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POLICY 1104 – Pre-Adoption Services

A. POLICY

Foster care is a temporary placement setting. Permanency exits for foster children are timely and in their best interest. The Division of Family Services (DFS) will strive to place a child with the best adoptive resource available in order to achieve permanency without undue delay. Careful matching, preparation of both the child and family, and planning at the beginning is necessary to ensure successful and permanent adoptions.

B. PROCEDURES

1. The caseworker will assist the child in preparing for adoption and permanency. The caseworker will refer the child (ages 4-17) to the My Life Program. This program helps a child piece together the story of their life and supports their work through permanence. The caseworker can request My Life by e-mailing their supervisor.
2. The caseworker shall compile as much information on the family as possible including pictures and medical history. Life Books shall be assembled for children younger than 4 years of age. A Life Book records the reason a child came into care, the child's foster care placements, educational history and medical records.
3. The caseworker may also want to consider requesting the child's therapist help the child with preparation if the child is currently in counseling or therapy.
4. The caseworker shall consider all the child's strengths and needs and match those with the strengths and needs of the prospective adoptive families.
5. For sibling placements to be successful, the caseworker will ensure that there are ongoing group meetings and discussion prior to transition. These will continue during the transition and after the placement. Communication is critical to the success of the placement.
6. The caseworker shall refer the child case to the Permanency Placement Committee (PPC) for approval of the adoptive resource. A child may not join an adoptive home without the review and recommendation of the PPC.
7. The caseworker and supervisor will review the approved home studies that are submitted from the agencies, narrow it down to three families that can best meet the needs of the child, and refer those home studies to the members of the Permanency Planning Committee for discussion. The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and/or Child Attorney are permitted to contact the worker to schedule a time to review the home studies in the DFS office location prior to the PPC meeting so their recommendation may be included in the decision-making process. The caseworker must document all activities in a separate FOCUS (For Our Children's Ultimate Success) progress note labeled

“Recruitment.” The family’s caseworker should attend the meeting in person or via telephone.

8. If the caseworker has only one appropriate home for the child and the child is legally free and listed on Deladopt, adoption exchanges, AdoptUsKids, and the Delaware Heart Gallery, for child-specific recruitment for a minimum of six (6) months (or a specified time determined by worker and supervisor), the caseworker may refer to the PPC for review.
9. The caseworker will ensure that child abuse checks, FOCUS history, Family Court Records, and current references are reviewed. Even if checks were done at the time of the adoption home study, they must be updated and documented in FOCUS prior to the PPC presentation. This will be completed for all relatives, non-relatives, foster families, adoptive families or anyone being considered as a placement resource for the child.
10. If the child will be moving from a relative, non-relative, or foster family, the caseworker will offer support to the family and suggestions on how the family can support the child with the upcoming move. The caseworker will give the child information about the family, which may include pictures, videos, and letters to familiarize the child with the family and the home. Other activities will include family time visitation, family outings and other activities to help the child adjust to their new family.
11. The caseworker shall inform the adoptive family that the child must be called by their birth name until the adoption is finalized. If the child is not TPR’d (Termination of Parental Rights), the caseworker shall also inform the foster/adoptive parent or pre-adoptive parent that they may not get the child’s haircut or ears pierced without the permission of the birth parents and the caseworker. For those children who are TPR’d, the caseworker must be consulted for permission until the child is adopted or legal guardianship is awarded by the court.
12. If the risk to achieving the termination of parental rights is minimal, a child may join an adoptive family (after PPC approval) before the adjudication of parental rights. Legal risk placements are the best option when a child must move from a foster family placement and TPR/adoption is the goal.
13. If the child will be moving to an adoptive family without their siblings, arrangements will be made to have the child maintain contact with their siblings in whatever way is in the child’s best interest.
14. When the Permanency Planning Committee approves the family for adoption, the Program Manager shall complete placement modify event 30 days after the termination of parental rights, if the order is not appealed. The caseworker will change the child’s status in FOCUS from ‘foster care’ to ‘foster care—pre-adoptive’ in the ‘pay type’ and ‘service’. The pay type will be pre-adopt board payment for DFS foster families and CPA (Child Placing Rate) rate for contract providers. This applies to both the DFS foster parents and private agency families.
15. The caseworker will assist the adoptive family in locating day care, registering in school and locating doctors and therapist if the family needs such help.

C. FOCUS

- All case management activities are documented in FOCUS progress notes and Child Plans and Reviews.
- The caseworker will ensure that child abuse checks, FOCUS history, Family Court Records, and current references are reviewed. Even if checks were done at the time of the adoption home study, they must be updated and documented in FOCUS prior to the PPC presentation.
- The caseworker documents all recruitment activities in a separate FOCUS progress note labeled "Recruitment."

D. FORMS

None