

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	Adoption	Effective Date:	September 2018
	Policy Title:	Child Life History		
Policy Number:	11.5	Previous Policy #:	103.14; 108.2; 103.16-103.22 105.4	

CODES/REFERENCES

N/A

REQUIREMENTS

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

1. Complete a Child Life History within:
 - a. 60 days of accepting a voluntary surrender of parental rights; or
 - b. 30 days of terminating the parental rights (TPR) of one or more parent.

EXCEPTION: A waiver of the requirement for completion of the Child Life History within the specified time frame may be requested from the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit immediately but not later than 15 days following the surrender/termination if one parent's rights have been surrendered/terminated and reunification efforts continue with the remaining parent or one or both parent's rights have been surrendered or terminated and the plan is to place permanent custody with a specified relative/non-related individual during the dispositional phase of the termination hearing, for a non-agency, independent adoption.
2. Contract the completion of a Child Life History when the funds are available, and it is not possible for the Social Services' staff that worked with and know the child and the birth family to complete the Child Life History for a child whom:
 - a. Is over the age of one year old; and
 - b. A legal services request in the child's interest has been made to the county's Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG) to prepare a petition for termination of parental rights; or
 - c. Parental rights have been surrendered by or terminated for at least one parent.

NOTE: The referral to the agency under contract for completion of the Child Life History should be initiated at the time a legal services request in the child's best interest has been submitted to the SAAG to prepare a petition for TPR.
3. Compile each Child Life History in the following specified order:
 - a. Child Life History Checklist and Registration Cover Letter
 - b. Birth Family Background Information for Child
 - c. Narrative
 - d. Waiver of policy concerning placement of siblings (if applicable)
 - e. Medical records - including birth records and all specialists, dentists and psychologist's reports
 - f. School records
 - g. Birth certificate (long form)
 - h. Court Orders (certified) and/or Voluntary Surrenders of Parental Rights (original)

- i. Parent's(s') death certificate (if applicable)
 - j. Divorce verification (if applicable)
 - k. Putative father registry certificate
 - l. Forms signed by the foster parent indicating the foster parent's intent to adopt
 - m. ICWA Notification Letter to the Tribe or Bureau of Indian Affairs and the response, if applicable
 - n. Adoption reunion registry forms
4. Have the completed Child Life History and the Child Life History Checklist approved by the Social Services Supervisor and County Director/Designee.
- NOTE:** The Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit will be notified in Georgia SHINES by a system generated alert when the Child Life History Checklist is approved by the County Director/ Designee. The Child Life History registration date is the date the system generated the alert to the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit.
5. Update the Child Life History on each child via the Adoption Information page and a written narrative at least every six months until the Adoption Placement Agreement is signed.
6. After registration, notify the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit and the Regional Adoption Coordinator (RAC) if the child's plan changes to a plan other than adoption.
7. Formally present the Child Life History to the prospective adoptive family within ten business days of the prospective adoptive family's Case Worker receipt of the selection letter:
- a. Present the de-identified Child Life History face to face; and
 - b. Verbally provide full disclosure of information, other than identifying information.
- NOTE:** If the selected prospective adoptive family is out-of-state, request that the family's case worker present the Child Life History to the prospective adoptive family in accordance with policy [11.18 Adoption: Placement of a Georgia Child Into Another State for the Purpose of Adoption](#).

NOTE: The presentation of the Child Life History shall occur in every type of adoption, including when the foster parent(s) is adopting the child. Pre-placement staffing may be combined with the Child Life History presentation if the current foster parent(s) who has been caring for the child in their home for the past 12 months has elected to adopt the child.

PROCEDURES

Preparing Child Life History

The Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) will gather and include the following in each Child Life History:

1. Child Life History Checklist and Registration Cover Letter
2. Birth Family Information
 - a. Background Information for Child (see policy [11.1 Adoption: Adoption Preparation](#))
 - b. Birth Family's Genogram(s) (see policy [19.19 Case Management: Genogram](#))
3. Narrative History
 - a. Child's Description, Personality and Current Functioning:
 - i. Brief description of child's physical appearance
 - ii. Origin of the child's birth name and the name by which the child is currently known
 - iii. Describe child's personality using behavioral descriptors:
 1. Interaction with peers and adults

2. What does the child do best? What is special about the child? What does the child perceive as his/her best qualities?
 3. Activities in which the child participates (i.e., sports, youth groups, church, scouts, etc.)
- iv. Describe in behavioral terms the current functioning of the child:
1. Describe child's current physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels using specific behavior descriptors to show age appropriate or developmental lags.
 2. Describe the level at which the child is functioning in terms of self-care, communication, and visual and motor skills and how these abilities affect his/her daily living.
 3. Fully explain the specific mental, emotional and physical needs of the child. If there are specialist's reports refer to them.
 4. Discuss any services provided to address any developmental delays and the progress made or expected.
 5. What are the child's behaviors that are most rewarding to foster parents?
 6. What are behaviors that are most annoying to foster parents?
- b. School Experiences/Day Care
- i. Grade and academic functioning in school, favorite subjects, least favorite subjects
 - ii. Does the child need special classes? What type and adjustment?
 - iii. Describe any school problems and methods of handling them.
 - iv. Has the child ever been retained? If so, what grade(s)?
 - v. Describe the child's relationships with school peers.
 - vi. Attach copies of all available school reports.
- c. Psychological/Psychiatric History
- i. Discuss placement implications based on the psychological/psychiatric evaluation(s).
 - ii. Has the child ever been hospitalized for psychiatric care? If so, explain fully regarding reasons, progress and prognosis (copies of hospital records must be attached).
 - iii. Discuss the child's ability to be self-sufficient and self-supporting as an adult.
 - iv. Attach trauma assessment and psychological reports.
- d. Medical History
- i. Discuss the medical history of the child. Every effort must be made to obtain a complete medical history of the child, including medical care prior to coming into agency custody.
 - ii. Did the child's mother use alcohol or drugs during pregnancy? If so, discuss the type and frequency of substance(s) used.
 - iii. Attach copies of all medical reports, including the child's immunization record.
 - iv. Attach the newborn delivery record from the hospital of birth. If a copy is not available on an older child, as much information as possible must be obtained from parents, relatives, etc.
 - v. Attach specialists care reports, if applicable.
 - vi. Attach dental reports on any child over the age of three.
- e. Developmental History

- i. Describe, as completely as possible, the major developmental milestones (i.e., crawling, walking, talking, etc.) in the child's life and the ages at which they occurred.
 - ii. Attach any developmental assessments completed (such as Babies Can't Wait, etc.), if applicable.
- f. Placement History
 - i. Age at initial placement and child's understanding of the reason for removal/placement
 - ii. Age at subsequent placement(s) or moves
 - iii. Reason(s) for any change(s) in placement
 - iv. Child's reaction to changes in placement
 - v. Child's ability to adjust and attach to new nurturing figures
 - vi. Child's attachment to current foster family
- g. Birth Family History
 - i. Presenting problem(s) at initial contact
 - ii. Summary of activities, services provided, and actions taken throughout birth family contact with DFCS:
 - 1. Reunification efforts, including the family's strengths and weaknesses that affected family unity
 - 2. General living conditions, management of the home and adequacy of the physical facility
 - 3. Adequacy of care and training of the child
 - 4. Degree of the family's involvement in school, church and neighborhood activities
 - 5. Economic and social status of family; their feelings regarding their status
 - 6. Attitudes of family toward placement and the possible effects on each member of the family
 - 7. Quality of nurturing; trust of and attachment level to family members; discuss the child's attachment to each immediate family member.
 - 8. Relatives outside the immediate family and their significance to the child:
 - a. Ability and willingness to offer home to the child
 - b. Interest in and importance of maintaining a relationship with the child
 - 9. Relationships of each parent to the child and the interactions between them
 - 10. Relationships of siblings and the interaction between siblings:
 - a. If more than one child is being placed for adoption and they are not being placed together, explain in detail why not and the child's understanding and reaction to the reason(s).
 - b. If there are siblings who are not being placed for adoption together, explain why and this child's understanding and reaction to the reason(s).
 - c. If there are siblings who have been previously placed for adoption or are in placement planning for adoption elsewhere, attach waiver to separate siblings (if applicable).
 - iii. Family's willingness and ability to assist child in separation from them:
 - 1. Activities accomplished in saying goodbye
 - 2. Child's understanding of permanence of separation
 - 3. Child's knowledge of names and whereabouts of family members

- iv. Family's desire regarding contact when child reaches 18 years of age.
 - 1. Attach the adoption reunion registry form(s) completed by the parent(s) (see policy [11.17 Adoption: Adoption Reunion Registry](#)):
 - a. Affidavit of Non-Disclosure; and/or
 - b. Consent to Contact.
 - 2. If it is not possible to get the form signed, make a statement as to why it is not included in the Child Life History.
- h. Child's Readiness for Adoption
 - i. Describe the child's understanding and feelings around being placed for adoption:
 - 1. Knowledge of the past and reasons for adoption
 - 2. With whom does he/she talk about this, and what areas does he/she discuss?
 - 3. Is there important information that needs to be filled in for him/her and if so, how is this being handled?
 - ii. Describe how much and what type of preparation this child needs to be ready to move into an adoptive home.
 - iii. Will continued contact with the foster family need to be maintained?
 - iv. Will foster family be able to assist the child in moving into the adoptive home?
 - v. Describe the family attributes needed for this child:
 - 1. Should the child be an only child or are other children in the home preferred? Should the child be the oldest; youngest?
 - 2. Does the child need a family who could support and maintain connections to siblings who are placed separately, other birth relatives, foster parents and significant others?
 - 3. Does the child need a quiet, passive family or one that is noisier and more assertive?
 - 4. Describe the special qualities, skills and resources a family must possess to parent this child.
 - 5. Describe behaviors that the family needs to be prepared to deal with once the child is placed (both anticipated new behaviors and reoccurring old behaviors).
 - i. If you are preparing a Child Life History for a child who has no adoptive resource identified, include:
 - i. Description of the child-specific recruitment plan (see policy [11.7 Adoption: Child Specific Recruitment Efforts](#));
 - ii. Description of how the child has been prepared for child specific recruitment (see policy [11.7 Adoption: Child Specific Recruitment Efforts](#));
 - iii. Completed referral for photolisting services (see policy: [11.7 Adoption: Child Specific Recruitment Efforts](#));

NOTE: A Child Life History shall not be delayed for a photolisting referral. If the photolisting referral is not submitted at the time of the Child Life History registration, it shall be received within 30 days.
 - j. What resources will be needed?
 - i. Adoption assistance (statement regarding child's Title IV-E eligibility; whether the child receives SSI?) (see policy [12.1 Adoption Assistance: Eligibility – Adoption Assistance Payments, Medicaid & Non-Reoccurring](#))
 - ii. Special school

- iii. Special medical care/doctors
- k. Length of time estimated for child to be emotionally ready to move into adoptive placement
- 4. Birth Verification
 - a. A certified copy of the official long form birth certificate with the state registration number and raised seal must be attached to the original copy of the Child Life History (see policy [11.2 Adoption: Putative Father Registry & Birth Certificates](#)).
NOTE: The certified birth certificate must be a complete long form, not a short verification
 - b. For newborn infants, a statement from the hospital may be used as temporary verification until the official certified certificate is received.
- 5. Legal Documents
 - a. Voluntary surrender of parental rights documents with original signature and raised seal must be attached to the original copy of the Child Life History. If the voluntary surrender of parental rights is taken less than 24 hours after the child's birth, the waiver must also be attached to the Child Life History (see policy [17.12 Legal: Voluntary Surrender of Parental Rights](#)).
 - b. Where rights were terminated by court order, a certified copy of the final termination order must be attached to the original copy of the Child Life History. The court order must include:
 - i. Finding of facts;
 - ii. Statement that rights of the person petitioned against are terminated;
 - iii. Statement that custody with the right to place for adoption is given to the Georgia DFCS;
 - iv. If there is a termination order and a separate dispositional order giving DFCS permanent custody, a certified copy of each must be attached; and
 - v. If the termination order states that the allegations in the petition are incorporated by reference as finding of facts and does not repeat them in the order, a certified copy of the petition must also be attached.
 - c. Death certificate of parent(s) (if applicable)
 - d. Divorce verification (if applicable)
 - e. Putative father registry certificate, if applicable (see policy [11.2 Adoption: Putative Father Register & Birth Certificates](#))
- 6. Additional Required Documents
 - a. Form(s) signed by the foster parent indicating the foster parent's intent to adopt (if applicable):
 - i. Notification to Foster Parent(s) of Filing of Petition to Terminate Paternal Rights; and
 - ii. Foster Parent Affidavit for Consideration of Adopting Foster Child(ren) Currently in Home; and/or
 - iii. Foster Parent(s) Notification of Decision Regarding Interest In Adopting Foster Child(ren).
 - b. Letter regarding Indian Child Welfare Act, if applicable (see policy [1.6 Administration: Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\) and Transfer of Responsibility for Placement and Care of a Child to a Tribal Agency](#)).

Compile Child Life History and Submit for Approval

The SSCM will:

1. Compile the Child Life History in the specified order as follows:
 - a. Child Life History Checklist and Registration Cover Letter
 - b. Birth Family Background Information
 - c. Narrative
 - d. Waiver of policy concerning placement of siblings if applicable
 - e. Medical records; including birth records and all specialists', dentists', and psychologists' reports
 - f. School Records
 - g. Birth Certificate (long form)
 - h. Court Orders (certified) and/or voluntary surrenders of parental rights (original)
 - i. Parent's(s)' death certificate (if applicable)
 - j. Divorce verification (if applicable)
 - k. Putative father registry certificate
 - l. Form(s) signed by the foster parent indicating the foster parent's intent to adopt (Foster Parent Affidavit for Consideration of Adopting Foster Child(ren) Currently in Home and/or Foster Parent(s) Notification of Decision Regarding Interest In Adopting Foster Child(ren))
 - m. Letter regarding Indian Child Welfare Act,(if applicable (see policy [1.6 Administration: Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\) and Transfer of Responsibility for Placement and Care of a Child to a Tribal Agency](#))
 - n. Reunion registry forms (see policy [11.17 Adoption: Adoption Reunion Registry](#))
2. Submit the Child Life History to the Social Services Supervisor for the first level approval.
3. Submit the Child Life History Checklist to the Social Services Supervisor in Georgia SHINES.

The Social Services Supervisor (SSS) will:

1. Review the Child Life History for accuracy, quality and completeness.
2. Approve the Child Life History Checklist in Georgia SHINES.
3. Submit the Child Life History Checklist in Georgia SHINES for a second level approval in Georgia SHINES.

The County Director/Designee will:

1. Review and make an approval decision on the Child Life History.
2. Approve the Child Life History Checklist in Georgia SHINES.

NOTE: Once the County Director or Designee approves the Child Life History Checklist in Georgia SHINES, a system generated alert is created to notify the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit that the Child Life History has been approved.

Child Life History Waiver

The SSCM will:

1. Request a written waiver to relax the requirement to complete the Child Life History within the 30 or 60 day timeframe, include:
 - a. The current six month case plan indicating that reunification for the remaining parent or relative/non-related individual placement continues to be the plan; and/or

- b. The current six month case plan indicating the plan for permanent custody with a relative/non-relative individual during the dispositional phase of the TPR hearing for a non-agency independent adoption.
2. Submit the written waiver to the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit.
3. Obtain a new waiver from the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit in the same manner for each subsequent six months that reunification or relative/non-relative individual custody continues to be the plan.

The Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit within five business days, will:

1. Acknowledge receipt of the plan/order; and
2. Provide a written six-month waiver for completion of the Child Life History.

NOTE: The Child Life History requirement will be reinstated if a decision is made to change the permanency plan from reunification or custody to specified relative/non-relative individual to adoption.

Child Life History Contracts

The SSCM will:

1. Complete the Child Life History Referral form to request approval from the contract agency for completion of the Child Life History.
2. Obtain any missing documentation required for the Child Life History.
3. Complete and forward to the contract agency the customer satisfaction survey provided by the contract agency with the completed Child Life History. The survey allows feedback by the County Department on the services provided.

The contract agency/designee will:

1. Designate an individual to complete the Child Life History.
2. Complete the Child Life History as specified in this section.
3. Have no direct contact with the child.
4. Not remove any original material or copies of material from the child's case record.

NOTE: If this provision presents a significant hardship that would potentially lead to delays in completion of the Child Life History, the County Director may approve an exception to allow copies of case material to be removed from the office. Policy exception approvals require the contract agency/designee to return copies of the case information to the County Department upon completion of the Child Life History for secure destruction.

Updates to the Child Life History

The SSCM will:

1. Update the Adoption Information page in Georgia SHINES every six months or more frequently if a major change occurs in the child's life. Information to be updated in the child's Adoption Information page includes:
 - a. Identified resource
 - b. Changes in sibling placement configuration
 - c. County/Regional considered families

- d. Preparation activities
 - e. Barriers to recruitment
 - f. County-initiated recruitment activities
 - g. Barriers to placement
 - NOTE:** If a resource has been identified and placement has not occurred, summarize barriers to the planned adoptive placement, plans to resolve those barriers and estimated time before the placement shall be achieved.
 - h. Barriers to obtaining a subsequent TPR
2. Upload to Georgia SHINES External Documentation a written update in narrative form every six months or more frequently if a major change occurs in the child's life. Information in the written narrative update will include:
- a. Any changes in placement, reasons, and child's current adjustment
 - b. Current special needs of the child including recent Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnoses, developmental evaluation results, special education placement and medical diagnoses.
 - NOTE:** Changes in special needs should also be updated on the child's Person Detail page.
 - c. Any changes in adoption plan and reasons
 - d. Any changes in legal status such as appeal filed, appeal denied, TPR overturned, etc.
 - e. Any changes in the type of family needed for the child.

Presentation of Child Life History to the Adoptive Family

The child's SSCM will:

- 1. Send the prospective adoptive family's SSCM or CPA Case Worker the following prior to the presentation:
 - a. The Selection Letter; and
 - b. Copy of the Child Life History.

The prospective adoptive family's SSCM or CPA Case Worker will:

- 1. Be knowledgeable about the Child Life History to be presented.
- 2. Notify the prospective adoptive family that they have been tentatively selected for a child and schedule an appointment to discuss the Child Life History with the prospective adoptive family.
 - a. Give only basic information over the phone. The prospective adoptive family should hear details about the child in person.
 - b. Inform the prospective adoptive family it is best for only the parent(s) to be present for the presentation of the Child Life History.
- 3. During the presentation discuss the following:
 - a. Physical description of the child (include photographs)
 - b. All information that is known regarding the child's health, emotional or educational needs (be prepared to discuss any medical conditions)
 - c. Any special care or resources needed
 - d. Reason(s) why child is in custody of the agency
 - e. Number of prior placements and reasons for moves
 - f. If there are siblings being placed separately, an explanation of the reasons for separation and recommendations for continued contact

- g. Child's current foster family lifestyle, composition of family, length of placement in home
 - h. Child's special talents, interests, hobbies
 - i. Typical daily routine of child
 - j. How child is disciplined and rewarded and his/her reaction
 - k. Child's eating and sleeping habits
 - l. Detailed physical characteristics of biological family
 - m. All information that is known regarding the health history of biological family
 - n. All other background information that is known to the agency
 - o. Any information concerning incestuous relationships or sexual abuse occurring in the child's family background
 - p. All information that is known related to any type of abuse of the child
 - q. Anticipated behavior of the child and possible ways to react and manage it
 - r. Preparation and readiness of child for adoptive placement
 - s. Availability of adoption assistance
4. Suggest the family take some time and think about the information and any questions they may have before making the final decision to proceed with the adoptive pre-placement staffing.
 5. Document the presentation within three business days.
 6. If the prospective adoptive family decides to proceed with becoming the adoptive parent of the child:
 - a. Explain to them when and where the adoptive pre-placement staffing will take place, who will be present, and what will occur (see policy [11.8 Adoption: Adoption Pre-Placement Staffing & Visitation](#)).
 - b. Obtain pictures or videos of the family, house, pets, neighborhood, school, etc. to bring to the adoptive pre-placement staffing for the child's SSCM to use in preparing the child for the specific adoptive family's visits (see policy [11.8 Adoption: Adoption Pre-Placement Staffing & Visitation](#)).
 - c. Provide a copy of the presentation documentation to the child's SSCM and respective County Directors/Designees prior to the Adoption Staffing.
- NOTE:** The adoption pre-placement staffing maybe combined with the Child Life History and the pictures are not necessary if the current foster parent(s) who has been caring for the child in their home for the past 12 months has elected to adopt the child. Proceed with negotiating the adoption assistance rate and the Adoptive Signing and Placement (see policy [12.5 Adoption Assistance: Negotiating the Adoption Assistance Agreement](#) and [11.9 Adoption: Adoption Placement Signing](#)).

Child Life History and Permanency Plan Changes

The SSCM will:

1. At any point after the Child Life History registration the child's permanency plan changes from adoption to a permanency plan other than adoption, submit the following documents to the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit and upload to External Documentation:
 - a. Narrative portion of the Child Life History (if not previously submitted);
 - b. Most recent trauma assessment and psychological evaluation (if applicable), if not previously submitted;

- c. Narrative updates documenting the reason(s) for the change in plan; and
 - d. Court order approving the new permanency plan.
2. Update the Adoption Information page in Georgia SHINES every six months thereafter. **NOTE:** Utilize the Adoption Information Page in Georgia SHINES and the six month case review as an update if these documents thoroughly cover all the events and changes in the child's life during the last six months.

Child Life History and Planned Placement Changes

The SSCM will:

1. If at any point after the Child Life History registration it becomes apparent the planned placement for adoption will not occur will within five business days submit to the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit to assist with placement planning:
 - a. Copy of narrative life history
 - b. Copy of current psychological evaluation
 - c. It's My Turn Now Georgia Descriptive Summary (if not previously submitted) (see policy [11.7 Child Specific Recruitment Efforts](#)).
2. Upload submitted documents to Georgia SHINES External Documentation

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The Child Life History presents a picture of the child, it is important that the information be as complete and accurate as possible in order to select the most appropriate family for the child. If a child has been in foster care for a period of time prior to termination of parental rights, a great deal of the information and documents needed for the Child Life History should already have been gathered. Due to the time sensitive nature of a Child Life History, the Child Life History referral form shall be completed as soon as the child meets the eligibility criteria.

Adoption Assistance

Adoption assistance is funding used to facilitate the adoption of children with special needs who might otherwise not be adopted. Adoption assistance is assistance provided on behalf of an eligible child to offset the costs associated with adopting and meeting the ongoing needs of the child. Adoption assistance can be provided in the form of payments, medical coverage and reimbursement of non-recurring expenses.

Adoption Reunion Registry

The Georgia Adoption Reunion Registry provides services to birth parents, adopted persons, adoptive parents and siblings who are attempting to obtain non-identifying or identifying information from the sealed file.

De-Identified Child Life History

De-identified information neither identifies nor provides a reasonable basis to identify an individual.

Putative Father Registry

The putative father registry is a list of the names of men who have acknowledged paternity of a child by completing the Paternity Acknowledgment form or have indicated the possibility of paternity without acknowledging paternity of the child. The registry allows possible biological

but not legal fathers to provide identifying information about themselves, the mother, and the child so these registered men can be notified about adoption proceedings.

Termination of Parental Rights

Termination of Parental Rights is the process for severing all legal rights between a child and his/her parent, except the right of the child to receive child support from his/her parent and inherit from and through his/her parent until a final order of adoption is entered. The child shall maintain the right to pursue any civil actions against his/her parent. The relationship between the child and his/her siblings and extended family remain intact until terminated by final order of adoption. Court orders terminating parental rights shall be without limit as to duration.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Child Life History Checklist and Registration Cover Letter](#)

[Child Life History Referral](#)

[Summary of the HIPPA Privacy Rule](#)