

# **MODULE 18**

## **AGENDA**

- I. Welcome
- II. Policy Power
- III. The Foster Parents Bill of Rights
- IV. Advocacy



# POLICY POWER

## con fi den tial



1. Done or communicated in confidence; secret.
2. Entrusted with the confidence of another: *a confidential secretary.*
3. Denoting confidence or intimacy: *a confidential tone of voice.*
4. Containing information, the unauthorized disclosure of which poses a threat to security.

Maintaining confidentiality is an important responsibility of foster parents and DFCS. Information is shared between DFCS and foster parents in order to provide the best care for a child and to facilitate achievement of permanency.

Confidential information should not be shared with other people except in specific situations, or as directed by DFCS.

### When Confidentiality is Respected...

Children and families feel supported and respected and develop trust with foster parents and DFCS. When confidentiality is respected, families become motivated to share information, get support and do the work they need to do for their children and family.

### Confidentiality Tips

1. Keep records in a safe private place.
2. Don't discuss confidential information with your family and friends.
3. Use care in public places and when leaving messages on answering machines.
4. Protect the identity of the child and his or her family when talking with other foster parents.

### When in Doubt...

Consult with the child's case manager or a case supervisor before releasing any information. You don't have to make these decisions alone.

### Foster Home Utilization

These standards state how many children can be in a foster home and where they can sleep. The standards are as follows:



- No more than six (6) children under the age of 16, including the children of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home.
- No more than two (2) children under two (2) years of age, including the children of the foster family, may be placed in a foster home.
- Only bedrooms shall be used as sleeping space for children.
- Each non-related child must have a separate bed.
- A maximum of two (2) children may sleep in a double or larger bed if they are siblings and are of the same sex (with no known sexually predatory behaviors).
- No child shall sleep in a bed with an adult.

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- A child over one (1) year of age cannot sleep in the bedroom of an adult.
- A maximum of three (3) children sharing a bedroom is preferable. The suitability of children sharing a room should be assessed based on the background/history of the children.
- Children age five (5) years and older and of different sexes shall not share a bedroom.

### Babysitters (Unreimbursed by DFCS)

For the purpose of this section, supervision refers to **in-home or out-of-home, unreimbursed childcare**; **occasional care** means care provided once a week or less with no more than three occurrences regardless of the timeframe; **routine care** means care provided more than once a week, usually at designated times; **short-term care** means less than four hours.

Responsible supervision of children in foster care is required at all times. The Child Protective Services standards regarding the supervision of children in the homes of their parents or relatives are not applicable to children in foster care placement. Standards of care for children in foster placement are stricter due to the uniqueness of their situation, past experiences, and the need to ensure their safety in out-of-home placements. This is the primary basis for the pre-service preparation and in-service training program (Continued Parent Development) for foster families.

Foster parents must provide or arrange for care and supervision appropriate to the child's age, level of development, and individual needs. A plan is established by the foster parent for the care and supervision of the child as needed, by a competent and reliable adult in their absence due to employment, training, or for personal situations.

Substitute caregivers providing occasional, short-term, in-home/out-of-home childcare are not required to undergo CPS screenings. However, upon completion of the third occurrence of care for any foster child having been placed in the home (regardless of timeframe), the "occasional" provider becomes "routine" and is subject to the requirements as follows: Substitute caregivers providing **routine** in-home/out-of-home childcare are required to complete Form 316 and submit to CPS screenings, Sexual Offender's Registry, Pardons and Parole, and Department of Corrections screening prior to providing care for the child.

Foster parents must be reasonably assured that any substitute caregiver possesses the necessary skills to manage the parenting and/or special needs of the child left in their care and is aware of and agrees to follow agency guidelines regarding supervision, discipline and other safety needs of the child.

**Note:** Children can not be left in the care of other minors. Persons providing reimbursed or non-reimbursed care for children must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older.

### Supervision of Older Youth

Generally speaking, reliable and competent youth, 13 years and older, may be left unattended under certain circumstances and for short periods of time so as not to jeopardize their safety and well-being. At this stage in their lives, many youth are able to benefit from experiences that foster a sense of responsibility, independence, and self-control. Situations requiring youth to be home alone after school hours or when foster parents are attending to short-term personal matters are acceptable within the limitations indicated.



The primary factor to consider in determining if youth may be left alone is their ability to function for short periods of time independent of a caretaker. The foster parent should assure that the youth is aware of procedures to be taken in case of an emergency and has access to emergency

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contact numbers, including their own and a nearby relative, neighbor or friend. Other important criteria to consider include the following:

- Length of time in the home.
- Judgment and level of maturity or development.
- Demonstration of dependability, responsibility and trustworthiness.
- History of emotional/psychological stability.
- History of running away and other status offenses.
- History of delinquent behavior.
- History of alcohol and substance abuse.
- Number of youth present in the home and their relationship with each other
- Gender, number and the relationship of the youth to be left alone.
- History of sexually acting out.
- School performance.
- Safety of the home environment (Firearm safety, water safety, any other potential hazards, etc.).
- Youth's ability to readily access foster parent or other identified persons should the need arise.

The foster parent and Case Manager together must determine the feasibility of leaving older youth alone in the foster home for short periods of time.

### Travel

Whenever a child is away from the foster home, the county must have information about the child's whereabouts in the event of a birth family emergency. Your county DFCS agency provides approval for out-of-town trips. **At least two weeks notice is preferred in seeking permission to take children on out-of-town trips; more notice may be needed for situations requiring parental or court approval.**

If you are planning a trip (that includes the child) for **3 days or less**

1. Obtain verbal approval from the child's Case Manager or a case supervisor prior to taking the child on an out-of-town trip.
2. Provide an emergency contact number where you may be reached.

If you are planning a trip that will last **more than 3 days**, obtain the following from the Case Manager or a case supervisor.

1. Written authorization for the trip.
2. Written authorization for emergency medical care for the child.
3. Provide the Case Manager or a case supervisor with an emergency contact number.

If you are planning a trip that requires travel with the child **out of state**, the following must be obtained:

1. Written authorization for the trip.
2. Written authority to obtain medical care for the child, if needed.
3. Written permission from the parent and the court, if the child is in temporary custody. The County Director may grant the above if the child is in permanent custody.

For trips involving **out-of-country** travel, follow the steps above and obtain:

1. A waiver from the Regional Director must be obtained.
2. Passport and immunizations must be obtained, and serious consideration must be given to the fact that Georgia Medicaid while out of the country will not cover the child.

*Even if you do not plan to have the child accompany you on the trip, the agency should be notified within the required time frame, as the child's continued care during your absence will need to be assured. Arrangements for the care of the child during your absence will be made by the agency or jointly between you and the agency. There is no state reimbursement, other than the usual per diem, for vacations or other trips for a child in care.*

## The Foster Parent Bill of Rights

To amend Chapter 5 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to programs and protection for children and youth, so as to enact the "Foster Parents Bill of Rights"; to provide for a short title; to set out a list of rights for foster parents; to provide that such rights be taken into consideration in policies of the Division of Family and Children Services of the Department of Human Resources; to provide for the establishment of grievance procedures for violation of the bill of rights; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Chapter 5 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to programs and protection for children and youth, is amended by adding a new article to read as follows:

ARTICLE 14.

49-5-281.

(a) The General Assembly finds that foster parents who are volunteers providing care for children who are in the custody of the Department of Human Resources play an integral, indispensable, and vital role in the state's effort to care for dependent children displaced from their homes. The General Assembly further finds that it is in the best interest of Georgia's child welfare system to acknowledge foster parents as active and participating members of this system and to support them through the following bill of rights:

(1) The right to be treated by the Division of Family and Children Services of the Department of Human Resources and other partners in the care of abused children with dignity, respect, and trust as a primary provider of foster care and a member of the professional team caring for foster children;

(2) The right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, color, creed, gender, marital status, national origin, age, or physical handicap;

(3) The right to continue with his or her own family values and beliefs, so long as the values and beliefs of the foster child and the birth family are not infringed upon and consideration is given to the special needs of children who have experienced trauma and separation from their families. This shall include the right to exercise parental authority within the limits of policies, procedures, and other directions of the Division of Family and Children Services and within the limits of the laws of the State of Georgia;

(4) The right to receive both standardized pre-service training, including training in Division of Family and Children Services policies and procedures and appropriate ongoing training, by the Division of Family and Children Services or the placing agency at appropriate intervals to meet mutually assessed needs of the child and to improve foster parents' skills and to apprise foster parents of any changes in policies and procedures of the Division of Family and Children Services and any changes in applicable law;

(5) The right to be apprised of information, laws, and guidelines on the obligations, responsibilities, and opportunities of foster parenting and to be kept informed of any changes in laws, policies, and procedures regarding foster parenting by the Division of Family and Children Services in a timely manner and at least annually;

(6) The right to receive timely financial reimbursement according to the agreement between the foster parents and the Department of Human Resources from funds appropriated by the General Assembly and to be notified of any costs or expenses for which the foster parent may be eligible for reimbursement;

(7) The right to receive information from the Division of Family and Children Services on how to receive services and reach personnel 24 hours per day, seven days per week;

(8) The right prior to the placement of a child to be notified of any issues relative to the child that may jeopardize the health and safety of the foster family or the child or alter the manner in which foster care should be administered;

- (9) The right to discuss information regarding the child prior to placement. The Division of Family and Children Services will provide such information as it becomes available as allowable under state and federal laws;
- (10) The right to refuse placement of a child in the foster home or to request, upon reasonable notice, the removal of a child from the foster home without fear of reprisal or any adverse affect on being assigned any future foster or adoptive placements;
- (11) The right to receive any information through the Division of Family and Children Services regarding the number of times a foster child has been moved and the reasons thereof; and to receive the names and phone numbers of the previous foster parents if the previous foster parents have authorized such release and as allowable under state and federal law;
- (12) The right, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parent, to receive from the Division of Family and Children Services any and all additional pertinent information relevant to the care of the child;
- (13) The right to be provided with a written copy of the individual treatment and service plan concerning the child in the foster parent's home and to discuss such plan with the case manager, as well as reasonable notification of any changes to that plan;
- (14) The right to participate in the planning of visitation with the child and the child's biological family with the foster parents recognizing that visitation with his or her biological family is important to the child;
- (15) The right to participate in the case planning and decision-making process with the Division of Family and Children Services regarding the child as provided in Code Section 15-11-58;
- (16) The right to provide input concerning the plan of services for the child and to have that input considered by the department;
- (17) The right to communicate for the purpose of participating in the case of the foster child with other professionals who work with such child within the context of the professional team, including, but not limited to, therapists, physicians, and teachers, as allowable under state and federal law;
- (18) The right to be notified in advance, in writing, by the Division of Family and Children Services or the court of any hearing or review where the case plan or permanency of the child is an issue, including periodic reviews held by the court or by the Judicial Citizen Review Panel, hearings following revocation of the license of an agency which has permanent custody of a child, permanency hearings, and motions to extend custody, in accordance with Code Section 15-11-58;
- (19) The right to be considered, where appropriate, as a preferential placement option when a child who was formerly placed with the foster parents has reentered the foster care system;
- (20) The right to be considered, where appropriate, as the first choice as a permanent parent or parents for a child who, after 12 months of placement in the foster home, is released for adoption or permanent foster care;
- (21) The right to be provided a fair and timely investigation of complaints concerning the operation of a foster home;
- (22) The right to an explanation of a corrective action plan or policy violation relating to foster parents; and
- (23) The right, to the extent allowed under state and federal law, to have an advocate present at all portions of investigations of abuse and neglect at which an accused foster parent is present. Child abuse and neglect investigations shall be investigated pursuant to Division of Family and Children Services policies and procedures, and any removal of a foster child shall be conducted pursuant to those policies and procedures. The Division of Family and Children Services will permit volunteers with the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia to be educated concerning the procedures relevant to investigations of alleged abuse and neglect and the rights of accused foster parents. After such training, a volunteer will be permitted to serve as an advocate for an accused foster parent. All communication received by the advocate in this

capacity shall be strictly confidential. (b) This bill of rights shall be given full consideration when Division of Family and Children Services policies regarding foster care and adoptive placement are developed. (c) Foster parents shall have the right to file a grievance in response to any violation of this article, which shall be such foster parents' exclusive remedy for any violation of this article. The Division of Family and Children Services and the Office of the Child Advocate for the Protection of Children, along with an advisory committee comprised in part of representatives from the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia, will develop a grievance procedure, including a mediation procedure, to be published in departmental policy manuals and the Foster Parent Handbook within one year of the effective date of the article.

# Community Resources



DFCS County Office: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>DFCS OFFICE</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Foster Care Case Manager		
Adoption Case Manager		
Teen Independent Living Case Manager		
<b>SERVICE PROVIDERS</b>		
Transportation		
Respite		
<b>CRISIS</b>		
Alcohol		
Substance Abuse		
Child Abuse		
<b>CLOTHING, FOOD &amp; HOUSEHOLD NEEDS</b>		
Thrift Stores		

<b>CHURCHES</b>		
<b>LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS</b>		
National Foster Adoptive Parent		
Georgia Foster Adoptive Parent		
Parent to Parent		
Georgia Adoption Resource Center		
<b>MEDICAL HEALTH</b>		
<b>EMERGENCY NUMBER</b>		911
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>		
<b>EMERGENCY NUMBER</b>		
Doctor		
Hospital		
<b>RUNAWAY YOUTH</b>		
Law Enforcement		
<b>SUICIDE PREVENTION</b>		
<b>TRAINING</b>		

# HOW TO BE A BETTER ADVOCATE

1. **Follow-up on the child's medical and educational needs** by:
  - ❑ Obtaining the child's medical and developmental history from the social worker
  - ❑ Arranging an initial assessment for the child as necessary
    - Obtain information from your county office about what assessments may have been completed
    - Although a variety of assessment services are provided to children when they enter the foster care system, it is recommended that they receive the following assessment services within 30 days:
      - Medical Exam including:
        - Screening for lead exposure
        - Screening for communicable diseases
        - Review of immunizations to ensure they are up-to-date
      - Hearing and vision screening
      - Developmental screening or educational assessment
      - Mental health assessment
      - Dental Exam
  - ❑ Communicating with other professionals in the child's life about his/her needs (i.e. social worker, doctor, teachers)
  - ❑ Keeping good records that can go with the child, if he or she leaves your home
  - ❑ Asking questions if you do not understand the information professionals are giving
2. **Provide a safe and secure emotional environment** by:
  - ❑ Creating a structured setting that includes a predictable set of daily routines
  - ❑ Sharing a consistent set of rules and expectations with the child
  - ❑ Practicing positive behavior management techniques such as "star charts"
  - ❑ Giving the child a chance to share his/her feelings, without the fear of being judged or punished
3. **Get to know the child in your care and help identify his/her strengths and areas of need with regard to development and behavior.** This information will be extremely important to the other professionals in the child's life, and will allow them to make the best possible decisions about how to care for the child.
4. **Help the child in your care access services provided by local agencies and programs.** Children with developmental and/or behavioral difficulties benefit from participating in early intervention programs, specialized school programs, or activities that focus on learning.

# HOW TO BE A BETTER ADVOCATE

5. **Take care of yourself.** Being a resource parent can be very rewarding and tiring at the same time. As a result, it is important for resource parents to take care of themselves by:

- ❑ Looking to family, friends, and other resource parents for support
- ❑ Having realistic expectations for the child in your life, and how you can help the child
- ❑ Using other resources to help your child, and to give you a break to rejuvenate yourself so you can continue to lovingly provide for the child in your care!
- ❑ Making sure you get enough rest to be energized for what ever may come your way
- ❑ Exercising to get rid of stress (It gives you more energy, believe it or not!)

