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|  | GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL | | | |
| | Chapter: | (10) Foster Care | Effective Date: | September 2020 |
| | Policy Title: | Introduction to Foster Care | | |
| | Policy Number: | 10.0 | Previous Policy #: | N/A |

CODES/REFERENCES

Public Law 96-272
Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 Public Law 105-89

DISCUSSION

Overview

Foster care is the temporary out of home care for children who cannot live with their families primarily due to safety threats within their own home. The Division of Family and Children Services’ (DFCS) Foster Care Program through partnership with the family, caregivers, court and other stakeholders provides support and strengthen families, protect children from further child abuse, and support every child having a permanent family.

GOALS

1. Ensure the safety and well-being of children in care;
2. Enhance caregiver protective capacities so caregivers are able to ensure the safety and well-being of their children;
3. Preserve family relationships and connections for children;
4. Promote expedited permanency for children in foster care by:
 - a. Assessing the needs of the child, the family and the foster care givers utilizing a trauma-informed approach;
 - b. Ensuring the safety, stability and security of children;
 - c. Supporting families;
 - d. Prioritizing placement with kinship caregivers.
 - e. Partnering with families to identify solutions and achieve needed changes in their behavior and/or circumstances;
 - f. Providing services and supports to children and families address the reason for foster care and to prevent reentry into care;
 - g. Supporting caregivers to meet the needs of children in their care.
 - h. Minimizing placement disruptions;
 - i. Meeting the unique developmental needs of children from birth to five years of age;
 - j. Addressing the needs of youth and young adults to ensure their successful transition to adulthood.

Safety, Permanency, and Well-being

Federal Law establishes provisions for reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families when children must enter foster care. In addition, there are established safety, permanency and wellbeing outcomes for children in foster care. Both federal and state law specify

compressed time frames for judicial reviews and decisions that are intended to move children quickly through the child welfare system to permanency. Georgia's child welfare practice remains mindful of these factors when working with families to establish case plan outcomes, provide appropriate services, and make permanency decisions. As a result, it is anticipated that children will spend less time in foster care and will experience fewer placement disruptions. Notwithstanding, DFCS must work in tandem with the judicial system and with community partners to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for children in foster care.

Children require a variety of services to promote their health, well-being and safety. Due to the trauma experienced by children who enter foster care, many of them will have one or more needs that require immediate attention and sometimes ongoing care and treatment. Foster care provides an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive trauma-informed assessment of each child's needs and respond to those needs through a combination of short and long-term interventions. Exposure to intensely traumatic events may require ongoing treatment after a child exits foster care. Consequently, case managers must be knowledgeable and resourceful in developing and utilizing resources to enable children to achieve the highest level of functioning possible to support successful permanency outcomes.

Responsibilities

While their child is in foster care, parents/guardians/legal custodians have the responsibility to:

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

DFCS has the responsibility to:

1. Ensure the safety and wellbeing of each child in care;
2. Treat parents/guardians/legal custodian, children and their caregivers with dignity and respect;
3. Provide excellent customer service;
4. Assist each parents/guardians/legal custodian in understanding the seriousness of foster care and the child's need for permanency within 12 months of entering care; Inform the parent that parental rights could be terminated should reunification not occur in an expeditious manner;
5. Participate with the parents/guardians/legal custodian in developing written case plans designed to achieve permanency for their child;
6. Provide services to parents/guardians/legal custodian to enhance diminished protective

capacity that necessitated foster care;

7. Arrange regular visits between the parents/guardians/legal custodian and their child;
8. Preserve sibling connections with children in care when they are not placed together;
9. Share information with the parents/guardians/legal custodian about the child's well-being and experiences during placement;
10. Inform the parents/guardians/legal custodian of placement changes and any major illnesses of the child; Make every effort to contact the parent prior to the child undergoing surgery;
11. Partner with families during action planning and through the development of problem-solving skills;
12. Conduct diligent searches in partnership with the family to identify absent parents and kin to serve as caregivers or other supports to the family.
13. Partner with parents/guardians/legal custodian in planning for the child by having regularly scheduled meetings;
14. Partner with the community to support families;
15. Reinforce progress and celebrate accomplishments with families;
16. Recommend the child be returned to the parents/guardians/legal custodian when the circumstances which made foster care placement necessary have been ameliorated to the point where the child will be safe in the home; and
17. Enter and update all case information in Georgia SHINES to assure effective tracking of all children in foster care.