

	<b>DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL</b>			
	<b>Chapter:</b>	(14) Resource Development	<b>Effective Date:</b>	
	<b>Policy Title:</b>	Home Safety	<b>Previous Policy #:</b>	1015.19
	<b>Policy Number:</b>	14.19		

### CODES/REFERENCES

Taylor v. Ledbetter, 818 F.2d 791 (11th Cir. 1987)  
O.C.G.A. § 31-19 Rabies Control Law  
O.C.G.A. § 40-8-76.1 Use of safety belts in passenger vehicles

### REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall ensure the safety and well-being of the children in foster care placements.

DFCS shall ensure all approved caregivers comply with safety requirements for children in foster care placements. Caregivers approved by DFCS and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) must follow the agency's established guidelines for water safety, motor vehicle safety, bicycle safety, firearm safety, animal safety, and environmental safety.

### PROCEDURES

**The Resource Development (RD) Case Manager will review the DFCS Child Safety Agreement (Form 29) with all approved families and obtain their signatures at the following times:**

1. Prior to approval of the initial Family Evaluation
2. At the time of the annual home re-evaluation
3. Whenever there are child safety concerns (i.e. Discipline or foster care policy violations, etc.)

**To ensure the overall safety of the children in approved homes, RD and Social Services Case Managers (SSCM) will:**

1. Review the Safety and Quality Standards for approved homes.
2. Inform the foster parent of any observed violations of the Safety and Quality Standards, especially those that pose a risk or potential risk to the health and safety of the child in the home and, if possible, provide measures for correction.
3. Notify the Supervisor in writing of any violations of Safety and Quality standards observed during foster home visits and the outcome of any discussion with the foster parent regarding observations. Upload a copy of the written report in External Documents in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (Georgia SHINES)
4. Provide follow-up to ensure the home's compliance with Safety and Quality Standards.

### PRACTICE GUIDANCE

When children are placed outside the home for various reasons of abuse and/or neglect, their health and safety are of paramount concern. It is the responsibility of DFCS and approved caregivers to take all measures within their power to reduce threats to a child's safety while in care. The safety of the child must become as much a priority for the child in placement as it is in the home of the birth parent.

Accidental drowning and motor vehicle accidents are among the leading causes of unintentional fatalities for children and youth ages 0-24 months. Children are the number one victims of dog bites, and firearms claim the lives of an inordinate number of children each year. Given the seriousness of these statistics, caregivers must be guided in changing any attitudes or behaviors that put the child's safety at risk. Moreover, caregivers must be assisted in employing injury prevention strategies that promote the safety of the children in their care.

The County Department will assist caregivers in locating resources for free swimming lessons. If free resources are not available, reasonable expenses should be allowed. County departments provide caregivers with easy access to child safety seats and bicycle helmets. Expenses incurred by caregivers in meeting agency approval requirements are reimbursable. Caregivers are required to obtain prior approval before incurring costs that require reimbursement.

### **Water Safety**

Drowning is the second leading cause of injury-related deaths across the nation to children ages one through fourteen. With this sobering statistic in mind, counties must take extra precaution when making placements in homes that have swimming pools or waterfront property. Any mobile child is a potential victim. As a result, the age, special needs and number of children in the home should guide decisions around placement in such homes. Caregivers whose primary or alternate place of residence (vacation or country home, etc.) is equipped with an in-ground or aboveground swimming pool, or is situated on waterfront property are required to adhere to the following general water safety guidelines:

1. Know or learn how to swim. Swimming requirements are completed by caregivers during the first sixty (60) days of approval. Swimming requirements for previously approved homes are completed within one year of the effective date of this policy. Water safety requirements for homes with newly acquired swimming pools are completed by caregivers within sixty (60) days.
2. Complete the required Red Cross CPR and First Aid training **prior to approval**. All previously approved foster homes that have not completed CPR and First Aid training are required to complete these courses as a part of the annual continued parent development requirements. CPR and First Aid certification must be renewed and be current at each foster home re-evaluation.
3. Complete training in a basic water rescue class during the first year of approval or as *soon as the course is made available in the county, or is within reasonable driving distance*. A basic water rescue is designed to teach recognition, prevention and response to water emergencies using non-swimming rescue methods. These type classes are generally offered by the Red Cross, community centers or aquatic centers.
4. Provide some form of *written verification* (this may be in the form of a signed statement, letter, certificate, etc. from the instructor) upon completion of the swimming, First Aid,

CPR and Basic Water Rescue requirements.

5. Provide a *signed statement*, in the absence of official verification, affirming previously acquired *swimming skills, if applicable*, or the previous completion of a *Basic Water Rescue course*.
6. Enroll children in care, age three (3) years and older, in a swimming class within one (1) year of the date of placement. The class must be taught by a certified instructor and, if necessary, re-taken until the child learns to swim. DFCS will reimburse the caregiver for the cost of the class. The caregiver must inform the SSCM if a child is unable to complete the required swimming course for any reason. The SSCM must make caregivers aware of any known physical/corporal or emotional challenges of the child, which would impact their ability to complete the course.
7. Provide written documentation that children in the home have satisfactorily completed a swimming course that is taught by a certified swimming instructor or a signed statement affirming their observation of the child's previously acquired ability to swim.
8. Ensure that the swimming pool or waterfront area meets any local and/or state ordinances.
9. Ensure that the swimming pool and surrounding area are properly maintained and free from danger.
10. Provide a cordless or pool phone, cellular phone, or poolside phone jack to eliminate the need to leave children unattended while answering the telephone indoors.
11. Equip the swimming pool with lifesaving and flotation devices such as reaching poles and ring buoys.
12. Provide direct adult supervision in the swimming pool or water area at all times. Close adult supervision is the key to ensuring adequate water safety for children, even if a child knows how to swim. **Close Adult supervision is mandated!**
13. Ensure the inaccessibility of *in-ground or aboveground swimming pools* by isolating the pool from the home with a fence or through the use of a pool safety cover.

### **Safety Guidelines for In-ground Pools**

The fence must surround all sides of the pool, must be at least four (4) feet in height and must isolate the pool from the home. The fence should have no vertical or horizontal openings that are more than four (4) inches wide and should be of such structure that a young child cannot climb through or under the fence. The fence must have a gate that locks. Pool safety covers must meet ASTM Standards and must be installed, used and maintained according to manufacturer's specifications. Pool covers must be kept free of standing water and be completely removed when the pool is in use.

### **Safety Guidelines for Above-ground Pools**

The side structure of an aboveground pool may be used to meet the fence requirement. Where an above-ground pool structure is used as a fence, or where the fence is mounted on top of an aboveground pool structure, the pool must be made inaccessible when not in use by at least one of the following: 1) securing it with a pool safety cover that meets ASTM Standards 2) removing or making the steps or ladder inaccessible; 3) surrounding the steps or ladder with a small fence that meets the above fencing guidelines.

### **Guidelines for Wading or "Kiddie Pools"**

Wading or "kiddie" pools should be used according to the manufacturer's instructions, and maintained and used in a manner that safeguards the lives and health of young children.

These small pools should be emptied and stored away when not in use to prevent the accumulation of water and other unsanitary debris.

### **Guidelines for On-property Ponds**

Homes with on-property swimming ponds must comply with the above General Water Safety Guidelines 1-12. Although this policy specifically refers to in-ground and above ground pools and waterfront property, families with *family hot tubs* and *spas* are required to take *substantial safety measures* to ensure the safety of children placed in the foster home. Specified safety measures should be *documented in the narrative of the foster home study or foster home record*. The key to preventing water accidents is supervision.

### **Motor Vehicle Safety**

Ensure caregivers' awareness and understanding of the following requirements regarding motorized vehicles and safety helmets:

1. Caregivers are required to transport every child placed in their care, under 8 years of age, in a federally approved child safety seat that is used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Caregivers are required to transport children 12 years and under in the rear seat of the vehicle, with seat belts buckled up to protect young children from air bag injuries.
3. Caregivers are prohibited from allowing children and youth under the age of 18 to ride in the bed of a pickup truck. The County Director/designee may provide *waivers* when children wish to participate in parades, hayrides and similar events.
4. Prior to allowing a child to operate a motor vehicle, caregivers must contact the child's SSCM and comply with all agency policy regarding the driving of motor vehicles by youth in placement.
5. Caregivers are required to take extra precaution in allowing a child less than 18 years of age to operate or ride as a passenger on a motorcycle, a motorbike, an all terrain vehicle, a high-speed water craft or other similarly motorized vehicles. These high-speed vehicles can be particularly challenging to operate; therefore, reasonable care and caution should be applied when considering a child's participation in such activities.

**Note:** When responding to a caregiver's request for guidance, the SSCM should take into consideration the child's psychological, medical and developmental needs. Determine the type and safety of the vehicle and its suitability for the child, as well as the vehicle operators and supervision plan. Discuss any restrictions (i.e., no use of public roads, daytime riding only, no racing or hot-rodding) and other safety measures as helmets, seat belts, flotation devices and any other manufacturer's recommended safety gear. Children should have reasonable opportunities to engage in play and wholesome recreational activities.

6. All children in care, regardless of age, must be individually secured (one child to a seat belt) by an appropriately fitting seat belt when being transported in a motorized vehicle.
7. Caregivers must never leave children 12 years and younger or children who are medically, emotionally, psychologically, or behaviorally challenged unattended in motor vehicles.

### **Bicycle Safety (Helmet)**

Caregivers must provide a properly fitted and securely fastened safety helmet for any child who is operating a bicycle or riding as a passenger on a bicycle on a road, bicycle path or sidewalk. Helmets are also required for children when operating or riding as a passenger on other types of vehicles (excluding an automobile) such as all-terrain vehicles, motorbikes, small motor craft, etc.

### **Fire Arm Safety**

1. All firearms in the home must be kept under lock and key and inaccessible to children at all times. As an added safety measure, any one of the reliable gun-safety mechanisms available commercially (trigger guard lock, etc.) may also be used. See Foster Parent Manual for a list of the types of gun safety devices that may be used.
2. All ammunition should be locked away and stored in a separate location from firearms in the home.
3. \*Caregivers must never allow children in care to handle any type firearm.
4. Keys to locked storage devices are to be kept in the possession of an adult or reasonably secured from children.

\***NOTE:** Youth age thirteen (13) years and older, who have successfully complied with all applicable hunting license requirements for Georgia, may engage in hunting activities, while under the **direct supervision** of the caregiver or other approved adult. The caregiver/ approved adult is also required to be in compliance with Georgia hunting license requirements. Georgia requires completion of a hunter education course (including safety guidelines) for all persons born after January 1, 1961. The County Director/designee must give prior approval, taking under consideration the psychological and emotional capacity of the child as well as any developmental or behavioral needs. If parental rights have not been terminated, prior written approval must be obtained from the birth parent.

### **Animals**

Georgia law requires that all dogs, cats, and ferrets be vaccinated for rabies. Re-immunizations are required either annually or triennially depending on the vaccine. Foster homes with exotic animals or wildlife (chimpanzees, snakes, raccoons, large mammals) will require a health and suitability statement from a veterinarian, and approval by the County Director. However, any issues or concerns related to any pet (type, size, quantity etc...) should be thoroughly discussed and documented during the assessment and re-evaluation process.

### **Dog Safety**

Children are the primary victims of dog bites. Dogs with which the child is familiar usually inflict such bites. In the absence of substantive dog safety laws in Georgia, caregivers are required to exercise reasonable safety precautions when children are around pets. Caregivers are required to take the following measures to protect the children placed in their home:

1. Monitor children when they are around animals.
2. Refrain from bringing into the home, after approval, any type or breed of animal that has a known history of violence and/or aggressiveness toward people. The Case Manager gives serious consideration to this issue when assessing safety factors in the foster home.
3. Safely secure animals that have a history of violence and/or aggressiveness toward

- people in a cage, fence or other similar enclosure.
4. When acquiring a pet for the home, choose a breed or type that has, at the least, a history of being people-friendly.
  5. Provide opportunities and instruction to children in care regarding safe socialization with people-friendly breeds of animals.
  6. Report immediately to the agency any acts of violence toward a child in care or others by an animal in the foster home.
  7. Carefully review the Foster Parent Manual for information regarding animal safety.

### **Fire Safety**

Gas heaters in the home must be vented to avoid fire and health hazards. However, unvented, fuel-fired heaters equipped with oxygen depletion safety shut-off systems may be operated in homes. As noted in the requirements for the initial approval of the home, such homes are approved for the placement of no more than three (3) unrelated children or in an approved Relative Foster Home. Working carbon monoxide detectors must be installed in these homes. However, it is a good safety practice that all homes with gas appliances (stove, fireplace and water heaters) have carbon monoxide detectors. Working smoke alarms must be installed in the home. Ideally, smoke alarms should be located on each level of the home and outside sleeping areas.

### **General Environmental Safety**

The approved home and surrounding property must be kept reasonably clean and uncluttered, properly maintained, and free of safety and health hazards, and uncontrolled rodents and insects. All hazardous substances including, but not limited to, flammable and poisonous substances, medications and industrial cleaning supplies must be stored out of the reach of children.

## **FORMS AND TOOLS**

DFCS Child Safety Agreement (Form 29)

<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/hunting>