efforts shall be made for so long as the child remains in the custody of DFCS:
  - a. To place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, kinship care, guardianship or adoptive placement, unless DFCS documents that such a joint placement would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings; and
  - b. In the case of siblings removed from their home who are not placed together, for frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between the siblings unless DFCS has information and documents that such frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings;
22. A plan for ensuring the educational stability of the child while in foster care, including—
  - a. Assurances that **each** placement of the child takes into account the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement; and
  - b. An assurance that DFCS has coordinated with appropriate local educational agencies (as defined under section 9101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) to ensure the child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of **each** placement; or
  - c. If remaining in such school is not in the best interests of the child, assurances by DFCS and the local educational agencies to provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the school.

23. *Incorporates the health and education records of the child including the most recent information available regarding*
- a. *The names and addresses of the child's health and educational providers;*
  - b. *The child's grade level performance;*
  - c. *The child's school record;*
  - d. *A record of the child's immunizations;*
  - e. *The child's known medical problems;*
  - f. *The child's medications;*
  - g. *Any other relevant health and education information concerning the child determined to be appropriate by DFCS;*
24. Includes a recommendation for a permanency plan for such child. If, after considering reunification, adoption or permanent guardianship, DFCS recommends permanent placement in another planned permanent living arrangement, the case plan shall include documentation of a compelling reason (See [Exceptions to Filing for TPR](#)) or reasons why reunification, termination of parental rights, adoptive placement or permanent guardianship are not in the child's best interests;
25. Includes a statement that the parent, guardian or legal custodian of the child and the child have had an opportunity to participate in the development of the case plan, to review the case plan, to sign the case plan and to receive a copy of the plan or an explanation about why such persons were not able to participate or sign the case plan;
26. Identifies the person within DFCS who is directly responsible for ensuring the case plan is implemented;
27. Includes all components of the [written report](#) required by the court.

DFCS shall submit a supervisor-approved case plan to the Juvenile Court for incorporation into a court order within thirty (30) calendar days of a child entering foster care and at each subsequent review of the disposition order. If the child is not placed with his/her siblings, a written statement shall be included in the case plan of the continuing efforts to place the siblings together or why such efforts are not appropriate.

DFCS shall submit a new case plan to the court within ten (10) calendar days of the court determining the current plan is no longer appropriate for the child's needs and/or directing DFCS to develop a new plan.

DFCS shall notify the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) of the development of any case plan of the child for which he/she was appointed and provide an opportunity for them to be involved in the development of the plan.

When an infant identified as being affected by illegal substances or withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder enters care, DFCS shall ensure any Plan of Safe Care is incorporated into the Family Plan. (See [Conducting an Investigation](#))

DFCS shall submit to the court, in conjunction with the case plan, a Written Transitional Living Plan (WTLP) for all youth ages fourteen (14) years and older, when applicable. (See [Written Transitional Living Plan](#))

DFCS shall request a hearing to modify the case plan whenever significant changes occur to the plan.

DFCS shall make diligent efforts to reunify the child and family through the provision of intensive, time-limited reunification services until otherwise directed by the court. If the court adopts a case plan of reunification, it shall be in effect until modified by the court.

**NOTE:** There are instances when the court may determine it is reasonable to make no efforts to reunify the child and family. (See [Reasonable Efforts](#))

Whenever a child is adjudicated dependent as a result of parental alcohol or substance abuse, the court is authorized to require the parent, guardian or legal custodian to undergo substance abuse treatment and random drug screens and those screenings must remain negative for a period of no less than six consecutive months before reunification can be recommended/requested.

DFCS will engage collateral contacts monthly during the continued assessment of child safety and well-being, caregiver protective capacity, family conditions and case planning progress in Permanency cases. (See [Collateral Contacts in CPS and Permanency](#))

## PROCEDURES

To develop the initial case plan, the SSCM will:

1. Review the case history, [Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment \(CCFA\)](#), other assessments completed on the child or family and any other background information in preparation for the meeting with the parents, guardian or legal custodian to develop the case plan.
2. Schedule a [Family Team Meeting \(FTM\)](#)/Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting to develop the case plan within twenty-five (25) calendar days of the child's entry into foster care. Engagement of the non-custodial parent in the case planning process is imperative to successful case plan development.
3. Provide written notification of the FTM to the parent, guardian or legal custodian, the child, the child's attorney and the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) at least seven (7) calendar days in advance of the meeting; The written notification should include:
  - a. The date, time and location of the meeting;
  - b. An explanation that the case plan developed at the meeting will be submitted to the court for consideration to become an order of the court;
  - c. Notification that the proposed case plan shall be in effect until incorporated into an order of the court;
  - d. An explanation that once adopted by the court, the case plan remains in effect until modified by the court.
4. Provide written or verbal notice of the FTM to any of the following persons who may

have significant input into the development of the case plan or placement of the child:

- a. Extended family of the child;
  - b. The current caregiver of the child (i.e., relative, foster parent, Room Board and Watchful Oversight (RBWO) provider);
  - c. Service providers;
  - d. Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA);
  - e. Any other persons identified as a member of the family's support team.
5. Conduct the FTM with the parents, guardian or legal custodian, child (when age and developmentally appropriate), and members of the support team. At the meeting:
- a. Ask the parents, guardian or legal custodian to sign any needed [Release of Information](#) forms;
  - b. Review any assessments, including the CCFA and the Concurrent Planning Assessment Guide with the parents, guardian or legal custodian;
  - c. Openly and honestly discuss:
    - i. The reason(s) the child was removed from the home, what needs to be done for the child to safely return and what DFCS can do to assist;
    - ii. Any possible Native American Heritage and implications of the [Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\)](#);
    - iii. The time-limited nature of foster care and the potentially detrimental effects that prolonged foster care placement can have on a child;
    - iv. Possible relatives or other committed individuals who may be a placement option or support to the child or family;
    - v. The need to determine a permanency plan for the child and finalize the permanency plan and case plan with the court;
    - vi. The limited timeframe for achieving reunification, if a reunification plan is developed, and the consequences of not achieving it in a timely manner;
    - vii. The need to utilize concurrent planning (if appropriate) so that if permanency cannot be achieved through reunification, it may be achieved through adoption or guardianship;
    - viii. The need for the parents, guardian or legal custodian to immediately become involved in the case planning and to cooperate in achieving case plan goals;
    - ix. The dual role of the SSCM in supporting the parents', guardian's or legal custodian's efforts while at the same time, monitoring the progress or lack of progress and reporting to the court;
    - x. The reasons DFCS is recommending a non-reunification case plan for the child, if one is recommended.
  - d. Identify caregiver protective capacities, family strengths, child vulnerabilities, well-being concerns, service needs and family supports;
  - e. Review information on concurrent planning;
  - f. Discuss options and decisions to be made regarding:
    - i. The permanency plan;
    - ii. Whether or not the permanency plan will be a concurrent plan;
    - iii. Treatment needs;
    - iv. Needed referrals for services;
    - v. Goals and steps to be documented on the case plan.

- g. Specify the activities or steps to be completed, the person(s) responsible for each step, and the time frames for achieving the goals, steps, and objectives;
  - h. Ensure any [Plan of Safe Care](#) is incorporated into the ongoing Family Plan;
  - i. Ensure all parties have an understanding of expectations and what is needed for the child to safely return home;
  - j. For any youth age 14 and older, discuss independent living services that are available to the youth and the goals and steps the youth and family would like to have incorporated into the [Written Transitional Living Plan \(WTLP\)](#). When necessary, consult with the regional Independent Living Specialist.
6. Enter all required information into the GA Statewide Automated Child Welfare System (SHINES) to populate the case plan, including:
- a. **Child's Information** (date of birth/sex/race/ethnicity/permanency plan/case plan type (initial/review)).
  - b. **Legal Status** (Child's Legal Status, Assigned Judge, Date the Initial Case Plan was filed with the Court).
  - c. **Caregiver Information** (name, date of birth, address, phone number and relationship of the mother and father of all children).
  - d. **Relative Information** (name, address, phone number and the side of family (maternal/paternal) for all known relatives located in the diligent search).
  - e. **DFCS Case Manager and Supervisor Information.**
  - f. **Purpose of This Plan and Consequence of Noncompliance.**
  - g. **Description of Evaluation Progress** (how caregiver progress will be evaluated and where information for this evaluation will come from).
  - h. **Case Tracking and Legal** (dates of CCFA referral, diligent search, initial case plan, review dates, emergency shelter care order date, disposition order, non-reunification order date, Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) date and other court dates).
  - i. **Removal and Separation** (initial reason for removal, reasonable efforts to prevent removal, services offered and provided to prevent removal, reason child placed in foster care, current reason child cannot be safely returned, future harm that may occur if child remains in the home, and any grounds for non-reunification).
  - j. **Permanency Goal(s) and Specific Action Steps** (Include assignment of specific responsibilities, projected dates of completion and dates time-limited services will be terminated. For a concurrent permanency plan, include the goals and steps for locating a permanency resource for the child if reunification efforts fail).
  - k. **Change Goal/Care: What must happen in order for the caregiver to control for safety independently?**
  - l. **Child's placement** (current placement and placement history, including a discussion of the safety and appropriateness of the placement). Reasonable efforts must be made to place siblings together unless it is contrary to the safety or well-being of the siblings to do so and the case plan shall state what efforts were made and will continue to be made to place siblings together.
  - m. **Health Care** (Provider, health status, immunizations, medical and psychological history, medications, health check, dates of last medical/psychological appointments).
  - n. **Education:** The case plan includes the dates of educational assessments, developmental screening information, early intervention services, grade level, school district, current school information, name of guidance counselor, classroom



placement, special educational needs, educational supports needed, surrogate parent and school records. Diligent efforts must be made to ensure the child remains in the same school they were attending at the time of removal and that the educational setting is appropriate to meet the needs of the child. (See [Educational Needs](#))

If the child remains in the same educational setting at the time of placement, the case plan must include:

- i. An assurance that the placement reflects consideration of the child's home school at the time of placement;
- ii. A specific description of the factors considered;
- iii. How the placement choice was derived;
- iv. An assurance that the appropriateness of the child's educational setting has been considered.

If the child is **NOT** going to remain in the same school setting, the case plan must document:

- i. A statement that it is contrary to the best interest of the child to remain in the school;
  - ii. A description of the supporting circumstances;
  - iii. An assurance that DFCS and the local school system have collaborated to ensure the immediate and appropriate enrollment in the new school and that all educational records have been provided or transferred;
  - iv. An assurance that the appropriateness of the child's educational setting has been considered.
- o. **Visitation Plan** [visitation plan types (parent, guardian, legal custodian, sibling, relative, non-relative), efforts for frequent visitation between siblings not placed together or reasons why these visits would be contrary to the safety or well-being of the siblings, name and relationship of person to visit child, location and length of visit, visitation supervision requirement, transportation arrangement, other types of contact allowed and contact arrangements, plan for how to cancel visits, barriers to visits and how these will be overcome, evaluation of visitation that has occurred, additional visitation instructions, number of visits since the last review, document if visits have been suspended by the court.] (See [Visitation](#)).
- p. **Participation and Disclosure.**
7. Obtain signatures from parents, guardian or legal custodian and age appropriate children on the case plan and WTLP. If the parents, guardian or legal custodian or child refuse to sign the case plan or WTLP, document their refusal to sign.
  8. Immediately provide a copy of the proposed case plan to the parents, guardian or legal custodian prior to the conclusion of the meeting to develop the case plan. If not possible, a copy must be delivered by United States mail, email or hand delivery at the same time the plan is transmitted to the court.
  9. Notify the parents, guardian or legal custodian of their right to contest the case plan by requesting a hearing before the Juvenile Court within five days of receiving the proposed case plan. Notify the parents that if the initial case plan is for non-reunification, the court shall hold a permanency plan hearing within thirty (30) days of the filing of the non-reunification case plan. (See [Case Review and Permanency Plan Hearings](#))



10. Immediately submit a copy of the supervisor approved signed case plan and CCFA to the court for approval and incorporation into an order of the court.  
**NOTE:** If counties participate in the Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS) interface, the proposed case plan should be submitted via the CPRS interface.
11. Notify the Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG) of the submission of a non-reunification case plan to ensure the court schedules a permanency plan hearing within 30 days.
12. If a hearing is not requested or scheduled by the court and the time to request a hearing has expired, the court shall:
  - a. Review the proposed case plan; and
  - b. Enter a disposition order or supplemental order incorporating all elements of the case plan for reunification services the court finds essential to reunification, specifying what shall be accomplished by all parties before reunification of the family can be achieved.
13. Update the Legal Action page when the supplemental order is received.
14. On an ongoing basis, continue to execute a diligent search for absent parent(s), relatives and others who have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the child and may be able to serve as a placement or support to the child.

If the court approved case plan is for reunification, the SSCM will:

1. Provide the caregiver, foster parent and any pre-adoptive parent or relative providing care for the child with a copy of those portions of the court approved plan that involve the permanency goal and the services to be provided to the child.
2. Immediately, initiate all referrals for services needed to address the issues that prevent the child from being able to return home safely.
3. Ensure frequent quality visits occur between the child and parents, guardian or legal custodian. (See [Visitation](#))
4. Conduct [purposeful contacts](#) with the parents, guardian or legal custodian, child and placement provider (based on contact standards identified at the FTM) to monitor the quality of services, their participation and to assess any behavioral changes observed as a result of the services.
5. Conduct collateral contacts with service providers, relatives and others with knowledge about the family to assess behavioral changes/progress in the child and/or parents, guardian or legal custodian they have observed.
6. Carefully and accurately document the services offered and provided and the family's response to the services, including level of compliance and progress in the Family Plan in SHINES.
7. Re-evaluate the case plan with the parents, guardian or legal custodian and child during each purposeful visit and more formally, every 90 days from the date the child entered care if the plan is a concurrent plan.

If the court approved case plan is for adoption, the SSCM will:

1. Document on the case plan in SHINES all of the reasons reunification would be detrimental to the child and that reunification services therefore should not be provided and include specifics as to whether any grounds for TPR exist.
2. Document on the case plan in SHINES and the Adoption Information page the steps to be taken by DFCS to secure an adoptive home for the child, including child-specific recruitment efforts to be taken (or already taken) to finalize a permanent placement.

3. Thoroughly explore any information that suggests the child is of Native American heritage, in compliance with [ICWA](#).
4. Notify the foster parents of the agency's intent to file a petition for termination of parental rights (TPR) and obtain their signatures on the [Notification to Foster Parents of Intent To Petition For TPR](#).
5. Locate an adoptive resource for the child and any siblings if the current placement is not an adoptive resource and/or does not wish to adopt the child/siblings.
6. Initiate services for the child to prepare the child and resource family for adoption.
7. Conduct collateral contacts with service providers, school or medical professionals, or any other individual with knowledge about the child or family to assess the safety and well-being of the child and the progress towards permanency.
8. Complete a search of the [Putative Father Registry](#) to identify any possible biological father of a child (who is not the legal father) who wishes to be notified if an adoption action is taken.
9. Obtain a certified copy of the official long form birth certificate with the state registration number and raised seal from the [Georgia Department of Public Health- Vital Records](#) to attach to the Child's Life History (CLH).  
**NOTE:** The State Office of Vital Records has agreed to send the complete copy if it is stated on the request that this is a child to be placed for adoption and the long form is needed.
10. Gather any additional background information on the family for the [Life History on a Child](#) by:
  - a. Helping the parents, guardian or legal custodian understand the importance of the child having information regarding their biological heritage as he/she passes through the various developmental stages;
  - b. Updating the information on the [Background Information Form](#);
11. File a TPR petition.  
**NOTE:** The TPR petition should be filed far enough in advance for an adoption to be finalized within twenty-four (24) months of a child's entry into foster care.
12. Within thirty (30) days of filing the [Legal Services Request](#) with the SAAG, verify the filing of the TPR petition.
13. Refer to the [Adoption Section](#) of the manual for details on the adoption process, preparing a child for adoption and completion of necessary documents.
14. Re-evaluate the case plan during each purposeful visit with the parents, guardian or legal custodian, child, relatives and/or caregivers.

If the court approved plan is for permanent guardianship, either with a relative or non-relative caregiver, the SSCM will:

1. Ensure the parents, guardian or legal custodian has received reunification services unless a non-reunification order has been granted.
2. Ensure a waiver from the State Office Permanency Director/Designee has been obtained if the child is under the age of 14 or is free for adoption.
3. In the Diligent Search tab in Georgia SHINES, clearly document an exhaustive search for relative placement resources and the reason(s) why placement with each relative identified is or is not in the child's best interest. Focus on safety, permanency and well-being.
4. Conduct paternity testing on putative fathers to expand the pool of possible resources to paternal relatives.

5. Conduct collateral contacts with service providers, school or medical professionals, or any other individual with knowledge about the child or family to assess the safety and well-being of the child and the progress towards permanency.
6. Document the following on the in Georgia SHINES, either on the case plan or in the Narrative section of the Log of Contacts:
  - a. All of the reasons reunification would be detrimental to the child;
  - b. That reunification services therefore should not be provided including specifics as to whether any grounds for TPR exist;
  - c. Reasons TPR and adoption are not in the best interest of the child;
  - d. The steps to be taken (or already taken) to finalize a permanent placement;
  - e. The presence of an existing, positive relationship between the child and the potential guardian;
  - f. A discussion with the guardian regarding the [financial and non-financial supports](#) available to the relative/non-relative caregiver if they are granted guardianship of the child;
  - g. A minimum of six (6) months of purposeful visits with the potential guardian and child to supervise the child's placement prior to recommending a transfer of guardianship.
7. Provide case management services to transition the child from DFCS custody to the guardianship of the child's caregiver including:
  - a. Pre-placement visits if the child is not already in the home;
  - b. A minimum of six (6) months of supervision of the child's placement with the potential guardian;
  - c. Referrals and linkages to community agencies (i.e. Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), etc.);
  - d. Support services to ensure the safety and well-being of the child including, but not limited to, a transitional plan regarding the child's educational, behavioral and/or medical needs.
8. Re-evaluate the case plan during each purposeful visit with the parents, guardian or legal custodian, child, relatives and/or caregivers.
9. Prior to transferring guardianship to a relative or non-relative caregiver, the SSCM shall ensure:
  - a. An approved [R/Non-RCA](#) is on file;
  - b. Monthly supervision for the child in the placement has occurred for a minimum of six (6) months prior to the transfer;
  - c. A non-reunification order is in place;
  - d. The relative/non-relative caregiver is aware of all [financial and non-financial supports](#) available once custody or guardianship is transferred;
  - e. If a relative/non-relative is to receive a subsidy payment, all eligibility requirements have been met; (See [Financial/Non-Financial Supports](#))
  - f. Medical history, copies of educational records, birth certificate, social security card, etc., are provided to the caregivers.
10. Petition the court to be relieved of custody and transfer guardianship to the relative/non-relative caregiver.  
**NOTE:** Non-reunification must be granted prior to a transfer of guardianship.
11. If the caregiver wishes to receive a guardianship subsidy, ensure the appropriate agreement is executed. (See [Financial and Non-Financial Supports](#))

If the court approved case plan is for Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, the SSCM will:

1. Document compelling reasons why reunification, TPR/adoption or guardianship are not appropriate nor in the best interest of the child and ensure these reasons are documented in the court order incorporating APPLA as the permanency plan.
2. If Long-Term Foster Care (LTFC) is the APPLA option, ensure a LTFC agreement is signed and the court order includes the name of the LTFC placement resource.
3. Document the placement resource's willingness to maintain the child in the placement until the child reaches the age of eighteen (18).
4. Develop a WTLP with the youth outlining the goals and steps necessary while the youth is in foster care to assist with transition to emancipation.
5. Initiate services for the child and/or placement resource to ensure that the child's safety and well-being needs are met.
6. Conduct collateral contacts with service providers, school or medical professionals, or any other individual with knowledge about the child or family to assess the safety and well-being of the child and the progress towards permanency.
7. Document the supports/services provided to prepare the child for adulthood including any Independent Living Program (ILP) workshops, community workshops and any independent living skills instruction provided by the foster parent.
8. Continuously explore and/or re-explore a more permanent placement option for the child including ongoing exploration of relatives and others with a committed relationship to the child.
9. Re-evaluate the case plan during each purposeful visit with the parents, guardian or legal custodian, child, relatives and/or caregivers.

If the court approved case plan is a concurrent plan, the SSCM will:

1. Provide intensive services and/or refer the birth family/caregiver for appropriate services, based on the case plan goals, recommendations from the CCFA, and other assessed/emerging needs.
2. Ensure referrals for service provision are made timely:
  - a. Emergency needs require a referral for services within twenty-four (24) hours of discovery;
  - b. Non-emergency needs require a referral for services within five (5) business days of discovery;
  - c. Document all referrals and services under the Services and Referrals Tab in SHINES.
3. Implement the visitation plan:
  - a. Ensure that the birth/removal family/caregiver and resource parents or other permanency resource are knowledgeable regarding the visitation expectation;
  - b. Ensure that any barriers to visitation have been discussed and resolved (i.e. Location, schedule, transportation, etc.).
4. Follow up with service providers to ensure services are initiated in a timely manner, based upon the urgency of the need and DFCS' requirements:
  - a. Maintain monthly contact with the service providers by phone, email, or face-to-face;
  - b. Review monthly provider notes and summarize findings in case documentation;
  - c. Document all contacts under the Narrative of the Contact Detail in SHINES;
  - d. Invite providers to case reviews, Permanency Roundtables, etc.

5. Follow-up with the birth family/caregiver to assess their perception of services and whether services are meeting their needs.
6. Participate in a monthly case staffing with the supervisor and discuss:
  - a. Whether or not services are working;
  - b. The quality of services; and
  - c. The need to change services.
7. Fully implement the alternative plan while the family is working towards reunification, which includes:
  - a. Identification and placement of child with the resource parents or other permanency resource; (See [Permanency Planning](#))
  - b. Ongoing discussion with resource parents or other permanency resource regarding the alternative permanency plan selected and commitment to permanency for the child if reunification fails;
  - c. Documentation of all efforts to reunify the child with the birth parents, guardian or legal custodian;
  - d. Adherence to specific goals and steps identified in the case plan relating to the alternative permanency plan for the family.
8. Utilize a structured process (i.e. Permanency Roundtable, Case Conference, Family Team Meeting) to re-evaluate the case plan and parental progress with the parents, guardian, or legal custodian and the support team every ninety (90) days. (See [Case Review](#))
9. Clearly document services to accomplish both the primary and alternative plans.

### **Changes in the Court-Ordered Plan**

In order to make any changes to the court approved case plan (goals/steps) or permanency plan, the following must occur:

1. DFCS shall request a hearing for the court to consider the recommended changes to the plan.
2. The court shall:
  - a. Provide timely notification to all relevant parties of the hearing;
  - b. Conduct a hearing;
  - c. Make all required findings and determinations as required by law;
  - d. Accept or reject the modifications to the case plan, in full or in part;
  - e. Enter a supplemental order incorporating any changes to the case plan.

### **PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

A case plan is a plan which is designed to ensure that a child receives protection, proper care and case management and may include services for a child, parents, guardian or legal custodian. Because of the tight timeframes to achieve permanency, it is critical for the initial case plan to be well executed. The likelihood of securing a safe and permanent home, either via reunification, adoption or guardianship, for the child in a timely manner is directly related to the appropriateness of the case plan.

The case plan provides the road map for meeting the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the child and family. The case plan must be developed collaboratively with the family and providers based on a thorough understanding of the strengths and needs unique to a family. Family Team Meetings (FTM) and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings are effective ways to enhance case plan development. The case plan should address what changes must be observed in families in order for children to be safely returned home. Case plans are unlikely to result in desired outcomes if the birth family is not invested in them; therefore, the birth family

must be actively involved in the case planning process if change is to occur. The most critical aspect of case planning involves obtaining agreement from caregivers regarding the goals for change.

The case plan should include:

1. A clear description of the reason a child was removed from his parents, guardian or legal custodian;
2. A description of what must change in order for the child to safely return home; and
3. Case plan activities needed to enhance diminished caregiver protective capacities and eliminate safety concerns to the child.

If reunification is appropriate, the agency proposes a **reunification case plan** outlining the goals and steps required for the child to be safely returned to the birth family. If reunification is not appropriate, the agency proposes a **non-reunification case plan** outlining the goals and steps required to secure a permanent living arrangement for the child with a relative or non-relative caregiver via other available permanency options (i.e. adoption, guardianship or another planned permanent living arrangement). In some instances, the agency may propose a concurrent case plan, which incorporates both a reunification and non-reunification permanency plan. In a concurrent case plan, reunification is the primary permanency plan and an alternate permanency plan is selected from one of the above referenced permanency options. The case plan outlines action steps to simultaneously support achieving the prescribed goals of both permanency plans.

### **Case Plan Goals and Steps**

Case plan goals are designed to address the specific behaviors or conditions that must be changed for the child to be safely returned to the birth family. Case plan goals should be individualized for the unique needs of the family and must be behaviorally specific, positively stated, measurable and written in clear and simple language. Case plan steps are those activities which outline who will do what, when, how often and where. Case plan steps are the “stepping stones” toward achievement of a specific goal. Realistic timeframes for achievement help to direct and motivate parents, guardians or legal custodians and children. However, the time needed by a parent, guardian or legal custodian to make the necessary changes must be balanced with the child’s developmental needs and his/her need for permanency.

### **Family Team Meeting (FTM)**

The FTM is a gathering of family team members (i.e., parent(s), guardian or legal custodian, extended family, friends, service providers, etc.) who join together to make critical decisions regarding child safety, permanency and well-being. It is available as an option for County Departments who wish to use this process to develop or change the case plan or permanency plan.

### **Court Approval of the Case Plan**

Georgia’s CPRS is an interface between SHINES and the Juvenile Court that allows the Juvenile Court to review the supervisor approved case plan in SHINES. Upon receipt of the case plan from DFCS, the Juvenile Court will conduct a review of the plan. The court will make a determination regarding the appropriateness of the child’s permanency plan and placement. If the court rejects the permanency plan or any other component of the case plan, DFCS must submit a new/modified case plan within ten (10) calendar days for court approval. Once the



court adopts the case plan, the court issues a disposition or supplemental order incorporating the case plan, which remains in effect until modified by the court. DFCS must ensure it receives copies of these supplemental orders and uploads these documents into External Documents in SHINES as they are important for IV-E purposes.

If DFCS submits an initial case plan to the court that **does not** recommend reunification as the permanency plan, supporting information is required. The court shall hold a **permanency plan hearing no later than thirty (30) days** following the filing of a **non-reunification case plan** to review the proposed case plan. If the court finds that reasonable efforts to reunify a child with his or her family will be detrimental to the child, then it enters an order stipulating “*reasonable efforts to reunify the child and family are not required*” or should be terminated. If the court finds that reunification efforts would not be detrimental to the child, it will order DFCS to submit a **reunification case plan** within ten (10) calendar days for court approval. The adopted permanency plan will be incorporated into an order. If a hearing is requested by the parent, guardian or legal custodian after the development of the case plan, the court will conduct a hearing. After hearing the evidence, the court will enter an order which **may**:

1. Accept or reject the DFCS recommended permanency plan and case plan (all or part).
2. Order an additional evaluation.
3. Appoint a Guardian ad Litem (GAL).
4. Outline other reviews, as it deems necessary to determine the disposition that is in the child’s best interest.
5. Include findings of fact that reflect the court’s consideration of the oral and written testimony offered by the parents, the guardian, the custodian of the child, the foster parents, relatives providing care for the child, and DFCS.
6. Make a disposition only if the court finds that such disposition is in the best interest of the child.

Once the case plan is court-approved, the court will provide a copy of the order and court approved plan to the parties. DFCS will be held responsible for providing copies of the case plan to the parents, guardian or legal custodian, foster parents, relative placement resource, and GAL/CASA. The parents, guardian or legal custodian may provide written consent for DFCS to provide a copy of the case plan to other significant parties.

### **Services to Parents/Guardians/Legal Custodians**

The quality of the provision of services largely depends on partnerships and collaborations with community partners assisting DFCS. Services must be directed toward achieving the identified goals and steps outlined in the case plan. DFCS must monitor the services provided to ensure families receive quality services that enhance the protective capacities of the caregivers and meet the needs of the children. While DFCS is obligated to provide and/or arrange services for the parents, guardians or legal custodians, they are also responsible and accountable for his/her actions and decisions around participating in those services. To accelerate permanency, services must be planned, organized and immediate. Some of the services provided to parents, guardians or legal custodians with children in foster care include, but are not limited to:

1. Visitation;
2. Housing assistance;
3. Income maintenance;
4. Mental health assessment/treatment;



5. Substance abuse assessment/treatment;
6. Domestic violence assessment/treatment;
7. Parenting education.

Services can be provided through community resources and/or through contracted services with the County Department. (See [Support Services to Preserve or Reunify Families](#))

### **Substance Abuse**

Substance abuse as an underlying need will likely require intensive treatment with anticipated periods of relapse. The parent, guardian or legal custodian dealing with addiction may still be in the treatment process when a decision regarding permanency is required. If the child cannot be safely returned home, then a decision may be made to continue the treatment plan and work toward reunification. However, there must be a “compelling reason” approved by the court as to why the agency is not seeking Termination of Parental Rights and another permanency option. Careful assessment of the parent’s, guardian’s or legal custodian’s progress and the treatment provider’s prognosis must be considered to determine whether additional time for rehabilitation will be requested.

### **Non-Custodial Parents**

Engage and assess non-custodial parents in the case planning process. Research indicates a correlation between engagement with non-custodial parents and fewer subsequent allegations of child maltreatment, as well as faster achievement of permanency. Engagement of non-custodial parents can help with safety planning, improving the relationship between the child and the non-custodial parent, and placement with the non-custodial parent and/or their relatives. Engagement of non-custodial parents is more than making contact with the parent and inquiring about whether the parent has any interest in being involved with the child. It requires making an effort to understand their situation and why they may feel the way they do. It is important to be aware of certain dynamics that may come into play in this process. For example, if the non-custodial parent appears disinterested, it could be something other than a lack of interest. The parent’s behavior may be in response to previous negative experiences they have had with the custodial parent, preconceived notions about how they are perceived by others regarding the status of their parental involvement, or the parent may be reluctant because of their views about the child welfare system.

Contacts with the non-custodial parent should be used to educate them on the case planning process and explore with them what their role might be. It is important to show empathy toward the non-custodial parent’s situation and interest in the non-custodial parent as a potential resource. Discussions with the custodial parent surrounding the involvement of the non-custodial parent need to occur during the development of the case plan.

### **Putative Father Registry**

Men who have completed the Paternity Acknowledgement form acknowledging paternity of a child or have indicated the possibility of paternity without acknowledging paternity of the child may register on the Putative Father Registry. The Registry is maintained by the Department of Public Health-Vital Records. It allows possible biological, but not legal fathers the opportunity to provide identifying information about themselves, the mother and the child. These men must be notified about any potential adoption of the child.

<b>FORMS AND TOOLS</b>
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N/A