DSCYF Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families | FAMILY SERVICES

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Authorized Signature: Trenee Parker, DFS Director	

POLICY 1302 – APPROVAL OF FOSTER FAMILY HOMES

A. POLICY

The Division of Family Services assesses and trains families to provide home-like substitute caregiving and issues the family a license utilizing foster family standards and competencies that support the safety, permanency, and well-being of foster children.

B. PROCEDURES

1. The Quality-of-Care Standards and Competencies ensure optimal safety, health, and well-being domains are established, maintained, and in children's best interest.

   Foster Care Licensing Standards:

   - Foster parents must be at least 21 years of age.
   - Must be approved by the Division of Family Services or licensed by a Child Placing Agency.
   - At least one applicant must have functional literacy.
   - Must be financially stable and able to meet basic needs independent of foster care assistance.
   - Required to report all household members and any changes to household composition.
   - Physically able to provide care and supervision to children.
   - Must have recent physical exams (within 6 months). Documentation from a health care provider must be provided for applicant and all household members.
   - All children in the home must be up to date on immunizations.
   - Must disclose current mental health and/or substance use. Additional documentation and/or screening/evaluation may be required.
   - Demonstrated stability of the household members and relationships.
   - Must have a DSCYF fingerprinted background check completed. This includes anyone in the household 18 years of age or older.
   - Must have completed Foster Care Home Assessment and meet or exceed the requirements of the Physical Environmental Checklist.
   - Provide a safe home environment, including safe drinking water.
   - Ability to transport children legally and protection through licenses and insurances.
   - Weapons and ammunition must be stored separately, locked, unloaded and inaccessible to children.
   - Secures all alcoholic beverages.
   - Complete Pre-Service Training and have a minimum of 5 hours of training annually.
   - Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid certified.
   - Household pets are safe with the children and are properly licensed/vaccinated.

Essential Competencies:

- Participate as a member of the child's professional planning team.
- Meet developmental needs of children in care.
- Provide safety, well-being, and placement stability for children in their home.
- Work effectively with primary families to promote reunification.
- Promote lifelong connections and permanency.

2. The Division provides a mandatory thirty (30) hour pre-service training developed by The Institute for Human Services (IHS). Modules of training include the following:
   a. Orientation to Foster Care
   b. The Child Protection Team
   c. The Effects of Child Abuse or Neglect on Child Development
   d. Attachment, Separation, and Placement
   e. Managing Behavior
   f. Preventing and De-escalating Crisis
   g. Cultural Issues in Placement
   h. Understanding Primary Families
   i. Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused
   j. The Effects of Caregiving on the Caregiver Family

3. Pre-service training for prospective foster parents will include information related to meeting the prudent parent standard in making decisions on behalf of foster children in their care. See **Policy 1313 – Prudent Parenting Standards** for additional details.

4. The Division provides prompt responses to prospective foster parents. Upon receipt of an inquiry, the receiving Foster Home Coordinator (FHC) or supervisor enters basic information in the FOCUS (For Our Children's Ultimate Success – automated information system) inquiry record. The family is assigned a FHC who follows the family throughout the application process.

5. Prospective applicants are invited to attend Orientation to Foster Care (training session 2a), by the contracted recruiter. The applicant is sent the pre-screening packet by the contracted recruiter. This session provides an overview and history of foster care as well as answers to basic questions. The presenting FHC collects the pre-screening packet and release of information forms from the prospective applicant at Orientation.

6. Following session 1, the FHC shall review the Pre-Screening Form and completes the DELJIS (Delaware Criminal Justice Information System) and FOCUS checks. Any concerning pre-screening information should be discussed with the FHC supervisor and/or Foster Care Program Manager. If the review finds evidence that they do not meet the critical standards for approval, DFS will notify the applicant they are being screened out and why. For all accepted pre-screened applicants, the FHC shall refer the applicant to the training contractor for pre-service training.

7. The training contractor will contact referred applicants to arrange enrollment in the next available training. The applicant will be given the foster home application packet no later than the second session to be completed during the training process.

8. Prospective foster parents will gain a clear understanding of the nature of foster care programming including requirements, expectations, effects of separation on children, and roles of agency staff and biological parents.

9. During the training process, if the contractor discovers information or evidence of a concern that could prevent an applicant from reaching final approval, they shall contact the FHC supervisor to discuss the concern.

10. If it is determined the applicant will discontinue the process by their decision or the Division's, the Division will send a withdrawal letter to the applicant.

11. Upon completion of pre-service training, the training contactor will forward the application to the assessment contractor to complete a comprehensive Foster Family Home Assessment. The training contractor will notify DFS of the referral to the assessment contractor.

12. The assessment contractor will have 90 days from receipt of the application to complete the Foster Family Home Assessment and send the report to DFS. The contractor will assist the family in completing all necessary documents as well as a written assessment including a recommendation for approval or denial.

13. Prospective foster parents will partner with the assessment contractor to determine their skills, strengths, qualifications, and life experiences that align with the requirements and needs of the foster care program.

14. Foster home assessments not completed within 90 days shall be withdrawn without prejudice. The applicant shall be notified in writing of the reason and shall be given the option to re-apply at a later date.

15. If completion of the home assessment is delayed by the applicant's failure to provide required information or documentation, an extension may be granted upon the approval of the Foster Care Program Manager. Such extensions shall be made for a specified time in order to complete a specific part of the assessment.

16. Home assessment documents shall verify the following critical standards:
    a. **Income**: Pay stubs and/or prior year income tax returns shall document sufficient income to meet their needs and ensure the security and stability of the household independent of foster care board payments. If it appears the applicant's income cannot meet their financial obligations, the application will be withdrawn, without prejudice, and the applicant can reapply when their financial status changes.

    b. **Health:** Applicants must be physically, mentally, and emotionally able to care for children. Health history shall be submitted for all household members, including a copy of applicant's physical examination conducted within one year of approval and verification of a negative tuberculosis test within six months. All mental or physical health concerns, or prescribed psychotropic medications including medical marijuana, must be disclosed. Additional documentation from a medical professional may be required regarding these conditions and medications. Disabilities of applicants shall be considered only as they affect the care of a child. The Division may, at any time, require the applicant to provide an updated medical statement from a physician verifying that they are free of communicable diseases, specific illnesses,

or disabilities which would either endanger the health of a child or interfere with the care of the child.

c. **Child Care Plan:** Foster parents working outside the home, conducting business in the home, or providing care or supervision of children or adults for other programs must provide adequate care for foster children placed in their care.

   Foster parents who conduct a business in their home shall demonstrate that activities related to this business will not interfere with the care of the children and that they have obtained all the necessary business licenses. The foster parent must provide the FHC with a copy of applicable business licenses.

   Foster families who choose to provide care or supervision in their homes for children or adults under the auspices of another in-home care program (whether on a 24-hour basis or during daytime hours only) must obtain approval in writing from both placing/licensing agencies. They must comply with any special rules or restrictions imposed by either or both agencies to ensure all clients in the home receive adequate care.

d. **Family Composition and Stability**: Marital status, relationships of additional household members, and the number of children shall be included in the assessment. Foster parents may be married or unmarried couples, single, or adults (related or unrelated) who share a home. Applicants shall have a stable living arrangement that ensures durable stability and reliability. Married or unmarried couples shall demonstrate a stable relationship and shall have been married or living together for at least one year. A foster family may not care for more than 2 children under 2 years of age. Foster families shall not care for more than 5 children including foster and their own children. Exceptions to these child limits must have documented approval via a FOCUS record submitted by the FHC and FHC supervisor and approved by the Foster Care Program Manager. See exception criteria as noted in Policy 1304 – Monitoring and Supporting Foster Families.

e. **Reference Checks**: Foster parents will sign consents for at least four reference checks as well any child placing agency applications and service history.

f. **Driver's Licenses and Insurance**: All foster homes must have a vehicle and a licensed driver to be able to provide transportation for children in their care. Applicants shall submit proof of driver's license, auto insurance, and liability insurance for all applicable household members.

g. **Criminal History and Child Abuse History**: Fingerprinting is required for all household members 18 years and older in compliance with 31 Del. C. § 309, Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and the Adam Walsh Child Protection Act of 2006. The criminal history unit within the Division of Management Support Services will verify the suitability of all applicants upon evaluation of the fingerprinting results and child abuse registry checks. Applicants must be found 'not unsuitable' by the criminal history specialist. Applicants and adult household members who have a history of gross irresponsibility or disregard for the safety of others, serious violations of accepted standards of honesty or ethical conduct, or criminal activity may be denied approval as a foster parent. If the applicant has a criminal record, the FHC or

FHC supervisor will discuss the criminal background report individually with the applicant and document the applicant's report of the incident(s). The coordinator may not disclose an individual's criminal background to the spouse or partner of the applicant or to any person other than the individual. The FHC will discuss all criminal record information and the client's response to it with the supervisor as part of the approval process. Responses and exceptions, if approved, to the Criminal History Background Check will be documented in FOCUS.

Applicants with the following felony convictions within the last 5 years will not be approved:

1. Child abuse or neglect
2. Spousal abuse
3. Violent offense
4. Drug related or driving under the influence offense.

Failure to disclose criminal arrests or child abuse reports on the application may be cause for disapproval. Applicants will be informed of yearly DELJIS checks on all household members aged 13 and older, as a required component of their annual review. Applicants will be informed of required reporting to DFS of arrests and child abuse reports within one day.

h. **Physical Environment**: A foster home shall be clean, reasonably safe (home and neighborhood), in good repair and have working utilities. The foster home and the exterior around the home shall be free from objects, materials, and conditions which constitute a danger to the child served. The home shall be comparable in appearance and maintenance to other family homes in the community. As part of this process, foster homes with wells will obtain a water test kit from the Department of Health and Social Services and test their water using a bacteria and full chemical panel. Prior to home opening, any water issues must be resolved. The home shall meet or exceed the requirements on the Physical Environment Checklist:
    1. A foster home shall be in compliance with state and local standards, ordinances, and regulations for residential use.
    2. Applicants shall have opportunity to correct substandard conditions within reasonable timeframes and confirmed by compliance checks. Deficiencies and corrections are documented in the assessment.
    3. Exceptions to environmental standards are noted in the assessment and must be approved by the assigned FHC, FHC supervisor and Foster Care Program Manager.

    The foster home shall have:
    1. A separate bed for each child.
    2. Children over the age of 5 shall share a bedroom with same sex children only.
    3. No child over age 1 shall share a bedroom with an adult unless there is a documented need such as a disability or condition.
    4. Space for each child's exclusive use to ensure a reasonable amount of privacy.
    5. Space for each child's self-expression through decoration and display of personal items
    6. Convenient accessible storage of clothing and other possessions

7. The foster home shall be free of fire hazards with accessible egress for all residents, and operating smoke alarms as appropriate on all floors including the basement.
8. All children must know how to evacuate in case of a fire and practice periodic evacuation drills.
9. The foster home shall always have a functional telephone and an acceptable plan for emergencies.

Exceptions to these standards (i. – ix.) may be allowed with contractor and DFS Program Manager Approval, provided the safety and well-being of children are not in danger.

i. **Home Insurance**: A foster family must provide proof of home liability insurance in the form of a declaration sheet and a letter from the insurance carrier.

16. The assessment contractor shall inform the applicant in writing within fifteen days of the decision to recommend them for approval or not recommending them and shall be informed of their right to appeal the decision. It will be the responsibility of the FHC or FHC supervisor to notify the applicant that they are not recommended to proceed forward and mail a letter.

17. All documents shall be turned over to the FHC supervisor for review and assignment to a FHC. The FHC Supervisor will determine that all needed requirements and documents are present. The FHC supervisor will then assign the family to a FHC to complete the approval process.

18. The FHC shall review the record and make note of any areas needing additional information or clarification as well as notes from the supervisory review.

19. The FHC Supervisor and the Foster Care Program Manager approve a family upon review of written documentation that the applicant satisfactorily meets critical standards and the family's ability and willingness to practice the essential competencies.

20. The FHC shall contact the family within 5 working days to discuss next steps and arrange a time to meet. At that meeting, the FHC will explain their role, follow up on any areas needing clarification, explain the Foster Home Agreement and have the family sign it if they agree.

21. The Foster Home Agreement is signed by the FHC supervisor and Foster Care Program Manager and sent with an approval certificate to the foster family as evidence of their active status for one year.

22. Documentation required to be on file for all approved foster families:

    1. Foster Care Application
    2. Copies of pay stubs, W-2's or prior years income tax filing (Provided by Applicant)
    3. Copies of Divers license and proof of car insurance (Provided by Applicant)
    4. Adult and Child Physical Form
    5. Personal references- Four
    6. Review of Family Court Records- Email to the Court
    7. Criminal History check (fingerprinting and child abuse check)

8. Child Abuse Registry check in any state the applicant has lived within the previous 5 years (Adam Walsh Act of 2006)
9. Signed Information Waiver Form
10. School reference reports on prospective family's own children
11. Landlord Reference
12. Completed Physical Environmental Checklist
13. Clean Drinking Water Agreement with clean results from a Bacteria and Full Chemical Water test for homes with well water.
14. Proof of Pet license and vaccinations.
15. Other child placing agency reference checks
16. Signed Confidentiality Pledge, Discipline Pledge, Smoking Agreement, and Transportation Agreement for foster parents.
17. Emergency Contacts
18. Completed W-9 form online and direct deposit form
19. Pre-Service Training Certificate
20. Written Home Study
21. Signed Foster Home Agreement

23. The FHC will complete the Foster Family Fact Sheet, which contains basic information about the foster family. The fact sheet provides information that can be used by the caseworkers to review and discuss the potential placement with the child or the team.

24. The FHC will update all provider information in FOCUS and upon final approval of the Foster Home Agreement will activate the provider and add services. The Certificate of Approval shall be printed from the Foster Home agreement event.

C. FOCUS

1. Foster Family Inquiry Record is completed upon first contact.
2. FHC's enter and maintain foster home provider records, complete annual review records, and progress notes.

D. FORMS Forms are located on the Division of Family Services Website: https://kids.delaware.gov/policies/dfs-policies

1. Foster Care Application
2. Foster Parent Information Waiver
3. Adult Household Member Information Waiver
4. School Reference
5. Landlord Reference
6. Physical Environmental Checklist
7. Child Placing Agency Reference Check
8. Confidentiality Pledge, Discipline Pledge, Smoking Agreement, and Transportation Agreement for foster parents. Clean Drinking Water Agreement
9. Emergency Contact Form
10. Directions to Completed W-9 form online and direct deposit form
11. Foster Home Agreement