



April 10, 2020

## **Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2020-04**

**To:** County Departments of Family and Children Services  
DFCS District Directors  
DFCS Regional Directors  
State Office Staff

**From:** Tom C. Rawlings, Division Director   
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

**Re:** Child Welfare Policy Manual: Special Investigations

### **Purpose**

The purpose of Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) No. 2020-04 is to announce revisions to Chapter 6: Special Investigations of the Child Welfare Policy Manual and provide related updates to sections of Chapter 3: Intake, Chapter 10: Foster Care, Chapter 14: Resource Development, and Chapter 19: Case Management.

### **Discussion**

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children served and strives to make continuous improvements in the outcomes for children and families. DFCS recognizes that sound policies, guided by federal and state laws and rooted in best practice, support the framework for providing effective child welfare services. To that end, DFCS continually reviews and makes responsive changes to the Child Welfare Policy Manual to assure continued alignment with federal and state laws, best practice and socio-cultural factors impacting children and families served.

Through this effort, Chapter 6: Special Investigations which incorporates provisions for assessing allegations of child maltreatment that extend beyond the traditional parent-child domain has been revised. In addition, there were related changes to other policy sections in Chapter 3: Intake, Chapter 10: Foster Care, Chapter 14: Resource Development, and Chapter 19: Case Management. The highlights of the policy revisions are as follows:

### **Chapter 6: Special Investigations**

#### **6.0 Introduction to Special Investigations**

1. Provides a concise overview of the objectives of a special investigation.

2. Describes types of investigations that classified as special investigations.

#### 6.1 Preparing for Special Investigations

1. New policy section which incorporates the preparation activities for a special investigation including reviewing intake information, analyzing DFCS history, and staffing with the supervisor.
2. Adds a provision to determine if a joint investigation is required with law enforcement and/or oversight agencies.
3. Requires adherence to the local Child Abuse Protocol when conducting a special investigation.

#### 6.2 Purposeful Contacts in Special Investigations

1. New policy section regarding conducting purposeful contacts with children (victim and non-victim), alleged maltreater, and the parent/guardian/legal custodian of the alleged victim child during a special investigation.
2. Requires preparing for the purposeful contact, including developing a plan for the visit.
3. Updates Practice Guidance for minimizing trauma to children during an investigation.
4. Add to Forms and Tools the Notification of Child Interview.
5. Discontinued Forms and Tools:
  - a. Notification of a Child Interview in a Facility Letter
  - b. Notification of a Child Interview in a School Letter

#### 6.3 Conducting Special Investigations on DFCS or Child Placing Agency Foster or Adoptive Homes

1. Re-numbers the policy section to 6.3 from 6.1.
2. Updates requirements and procedures for assessing allegations of child abuse in a foster or adoptive home setting.
3. Adds Practice Guidance for:
  - a. The assessment of the foster or adoptive home, including assessing children in the legal custody of the foster or adoptive parent who do not reside in the home.
  - b. Service provision during an investigation of a foster or adoptive home.

#### 6.4 Conducting Special Investigations on Foster Care Kinship Placements

1. Renames the section from "Conducting Special Investigations on Relative or Non-Relative" to "Conducting Special Investigations on Foster Care Kinship Placements" to align with the agency's kinship continuum.
2. Re-numbers the policy section to 6.4 from 6.2.
3. Updates requirements and procedures for assessing allegations of child abuse in a foster care kinship placement.
4. Adds Practice Guidance for:
  - a. The assessment of the foster care kinship placement, including assessing children in the legal custody of the kinship caregiver who do not reside in the home.
  - b. Service provision during an investigation of a foster care kinship placement.

### 6.5 Conducting Special Investigations on Residential or Non-Residential Facilities

1. Re-numbers the policy section to 6.5 from 6.3.
2. Updates requirements and procedures for assessing allegations of child abuse in an investigation involving a facility.
3. Requires conducting a joint investigation with the oversight authority, as applicable.
4. Provides a description of residential and non-residential facilities.
5. Adds Practice Guidance for:
  - a. Assessing caregiver protective capacities in a residential or non-residential facility investigation.
  - b. Conducting collateral contacts who can provide relevant information for assessing the child maltreatment, child safety and caregiver capacity at the facility.
  - c. Service provision during an investigation of a residential or non-residential facility.

### 6.6 Conducting Special Investigations on Public or Private Non-Residential Schools

1. Re-numbers the policy section to 6.6 from 6.4.
2. Updates requirements and procedures for assessing allegations of child abuse in an investigation involving a school.
3. Adds a description of public or private non-residential schools.
4. Adds Practice Guidance for:
  - a. Assessing caregiver protective capacities in public or private non-residential school investigation.
  - b. Conducting collateral contacts who can provide relevant information for assessing the child maltreatment, child safety and caregiver capacity at the school.
  - c. Service provision during an investigation of a public or private non-residential school.

### 6.7 Conducting Special Investigations of Child Death, Near Fatality or Serious Injury (CD/NF/SI)

1. Re-numbers the policy section to 6.7 from 6.6.
2. Directs staff to also adhere to the corresponding investigation policy section based on the legal status, setting, or location of the incident.
3. Provides additional investigation activities required in a CD/NF/SI case including:
  - a. Joint investigations with law enforcement and/or the oversight authority.
  - b. Participating in multidisciplinary team meetings (MDT).
  - c. Referring children for a forensic interview at the local Children's Advocacy Center (CAC).
  - d. Consulting with subject matter experts.
  - e. Conducting collaterals with healthcare professionals and medical examiner.
  - f. Obtaining autopsy results.
4. Enhances Practice Guidance to include information related to:
  - a. Delaying or refraining from interviewing alleged maltreaters when requested by law enforcement.
  - b. CAC, forensic interviews, and MDT meetings.

- c. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) Child Abuse Investigative Support Center and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children.
5. Adds to Forms and Tools GBI Child Abuse Investigative Support Center (CAISC) and Frequently Asked Questions About Autopsies.

#### 6.8 Making a Special Investigation Determination

1. New policy section that outlines special investigation decision making process.
2. Requires conducting a MDT staffing at least 48 hours prior to submitting the special investigation for closure.
3. Includes procedures for making safety and maltreatment determinations as well as:
  - a. Whether a policy violation has occurred.
  - b. Whether evidence confirms that unsafe sleep practices were the cause or a contributing factor to the death of an infant, and case documentation supports that DFCS staff previously educated the caregiver(s) of the dangers of an unsafe sleep environment.
4. Provides practice guidance regarding making an investigative decision when the maltreater is unidentified or unknown.
5. Add to Forms and Tools the Child Abuse Registry Handout: Roadmap to Substantiated Abuse.

#### 6.9 Notifications in Special Investigations

1. New policy section that outlines notifications required in a special investigation including timeframes, procedures and individual/entities to be notified.
2. Provides a description and contact information for oversight authorities.
3. Adds visual aids - Special Investigation Notification Matrix and Oversight Authority Matrix.
4. Adds to Forms and Tools the Notification of Child Protective Services Investigation Outcome to Oversight Authority, Agency, Facility, or School.
5. Discontinues Forms and Tools:
  - a. Notification of a Child Interview in a Facility Letter
  - b. Notification of a Child Interview in a School Letter
  - c. Notification of CPS Investigation Outcome for Directors and Oversight Agencies Letter
  - d. Notification to Department of Community Health – Division of Healthcare Facility Regulation

#### 6.10 Reporting a Child Death, Near Fatality or Serious Injury

1. Re-numbers the policy section to 6.10 from 6.7.
2. Focuses requirements and procedures on the activities for reporting of a CD/NF/SI.
3. Requires notification to the DFCS Office of Communications if contacted by the media concerning a CD/NF/SI.
4. Requires making a new Intake Report if maltreatment is suspected and not previously reported.
5. Requires documenting in Georgia SHINES any child death that occurred in a family currently involved with DFCS, when that death occurred within the 12 months prior to the start of DFCS' involvement with the family, even if the circumstances of the

child death were not related to maltreatment.

6. Adds Practice Guidance on:
  - a. The role of the Knowledge Management CD/NF/SI Review Team in reviewing cases involving a CD/NF/SI.
  - b. The role of the Child Fatality Review Committee on reporting deaths.

#### 6.11 Special Investigations and Policy Violations Review Process

1. Changes the title of policy 6.5 Special Investigation Concurrence Submission and Review Process to 6.11 Special Investigations and Policy Violations Review Process.
2. Changes the focus of the policy to the process for reviewing special investigations involving a foster/adoptive home, foster care kinship placement, or child in DFCS custody with a permanency plan of adoption or guardianship.
3. Adds procedures for the State Office Placement and Permanency when reviewing special investigations.
4. Discontinued Forms and Tools Special Investigations/Policy Violations Memorandum

The following items have been discontinued as the information is incorporated into Chapter 6: Special Investigations:

1. Child Welfare Services Memorandum 2016-01: Discontinuation of the State Office Concurrence Review for Special Investigations; and Modification of the Type of Policy Violations Assessments that require State Office Concurrence Review.
2. Child Welfare Services County Letter 2017-01: Timeframe for Completion of Special Investigations.

### **Chapter 3: Intake**

#### 3.9 Intakes Involving Sex Trafficking/Sexual Servitude

1. Removes the requirement to notify the Attorney General of an intake report involving known or suspected victims of sex trafficking.

#### 3.13 Intakes Involving DFCS or Child Placing Agency Foster or Adoptive Homes

1. The portions specific to the Intake Reports involving DFCS or CPA foster or adoptive homes were moved to this section from the previous policy 3.3 Intakes Involving Special Investigations and Policy Violations.
2. Provides description of DFCS and CPA foster and adoptive homes.
3. Provides description of oversight authorities for CPA foster or adoptive homes.
4. Provides instructions for oversight authorities notifications.
5. Updates Practice Guidance on case name assignments.
6. Add to Forms and Tools the Maltreatment in Care - Georgia SHINES Job Aid.

#### 3.14 Intakes Involving Foster Care Kinship Placements

1. The portions specific to the Intake Reports involving foster care kinship placements were moved to this section from the previous policy 3.3 Intakes Involving Special Investigations and Policy Violations.
2. Provides description of a foster care kinship placement.
3. Updates Practice Guidance on case name assignments.
4. Add to Forms and Tools the Maltreatment in Care - Georgia SHINES Job Aid.

### 3.15 Intakes Involving Residential and Non-Residential Facilities

1. The portions specific to the Intake Reports involving residential and non-residential facilities were moved to this section from the previous policy 3.3 Intakes Involving Special Investigations and Policy Violations.
2. Provides description of residential and non-residential facilities.
3. Provides definitions of the oversight authorities involved with residential and non-residential facilities.
4. Provides instructions for oversight authorities notifications.
5. Updates Practice Guidance on case name assignments.
6. Add to Forms and Tools the Maltreatment in Care - Georgia SHINES Job Aid.
7. Discontinued Forms and Tools Notification to Department of Community Health – Division of Healthcare Facility Regulation Division

### 3.16 Intakes Involving Public or Private Non-Residential Schools and Overnight Camps

1. The portions specific to the Intake Reports involving public or private non-residential schools and overnight camps were moved to this section from the previous policy 3.3 Intakes Involving Special Investigations and Policy Violations.
2. Provides description of public or private non-residential schools and overnight camps.
3. Updates Practice Guidance on case name assignments.
4. Add to Forms and Tools the Maltreatment in Care - Georgia SHINES Job Aid.

### 3.17 Intakes Involving Child Death Near Fatality Serious Injury (CD/NF/SI)

1. Re-numbered from policy 3.4 to 3.17.
2. Updates requirements and procedures for intakes involving a CD/NF/SI.
3. Requires notifying the County Directors and County CPS Intake Communication Center (CICC) Point of Contacts of the legal and boarding counties, within two hours of an Intake Assessment screen-out disposition involving a CD/NF/SI.
4. Add to Forms and Tools the Maltreatment in Care - Georgia SHINES Job Aid.

The following policy sections of Chapter 3: Intake have no policy content changes however they were re-numbered as follows:

1. 3.3 Intakes Involving Active Cases
2. 3.24 Mandated Reporters
3. 3.25 Sharing Intake Reports with Law Enforcement, District Attorney or Military
4. 3.26 Second Level Screen-Out Review and Approval Process
5. 3.27 Administrative Openings
6. 3.28 Non-Incident Request Types

## **Chapter 14: Resource Development**

### 14.21 Actions During Special Investigations

1. Changes the title of policy 14.21 from Reporting Allegations of Abuse and Neglect in Approved Homes to Actions During Special Investigations.
2. Changes the focus of the policy to the role of the Resource Development staff during special investigations, including:
  - a. Consulting with the special investigator.

- b. Participating in the multi-disciplinary staffing held at least 48-hours prior to the special investigation being submitted for closure.
  - c. Notifying Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) when closure of a home is recommended.
  - d. Maintaining neutrality during the investigation process.
3. Requires making an Intake Report in accordance with policy 3.24 Mandated Reporters for suspected or known instances of child abuse.

#### 14.22 Policy Violations

1. Added requirements for developing, implementing and monitoring a corrective action plan (CAP).
2. Requires analyzing DFCS history as part of completing a policy violation assessment.
3. Requires engaging relevant collateral contacts when conducting a policy violation assessment.
4. Requires observing the physical home environment to determine if it is safe and appropriate to meet the needs of each child in the home.
5. Adds procedures for interviewing children regarding the alleged policy violation.
6. Added individuals to be included in the policy violation assessment staffing including the Kinship Coordinator when a kinship foster home or foster care kinship placement is involved.
7. Updates practice guidance regarding what constitutes a policy violation.

#### 19.10 Analyzing DFCS History

1. Requires reviewing special investigations as part of DFCS history.
2. Adds procedures for reviewing and analyzing DFCS history when conducting a special investigation and/or policy violation assessment.
3. Adds Practice Guidance for reviewing DFCS approval history of a placement resource involved in a special investigation.

#### 19.11: Safety Assessment

1. Requires the completion of the Safety Assessment in Georgia SHINES within 72 hours of initial contact with the alleged victim child and at conclusion of a special investigation.
2. Updates practice guidance for consistency with the language used in the current Family Functioning Assessment.

#### 19.13 Family Functioning Assessment

1. Provides an exception for the completion of the FFA in special Investigations on a residential or non-residential facility or public or private non-residential school.
2. Adds Practice guidance on how to tell when a family is functioning well.

#### 19.16 Collateral Contacts

1. Requires establishing minimum collateral contact standards based on the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the child and family.
2. Adds Resource Development to the program area that requires conducting collateral contacts.

3. Requires obtaining relevant and sufficient collateral contacts to assess allegations of policy violations and progress toward CAP objectives.
4. Adds the required collateral contacts to be engaged when a child on an active case has suffered any injury including a CD/NF/SI.

#### 19.17 Service Provision

1. Updates Codes/References with federal statutes related to child welfare service provision.
2. Requires making a referral within 72-hours of the identification of a need when the family has entered into voluntary kinship arrangement.
3. Requires engaging formal and informal providers at a minimum bi-weekly when the family has entered into a voluntary kinship arrangement.
4. Separated and updated procedures for implementing, monitoring and concluding service provisions.
5. Separated and updated procedures for supervisors to support the implementation, monitoring and conclusion of service provisions.
6. Adds Support Services for Post Adoptive Placement and Post Adoption to the list of services to address family needs in Practice Guidance.

#### **Policy Maintenance Updates**

1. The following policy sections were updated to reflect the name change of the DFCS Care Coordination Treatment Unit, formerly known as Placement Resource Operations (PRO):
  - a. 10.12 Foster Care: Psychological and Behavioral Health Needs
  - b. 19.29 Case Management: Coordination of Care with Hospitals
2. The following policy section was updated to clarify that children under 12 months of age undergo dental screening when entering foster care:
  - a. 10.11 Foster Care: Medical, Dental, and Developmental Needs

#### **Implementation**

This policy update is effective upon the release of this manual transmittal and is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>.

Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to policy [1.3 Administration Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies](#) for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Please direct questions regarding this policy release to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at [PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov).