



Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resources Approval Policies and Procedures

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I. INTRODUCTION

Approvals of foster family homes/adoptive resources are the responsibility that the Department maintains, in order to provide substitute care to dependent, neglected, and abused children. The Department is responsible for developing new foster family/adoptive resources; evaluating those homes, as well as group homes, child placing agencies and institutions that make application for approval/license to provide care to children. The Department also has the responsibility for re-evaluating and re-approving existing foster family homes/adoptive resources.

The State Department of Human Resources has delegated to the County Departments of Human Resources the responsibility to develop and approve foster family homes/adoptive resources. **A prospective foster family home/adoptive resource must meet the requirements prescribed in Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes: Principles, Regulations and Procedures (Referred to in this policy as Minimum Standards).**

A. Purpose

The Code of Alabama 1975 § 38-7-7 directs the Department to not only prescribe and publish Minimum Standards for the licensing and approval of childcare facilities, but to “offer consultation through employed staff or other specified persons to assist applicants and licensees to meet and maintain minimum requirements for a license or approval and to help them to otherwise achieve programs of excellence related to the care of children served.” The policies and procedures discussed herein provide county departments with a framework to develop, approve and monitor foster family homes/adoptive resources to assure that the homes continue to meet Minimum Standards.

Until the development of this set of policies, the Department has approved foster and adoptive homes as separate resources by allowing homes to be dually, but separately, approved as a foster and adoptive home. The Department recognizes the need for a broader and more seamless manner of approving homes to foster and adopt children who are in the Department’s care and/or custody. Recognizing that a substantial number of children in the Department’s care are adopted by parents who have fostered those children, there is a need for resources to be initially approved as a foster/adoptive resource. It is the expectation of the Department that a resource approved as a foster/adoptive resource will foster a child in the Department’s care or custody and then consider adoption of that child. However, this does not limit a foster/adoptive resource from considering adoption of a child who is in the Department’s care, but may not be placed in the home of the foster/adoptive resource which is considering adoption of a certain child in the Department’s care. For example, a foster adoptive resource may become aware of a child in the Department’s care through the Heart Gallery or AdoptUsKids and consider adoption of that child. The primary objective of approving homes as foster/adoptive resources for the Department’s children is to seek permanency for children in care in a more seamless and expeditious manner.

For those resources who wish to adopt only, separate policies are in place to approve adoptive only resources.

B. Legal Base

Title 42 of the United States Code § 670 provides that states shall be responsible for establishing and maintaining standards for foster family homes and for the periodic review of the standards. Federal funding for foster care activities is contingent upon the Department meeting these two requirements. The Code of Alabama 1975 Section 38-7-1, Child Care Act of 1971, provides the legal basis for approving or licensing all childcare facilities. The Child Care Act defines the various types of childcare resources.

Public Law 115-123, the Family First Prevention Services Act, section 472(c) (1) (B) limits the number of foster children cared for in a foster family home.

C. Role of County Resource Worker

Resource workers must maintain a thorough working knowledge of the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes, particularly those related to the safety of children placed in the home. These are located in Section IV Physical Facilities in the Minimum Standards. They include, but are not limited to, clean home and grounds; specific requirements for baby cribs; fences; storage of harmful household products; swimming pools and hot tubs; health and fire safety; emergency plans; and animals in the home. During the completion of the home study, resource workers are required to evaluate and assess that all of the physical and safety issues in the Minimum Standards are addressed and that the home meets all of these.

Large counties generally have staff dedicated to recruiting, approving, training and re-approving foster family homes/adoptive resources. Medium and small counties may have resource workers assigned additional duties. Regardless of how a county assigns resource development duties, resource staff is responsible for maintaining each foster family home/adoptive resource's approval and monitor the home's approved capacity, while monitoring foster family homes for compliance with all Minimum Standards.

The resource worker's duties include, but are not limited to, recruitment, response to inquiries, review of applications, conduct Trauma Informed Partnering for Permanence and Safety (TIPS)/Deciding Together, and complete the written home study. It is the responsibility of the resource worker to gather and analyze information, through interview and observation, as it relates to each applicant's personal qualifications and assess the conditions that appear to exist in the home and that affect safety and well-being for a child (ren). Other duties of a resource worker include initial approval of a foster family home/adoptive resource, annual re-approval and semi-annual visits. The resource worker should check for adequate space for each member of the household, including space for safe and appropriate sleeping arrangements. The resource worker shall monitor the number of children placed in the home by the Department to assure that the foster family home/adoptive resource must not exceed the number the home is approved to serve. The foster family home/adoptive resource must not exceed the number the home is approved to serve. The maximum number any foster family home/adoptive resource may be approved for is six. There are only two

exceptions permissible. One is a sibling group of six or more who are from a common parentage. This exception is applicable only when there is space available in the foster/adoptive home. There can not be any additional foster/adoptive children placed in the home or residing in the home if a sibling group of six or more from common parentage is placed in the home. The other exception that is permissible is a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the child of the parenting youth.

The resource worker is encouraged to communicate with the other child welfare staff about pertinent information involving the approval of foster homes/adoptive resources. The purpose of this communication is to further the goals of advancing the needs of children placed in the foster family home/adoptive resource and assessing, on an on-going basis, the individualized strengths and needs of the foster parents in relation to particular children placed in their care. Resource workers are responsible for dealing with issues and concerns that impact the continued approval of a foster family home/adoptive resource. Resource workers may also participate in the ISP's where there are concerns regarding the foster parent/adoptive resource's adherence to the child and family case plan. Other duties may include being a liaison to the county foster parent/adoptive resource association. The amount of involvement that a county resource worker may have with the foster parent/adoptive resource association is on a county-by-county basis.

The resource staff is responsible for entering provider information into the FACTS system and updating as needed. (Some counties may have an assigned individual to enter information in FACTS.)

D. Role of County Resource Supervisor

Resource supervisors must have a comprehensive understanding of the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes and the Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resources Approval Policy and Procedures.

Expected duties of resource supervisors include, but are not limited to, providing consultation and training to resource workers, careful review of home studies/narrative for pertinent, documented, and complete information maintained in the case file; and review to determine that foster parent/adoptive resources meet the necessary requirements for approval (Criminal history checks, medicals, fingerprints, etc.). The supervisor may oversee that the information from TIPS sessions is documented in the record and that all necessary entries have been made in FACTS. The resource supervisor should monitor the foster family home/adoptive resource documentation on a regular basis including semi-annual visits and re-approval visits and monitor that each are completed in a timely manner. Resource supervisors should provide assistance to resource workers to assist in resolving issues around non-compliance of foster family home/adoptive resources and/or conflict resolution.

II. PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING FOSTER FAMILY HOMES/ADOPTIVE RESOURCES

A. Recruitment

The County Department has the responsibility to recruit foster family home/adoptive resources through: (1) general community awareness of the need; (2) publicity campaigns; (3) news media; (4) direct appeal to specific interest groups or organizations; and (5) individualized approaches to specific families who may be interested in caring for foster children.

The best recruiters are often an approved foster parents/adoptive resources who are confident in their partnership role with the Department in providing services to foster children. Consistent recognition of their role will enhance their recruitment efforts formally with the media or informally with a neighbor. Counties may contact the State DHR Center for Communications when assistance is needed in planning publicity releases for radio, TV, or newspaper. After any planned publicity or recruitment effort, County Departments must have staff available to receive inquires and make the necessary follow-up contacts.

The following personal characteristics have been found to be beneficial to be a strong and effective foster parent/adoptive resource; and are suggested personal characteristics to consider when recruiting, as well as evaluating, prospective foster parent/adoptive resources. (Because everyone is an individual, some potential foster parent/adoptive resources may possess these characteristics more so than others; however, each foster parent/adoptive resource is evaluated individually).

- A concern for children and others;
- Ability to give affection, while providing constructive and caring discipline;
- Ability to provide good physical care;
- Capacity to give without needing immediate gratification;
- A satisfactory, stable, and harmonious family relationship;
- Ability to maintain relationship with persons within and outside their family;
- Possess the ability to exercise sound judgment and demonstrate responsible, stable, emotionally mature behavior;
- A reputable character, good values and ethical standards;
- A flexible attitude;
- Patience;
- Ability to accept a child's relationship to birth parents;
- Capacity to listen carefully to a child's spoken and unspoken expressions;
- Ability to accept and understand a child's limitations while helping a child to achieve their potential;

- Maintain conditions in the home that provide safety and well-being for the child;
- Ability to use help when needed and work cooperatively with the agency and other professionals in the child's best interest;
- Have an open mind about the children entering their home and possess the ability to accept cultural differences; and
- Ability to support the permanency plan as determined by the ISP especially the plan of reunification with parent or family.

Note: For required qualifications for foster family/adoptive resource approval refer to Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes Section III Qualifications of the Foster Family.

While it is desirable for the foster family/adoptive resource to include two parents, single parents may be recruited and approved, as single parents have proved to be successful in fostering and adopting.

B. Inquiry and Screening

It is preferable that an action be taken on inquiries or referrals within 10 working days of the receipt of the inquiry. The urgency of a child's situation will determine the response time for inquiry and referrals. ICPC referrals need a high priority because of the federal requirement that the home study for these homes be completed within sixty days. Based on the information provided at the time of inquiry, the county may acknowledge in writing the inquiry or may elect to send the inquirer an application and other material to begin the approval process. Counties may accept an application from prospective foster parent/adoptive resources even though there may be an identifiable standard that is not met at the point of inquiry/application but will be met at the time the home could be approved. (e.g., A couple has been married 9 months at the point of inquiry, but will meet the one-year requirement before the approval process is complete including TIPS.) All inquiries, whether sent an application or not, are entered into FACTS at the point of inquiry on the resource directory, recruitment tab. It is possible to decide at inquiry that it is not appropriate to provide an application to the person making inquiry and this should be noted in FACTS. Once the completed application is received back in the County Office, the foster family/adoptive resource case shall be registered on FACTS with a status of "applicant" on the license screen as "pending." Inquiries that do not result in receipt of an application within three months from the date of inquiry may be closed on the FACTS Closure History Tab located on the Resource Directory screen. A history is maintained on the Closure History Tab.

Inquirers should be given information about the foster family home/adoptive resource program, requirements, study process and general agency policies and procedures. Inquirers are informed that many of the children the department works with have been the victims of abuse and neglect and have specific needs related to any abuse/neglect they have experienced.

The motives of applicants seeking to foster children must be discussed and understood relative to the motivations meeting the needs of the child (ren) placed in their home as opposed to meeting foster/adoptive resource applicant's needs. It is important for foster/adoptive families to respect the families and children and their culture.

The Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes should be discussed with inquirers. In particular, inquirers should be asked about any history of felony or misdemeanor charges and any reports of abuse or neglect committed against a child. Inquirers should be informed that FBI/ABI criminal history background checks are completed and that clearances of child welfare abuse and neglect registries in any state the inquirer has resided during the past five years are required.

Inquiries may be informed that previous reports of abuse and neglect may not automatically disqualify an inquirer from being approved as a foster family home/adoptive resource. The department will review previous child abuse and neglect reports and consider the following: the circumstances and severity surrounding the allegations; results of the investigation into the child abuse and neglect report; whether any further reports have been received; and the number of years that have elapsed since the disposition. When a county department cannot access the CA/N investigation report on FACTS and receives a "Conversion" status, the county department should either call the county that investigated the report or contact the Office of Safety & Well Being and request a copy of the CA/N investigation. (SDHR maintains "Conversion" status cases on microfilm and can provide copies to county departments). There are certain criteria, when met that allows for expunging the abuse and neglect report. For further information on expunging child abuse and neglect reports, refer to *Child Protective Services Policies and Procedures, Central Registry*.

It should be stressed to inquirers that the Department's efforts are directed at matching the needs of a child to a family that can best meet the child's needs. The Department can not guarantee placement of any child or the length of the placement. The Department can not guarantee the children will become legally available for adoption.

The County Department resource worker should inquire if the prospective foster parent/adoptive resource has previously fostered/adopted or applied to foster/adopt in this state or another state. If so, prior to the home being approved, a signed release of information should be obtained from the prospective foster parent(s)/adoptive resource and a copy of previous foster family/adoptive resource records obtained. This will give the resource worker knowledge as to the reason the home closed. FACTS should be cleared on the prospective family to determine whether the family is currently/previously approved by another county or agency.

During the inquiry contact, it is recommended that the resource worker obtain the following information which is documented in FACTS and/or on the PSD-DAR 723 (Face sheet):

- identifying information (name, address, phone number, and family composition);

- basic agency requirements (age, residence, marital status, etc.);
- previous foster family home/adoptive resource experience with another state child welfare agency, a child placing agency in this state or a child placing agency in another state *;
- initial description of a child whom the inquirer is interested in providing care for (age, sex, race, physical disabilities, family background, etc.); and
- source of referral for foster family home/adoptive resource program.

***Note:** Foster family home/adoptive resource providers can not be approved with two different agencies providing the same service simultaneously. It is the worker's responsibility to clear FACTS to assure that the foster/adoptive resource is not approved with another agency or county.

C. Types of Foster Family Homes as Defined by the Code of Alabama 1975

There are two types of foster family homes as identified in Code of Alabama 1975 Section 38-7-2 (8): (a) Paid Foster Family Home and (b) Non Paid Foster Family Home.

A paid foster family home is a foster family home that cares for a child or children and receives payment for the child's (ren) care. A non paid foster family home is a home that does not receive payment for the care of a child or children. A paid foster family home and a non paid foster family home are both subject to the same rules and regulations regarding care of children, standards of homes, etc. as prescribed in the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes, Principles Regulations Procedures. If a foster care payment is made to a relative, the relative must meet the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes, Principles Regulations Procedures.

The foster home, either free or receiving payment, can be approved for no more than six foster children in a foster home. The only exception to this regulation is a sibling group of six or more having the same mother or father. The sibling group of six or more must be the only children in foster care residing in the home. This allows for the family unit to be preserved and a large sibling group to be placed together. There must be documentation in the resource record sufficient to support that the foster parents' have capabilities to care for the sibling group and documentation that there is adequate space to accommodate the sibling group placed in the home. For policy concerning foster family home placements refer to the *Out-of-Home Care Policies and Procedures*, Placement of Children section.

Foster care board payments made to approved relative/kinship foster parents is equivalent to that of non-relative approved foster parents. A review of payments made for foster care maintenance payments will be conducted every **five years** by the Director of Children and Family Services and the Director of Finance to assure the continued appropriateness of payments. During the review period, the

Department will check to ensure payments made to approved relative or kinship foster parents is the same as those payments made to non-relative foster parents.

D. Foster Family Homes/Adoptive Homes of DHR Employees

DHR employees may be foster parents/adoption resources under certain conditions. Advisory opinions from the State Ethics Commission, AO2001-07 and clarified by AO2005-27, set forth the conditions under which DHR employees may be approved foster parents/adoptive resources. Although the question posed to the State Ethics Commission dealt with foster care, the conflict-of-interest issues addressed in the Ethics Opinions also applies to adoptive homes and the legal opinions espoused in the opinions do not negate the applicability to adoptions. The following policy reflects the opinions of the Commission:

1. County DHR Employees

County DHR employees may be approved as a foster family home/adoptive resource in a county other than the county in which they are employed. DHR employees are prohibited from being a foster parent for their county of employment because they would be interacting directly with the Department with which they are employed and have access to confidential information, thereby, creating a conflict of interest. An employee's position in a county is not a consideration but the inherent interaction with their employer creates conflict of interest. The only exception to a DHR employee serving as a foster family home/adoptive resource for their county of employment would be if the foster care placement is approved and otherwise overseen by a County DHR office other than the employing county. This may occur in rare situations. DHR employees may be approved as foster parents by child placing agencies but may not accept children from the county in which they are employed because to do so would involve the "inherent interaction with their employer."

County DHR employees may serve as foster family home/adoptive resources to children who are their relatives under a fact-specific, case-by-case review. The Individualized Service Planning team must determine that placement with the relative/DHR employee is the most appropriate one for the child. The county of employment shall request that an adjoining county department complete the foster/adoptive home study and approve the home. The adjoining county is credited with the foster home resource case. Should a county have such a case, the county should notify the court to obtain concurrence with the placement plan.

A county DHR employee may serve as a substitute for an approved foster family home/adoptive parent (AO2005-26). Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes describes the requirements that a prospective substitute for the approved foster parent must meet. In addition to the Minimum Standards' requirements, a DHR employee wishing to serve as

a foster parent's substitute must meet and maintain the following two conditions:

- The DHR employee wishing to be a substitute for a foster parent cannot be involved in the selection of foster care providers for children; and
- The DHR employee wishing to be a substitute for a foster parent has no opportunity to accrue personal gain.

2. State DHR Employees

State DHR employees may participate in the foster family home/adoptive resource program in their county of residence as all interaction/approval, etc. is done at the local level. A State DHR employee participating in the foster family home/adoptive resource program in his or her county of residence would not conflict with or be in violation of Advisory Opinion No. 2001-07 as the State DHR is not involved in approving/overseeing the foster family home/parent. State DHR employees cannot use their position as a State DHR employee, nor may they use confidential information obtained in the course of their employment with State DHR to influence or affect their being approved as a foster care provider.

3. DHR Employees As Relative Placements

County or State DHR employees may serve as a foster family home/adoptive resource provider to children who are their relatives under a fact-specific, case by case review.

4. DHR Employees As Respite Providers

County DHR employees cannot be approved as respite providers for foster parents/adoptive resources in the county in which they are employed. They cannot accept children from the county in which they are employed. Procedures are in place for approving respite care providers. (See *Out of Home Care Policies and Procedures* Section XII, Supports to Foster Parents).

5. DHR Employees As Adoptive Resources

The ethics opinion referred to above dealt with foster parents. The Department's policy for DHR employees being adoptive resources is located in *Adoption Policies and Procedures* Section Applications and Home Studies. County Departments must follow policy outlined in the *Adoption Policies & Procedures* in regard to DHR employees being adoptive resources.

6. Payments to DHR Employees Approved as Foster Parents/Adoptive Resources

Foster care maintenance payments are made to DHR employees approved as foster parents/adoptive resources in the same manner as

any other foster parent/adoptive resource. Such payments are made on FACTS and initiated by the county placing the child.

E. Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Approvals of Professionals

Individuals with a professional relationship with a county department may serve as a foster/adoptive resource. County departments should follow the following policy to deal with those situations in which there is a conflict of interest due to the professional relationship. This policy applies to those professionals who have a professional work relationship with the Department. The county department is to act in the best interest of children when approving foster family homes/adoptive resources of professionals who have a working relationship with the county.

During the course of providing services to children and families, it is necessary for county departments and State DHR to work closely with professionals, paraprofessionals or other individuals who are closely associated to a professional who does work with the Department. Such individuals may include, but are not limited to, counselors, physicians, attorneys, judges and other court personnel, elected local county government officials, school teachers and school administrators, private social workers, or social workers employed with another agency that works closely with the Department.

It is the responsibility of the Department to assure that the professional work relationship with an individual interested in becoming a foster/adoptive parent does not interfere or conflict with the responsibility of the Department to develop foster/adoptive homes that will meet the needs and best interest of the children the Department serves. Professionals may become aware of a child's placement needs through avenues other than their work relationship with the Department involving a specific child. In these situations, the county department should assess, on a case-by-case basis, whether the individual professional is an appropriate placement resource; whether the placement is in the best interest of the child; and what county may complete the foster family home/adoptive resource approval process.

Professional work relationships cannot be allowed to influence the county department's mandate to objectively provide services that are in the best interest of children and families. It is important to consider the best interest of the child in considering foster/adoptive home placements. Issues to consider may include whether the child is likely to face embarrassment in the local community and/or school setting if placed in the home, whether the child's family and family history is known in the community, etc.

Applications to become foster/adoptive parents are accepted from professionals who have a working relationship with county departments; however, in many cases the work relationship between the professional and a specific county department (usually the county in which the professional resides) is such that the professional has ongoing inherent interaction with the county department or has access to confidential information, thereby, creating a conflict of interest. Examples of conflict of interest include, but are not limited to, a judge who presides over legal proceedings involving a county department seeks to become

approved as a foster/adoptive home in the same county, or a GAL learns of a child through work with the county department and then seeks approval as a foster/adoptive home in the same county. Additionally, many professionals, e.g., counselors, attorneys, etc., are compensated by the Department for their services to children and families being served by the Department which creates another avenue of conflict of interest. The working relationship may in and of itself cause a conflict of interest.

In order to prevent any conflict of interest, protect objectivity and ensure the best interests of children, the county department where the professional resides should request that an adjoining county department complete the foster/adoptive home study. The adjoining county is responsible for fingerprinting, checking Central Registry, contacting references, TIPS /Deciding Together and any other issues that may arise during the approval process. The adjoining county will continue to be responsible for the re-approval of the foster/adoptive home.

In the situation of a professional having a work relationship with more than one county department and no adjoining county is appropriate to complete the approval process; the county of residence should contact the county's child welfare consultant. Assistance will be provided to determine what county, if any, should approve and supervise the prospective foster/adoptive home. Professionals who have a working relationship with their county of residence and all surrounding counties may be referred to a child placing agency to apply to become foster/adoptive parents.

Individuals who have a professional relationship with the county department may serve as a relative resource, including approval as a related foster/adoptive resource, on a case-by-case basis. After a child's individualized service planning team has determined that placement with the relative (professional) is in the best interest of the child and that the relative (professional) wishes to apply as a related foster home, the child's worker is responsible for making a contact with the county resource worker. The county department where the professional resides shall request that an adjoining county department complete the foster home approval process, inclusive of TIPS, criminal history checks and Central Registry checks. The adjoining county will continue to be responsible for the resource case and re-approval of the home.

F. Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resources Approved as Child Day Care Home or Adoption Only Home

A foster family home/adoptive resource may be dually approved to provide foster family home/adoptive resource and day care for children but cannot be approved for more than six children, inclusive of foster family home/adoptive resources and day care children. For further policy information concerning dual foster family home/adoptive resources and day care services refer to the *Out-of-Home Care Policies and Procedures*, Section Applicable to all Out-of-Home Care.

Trauma Informed Partnering for Permanence and Safety (TIPS) allow applicants the opportunity to be considered as a foster family home/adoptive resource or an adoption only resource. The county departments approve the foster family home/adoption resource studies and the adoptive only home studies must be

forwarded to SDHR for approval. For further policy information concerning approval for adoption only cases refer to the *Adoption Policies and Procedures*.

For policy concerning foster care placements refer to the *Out-of-Home Care Policies and Procedures*, Placement of Children section.

G. General Requirements for Foster Family Homes/Adoptive Resources

Applicants for foster/adoptive homes (application has been received and is being processed), must meet certain criteria as individuals. Items 1-9 below address those criteria that pertain to the individuals themselves, not the physical home setting. There must be a thorough assessment made of each of these criteria and issues surrounding the criteria must be resolved before the individual/couple can be approved. Refer to Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes section III Qualifications of the Foster Family for further details.

1. Residence

SDHR has delegated to each County Department the responsibility of developing foster family homes/adoptive resources to meet the needs of the children within that county. In most circumstances, a family is approved as a foster family home/adoptive resource in the county in which they reside. The County Department where the foster family home/adoptive resource is located is responsible for approving and reapproving the foster family home/adoptive resource unless there is another policy section addressing specific groups, e.g., DHR employees and professionals with a working relationship with the county department.

With the implementation of FACTS, counties may view all resources statewide. Counties **may not** randomly place children in other counties without first making contact with the county having responsibility for approving the home. A worker should not make a contact with an out of county foster family/adoptive resource without first contacting the approving county where the foster parent/adoptive resource resides. Counties **must** contact the resource supervisor/worker in the county in which the resource is located to determine if the resource is a viable one for a child. A county must have concurrence from the receiving county before placing a child. Even though the concept of “statewide availability” is present in FACTS, counties must adhere to the principles of placing children in close proximity, placing siblings together, and least restrictive setting. See Section X, (N) Use of Other Counties’/Agencies Foster Homes of this policy for additional information.

2. Age

A foster parent/adoptive resource must be at least nineteen (19) years of age. However, if the couple is related to the foster child,

one spouse may be 19 or older and the other spouse may be under age 19. As long as this requirement is met, applications may not be denied solely on the basis of age. "Relative is defined as an individual who is legally related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption within the fourth degree of kinship, including only a brother, sister, uncle, aunt, first cousin, grandparent, great grandparent, great aunt, great uncle, great great grandparent, niece, nephew, grand niece, grand nephew or a stepparent." [Code of Alabama 1975 Section 12-15-301 (13)].

3. Marital Status

Foster parents/adoptive resources may be both single (single includes never married or legally divorced) and married persons. Foster parents/adoptive resources living together in a relationship shall have been married in a legal ceremony as defined by the Code of Alabama. Alabama Law effective January 1, 2017, abolished common law marriages in Alabama entered into on or after January 1, 2017. However, couples who entered into a valid common law marriage before January 1, 2017, shall continue to be valid in Alabama. Verification examples include, but are not limited to the fact that one spouse uses the other spouse' surname, in social settings the couple is regarded as a married couple, and both individuals are listed on utility bills, mortgages, rental agreements, leases, and tax returns. A common law marriage is ended only by a legal divorce. A couple residing together as a married couple must both be approved as a foster parent/adoptive resource. Applications for foster family home/adoptive resources are not accepted from couples who are living together (neither legal or common law marriage) or from single individuals living in a conjugal relationship. In rare cases, exceptions can be requested based on the special relationship to the applicants or other extenuating circumstances. Concurrence by the Office of Permanency must be received before an exception is granted. All exceptions must be well documented in the case record. Married couples living together can only be approved as a foster family/adoptive resource if both want to foster/adopt.

If an application is received and the couple is separated the spouses must have lived apart continuously for a minimum of a one-year period with no intent to reconcile. Each spouse shall maintain separate households and the separation must be verified by at least three references. If an application has been accepted from a couple and the couple should separate prior to approval, they would not have been separated for one year and neither applicant could be approved.

Verification of all marriages and divorces is required. Acceptable marriage verification includes a valid marriage certificate or other

official records verifying the marriage. If there are previous marriages (including common-law), divorces or spousal death, they must be verified, and a copy of the verification included in the home study.

If a single approved foster parent/adoptive resource marries and plans to continue to provide foster family home/adoptive resources after marriage, the new spouse is required to be approved as a foster parent/adoptive resource. TIPS /Deciding Together, central registry clearance, background checks, training (i.e. CPR, basic water safety, if applicable, etc.), medical, etc. should be completed on the new foster parent/adoptive resource prior to the marriage, if possible. The care of foster children placed in the home should not be disrupted during the approval of the new spouse unless through information gathering, the county determines it is not in the best interest of the child. In most cases, during their on-going relationship with the foster parent/adoptive resource, county staff should know that marriage is planned.

4. Health

The Physical Examination for Foster and/or Adoptive Applicants (DHR-FCS-634) must be completed for each prospective foster parent/adoptive resource. Physical examinations (DHR-FCS-2257) are required for all household members indicating they are in good health, free of contagious diseases and up-to-date on immunizations. This statement can be signed by a medical doctor, physician's assistant, or certified nurse practitioner. A household member may include the foster parents/adoptive resources' children, boarders, grandparents, etc. who may be residing in the home. Additional information may be requested if there are medical issues (i.e. physical or mental) that may impact the family's ability to parent a child. The physical exams and medical reports must be completed every two years. Religious exemptions are allowed for children who are household members. These exemptions can be obtained by visiting the local Health Department if the presenting patient qualifies. Public health is a resource for foster parents and their household members in efforts to obtain required immunizations. More information can be located at <http://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/about/health-departments.html>.

5. Financial Stability

Applicants must complete the Financial Statement for Foster and/or Adoptive Applicants (DHR-FCS-705). Foster parents/adoptive resources must have sufficient income to meet their needs without difficulty and provide for the child (ren) placed through DHR payment. There is no minimum income level for foster parent/adoptive resource applicants. Foster

parent/adoptive resources can not rely upon the foster care board payments or foster children's income for their financial support.

6. Employment

One or both foster parent/adoptive resources may likely be employed outside of the home. If both foster parent/adoptive resources are employed, childcare arrangements should be discussed during the foster family/adoptive resource study. Employment is most often necessary for foster parent/adoptive resources to have income to support themselves.

7. Child Abuse/Central Registry Clearance

All household members age fourteen (14) years and older must sign a Child Abuse/Central Registry Clearance form (DHR-DFC-1598) and be cleared through the registry as part of the foster family home/adoptive home study process. Because children age 14 and older are minors, they must also have the signature of their parents or legal guardian on the DHR-DFC-1598. If prospective foster care/adoptive parents and other adults residing in the home have resided in any other state, the child abuse and neglect registry in each state must be checked for the past five preceding years. These checks must be made before the home can receive final approval or before the home can receive provisional approval, whichever is the case. The check of other states' child abuse/neglect registries is the Department's responsibility, not a prospective foster parent/adoptive resources' responsibility. Should other state's procedures surrounding their child abuse/neglect registries require a fee for the check, the county should use local funds to make such a payment. After the county receives the written reply/invoice from the other State requesting a fee for the check, the county can pay the cost from any Public General account and charge 6008. Enter "CAN Registry Check" in the Description field. Since the other State is a governmental entity, it should be coded as "N" on the vendor table and a W-9 is not required. The county should contact Office of Audit and Compliance at 334-242-3226 if there are any questions.

Counties should not make a decision about the applicant before a review of the CA/N report is completed. County Departments will need to establish an internal process for reviewing indicated CA/N investigations on foster family home/adoptive resource applicants. The County Department may convene a group consisting of a supervisor with CA/N experience, the resource worker, the resource supervisor, or another child welfare supervisor and possibly the county director to consider the circumstances of the indicated report.

The review group should consider the following items when deciding whether the foster/adoptive home applicant with an

indicated CA/N may be approved as a foster family home/adoptive resource.

- Does the report meet current policy? For example, allegations of abuse have changed, and the particular allegation may no longer be considered as a report, e.g. head lice.
- Is there sufficient documentation to show a preponderance of evidence that justifies the report being “indicated.”
- Status of due process must be researched. If the CA/N had a due process hearing, was the “indicated” report upheld? Is this documented? The county file may not have sufficient information concerning the due process hearing and the county will need to research this by contacting SDHR, Family Services, Office of Protective Services, Administrative Record Review.
- The disposition of “Reason to Suspect” is no longer released and is not sufficient to disqualify a foster family/adoptive resource home applicant.
- In a situation of “no record is found” but the Central Registry search reveals an indicated report, contact the Office of Child Protective Services to determine if there is a microfilmed copy.

Note: A non-indicated report can not be used as a basis for denial of a foster family/adoptive resource home.

It is the responsibility of the resource staff to explain to the applicant the decision of the county not to approve the home and why.

County Departments should use the American Public Human Services Directory, published by the American Public Human Services Association to locate other states’ central registry section of their child services departments’. If another state reports that the particular state does not maintain a central registry, document the contact and this result in the record of the prospective foster parent. For assistance in clearing other states’ central registries, contact the Office of Child Protective Services.

8. Criminal History Check Requirements

Code of Alabama (1975), §38-13-1, et seq. provides for the implementation of a criminal history background check system in which the Alabama Department of Human Resources and licensed child placing agencies may determine if licensees,

applicants, employees and volunteers are suitable to care for the children.

Criminal History Check Application Process

All prospective foster parent/adoptive resources seeking approval to operate a foster family/adoptive home, all adult household members (19 years and older) of such home, all employees who work or plan to work in the prospective foster family/adoptive home, and all volunteers who provide or intend to provide a service to children in approved foster family/adoptive homes shall be required to undergo criminal background checks. Both prospective and approved foster parent/adoptive resources are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their household members, employees and volunteers have complied with criminal history checks requirements. All prospective applicants who apply with the Department are required to complete a DHR Criminal History Check Application DHR Fee Paid (DHR-CHC-2178 and DHR-CHC-2174). The name, address, date of birth, race, gender, and Social Security number as they appear on a valid identification document are required. If the applicant does not have a Social Security number, the Social Security number shall not be required, and the Department and the Department of Public Safety shall provide an alternative means of identification and procedure. **Note:** Being a citizen is not a requirement for the foster family/adoptive resource homes and there can be individuals who are in the United States legally but do not have a Social Security Number.

Fingerprint Process for DHR Prospective Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resources

Applicants will either have a live fingerprint scan or be given two sets of blue DHR fingerprint cards depending upon whether the county has live scan equipment. Applicants will ensure forms are completely filled out. If the applicant needs assistance completing the forms, the person responsible for the fingerprinting may assist the applicant in completing the forms.

Counties that do not have access to live scan fingerprinting equipment in the DHR county office will do manual fingerprinting on fingerprint cards. Each person shall submit two sets of fingerprints and sign a written consent to obtain the criminal history background information. The two sets of fingerprints are sent to the Office of Criminal History Checks for processing. Suitability letters will be issued from the Office of Criminal History Checks.

Fingerprints shall not be required when a disability prevents a person from being fingerprinted. In cases involving disability, a written consent to obtain available criminal history background information by name and Social Security number only shall be obtained. Disabilities preventing fingerprinting include the loss of both hands, severe scarring of all fingers, closed paralytic hands, and similar disabilities. Medical documentation is required and the disability preventing fingerprinting must be specified in the medical documentation.

No one who fails or refuses to give written consent or submit fingerprints necessary to obtain criminal history background information may be approved as a foster family/adoptive resource home or permitted to work in the home or volunteer in the foster family/adoptive home. If an adult household member age 19 and over refuses to consent or submit fingerprints to meet this requirement, the prospective foster family/adoptive cannot be approved. The Department shall pay any fees related to criminal history checks required pursuant to approving the agency's foster family/adoptive homes.

Results

No suitability letters will be issued until both the ABI and FBI results have been received. **Only the suitability letter is imported into the FACTS file cabinet and a copy maintained in the foster parent/adoptive resource case record.**

Results will be one of the following categories:

- No Criminal History Activity - There is no criminal record of the applicant on file with either ABI or FBI.
- Criminal History Activity without disqualification indicates the applicant has a criminal history but has not been charged with a crime that would make him/her ineligible for a suitable determination to work with children.
- Criminal History Activity with disqualifying Crime indicates the applicant has a criminal history and has been charged/convicted with a crime that could make the applicant ineligible to work with children.

If additional information is needed, the applicant will be sent a letter by the criminal history worker through regular mail requesting the information. The applicant will have 45 days to return the information requested to the criminal history check worker. The resource worker should continue TIPS /DT sessions for the applicant during the time additional criminal history information is being gathered by the criminal history worker. If the additional criminal history information is not received from the applicant within 45 days from the date of the requesting letter, the applicant may be considered unsuitable; the application may be denied, and the resource case will be closed on FACTS. If a final decision on approving the home is delayed because of additional criminal history information the resource worker must document in FACTS the reason for the delay.

Suitability Letters

At the conclusion of the criminal history process, a suitability letter, unsuitability letter or an unable to determine letter will be sent to the resource worker. Only suitability, non suitability letters or unable to determine letters maybe imported into FACTS.

Confidentiality of Criminal History Information

All reports of criminal history background information received by the Department shall be confidential and marked confidential with no further disclosure and shall

not be made available for public inspection. All criminal history background information reports shall be excluded from any requirement of public disclosure as public record.

Suitability Criteria

Convictions for any of the following crimes shall make an individual unsuitable for approval as foster family/adoptive home or being an employee or volunteer in the foster family/adoptive home. These are used by the criminal history check person in determining the suitability.

- Murder, manslaughter, or criminally negligent homicide;
- A crime committed against a child;
- A crime that involves the physical or mental injury or maltreatment of a child;
- A crime involving the sale or distribution of a controlled substance;
- A sex crime – sex crimes include but are not limited to the following:
 - Enticing a child to enter a vehicle, room, house, office, or any other space for immoral purposes as proscribed by Section 13A-6-69 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Incest, when the offender is an adult and the victim is a minor, as proscribed by Section 13A-13-3 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Kidnapping of a minor, except by a parent, in the first or second degree as proscribed by Section 13A-6-43 or Section 13A-6-44 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Promoting prostitution in the first or second degree as proscribed by Section 13A-12-111 or Section 13A-12-112 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Rape in the first or second degree, as proscribed by Section 13A-6-61 or Section 13A-6-62 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Sexual misconduct, as proscribed by Section 13A-6-65 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Sexual torture, as proscribed by Section 13A-6-65.1 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Sexual abuse in the first or second degree, as proscribed by Section 13A-6-66 or Section 13A-6-67 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Sodomy in the first or second degree, as proscribed by Section 13A-6-63 or Section 13A-6-64 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Soliciting a child by computer for the purposes of committing a sexual act and transmittal of obscene material to a child by computer as proscribed by Sections 13A-6-110 and 13A-6-111 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
 - Violation of the Alabama Child Pornography Act, as proscribed by Section 13A-12-191, 13A-12-192, 13A-12-196 or 13A-12-197 of the Code of Alabama 1975.

- Any solicitation, attempt, or conspiracy to commit any of the offenses listed above, inclusive.
 - A crime listed in the Community Notification Act, Chapter 20 of Title 15 of the Code of Alabama 1975.
- Conviction for a crime listed in Social Security Act, §471 (a)(20)(A) as prohibiting a person from being a foster parent/adoptive resource shall be deemed to make the convicted person unsuitable for employment, volunteer work or approval as a foster parent/adoptive resource.
 - Conviction for either a violation or attempted violation of an offense committed outside the State of Alabama which would be an offense if committed in Alabama.
 - Conviction for a violation or attempted violation of a federal law, either a sex crime or any other crime, if the offense would be a crime in Alabama.
 - Convictions of crimes that involve violence include, but are not limited to, the following: murder, manslaughter, kidnapping, aggravated assault, forcible sex offenses, robbery, arson, extortion, extortionate extension of credit, and burglary of a dwelling. Other offenses considered as “crimes involving violence” such as attempted use or threatened use of physical force against a person, or the conduct set forth in the count of which the defendant was convicted involved use of explosives or, by its nature, presented a serious potential risk of physical injury to another. “Crimes of violence” also includes the offenses of aiding and abetting, conspiring and attempting to commit such offenses. Refer to Alabama Administrative Code, 660-5-46-.03.
 - Any crimes listed in Alabama Administrative Code (DHR), Rule 660-5-46-.03.

In addition to the above convictions, other disqualifications for foster/adoptive parents are based upon Adoption and Safe Family Act (ASFA) pursuant to Administrative Code (DHR) Rule 660-5-45-46-.05.

- A felony conviction for child abuse or neglect, for spousal abuse, for a crime against children (including child pornography), or for a crime involving violence, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide, but not including other physical assault or battery or
- A felony conviction for physical assault, battery, or a drug related offense committed within the past five years from the date of application.

For further information concerning criminal history check, county departments should contact the Office of Criminal History Checks.

9. Verification of Citizenship

Alabama Act 2011-535 (HB 56) provides that the Department maintain verification of United States Citizenship, United States National Status, or

Alien Status on all foster family/adoptive resource homes. Verification should be obtained prior to issuing a new approval or renewal of a foster family home/adoptive resource. The Department is prohibited from issuing an approval to anyone other than a United States citizen without proper documentation. Proper identification includes driver's license, non-driver ID card, birth certificate, valid passport (passport must be signed), certification of naturalization, certification of citizenship, a United States certificate of birth abroad, a foreign passport with a United States visa, a tribal certificate of Indian blood, a tribal or bureau of Indian affairs affidavit of birth, or CBP Form I-94. The Department of Public Safety has confirmed the citizenship or legal immigration status prior to issuing a valid drivers license.

Entry of the SSN or FEIN (Federal Employees Identification Number) shall be entered on the appropriate FACTS screen for all placement providers. Documentation of all minimum standards shall continue to be maintained on FACTS. The Resource Licensing Checklist screen contains a selection of Citizenship on the Checklist Item field.

H. Physical Facilities

In addition to the personal attributes of applicants for foster/adoptive resources, the physical home must be thoroughly assessed to assure that the physical home meets the requirements in the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes. Resource workers must document that the home meets the requirements of the Minimum Standards. These are located in Section IV Physical Facilities in the Minimum Standards. They include, *but are not limited to*, clean home and grounds; specific requirements for baby cribs; fences; storage of harmful household products; storage of firearms; storage of medications; swimming pools and hot tubs; health and fire safety; smoke alarms; carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers; vented gas space heaters; emergency plans; and animals in the home. During the completion of the home study, semi- annual and re-approval visits, resource workers are required to determine that all of the physical facilities and safety issues in the Minimum Standards are addressed and that the home meets all of these. The initial home study is documented in narrative form; the semi-annual visit may be documented in narrative form or a county developed semi-annual review form; and annual re-approval visits are documented on the DHR-1446 (Application Renewal).

Minimum Standards require that a working telephone (landline or cell) or access to a working telephone nearby the residence within 500 feet or less. A landline telephone has a safety advantage over a cell phone during an emergency call placed to 911, since the 911 operator is able to access the location and respond appropriately to the caller. It is not possible to identify the physical location of a call placed from a cell phone.

I. Foster Parent Assurances

There are four foster parent assurances that a foster parent must agree to comply with before a foster child may be placed in their home. The four

assurances include: will not use corporal or degrading punishment, will not use any illegal substances, abuse alcohol by consuming it in excess amounts, or abuse legal prescriptions and/or non-prescriptions drugs by consuming in excess, will adhere to the reasonable and prudent parent standard and foster parents and their guests will not smoke in the foster family home or vehicle used to transport the child or in the presence of foster children These assurances assist foster parents in having a clear understanding of expectations in the foster family home. Foster parent assurances must be documented and maintained in the case record. The Foster Parent Assurances form (DHR-FCS-2256) must be completed during the semi-annual and annual re-approval visit. This form is located in iDHR.

III. TRAUMA INFORMED PARTNERING FOR PERMANENCE AND SAFETY/DECIDING TOGETHER

All prospective foster family home/adoptive resource applicants must attend and successfully complete Trauma Informed Partnering for Permanence and Safety (TIPS) or Deciding Together before receiving approval as a foster family home/adoptive resource. The purpose of TIPS/Deciding Together is to provide prospective foster parent/adoptive resources with an understanding of the kinds of issues and situations they will need to manage as foster parent/adoptive resources. TIPS/Deciding Together is a mutual process for both the prospective foster parent/adoptive resources and the county's resource staff to jointly assess the applicant's current parenting skills and the ability to develop the skills necessary for successful fostering/adopting.

TIPS has a thirty (30) hour preparation component held over ten (10) weeks which also satisfies the Minimum Standard requirements for thirty (30) hours of pre-service training. Deciding Together, a derivative of TIPS, is a one-on-one in-depth home study process for families who cannot participate in group meetings. Deciding Together requires at least seven (7) family consultations, and the worker and family will need to establish a schedule.

Since applicants apply to become resources for foster family homes/adoptive resources and adoptive only homes, TIPS and Deciding Together guides foster and adoptive applicants through the complex issues they will face. Through carefully designed activities, parents experience first-hand scenarios of the challenges of fostering/adopting. Activities are designed to assist the TIPS leader and the prospective foster family to mutually assess the parents' abilities and readiness for fostering. Because many foster families adopt children placed in their home, it is important for co-leaders of TIPS to implement the curriculum consistently, being sure to cover both the foster care and adoption related role plays and case examples.

Although TIPS is the preferred method for preparing and assessing foster family/adoptive resource homes applicants, Deciding Together can be used with families who cannot participate in a group process because of their schedules or when there are not enough applicants to conduct a group in the county or region. Deciding Together can also meet the needs of rural county departments who may only have one or two applicant families at a time.

From time to time, it may become necessary for county departments to partner with neighboring counties and/or child-placing agencies in an effort to offer TIPS for potential applicants in a timely fashion. In these instances, the resource worker in the applicant's county of residence will be responsible for family consultations and ensuring that all documents that comprise the family portfolio are complete and accurate. Although reviewing the family profile document, strengths and needs sheets and other materials completed by the applicant throughout the TIPS process, can provide some insight into the strengths and needs of a potential foster parent/adoptive resource, the resource worker in the county of residence is strongly encouraged to attend all TIPS meetings in an effort to get to know the potential applicant. The resource worker should attend, at a minimum, meetings two, five, and ten, when they have potential applicants attending a TIPS class being led by another county or Child-Placing Agency.

All prospective foster parent/adoptive resources are expected to attend all ten TIPS meetings. If a parent misses a meeting, they will be expected to make up the missed session with the TIPS leader. However, if a prospective foster parent/adoptive resource should miss more than two meetings, they may be asked to repeat the entire process. Deciding Together may be used for this purpose. If the foster family home/adoptive resource applicants are married, it is an expectation that both will attend all ten sessions, and both will be involved in the family consultations because both parents will be involved in the parenting of a child placed in their home. Additionally, any adults who will be living in the home with the foster/adoptive children should attend the meetings. Between each TIPS session, co-leaders are to meet together, discuss the meeting and prepare written notes for each family. Meeting notes should be incorporated into the family resource file.

The TIPS co-leading teams are to be facilitated, at a minimum, by a team of at least one staff person and at least one foster or adoptive parent, both of whom must be certified TIPS leaders. Having the co-leader to be a foster/adoptive parent means they will be able to share experiences of fostering/adopting with the group. This reinforces the model approach of partnerships in parenting by demonstrating a working relationship between the agency and foster parents/adoptive resources. Counties may use co-leaders (foster/adoptive parents) from neighboring counties or other agencies. The county conducting the TIPS session is responsible for paying the foster parent/adoptive resource's expenses. Employees of the department may not be compensated for co-leading. There can be more leaders leading the group, e.g., there could be two agency persons and one foster parent/adoptive resource. Deciding Together is to be led by the agency representative.

There are seven tools used in TIPS to assess parents for their readiness to foster/adopt: family profile; family consultation; strengths/needs assessment; criteria for mutual selection; partnership and professional development plans; and family portfolio. All profile components, as described below, are to be completed and all requirements of the home study apply. The TIPS curriculum provides handouts for potential foster parents/adoptive resources to document these seven (7) tools. Documentation of completed TIPS handouts is maintained in the resource record.

1. Mutual Selection

The TIPS program outlines the criteria specifically related to the abilities necessary for successful fostering. The criteria is concrete and behaviorally-specific, rather than subjective. This allows the department and prospective foster parent/adoptive resources to know the exact criteria and work together on the specific qualities that are being assessed. There are twelve skills in the behaviorally-specific criteria. These skills enable the family to have a clear understanding of the abilities needed to become a successful foster parent/adoptive resource. The following assessment criteria is shared with families and used in the mutual selection process.

- Know their family – assess their individual and family strengths and needs; build on strengths and meet needs;
- Communicate effectively – use and develop communication skills needed to foster;
- Know the children – identify the strengths and needs of children and youth who have been abused, neglected, abandoned and/or emotionally maltreated;
- Build strengths/meet needs – build on strengths and meet the needs of children and youth who are placed with them;
- Work in partnership – work in partnership with children and youth, birth families, the agency and the community to develop and carry out plans for permanency including all efforts toward reunification with parents and family;
- Be loss and attachment experts – help children and youth develop skills to manage loss and attachment;
- Manage behaviors – help children and youth manage behaviors;
- Build connections – help children and youth maintain and develop relationships that keep them connected to their past;
- Build self-esteem - help children and youth build a positive self-concept and a positive family, cultural and racial identity;
- Assure health and safety – provide a healthy and safe environment for children and youth and keep them free from harm;
- Assess impact on own family – assess the ways fostering will affect their own family; and
- Make an informed decision – make an informed decision to foster.

For additional information regarding the twelve skills, resource workers should consult the TIPS Implementation Guide, Section E. This Guide is provided to individuals who complete TIPS leadership curriculum.

2. The Strengths Approach

The strengths approach is a practice method which enables families to identify their strengths in twelve core skill areas and determine how they can be enhanced and used to meet needs. In the TIPS process “strengths” are the skills, resources, attributes, and experiences which enable families to be successful in their foster parent roles. “Needs” are barriers or challenges to be overcome before a family can reach the goal of being able to perform the 12 skills. Identifying a family’s strengths and needs is an important part of TIPS as it helps the foster parents be successful parents. The goal is to match each family’s strengths and needs with the strengths and needs of children needing foster/adoptive families. TIPS/Deciding Together provides an opportunity for families to identify both their strengths and needs related to the twelve skills needed for successful fostering. Once needs are identified, strategies are developed with families to meet those needs.

3. The Profile

The profile is a family’s written description of the family in their own words. It is focused on specific areas important to the fostering decision. Each prospective foster parent/adoptive resource as well as any children in the family prepares a profile.

4. Family Consultations (Home Visits)

The TIPS curriculum requires a minimum of two in-home family consultations. The first home consultation should be completed as soon as the profile is returned. The purpose of the home consultation is to assess the family’s progress in the TIPS training, discuss the family’s strengths and needs and develop a partnership plan to assist the family to turn needs into strengths. This visit should be considered as a period for the worker and prospective foster family/adoptive resource to get to know each other and become comfortable together; for applicants to become familiar with the Department’s program and the social worker; and for mutual trust to be established.

The worker should thoroughly review completed profiles prior to the first consultation and make notes of strengths and needs for further clarification. In addition to the strengths and needs, the following areas are to be covered during the first consultation.

- How the family/individual came to apply: The sequence of events leading to the decision to apply is important. A married couple should have reached a mutual decision to foster/adopt.
- Experience with children.

- A general discussion about children the applicants have known may provide some indication of their readiness to accept the change in lifestyle that children bring.
- Expectations they have for the prospective child: Applicants should be flexible about their expectations for a child, and they should be capable of accepting a child as he/she is or may develop.
- Leisure time activities: What do they do together and what are their separate interests? Do they spend time with extended family members?
- Family support system: This discussion should include information about current family relationships, other relationships and friendships that will likely be available to help meet the emotional, material and other needs of the foster family and in placement. The availability of supportive relationships is particularly important for single and married applicants whose extended families live in distant locations.
- A couple's marital stability and relationship: How did they meet? What were their dating activities? How long was their courtship before they were married? Were both families involved in the wedding? Did either spouse's immediate family members have reservations about the marriage? If so, how has it impacted their relationship and/or been resolved? Present marital satisfactions and adjustments. Any history of marriage counseling should be discussed in detail.
- Any prior history of criminal offenses (felonies or misdemeanors) or previous reports of suspected abuse or neglect of a child, by the applicants, should be discussed along with the effects of this history on their application.
- A complete tour of the home is to be taken and viewed for adherence to the minimum requirements for foster family homes. (Refer to the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Home). The narrative recording for the study must include a description of the home itself; a description of bedroom (s) to be used for a child/children; and what the house reveals about the applicant's personality and interest.

Individual interviews must be scheduled with each spouse that counts as one home consultation. The worker should discuss any incomplete information gathered in the joint interview. Any indications of unresolved issues must be addressed. There may have been some indication of dissatisfaction with work, dysfunctional family history, marital difficulties, which could not be explored fully in the group. This should be discussed in an individual interview. Individual interviews are focused on the

applicant and may include, but are not limited to the following: (The interviews are part of the home study and are recorded in the TIPS home study. The questions listed under each item are to assist the resource worker in completing the home study and may not be applicable to every applicant).

- Early life – What were the applicant’s first memories? What was the applicant’s position in the family? What were the applicant’s parents like-their marriage, involvement with each other and children? What were the family crises and how were these handled? What were the happy times? Applicants should be asked if they were ever abused, physically or sexually, or neglected as a child. If so, a full discussion of the circumstances should follow, including the applicant’s resolution of the abusive or neglectful experiences. The worker’s impression of present adjustment to traumatic life experiences is important here.
- Schooling – What were satisfactions, frustrations, and disappointments? Did the individual form attachments to teachers and school friends, particularly if family relationships were barren? How does the applicant’s educational attainment affect educational expectations for a prospective child?
- Work – What are the frustrations and satisfactions? How does the applicant view employer and fellow workers? If the applicant’s job is not satisfying, is there a plan to change? Are there leisure time activities to compensate? What do the applicants’ imagine caring for a child will be like?
- Marriage – There should be a full and in-depth exploration with the applicant around adjustments, differences, and disagreements that have had to be worked out through out the marriage. If there have been any previous marriages, discuss those relationships, including the reasons for dissolution. Questions to be answered include what lessons were learned and the impact of the previous relationships on the current marriage. It is important to know if they have ever separated or if either spouse ever contemplated separation. If the couple has ever attended marriage counseling, it should be explored in terms of dates, reasons, duration, and outcome. How are problems worked out now? Who handles finances?
- For single applicants, what courtships or relationships have they had? What lessons were learned and what areas of difficulties noted? What is the hope of a future relationship and thoughts of how it may impact fostering/adopting?
- Are the extended family and community/neighborhood accepting of foster/adoptive parenting? If not, how will this be handled?

- What is the child rearing practices of the prospective foster parent/adoptive resource and how would they handle troublesome behavior, e.g., complaining, cursing, bedwetting, masturbation, and disruption?
- Religion - What influence has religion had on the applicant's life? How does the applicant see the prospective child affected by the applicant's religious experience? How will spiritual training be provided for the child?
- Are there responsible substitute providers? Discuss with the applicants their responsibility for making appropriate childcare arrangements during an absence of less than 24 hours. Emphasize the importance of using good judgment in the selection of substitute caretakers. Explain that the worker is to approve arrangements if a child requires substitute care for more than 24 hours.

The Department can request with the consent of the applicant any additional information and/or documentation (e.g., clarification of doctor's findings, mental health records, and domestic abuse assessments) as needed to make an informed assessment.

The final family consultation should take place after the end of the ten meetings. The purpose of the consultation is to discuss the family's involvement and progress in TIPS, the family's decision to foster/adopt, the description of the child/children who may be placed in their home, and the resources the family may need from the agency and surrounding community.

5. Partnership Development Plans

The partnership development plan is a written tool used to record what the TIPS leader and the family has agreed to do together to meet the family's needs in becoming foster parent/adoptive resources. The plan should include a clear statement of the issue or problem, an explanation as to why this is a concern to the leader, and an action plan which includes what needs to happen in order for the tasks to be completed. Additionally, after a family becomes a resource, the resource worker should continue to work with them on any development issues that arise, using the Partnership Development Plans. This enables the worker and family to have clear goals regarding how to turn needs into strengths.

6. Professional Development Plans

The professional development plan is a written summary of the steps to be taken by the new foster parent/adoptive resource during the first six months after the completion of TIPS. This plan addresses areas needing improvement and to further strengthen their ability to foster/adopt. This

plan is also for the ongoing development of a foster family/adoptive resource and can be re-evaluated at any time.

7. Family Portfolio

The family portfolio is the whole collection of information designed to document and consolidate the entire preparation and selection process for each foster family/adoptive resource. The portfolio is developed mutually with the prospective foster family/adoptive resource. The family portfolio should consist of the following:

- Decision page;
- Partnership profile;
- References;
- Final strengths and needs work sheet;
- Professional development plan;
- Medical records;
- Strengths and needs weekly work sheets;
- Notes from family consultations;
- Meeting notes;
- EcoMap;
- Partnership development plan;
- Letter(s) to birth parent;
- Letter(s) to a child;
- Photographs of family to be shared with children and /or birth families;
- Recertification information; and
- Other information required by the Department including a home study narrative.

For further information concerning TIPS refer to the Implementation Guidebook and Leader's Guide for TIPS. The Implementation Guidebook and Leader's Guide also provides direction for documentation of the above.

A. References

Reference contacts are to be made by the resource worker only after the resource worker is reasonably certain that the applicant(s) will be recommended for approval. Foster family home/adoptive resource applicants are required to submit, through the application (DHR-FCS-704) the following references: three unrelated references; employer or supervisor references, if any; relatives; minister, if applicable; and friends. At least two (2) of the references provided by

the applicant(s) should be personally interviewed, i. e., face to face or by telephone. After contacts with at least two references, the resource worker determines whether further reference contacts should be made.

Some of the areas to be discussed with the references are (1) length and nature of relationship between applicants and references, (2) reputation of applicants in the community, (3) knowledge of drug/alcohol use, (4) extreme or fanatical behavior, (5) knowledge of applicants' childcare skills, (6) job stability of applicant, (7) financial management of applicant, and (8) marital stability. Letters of reference from other individuals may also be accepted in addition to required interviews. When contacting references, staff should assure those individuals providing a reference that their confidentiality will be maintained.

Issues brought up by references will need to be addressed with the applicant, but the resource worker cannot disclose the source of information. All such discussions will need to be documented.

IV. DISPOSITION OF THE HOME STUDY

The home study is an assessment of the applicant's abilities to become effective foster parent/adoptive resources. It is a shared process between the applicants and the department. Through the home study, applicants are provided the opportunity to assess the foster family home/adoptive programs so they can decide whether they wish to participate. After learning what is involved, some may decide to withdraw their application. A statement should be included in the home study that reflects the applicants motivation. The foster parent/adoptive resources who continue will be better informed as to what to expect.

A. Approval

When the application is approved, the County Department issues a "Foster Home/Adoptive Resource Approval," DHR-FCS-614 signed by the Director or person designated to sign the Director's name. This form is located in iDHR Documents. The County Department is responsible for notifying the foster family/adoptive applicant of their approval. The approval extends for one year from the date of issuance. Approval for free homes shall remain in effect until notice of disapproval is given or until the free home voluntarily withdraws. The original copy of the approval is given to the foster parent/adoptive resources and a copy filed on the left-hand side of resource record folder.

Each foster parent/adoptive resource will be given an identification card, signed by the Director of the County Department or employee authorized to sign the Director's name, when the approval is issued. The purpose of the card is to assist foster parent/adoptive resources when identification is needed to verify their official role as foster parent/adoptive resources. The card will be effective for the same period of time covered by the approval. A new card will be given to each foster parent/adoptive resource when an approval is renewed.

Children are not to be placed in a home until a study of the home is complete and the approval is in the possession of the foster parent/adoptive resources.

For those applicants seeking to become foster/adoptive resources, the county department is to give approval to foster/adoptive resources. For adoption only cases, refer to the *Adoption Policy and Procedures, Applications and Home Studies* for further information.

B. Denial

There are times when the Department will need to deny an application even though TIPS has been completed. When the application is disapproved, the reasons must be discussed with the applicants in a way that will minimize any damage to the family and give recognition to their strengths. The primary purpose of TIPS is for both the Department and the applicants to make an informed decision about the family's ability and appropriateness to provide a foster family/adoptive resource home for the children in the Department's custody. It is hopeful this will be a mutual decision, but there are times that the agency will need to deny an application and the applicants may not readily agree with the decision. It is the worker's responsibility to assist the applicants in understanding and accepting this decision. The worker and/or supervisor should be open in sharing the concrete specific issues, problems, or attitudes that prevent the applicant from being considered as a resource for the Department. The failure to approve an application must always be related to the Department's responsibility to choose homes that would best serve the children in the Department's care. When possible, applicants should be helped to withdraw their application. Denials should occur as early as possible in the application and home study process while recognizing respect for what applicants felt they had to offer and what it meant to them. All denials should be given verbally and in writing. Applicants have no right to appeal an initial denial.

C. Relocation of Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Residence

The foster family/adoptive resource home approval is for the residence in which the foster family/adoptive home resides. If the foster parent/adoptive resource plans to relocate they should notify the Department two weeks in advance prior to relocating. Each approval is specific to the dwelling and if the foster/adoptive family moves the approval is no longer valid as the approval is not transferable. Foster parent/adoptive resources who relocate either within the same county or outside of the county must notify the current approving county office.

1. Within the Current County of Approval

The Foster Family Home/Adoption approval is non-transferable and becomes ineffective if the family moves to another residence. Foster parent/adoptive resources must complete a new application, financial form and any other form for which the move may have created a change in the family circumstances. The worker must make a home visit to the new residence to determine if Minimum Standards are met. An approval shall be issued for the new residence.

2. Outside the Current County of Approval

The current county of approval is responsible for notifying the receiving county of the anticipated relocation. A copy of the foster family

home/adoptive resource study and other relevant information should be forwarded to the receiving county. Foster parent/adoptive resources must complete a new application form. In most cases, the receiving county will evaluate the new residence and if the home meets Minimum Standards it shall be approved.

In some circumstances, generally because the county of origin has children placed in the home, the county of origin may request to maintain a foster family/adoptive resource home which is re-locating to a bordering county. The county of origin must be bordering the new county of residence in order to make such a request. A letter must be written to the receiving county director asking permission for the original county to maintain the home. A statement must be included stating why it will be in the child and/or family's best interests for responsibilities to remain with the county of origin. The statement must also include the county of origin can readily maintain contact with the family and will maintain case responsibility for the resource case. This should be documented in the case record. There must be joint agreement by both counties.

V. SUPERVISION OF FOSTER FAMILY HOMES/ADOPTIVE RESOURCES

The County Department having approval responsibilities must maintain supervision of the foster/adoption home. A home visit is required every six months or more often as the need arises. The resource worker responsible for approving the foster family/adoptive resource home has the responsibility for assuring this requirement is met.

Should a foster/adoptive parent or other adult resident in the foster/adoptive resource home be convicted of a felony or misdemeanor while there are foster children placed in the home, the county resource worker, upon learning of the conviction, must immediately assess the situation to determine the safety of children placed in the home. The county department approving the home has the responsibility for reporting to the juvenile court having jurisdiction of the children in the approving county. The report to the juvenile court should include facts about the felony or misdemeanor and information about the child's placement, including length of placement, quality of care received, strength of attachment the child has to the foster/adoptive parent or family, etc. The county department should include a recommendation in the court report about the child remaining in the placement. Should the court not concur with the recommendation, the county department should contact the Office of Consultation Services.

In the situation above, if children are placed in the home from a county other than the approving county, the approving county is responsible for contacting and informing the county department with responsibility of a child placed in the foster/adoptive home of a person with a felony or misdemeanor conviction. The county with responsibility for children in the home (but not responsible for approving the home), should inform the juvenile court of that county regarding the circumstances of a child's placement in the home.

There will be occasions when child abuse and neglect reports will be received on foster family/adoptive resource homes approved by the Department. The county CPS staff shall conduct the investigation, not the staff person responsible for approving the home.

When no safety threats exist, the ISP team must make the decision whether to leave or remove the placed in the foster family home. For further instructions and information refer to the *Child Protective Services Policies and Procedures, Out-of-Home Protocol*.

Through training and ongoing supervision foster parent/adoptive resources can be helped to understand that it is normal to have problems with children, and that they should not hesitate to call upon the child's worker or resource worker. Foster parent/adoptive resources and workers have different roles and perspectives, but it is only through a cooperative effort that a child's needs are met. Collaborative efforts of the resource worker and the foster care worker sharing information should be ongoing with the best interest of children placed in the foster home at the center of their collaborative efforts.

Staff should encourage foster parent/adoptive resources to promptly report any changes that may impact the care of the children placed in their home. Such as changes in the foster/adoptive family household, (i.e. a person moving into or leaving the home not including foster children), change in marital status, movement of foster children out of the foster/adoptive home, errors in foster care payments, plans to take the child on a trip or vacation out of town or out of state, changes in work schedule, child or foster family/adoptive resource's potential community resource needs, financial situation, and/or health. Early assessment and intervention can often avoid more serious problems later, and any unexplained changes in living arrangements, behavior of foster parent/adoptive resources or foster child, or their appearance, must always be explored. Such changes may be indicators of potential or actual abuse of the foster child.

Foster parent/adoptive resources may need help in understanding that some placements will fail despite their best efforts. The child, his/her problems and past experiences, his/her family's dysfunction, and interference, as well as other extraneous factors are some possible reasons. Otherwise, foster parent/adoptive resources may tend to see themselves as responsible for the failure.

Foster parent/adoptive resources are persons in their own rights with needs and anxieties of their own, who, at times, need attention. With this focus, the resource worker will be more alert to signs of undue stress and/or reduced ability of foster parent/adoptive resources to cope. Some signs that stress is becoming unmanageable are:

- Increased complaining about the child;
- Physical complaints;
- A feeling of being overwhelmed, weighed down and unable to maintain control.

Workers can suggest to foster parent/adoptive resources ways of managing stress better, and can intervene with arrangements for respite care, counseling, etc.

Innovative kinds of rewards for foster parent/adoptive resources are very important. The various forms of appreciation and recognition given to foster parent/adoptive resources for their efforts by workers and the agency are therefore especially meaningful and

range from informal thank yous and thank you letters, to certificates, awards, special recognition days, etc.

There must also be periodic recording of contacts made by the resource worker with foster parent/adoptive resources during the time a child is in the home. These contacts reflect the performance of the foster family home/adoptive resources and the quality of care the children are receiving. Documentation of the resource worker's contacts can be useful should future decisions about the approval status of the home need to be evaluated. Recordings should be in chronological order. In addition to the paper case record containing copies of medicals, approvals, etc. resource cases are tracked in FACTS.

VI. APPLICATION RENEWAL

A foster family home/adoption resource approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance. The resource worker is required to complete a semi-annual visit and a re-approval visit each year. The resource worker should explain the renewal process and discuss the role and responsibilities of the Department with the foster family/adoptive resource.

Alerts are issued by FACTS for foster family/adoptive resource homes requiring re-approval visits, semi-annual visits, CAN clearances on children turning 14, and youth turning 19 for the purpose of fingerprinting. County resource staff should establish their own alert methods for updating medicals, pet vaccinations, CPR, and provisional approvals. This may be done on FACTS by locating roadmap entering manual alerts and following directions in FACTS. FACTS requires a license number and this should be the same as the entity number of FACTS.

A. Semi-Annual Visit

The foster family/adoptive resource home study must be updated semi-annually (i.e. at least every six months) and more frequently when there are significant changes in the foster/adoptive family's situation. The semi-annual visit must take place in the foster/adoptive family home. This visit should address any changes which may have occurred in the home or within the family composition. The smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguisher should be checked semi-annually for operational purposes. The home should be checked to ensure continued compliance with the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes. The semi-annual visit must be documented in the narrative of the foster/adoptive family home record in FACTS.

B. Re-Approval Visit

The re-approval for foster/adoptive family homes must be completed yearly and a recommendation documented regarding re-approval. The re-approval visit must take place in the foster/adoptive family home. This process should be recorded in the narrative recording as it occurs, and must include the age, sex, and number of children for whom re-approval is recommended. It is part of the re-

approval process to assess the foster parent/adoption resource abilities, including strengths and needs, as well as professional judgment as to the type of children they do well with and those children that they do not do well with. Documentation must reflect that the evaluation process has been discussed with the foster parent/adoptive resources and the Minimum Standards are met. The agency's discipline policy should be discussed during the re-approval visit. The smoke alarm, carbon monoxide and fire extinguisher must also be checked. This visit may be documented on the DHR-1446 (refer to Family Services Forms located in iDHR under Out-of-Home Care) or documented in the narrative recording of the foster/adoption family home record in FACTS. The re-approval visit must be documented chronologically and filed in the record.

The foster/adoption family shall submit the completed Application to Foster and/or Adopt - DHR-FCS-704 (refer to Family Services Forms located in iDHR

under Out-of-Home Care), thirty (30) days prior to the expiration date on the current annual approval. The name of one (1) reference who has known the family for at least two (2) years is required. However, it is preferred for two (2) references to be contacted. Foster/adoptive parents should not submit the same references each year.

Foster/adoptive parents are required to complete fifteen (15) hours of in-service training annually after being approved. This is to be documented in FACTS on the provider screen, training needs. This training may include, but is not limited to:

- Child Safety Issues, including CPR and Pediatric and Infant First Aid;
- Crisis Intervention/Engaging Families;
- Effects of Multiple Placements;
- Cultural Sensitivity and Responsive Services;
- Significance of Birth Families;
- Substance Abuse;
- Gang Activity;
- Universal Precautions and Infection Control.

Medicals are to be updated every two (2) years. The Physical Examination for Foster and/or Adoptive Applicants – DHR-FCS-634 shall be completed, including the tests specified, required immunizations and a copy placed in the foster/adoptive family home record. Physical examinations for household members (DHR-FCS-2257) are also required every two (2) years for all other family/household members (e.g., foster/adoptive parents' children, boarders, etc.) stating the person is free from infectious and contagious diseases and up to-date on immunizations. Medicals should be placed in the foster/adoptive family record.

In the event the foster/adoptive family home has a pet (i.e. cat, dog) the yearly rabies vaccination is required. A copy should be maintained in the foster/adoptive family home case file.

Upon completion of the re-approval process, the foster/adoptive parents are issued a new "Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Approval," DHR-FCS-614, or "Related Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Approval," DHR-FCS-615, completed in duplicate with the original copy sent to the foster parents. A copy is to be retained in the case record. The foster parents should also be issued new identification cards.

C. Disapproval or Revocation of Approval

Immediate action may be necessary to protect children from persons or families providing child foster care where safety is an issue. The Department must take action to consider revocation of an approval when an approved foster family/adoptive resource home violates one or more of the Minimum Standards for foster Family Homes: Principles, Regulations, Procedures, 1974, Revised 2007. The resource staff must inform the foster/adoptive parent in writing of the specific deficiencies in meeting the Minimum Standards and specify a deadline not exceeding fifteen days for coming into compliance. The resource worker must re-visit the foster home within fifteen days to review compliance. Information regarding the incident and corrective action plan shall be documented in FACTS.

The Department may revoke an approval if the Department discovers an approved foster/adoptive family has falsified information (by act of commission or omission) before or after the approval has been issued or if an approved family fails to provide information or inform the Department of any disqualifying condition that arises after the approval has been issued. The reasons must be discussed with and confirmed in writing to the foster/adoptive parents. The Department must remove all the foster children from the foster/adoptive family home upon making the decision to revoke the foster/adoption family home approval.

If the home has failed to submit reports or records required by the Department, the Department must make written demand for such records or reports. If the home fails to submit requested material within ten (10) days following such written notice, the approval may be revoked.

The Department may revoke or refuse to renew the approval of any child-care facility, which includes foster family homes, provided that one or more of the items listed below applies (Code of Alabama 1975 §38-7-8).

- (1) Consistently fail to maintain standards prescribed and published by the Department;
- (2) Violate the provisions of the approval issued;
- (3) Furnish or make any misleading or any false statements or report to the Department;
- (4) Refuse to submit to the Department any reports or refuse to make available to the Department any records required by the Department

- (5) in making investigation of foster homes for approval purposes, provided, however, that the Department shall not revoke or refuse to renew a license in such case unless it has made written demand on the person, firm or corporation operating the facility requesting such report or reports and such person, firm or corporation fails or refuses to submit such reports for a period of ten (10) days.
- (6) Fail or refuse to submit to an investigation by the Department;
- (7) Fail or refuse to admit authorized representatives of the Department at any reasonable time for the purpose of investigation;
- (8) Fail to provide, maintain, equip and keep in safe and sanitary condition premises established or used for childcare as required by any law, regulation or ordinance applicable to such facility;
- (9) Refuse to display its approval;
- (10) Fail to maintain financial resources adequate for the satisfactory care of children served in regard to upkeep of premises and provisions for personal care, medical services, clothing, learning experience and other essentials in the proper care, rearing and training of children.

In addition to statutory reasons and Minimum Standards for revoking or not renewing a foster/adoptive family home approval, the Department has established the following reasons for revoking or not renewing a foster family home/adoption resource approval.

- The foster/adoptive parent or household member has been convicted of a felony that involves violence that concerns a child or vulnerable adults or demonstrates a propensity toward violence, unless the Department has evaluated the crime and concluded that the family can remain approved.
- There is an indicated abuse report on a foster/adoptive parent or household member.

When considering revocation of approval for foster/adoptive parents who are under a departmental child abuse/neglect investigative hearing, refer to *Child Protective Services Policies and Procedures*, Out-of-Home Protocol section.

If a foster/adoptive family desires to relinquish their approval, a two-week notice is to be given to the Department.

VII. RE-OPENING A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED FOSTER FAMILY HOME/ADOPTIVE RESOURCE

There may be times when a previously approved foster/adoptive family home may request to have their home re-opened. When a foster/adoptive family home has been closed one year or less, the previous approval for foster/adoptive family may not have expired during the months the home was closed (if the approval for foster/adoptive family homes was not revoked). The following must be verified and recorded by the resource worker:

- the family continues to reside in the same residence;

- the resource worker must conduct a home visit to identify and assess any changes in motivation to foster/adopt, the environment or family;
- observe and assess the safety of the physical environment; and
- document in the narrative the circumstances under which the Department reopened the approval.

When an approved foster/adoptive family home has been closed for one year or more and the approval expired during the time the home was closed, and the previously approved family contacts the Department to become an approved resource again, the resource worker must have the family to complete a new foster/adoptive family home application, financial form, medical (s), complete CAN clearance and criminal history records checks. The resource worker must update the home study and document any changes in the family's circumstances since the closure of the home. The resource supervisor must also review and approve or deny the home study completed by the resource worker. A foster/adoptive family home maybe required to repeat TIPS if the home has been closed for five years or longer. This decision should be made by the County Department.

VIII. PROVISIONAL APPROVAL OF FOSTER FAMILY HOMES

Alabama law allows for certain foster family homes to be provisionally approved for specified children. Therefore, provisional approvals apply to only foster family homes. Provisionally approved homes must meet all of the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes except receipt of the criminal history check. Because the approval of such a home is contingent upon a child's documented placement needs, the policy for approving provisionally approved foster homes is included in the *Out-of-Home Care Policies and Procedures*, section on Placements. Refer to that policy for specific directions on provisionally approved foster homes.

Note: There is no provisional approval to adopt, only to foster.

IX. DOCUMENTATION

A. Entering Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Cases Into FACTS

It is the responsibility of the county resource staff to enter each inquiry and applicant into FACTS. The timeframe for entering any action into FACTS is three (3) days from the date the action occurred.

B. The Foster/Adoptive Home Study

The homestudy must be recorded in narrative form indicating the dates of home and office visits and collateral contacts.

The homestudy is the basis of an initial decision about a family as a resource for children. A homestudy is not expected to review every possible condition that may accompany a child. The homestudy must clearly communicate family capabilities relative to care of children who may be placed in the home. The homestudy should address the applicant's strengths and needs and must be

sufficiently documented to substantiate conclusions. The worker's impressions and assessment should be included at the end of each interview. Documentation should reflect how the foster/adoptive care applicants' TIPS participation and paperwork completion have helped the applicant develop the potential for being a parent to a foster child. The recommendation for approval must state the number, age, and sex of children for whom the home is being approved. It also specifies the recommended period of time the approval covers, not to exceed one year from date of issuance.

X. OTHER PROCEDURES APPLICABLE TO FOSTER FAMILY HOMES/ADOPTIVE RESOURCES

A. Board of Adjustment Claims

The Board of Adjustment is the only means available to pay for damages caused by foster children. Flex funds cannot be used to pay these claims.

The Board of Adjustment encourages the Department to make a recommendation regarding the merits of any claims filed against the Department. The Department has established a committee at the state office to meet periodically to review Board of Adjustment claims filed by foster parents and to make recommendations to the Board of Adjustment regarding payment. The committee consists of three deputy commissioners and an attorney from the Legal Office. The committee will need accident report, police report, proof of insurance, statement of estimated cost for repair, and other pertinent verification data.

All claims for damages by foster children must be submitted to the Board of Adjustment. Each claim will be considered on an individual basis by the department and a recommendation will be made to the Board whether the claim should be paid. Not all claims are recommended for payment and there are many factors that the Department considers when recommending payment of a claim. The Department only makes a recommendation on payment. The final decision whether to pay a claim rest with the Board of Adjustment.

Claims must be submitted within one year of the loss or damage. The Board of Adjustment can waive this one-year requirement, but justification for the delay in presenting the claim must be provided. It is up to the discretion of the Board whether to waive the one-year requirement.

Claim forms may be obtained from each county office. Processing of claims can be expedited if complete documentation is provided with the claim. Foster/adoptive parents should thoroughly explain their claims and give detailed facts about how the damage or loss occurred. If necessary, additional sheets should be attached to the claims form. Proof of replacement or repair costs should be provided. The social worker (child's worker or resource worker) assigned to the case should review the damage as soon as possible after the incident to help substantiate the claim. Pictures of the damage can sometimes assist in verifying the claim. Claimants can also submit statements from other people who have information about the claim or who saw the child damage the

item. Proper completion of the Request for Taxpayer Identification Number form will also expedite payment of approved claims. Even with proper documentation, it may still take several months for an approved claim to be paid.

The laws of Alabama and the Rules of the Board of Adjustment are the final authority regarding Board of Adjustment claims. There is no guarantee that any claim, even if similar to the examples listed above, will automatically be paid. Each claim is considered based on its own particular facts. Claims from people other than foster parents/adoptive resources, for damages caused by foster children, are not usually recommended for payment by the Department.

B. Code of Ethics for Foster Parents

The following is recommended as information to share with foster parents.

The National Foster Parent Association has adopted a code of ethics for foster parents to provide a solid moral and ethical base to strengthen foster family care.

Preamble

Foster family care for children is based on the theory that no unit in our society, other than the family, has ever been able to provide the special qualities needed to nurture children to their fullest mental, emotional, and spiritual development. If, for a certain period, a family ceased to provide these special qualities, substitute care must be used. It is recognized that ideally, foster care is temporary in nature. Parents who provide foster family care must have a commitment, compassion, and faith in the dignity and worth of children, recognize and respect the rights of natural parents, and be willing to work with the child placing agency to develop and carry out a plan of care for the child.

Foster care is a public trust that requires that the practitioners be dedicated to service for the welfare of children, that they utilize a recognized body of knowledge about human beings and their interaction, and that they be committed to gaining knowledge of community resources which promote the well-being of all without discrimination.

Each foster parent has an obligation to maintain and improve the practice of fostering, constantly to examine use, and increase the knowledge upon which fostering is based, and to perform the service of fostering with integrity and competence.

The following Principles are provided in the Foster Parent Code of Ethics:

1. I regard as my primary obligation the welfare of the child served.
2. I shall work objectively with the agency in effecting the plan for the child in my care.
3. I shall keep confidential from the community information pertaining to any child placed in my home.

4. I hold myself responsible for the quality and extent of the services I perform.
5. I accept the reluctance of the child to discuss the past.
6. I treat with respect the finding, views, and actions of fellow foster parents, and use appropriate channels, such as a foster parent organization, to express opinions.
7. I shall take advantage of available opportunities for educating and training designed to upgrade my performance as a foster parent.

C. Confidentiality

The approved foster/adoptive family must exercise good judgment and respect the confidentiality of children in foster care and their families in sharing personal information about the child and/or the child's family. The approved foster/adoptive family may not disclose confidential information regarding the child or his/her family, except as determined through the ISP to promote or to protect the health and welfare of the child. Information should only be shared with the Department or agency placing the child in the care of the approved foster/adoptive family; by order of the court; or as otherwise provided by law. Code of Alabama 1975, Section 38-12A-2 (8) provides the legal bases for foster parents to maintain confidential information.

The foster/adoptive parent should not share personal information concerning the child or the child's family with their neighbors, church members, friends, relatives, etc. who are not specifically authorized to receive the information while the child is in the foster home or after the child leaves the home. The approved foster/adoptive family must store documents (e.g. ISP's, medical records, IEP's, etc.) regarding the child and his/her family in a way that protects the privacy of the child and his/her family.

Confidential information includes sensitive information and documents provided by the Department, court, the child, the child's family and the foster/adoptive parents. It may be about the family's background, the child's and family's medical history or diagnoses, services being provided to the child or family, etc. The foster/adoptive parent may give general information, such as first names, ages, grade in school, etc.

1. Posting of Foster Child Images to Social Networking Websites by Foster Parents/Adoptive Resources

The Department has the responsibility to ensure the safety and privacy of children in the Department's custody is not compromised. Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes state each foster parent is to "maintain the confidentiality of information about children and their families." The standards further state foster parents are to "only use or disclose confidential information concerning children with authorization by the approving agency." Pursuant to Minimum Standards which establish the Department's obligation to maintain the confidentiality of children in the Department's custody; foster parents/adoptive resources shall not post photographs of foster children to social networking

websites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc. The Foster Parents' Bill of Rights (FPBR) does not provide foster parents the right to disclose information about a foster child for social purposes, nor does the FPBR suggest that foster parents may disclose information through social networking sites.

D. Foster Parents/Adoptive Resources as TIPS Co-Leaders

Foster/Adoptive parents who are trained as TIPS co-leaders are to be reimbursed for each week of TIPS co-leader training. Childcare expenses for foster/adoptive parent TIPS co-leaders may be paid directly to the provider.

The form "Parent Compensation for TIPS Co-Leader Training" is to be used to document attendance at training. Each parent co-leader requesting compensation must complete a separate form for each training session, indicating the training dates. This form must be attached to the disbursement authorization. Payment to the parent co-leader is to be made from flex funds. New vendor codes for these parent co-leaders must be set up in order to account for these payments which are considered as taxable income and will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service as such. A signed W-9 must be on file in the county office. The County finance office will code "Y" in the 1099 field.

Payment to the childcare vendor (provider of childcare) is to be paid directly to the provider. Each payment is to be made from the county's flex funds. If needed, set up a vendor code for the childcare provider. This will be considered as taxable income for the foster parent and will be reported to the Federal Revenue Service. A signed W-9 must be on file. The County finance office will code "Y" in the 1099 field.

TIPS certified foster/adoptive parents make a valuable contribution to the training of other foster parent/adoptive resources and staff. Foster/adoptive parents approved through the Department and who assist the Department as Co-leaders are compensated. The rate of compensation for TIPS parent co-leaders has been set at \$15.00 per hour for one hour of preparation and three hours of co-leading a TIPS session for a total rate of \$60.00 per session. Co-leading all ten sessions would result in a total compensation amount of \$600.00 per parent co-leader.

Foster/adoptive parents may assist DHR staff outside their County or other agencies with concurrence from their local Department. The county or childcare placing agency conducting the TIPS session is responsible for paying the foster/adoptive parent's expenses. Each foster/adoptive parent requesting compensation must complete a separate "DHR-DFC-1668, Foster Parent Compensation as Co-Trainer", for each session. Payment is made from Flex Funds. The original form, a copy of the PSD-BFM-682, Disbursement Authorization Form, and a letter to the DHR Finance Division is submitted quarterly to request reimbursement to the flex funds account.

Foster/adoptive parents who are also employees of the Department are not eligible for compensation as Co-leaders. The supervisor of the employee may approve comp time for TIPS sessions held after hours.

E. Foster Parent/Adoptive Resource Mileage Reimbursement

Foster/adoptive parents can be reimbursed for mileage costs incurred in transporting foster children in situations that eliminate the necessity of worker travel (e.g., transporting a child for parental visitation, to court hearings, out of town doctor's visits or other medical appointments, etc.). If a foster/adoptive parent is transporting more than one child at the same time and to the same location, mileage can only be submitted for one child. Routine everyday transportation is considered as "ordinary parental duties" and may not be considered or filed for reimbursement (i.e. school, daycare, local extra curricular activities, local doctor's visits, etc.). Local travel is within the county boundary. Local funds may not be used for foster parent/adoptive resource mileage reimbursement or for transportation costs (e.g., issuing a gasoline voucher to the foster parent/adoptive resource). While using foster/adoptive parents to transport children can be helpful, there are times when it is not appropriate, for example, placement of a child into a new foster/adoptive home. Per diem can also be paid to foster/adoptive parents who transport children outside their home county and are away from their home over six hours.

For securing reimbursement for agency approved travel by foster/adoptive parents, complete travel forms for foster/adoptive parents in the same manner as other travel forms submitted by the County Department (DHR-FD-1147, In-State Travel Expense Voucher). The foster/adoptive parent's official base is the foster/adoptive parent's hometown. Use the community's name as official base for rural residents. Under the Prog/Cost Center Name block on the travel statement, fill in the county name and the words "Foster Parent." For regular foster/adoptive parent travel, use the following codes, ORG:026 SUB-ORG: County location number, OBJT: 301 and RPT-CTG: 0154. Foster/adoptive parents traveling to meetings on the Department's approved training calendar may claim mileage and per diem using the codes provided at the training meeting.

F. Foster Parent/Adoption Resources Responsibilities and Notification Requirements in Using Babysitters

The approved foster/adoptive family, at their own expense, is responsible for identifying and selecting a safe and responsible person to babysit a foster child. This is not to be confused with daycare as babysitting is short-term hours and sporadic supervision provided to children within the foster/adoptive home setting. The foster/adoptive parent should know the youth or adult babysitter to be reliable and mature enough to provide care to the foster child. If the care by the adult or youth babysitter is a regular arrangement, the foster parents must have the written approval of the child's social worker.

Responsibilities of the foster/adoptive parent when using a babysitter:

- The approved foster/adoptive family must use a responsible person 14 years of age or older for short-term intermittent childcare.

- The babysitter must have an available method, i.e. telephone, through which to contact the foster parent/adoptive resource in the event of emergency.
- The foster/adoptive parent should assure the babysitter is capable of assuming childcare responsibilities required to meet the needs of each child in the foster/adoptive home.
- Assure the babysitter does not provide overnight care.
- A babysitter does not need to complete a criminal history background check.
- For overnight care in a foster/adoptive family home, the babysitter must be 19 or older and a criminal history check is required.

G. Foster Parent Written Explanation Regarding Placement

Foster Parents have the right to be informed of the plan concerning the child placed in their home prior to the placement. Code of Alabama 1975, Section 38-12A-2 (Foster Parents' Bill of Rights) provides foster parents with the right to a written summary prior to the child being placed in their home. In emergency placements where time does not allow for a written summary, the department should provide such explanation within 72 hours, in accordance with Code of Alabama 1975, section 38-12A-2, and consistent with the ISP policy, requiring an ISP within 72 hours of placement.

Foster parents should be informed of basic information on the child to include health, education, developmental concerns, emotional/mental issues, family history, and other issues involving the child. Confidential information shall be kept confidential by the foster parents, except as determined through the ISP process to promote the health and welfare of the child. Child welfare staff must tell the foster parents at the time of placement that any and all information provided on a child is confidential.

There is no provision in the Foster Parent Bill of Rights that allows the Department to release written information to foster parents about the parents of children in care. Personal information regarding the birth parents should not be included on the written summary provided to the foster parents. The Department has no authority to release Social Security numbers of the parents of children in care on the written information form or otherwise. The whereabouts of the parents maybe included to the extent that it is of value to placing the child. Information on the parents will be shared/covered during the ISP.

To “foster” means to help take care of children and help them grow and develop. The following information is needed for the foster parent to be able to parent children placed in their home and assist them in continued development of their own individuality and personality. The following is information per the Foster Parent Bill of Rights which should be included in the written summary of information concerning the child and to the extent the information is available and accessible to the department.

1. Basic identifying information on the child

- Name
- Age and date of birth
- Sex
- Ethnic background
- Religious preference

2. Health

It is important for foster parents to have knowledge of any health-related problems the child may be experiencing to the extent that the child welfare worker knows of them. While all children have health needs, some will have serious health problems. To the extent available and known by DHR, foster parents need to be informed of any known health issue a child may be experiencing. Foster parents will need to be made aware of the following:

- All health problems including allergies, bedwetting, emotional problems;
- Both prescribed medications and regularly administered over the counter medications, the time and dosage of the medication and the purpose of the medicine;
- Special diets or food allergies;
- Pediatrician's name and/or primary health care provider along with the telephone number; and
- Verification of health insurance-private insurance, Medicaid card or Medicaid number.

3. Education

School age children entering out of home care can experience difficulty with a change in schools and the foster parents have a right to certain information to help the child make as successful change in schools as possible. Foster parents shall be informed of the child's past educational experiences along with being provided the information listed below.

- Name and location of the prior school attended before entry into foster care;
- Be informed of the school arrangements made for the child including records being transferred;

- Advised of special arrangements including special education services; and
- Informed if an Individualized Education Program is in place, if known by child welfare worker.

4. Developmental Concerns

Children should exhibit certain developmental actions and behaviors appropriate to their age. Foster parents must be informed of a child's developmental functioning, regardless of the child's age. It is important for the foster parent to be advised of the items listed below, to the extent known or when they are available.

- Developmental delays;
- Drug/alcohol usage by the child or history of violent behaviors;
- Sexually active child.

5. Emotional and Mental Issues

Emotional and mental problems can be the outcome of many different experiences in a child's life. Emotional and mental stress is the feelings of being overwhelmed by life's tasks, losing control or worrying about the future. In order for a child to regain happiness they will need direction with their individual thoughts, feelings and actions. The first step is for the foster parents to assist the child in understanding how and why they hurt. Secondly, the child will need to see they are not alone. Children need guidance and will learn from others. Foster parents will need to be provided information and/or training that will assist them in caring for the children in their home. At a minimum, foster parents need the following information:

- Informed if the child was sexually or physically abused resulting in the child exhibiting behaviors due to the abuse they encountered;
- Advised of any fears the child may have (i.e., the dark, phobias, pets);
- Notified of counseling/therapy the child receives including how often the sessions occur, where the sessions take place, and how the child will get to the sessions; and
- Informed of training available to address specific issues with children in their care.
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6. Family History

Family History is vital in keeping the child connected to their birth family. Information shared with the foster parents will help in building the fullest possible picture of the child and the child's family background specific to each child and to maintain family circumstances. It is vital that visitation with family members be shared with the foster parents as soon as it is known by the department.

- Visitation schedule as directed in the ISP including how often the visits will occur, where the visits will take place, and transportation arrangements to and from the visits;
- If there are other siblings not placed in this foster home a brief explanation of their whereabouts including any visitation arrangements with the child in the specific foster home.

7. DHR Involvement With a Child

Foster Parents need insight into the underlying factors that brought a child into foster care. Foster parents need to be clear about the expectations that may be placed on them. Foster parents should be advised of and provided with the following:

- The date the child initially entered foster care;
- How many placements the child has experienced;
- The name and telephone number of the social worker and the supervisor;
- In the event of an emergency, how to reach personnel after hours;
- The name of the GAL, if known at placement;
- If the child is being removed from another foster home, an explanation as to why;
- The amount of board rate of the child and when to expect the first payment;
- A copy of the current ISP, or if not available, informed/invited to the ISP meeting;
- The permanency plan for the child if already agreed to by the ISP team;
- Estimated length of time of the placement;
- The child's personal belongings including clothes;
- Issues with the child (i.e., diet, counseling, etc.); and
- An appropriate car seat, if needed.

H. Recruitment Incentive Fee

In an effort to increase the number of foster/adoptive family homes which supports Alabama's best child welfare practice for least restrictive, community-based placements, a Recruitment Incentive Fee is available. This does not apply to adoptive only homes. There is no state funding for this service, counties may use flex funds or public general funds for purchase of this service through vendor payment. Legal Services, Finance Division and Office of Audit have approved the following procedure.

- The County Department will need to determine amount of money to be used during a designated period of time based on need. Ex. If a County Department determined that there was a need for 5 additional foster homes, and all homes were recruited by currently approved foster parents, the county would designate up to \$500.00 to be used.
- Only currently approved foster/adoptive parents are eligible for the recruitment incentive fee.
- Payment of the recruitment incentive fee only occurs after the referred home has been approved and a child placed in the home.
- The recruitment incentive fee for referral of a family cannot exceed \$100.00.
- Each county will need to set up a system for documenting when and by whom referrals are made, when a referred family has been approved and a child actually placed in the home.
- For payment to the foster/adoptive parents, the Foster Parent Recruitment Incentive Fee form must be completed, attached to the disbursement authorization, and submitted to the county finance office.
- The incentive fee can be paid from flex funds or any Public General Account
- The object of expenditure will be "miscellaneous" (6008). A separate vendor code will need to be set up for the foster parent, if necessary. A signed W-9 must be on file in the finance office prior to any check being issued. A form 1099 will be issued when any taxable income exceeds \$600.00 in a calendar year.

I. Reporting and Investigation of Child Abuse/Neglect in Approved Foster/Adoptive Homes

Child Welfare staff must refer to and follow *Child Protective Services Policies and Procedures*, Out-of-Home Protocol section when CA/N reports are received on children in out of home care. Investigative protocol for the following types of foster care facilities is outlined in the following sections:

1. Foster/Adoptive Homes Approved by DHR;

2. Foster Homes Approved by a Private Child Placing Agency or Other State Agency;
3. Institutions and Group Homes Licensed by DHR;
4. Institutions and Group Homes Licensed/Certified by Other State Agencies.

J. Requirements Regarding Mandatory Reporting

Any member of the foster/adoptive family household, independent contractor, or volunteer who is in the approved foster/adoptive family home, must report the pertinent information to the Department upon reasonable cause to believe any foster child with whom the individual comes in contact has suffered abuse or neglect or that any adult with whom the individual comes in contact has abused or neglected a child. All incidents of abuse and neglect of the foster child brought to the attention of the Department will be investigated promptly.

Code of Alabama 1975 Section 38-9-10 states failure for mandatory reporters to knowingly or willingly fail to make a report of abuse and neglect as required by law is guilty of a misdemeanor and shall upon conviction be punished by imprisonment not more than six months or fined \$500.00.

K. Request to Release Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Study

Foster Family Home/Adoption Resource Studies approved and current may be released provided the foster/adoptive parents have signed a release of information form. Foster/adoptive family home studies may be released to other state child welfare agencies, other child placing agencies and approved foster/adoptive family parents. The suitability letters from the Office of Criminal History Checks (ABI/FBI) must be removed from the home study as they are protected under the law and can not be released. The letters of reference and Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry Clearance form must also be removed from the home study prior to the release. In the event the foster family home is closed, the Department should not release the record without written consent of the foster/adoptive parents.

As per Adoption Policy, no adoption home study approved and current within last 12 months can be considered for release to other state child welfare agencies, licensed child-placing agencies, or Private Independent Practitioners. In order to release an approved adoption home study, a written request should be received from the approved adoption resource and the Department is to collect the required \$300.00 fee (Code of Alabama 26-10A). Refer to Adoption Policy, Application & Home Studies for further information.

L. Termination of Placement

A two-week notice must be given by the foster/adoptive parent to the agency to terminate a placement, except in extenuating or emergent circumstances. The

worker must determine the reason for the requested move and evaluate the home in relation to continued use and future placements.

When the Department terminates a foster family home/adoptive resource placement, the foster/adoptive parents must be given advance notice and a reason for the termination except when conditions occur which indicate that immediate removal is needed. Examples would be an indicated report of abuse/neglect or an otherwise endangering of the health, safety, or welfare of the child or when there is a court order. Unless the removal is immediate, the worker is to help the foster/adoptive parents accept the need for the child's move and give assistance with the preparation of the child for his removal.

M. Training/In-Service/CPR/Water Safety For Foster Family-Adoptive Resources

All foster/adoptive parents are required to complete the thirty (30) hours of Trauma Informed Partnering for Permanence and Safety or Deciding Together as provided by the Department prior to being approved. Additionally, and in order to maintain the foster family home approval, each foster/adoptive parent must complete fifteen (15) hours of in-service training yearly. This is to be documented in FACTS on the provider screen, training needs.

County Departments shall work in cooperation with their local foster/adoptive parent association to provide opportunities for foster/adoptive parents to obtain their on-going training hours. Alabama DHR also has partnerships with other agencies and groups e.g. AFAPA, APAC, etc. to provide local, regional, and statewide training that can often be provided to foster/adoptive parents at little or no cost to the foster/adoptive parents. Training hours may be completed through a variety of methods (attending an on-site training, watching video presentation, participating in on-line training, reading a book/journal article). Training hours cannot be solely completed through online training. When training is completed through a mechanism where no certification of training is provided e.g. video, book, journal article, etc., the foster/adoptive parent shall obtain prior approval from the resource worker that the content is appropriate. The resource staff will determine how many hours of credit will be awarded for the training. Once the material is viewed, read, etc. the foster/adoptive parent shall prepare a written summary of the contents. This summary will be placed in their foster/adoptive family record.

CPR certification is also required by each foster/adoptive parent. The purpose of CPR certification is to better assure the health and well being of children placed with a foster/adoptive parent. The Department shall have a copy of each foster/adoptive parent's certification and ensure that it is valid for the period of the foster family/adoptive resource home approval. CPR training hours may be counted toward the fifteen (15) hours of required annual training. The CPR certification should match the age of a child the foster/adoptive family home is approved for.

There are three types of CPR: Infant and Toddler for ages birth to age 2; Pediatric for ages two to eight; and Adult for ages eight and older. The Department can pay for CPR certification for foster/adoptive parents. Counties are encouraged to partner with local providers to arrange training as

economically as possible. The County DHR may use local funds to cover the cost of CPR training for their foster/adoptive parents and later request reimbursement from SDHR Finance Division. To request reimbursement, the county should send a memo with supporting documentation, including the paid bill and disbursement to SDHR Finance Division. When a county does not have sufficient local funds to cover the cost of CPR training, the county may submit the bill directly to the SDHR Finance Division along with a memo requesting payment be made to the provider.

Foster/adoptive parents shall have a current CPR certification from the American Red Cross, American Heart Association, National Safety Council or Health & Safety Institute. In addition, foster/adoptive parents may maintain CPR certification training from a certified CPR instructor such as local fire departments – EMT's, nursing instructors at local junior colleges/other nursing programs or County Extension Offices. CPR certification completed through on-line training is not accepted for foster/adoptive parent approval.

Basic water safety is required by each foster/adoptive parent who owns a pool or hot tub or who lives near a body of water i.e. pond, lake, etc. The purpose of basic water safety is to assure the safety and well being of children placed in foster care. The Department shall have a copy of each foster/adoptive parent's water safety certification and ensure it is valid for the period of the foster/adoptive family home approval. Basic water safety hours may be counted toward the fifteen (15) hours of required annual training. The maximum certification for basic water safety is three years.

The County DHR may use local funds to cover the cost of basic water safety training for their foster/adoptive parents and then request reimbursement from SDHR Finance Division. To request reimbursement for basic water safety training, the county should send a memo with supporting documentation, including the paid bill and disbursement to SDHR Finance Division. When a county does not have sufficient local funds to cover the cost of basic water safety training, the county may submit the bill directly to the SDHR Finance Division along with a memo requesting that payment be made to the provider.

The foster/adoptive parents shall have a current basic water safety card from the American Red Cross, YMCA, Therapeutic Recreation Center, scuba/dive shop or other authorized provider certified in water safety training. Basic water safety completed through on-line training is not accepted for foster/adoptive parent approval.

The county department will not be responsible for paying for or providing ladders to foster/adoptive family homes that have upstairs bedrooms. The county office is also not responsible for providing smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors or fire extinguishers to foster family homes.

The county department will also need thermometers to measure water temperature and measuring tapes to measure height of a fence surrounding pools and crib railings (slats on babies' cribs). Counties may use local funds to purchase a limited number of these items. A digital, instant-read thermometer for testing water temperature is recommended.

N. Use of Other Counties'/Agencies Foster Family Homes/Adoptive Resources

Each County Department has a responsibility to establish its own foster/adoptive family home program. County Departments should not request the use of a foster/adoptive family home in another county or agency (i.e. Catholic Social Services, AGAPE, etc.) unless the child must be temporarily removed from the county for protective reasons or there are no immediate appropriate resources available in the county of responsibility to meet the child's needs.

FACTS provides counties the capability of viewing all statewide placement resources. Counties must contact and receive approval from the resource supervisor or worker in the county in which the placement resource is located before proceeding with any placement in the home. **A county should not place a child in another county's approved foster/adoptive home without the approving county's agreement.**

The county department requesting the use of another county/agency home shall submit a summary stating the ISP goals for the birth family and child, expected length of foster care, and the reasons for the need of an out-of-county or another agency placement.

Prior to placement, a decision must be made regarding which county/agency will provide supervision for the child. The requesting county/agency must initiate a County Department/Agency Placement Agreement, PSD-BFC-750, in duplicate, copies to be signed by both county/agency directors, or employee authorized to sign the Director's name. Planning for a child and board payment continues to be the responsibility of the placing county or agency.

Child placing agencies must be licensed and approved in accordance with licensing standards and be in compliance with the Civil rights Act of 1964 prior to placement of child by the Department in a foster home approved by a child placing agency.

APPENDIX

Effective January 01, 2011
Revised September 7, 2017

Suggested Timeframe for Activities Involved in Approving Foster Family Homes/Adoptive Resources

Activity	Response From County	Timeframe for Completion
SDHR Inquiry Received	County Follow-up Within Ten Working Days From Notice from SDHR	Within 30 days, county reports back to SDHR on status of inquiry.
Initial Inquiry to County	Depends on Counties system for taking inquiries. If a resource worker does inquiries, more detailed information is gathered at initial contact.	Initial Inquiry entered in FACTS within 3 days. Within 10 working days action should be taken on inquiry, e.g., send application or determine not to.
ICPC Referrals from other states for a home study	High Priority; Completed within 60 days; Reference <i>ICPC Policy & Procedures</i> , page 16. Because the federal legislation is ICPC, this is in <i>ICPC Policy & Procedures</i> .	Sixty-day time frame includes the date request is received at SDHR. County has fifty calendar days to complete, and return the <u>home study</u> to SDHR ICPC Office. (Education and training is excluded in the timeframe for these cases).
Application Received	Check for completeness of application and any obvious <u>Minimum Standards</u> that are not met or cannot be met within six months.	Within 3 days of receipt, enter the date application received in FACTS. Within seven work days from date application received, acknowledge receipt of application, phone or mail.
Application Not Received	Give 90 days from date of inquiry/sending of application.	Close on FACTS Closure History Tab/Resource Directory Screen
Develop homes in county to meet needs of children	Counties approve homes within the counties, except in exceptional situations	Confirm that residence is in county. If not refer applicant to county of residence.

Scheduling of TIPS or Deciding Together	Determine when TIPS is scheduled next. If the county does not have a TIPS class beginning within 3 months from receipt of application, either schedule Deciding Together or consider adjoining county's TIPS class.	Within 60 days of the receipt of the application, a plan should be in place for TIPS Training or Deciding Together. Because forward movement is contingent upon the TIPS /DT sessions, a prospective resource should not be asked to begin to provide other approval requirements until the third week of the TIPS /DT session.
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Activity	Response	Timeframe for Completion
Criminal History Checks	Arrange for live-scan or fingerprint card process after applicant's exposure to expectations in TIPS.	This should occur no earlier than the third week of TIPS and be completed no later than the sixth week of TIPS.
Verification and Assessment of Applicants	Areas to be considered are age, marital status, health, financial stability, employment, motivation, and CA/N Central Registry Clearance.	No later than the third week of TIPS /DT these areas should begin to be reviewed. By the time the home will be approved (six months) the personal characteristics shall be met.
Determining and documenting that home meets physical facilities requirements; <u>first in-home family consultation</u> ; home study.	Home Study completed during TIPS /DT process. All <u>Minimum Standards</u> must be met by time home is ready for and can be approved. The applicants are allowed to make any changes to their home to meet <u>Minimum Standards</u> .	The first in-home family consultation is completed as soon after the family profile is received. The process of determining whether the physical home of the applicant(s) meets standards should begin by the <u>fourth</u> week of TIPS /DT and should be complete by the eight week unless there is a documented reason for a delay.
Individual interviews	These are held before TIPS /DT is finished to allow time for incomplete information or other issues to be addressed	Individual interviews with each spouse should occur after the first family consultation and before the <u>eighth</u> week of TIPS.
Required Training Other than TIPS /DT	This includes CPR Training for all applicants; Water Safety for applicants with swimming pools or whose home is	CPR Training will need to be coordinated with the Red Cross or the agency that will provide CPR training. Since all applicants will need this,

	near a body of water; and, medically fragile training for those who provide care to a medically fragile child. All required training must be complete before approval of the home.	<u>arrangements for the training</u> to occur should be made by the fifth week of TIPS /DT. The Training should be completed within six months of the receipt of the application. The individualized trainings should occur within six months of the receipt of the application.
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Activity	Response	Timeframe for Completion
Final(second) family consultation	The purpose is to address intrinsic issues with the family. By this time the physical requirements of the home would have been addressed.	This occurs after the end of the TIPS/DT sessions are complete.
Reference Contacts	Three references from unrelated source. Additional references from minister, employer, and relatives should be obtained.	Occurs only after the worker is reasonably certain that the applicant will be recommended for approval. This would be after TIPS sessions are completed and all paperwork is received; after criminal history checks are back and a suitability letter has been sent; after Central Registry checks are completed; after medicals are received and after family and individual consultations are complete.
Disposition	The home study is complete, all required documents are in the record and reference contacts have been made and documented.	Within 30 days from the completion of all requirements and documentation of this, the home should be either approved or other recommendations made. In the case of adoption, the home study is submitted to SDHR Office of Permanency for a decision within 30 days of receipt of family's file. The recommended time for a home to be approved is six months from the date the application is received.

STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

COUNTY: _____

APPLICATION TO FOSTER AND/OR ADOPT

DATE: _____

PLEASE PRINT USING BLACK OR BLUE INK AND ATTACH ADDITIONAL PAGES AS NEEDED.

Type Application Initial or Re-approval to Foster/Adopt Adopt

Applicant 1

Applicant 2

Name	Last	First	Middle	Last	First	Middle		
	Aliases, Maiden Name, Previous Married Name			Aliases, Maiden Name, Previous Married Name				
Residence	House #	Street	City	County	State	Zip	Phone	
	<input type="checkbox"/> House	<input type="checkbox"/> Apartment	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Home	No. of Bedrooms	<input type="checkbox"/> Own	<input type="checkbox"/> Rent		
If Married	Date of Marriage			Place of Marriage				
	Applicant 1			Applicant 2				
Birth Date & Place								
U.S. Citizen?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					
If Naturalized	Date		Serial Number		Date		Serial Number	
	Nationality/ Descent							
Religious Preference								
Church Affiliation								
Previous Marriage(s) (List all)	Date		Place		Date		Place	
	Terminated		How		Date		Place	
Education	High School			High School				
	College		Other		College		Other	

	Applicant 1	Applicant 2		
Employment	Occupation	Occupation		
	Employer	Employer		
	Address Number	Address Number		
	Phone	Phone		
	Length of Present Employment	Length of Present Employment		
	Social Security #	Social Security #		
Applicant's Children & Other Household Members	Name	DOB	Grade Completed	Relationship
	1			
	2			
	3			
	4			
Specific Serious or Chronic Illness of Any Household Member	Name	Age When Occurred	Condition/Diagnosis	
	1			
	2			
	3			
	4			
Applicants' Children Not in Home & Where They Live				
References:	Name	Address	Phone Number	
Three unrelated references				
Relatives				

Employer or Supervisor of each applicant	
Friend	
Minister, if one	
Length of Residence In Alabama	How long do you expect to reside in Alabama?
Have you applied for a child with any other agency? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes If "Yes," provide the date applied & the agency's name/address	
Date:	Name/Address
Have you previously fostered/adopted? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes If yes, where?	
If you have previously adopted, date the Final Decree of Adoption was issued.	
Reasons and/or Motivation to Foster/Adopt	
Child/Children Desired	How Many? Age(s) Sex

ALL APPLICANTS

I authorize the Department of Human Resources to release information regarding me contained in the State Central Registry on Child Abuse/Neglect to foster/adoption staff of the Department of Human Resources who may use that information in making decisions related to my application to foster/adopt a child. I further release the Department of Human Resources from all responsibility and liability for the release and use of the information as it pertains to the foster/adoption application process.

Applicant's Signature

Date

Applicant's Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date

AGREEMENT FOR APPLICANTS SEEKING A FOSTER FAMILY HOME APPROVAL

We hereby agree to the following if we receive an approval to maintain a foster family home.

1. To accept children only through the State of Alabama Department of Human Resources.
2. To work in partnership with the Department of Human Resources providing care for children and cooperating with said Department in maintaining prescribed standards.
3. To report to the Department of Human Resources any changes of address 14 days prior to move, sickness in family or changes in family composition, and sickness of or accident to children whom we may receive for care.
4. To allow the representatives of the Department of Human Resources to visit the foster family home whenever desired.
5. To treat the children who we may receive for care as well as we would treat members of our family.
6. To obtain permission of the Department of Human Resources for all visits of the children outside of the State and for visits within the State in excess of three (3) days.
7. That we will work in partnership with the Department of Human Resources, children and their families, and the child and family planning team in developing, implementing, maintaining and evaluating permanency goals for children established by the ISP team. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the State/County Department of Human Resources to carry out any and all planning responsibility for children. Placements for children may include returning them to their own homes, a relative's home, transfer to other homes or a facility, adoption, kinship/guardianship or any other planning decisions that must be made in the planning and care for children.
8. That in working with the Department of Human Resources, we will maintain confidentiality to protect the personal and intimate information of everyone in accordance with the Code of Alabama, 1975.
9. That we will not file a petition in any court pertaining to any child placed in our home by the Department of Human Resources, or take any steps toward the adoption of the child, or take any steps to obtain any order granting us legal or physical custody or placement of the child, without the **WRITTEN CONSENT** of the State Department of Human Resources.
10. To give the Department of Human Resources adequate notice if we want a child removed from our home.

I have read the above Foster Family Home Agreement, understand it, and will abide by its contents. I certify that the information given on this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any misrepresentation of information may be grounds for denial of the application or revocation of an approval.

Applicant's Signature

Date

Applicant's Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Required Forms for Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Records:

DHR-FCS 704 – Application to foster and/or adopt
DHR-FCS 705 – Financial Statement for foster and/or adoptive applicants
DHR-FCS 634 – Physical examination for foster and/or adoptive applicant
DHR-FCS 2257 - Physical examinations for all household members
DHR-DFC-1598 Child Abuse/Central Registry Clearance on foster/adoptive parents and all household members age 14 and older
DHR-CHC-2178 and DHR-CHC-2174 DHR Criminal History Check Application DHR Fee Paid
DHR 2158 HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (one time signature)
DHR-FCS-614 – Foster Home/Adoptive Resource Approval
DHR-FCS 2256 – Foster Parent Assurances and Fire Extinguisher, Smoke Alarm and Carbon Monoxide Detector

Required Documentation in Foster Family Home/Adoptive Resource Records:

Home Study
Copy of TIPS or DT Certificate

Family Portfolio which includes decision page, partnership profile, references, strengths/needs worksheets from each meeting, professional development plan, notes from family consultation, Eco Map, Partnership Development plan, letter(s) to birth parent, letter(s) to child, photographs of family to share with birth families/child

Copy of all marriages, divorces & separations or death
Copy of suitability letters
Copy of current CPR cards
Copy of current first aid, if applicable
Copy of current water safety, if applicable
Copy of current pet vaccinations, if applicable
Documentation of specialized training, if applicable, i.e. medical fragile, TFC, etc.

Documentation of semi-annual & re-approval home visits (DHR-FCS-1446 Application Renewal Foster Home for Children) is in compliance with Minimum Standards (refer to the Physical Facilities section of the Minimum Standards)

Copy of letter, if applicable, from licensed inspector regarding unvented fuel fire space heaters

Documentation in FACTS of the 15 hours of yearly training