The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) has established standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended standards of national organizations concerned with such institutions or homes, including standards related to admission policies, safety, sanitation, and protection of civil rights. The standards so established are applied by DFCS to any foster family home or child-care institution receiving funds under titles IV-E or IV-B.

DFCS has provided that waivers of such standards may be made only on a case-by-case basis for non-safety standards (as determined by the State) in relative foster family homes for specific children in care. (See Waiver of Non-Safety Approval Standards for Relative Foster Homes)

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall ensure all approved caregivers and their household members meet the Safety and Quality Standards (SQS). The standards apply at initial approval, re-evaluation, and at all times the home remains open. This includes homes affiliated with Child Placing Agencies (CPA). To attain Full Approval Status, prospective foster and adoptive parents must:

a. Evidence the maturity, stability, fitness, skills and competency to successfully protect, nurture, and meet the developmental needs of children;

b. Support the agency’s established case goals and permanency plan for child (ren) placed in their care;

c. Meet the citizenship requirement;

d. Be at least ten (10) years older than the child to be placed, if married;

e. Be at least 25 years of age, if unmarried;

f. Have no substantiated Child Protective Services (CPS) history;

g. Have no history of violent crimes or crimes against children;

h. Abstain from the use of illegal drugs or abuse of prescription drugs;

i. Have sufficient income to maintain their family excluding the amount of the per diem received for any child(ren) in foster care;

j. Meet health requirements for all household members;

k. Be certified by the Red Cross in CPR and First Aid;

l. Have at least three (3) positive character references;
m. Complete an IMPACT Information Session;

n. Complete approved pre-service training;

o. Meet the requirement for continued parent development (CPD);

p. Have reliable transportation;

q. Have a home environment that is clean, free of environmental hazards, and provides a livable atmosphere;

r. Meet standards for appropriate utilization of the home;
   i. No more than six (6) children under the age of sixteen (16), including the children of the foster family, shall be placed in a foster home. The parent-child ratio may never exceed 1:6 at any time.
   ii. No more than two (2) children under two (2) years of age, including the children of the caregiver’s family, shall be placed in the home.
   iii. Only bedrooms shall be used as a sleeping space for children.
   iv. Each non-related child must sleep in a separate bed.
   v. A maximum of two (2) children may sleep in a double or larger bed. The children must be siblings and must be the same gender.
   vi. No child shall sleep in the bed with an adult.
   vii. A child over one (1) year of age shall not sleep in the bedroom of an adult.
   viii. No more than three (3) children shall share a bedroom. The suitability of children sharing a room should be assessed based on the background/history of the children.
   ix. Children five (5) years of age and older shall not share a bedroom with a person of the opposite sex.

s. Support the religious and spiritual beliefs of a child's birth family;

t. Comply with the standards in the Foster Parent Manual;

u. Comply with requirements for supervision of children;

v. Comply with requirements for discipline of children;

w. Follow the medication management protocol;

x. Have functional smoke alarms, fire extinguisher and carbon monoxide detector (if applicable) in the home;

y. Meet all safety guidelines in regard to fire safety, water safety, firearm safety, gas heaters, unvented fuel-fired heaters, pet inoculations, etc. (See policy 14.19 Home Safety);

z. Have a Family Evaluation (Initial and subsequent) approved by the DFCS County Director/Designee or Child Placing Agency Director/Designee.

DFCS shall ensure any exception to the Safety and Quality Standards is documented in the FAD Stage and Contact Detail page of the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES).

DFCS County Directors shall not approve prospective foster or adoptive homes that do not meet the agency’s Safety and Quality Standards.

**PROCEDURES**

The Resource Development (RD) team will:

1. Continue to monitor active placement resources to ensure compliance with Safety and Quality Standards.

2. When unusual situations make it advisable to waive any of the Safety and Quality
Standards, submit a waiver request to the State Foster Care Services Director or Designee via the state waiver mailbox: dfcs-waivers@dhr.state.ga.us

3. Document any exception to the Safety and Quality Standards in the FAD Stage and on the Contact Detail page in Georgia SHINES, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System.

**PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

Having safety and quality standards ensures children are placed in safe home environments and receive the high quality of care they deserve. Caregivers and DFCS staff work together as a team with a common goal of helping children achieve permanency. As a team, caregivers will face many challenges as they seek to provide continuity of care while helping a child repair the effects of earlier life experiences. To do this type of work, caregivers need to have a number of specific skills:

*Understanding of the Impact of Fostering*
The caregivers must be able to identify their individual and family strengths and needs, and communicate these to the agency. Caregivers should recognize how the addition of a new family member can affect family relationships (including the extended family), life styles and support systems. Caregivers should understand their role in fostering and know the kinds of children whose needs they can best meet.

*Teamwork and Communication*
Caregivers must be able to communicate with the child, the agency, birth parents and other foster and adoptive parents who may have different outlooks because of different experiences, ages and cultures. Families must be able to understand and fulfill their roles and responsibilities in working with children, birth families, the agency and community. They must work in partnership to help children be reunified with birth families, be adopted, or move into independent living.

*Parenting Abused/Neglected Children*
Caregivers must be able to effectively parent children who have been abused, neglected, abandoned and/or emotionally maltreated. Families must help children develop a positive self-concept and identity, recognizing that past experiences and losses may have contributed to poor self-image and identity-confusion. They must help children understand and deal with the past in non-judgmental ways, which helps children feel good about who they are. Families must know how to access outside assistance as necessary to meet a child’s needs.

*Understand Grief, Loss and Attachment Issues for Children in Care*
Children removed from their birth families experience profound losses and need help in managing their grief. Caregivers must have resolved their own losses and be able to anticipate the effects of future losses on the family. Since children who have experienced loss often have difficulties with attachment, families will need to understand attachment issues and be able to use specific techniques to help.

*Understand, Prevent and Manage Misbehaviors*
Children in placement display many behaviors that reflect the physical and emotional pain they have experienced. Caregivers must understand the feelings and the reasons behind the behaviors, and then help children get their needs met in ways that make children feel lovable,
capable, worthwhile and responsible. Caregivers must understand the reasons for and adhere to the policy prohibiting physical discipline/corporal punishment.

**Support Primary or Birth Family Connections**
Families must help children maintain and develop relationships that keep them connected to the past, the source of their identity and self-esteem. Since most children are reunified with their birth families, acceptance of parent/child visitation and return to birth families as soon as possible is critical.

**Provide a Safe, Nurturing and Healthy Environment**
Recognizing that children in foster care are vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation, foster parents must be able to protect children from maltreatment. In addition, caregivers must provide a healthy and safe environment for children, following all state and local health and safety regulations. Close supervision of all children is necessary, but especially for infants and young children, both when awake and asleep.

### FORMS AND TOOLS
[http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/GDC/OffenderQuery/jsp/OffQryForm.jsp](http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/GDC/OffenderQuery/jsp/OffQryForm.jsp)
[http://services.georgia.gov/gbi/gbisor/ControllerServlet](http://services.georgia.gov/gbi/gbisor/ControllerServlet)
[http://www.pap.state.ga.us/InmateTPM/](http://www.pap.state.ga.us/InmateTPM/)