

	<b>GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL</b>			
	<b>Chapter:</b>	(10) Foster Care Services	<b>Effective Date:</b>	July 2019
	<b>Policy Title:</b>	Changes in Placement		
<b>Policy Number:</b>	10.3	<b>Previous Policy #:</b>	N/A	

### CODES/REFERENCES

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-109 Notice of Hearings to Specified Nonparties;  
O.C.G.A. § 15-11-215 Notice of change in Placement Hearings  
O.C.G.A. § 49-5-281. Bill of Rights for Foster Parents; Filing of Grievance in Event of Violations

### REQUIREMENTS

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

1. Minimize the number of placement changes for children in foster care to lessen their trauma and only move children to:
  - a. Ensure the safety and well-being of the child;
  - b. Achieve permanency;
  - c. Place with siblings or kinship caregivers (relative or fictive kin);
  - d. Comply with placement preferences of the Indian Child Welfare Act, if there is reason to know a child is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe; or eligible for membership in a federally recognized Indian tribe, and is the biological child of a member/citizen of a federally recognized Indian tribe (see policy [1.6 Administration: Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\) and Transfer of Responsibility for Placement and Care to a Tribal Agency](#)); or
  - e. Step down to a less restrictive placement.
2. Remove a child immediately if the child's health or welfare is endangered. Provide notification to the court and attorneys of record within 24 hours of the placement change.
3. Provide written notification to the Juvenile Court no less than five business days in advance of any placement change.
4. Provide written notification no less than five business days in advance of any placement change to allow an opportunity to be heard to the following:
  - a. Children age 14 and older;
  - b. Parents, unless parental rights have been terminated;
  - c. Guardians or other legal custodians;
  - d. Persons/agency with physical custody of the child (i.e. kinship caregiver, foster parent, child placing agency [CPA] and/or child caring institution [CCI]);
  - e. Guardian Ad Litem (GAL);
  - f. All attorneys of record, including the Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG).

**NOTE:** A child 14 years of age or older, parent, guardian, legal custodian, person or agency with physical custody, GAL, and any attorney of record may request a hearing for the court to consider the change in placement and any changes to the case plan or permanency plan resulting from the change in placement.
5. Require placement resources to provide DFCS with a 14 calendar days' notice to have a child removed a child from their home.

6. Rejoin separated siblings when making placement changes, unless it has been reassessed to be contrary to any child's safety or well-being.
7. Ensure education stability for the child, when changing placements, in accordance with policy [10.13 Foster Care: Educational Needs](#).
8. Arrange pre-placement visits when making a non-emergency placement change to minimize trauma, whenever possible.
9. Discuss and provide the placement resource with the following information in writing:
  - a. At the time of placement:
    - i. An explanation of the process for enrolling the child in school and any information necessary to complete the process;
    - ii. A copy of the child's educational records;
    - iii. A copy of the child's health records;
    - iv. A description of any financial assistance for which the placement resource may be eligible, including any financial assistance for childcare;
    - v. A description of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard;
    - vi. Contact information for the county DFCS office.
  - b. At the time of placement, if available:
    - i. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent physical and dental exams and any available information on the child's known medical conditions and current medications;
    - ii. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent developmental assessment, trauma assessment and psychological evaluation;
    - iii. A copy of any court scheduling order or he dates and times for any scheduled hearings related to the child; and
    - iv. Health insurance information for the child, including the child's Medicaid number.

**NOTE:** If this information is not available at the time of placement, DFCS shall request the information no later than 15 days after the child's entry into foster care. Discuss and provide the information to the placement resource within five business days of receipt.
10. Develop the Runaway Prevention Plan for any child with a history of running away or at-risk to run away within seven calendar days of any placement change. Include the child, caregiver and other providers working with the child in the development of the plan (see policy [19.22 Case Management: Missing Children](#)).

**NOTE:** If the child already has a Runaway Prevention Plan in place, review and modify the plan with the new caregiver, child, and others working with the child.
11. Make every effort to ensure continuity of services. If any services must be re-established due to the change in placement, this must occur with the least disruption possible. Provide notification of the placement change to the following to ensure continuity of services:
  - a. The child's school;
  - b. Revenue Maximization (Rev Max) Unit;
  - c. Children's 1<sup>st</sup>/Babies Can't Wait (BCW), if applicable (see policy [19.28 Case Management: Children's 1<sup>st</sup> and Babies Can't Wait](#));
  - d. Service providers involved with the child.
12. Conduct a purposeful contact in the home of the placement resource within seven calendar days of the placement change.
13. Consider the following as a temporary absence from the child's placement and not a

placement change:

- a. Visitation with a friend, sibling, kin or other caregiver, including a pre-placement visit to a prospective foster or adoptive placement;
- b. Hospitalization for medical, acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis;
- c. Respite care when a child is expected to return to his or her foster care placement;  
**NOTE:** If the child is moved to respite and there is no plan to return the child to the original placement or it is determined later the child cannot return to the original placement, this is considered a placement move and thus, appropriate notification must occur.
- d. Day or overnight camp;
- e. Temporary travel with the foster family or CCI personnel, church, school or other persons or groups approved by DFCS;
- f. Trial home visits; and
- g. Runaway episodes.

## PROCEDURES

### When DFCS Initiates the Placement Change

The Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) will:

1. Consult with the Social Services Supervisor (SSS) and obtain approval prior to initiating placement changes.
2. Immediately move the child, if the child is unsafe in their current placement.  
**NOTE:** When a safety threat is identified, the placement move can occur prior to the commencement of a scheduled hearing. Notify the court and attorney of record within 24 hours of the placement move.
3. Provide all required parties with a written notice of intent to move the child via the Notice of Change in Placement form at least five business days prior to the move, including their right to be heard via requesting a hearing regarding the placement change.
4. Conduct a purposeful contact with the child to discuss the placement change (see Practice Guidance: Placement Change Discussion with the Child).
5. Conduct a purposeful contact with the current placement resource to discuss the placement change and discuss their right to be heard via requesting a hearing regarding the placement change (Practice Guidance: Placement Change Discussion with the Current Placement Resource).
6. Discuss the placement change with the parent, guardian or legal custodian.
7. Schedule and conduct pre-placement visits, whenever possible; and invite the parent, guardian or legal custodian, when appropriate.
8. Engage the child (when age and developmentally appropriate) and the placement resource in discussion about the new placement (see Practice Guidance: Placement Change Discussion with the Child and Placement Change Discussion with the Current Placement Resource).
9. Ask the SAAG to request a hearing, if changes to the case plan or permanency plan result from the child's placement change (see policy [10.23 Foster Care: Case Planning](#)).  
**NOTE:** The hearing should be held within five days of the placement change notification. Contact the Office of General Counsel if problems arise related to the time of the hearing.
10. Provide the child with the opportunity to say good-bye to the placement resource and family or any facility staff and peers. If ongoing contact is appropriate, encourage this

opportunity.

11. Provide notification of the placement change to the child's school and discuss maintaining the child in the same school setting and secure information needed for the new placement resource (see policy [10.13 Foster Care: Educational Needs](#)).
12. Provide notification of the placement change to the service providers (medical, dental, mental health and other well-being services and supports) to secure any information need for the new placement resource (see policy [19.17 Case Management: Service Provision](#)).
13. Proceed with the placement change five business days after the Notice of Change in Placement form is sent.  
**EXCEPTION:** If a hearing is requested, the change in the placement may not occur until the required hearing is completed.
14. Provide and discuss the following with the placement resource at the time of placement:
  - a. Agreement Supplement or RBWO Placement Agreement (if the child's placement is with a RBWO provider) which provides written and dated confirmation of the child's placement into the home and is signed at the time of placement;
  - b. Child Passport from Georgia SHINES which includes:
    - i. Identifying information for the child
    - ii. Contact information for the SSCM and Social Services Supervisor (SSS)
    - iii. Psychological and developmental history
    - iv. School history
    - v. Reason for foster care entry (maltreatment code)
    - vi. History of foster care entry and previous placement types
    - vii. Siblings in foster care
    - viii. Child foster care plan type
  - c. To minimize trauma, also provide the caregiver with the following related to the child:
    - i. The name the child prefers to be called
    - ii. Sleeping patterns/rituals
    - iii. Food preferences/dislikes
    - iv. Religious preferences
    - v. Clothing preferences
    - vi. Fears
    - vii. Strengths, including any special skills/achievements
    - viii. Special toy/object
    - ix. Pictures of the family
  - d. During and after hours contact information for the SSCM, Social Services Supervisor (SSS), County Director and County Office;
  - e. Confidentiality of foster child information as outlined in policy [2.6 Information Management: Confidentiality and Safeguarding of Information](#) and protected health information in accordance with policy [2.5 Information Management: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#);
  - f. The Caregiver Placement Passport from Georgia SHINES which includes:
    - i. A description of any financial assistance for which the placement resource may be eligible, including any financial assistance for childcare;
    - ii. Reasonable and prudent parenting standards (RPPS) and restrictions on foster caregiver decision making;
    - iii. RPPS handout and Know Before You Say No;
    - iv. Educational stability for children in foster care and the school enrollment

information.

- g. A copy of the child's educational records;
  - h. A copy of the child's health records;
  - i. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent physical and dental exams and any available information on the child's known medical conditions and current medications;
  - j. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent developmental assessment, trauma assessment and psychological evaluation;
  - k. A copy of any court scheduling order or the dates and times for any scheduled hearings related to the child;
  - l. Health insurance information for the child, including the child's Medicaid number;
  - m. Any upcoming appointments, medical supplies, prescriptions, etc.;
  - n. Safe sleeping practices with all caregivers accepting an infant (birth to 12 months of age) in his/her home (see Forms and Tools: Infant Safe to Sleep Guidelines and Protocol);
  - o. Motor vehicle safety recommendations (see Practice Guidance: Motor Vehicle 'Hot Car' Safety);
  - p. The child's Life Book; and
  - q. The child's portion of the current case plan.
15. Develop the Runaway Prevention Plan for any child with a history of running away or at-risk to run away within seven calendar days of any placement change. Include the child, caregiver and other providers working with the child in the development of the plan (see policy [19.22 Case Management: Missing Children](#)).
- NOTE:** If the child already has a Runaway Prevention Plan in place, review and modify the plan with the new caregiver, child, and others working with the child.
16. If the following information was not available at the time of the child's placement, request within 15 days of the child's entry into foster care. Provide and discuss the information with the placement resource within five business days of receipt:
- a. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent physical and dental exams and any available information on the child's known medical conditions and current medications;
  - b. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent developmental assessment, trauma assessment and psychological evaluation;
  - c. A copy of any court scheduling order or the dates and times for any scheduled hearings related to the child; and
  - d. Health insurance information for the child, including the child's Medicaid number.
- NOTE:** If the change in placement occurs after this timeframe and the information is not yet available, immediately request the information and provide the information upon receipt to the placement resource.
17. Complete the following in Georgia SHINES:
- a. Documentation of contacts in the narrative of the Contact Detail page within 72 hours of the occurrence;
  - b. Documentation that all relevant information was provided to the caregiver and/or requested;
  - c. Update the Placement List page;
  - d. The Notification of Change (NOC) to Rev Max.
18. Notify Rev Max and Amerigroup within 24 hours of the placement change via the Amerigroup GA Families 360° DFCS Referral Form.

19. Conduct a purposeful contact in the home of the new placement resource within seven calendar days of the child's placement (see policy [10.18 Foster Care: Purposeful Contacts in Foster Care](#)).

### **When a Placement Resource Requests the Placement Change**

The SSCM will:

1. Notify the Resource Development (RD) SSCM of the placement change request:
  - a. Inquire about any support the RD SSCM can provide to the foster parent to preserve the placement, if the child is placed in a DFCS foster home;  
**NOTE:** If the child is placed in a CPA or CCI, coordinate efforts with the agency to preserve placement.
  - b. Request other placement options.
2. Immediately conduct a purposeful contact with the placement resource and the child to discuss the reason for the placement change request. This discussion may occur in conjunction with the placement change meeting described below.
  - a. Obtain the child's understanding of the reason the placement resource requested the placement change;
  - b. Gather family functioning information regarding the placement resource family (see policy [19.13 Case Management: Family Functioning Assessment](#));
  - c. Conduct a safety assessment (see policy [19.11 Case Management: Safety Assessment](#)). If the child is determined to be unsafe, immediately proceed with the placement change;  
**NOTE:** When a safety threat is identified the placement move can occur prior to the commencement of a scheduled hearing. Notify the court and all attorneys of record within 24 hours of the placement move.
  - d. Identify supports or services needed to prevent the placement change;
  - e. Ask the child to provide information on any kin or former foster parents who may be able to become a placement resource, if the placement change will occur.
3. Refer the family for emergency services, if the placement resource has agreed to services to stabilize the placement (see policy [19.17 Case Management: Service Provision](#)).
4. Accept the placement resource's notice to terminate the placement if the placement cannot be stabilized and continue to provide services pending the placement move.
5. Review the diligent search information in Georgia SHINES to assess for potential placement with kin or other committed individuals.
6. Discuss the possible placement change with the parent, guardian or legal custodian and ask them to provide any additional kin to explore as a placement resource.
7. Convene a placement change meeting with the SSS, family and support team to discuss the following:
  - a. Reasons for the placement change request;
  - b. The needs of the child and the type of caregiver needed to meet those needs;
  - c. Services implemented to stabilize the placement and prevent the need for the placement change (see Practice Guidance: Placement Stability);
  - d. Additional actions that can be initiated to stabilize the current placement;
  - e. Recommendations for supports/services to be implemented with the current or next placement. The emphasis is on preserving the placement which often means providing additional support to the existing placement resource;

- f. The child's placement history for the purpose of identification of former resources that may be amenable to the child's return, or to assess patterns that may assist in providing support to the current or new placement;
- g. If child will be moved, what will be needed to stabilize the new placement and assist with the child's adjustment;
- h. The availability of kin;
- i. Whether the child is part of a sibling group. Whether the child is currently separated from a sibling in foster care and if so, whether the sibling's placement resource has been contacted for possible placement;
- j. Prospective placement resources that are in close proximity of the parent, guardian or legal custodian that are the most appropriate, least restrictive placement for the child;
- k. The removal family's permanency plan and whether the family is working the plan. If the plan is reunification, identification of barriers preventing reunification and the anticipated timeframe for achievement;
- l. Parent/caregiver participation in visitation and services provided to the child and family that may be adversely impacted by the move;
- m. Consideration of how to ensure educational stability in accordance with policy [10.13 Foster Care: Educational Needs](#)).

**NOTE:** For youth with probation involvement, invite probation officers to the meeting, when possible as the probation officer may be aware of the placement issues and can speak to how child's probation is impacted. Always maintain confidentiality regarding the child and family.

- 8. Document the placement change meeting in Georgia SHINES and follow up on recommendations to ensure placement stability.
- 9. Update the diligent search information in Georgia SHINES, if new information is obtained regarding the availability and interest of kin to serve as a placement resource or supports.
- 10. Select the new placement for the child that will meet his/her needs. Schedule pre-placement visits with the new placement resource, whenever possible; and invite the parent, guardian or legal custodian to the pre-placement visit as appropriate.
- 11. Engage the child (when age and developmentally appropriate) and placement resource in discussion about the new placement (see Practice Guidance: Placement Change Discussion).
- 12. Notify the required parties at least five business days prior to the placement change via the Notice of Change of Placement form.
- 13. Ask the SAAG to request a hearing, if changes to the case plan or permanency plan result from the child's placement change (see policy [10.23 Foster Care: Case Planning](#)).  
**NOTE:** The hearing should be held within five days of the placement change notification. Contact the Office of General Counsel if problems arise related to the time of the hearing.
- 14. Provide the child an opportunity to say good-bye to the placement resource and family or any facility staff and peers. If ongoing contact is appropriate, encourage this opportunity.
- 15. Provide notification of the placement change to the child's school and discuss maintaining the child in the same school setting and secure information needed for the new placement resource (see policy [10.13 Foster Care: Educational Needs](#)).
- 16. Provide notification of the placement change to the service providers (medical, dental,

mental health and other well-being services and supports) to secure any information need for the new placement resource (see policy [19.17 Case Management: Service Provision](#)).

17. Proceed with the placement change 14 calendar days after receiving the placement change request from the placement resource.

**EXCEPTION:** If a hearing is requested, the change in the placement may not occur until the required hearing is completed.

18. Provide and discuss the following to the placement resource at the time of placement:
  - a. Agreement Supplement or RBWO Placement Agreement (if the child's placement is with a RBWO provider) which provides written and dated confirmation of the child's placement into the home and is signed at the time of placement;
  - b. Child Passport from Georgia SHINES which includes:
    - i. Identifying information for the child
    - i. Contact information for the SSCM and Social Services Supervisor (SSS)
    - ii. Psychological and developmental history
    - iii. School history
    - iv. Reason for foster care entry (maltreatment code)
    - v. History of foster care entry and previous placement types
    - vi. Siblings in foster care
    - vii. Child foster care plan type
  - c. To minimize trauma, also provide the caregiver with the following related to the child:
    - i. The name the child prefers to be called
    - ii. Sleeping patterns/rituals
    - iii. Food preferences/dislikes
    - iv. Religious preferences
    - v. Clothing preferences
    - vi. Fears
    - vii. Strengths including any special skills/achievements
    - viii. Special toy/object
    - ix. Pictures of the family
  - d. During and after hours contact information for the SSCM, Social Services Supervisor (SSS), County Director and County Office;
  - e. Confidentiality of foster child information as outlined in policy [2.6 Information Management: Confidentiality and Safeguarding of Information](#) and protected health information in accordance with policy [2.5 Information Management: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#);
  - f. The Caregiver Placement Passport from Georgia SHINES which includes:
    - i. A description of any financial assistance for which the placement resource may be eligible, including any financial assistance for childcare;
    - ii. Reasonable and prudent parenting standards (RPPS) and restrictions on foster caregiver decision making;
    - iii. RPPS handout and Know Before You Say No;
    - iv. Educational stability for children in foster care;
    - v. The school enrollment information.
  - g. A copy of the child's educational records;
  - h. A copy of the child's health records;
  - i. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent physical and dental exams and any available information on the child's known medical conditions and

- current medications;
  - j. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent developmental assessment, trauma assessment and psychological evaluation;
  - k. A copy of any court scheduling order or the dates and times for any scheduled hearings related to the child;
  - l. Health insurance information for the child, including the child's Medicaid number;
  - m. Any upcoming appointments, medical supplies, prescriptions, etc.;
  - n. Safe sleeping practices with all caregivers accepting an infant (birth to 12 months of age) in his/her home (see Forms and Tools: Infant Safe to Sleep Guidelines and Protocol);
  - o. Motor vehicle safety recommendations (see Practice Guidance: Motor Vehicle 'Hot Car' Safety);
  - p. The child's Life Book; and
  - q. The child's portion of the current case plan.
19. Develop the Runaway Prevention Plan for any child with a history of running away or at-risk to run away within seven calendar days of any placement change. Include the child, caregiver and other providers working with the child in the development of the plan (see policy [19.22 Case Management: Missing Children](#)).
- NOTE:** If the child already has a Runaway Prevention Plan in place, review and modify the plan with the new caregiver, child, and others working with the child.
20. If the following information was not available at the time of the child's placement, request within 15 days of the child's entry into foster care. Provide and discuss the information with the placement resource within five business days of receipt:
- a. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent physical and dental exams and any available information on the child's known medical conditions and current medications;
  - b. A copy of or recommendations from the child's most recent developmental assessment, trauma assessment and psychological evaluation;
  - c. A copy of any court scheduling order or the dates and times for any scheduled hearings related to the child; and
  - d. Health insurance information for the child, including the child's Medicaid number.
- NOTE:** If the change in placement occurs after this timeframe and the information is not yet available, immediately request the information and provide the information upon receipt to the placement resource.
21. Complete the following in Georgia SHINES:
- a. Documentation of efforts to preserve the placement and/or locate an alternative placement in the narrative of the Contact Detail page within 72 hours of the occurrence;
  - b. Documentation that all relevant information was provided to the caregiver and/or requested;
  - c. Update the Placement List page;
  - d. The NOC to Rev Max.
22. Notify Rev Max and Amerigroup of the placement change via the Amerigroup GA Families 360° DFCS Referral Form.
23. Conduct a purposeful contact in the home of the new placement resource within seven calendar days of the child's placement (see policy [10.18 Foster Care: Purposeful Contacts in Foster Care](#)).

## **Pre-Placement Visits**

The SSCM will:

1. Arrange pre-placement visits with the new placement resource, taking into account:
  - a. The child's eating, sleeping and activity patterns;
  - b. The parent's, guardian's or legal custodian's work schedule or other responsibilities;
  - c. The daily routine of the new placement resource.
2. Prepare the placement resource by providing as much information about the child as possible, including:
  - a. The reasons the child entered foster care; the number of previous placements and the reasons for previous placement moves; and the names and telephone numbers of the previous foster parents, if the previous foster parents authorized such release and as allowable under state and federal law;
  - b. Any pertinent information relevant to the care of the child;
  - c. The child's history of abuse or neglect;
  - d. The child's relationship with his/her family;
  - e. The presence of any siblings in foster care and the visitation requirements with siblings;
  - f. Any history of psychological or behavioral issues or psychotropic medications;
  - g. Any significant medical history or conditions including current health needs and medications;
  - h. The child's educational needs and current school setting;
  - i. The child's strengths, skills or talents.
3. Encourage the parent, guardian or legal custodian to share information about the child with the placement resource, including the child's nickname, favorite foods, developmental history, current needs, etc.
4. Engage the child in a discussion (when age and developmentally appropriate) to prepare them for the pre-placement visit:
  - a. Provide information about the placement resource family, home, and community;
  - b. Discuss the date, timeframe and transportation arrangements.
5. Conduct the pre-placement visit:
  - a. Introduce the child to the placement resource family and facilitate interaction;
  - b. Show the child where he/she will sleep and where his/her belongings will be kept;
  - c. Confirm the ending time of the visit with the placement resource and the child.
6. Confirm the details of the actual placement with the child, parent, guardian or legal custodian and placement resource following pre-placement visits.

## **Placement Change Hearing Requests**

Whenever a hearing is requested as a result of the notification of a change in placement, the SSCM will:

1. Staff the case with the SSS and SAAG.
2. Be prepared to testify in court and provide the court with the reason for the placement change.
3. Address the court's concerns regarding the original recommended placement and offer the court an alternative placement for the child, if the court rejects the recommended placement.

**NOTE:** The court may order DFCS to submit a new case plan with a new permanency plan and an alternative placement; or the court may make any other order related to

placement or custody outside the department.

4. Document any court ordered recommendations in the narrative of the Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES.
5. Upload the court order in Georgia SHINES.
6. Participate in a staffing with the SSS to discuss court hearing outcome.
7. Complete court ordered recommendations including updating the case plan or permanency plan in Georgia SHINES.

The SSS will:

1. Conduct a staffing with the SSCM to:
  - a. Determine if any safety concerns exist that require the immediate removal of the child from the current placement;
  - b. Discuss whether the child is part of a sibling group including:
    - i. Whether the placement resource for a separated sibling is capable of caring for all siblings;
    - ii. Whether all siblings will be placed together in the new placement;
    - iii. How the child will transition to the new placement.
  - c. Assess whether services could prevent a placement disruption;
  - d. Discuss the child's placement history and diligent search information;
  - e. Determine next steps.
2. Participate in the placement change meeting with the SSCM, family and support team.
3. Monitor ongoing efforts to jointly place siblings and/or locate kin or prior placement resources amenable to the child's return as a possible placement resource.
4. Verify that the Child Passport, Caregiver Placement Passport, copies of recent medical, dental, psychological, developmental and all other required information was provided to the placement resource at the time of placement or requested and provided in accordance with the timeframes outlined in the requirements and procedures.
5. Ensure timely notification of the placement change to the court, parent, guardian or legal custodian and other required parties.
6. Ensure Rev Max and Amerigroup receive notification of the placement change.
7. Participate in a staffing with the SAAG prior to a scheduled court hearing as a result of the placement change.
8. Review the case record in Georgia SHINES to ensure:
  - a. A purposeful contact is made within seven days of the child's placement change;
  - b. The following pages in Georgia SHINES are completed or updated:
    - i. Custody Detail
    - ii. Legal Status
    - iii. Legal Action and Outcomes Detail
    - iv. Placement List
    - v. NOC
    - vi. Person Detail
    - vii. Diligent Search

## **PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

### **Placement Stability**

Placement stability is important for children to develop healthy secure relationships.

Additionally, placement stability is especially important for youth success in foster care. Youth who experience minimized placement changes are more likely to experience fewer school changes, less trauma and distress, less mental health and behavioral problems and increased probabilities for academic achievement and experiencing a lasting positive relationship with adults. For children in foster care, the number of placements, or places where they live, can impact daily functioning and adjustment as well as the time to achieve permanency. Frequent placement moves not only compound the issue of being separated from one's parents, but can also result in separation from siblings, relocation to a new geographical area, and experiencing a sense of not belonging; all of which can lead to distress and have a profound adverse emotional impact. Because of the seriousness of the long-term consequences for children, placement stability is one of the permanency outcomes in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR).<sup>1</sup>

It is essential that SSCMs make every effort to maintain stabilized placements for children in foster care. Some tips for placement stability are:

1. Prioritizing placements with kin or other committed individuals.
2. Early and detailed assessments of the needs of the child, identifying risk factors to assist with placement planning.
3. Providing support and training for caregivers. This involves but is not limited to the following:
  - a. Anticipating caregiver needs based on knowledge of the child's needs and proactively providing support;
  - b. Responding timely to caregiver requests for support and intervention;
  - c. Identifying red flags that can escalate without intervention;
  - d. Providing or referring the caregiver for training on caring for special or new needs of the child.
4. Conducting frequent purposeful contacts with children and caregivers.
5. Ensure frequent parent/child, sibling visitation, as appropriate.
6. Providing timely services to address behavioral health or other needs the child may have.
7. Providing services to the child and caregiver to assist in addressing conflicts.

### **Placement Changes**

When the child experiences a placement change and must be moved to another placement, careful planning and preparation must occur to assist the child through another loss. Pre-placement preparation eases the child's transition and lessens his/her fear and confusion. Whenever possible, the SSCM, placement resource and parent, guardian or legal custodian should all be involved in the placement change process. Taking the time to engage in pre-placement efforts better ensures that an appropriate match between the child and the placement resource has been made and reduces the likelihood of unnecessary placement moves for the child while in foster care.

Placement moves experienced by a child may revive earlier feelings associated with past separations and entry into foster care. Helping a child express his/her feelings and concerns,

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<sup>1</sup> Placement Stability Information Packet National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections A Service of Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS. Placement Stability in Child Welfare Services Issues, Concerns, Outcomes and Future Directions Literature Review: UC Davis Extension Center for Human Services

as well as finding appropriate ways to grieve, will also make the placement transition smoother. The SSCM or other trusted adult should encourage the child to discuss his/her feelings regarding the placement move and allow the child to have input. Although the placement decision is the responsibility of DFCS, the child may have suggestions on placement options or ideas that would help assure placement stability and ease the child's apprehension regarding changing placements.

### **Placement Change Discussion with the Child**

The placement change discussion with the child should include:

1. An age-appropriate explanation of the placement change, when it will occur, why it is necessary and how it will occur.
2. Whether siblings in care will be placed together and/or change placements with the child.
3. A description of the home or facility where the child will be placed to help the child better understand what to expect.
4. Information about the people who live in the home or facility, showing pictures if available.
5. A description of the community, including the school the child will be attending, if it is different from the child's current community or school.
6. Any feelings or concerns the child may have related to the placement change.
7. An explanation as to when the pre-placement visit(s) will occur, if possible, and how the child will be transported to the home or facility.
8. Information about when the next contact with the parent, guardian or legal custodian will take place.
9. The identification of "transitional objects" such as toys, pictures, stuffed animals or other familiar items that give the child some sense of security during the move.
10. How the child and current placement resource will maintain a relationship after the placement change when it is in the child's best interest.
11. Any questions the child may have.

### **Placement Change Discussion with the Current Placement Resource**

The placement change discussion with the current placement resource should include:

1. A discussion of the issues that precipitated the need or request to change placements.
2. A discussion and notification of the right to request a court hearing related to placement move decision and the process for requesting the hearing.
3. An explanation when the placement change will occur and how it will occur.
4. Whether siblings currently placed in the home will also be moved.
5. Any feelings or concerns the placement resource may have related to the placement change.
6. Whether they are willing to be contacted by the new placement resource for the purpose of sharing information with them.
7. How they can maintain a relationship with the child when it is in the child's best interest.
8. Their ability to participate in pre-placement visits to assist the child in transitioning to the new placement.
9. Any questions the placement resource may have.

## **Notice of Change in Placement Hearings**

At the hearing requested as a result of a placement change, the court shall consider the case plan and permanency plan recommendations made by DFCS, including a recommendation as to the placement of the child. The court shall make findings of fact upon which the court relied in determining to reject or accept the case plan or permanency plan and DFCS' recommendations, including the location of the child's placement.

If the court rejects DFCS' recommendations, the court shall demonstrate that DFCS' recommendations were considered and explain why it did not follow the recommendations. If the court rejects the DFCS case plan and permanency plan recommendations, including the change in placement of a child adjudicated as a dependent child, the court may order DFCS to devise a new case plan and permanency plan recommendation, including a new recommendation as to the placement of the child within the resources of the department, or make any other order relative to placement or custody outside the department as the court finds to be in the best interests of the child and consistent with the policy that children in DFCS custody should have stable placements.

If the court finds that the child has been living in a stable home environment with the current caregiver(s) for the past 12 months and that removal from the caregiver(s) would be detrimental to the child's emotional well-being, the court may presume that continuation of the child's placement with the current caregiver is in the child's best interests and shall enter a finding that a change of placement is a failure by DFCS to make reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan in effect at the time of the hearing.

## **Respite Care**

Respite care placements are intended to be temporary in nature, therefore the child should return to his/her original placement within a short period (see policy [14.18 Resource Development: Supervision of Children](#) for a definition of respite). If a child is moved to a temporary placement until a more permanent placement is located, this temporary placement is not considered a respite placement, but rather a placement change; thus, the change in placement notification requirements apply. As soon as it is determined that a respite care placement is going to become the child's new placement, notice must be given. The DFCS SSCM should provide placement change notification as soon as they become aware a child is changing placements or a child cannot return to his/her original placement.

## **FORMS AND TOOLS**

[Agreement Supplement](#)  
[Amerigroup GA Families 360° DFCS Referral Form](#)  
[Notice of Change in Placement](#)  
[Room Board Watchful Oversight Placement Agreement](#)