

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL		
	Chapter:	(10) Foster Care	Effective Date: September 2020
	Policy Title:	Aftercare	
Policy Number:	10.27	Previous Policy #: N/A	

CODES/REFERENCES

N/A

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall:

1. Request the court to order aftercare services when needed to support a child’s transition from foster care to the home of their parents or another permanent caregiver.
2. Provide court-ordered aftercare services for a period not to exceed six months, unless a longer period is ordered by the court.
3. Develop an aftercare case plan with the family prior to a child’s exit from foster care if aftercare services are anticipated.
4. Make face-to-face purposeful contacts with caregivers and children in the home at least once per week for the first 30 days following reunification to monitor a child’s transition back into the home of the birth family or other permanent caregiver.
5. After the first 30 days, make face-to-face purposeful contact with caregivers and children at least once every month.
6. Obtain feedback from service providers (if applicable) throughout the aftercare period to verify that the child’s needs are being met and the parents continue to demonstrate the appropriate protective capacity.
7. Manage relapses/setbacks that occur during the provision of aftercare services.

PROCEDURES

If aftercare supervision is ordered by the court, the SSCM will:

1. Meet with the child and caregiver to develop Family Level Outcomes (FLOs) and Individual Level Outcomes (ILOs) related to the aftercare case plan prior to the child’s exit from foster care (if aftercare is anticipated).
 - a. Help the family recognize potential risks they face at the termination of foster care.
 - b. Explore possible strategies and techniques that may be effective in minimizing those risks and contribute to better outcomes.
 - i. Family group decision-making
 - ii. Parent education and mentoring programs
 - iii. Support Groups (e.g. AA, NA, etc.)
 - iv. Independent Living Skills Training (see policy [13.4 Independent Living Program: Transition from Foster Care](#))
 1. Help youths acquire and refine skills necessary for independent living and social responsible living.
 2. Help youths create and maintain interdependence between themselves

- and important adults in their lives.
- v. Non-parental Mentoring
 1. Identify and strengthen existing relationships.
 2. Focus on natural relationships, not just formal ones in a short-term program.
- vi. Developing Kinship Connections
- vii. Reintegration Services to help the child transition the child back into the family and help the family normalize the need to adjust to being around each other on a full-time basis.
- c. Discuss specific issues that impact safety.
- d. Help families increase their confidence in their ability to maintain the change(s) they have made by consistently reminding them of the successes they have achieved.
- 2. If aftercare is ordered, update the Legal Action detail in Georgia SHINES to reflect that custody of the child was transferred to the caregiver and that aftercare supervision was ordered.
- 3. Make a face-to-face purposeful contact with the child and his/her parents within one week following reunification to assess safety and support the child's transition back into the home of the birth family.
- 4. Provide a copy of the aftercare case plan to the family and the court within two business days of approval.
- 5. Make weekly face-to-face purposeful contacts with children and their parents during the first 30 calendar days after reunification placement; thereafter, make at least monthly face-to-face purposeful contact with children and their caregivers to assess safety and support the transition from foster care to home.
- 6. Make monthly contact with any in-home safety service providers working with the family; make an immediate purposeful contact with the family to address any safety concerns identified by service providers.
- 7. Manage any relapses/setbacks.
 - a. Assess how the setback affects safety.
 - b. Gather information surrounding the setback to determine the relapse prevention skills that were not utilized.
 - c. Utilize the family's action plan in discussions around what went wrong to help pinpoint where the problem occurred.
 - d. Staff with the Social Services Supervisor to determine next steps.
(See policy [10.23 Foster Care: Case Planning](#) for additional guidance on managing setbacks.)
- 8. Initiate referrals for services to address an identified safety need (see policy [19.17 Case Management: Service Provision](#)).
- 9. Conduct a face-to-face meeting with the family at the conclusion of the aftercare period to discuss case closure (see policy [10.26 Foster Care: Case Closure](#)).

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

What is aftercare?

Aftercare refers to the continued efforts and resources needed to further maximize the potential for positive outcomes once children exit foster care. Aftercare services can be used to help sustain permanency and prevent children from re-entering the foster care system after everyone thought they had achieved permanency in a safe and stable living environment.

Common factors that increase the likelihood of foster care re-entry

Some factors associated with foster care re-entry include:

1. Children with behavioral or health issues: After the supports that were present while the child was in foster care are removed, some parents may become overwhelmed.
2. Length of time a child remains in foster care: The longer a child is separated from the family, the greater the impact on the parent-child relationship as well as other family relationships.
3. Children placed in non-kinship foster care settings: Family connections can become strained when children are not placed with kin.
4. Placement instability: Structure and consistency within a child's environment may play a causal role in the development of self-regulatory abilities (e.g. impulse control, abstract thinking, planning and the anticipation of consequences). Consequently, the stress and uncertainty experienced in the foster care system may contribute to considerable and lasting changes in the brain that do not contribute to its positive development.
5. Parental mental illness: This is a lifelong issue that can disrupt the family if not managed on a continual basis.
6. Parental substance abuse: This is a lifelong issue that can disrupt the family if not managed on a continual basis.
7. Parental poverty: Foster care cannot alleviate poverty so families still have to manage the daily struggles of living in poverty.
8. Parental ambivalence about reunification: Sometimes others want reunification more than the parents or force change upon the parents without building a consensus for change. Change derived in such a manner might not be maintained by the parents.
9. The amount of family coherence at the time of separation: Some families may not be a cohesive unit prior to the child entering foster care. Consequently, the separation associated with foster care may pull them further apart.
10. Previous failed reunification attempts: When one does not learn from the mistakes of one's past, one might often repeat them.
11. Inappropriate service goals and tasks for families: When the goals are not realistic or do not address the underlying issues that lead to child maltreatment, the family's efforts and energy (as well as that of DFCS) may be exerted on the wrong things.

Duration of aftercare services

If aftercare supervision is needed, it should only be for a short period of time. Neither reunification nor any other permanency plan can be considered achieved without a sound determination that the child will be transitioning from foster care into a safe environment. Therefore, if one believes DFCS involvement is needed beyond six months after the achievement of the permanency plan, then one may need to reconsider whether the permanency plan is appropriate.

FORMS AND TOOLS

N/A