

	<b>GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL</b>			
	<b>Chapter:</b>	(11) Adoption	<b>Effective Date:</b>	September 2018
	<b>Policy Title:</b>	Adoption Pre-Placement Staffing & Visitation		
<b>Policy Number:</b>	11.8	<b>Previous Policy #:</b>	105.2; 105.5; 105.7; 106.1- 106.4	

### CODES/REFERENCES

N/A

### REQUIREMENTS

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

1. Conduct an adoption pre-placement staffing to share information with the identified prospective adoptive family to assist in making an informed decision regarding their interest in becoming an adoptive parent to the child.
2. Conduct the adoption pre-placement staffing within ten business days of the prospective adoptive family's decision to become an adoptive resource for the child following the child life history presentation.
3. The staffing shall include the following participants:
  - a. Child's Social Services Case Manager (SSCM)
  - b. Family's SSCM
  - c. Appropriate supervisors from each county/private agency
  - d. Foster parent(s) or child care institution (CCI) staff
  - e. Adoptive parent(s)
  - f. Regional Adoption Coordinator (RAC)
  - g. Child's therapist, when appropriate

**NOTE:** The 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 (see policy [11.5 Adoption: Child Life History](#)).

4. Initiate the pre-placement visitation with the child and their prospective adoptive family, if the decision is made to proceed with the adoptive placement:
  - a. Determine when the child is sufficiently comfortable with his/her knowledge of the adoptive family to have the first pre-placement visit.
  - b. Ensure that the child's first pre-placement visit with the prospective adoptive family will take place in a location where the child is familiar and comfortable.
  - c. Determine the number, length and timing of the pre-placement visits by the readiness of the child to move into the prospective adoptive family's home. This will have been discussed at the adoption pre-placement staffing but can only be finalized during the actual placement period.
  - d. Ensure a minimum of two, preferably more, pre-placements visits occur for any child above two months of age.
  - e. Do not allow a child to spend the night with the prospective adoptive family on the first pre-placement visit.

- f. Do not place an infant, under two months of age with a prospective family immediately following the first pre-placement visit; at least 24 hours is required to confirm their decision regarding adoption of the child.  
**NOTE:** Any change in this requirement must be thoroughly reviewed by the County Director/Designee and a waiver granted in writing (the waiver must be included in the placement narrative).
  - g. Schedule at least one overnight visit when placing an older child.
  - h. When siblings are being placed together, allow each child to have at least one individual visit to get to know the adoptive family.
  - i. When siblings are being placed separately, allow for a visit to occur between the siblings and their respective caregivers if continued contact between the siblings has been identified as a need of the child being placed (see policy [10.20 Foster Care: Preserving Sibling Connections](#)).
  - j. Discuss any variation from the planned schedule with the Supervisors and the County Directors/Designees.
  - k. Ensure the child has a clear understanding of any changes to the pre-placement plan.
  - l. Determine when it may be appropriate for the prospective adoptive parent(s) to be involved in the child's ongoing services, such as therapy appointments, school conferences/events, etc. prior to placement.
3. Engage the foster parent(s) in the adoption planning process for a child in their home and ensure the child has ample opportunity to say goodbye before the final move into the pre-adoptive family's home.

## PROCEDURES

### Adoption Pre-Placement Staffing

The SSCM will:

1. Discuss and/or review the following items thoroughly during the adoption pre-placement staffing:
  - a. The Child Life History and the family evaluation in terms of the following areas:
    - i. Child vulnerabilities (current and future);
    - ii. Parental capacities of the adoptive resource and the willingness of the prospective adoptive family to accept and meet the child's needs;
    - iii. Supports needed by the child and family during the post placement period:
      1. Medical (Who, if any, are the medical providers, including specialists, physical and occupational therapists, medical equipment providers, etc.? What is the frequency of medical/therapy appointments? Will special medical training be required?)
      2. Educational (What is the child's school placement? Will supportive services be needed? If school transfer is necessary, will transfer information be provided prior to placement?)
      3. Emotional (Who are the therapeutic providers? What are the ongoing therapeutic needs of the child? Will respite and community support services be accessible to the family if needed?)
      4. Social (What are the current faith-based practices of the child? Will there be a continuing need for involvement in the community? What extracurricular activities are important to the child?)

5. Parent groups (What support groups are available in the family's area?)
  6. Financial (What resources are available to meet the child's needs, such as supplemental security income (SSI) or Retirement, Survivors or Disability Insurance (RSDI)? Does the child qualify for adoption assistance benefits? Do the prospective adoptive parent(s) require adoption assistance payments to adopt the child? How soon after adoptive placement will adoption assistance benefits begin? Does the child have any specific needs prior to placement (e.g., clothing, medical equipment, etc.)?
- b. Need for the child's continued contact with siblings, other birth relatives, foster parents and significant others;
  - c. Provide the pre-adoptive parent(s) with information and guidelines about the possibility of Post Adoption Contact Agreement (see policy [11.15 Adoption: Post Adoption Contact Agreement](#)).
  - d. Any other questions around Child Life History or family evaluation;
  - e. Child's readiness to make the move and/or the length of time needed to prepare the child;
  - f. Any questions the adoptive family may have, ensuring all have been answered fully and accurately;
  - g. If the decision is made to proceed with placement:
    - i. Discuss and develop a calendar of tentative dates for pre-placement visitation depending on the time needed to prepare the child.
    - ii. Discuss the length and anticipated number of visits needed. If a sibling placement waiver was granted, visits with siblings and their caretakers should be a part of the pre-placement visits.
    - iii. Discuss the need for overnight visit(s) in the adoptive home prior to final placement.
    - iv. Discuss the need for a meeting and visit in the foster home.
    - v. Discuss the need for a goodbye time with the foster family prior to the final move.
    - vi. Develop a preliminary plan for ongoing contact with siblings and significant others following placement.
    - vii. Discuss and write out a calendar of events for the placement. Make sure everyone knows that this will be shared with the child and as few changes as possible should be made after that time.
    - viii. The child's SSCM should receive family pictures at this time to use to prepare the child for this specific prospective adoptive family.
    - ix. The family's SSCM should set a time to discuss any additional questions that the family might think of after the staffing.
    - x. Make sure everyone knows what they are expected to do and their time frames. It is important for the family's SSCM to get to know the child and the child to get to know the "new" SSCM during the placement process.
2. Document the pre-placement staffing in Georgia SHINES within three business days:
    - a. Add the date of the adoption pre-placement staffing to the Adoption Information page;
    - b. Record the discussion and the decision. If the decision is made not to proceed, include the specific reasons. If the decision is made to proceed, include the date for placement.

- c. Send copies of the documentation to the prospective adoptive family's SSCM, County Directors/Designees or Child Placing Agency (CPA) Director. Also, send a copy to the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit, if the decision is made not to proceed with the placement.
3. If the decision is made to proceed with the adoptive placement:
  - a. Provide a copy of the placement schedule to all Case Managers, the prospective adoptive parent(s) and foster parents.
  - b. Negotiate the adoption assistance rate if the child was determined by the Social Services Administration Unit (SSAU) to be eligible for adoption assistance payments (see policy [12.5 Adoption Assistance: Negotiating the Adoption Assistance Agreement](#)).
4. If the decision is made not to proceed with the placement, request the prospective adoptive family return the de-identified Child Life History.

The County Director/Designee will:

1. Notify the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit if the adoptive placement cannot be successfully executed within 90 days of placing the child on adoptive status with the Adoption Exchange, State Adoption Unit.

### **Preparing the Child for the Selected Adoptive Family**

The SSCM will:

1. Move the preparation from general discussion and work around adoption to the specifics concerning the prospective adoptive family selected.
2. Take responsibility for selecting the family.
3. Use the Life Book to discuss the reasons for the adoptive placement.
4. Share pictures of prospective adoptive family and talk about each individual family member, including close extended family and pets.
5. Make numerous visits and have several discussions with the child as necessary.
6. Share the calendar of visiting plans for the child in order that he/she can understand the process and time frames. Explain that there may be some minor changes in the plans but assure him/her that he/she will be involved and informed at all times.
7. Involve the foster parent(s) in the actual adoptive placement:
  - a. Share enough general information about the prospective adoptive family to enable the foster parent(s) to talk with or reassure the child and reinforce the SSCM's preparation discussions.
  - b. Involve the foster parent(s) in the adoption pre-placement staffing.
  - c. Discuss child's reactions with foster parents on a frequent basis during this period.
  - d. Discuss thoroughly the planned meetings between the foster and prospective adoptive family.
  - e. Remain aware of the foster parent(s)' possible feelings of guilt for not adopting the child and support them in their decision.
  - f. Acknowledge the foster parents' feelings around separation and grief in facing the reality that the child is moving and assist them in dealing with these feelings.

## Adoption Pre-Placement Visitation

The SSCM will:

1. Make numerous visits with the child and with the foster parent(s) until sufficient preparation has been conducted;
2. Arrange with the prospective adoptive family's Case Worker the date and time of the first pre-placement visit (this should have been tentatively set at the adoption pre-placement staffing);  
**NOTE:** The pre-placement visit should be scheduled for no more than a few hours, depending on the age of the child as it is an emotionally charged time.
3. Review with the prospective adoptive family the plans, purpose and schedule of the pre-placement visitation which was tentatively set at the adoption pre-placement staffing;
4. Arrange for the prospective adoptive family to arrive in time for the child's SSCM to answer any new questions; and
5. Inform the prospective adoptive parent(s) that the first pre-placement visit should be limited to the prospective adoptive parent(s) and not include any other children or relatives from their family.
6. Make sure that the foster family is comfortable with the visit occurring in their home and that they are supportive of the adoption;
7. Ensure that the prospective adoptive family is comfortable with the plans;
8. Prepare the foster family to show their support of the placement visitation during this first visit as this gives the child permission to begin to relate to the prospective adoptive family;
9. Make arrangements to remain until all parties are comfortable;
10. Prepare and coach the foster family to gradually withdraw from the visit as the child becomes more comfortable with the prospective adoptive family to allow them to have some time alone; and
11. Have the prospective adoptive family share with the child the plans and timeframes for the next visit using the child's placement calendar.
12. If the first pre-placement visit must occur in the office:
  - a. Ensure the child is familiar with the room and comfortable in the setting.
  - b. Make staff aware that the first pre-placement visit is an emotionally charged time for the child and advise them to go about their duties without making a big deal over the child meeting the prospective adoptive family for the first time.
  - c. Have another staff person with whom the child is familiar in attendance to be with him/her while the Social Services Case Manager is alone with the prospective adoptive family. If this is not possible, the Social Services Case Manager should meet with the prospective adoptive family at the office and then go to the foster home to get the child.
  - d. Ensure the area in the office is comfortable enough for the prospective adoptive family and the child to interact with one another for a period of time.
  - e. Stay in the room until the child is comfortable with being left alone with the prospective adoptive family.
  - f. Prepare for the prospective adoptive family and child to go outside or to a nearby park to play when the child is ready, if the visiting room is small.
  - g. The prospective adoptive family should share with the child the plans and timeframes for the next visit using the child's placement calendar.

## Following the Pre-Placement Visit

The family's Case Worker will:

1. Discuss the pre-placement visit with the prospective adoptive family after the pre-placement visit and confirm plans for the next visit.
2. Document the observation and feedback received from the prospective adoptive parent(s).

The child's SSCM will:

1. Maintain close contact with the foster parent(s) after the pre-placement visit to help gauge the child's reaction to the visits.
2. Discuss with the child any feelings or concerns related to the visit.
3. Document the observation and feedback received from the prospective adoptive parent(s), foster parent(s) and child.
4. Assist the child with saying goodbye, once the move date has been set, by:
  - a. Ensuring the child has at least one night with the foster family to say goodbye. Recommend that foster parent(s) include:
    - i. A special time of sharing sad/happy feelings with the foster family and close friends; and
    - ii. Any extended members of the foster family that the child is close to.
  - b. Arranging for the child to say goodbye to friends and teachers if the child is in school and will be changing schools;
  - c. Allowing special time with biological sibling(s) for their good-byes including information on how they are to keep in touch after the move;
  - d. Making time to spend with the child to say special good-byes, and letting the child know he/she is pleased with the adoption placement and feels this is a good move.
  - e. Arranging for the foster family to assist on moving day by helping the pre-adoptive family pack the child's belongings in the car, signifying their approval of the move.

### PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The adoption pre-placement staffing is used when the adoptive resource is not the current foster parent(s) who has had the child in their home and usually follows the foster parent(s) declining the option to be considered as an adoptive resource for the child. The adoption pre-placement staffing shall be scheduled by the child's SSCM for the purpose of sharing information with the identified adoptive placement resource to assist the prospective adoptive family in making an informed decision regarding their interest in becoming an adoptive parent to the child. It is important that all involved parties are in attendance to ensure that a viable pre-placement plan is created for the child. Prior to the adoption pre-placement staffing, the SSCM and Social Services Supervisor should discuss the meeting format and decide which segment(s) of the meeting is appropriate (if not all) to have the foster parent(s) in attendance. When making the decision, it should be considered that the foster parent(s) has a lot of information about the child that could be useful.

Pre-placement is the period of time during which the child and prospective adoptive family visit together through the Adoption Placement Signing. Significant holidays must be taken into consideration when scheduling pre-placement visits as holidays are not a good time to plan a move. In the ideal situation, the first pre-placement visit should occur in the foster home. The child needs time between visits to process the experience and deal with the idea of the move.

After each visit, adequate time shall be given for discussing what occurred with the child and listening to his/her impressions and feelings. Adequate time shall also be given to review and explore the adoptive family's impressions and to allow for planning of the next visit. Pre-placement visits should not extend beyond two months. The SSCM should consult with the RAC if the pre-placement visitation is going to exceed two months.

The foster parents can be a great help in facilitating a child's move into the adoptive family. The foster parent is a rich resource for the adoptive parent(s) and can provide information that would not be seen by a SSCM who is not in the home with the child. The foster parent(s) can provide information about the child's schedule, eating and sleeping routines, fears, functioning in the family, reaction to situations, etc. The foster parent(s) can also give information on techniques that they have found effective in managing the child's behaviors.

It is important that the SSCM partner with the foster parent during this process. If the foster parent(s) views adoption as a positive move for the child, they will be able to help the child separate from them and easily transition into an adoptive family. Conversely, if the foster parent(s) do not view the adoption as positive, the child may have feelings of guilt over and feel anger toward the adoptive parents/DFCS for taking them away.

The policy and practice discussed in this section are related to an adoptive placement other than the current foster parent(s). A foster parent(s) who has had a child in his/her home for a period of at least 12 months has the option of being considered as an adoptive resource for the child (see policy [11.6 Adoption: Foster Parent Adoption Consideration Evaluation](#)).

### **Adoptive Status**

Adoptive status is the point when a child is legally free to be adopted, an adoptive resource has been identified, physical adoptive placement has occurred, and the adoptive resource has committed to be the child's adoptive parent(s) by signing the placement agreement(s). Placing a child on adoptive status signals recruitment procedures should be halted as a potential adoptive resource has been located for the child.

### **Child Care Institution (CCI)**

Child care institutions provide care, supervision and oversight in a residential setting, including neighborhood-based group homes, campus-based arrangements and self-contained facilities.

### **Child Placing Agency (CPA)**

A CPA is an agency that places children in foster and adoptive resource homes for individualized care, supervision and oversight. Child placing agencies are responsible for assessing the placement regarding the appropriateness of the room, board and watchful oversight that the prospective foster and adoptive families will provide. The CPA's employees and their foster and adoptive parents work as a team to provide a stabilizing and nurturing environment that promotes safety, well-being and permanency.

### **De-Identified Child Life History**

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

**FORMS AND TOOLS**

[Summary of the HIPAA Privacy Rule](#)