

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

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1014

FOSTER PARENTS

The mission of Georgia's Foster Care Program is to strengthen families, protect children from further abuse and neglect and ensure permanency for every child in care. To meet the safety, stability and security needs of children in care, the Division of Family and Children Services depends upon the best efforts of community partners - particularly foster parents. Committed foster parents, sharing a common goal of safety and permanency for children with the agency and other team members, are integral to the success of these efforts.

The Division provides orientation, pre-service preparation and ongoing training to help potential resource families make an informed decision about providing foster care, to develop and enhance skills for parenting and nurturing children placed in their homes and to clarify the roles of resource families in working with children, families, the agency and other community partners.

The agency's preparation and training continuum includes a mechanism for providing practical knowledge of financial, structural and administrative support for resource families, and skills and competencies required in meeting the behavioral, attitudinal, and ongoing maintenance needs of children in care. The preparation and training continuum also serves as a strategy to develop and enhance the pool of resource families. It is the division's belief that well-prepared and informed resource families directly impact the strength, success and overall positive outcomes of the state's foster care program. The preparation and training continuum addresses three important phases of family readiness in caring for children in placement:

Phase I Orientation
Phase III Ongoing Training

Phase II IMPACT Pre-service Training


The Orientation Phase provides basic information to help potential resource families decide whether to pursue the process. The IMPACT Pre-service Training Phase provides families with preliminary or basic information, competencies and skills, and the philosophical framework they will need to begin providing care for children. The division recognizes that, just as Case Managers need continued in-service training to maintain the level of skills needed to do an effective job, resource families, too, require on-going training opportunities – to enhance previously learned skills and acquire new skills and strategies for parenting today's children in foster care.

On-going training is a crucial phase impacting the continued readiness of resource families to meet the ever-changing and varied needs of children in care and begins during the first year of approval. This requires honest disclosure by resource families and keen observations by Case Managers regarding the training needs of these families. These on-going skills and competencies may be obtained through specialized training sessions based on specific needs and expectations, seminars, workshops, conferences and additional opportunities for families to experience personal growth by reflecting on their own personal needs and experiences in order to give their best to children placed in their care. The annual in-service training requirement continues to focus on skills and competencies required by families for the on-going challenge of parenting children in placement.

Under girding the above continuum is the implementation of successful recruitment and support

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strategies (1014-S [Rev. May 2003] and *Supplemental Activities for the Recruitment, Retention and Support of Family Placement Resources for Children* [May 2001]), and other useful publications.

 DHS Georgia Department of Human Services	Division of Family and Children Services Child Welfare Manual	Chapter 1014- Supplement Effective Date: November 30, 2009
		Previous Policy #:

POLICY TITLE: Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

POLICY NUMBER: 1014. S.1

CODES

REQUIREMENT

The Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS) will diligently recruit and retain foster parents through ongoing recruitment and retention efforts which include:

1. The development and implementation of a statewide coordinated recruitment and retention plan;
2. The development and implementation of local county and regional foster parent recruitment and retention plans;
3. Achievement of child specific recruitment efforts for foster and adoptive parents to meet the specific need(s) of a child; and
4. Achievement of targeted recruitment efforts for foster and adoptive parents to meet the needs of a specific group/category (e.g. medically fragile, teens, siblings) of children.

DFCS will direct all recruitment activities toward a broad cross-section of the community that reflects racial and ethnic diversity and meet the resource needs of children and families in the respective county/area in accordance with The Multiethnic Placement Act and Interethnic Adoption Provisions (MEPA-IEPA) (See Practice Guidance).

PROCEDURE

The State Recruitment and Retention Manager will;

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1. Establish statewide targets for recruitment and retention initiatives based upon available trend and data analysis;
NOTE: Statewide targets will be established annually by September 30th.
2. Provide ongoing technical assistance in the coordination of recruitment and retention efforts; and
3. Provide monthly monitoring plan of recruitment and retention activities.

To initiate and complete the **Annual Recruitment and Retention Plan**, the County DFCS Staff will:

1. Utilizing statewide goals, establish a profile of recruitment and retention needs within the county that addresses the following;
 - a. Characteristics and numbers of children in county's custody.
 - b. Average number of children exiting care annually.
 - c. Assessment of usability of foster and adoptive homes.
 - d. Number and reason of home closures annually (See Practice Guidance).
 - e. Assessment of past recruitment and retention efforts (areas needing improvement, successful efforts).
 - f. County demographics of potential resources.
2. Determine the strategies of recruitment such as;
 - a. Use of church bulletins, flyers and brochures.
 - b. Informational booths at local carnivals and fairs.
 - c. Participation in town hall and neighborhood association meetings.
 - d. Utilizing existing foster parents to provide information about fostering.
3. Determine the strategies for retention such as;
 - a. Forum in which information can be shared with foster parents.
 - b. Avenue in which foster parents can share questions/concerns.
 - c. Ongoing training and support to meet the specific need of a foster parent.
4. Draft plan considering aforementioned information and submit to County Director for approval; and
5. Upon approval from County Director:
 - a. Submit the Annual Recruitment and Retention Plan to Statewide Recruitment & Retention Manager by the last business day of November for activities for the upcoming calendar year (Jan-Dec).

To initiate and complete the **Child Specific or Targeted Recruitment** efforts, the County DFCS Staff will:

1. Identify the child and/or group of children and their characteristics that are in need of a foster or adoptive home resource;
2. Identify adult or group of adults (church group, nurses, school teachers, etc.) that potentially meet the need(s) of the child and or group of children;

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3. Provide individuals with information regarding foster or adoptive parenting;
4. If interest is expressed, refer families' to the Inquiry Information Line to schedule Orientation (See policy [1014.1 Responding to Inquiries](#)).

To compile and submit the **Recruitment and Retention Monthly Report**, the County DFCS Staff will at the minimum:

1. Document the recruitment activities occurring in the previous month and provide a description of each by the:
 - a. Methods used for dissemination of both general and/or child specific information including the use of targeted and general recruitment;
 - b. Methods geared toward a broad cross-section of the community; and
 - c. Strategies developed to address any barriers.
2. Describe the outcome for each recruitment activity to include at the minimum:
 - a. Compliance with Multi-ethnic Placement Act, MEPA-IEPA;
 - b. Number of families responding to each activity;
 - c. Number of families scheduled to attend IMPACT;
 - d. Number of families completing IMPACT; and
 - e. The type of homes developed (i.e. Partnership, Resource, or Adoption Parent).
3. Document the retention activities occurring in the previous month and provide a description of each by the:
 - a. Type of retention variable activity is aimed at improving (See Practice Guidance).
4. Describe the outcome for each retention activity to include at the minimum:
 - a. Number and percentage of families who participated in the activity.
5. Submit the report to the State Recruitment & Retention Manager by the last business day of each month.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents

The recruitment and retention of foster family resources is critical to the overall success of the family foster care program. An effective recruitment and retention program is paramount to our success in ensuring the availability of appropriate foster family resources for children who are placed in the custody of DFCS. Recruitment and retention efforts must be designed to provide the community with information about the characteristics and needs of the children and their families involved in the foster care system in Georgia. The diligent recruitment and retention of foster or adoptive parent resources is an ongoing process that involves presenting information and providing feedback and consultation.

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Annual Recruitment & Retention Plan

Every county department is responsible for developing and implementing an Annual Recruitment and Retention Plan. The plan must include:

1. Specific recruitment and retention activities to accomplish the goal.
2. Steps needed to carry out the recruitment and retention activities.
3. The resources available/needed to carry out the recruitment and retention activities.
4. A list of possible barriers to the accomplishment of recruitment and retention requirements.
5. Strategies for meeting MEPA-IEPA recruitment and retention activities.
6. Methods for prompt and/or effective follow up to community inquiry to include:
 - a. Who will respond to the inquiries?
 - b. How will the inquiries be responded to?
 - c. What method will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the activity?

The Annual Recruitment and Retention Plan must be developed every calendar year (January 1st -December 31st) and must be submitted to the State Recruitment and Retention Manager by the last business day in November.

Recruitment of Foster Parents

Recruitment involves building public interest and awareness of the foster care system and expressing to the community a need for foster parents. Recruitment efforts can not be centered on the goal of increasing foster families only, but must be focused on developing the most appropriate individuals to meet the needs of children in foster care. Plans addressing recruitment may include the following activities/focus:

1. ***Utilizing Foster Parents*** – Foster Parents are great resources for recruiting individuals because of their first hand knowledge of the needs of foster children and their experience in working with foster children and the agency.
2. ***Embracing Faith Based Community*** – Worship centers (e.g. churches, mosque, and synagogue) are responsible for serving children and families within their respective communities. This shared responsibility provides an opportunity for the agency to partner with faith based communities to inform the public about the needs of children in foster care.
3. ***Medical Community*** – Targeted recruitment efforts can involve reaching out to the medical community (e.g. doctors and nurses) to provide information regarding the special medical needs for children in foster care.

Retention of Foster Parents

In order to maintain an adequate resource of foster parents to meet the needs of children in foster care, special attention must be made to the support offered and provided to foster parents. Foster homes are closed for a variety of reasons that

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include the following:

Family Moves/Relocates/Change in circumstances	Adoption Finalized With Subsidies
Family requested closure due to marital problems.	Adoption Finalized Without Subsidies
Foster Care/Home Policy Violation	Arrest of foster parent.
Foster parents decided to no longer serve for personal reasons.	Burn Out
Health/Deceased	Child/Parent available for adoptive placement
ICPC case closed due to supervision of children by adoption planning	Child Protective Service (CPS)
Child turned 18 and left home.	Family and/or child selected
Closed-No Placement	Family did not get mandatory training requirements.
Child/Family on hold for identified regular adoptive placement	End of relative placement
Denied	Family consistently declined placements
Not ready	Plan foster parent placement
Other issues regarding safety and well-being	Plan foster/adopt placement
Out for consideration	Plan relative adoptive placement
Prefers to foster only.	Plan relative foster adoptive placement
Requested transfer to another agency.	Family not amenable to change, correction, or DFCS intervention

SHINES – FA Home-Home Information Page

Foster home closures can result in positive outcomes such as a child being adopted or obtaining guardianship. In comparison, a foster home may be closed at the request of a foster parent due to a negative experience(s) which affect the following **Retention**

Variables:

1. Satisfaction with DFCS Staff – includes staff customer service, response to phone calls, or any interaction with DFCS staff or providers
2. Confidence in Ability to Meet the Needs of Children- includes how confident the fostering family feels about being able to manage the demands of being a foster parent.
3. The ability to express concerns without fear of retaliation from DFCS.

County retention plans must address local issues affecting foster parent retention. Plans addressing retention may include the following activities:

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1. **Customer service training for DFCS staff** - Webinars and on-site presentations to help improve and address general customer service issues with specific regard on how to best respond to visits and phone calls from foster parents.
2. **Foster Parent Leadership and Development Council** – A forum for foster parents that allows them to offer wisdom and expertise on ways to recruit, retain and support foster homes.
3. **Regular e-mail, phone or web based survey of foster parents** - Surveys will help the county determine what is working and what needs improvement to ensure that foster parents are provided with ongoing support.
4. **Exit interviews with families leaving the program** - Conduct brief interviews with foster parents leaving the program. The interviews should be conducted by staff not known to the families. Results of interview should be used to assess current practices and improve in areas as identified.
5. **Foster Parent Grievance Process** – The County Director should use this opportunity to assess what event(s) occurred that caused the foster parent to file a grievance. Recommendations and “lessons learned” from the staffing and/or case review should be employed across the appropriate program areas (i.e. CPS, Placement) to improve practices as it relates to supporting foster parents.

MEPA-IEPA and Foster Care Recruitment

MEPA-IEPA requires states to develop recruitment plans that provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

- Experience demonstrates that minority communities respond when they are given information about the need for homes and when they are treated with respect.
- In order to achieve timely and appropriate placement of children, recruitment plans must focus on developing a pool of potential foster parents willing and able to foster or adopt the children needing placement.
- Recruitment must seek to provide all children with the opportunity for placement. Both general and targeted recruitment should be used. When using targeted recruitment, counties must ensure that children being recruited for are also included in general recruitment activities.
- Recruitment must also seek to provide all qualified members of the community with an opportunity to adopt or foster a child.
- Recruitment strategies must not systematically discourage or deter the interest of prospective foster parents in trans-racial or interethnic placements.
- Counties must avoid the arbitrary use of race-neutral recruitment

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strategies, related to income, age, education, family structure, and size and ownership of housing, that have the effect of excluding groups of perspective foster parents on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

Both general and targeted recruitment activities are important in meeting diligent recruitment requirements.

- Recruitment efforts should educate the community on the financial, medical, counseling and other assistance and supports available to foster families.
- Recruitment methods must include the use of general media (radio, television, printed material, public service announcements, talk shows and news programs) to highlight the needs and provide the foster care program with visibility.
- Efforts should be undertaken to develop ongoing newspaper columns concerning the plight of children or highlighting outstanding foster families. Work with reporters and editors to stimulate relevant news and feature articles. Press releases may be sent out to newspapers, businesses, clubs, civic organizations, fraternities, sororities, churches, and other groups.
- Posters, flyers and brochures should be distributed throughout the community, to churches, schools, clubs, medical offices and facilities, libraries, beauty and barber shops, laundromats, community centers, etc.
- Partnerships must be developed with community groups to make the placement needs of children more visible, to identify and support prospective foster parent resources, and to strengthen community outreach.
- Agencies should provide greater community access, including location and adjustment of hours to accommodate a broad cross-section of the community.
- Agency practice and procedures should be congruent with the cultural and social values of the targeted community.
- Agencies should establish non-discriminatory fee requirements for potential foster family resources that allow families of varying income levels to meet the costs for mandatory pre-approval requirements (medical, drug screens, finger prints, residential upgrades, etc.)
- Recruitment activities should provide potential foster parent resources with information about the characteristics and needs of the available children, including age, gender, membership in sibling groups, culture and ethnicity, developmental and behavioral needs, etc.

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- Recruitment activities should provide information about the nature of the foster care process, including the basic requirements and minimum standards set by the State.

In order to meet MEPA's diligent efforts requirements, an agency should develop a comprehensive recruitment plan which addresses the following:

- A description of the characteristics of waiting children;
- Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community;
- Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child specific information;
- Strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have timely access to the GPS/DT:MAPP Preparation and Selection Process, including location and hours of service that facilitate access by the community;
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities;
- Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
- Non-discriminatory fee structures;
- Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a waiting child, including the diligent search for relatives and the use of interagency efforts, provided that such procedures must ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

REFERENCES

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PREPARATION AND APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS

THE MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR APPROVAL FOR PROSPECTIVE RESOURCE FAMILIES FOR FOSTER CARE

Family foster homes approved by the Division of Family and Children Services must meet the Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes which were established by the State Board for Children and Youth and incorporated into the policy of the Board of the Department of Human Resources through the Reorganization Act of 1972. The standards must be adhered to in the approval of DFCS family foster homes, which will be used for the placement of children in foster care. When unusual situations make it advisable to waive one or a minimal number of requirements, only the County Director, by written approval, has the authority to grant such a waiver and to provide written assurances that the home can provide the expected level of care based on the needs of a child. Documentation of any exception to the Minimum Standards must be on file in the foster home record.

The Minimum Requirements for Approval of Prospective Resource Families

The following *Minimum Standards* for foster care must be met in order for a resource family to be in *Full Approval Status*.

- A. Evidence the maturity, stability, fitness, skills and competency to successfully protect, nurture, and meet the developmental needs of children; support the agency's established case goals and Permanency Plan for child(ren) placed in their care. Resource parents must be at least ten (10) years older than the child to be placed and if unmarried, at least 25 years of age.
- B. Completion of Orientation
- C. Completion of Pre-service Training
- D. Completion of Safety Checks (GCIC and NCIC fingerprint check, CPS, Sexual Offenders Registry, Pardons and Parole, Department of Corrections, the child abuse and neglect registry in any other state that the prospective foster/adoptive parent or any adult household member over eighteen has resided in within the past five years and Completion of a Health Exam
- E. Approved Family Assessment (by County Director).

RECRUITMENT

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Note: See Social Services Manual Section 1014-S for Recruitment policies and guidelines

RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES

1014.1

Requirement

The county department will direct all inquiries from potential foster/adoptive resource families to the 877-210-KIDS inquiry information line. This toll-free intake number serves as the central intake line for all inquires.

Note: No individual should be denied the opportunity to become an adoption or foster parent on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the person or the child involved. Agencies should not systematically and inappropriately filter out potential transracial or interethnic placements. Agencies should not use race-neutral policies (income, age, education, family structure, ownership of housing, etc.) that also have the effect of excluding groups of prospective families on the basis of race, color, or national origin, where those standards are arbitrary or unnecessary (the Multiethnic Placement Act – the Interethnic Adoption Provisions [MEPA-IEP]).

- A. The inquirer will receive a telephone response and be mailed or emailed informational literature from the 877-210-KIDS Information Line within two (2) working days.
- B. The local county office will receive notification of the inquiry from the Information Line within one (1) working day.

1014.1 PROCEDURES

1. The county department directs all inquires to the 877-210-KIDS Information Line. The Information Line serves as the central intake for all prospective resource families.
2. The Information Line contacts inquirers within two (2) working days; enters all inquirer information into the Information Line Database (which includes the inquirer's name, address, telephone number, age and race/ethnicity); and mails or emails informational literature.
3. The county department receives notification of the inquiry within one (1) working day after the Information Line responds to the inquirer. The county department accesses the database to review the information.

TRACKING

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1014.1.1

Requirement

Maintaining an accurate account of prospective resource families and their progress toward approval is critical in ensuring a trained and readily available placement options. The Information Line Database is utilized to track all prospective resource families from initial inquiry to entry into IMPACT Pre-Service Training or closure.

1014.1.1 PROCEDURE

1. The online database can be accessed at www.hgkinquiryline.org.
2. County departments will utilize the Information Line Database to track contacts and progress of prospective resource families.
3. All dates of contact, results of calls, scheduled and missed appointments and eventual reason for closure is entered into the Information Line Database.
4. Each inquiry that is opened in the Information Line Database must be closed with disposition noted.

ORIENTATION

1014.2

Requirement

Within ten (10) working days of notification of an inquiry, the county department will contact the prospective resource family to schedule orientation. An orientation meeting is held with potential foster/adoptive resource families who would like additional information about the state's foster care and adoption programs. To be approved to provide foster care or to adopt, applicants must complete the IMPACT orientation session which consists of the components outlined in Section 1014.2.2.

1014.2 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Orientation is completed in one of two ways: 1) within a scheduled group setting or, 2) Individually with families whose circumstances prevent one or both family members from participating in the group process or in order to meet a specific county need.
2. County departments will conduct orientations at least once every 30 days.
3. Resource families are contacted within two (2) days of a missed Orientation appointment to be offered a reschedule date.
4. After three missed orientation appointments, prospective resource families are closed from the Information Line Database and sent written notification asking that they re-contact the Information Line when they decide to proceed with the process.

MANDATORY ORIENTATION REQUIREMENT

1014.2.1

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Requirement

There are no exceptions to the required orientation training. Orientation constitutes the first phase of IMPACT pre-service training/preparation for foster/adoptive applicants and is mandatory for all potential resource families. Families approved by other states are also required to have the fundamental information needed to consider fostering or adopting in this state.

1014.2.1 PRACTICE ISSUES

Orientation also allows the agency to interact with and form initial impressions about potential resource families.

INFORMATION COVERED DURING ORIENTATION

1014.2.2

Requirement

Each county department utilizes the scripted 2-hour IMPACT orientation. The orientation is designed to provide fundamental information to help potential resource families decide whether to pursue the foster care or adoption experience.

1014.2.2 PROCEDURE

Information presented during the IMPACT orientation session includes the following areas:

1. The goal and purpose of foster care and adoption; the various placement options through the state: regular foster care, relative foster care, foster/adopt and adoptive.
2. The roles and responsibilities of resource families, the agency, the legal/extended family and the children in placement, and the interaction between and among them.
3. The agency philosophy of placement and the philosophy of cooperation and partnership with resource families.
4. HIPAA, ASFA, MEPA – IEPA and their impact upon the foster care and adoption process.
5. The importance of clear communication between the resource family, agency staff, birth families, courts, schools and other partners involved in the foster/adoption process.
6. The general requirements for parenting children in placement, including the general qualifications for the resource family; requirements for the physical facilities (home); the family assessment process, including background checks, medicals and other requirements; financial responsibility, including per diem and reimbursements for services provided; annual in-service training requirements; care of the child, including safety, physical care, transportation and child care practices.

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7. Understanding the mechanics of the placement system and the procedures and processes involved; who pays for what and when.
8. The agency's policy regarding discipline and specifications regarding the consequences of violating the discipline policy; an overview of the implications of JJ vs. Ledbetter.
9. The supports available from the agency, the community and other resource families; accessing services and resources.
10. An overview of the various levels and types of care in the continuum of care for children.
11. Clarity regarding the purpose and function of resource families in providing foster care services and how this process is *impacted* by the underlying desire to adopt.
12. Post-Adopt services (refer to Adoption Manual Section 109 and 111).

1014.2.2 PRACTICE ISSUES

Counties must offer information and direction that assist resource families in determining their suitability or readiness for the foster parenting role.

PRE-SCREENING PROSPECTIVE RESOURCE PARENTS

1014.2.3

Requirement

Following orientation, prospective resource parents who express an interest in continuing the approval process to foster/adopt will have their names checked against the county's *child protection services records and the Sexual Offender's Registry, Pardons and Parole, and the Department of Corrections public information resources.*

1014.2.3 PRACTICE ISSUES

Orientation is provided to any interested person. Orientation provides a basic introduction of applicable DFCS policy to assist prospective resource families in making an initial decision about resource parenting. Subsequently, families can determine if they are indeed eligible to continue the process and if not, to select themselves out.

1014.2.3 PROCEDURES

1. Prospective Resource parents will be screened through CPS records, the Sexual Offender's Registry, Pardons and Paroles, Department of Corrections (links at IDS

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Placement Central) before being invited to IMPACT pre-service training.

2. Any negative findings should be reviewed by the County Director or Designee before invitation to IMPACT Pre-Service Training is extended.

IMPACT: PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION

1014.3

Requirement

To be approved as a DFCS resource family for foster care or adoption, families are required to complete IMPACT. The IMPACT program involves an instructive approach to preparing families and includes an assortment of visual aids, audio-visuals, role-play and vignettes to support the acquisition of skills and competencies. Woven throughout the training will be applicable references to cultural and disciplinary issues in caring for children in placement. The successful completion of the IMPACT program exposes participants to basic skills and competencies required to begin providing foster or adoptive care. Upon completion participants must demonstrate at least minimal mastery and internalization of the skills and competencies presented.

The IMPACT pre-service training addresses several areas that are required in establishing the basic skills and competencies needed to parent children placed in foster or adoptive care. These areas include the following:

- ***The Fostering/Adoption Process*** – including supervision and safety issues for children in care; communication with the agency and other foster care partners; the judicial/legal process; discipline policy requirements and behavior management; cultural, ethnic and religious issues; supports for the resource family; an awareness of personal and family strengths/needs, and resources required to successfully foster/adopt; understanding the role of the resource family in concurrent planning.
- ***Emotional/Cognitive/Behavioral Implications in Fostering/Adopting*** – Loss and attachment issues and techniques for intervention; the impact of placement on the cognitive functioning of children; family's role in working with professionals in meeting the medical/psychological/educational, etc. needs of child; supporting the agency in moving a child into the appropriate level of care; the immediate and long term effects of placement on the resource family; the agency's role in supporting collaboration between partners; recognizing and responding to emotional, psychological and biochemical disorders.
- ***Sexuality and Sexual Orientation*** – sexuality as it relates to different age groups; recognizing and supporting children who have been victims of sexual abuse; supporting and responding to children who express sexual

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identity and sexual orientation issues; learning to recognize and avoid personal vulnerability to sexual maltreatment accusations and alleged overtures for sexual intimacy; expecting, recognizing and coping with exaggerated sexualized behaviors.

- *Communication and Partnership* – Defining the basics of communication patterns and the dynamics involved in communicating with partners; roles and responsibilities in initiating various types of communication; procedures to follow when communication is problematic; defining partnership and the various partners (resource families, agency staff, community agencies, faith based groups, biological/extended family members, professional resources, other resource families) involved in communication.
- *Identity and Cultural Issues* – an examination of cultural, religious, ethnic and trans-racial factors impacting the placement and care of children, including the importance of cultural and ethnic identity; diversity; practical cultural and identity issues for resource families, including grooming, hygiene, customs, manners, social interaction, and dietary considerations;

1014.3 PRACTICE ISSUES

The IMPACT pre-service training may be completed in one of two ways: 1) through a group approach (which is the preferred mode, or 2) through a series of individual meetings with the family.

EXCEPTIONS TO MANDATORY IMPACT REQUIREMENTS

1014.3.1

Requirement

*Pre-service preparation involving the IMPACT pre-service training is mandatory for all families except the following:

- Those resource families previously approved to foster or adopt for another state and moving to Georgia with children previously placed by that state through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC).
- Those resource families who were previously approved by another state and can document completion of a comparable pre-service training program through that state.

*These families are required to attend the orientation session.

1014.3.1 PRACTICE ISSUES

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

Families *not* required to participate in the pre-service preparation program should be encouraged to do so, as it will help their understanding of the needs and feelings of children in their care.

1014.3.1 PROCEDURES

1. Contact the other state or agency either verbally or in writing.
2. Obtain a description of the training content and number of hours earned as part of pre-service and in-service hours.
3. Request a copy of the family's assessment and any subsequent evaluations.
4. Request a recommendation from the state as to the capabilities of the resource family. If the recommendation is given verbally, request a written confirmation (may be faxed). Include this information in the resource family's file.

REQUEST TO WAIVE IMPACT REQUIREMENTS

1014.3.2

Requirement

Any approval to waive (except as noted in Requirement 1014.3.1) IMPACT can be granted and confirmed in writing by the County Director and a copy is sent to the Regional Director.

Note: The foster home cannot be granted Full Approval until the IMPACT is completed. (See Section 1003 regarding *IV-E* FC criteria.)

1014.3.2 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Waiver requests will be considered when they involve meeting the needs of a specific child.
2. Any approved waiver will be time limited.
3. All non-negotiable requirements must be satisfied (refer to Social Services Policy 1015.2).
4. In general, IMPACT requirements will not be waived when the parent is unable to participate because of work schedule.
5. IMPACT requirements WILL NOT be waived on the basis of the parent's profession (i.e., physician, psychologist, counselor, attorney, etc.).

THE FAMILY ASSESSMENT

1014.4

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

Requirements

The Family Assessment, which represents a comprehensive evaluation of the family, will be initiated for all families choosing to continue with the process following the first IMPACT session (an outline of the requirements for the Family Assessment is included at Section 1014.25).

REQUIREMENTS FOR INACTIVE, UNAPPROVED OR PENDING HOME

1014.5

Requirement

Resource families who have been on **inactive*, **unapproved* or **pending* status for longer than one (1) year must be re-evaluated and a written update completed in order to receive approval status.

1014.5 PROCEDURES

1. Waiver requests for this requirement must be submitted to and approved by the County Director with a copy to the Regional Director.
2. Waiver requests must clearly describe the reason(s) for the inactive/unapproved status and must include a copy of the previous Family Assessment with a summary of any updates.
3. If the family is placed on active status, the county will update the family's written Family Assessment and specifically describe resolution of the issues that necessitated the family's inactive/unapproved status.
4. All required verifications, including criminal record checks, must be updated and/or current.
5. Resource families whose homes have been closed for five years or longer must complete IMPACT Pre-Service Training.

1014.5 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. **A* family may be placed on *inactive* status for a number of reasons, including family illnesses, crises or circumstances which contra-indicate placement of children.
2. **Pending* status means that all required verification requirements have not been satisfied and the expectation is that they are capable of being met by the potential resource.
3. **Unapproved* status means the home would not or is unable to meet the Minimum Standards for approval. This designation is generally assigned to *new homes*.

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

DFCS STAFF/EMPLOYEES CANNOT BE DFCS FOSTER PARENTS

1014.6

Requirement

DFCS staff/employees

- Cannot be resource families for foster care because of the potential conflict of interest.
May foster for a private child-placing agency only if the placements are for non-DFCS children
- May serve as resource parents to related children only on an individual basis and with approval by the Manager of Field Operations.

Any exception to these requirements may be granted only by the Division Director.

1014.6 PROCEDURES

1. Waiver requests must include a recommendation from the County Director to the Division Director with a copy to the appropriate Manager of Field Operations.

DFCS FOSTER PARENTS CANNOT BE DFCS STAFF/EMPLOYEES

1014.7

Requirement

DFCS foster parents cannot be DFCS staff/employees or contract employees with agencies providing services to DFCS (ex. CCFA providers) because of the potential for conflict of interest situations.

Any exception can be granted only by the Division Director.

1014.7 PROCEDURES

1. Waiver requests must include a recommendation from the County Director to the Division Director with a copy to the appropriate Regional Director.

2.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

STAFF TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

1014.8

Requirement

The IMPACT curriculum defines requirements and practice issues in working with children in care and working with foster and adoptive parents and birth families. Staff who will not actually lead IMPACT classes can receive an abbreviated “*overview session*” of the curriculum from resource development staff, or they may attend the actual IMPACT Pre-service Training for leaders or participate in an IMPACT group with resource families. At a minimum, the following staff must be provided a comprehensive *overview* of the IMPACT Curriculum:

- Managers of Field Operations
- Field-based Consultants
- County Directors and
- Deputy Directors
- Program Directors and Social Services Administrators
- Placement Staff and all Supervisors
- Independent Living Coordinators

1014.8 PROCEDURES

1. Staff who co-lead or provide IMPACT for families must complete all leader certification preparation requirements. Any staff person with responsibilities in these areas must understand and be able to implement the philosophy and conceptualizations inherent in the IMPACT curriculum.
2. Staff who will not co-lead or provide IMPACT will be provided with a comprehensive overview of the IMPACT Curriculum by RD staff or other approved trainer; OR complete the IMPACT program with a parent group; OR attend IMPACT leader certification classes.

1014.8 PRACTICE ISSUES

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

Counties have an ongoing responsibility to ensure that resource families are supported through their term of approval. One important method of accomplishing this is through the establishment of an awareness of the needs and expectations of families and our role in supporting the implementation of these components of successful fostering and adopting.

TRAINER GUIDELINES

1014.9

Requirement

Training guidelines are supplied to each county/region providing training and to foster/adoptive parent co-leaders.

1014.9 PROCEDURES

1. The county department provides training guidelines to staff trainers and parent co-trainers.
2. The state provides training guidelines to counties and private agencies.

HANDOUTS AND CERTIFICATES

1014.10

Requirement

Handouts and certificates will be duplicated by the county department. Certified IMPACT trainers will be given master copies for duplication of participant material.

1014.10 PROCEDURE

County departments duplicate training handouts and certificates.

1014.10 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. County departments will ensure that they have a sufficient supply of materials for their IMPACT groups.
 2. Handouts and certificates are available online at <http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/impact> .
- SPECIFIC IMPACT SEGMENTS MAY BE USED IN IMPLEMENTING A CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN***

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

After a potential parent has completed the orientation process, the agency co-leader will evaluate the needs of the family, as well as the needs and resources of the agency, and choose as a mode of preparation either the *group* or the *individual* IMPACT program.

(See Office of Adoptions Manual Section 104.3 for any specific adoption requirements)

1014.12 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. IMPACT within a group context is the preferred option of preparing families to foster and/or adopt. However, some families will not be able to participate in the group process.
2. Individual training addressing the IMPACT pre-service training may be used as an option when the group approach is not possible or feasible. Individual training may be used in the following situations:
 - Work schedules prohibit participation in a group.
 - Health or physical issues prohibit participation in a group.
 - There are not enough applicants on the waiting list to schedule a group.
 - The family has a long wait before another group begins.
 - The potential parent is needed for a specific child(ren) and a group is not imminent.
 - The potential resource family has specific skills and experiences that are much needed by the agency.

SCHEDULING

1014.13

Requirement

IMPACT sessions will be held on days and times that meet the needs of the resource families.

1014.13 PRACTICE ISSUE

Meetings may be held at night, during the day and/or on weekends.

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MAXIMUM GROUP SIZE

1014.14

Requirement

Agency needs and the number of families with whom co-leaders can comfortably work during this process should guide the maximum group size of a IMPACT group. It is important that county's make the most effective use of time and resources in implementing the IMPACT program. A suggested average group size is 20 participants.

MAXIMUM WAITING PERIOD

1014.15

Requirement

The waiting period between the applicant's initial request and the initiation of IMPACT shall not exceed ninety (90) days.

1014.15 PRACTICE ISSUE

Options to meet this time frame include the following:

- Groups across county lines
- Reciprocal arrangements with other counties, groups, agencies
- Co-leading groups with other public or private agencies which have approved trainers.
- Referring prospective resource families for adoption and foster-adopt to the Regional Adoptions Coordinator for linkage to a private agency under contract with the Office of Adoptions.

IMPACT PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

1014.16

Requirement

For families who provide foster care services, all adults (age 18 and over) residing permanently in the home and who will be involved in parenting the child(ren) shall participate in the IMPACT. For adoptive families these household members are *strongly encouraged* to participate.

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IMPACT SESSION STRUCTURE

1014.17

Requirement

IMPACT consists of twenty (20) one-hour modules.

TIME FRAME FOR CONDUCTING SESSIONS

1014.18

Requirement

IMPACT must be completed within seven (7) weeks of initiation. County departments have discretion in deciding how many hours to present at each session, and the number of intervening days between sessions.

1014.18 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. County departments offer IMPACT classes in the configuration that best meets the needs of the resource families and accomplished completion of all hours within seven (7) weeks.
Example One: Monday and Thursday IMPACT classes at 3 hours each will be completed in 3 ½ weeks.
Example Two: IMPACT Classes offered Saturdays at 6 hours each will also be completed in 3 ½ weeks.
Example Three: IMPACT classes offered once a week at 3 hours will be completed in 7 weeks.

CONSISTENT GROUP CO-LEADERS

1014.19

Requirement

It is preferred that co-leaders are not changed or substituted and complete all assigned sessions of the IMPACT curriculum.

1014.19 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Consistent co-leaders are essential to the effectiveness of the IMPACT curriculum.

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2. Co-leaders should not start group or individual training if it is known in advance that they will not be available for the entire series.

PARTICIPANTS MUST ATTEND ALL MEETINGS

1014.20

Requirement

Participants are expected to attend/participate in all sessions of the IMPACT program.

1014.20 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. If a participant knows in advance that he/she will be unable to attend all sessions of an upcoming IMPACT series, he/she should wait for another group.
2. If an unforeseen circumstance results in a missed meeting, the participant may make up up to three hours in another IMPACT group or, the trainer may substitute the group meeting missed with an individual meeting in which the IMPACT requirements are satisfied.

Note: A Family assessment cannot be completed before completion of the IMPACT Training program.

PARTICIPANTS MAY OPT OUT

1014.21

Requirement

Participants may make a decision to “select out” at any point during the IMPACT process.

1014.21 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Participants who wish to remain in the group, after deciding that they will neither foster nor adopt, should be allowed to do so unless they are disruptive to the group.
2. One to one sessions are discontinued if the family decides they will neither foster nor adopt.
3. Through leadership, support and supervision from the agency, families who choose neither to foster nor adopt may work with the agency in other ways when appropriate:
 - Special activities/events (Secret Santa, picnics, etc.)

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- Volunteer activities for families
 - Recruitment activities
 - Operate clothes closets/food pantries
 - Provide refreshments for future groups
 - Sponsor a child's expenses for scouts, ballet, prom clothing. etc.
 - Use special skills (art, athletics, etc.)
 - Serve on citizen panels
4. The co-leader will help participants make the decision to "select out" as a part of the joint selection process.

TEAM LEADERS

1014.22

Requirement

IMPACT Pre-service Training sessions can be conducted by a team composed of approved agency staff or agency staff with a resource parent co-leader.

1014.22 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Agency staff or agency staff and foster/adoptive parents implement the IMPACT Pre-service Training curriculum. As co-leaders, each brings unique perspectives and experiences to the learning process. Pre-service preparation of resource families is most effective when presented jointly by staff and competent, experienced resource families – using an instructive and practical approach.

PARENT CO-LEADERS

1014.23

Requirement

Resource parents chosen to become approved co-leaders should meet the following criteria:

- Be an active and approved foster/adoptive resource family.
- Demonstrate the ability to grasp and impart information.
- Have at least two (2) years experience as an approved resource family.
- Demonstrate functional knowledge and understanding of the general needs of the children in placement.

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- Demonstrate the ability to manage, nurture and support children in placement.
 - Demonstrate a functional understanding of the agency's mission to strengthen and support birth families.
 - Have a positive working relationship with the agency.
 - Provide an environment that assures the health and safety of the child.
 - Understand the role they have assumed as resource family and the on-going impact this has on their family and themselves.
1. Resource families who are subjects of a CPS investigation cannot be approved as co-leaders until the investigation is satisfactorily resolved.
 2. Resource families should be equal partners in conducting groups, sharing an active role in planning, scheduling, logistics and delivery.
 3. Resource families should present a portion of each meeting, but will not be solely responsible for either an entire meeting or an entire group.
 4. Counties/clusters should have enough certified parent co-leaders to meet the training needs of the county/cluster.
 5. Counties will refer parents for approval as co-leaders when there is intent to use that parent for co-leading sessions.
 6. Counties/clusters should develop an annual training plan and inform parents of plans and approximate times that parents will be co-leading groups.

CO-LEADER WORK ASSIGNMENTS

1014.23.1

Requirement

Leaders are to provide individualized IMPACT to no more than two (2) families at a time. If a leader is also conducting group training, the leader may use individualized training with no more than one family during that period of time.

PARENT CO-LEADER SCHEDULING

1014.23.2

Requirement

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Resource parents with placements will not co-lead more than two (2) IMPACT groups a year or more than one (1) group at a time.

1014.23.2 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The county and family should assure that the needs of children placed with that family are being met before scheduling the parent to co-lead IMPACT groups.
2. The parent must be able to state how the child(ren)'s needs will be met during the parent's absence.

PLACEMENTS WITH PARENT CO-LEADERS

1014.23.3

Requirement

Careful consideration is given to the placement of children with prospective parent co-leader during the period they are training to become an approved trainer, or when that parent is co-leading a group.

1014.23.3 PRACTICE ISSUE

A careful assessment of the parent co-leader's family situation is made prior to placements during these periods.

FEEDBACK TO PARENT CO-LEADERS

1014.23.4

Requirement

The county/cluster will provide the parent co-leader feedback on his/her performance.

1014.23.4 PROCEDURES

1. Agency and parent co-leaders will collaborate following each meeting to discuss the meeting and give and receive feedback.

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1014.23.4 PRACTICE ISSUE

The county/region supports the parent's continued growth and development in delivering the IMPACT curriculum.

PARENT CO-LEADERS AND FAMILY CONSULTATIONS

1014.23.5

Requirement

Parent co-leaders will not be approved to provide the following:

- IMPACT Pre-service Training to individual families.
- Family consultations and assessments.

1014.23.5 PRACTICE ISSUE

The decision to involve foster/adoptive parent co-leaders in individual training, family consultations and assessments would create issues regarding the family's level of comfort in divulging sensitive material to peers and the subsequent concern with confidentiality.

PARENT CO-LEADER REGISTRATION FEES

1014.23.6

Requirement

The county department will pay any registration fees for parents who participate in IMPACT Pre-service Training when they are being prepared as co-leaders.

1014.23.6 PROCEDURES

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1. The county department will be notified when a parent is scheduled for a co-leader training session and will receive instructions on payment of registration fees.
2. The county department will notify the parent when he/she is scheduled for training.

1014.23.6 PRACTICE ISSUE

Foster/Adoptive parents will not be accepted into co-leader training program until a referral is made by the county department and any required registration fees are paid

PARENT CO-LEADER TRAVEL & PER DIEM EXPENSES

1014.23.7

Requirement

Travel and per diem expenses will be paid for foster/adoptive parents when training to become co-leaders for IMPACT Pre-service Training.

1014.23.7 PROCEDURES

1. Parents will submit expenses to the county department via Form 5357, *Bill for Services Rendered*.
2. The county department will reimburse the parent using the following data:
 - UASCode-531
 - Program Name - Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Services
 - Entitlement Code - 67
 - Services Provided – IMPACT Pre-Service Training
3. Accounting staff should *NOT* enter a client count for expenses related to the co-leader training.
4. In some situations, counties may prefer to direct pay hotels/motels rather than reimburse the parent. Direct pay arrangements may be completed between county accounting staff and the facility.

1014.23.7 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Reimbursement will be made in conformity with state travel policy.
2. The procedures outlined in 1014.23.8 are for reimbursing foster/adoptive parents for travel

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and per diem. They are *not* to be used for reimbursing staff.

PARENT CO-LEADER REIMBURSEMENT

1014.23.8

Requirement

Foster/adoptive parent co-leaders will be reimbursed a flat \$350 fee for co-leading IMPACT Pre-service Training.

1014.23.8 PROCEDURES

1. The parent co-leader must be an approved trainer prior to co-leading IMPACT groups.
2. The parent must submit a complete *Co-Leading Proposal* and *Questionnaire to Determine Independent Contractor Status*, to the local county department prior to co-leading a session (See Appendices):
 - IMPACT Pre-service Co-Leading Proposal
 - Questionnaire to Determine Independent Contractor Status
 - Sample: Questionnaire to Determine Independent Contractor Status
 - Form 5357 - Bill for Services Rendered
 - Sample: Form 5357 Bill for Services Rendered
3. The County Department authorizes the parent to co-lead group training by securing authorized signatures on the Proposal and Questionnaire.
4. After the final session, the foster/adoptive parent co-leader will submit an original completed copy of Form 5357, *Bill for Services Rendered* to claim the \$350 payment and a statement along with Form 5357 verifying the unduplicated number of persons completing the session. Payment cannot be made before these two requirements are met.
5. Accounting staff will use Form 5357 and the participant count to authorize payment and effect COSTAR reporting.
6. The county department will reimburse the parent using the following data:
 - UAS Code 531
 - Program Name - Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Services
 - Entitlement Code - 67
 - Services Provided – Foster Parent Pre-service Training
7. Accounting staff *will* enter a *client count* for the \$350 payment to co-lead a group.
8. In COSTAR, the reported clients will be an unduplicated count of those foster/adoptive parents who complete IMPACT Pre-service Training sessions as reported by the IMPACT Leader.

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9. If a foster/adoptive parent co-leads more than one IMPACT session in a tax year, accounting staff will provide that parent with Form 1099 - *Miscellaneous Income* as their payment will be in excess of the \$600 limit.
10. A separate vendor number will be assigned to the foster parent for IMPACT Pre-service Training services as opposed to the vendor number used for per diem.

1014.23.8 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The \$350 fee covers all expenses, and no additional travel, meals or childcare costs may be claimed.
2. The county department should assist parent co-leaders with making child care plans when needed.
3. The county should pay the parent within 30 days of completion of the final IMPACT meeting and submission of a bill (invoice) for payment.

COMPLETION OF THE FAMILY EVALUATION

1014.24

Requirement

A family evaluation shall be completed within six (6) weeks of completion of the final meeting or consultation (whichever is completed last) for all prospective foster/adoptive families. See fingerprinting requirements in this section.
(Refer to Office of Adoptions Manual, Section 104 for specific adoption requirements).

The Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006 requires that Interstate Foster Home Studies be completed within a sixty (60) day timeframe. Please note: the education and training component of the home study does not require completion within the sixty (60) day timeframe. Refer to Foster Care Manual Section 1010.5 for ICPC requirements.

1014.24 PROCEDURES

1. Potential resource families are notified in writing as to whether or not their home has been approved for the placement of DFCS children in foster care.
2. The County Director will approve all extenuating circumstances, which prohibit the completion of a family evaluation within six (6) weeks.
3. A written explanation, signed by the County Director, is sent to all families whose family evaluation cannot be completed within six (6) weeks.

1014.24 PRACTICE ISSUES

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1. Timely completion of the family evaluation (within 6 weeks) requires a cooperative effort between the agency and the resource family. Evaluations for resource families who do provide required documentation or otherwise not prepared to proceed with the evaluation process are exempted from the timeframe requirements.
2. Once the resource family provides outstanding documents or indicates that they are prepared to proceed with the family evaluation, no more than six (6) weeks should elapse before completion of the evaluation.

APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL OF THE FAMILY EVALUATION

1014.24.1

Requirement

The County Director must approve the family evaluation.

1014.24.1 **PROCEDURE**

1. The County Director has five (10) working days from receipt of the family evaluation to review/comment and approve/disapprove family evaluations.
2. The County Director is the final approving authority for family evaluations. However, all resource family evaluation approval decisions are subject to review by the regional office.

1014.24.1 **PRACTICE ISSUES**

1. Timely approval/disapproval and thorough review of family evaluations is key to having a readily available and qualified pool of placements available.
2. Evaluations should be prepared with signature blocks for the County Director and Regional Director as well as space to indicate approval/non-approval and comments. Review of family evaluations by the Regional Director is at the discretion of the Regional Director.

For example: _

-----Approved -----Disapproved

Comments: _____

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County Director

-----Approved -----Disapproved

Comments: _____

Regional Director

NOTIFICATION OF APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL

1014.24.2

Requirement


Resource families are officially notified in writing as to whether their family evaluation has been approval or disapproved.

1014.24.2 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Resource families, whether approved or not approved, should be made aware of their status as soon as possible. Approved families are cordially welcomed to the foster care/adoption team and apprised of subsequent procedures.
2. If families do not meet the Minimum Standards (whether objectively which includes non-negotiables such as criminal history or subjectively which includes applicant's ability to evidence the maturity, stability fitness, skills and competency to protect, nurture and meet developmental needs) they should be selected out.
3. Families should be told of non-approval in an empathetic and supportive manner. If non-approval is due to non-acceptable criminal history record information, the Case Manager will make this information known to the family in a clear, concise and non-judgmental manner. Initial contact may be made by telephone, immediately followed by a written letter to the family. All resource family evaluations approval decisions are subject to review by the regional office. If selected for review the Regional Director has ten (10) working days from receipt of the family evaluation to review/comment and approve/disapprove family evaluations. All resource family evaluations must include the following statement: If your resource family evaluation is selected for review additional information may be requested and in extreme circumstances, approval decisions may be reversed.

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4. Resource families for foster care may be approved for only one (1) agency, but may accept children from another agency with prior approval from their original approving agency.
5. The Agreement Form (38) between DFCS and foster parents should be completed as soon as possible following approval of the home for foster care.

	<p>Division of Family and Children Services Child Welfare Manual</p>	<p>Chapter : 1014 Foster Parents Effective Date: March 1, 2012</p>
		<p>Previous Policy #: N/A</p>

**POLICY TITLE: WAIVER OF NON-SAFETY APPROVAL STANDARDS FOR
 RELATIVE FOSTER HOMES**

POLICY NUMBER: 1014.24.3

CODES

P.L. 110-351 (Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act)

REQUIREMENT

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall ensure that all foster homes meet approval standards. However, DFCS may consider waiving non-safety related approval standards for Relative Foster Homes to allow the placement of children with relatives.

NOTE: The standards related to safety may not be waived. The home must be assessed suitable to meet the safety and well being needs of the child in order for a waiver to be granted.

1. Non-safety related approval standards include age, income, utilization of the foster home, and driver's license.
2. Waivers must only be considered for relatives. No waiver may be approved for fictive kin or non-relatives.

NOTE: Relative is defined as related by blood, marriage or adoption.

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3. Waivers must only be considered on an individual, case by case basis, and should indicate it's applicability to a specific relative child or relative sibling group.
4. Waivers must be approved by the County Director or their designee.

DFCS must review and document the continuing appropriateness of a waiver during the annual recertification of the relative foster home.

NOTE: If the relative foster parent is granted a waiver and later becomes interested in being a placement resource for non-related children, the condition resulting in the waiver must be reassessed to ensure full compliance with all approval standards.

DFCS must ensure that all waivers are documented in Georgia SHINES. Documentation must include the specific approval standard being waived, the reason the waiver is needed, any alternative agreements, plans, or terms of the waiver(s).

NOTE: The need for a waiver must be identified and staffed with the Resource Development Supervisor as early as possible during the home evaluation process.

PROCEDURE

If during the relative foster home approval process it is determined that a waiver of a non-safety standard is needed to facilitate the approval of a relative foster home; and after discussion with the RD SSS, the Resource Development SSCM shall:

1. Discuss the needed waiver with the relative.
NOTE: Discussion must include how the safety and well being of the child would be maintained if waiver is granted.
2. Discuss the needed waiver with the Permanency SSCM and Supervisor to determine how safety, and wellbeing would be maintained, and monitored, if the standard is waived,
3. Complete the waiver request in SHINES, FAD Stage (See Practice Guidance).
 - a. Include the following information:
 - i. The name(s) of the child/sibling group and relationship to relative,
 - ii. The non-safety standard that is being waived,
 - iii. The reason the non-safety standard cannot be met,
 - iv. How child safety and wellbeing is maintained, if waiver is granted,
 - v. The length of time waiver is needed.
4. Submit the waiver request within five (5) workdays of identification of the need for a waiver, to the RD Supervisor via SHINES for review and approval.
5. The RD Supervisor reviews the waiver request, the home evaluation and all other documentation to determine whether to approve or disapprove the waiver.
 - a. If waiver is disapproved, the RD staff shall:
 - i. Notify the Permanency SSCM and SSS of the decision and discuss alternatives for the placement of the child/sibling group.
 - ii. Notify the family of the decision to approve or disapprove the waiver and

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- home evaluation. (See 1014.24.2 for additional requirements regarding family notification)
- b. If waiver is approved, submit within five (5) workdays of the receipt of the waiver request, via SHINES to the County Director/Designee for final approval.
6. The County Director/Designee approves/disapproves the waiver along with the home evaluation.
- a. The County Director has five (5) workdays from the receipt of the waiver to review/comment and approve/disapprove the waiver.
 - b. If the County Director approves or disapproves the waiver and home evaluation, the Resource Development staff shall:
 - i. Notify the Permanency SSCM and SSS of the decision and discuss next steps regarding placement of the child or exploring other placement resources if waiver is not approved.
 - ii. Notify the family of the decision to approve or disapprove the waiver and home evaluation. (See 1014.24.2 for additional requirements regarding family notification)

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Relative Foster Home

A relative foster home refers to the home of a relative, which meets the same approval standards as a regular foster home. This includes completing all the required home evaluations, safety and background checks, orientation and training. A relative foster parent receives foster care per diem reimbursement for the care of a child in the legal custody of the Department.

Relative Placement

A relative placement refers to placement in the home of a relative who does not receive a foster care per diem for the care of the child, but may receive an Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) or other benefits. An approved relative placement is required to complete the Relative Care Assessment as well as relevant safety and background checks. The child is in the legal custody of the Department.

Documentation of Waivers in SHINES

The waiver of non-safety approval standard for a relative foster home must be documented in SHINES, FAD Stage. To complete and submit the waiver request for approval:

1. Click on the **Case Management** 2nd Level Tab,
2. Click on the **Policy Waiver** 3rd Level Tab,
3. Click on the **ADD** button,
4. Select the **Waiver Type** as **Placement Waiver**, then click **Continue**

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5. Complete the Policy Waiver Detail Section
 - a. Select the **Reason** (Scroll down and select from the list)
 - i. If the reason for the waiver is Age, Income, and Driver's License, Select **Other**,
 - b. Select the **Justification** reason. If not listed select N/A,
 - c. Enter the **Begin Date** and **End Date**, if applicable,
 - d. Complete the Waiver Capacity box, if applicable to the reason for waiver request,
 - e. Complete the Sleeping Arrangements field, if applicable to the reason for the waiver request,
 - f. Complete the **Comment** field with the following information:
 - i. The name (s) of the child/sibling group and relationship to relative,
 - ii. The non-safety standard that is being waived,
 - iii. The reason the non-safety standard cannot be met,
 - iv. How child safety, and wellbeing is maintained, if waiver is granted,
6. **Save and Submit** the waiver request to the RD Supervisor/Designee for approval.

What are some Non-Safety Approval Standards that can be waived?

Examples of non-safety foster care standards which may be considered for a waiver include, but may not be limited to;

1. Income
 - a. Flexibility regarding the income verification process which currently requires fosters parent to complete a financial statement and verification (check stubs, Federal Income Tax Return from the previous year, statement from employer, etc.) of income.
 - b. Review how the relative is currently maintaining sufficiency. For example, if they are showing an income deficit, ask them about other informal sources of income or obtaining resources to meet the family needs, i.e. is there a grandmother or other relative who lives in the home or out of the home who helps out financially.
2. Age
 - a. If the relative is less than ten (10) years older than the child or unmarried, assess their ability to provide a stable home for the child or children. Consider their maturity level; stability (housing, income history, etc.; support system; reliability and motivation; the specific needs of the relative child/ren being considered for placement; are they viable option for permanency; etc.
3. Appropriate utilization of foster home,
 - a. Determine if any of the following circumstances would exist if a child/ren is placed in the relative's home:
 - i. No more than six (6) children under the age of 16, including the children

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- of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home.
 - ii. No more than two (2) children under two (2) years of age, including the children of the foster family, may be placed in a foster home.
 - iii. A maximum of two (2) children may sleep in a double or larger bed if they are siblings and are of the same sex.
 - iv. No child shall sleep in a bed with an adult.
 - v. A child over one (1) year of age cannot sleep in the bedroom of an adult.
 - vi. A maximum of three (3) children to share a bedroom is preferable.
 - vii. Children age five (5) years and older and of different sexes shall not share a bedroom.
- b. If any of the conditions exist, consider the following issues in making your waiver request.
- i. Child specific issues
 - ii. The relative's protective capacity in ensuring the safety and well being of the child
 - iii. The relative's ability to adequately manage the child
 - iv. Supports/resources are in place
 - v. The relative's ability to meet the child's special needs
 - vi. Placement in this relative home in the child's best interest
4. Drivers license,
- a. Consider flexibility for potential relative foster parents who do not have a driver's license, but is still able to partner with the agency to ensure the child is taken for medicals, counseling, visitation or any other responsibilities. Consider alternatives to meet such needs including access to and knowledge of public transportation, other relatives who can provide transportation when needed. Ensure that such persons are identified and note that they are subject to background checks including driving record check. If the county department determines that the lack of transportation is an issue that can be managed effectively, the home can be approved with no waivers necessary.

IV-E Applicable

Relative foster families who receive a waiver, and have satisfied all other approval requirements will be considered to have full, regular foster care approval and are Title IV-E reimbursable.

Timeliness of Approval

When children are removed from their families, they often experience trauma which can impact on their ability to develop positive, lasting relationships, and become well adjusted productive adults. If placed with relatives these traumatic experiences are minimized as they are able to maintain family connections. Timely approval/disapproval of a relative resource family is therefore especially critical to placing children sooner with their family members to assure their

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wellbeing. Best practice is for the waiver request to be submitted to the County Director within 5-7 days of the identification of a need for a waiver.

Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

When a waiver of an approval standard is granted, when appropriate, the RD and the Permanency staff must ensure the ongoing monitoring of the home includes addressing the standard that was waived. This is to ensure that the child's safety and wellbeing is not adversely affected and to assess when, if appropriate, the waiver is no longer needed.

REFERENCES

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=26#26
www.socialsecurity.gov/OP_Home/comp2/F110-351.html

FAMILY ASSESSMENT COMPOSITION

1014.25

Requirement

The family assessment is composed of the following:

Section I

- A. ***Family Assessment Checklist/Family Approval and Adoption Registration Cover Letter (rev. form 6036) (See Appendix 0--6)***
- B. ***Form 401 - Adoption Exchange Family Registration. (Adoption and foster-adopt Only.)***

Section II

Written Family Assessment and Recommendation for Adopting and/or Fostering

Section III

Required Attachments and Verifications

1014.25 PROCEDURES

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The Family Assessment consists of the total trainer observations and collection of information gleaned during the IMPACT sessions and the family consultations. The information should be written and assembled as follows:

Section I – Approval Checklist and Adoption Exchange Registration

A. Family Assessment Checklist: Family Approval and Adoption Registration Cover Letter (rev. Form 6036).

The checklist is placed on the top of the Family Assessment. This cover letter also provides a means of approval of the Family Assessment and is required when registering the family as an approved foster/adopt or adoptive resource with the Adoption Exchange (refer to the Adoption Manual Section 104.10). The checklist is completed by the worker and signed. The County Director is the final approving authority for the Family Assessment.

B. Form 401, Adoption Exchange Registration – Family (adoption or foster/adopt only)

- Complete and submit to the Adoption Exchange, Office of Adoptions, for registering foster/adopt and adoptive resources. Provide the *name* and *county of child*, if identified.

Section II – Written Family Assessment and Recommendation to Foster or Adopt

- The Family Assessment provides a profile of the family and conforms to those skills and competencies taught during the IMPACT Pre-service Training phase of the pre-approval process;
- Families are required to demonstrate previously learned skills and competencies regarding the ability to care, support, nurture and empathize with children in placement;
- Families are required to complete the self-report assessments as well as the IMPACT Resource Family Questionnaire; and
- Families are required to demonstrate at least minimal mastery and internalization of the skills and competencies taught during the IMPACT Pre-service Training phase of preparation.

The Family Assessment includes the following:

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A. Motivation

State the applicants' initial reasons for wanting to become foster and/or adoptive parents. Include the length of time they have been considering foster care and/or adoption.

Include the applicants' stated reasons for deciding to commit to foster care and/or adoption after receiving preparatory training.

B. Family Well-Being

Mother/Father's History

A. Description of Applicant. Describe the applicant's appearance (include height and weight) and personality. Provide details about the applicant's educational background, work history, and present employment.

Include the applicant's citizenship and length of time she/he has spent at current residence.

B. Parents. Include the applicant's description and feelings about her/his parents or parent figures. (Include information about absent parent, if appropriate.) Describe the quality of her/his parents' marital relationship, support/nurturance, and decision-making. Address the applicant's understanding of the effects her/his parents had on her/his life.

C. Childhood. Present the applicant's description and feelings about her/his childhood, including the way she/he was disciplined and her/his feelings about it.

Address both the happiest and most traumatic memories of her/his childhood, and her/his overall feelings regarding her/his childhood.

Discuss the applicant's birth order, her/his relationship with siblings (past and present), and which sibling(s) she/he feels closest to. Does the applicant believe all siblings were treated equally and fairly? How was sex education handled in the applicant's family of origin? Include the effects on the applicant's current feelings and how she/he would handle (or has handled) this with her/his own child(ren).

D. History of Child Abuse and Neglect. Discuss the applicant's history of child abuse (physical and sexual) and neglect, if any, and her/his resolution of this experience.

History of Drug and Alcohol Use. Discuss the applicant's history of drug or alcohol use, if any, and her/his resolution of this experience. (*Address these issues regarding other members of the family if appropriate.*)

E. Abuse/Neglect and Criminal History Checks. Explain any criminal history and subsequent rehabilitative activities. Document the results of both checks.

F. Health and Disabilities. Discuss any disabilities, and physical and mental concerns that affect her/his ability to care for a child. Summarize the results of the Mental Health Questionnaire, Stress Index and Sensitive Issues Inventory. Discuss any pertinent findings which may impact resource parenting.

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C. Family Interaction

Children in the home. Include a brief summary of the physical (health) statement and the case manager's observations of the child's general well-being for each child living in the home in relation to the family's ability to provide foster and/or adoptive care. Ask children how they are disciplined, what the rules are in the family, their opinions/perceptions of the family's decision to foster/adopt, etc. *(Report their perceptions, your own, and your observations of the children's interaction with parents.)*

Current relationships. Describe the applicants' interactions as husband and wife or as partners. Describe the history of the relationship including how they met, their courtship, and decision to marry or commit. Report the date and place of marriage. Discuss any separations and/or marital counseling. Address their decision-making processes (including financial), how they handle disagreements, their support for and nurturance of one another, and their individual feelings about themselves as spouses. Discuss the effects of adding a child to the home. Describe the strengths and needs of their marriage, including their perceptions and your own. Describe other emotional support systems each applicant has.

Previous relationships. Include discussions of previous significant relationships and all marriages and/or partnerships. Include discussions of children by previous marriages, partnerships and/or significant relationships, parental visitation, and child support. How were the relationships ended and resolved? Include date and place of divorce(s), or death of spouse, if applicable.

Other household members. Discuss other household members, including any who reside in the home part-time. (Include grandparents, college children, exchange students, and part-time or full-time help.) Also include the results of CPS history, Sexual Offender's Registry, Pardons and Parole and the Department of Corrections and GBI/FBI criminal history checks of each person 18 years of age and older in the home.

Parenting. Include the applicants' feelings about themselves as parents. How do the applicants describe each of their children? Describe the realism of the applicants' expectations of each of their children and the foster and/or adoptive children.

Couples with children. Address the same issues as noted above with "current relationships." Describe the applicants' interaction as parents. Address their decision-making processes, their agreements about parental discipline, their disagreements and how they are resolved, their support for one another as parents, and any other issues of possessiveness, excessive control, and so forth.

Single parents. Discuss the applicants' single-parent support system. Describe the applicants' significant relationships with both men and women, including sexual relationships.

Infertility Issues. Discuss applicants' condition of infertility, their feelings about infertility, how infertility was and/or is handled, and how this has been resolved.

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Family operations. Discuss in regard to expectations, responsibilities, division of labor, nudity, privacy, etc. Discuss family rules, roles and boundaries. Explain how family members handle stress and express negative feelings. Be specific. Include examples of statements and behaviors that support your assessment.

Extended family. Describe the applicants' interaction with their extended family and the community. Describe the applicants' relationships with members of their extended family, friends, neighbors, church, and community. Discuss the attitudes extended family members have toward the applicants becoming foster and/or adoptive parents, including their degree of acceptance.

Religion. Describe the family's religious background and practices. Discuss the family's ability to be accepting of religious practices other than their own. Also discuss the family's willingness to take a child to the church of his or her choice.

D. Home Environment

Home and neighborhood. Describe the income level and age group of residents, the racial makeup, and the maintenance of the property.

In the description of the applicants' home, include sleeping arrangements and physical descriptions of the foster and/or adoptive child(ren)'s room(s), as well as the applicants' housekeeping standards.

Address the applicants' home and neighborhood as an environment for childcare, including the adequacy of space for children to play both inside and outside.

Observation of home environment. Describe the home environment observing the following:

- **Soundness of physical dwelling (address all visible/known dangers: roofing, porches, steps, doors, windows, flooring, etc.)**
- **Cleanliness (clothing, furnishings, waste: garbage, trash, animal feces, etc.)**
- **Appearance of electrical wiring system, fixtures and outlets**
- **Appearance of gas lines and heating/cooking appliances**
- **Availability and condition of running water indoors**
- **Availability and condition of toilet facilities indoors**
- **Appearance of household furnishings**
- **Presence and appearance of external storage facilities and/or environmental hazards**
 - **Equipment/vehicles (including operable/inoperable and/or unlocked)**
 - **Adequacy of fencing/gates**
 - **Access to busy streets and/or highways**

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Safety issues. The applicants' knowledge of basic care and safety issues must be discussed along with firearm safety issues, water safety, and basic home health and safety issues. Discuss the applicant's plan regarding swimming and wading pools, ponds, lakes, trampolines and any concern identified in the case manager's observation of the home environment. If firearms are present, all necessary precautions must be taken (firearms and ammunition must be kept separate from each other and in locked compartments at all times). Discuss the family's plan to keep medications out of children's reach and how these plans meet minimum standard requirements.

Financial situation. Identify the applicants' employment history, income, expenses, and ability to manage money.

For foster families only, address the family's ability to manage the expenses of caring for foster children on a reimbursement basis.

For adoptive families only, verify income and insurance coverage (medical) of all household members, including the children to be placed. (Children being placed may have private insurance coverage or be eligible for Medicaid through SSI or adoption assistance.)

Verify that the applicants have been informed of the application process for the adoption assistance program (subsidy), including the non-recurring adoption expenses program (adoption only). Address the adoptive family's ability to support a child with and without a subsidy or prior to reimbursement.

E. Supporting the Child's Needs Regarding Birth Family

Birth family connections. Discuss the applicants' sensitivity to and feelings about children who may have been subjected to abuse and/or neglect; and who are dealing with their separation from, and the loss of, their biological family.

Discuss the applicants' acceptance of the (prospective foster or adoptive) child's feeling about his or her birth family, and the applicants' ability to help the child deal with these feelings.

Describe the applicants' ability to support the child's relationship with his or her birth family, including extended family. Include the degree of support for contacts between the child and his or her birth family and siblings. Describe the adoptive parents' expectations about any ongoing relationship with the birth family.

Other significant relationships. Describe the applicants' sensitivity to and feelings about the child's need to stay connected to people (other than birth parents) who have been important in the child's life (foster parents, teacher, friends, siblings).

Additional information :

For foster/adopt and adoptive parents, include the applicant's plans regarding the child's name.

Document information about the child if this is an adoption by a relative or if it is a child specific foster or adoption case:

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- the child's name, age, general health, and any specific medical problems;
- the child's history of previous placements and a description of the current placement;
- the child's school adjustment (include at least the following information: grade, academic performance, potential conduct problems);
- the child's feelings about the relative and/or potential caregiver and the amount of past and current contact with the relative; and
- any observations of the child's interactions with the relative and/or potential caregiver.

Address the applicants' feelings, willingness, and ability to work with birth families towards reunification, including methods used to support this plan (foster only).

Discuss the applicants' ability to support a child's search for his or her birth family (adoption only).

If this is an adoption by a relative or relative foster care, address the relatives':

- plan for protecting the child from exposure to the conditions from which the child was removed;
- attitudes towards the child's parents and other members of the child's family;
- thoughts and feelings about the parents;
- frequency of contact with the child's parents;
- attitudes towards parental visitation and contact; and
- proximity to the child's parents.

F. Dealing with Separation and Loss

Address the applicants' understanding of the dynamics of separation and placement, significant losses, how these have been dealt with, and how they have been managed and/or resolved. You may include stages of grieving. Examples: the deaths of friends or relatives, the death of a child, miscarriages, infertility, experiences of victimization, loss of job, children leaving home, health losses, and natural disaster.

How have the applicants' own losses equipped them to help an adoptive and/or foster child work through his or her losses?

Discuss the applicants' ability to communicate with and help the child deal with his or her foster placement and/or adoption.

Discuss the applicants' ability to help children grieve by accepting feelings of denial, anger, and depression.

G. Ability to Parent Children Who Have Been Physically, Sexually Abused and/or Neglected

Discuss the applicants' understanding of the dynamics of child abuse and neglect.

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Address the applicants' sensitivity to and feelings about children who may have been subjected to abuse and/or neglect; and who are dealing with their separation from, and the loss of, their biological family.

Include the applicants' understanding of how these issues and feelings will affect them as well as the children they will foster and/or adopt. Include the applicants' ability to help the child with their experience of abuse and neglect and the availability of community resources to meet the needs of the child.

H. Child Management and Discipline

Discipline. Describe the ways in which the applicants were disciplined as children, and their feelings about the discipline they received.

Discuss the applicants' values (parenting philosophy) regarding child discipline and care.

Describe the applicants' current methods of disciplining children, and their feelings about the discipline of children. If their current disciplinary practices are incompatible with DFCS's discipline policies, how do they plan to reconcile their practices with DFCS's policies? Include the applicants' ability to support DFCS's discipline policy.

Child management. Discuss the applicants' ability to manage the behaviors of children who have been sexually or physically abused and/or neglected. (Explore the applicants' abilities to manage specific behaviors, such as sexual acting out, aggression, abusive language, etc.)

Discuss the applicants' ability to manage a child's behavior associated with separation and loss.

Views and Practices of Child Supervision. Describe the applicant's knowledge of child supervision.

Child-care knowledge. Discuss the applicants' knowledge of child development.

Discuss the applicants' child-care experience if they have no children.

Address the applicants' plans for childcare, if both are employed, and their plans for any baby-sitting needs during emergency or occasional outings.

I. Partnerships

Summarize applicant's available support systems and ability to access supports as necessary. Summarize applicant's Personal Network Matrix questionnaire.

Describe the applicants' participation in pre-service training.

Describe the applicants' ability to accept and act on recommendations.

Describe the applicants' willingness to participate in continued training.

Explore the applicants' understanding of their role as caregivers in partnership with DFCS, and their ability to advocate for the child's needs.

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Discuss the applicants' willingness to participate in post-adoption services when appropriate (adoption only).

J. The Continuing Education Plan

Describe the continuing education plan agreed to by the applicants during their preparatory training. Identify the self-reported continuing education need the plan addressed. If you have already described the need elsewhere in the home study, make only a brief statement here.

The following statement must be included:

“The (name of family) agree to comply with the continuing education requirement and will complete 10 hours of additional training annually. The (name of family) understand that continuing education training must begin within 60 days of their approval date.”

K. Verification and Attachments

Confirmation Statements Only– Include a confirmation statement in the body of the Family Assessment that the following were viewed/completed and they meet DFCS standards.

1. Driver's license and insurance – A statement that foster parents have a valid State of Georgia driver's license and proof of insurance in order to transport children.
2. Confirmation of current marriage, divorce, and/or deaths of spouse(s) – Neither document is *required* for approval to foster, but will be required for any future adoption; therefore, it is *strongly recommended* that families provide these documents at the point of foster care approval as delay in securing these documents will prolong the adoption process.
3. Smoke alarms - A statement that smoke alarms are present in the home and in working order.
4. Pet inoculations - A statement that domestic pets have been inoculated for rabies as required by state law.
5. Firearms - A statement that all firearms are secured as required by policy or a statement that none are present.
6. Gas heaters - A statement that gas heaters are vented to avoid fire and health hazards.
7. Unvented fuel-fired heaters - A statement that any *unvented* fuel-fired heater is equipped with an oxygen depletion safety shut off system and that a carbon monoxide detector is present and functioning in the home.

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8. **Swimming pools** - A statement that in-ground and aboveground swimming pools are secured as required by policy outlined in Section 1015.
9. **Environmental inspection** - A statement that an approved environmental inspection has been completed on homes that are not on county/city water and/or sewage systems. A statement that the utility bills, etc. were viewed and the home is on county/city water and/or sewage system if an environmental inspection is not completed. The *Water Well Standards Act* requires that, "*The upper terminal of the well shall be protected by a sanitary seal or cover to prevent entrance of pollutants to the well.*" Reports from sampling of the wells without the upgrade can be construed as "safe" nevertheless with the advisory that the upper well terminus should be upgraded into compliance with the intent of the *Water Well Standards Act* in order to provide adequate protection from surface contamination. Until the well is brought into full compliance with the Act, annual re-testing is required.
10. **CPS check** – A statement that the county has checked its own files and those of other counties where the family has resided for any CPS reports on family members who live in the home.
11. **Sex Offender Registry, Pardons and Parole and Department of Corrections check** – A statement that none of the adults living in the home appears on the above named registries.
12. **Child Abuse and Neglect Registry from any other State that Prospective Foster /Adopt Parent or Adult household member over eighteen has resided in within the past five years-** A statement that none of the adults living in the home appears on the above named registries. *This requirement is a federal mandate as per the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006. Satisfactory results of this registry check must be received before the home can be approved and before a child can be placed in the home. This check is initiated following the first IMPACT class due to the projected length of time needed to process child abuse/neglect registry requests.*
13. **Criminal Records Check** – Statement regarding results of criminal records check by way of GCIC and NCIC fingerprint screening for all adult household 18 years and older residing temporarily or permanently in the home and having access to the children. If either prospective parent has a criminal record history and the home is being recommended for approval, discussion of the offense as indicated in 1014.27 and justification for approval are included in this section. (**PROCESSED FINGERPRINT CARDS AND/OR GCIC AND NCIC REPORTS ARE STAPLED TOGETHER AND KEPT IN A LOCKED FILE.**)
14. The following statement must be on each home study:
"The (name of family) meet the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services' Minimum Standards for Resource Parents. The applicants were evaluated and found to be in compliance with the standards. Included are copies of all verification and attachments."

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L. Desired Placement

(Resource parents must be at least ten years older than the child to be placed and if unmarried at least 25 years old.) Discuss the type of child the parents are best qualified to foster and/or adopt. Include specific special needs and/or disabilities and behaviors the family is best qualified to manage (such as: sexual acting out, withdrawal, hyperactivity, noted emotional problems needing counseling, noted mental delays or retardation, minor to severe medical problems, etc.). Identify any special abilities or qualifications of the family. Discuss behavior, background, special-needs status, or other characteristics of a potential foster and/or adoptive child that the family cannot accept.

Address the family's ability to accept a child with parents who have:

- a documented physical or mental illness (schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, etc.);
- alcohol abuse and/or drug usage;
- criminal history; or
- no available background information.

M. References

References - A minimum of three (3) character references – Interviews may be in person, by letter or telephone.

- One of the three references must be from an extended family member not residing in the home. Contact may be by letter, telephone or in person.
- If the prospective foster parent has either served previously as a foster parent for another agency in Georgia or another state, and/or has been employed in a job involving the care of children, at least one reference must be from the *former agency or employer*.
- Additional references may be requested as needed if conflicting, ambivalent or inadequate responses are received from those initially requested.
- Additional references are needed if the family has fostered or adopted for another county, agency, or state.

Birth children -- *living in the home* are interviewed in regard to their reaction to their parent(s) fostering or adopting. Any birth children *living elsewhere* are interviewed for their reaction to parental adoption or fostering. Interviews for children living outside the home may be done in person, by telephone, or the individual may submit a letter expressing feelings and/or reactions.

- Permission of the parent(s) is obtained prior to such contact.

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- If permission is not granted, reason(s) are explored and documented.

Briefly summarize information from the applicants' references. Additional references may be requested as needed if conflicting, ambivalent or inadequate responses are received from those initially requested.

N. Summary and Recommendations

Summarize each parent's skills and abilities, strengths and needs. Make specific recommendations about the family's capacity to work with children. *(Be specific about what type of special needs the family can handle and why).*

Required signatures:

Case Manager

Supervisor

County Director

Regional Director*-Optional, reviewed at the discretion of the Regional Director

* Family Assessment Approval Date

Section III -- Required Attachments and Verifications

A. Attachments/Verifications-- Documentations to be attached to the Family Assessment include the following:

1. Application to Foster/Adopt – Form 35
2. Citizenship/legal residence – A copy of birth certificate, naturalization papers, passport or Permanent Resident Alien Form (so called “Green Card”)
3. Medical report - Form 36 completed and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or public health department within twelve (12) months of the date of approval of the Family Assessment. Must include TB screening, a comprehensive drug screen report conducted and signed by a qualified health professional (includes testing for marijuana/cannabinoids (THC), cocaine, amphetamines/methamphetamines, opiates, ecstasy and phencyclidine (PCP). See Fiscal 1016 for reimbursement guidelines for foster parents.

Health Statement -- on youth and other adults (May be completed and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or public health department) - Other adults and children, 16 years of age and older must have a health statement and tuberculin test results (skin test or chest x-ray) dated within twelve (12) months of the approval of the Family Assessment.

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Health Statement -- on all children in the home under 16 (May be completed and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or public health department.) Health statement must be dated within twelve (12) months of the approval of the Family Assessment.

Specialist/Other Medical Reports – Any appropriate specialist reports or other medical reports. If approved, cost may be reimbursed for foster parents by claiming on Form 526, Foster Care Invoice.

4. Professional qualifications (foster care only): Evidence of professional medical credentials for families who plan to care for medically fragile children (diploma, license, certificate, etc.)
5. Financial Statement – (Adoption Form 44) and verification of income (check stub, previous years Federal Income Tax Return, statement from employer, etc.)
6. Safety Agreement – Form 29, the DFCS Foster Parent Child Safety Agreement is completed, signed and dated when the home is initially approved and placed in the foster home record.
7. Self-Report Assessments—the Personal Network Matrix, Sensitive Issues Inventory, Stress Index, Mental Health Questionnaire and IMPACT Resource Family Evaluation Questionnaire are completed and reflected in the written narrative as well as included as attachments.
8. A legible Genogram of the family either handwritten or computer generated. Include as many generations as pertinent (i.e.. the resource parent household, preceding generation, children's families...).

SECURING CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECKS

1014.26

Requirement

A state and national fingerprint check (GCIC and NCIC) is required for all adoptive and foster parents and on all adults (age 18 and over) residing permanently or temporarily in the home and having access to children. *Fingerprinting must be initiated following the first IMPACT session due to the delay in turnaround for GCIC and NCIC reports.*

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1014.26 PROCEDURE

1. See appendix O-9 for the sample *Explanation Sheet for Securing Criminal Records Check*, which is given to prospective applicants to outline the fingerprint process. Some of these steps are repeated below.
2. Follow the steps listed in Appendix O-10, *Securing Criminal Record Checks*, in order for the county department to access criminal history information.
3. Designate an agency representative in each county department to receive and safeguard the results of each records search.
4. See Appendix O-12 for the **Awareness Statement*, which must be signed and retained in the county.
5. Have each applicant sign a Form 404, *Consent for Criminal Records Check*, which is contained in Appendix O-11.
6. Submit two (2) sets of fingerprints cards and a check or money order, in the amount of \$24.00 per applicant, to the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) for processing (See O-10 for complete address). See 1016 Fiscal in the Foster Care Services Manual for instructions related to charging the expense to UAS Code 531.

REVIEWING THE RESULTS OF THE CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK

1014.27

Requirement

The results of all Criminal Records Checks are carefully reviewed to assure compliance with state and federal requirements and to safeguard the safety and security of children placed in the home. Fingerprint checks with satisfactory results (that will ensure compliance with state and federal requirements and to safeguard the safety of the children) must be done prior to approval of the home and prior to a child being placed in the home.

1014.27 PROCEDURES

1. Upon receipt of a fingerprint card stamped "no record", a statement to this effect is included in the narrative under 1014.25 (L) *Confirmation Statements*.
2. Upon receipt of a fingerprint card and report of record found, carefully review the results using the following directives as a guide:

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If the record reveals that a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that any of the following felony convictions was committed, *approval is not granted*:

- a. Felony conviction for child abuse or neglect.
- b. Felony conviction for spouse abuse.
- c. Felony conviction for a crime against children (including pornography).
- d. Felony conviction for a crime involving violence, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide, but not including other assault or battery.

In the case where the report reveals that a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that any of the following felony convictions have been committed within the last five (5) years, *approval is not granted*.

- a. Felony conviction for physical assault.
- b. Felony conviction for battery.
- c. Felony conviction for a drug or alcohol related offense.

All other negative findings are reviewed with the Supervisor and County Director/designee. Any reported offenses are fully explored with the parties involved. The decision to approve involves weighing issues related to the following:

- nature of the activity,
- when the activity occurred,
- length of time since last occurrence,
- chronicity of the activities,

- specific circumstances involved,
- applicant's lifestyle in recent years,
- possibility of recidivism, etc.

A discussion of findings and justification for approval, if granted, is included as stated in 1014.25 Section II (L, 12).

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

ONGOING TRAINING

1014.28

Requirement

Resource families for foster care are required to obtain a minimum of ten (10) hours of training annually. Ongoing training should be initiated within sixty-days (60) of the resource parent's approval date. "Initiated" means as few as one hour of training.

CPR and First Aid training are required during the first year of providing foster care. The hours received for CPR and First Aid training may be used toward satisfying the required hours for ongoing or in-service training.

1014.28 **PROCEDURES**

1. The County Director/designee is responsible for assuring that resource families providing foster care complete the required hours of ongoing and in-service training prior to annual re-approval or any additional placement of children.
2. The agency and the foster care resource family together determine the training competencies and skills needed during the family evaluation and the first five months of approval.
3. Annual in-service training is based on the individual needs of the family and the needs and expectations of the agency relative to good practice in child welfare.
4. Activities, which meet the parents' personal growth and development, are limited to three (3) hours and may include counseling, support groups, stress management, nutrition, etc..
5. Ongoing and in-service training provide general, as well specialized training opportunities for foster care resource families. Some of the areas identified as being appropriate for ongoing and in-service training include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. CPR and First Aid
 - b. Caring for Children with Medically Fragile Needs
 - c. Managing Specific Behaviors (Acting Out/Oppositional Defiant, etc)
 - d. Helping Children Learn Appropriate Behaviors
 - e. Helping Children Achieve Permanency and Independence
 - f. Toilet Training Toddlers
 - g. Managing Bedwetting
 - h. Gender Specific Issues
 - i. Helping Children Develop Self-esteem
 - j. Promoting Cultural Identity

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

- k. Attachment Disorders
- l. Personality Disorders
- m. Parenting the Gifted Child
- n. Parenting the Developmentally Disabled Child
- o. Understanding and Implementing Agency Policies
- p. Conflict Resolution (agency, birth parent, etc.)
- q. Working with Birth Families and Nurturing Connections
- r. Managing Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
- s. Specific Child Development Issues (toddlers, pre-adolescents, teens, etc.)
- t. Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity
- u. Child Safety Issues
- v. Managing the Child who has been Drug Exposed
- w. Personal Growth And Development
- x. Managing the Impact of Fostering
- y. Working with the School System

1014.28 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Ongoing and in-service training may be provided by state or county staff, or other qualified, credentialed, licensed and/or certified professionals.
2. The county department develops and implements a system for tracking and monitoring completion of ongoing and in-service training hours.
3. Each county/region is responsible for arranging or securing ongoing training activities for its foster care resource families. Following are alternatives from which agencies may choose to assist resource families in complying with training requirements:
 - Group training sessions sponsored local or state AFPAG, DFCS or other credentialed party.
 - Certain pre-approved classes or courses at local community agencies and institutions.
 - Approved conferences and mini-conferences that relate to foster parent issues, competencies and practices.
 - One-on-one training provided by a credentialed trainer, educator, therapist or First Placement Best Placement provider.
 - Video training followed with a discussion led by a credentialed person.
 - Online training at the state and National Foster Parent Association recommended website www.fosterparents.com or other similar county approved website. A certificate and post-test must be provided. Payment is reimbursable with proof of payment.
 - Attendance at local foster parent association meetings, which focus on topics relevant to foster parenting practices and competencies and/or the needs of children.

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

- Participation in First Placement Best Placement Multi-disciplinary Team Meetings (maximum of 5 credit hours allowed per year).

Credit hours for ongoing and in-service training may not be obtained through in-home video viewing, reading books, articles, or other literature, etc.

4. Families who have not previously completed the IMPACT program may earn hours by attending individual sessions or the complete training program.
5. Families accepting Level of Care children must participate in additional in-service training activities beyond the mandatory 10 hours in order to meet the special needs of children placed in the home.
6. Counties should ensure that families complete ongoing or in-service training before the end of the calendar year.

ANNUAL TRAINING REQUIREMENT DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF SERVICE

1014.29

Requirement

To ensure a continuous training cycle, newly approved families are required to begin training within 60 days of their approval date. Based upon the month of their approval, a prorated amount of training hours is required.

1014.29 PROCEDURE

1. As families are approved throughout the year, the following prorated chart applies:

Approval Date	Start of Training (60 days from Approval Date)	Hours Due before by December 31 st
January	March	10 hours
February	April	10 hours
March	May	10 hours
April	June	6 hours
May	July	6 hours
June	August	6 hours
July	September	4 hours
August	October	4 hours
September	November	2 hours
October	December	2 hours
November	January	10 hours *
December	February	10 hours *

* by December 31st of the following year of approval

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

TEAM MEMBER

1014.30

Requirement

The resource family is actively involved as a participant on the foster care team working toward the permanency plan for the child.

1014.30 PROCEDURES

1. The Case Manager provides the foster parent with as much information as is available about the child in advance of and/or following the placement. Information to be provided in writing include the following:
 - Form 469, Foster Child Information Sheet (See appendix J).
 - Initial Case Plan, Case Review and/or WTLP.
 - Updated medical and educational information.
2. The Case Manager keeps the resource family informed of plans for the child and of birth family information, which affects the child.
3. The resource family is given timely written notice of and an opportunity to be heard in any periodic review or hearing to be held regarding the child in the foster parent's care. Relevant information regarding the child may be provided verbally or in writing and considered at the review or hearing. The resource family may attend the hearing and, if possible, provide such information in person.
4. Whenever possible and appropriate (with case manager's approval), the resource family is encouraged to have some parent/child visitations in the foster home to assist the parent in learning to meet the needs of the child. The resource family should be willing to assist the birth family in meeting the needs of the child during such visits.

1014.30 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The resource family has the most contact with the child and can offer valuable information about the child's needs and behaviors. As a member of the team, the resource family makes an important contribution to the agency's goals.

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

REQUIRED CONTACT

1014.31

Requirement

At least *monthly*, the Case Manager has face-to-face contact with the child and the child's foster parent. At least *bi-monthly* contact with the child and the resource family occurs in the foster home.

1014.31 **ROCEDURES**

1. Case Managers make both announced and unannounced visits.
2. The following topics should be discussed with the family during visits:
 - Child's progress and/or needs
 - Behavioral and/or management problems
 - Health and safety issues
 - Foster parent's concerns and issues
 - Needed supports, training or services
 - Foster family household/health/or changes
 - Issues in the case plan which pertain to the child and foster parent

(See 1011.15 regarding guidelines for contact with children)

3. Visits and topics discussed are documented in the child's case record.
4. All significant issues are documented in the foster parent's record (See Section 1015).

TERMINATION OF SERVICE

1014.32

Requirement

The County Director/Designee conducts an exit meeting with the foster parent when services are voluntary or involuntarily terminated County determine the best method to implement such meetings.

Foster Care Services: Foster Parents

1014.32 PROCEDURES

- 1. Within ten (10) working days of the closure of the home, the agency sends a letter to the family indicating the reasons for closure and the date of closure. Indicate the Director/Designee's desire to meet with the family at a scheduled time to conduct an exit meeting.**

- 2. During the exit meeting, the Director/Designee and the resource family addresses the following areas:**
 - **The agency's appreciation for their contribution as a member of the foster care team.**
 - **The agency's role as mandated protector of children in placement.**
 - **The primary reason the family decided to discontinue fostering, if applicable.**
 - **What the agency might have done differently that would have prevented them from leaving.**
 - **Description of their overall experience with the agency.**
 - **Recommendations or suggestions for improvement that the foster parent may be willing to share.**

1014.32 PRACTICE ISSUES

Resource families are a valuable source of information for the agency as we strive to improve policies and service delivery to children and families, and strengthen our collaboration on behalf of children with community stakeholders.