The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall require safe, responsible supervision of each child in foster care at all times. For the purposes of this requirement, 
**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; **routine care** means care provided more than once a week, usually at designated times; **short-term care** means less than four hours.

DFCS shall screen each substitute caregiver providing **occasional**, short-term, in-home/out-of-home childcare for Child Protective Services (CPS) history. After providing childcare for the third time (regardless of timeframe), the “occasional” provider is considered to be “routine” and is subject to the requirements for a routine provider.

DFCS shall require each substitute caregiver providing **routine** in-home/out-of-home childcare to submit to a criminal records check through the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) prior to providing care for a child in foster care. In addition, DFCS shall screen the substitute caregiver in the following databases: DFCS CPS records, Sexual Offenders Registry, Bureau of Pardons and Parole and the Department of Corrections.

DFCS may permit caregivers to allow youth fourteen (14) years of age and older to be left under their own supervision for short periods of time under certain circumstances (e.g. an hour after school or when foster parents are attending to short-term personal matters). Youth must not have any physical, mental, or emotional issues that adversely impact their ability to function for short periods of time independent of a caregiver. The caregiver must ensure the youth is aware of procedures to be taken in case of an emergency and has access to emergency contact numbers, including their own and a nearby relative, neighbor or friend. Other important criteria to consider include the following:

a. Length of time in the placement setting
b. Judgment and level of maturity or development
c. Demonstration of dependability, responsibility and trustworthiness
d. History of emotional/psychological stability
e. History of running away and other status offenses
f. History of delinquent behavior
g. History of alcohol and substance abuse
h. Number of youth present in the home, gender, and their relationship with each other
i. History of sexual acting out
j. School performance
k. Safety of the home environment (firearm safety, water safety, any other potential hazards, etc.)
l. Youth’s ability to readily access their foster parent or other identified person should the need arise

DFCS shall provide paid respite care as a support service for caregivers who need time away from their parenting responsibilities. Caregivers may receive (5) calendar days per fiscal year (taken individually or consecutively) for day respite (less than 24 hours) and five (5) calendar days per fiscal year for overnight respite (See Practice Guidance).

DFCS shall utilize visiting resources for children in foster care if it is determined to be in the child’s best interest (See Practice Guidance).

**PROCEDURES**

When it becomes necessary to utilize substitute caregivers, the approved DFCS or Child Placing Agency (CPA) family will:

1. Provide or arrange for care and supervision appropriate to the child’s age, level of development and individual needs.
2. Establish a plan 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*.
3. 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.
4. Leave no child in DFCS custody under the supervision and care of other minors. Persons providing reimbursed or non-reimbursed care for children must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older.
5. Consult with an older youth’s Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) before making the decision to leave the youth alone in the foster home for short periods of time (See Practice Guidance).

The local DFCS office or CPA will:

1. Maintain open communication with approved caregivers regarding the use of substitute caregivers and respite (See Practice Guidance)
2. Explain to all approved caregivers the consequences of improper or inadequate supervision of children placed in their homes (i.e. Policy violation or CPS Investigation).
3. Complete the appropriate background screening on potential substitute caregivers (See Practice Guidance).
4. Upload the following forms into External Documents in Georgia SHINES, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System as applicable:
   a. Unreimbursed Routine Substitute In-Home/Out-of-Home Caregiver (Form 316)
   b. DFCS Child Safety Agreement (Form 29)
   c. Consent for Criminal Records Check (404).
5. Implement a corrective action plan (CAP) when there are concerns regarding the level of supervision in foster homes, but concerns do not rise to a level that requires children to be moved.

6. Make a CPS referral when there are identified safety threats to a child as a result of improper or inadequate supervision.

When a visiting resource has been identified, the SSCM will:

1. Ascertain whether the child has a significant, positive relationship with the visiting resource being considered.

2. Arrange a face-to-face contact with the proposed visiting resource to initiate a thorough assessment prior to any visit occurring. If the resource is planning to care for the child in his/her own home, this contact must be made in the person’s home.

3. Discuss the following areas and prepare a written summary called a “Visiting Resource Evaluation” on the Contact Detail page in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES):
   a. Identifying information (i.e. name, sex, date of birth, address, telephone number, etc.)
   b. Child Protective Services (CPS) History check
   c. Criminal Records Check (CRC)
      i. GCIC and NCIC fingerprint check for the proposed visiting resource and other adults in the home (Only required for other adults in the home if visits will occur in the home)
      ii. Screening of Department of Corrections
      iii. Screening of Board of Pardons and Parole
      iv. Screening of Sexual Offender Registry
   d. Health Status
   e. Physical Home Environment (i.e. clean, hazard-free, vented heaters, sufficient space, working smoking alarms fire extinguishers, etc.)
      i. Must be clean and hazard-free with sufficient space
      ii. Gas heaters must be vented
      iii. Must have functioning smoke alarms on each level
      iv. Must have a functioning carbon monoxide detector if a gas heater, gas water heater, or gas oven is present
      v. Must have a functioning fire extinguisher
   f. Understanding of Child Development
   g. Understanding of the DFCS Discipline Policy
      i. Review and obtain signature of the visiting resource
      ii. Provide a copy to the visiting resource
   h. Number, sex, and ages of children in the home with the child in care (Determine if the visiting resource is able to care for another child)
   i. Other adults who will be present during visits
   j. General plan for contacts with the visiting resource (i.e. frequency, duration, activities, etc.)
   k. Approval or Non-Approval (Signature and date of SSCM, and County Director/designee)

4. Make home visits to monitor the appropriateness of the visiting resource no less frequently then once every six months.

5. Document how utilization of the visiting resource is in the best interest of the child on
Due to their unique needs, children in foster care placement require the on-going care and supervision of caregivers who have undergone preparation and training adequate to meet their needs. Inherent in the process of "becoming" a caregiver is the understanding of the impact this experience will have on the life of the child and of the caregiver's family.

**Safe Supervision**
The Child Protective Services (CPS) 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 care 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 and in-service training program (Continued Parent Development) for foster families.

**Unreimbursed Caregivers**
These are substitute caregivers used by foster parents to provide childcare for children placed in their home. After they provide childcare three times for a child placed in a foster home, the substitute caregivers are required to submit to the same criminal records check and CPS screening as foster parents.

**Supervision of Older Youth**
Generally speaking, reliable and competent youth, 14 years and older, may be left under their own supervision 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. The primary factor to consider in determining if youth may be left alone is their level of maturity and ability to function in a safe, responsible manner for short periods of time without a caregiver present.

**Respite Care**
Children in DFCS approved foster homes and Private Agency foster homes are eligible for this service. Respite is paid at the child’s current per diem rate, not to exceed five (5) calendar days per fiscal year (taken individually or consecutively) for day respite and five (5) calendar days per fiscal year for overnight respite.

Respite care (under Concurrent Per Diem) may also be used to support foster parent attendance at approved conferences when overnight or extended care may be needed. When a foster parent’s attendance at an approved conference is overnight or extended care is needed, the foster parent’s respite balance is not impacted.

**Day Respite**
Day respite is designed for less than 24-hour childcare that allows foster parents to deal with short-term situations of being away from home for such personal matters as hair appointments, unexpected family illness and similar circumstances. The respite care provider must meet the same requirements as Supplemental Supervision providers.
**Overnight Respite Care**
Overnight respite care is designed to give foster parents a needed break from parenting for such purposes as vacation, hospitalization, or any other circumstance that makes the foster parent unable to provide for the child's care in the home. All approved DFCS or Private Agency foster home must meet DFCS Safety and Quality Standards. A CPA must request a waiver from the Office of Provider Management (OPM) to utilize a DFCS foster home for overnight respite.

**Visiting Resources**
Visiting resources mentor and provide support for children in care through positive, supportive interaction. They may provide social and/or cultural experiences of short duration (not to exceed two consecutive days or a weekend) to a child with whom there is a relationship that has been determined to be positive and significant, and does not interfere with permanency for the child. A decision to arrange/approve visiting resources must be in the best interest of the child.

**FORMS AND TOOLS**
- Form 316-Unreimbursed Routine Substitute In-Home/Out-of-Home Caregivers
- Form 316I-Unreimbursed Routine Substitute In-Home/Out-of-Home Caregivers Instructions
- DFCS Child Safety Agreement (Form 29)
- Consent for Criminal Records Check (404)