

FOSTER CARE SERVICES: Placement Resources

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Placement Resources

When a child is initially placed in care or if circumstances require that the child be placed again, a safe and appropriate placement resource must be identified. The particular placement selected is determined by the overall goal of the placement, the needs of the child and birth family (as related by blood, marriage, or adoption), and the availability of the resource. Having a good understanding of the child's individual needs and the strengths of the placement resource is critical to a decision toward making the first placement the best for the child. Ideally, placements should be in close proximity to the parents to promote parent/child visitation. The most appropriate, least restrictive setting offers the child an opportunity to be placed where there will be a minimum of disruption to family life and an assurance that the child will be afforded safety, permanence and overall well-being. The selected placement resource should also be consistent with the best interest and special needs of the child.

Exploration of all possible relative placement resources is critical and must be expedited in order to maintain and promote family continuity. The child's extended family may, also, offer permanency to a child. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) recognizes that a fit and willing relative caretaker may be able to provide the best permanent living arrangement for the child. Such a placement plan honors and preserves the child's right to maintain ties with his/her family, provided that the safety and general well-being of the child is not jeopardized. Further, in preserving the integrity of the child's family ties, the agency is supporting and promoting his/her need to feel and experience a sense of belonging.

The intent of family continuity and permanency planning is to focus on achieving a level of stability in the child's life. By assuring that neglectful, abusive or other threatening situations are prevented, and that the child is safe and protected in a wholesome living environment, the child's permanency is assured. This approach recognizes and accepts that the prevailing problems/needs and other issues that led to the out-of-home placement of the child will require the support of a vast network of resources to help the family achieve reunification or another permanency plan for the child. This means that all persons concerned about the child's wellbeing (including birth family members, close friends, foster parents and other stakeholders) must work cooperatively in this regard.

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1004.1.1

Placements in Relative Homes

These policy requirements offer guidelines for deciding which relative resource, if any, is the most appropriate for the child. The policy emphasizes the importance of identifying family members, who may be appropriate to have a continuous positive role in the life of the child as a placement resource. It also provides procedural and good practice guidelines for:

1. Working within the child's birth family and community;
2. Conducting Comprehensive Child and Family Assessments (CCFA), Relative Care Assessment (RCA), including criminal records checks and drug screens to assure the child's safety and well being;
3. Accessing any support services that may be required (i.e., child care, financial support, mental health, medical and other services, etc.);
4. Interpreting and implementing mandates for monitoring or supervising the placement; and
5. Conducting case reviews and other permanency planning activities towards the targeted outcome of achieving permanency for the child as quickly as possible.

1004. 1.1

Requirement

When a child must be separated from his or her parents because of abuse, neglect, dependency, abandonment, or special medical circumstances, preference is given to an adult relative over a non-related caregiver when determining a placement for the child. The relative caregiver must meet all relevant state child protection standards and the placement must support the safety, permanency and well-being of the child when the child is placed in the legal custody of the child welfare system.

1. The Case Manager discusses maternal and paternal (including putative) extended families with the parents and child.
2. The Case Manager reviews the Basic Information Worksheet to identify the names of household members, significant others, absent parents and other client information. Note: Information may also be used to assist with the Reasonably Diligent Search requirement.

1004. 1.1 PROCEDURES

The child is placed with a relative (as defined by blood, marriage [divorce does not sever the degree of relationship] or adoption) if possible. If a relative is not immediately identified, the SSCM must continually inquire about relatives (including putative relatives) as a possible placement resource for the child. Note: If putative relatives are identified, establish paternity through DNA testing or legitimating.

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1. Placement of the child with a relative may be made immediately following the child's placement in foster care. The Social Services Supervisor must approve the placement and there must be a documented and satisfactory history (CPS), home safety check (See 1004.1.3 – Safety and Home Assessment Components), and a local criminal records check on all household members eighteen (18) or older.
2. A Relative Care Assessment (RCA) is completed on any relative who expresses interest in being a resource for the child, unless court requirements restrict or prevent such relative from being considered as a placement resource. The RCA provides an assessment on the relative's caregiver's ability to meet the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the child.
3. The Relative Care Assessment (RCA) shall be completed within thirty days of the referral date (to an approved CCFA provider or Out Of Town Inquiry – OTI) or within thirty days of the initial placement date with the relative (Case Manager placing the child completes the RCA).
4. The Social Services Case Manager must discuss and provide a copy of the relative care giver handouts (brochure etc.). These are tools that provide information on the supports provided to relatives and the requirements for becoming a relative foster parent. Document the date that the care giver received the information in the case record.
5. The Social Services Case Manger must inform the relative of the types of relative placements and supports available for the child. There are two types of relative placements:
 - a. **Relative Home** refers to placement in the home of a relative who does not receive a foster care per diem for the care of the child, but may receive an Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) or other benefits. The child is in the legal custody of the Department.
 - b. **Relative Foster Home** refers to the home of a relative, which meets the same requirements as a regular foster home and to which a foster care per diem reimbursement is made. The child is in the legal custody of the Department.
6. Explain to the relative that they may be eligible to receive the ERR pending their approval as a foster parent if all eligibility requirements are met. The relative may not receive double funding (ERR and Foster Care Per Diem) in one month.
7. The Case Manager encourages the family to participate in a Family Team Meeting (FTM) held within nine (9) days of the child's placement and at any point in the life of the case. The FTM provides an opportunity for family members to come together to discuss the critical issues and circumstances which led to the child's placement. Family members are encouraged to discuss what step/actions are required to reunite the child with the family and how each member can participate in assuring the child's safety, stability, permanency and well- being.

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At the FTM, the Case Manager:

- a. Discusses and obtains contact and any other information concerning who might be a potential placement resource (short-term and permanent, if necessary, for the child)
 - b. Helps the family to reach a consensus about resources, and decide who would most likely help expedite the child's placement.
8. The social services case manager must make every effort to obtain as much information as possible about the child, the parents, and the relative resource(s) before the child is placed in the home.

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Relative Care Assessment (RCA)

1004. 1.2

Requirement

An in-depth Relative Care Assessment (RCA) is completed expeditiously on relative resources that wish to provide a home for a child in agency custody, with written notification sent informing such person(s) of the agency's decision. The Relative Care Assessment (RCA) must be completed within thirty days of the referral date for the RCA (applies to Out of County Evaluations (OTI) and referrals made to Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA) Providers); however, a child may be placed in the relative home immediately if there is a documented and satisfactory history (CPS), home safety check, and a local criminal records check on all household members eighteen (18) or older. If the placing case manager completes the RCA, it shall be completed within thirty days of the initial placement with the relative. A Social Services Case Manager or an approved CCFA/Wrap-Around Provider may complete the RCA. The list for approved CCFA/Wrap-Around providers is at: <http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/fostercare>.

1004. 1.2 PROCEDURES

The Case Manager completes the following for potential relative placement resources:

Note: The following must be completed prior to placement with the relative.

The SSCM:

1. Makes a preliminary phone contact with the relative to determine their interest and suitability in being a placement resource, to explain the process and to determine if an immediate placement is possible.
2. Documents that a relationship by blood, marriage or adoption exists between the child and caregiver prior to completing the Relative Care Assessment (RCA). This requirement includes establishing paternity through DNA testing or legitimating.
3. Schedules a home visit for the same day, if possible. (Initial Home Visit)
4. Determines with Supervisor if he/she will conduct the RCA.
 - a. May request assistance from another county, if relative resides outside of county. See Section 1004.1.7 for Out Of Town Inquiries (OTI).
 - b. Initiate a referral for the RCA to an approved CCFA provider.
 - c. If the relative resides in another state, refer to Section 1010.4 ICPC Procedures for Placement out of Georgia.
5. Completes as much information as possible on Form 450 - Part F. Significant Others Not in Household.

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6. Discusses the relative placement with the child and asks them to share their feelings regarding the potential placement. Explore any potential issues that may prevent placement.
7. Screens the relative and other household members age 18 and older as required in Internal Data System (IDS) online for: "Master Index" and "Other Links" for CPS (PSDS Screening), Sex Offender Registry, Department of Corrections Query, Parolee Database and Shines Screens.
8. Makes the home visit and **during the visit** the Case Manager or approved CCFA provider:
 - a. Informs the relative of all possible supports available to the caregiver.
 - b. Reviews the Supports for Relative Caregivers Resource Guide. Provides the relative caregiver with a copy for their records. Posted at:
<http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR-DFCS/menuitem.8237042e9dbda3aa50c8798dd03036a0/?vgnextoid=35b7dcf444674010VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCD&vgnnextchannel=69e92b48d9a4ff00VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCD> :
 - c. Discusses with the relative the Enhanced Relative Rate pending approval of their home as a Relative Foster Home.
 - d. Requirements for becoming a Relative Foster Home are presented and the pre-service training requirements are also discussed with the relative. The Case Manager or CCFA Provider must document the relative's agreement to accept the placement of the child (ren) pending approval as a relative foster parent. Explain to the relative that they may be approved to receive the ERR until the foster home approval is complete if all eligibility requirements are met. The relative must be approved as a relative foster home within 180 days of the date that the child was placed in the home.
 - e. Provides the relative with contact information, the placement services Information guide (A Relative Caregiver Needs To Know about DFCS) , and the legal process:
 - Discusses the requirements for the RCA
 - Discusses special issues related to the Division's discipline policy for children in care and obtains signature on Form 29-R Relative Caregiver Child Safety Agreement. Posted at: <http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR-DFCS/menuitem.8237042e9dbda3aa50c8798dd03036a0/?vgnextoid=35b7dcf444674010VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCD&vgnnextchannel=69e92b48d9a4ff00VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCD>
 - Discusses firearm safety in the home (obtains relatives initials on Form 29-R).
 - Discusses water safety requirements (obtains relatives initials on Form 29-R).
 - Discusses safe supervision requirements (obtains relatives initial on Form 29-R).
 - Discusses the financial responsibility for the child (i.e. how they will manage) and documents the relative's resources and the need for assistance with childcare. Explains that all adult caregivers must be employed outside of the home to receive child care services.

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- Reviews and obtains the relative's signature on the Placement and Financial Responsibility Agreement.
- Identifies any special needs that must be addressed before placement or immediately after placement.
- Obtains a release of information from all adult members for the local criminal investigation clearance. Case Manager explains that a name check may be completed with the Office of Investigative Services for emergency placements. A Live Scan Criminal Record Check (CRC) is required within fifteen (15) days of the completion of the name check.
- Ensures that the relative understands that the following are needed to finalize the RCA:
 - ❑ A medical statement for primary caretaker(s),
 - ❑ Drug screen on primary caretaker(s)
 - ❑ Satisfactory GCIC and NCIC Live Scan Criminal Record Check on all adults 18 years and older in the household.
 - ❑ A CPS check in any state where the relative or household member age 18 or older resided within the last five years.

Note: Relatives accepting placement must be informed that the placement is contingent upon a favorable Relative Care Assessment including satisfactory information contained in the GCIC and NCIC report

9. The Case Manager provides the Resource Development Unit in the county/region where the relative resides with the identifying information for the relative along with contact information. The Case Manager indicates the relative caregiver's interest in becoming a foster parent. The date of the referral to Resource Development (RD) is documented in the case record. Contact with the relative shall be made by RD within five (5) days of the notice of interest to become a relative foster parent. The relative must be approved as a resource parent within 180 days of the placement of the child in the home.

Safety and Home Assessment Components

1004.1.3

Requirement

The Case Manager shall document the Safety and Home Assessment findings using Form 452 or another format approved by the County Director/designee during the initial home visit with the relative. The information from the Safety and Home Assessment must be reviewed and determined satisfactory by the SS Supervisor before placement is made. The following areas or domains must be addressed and documented.

A. Data Section

1. Date Evaluation Initiated
2. Identify Child
3. Relative Name and Spouse (if married)
4. Clarify Relative's Relationship to the Child
5. Reason for Evaluation
6. Household Composition (Names, ages, gender, relationship to child and other household members, etc.)
7. Prior DFCS Involvement (relative caregiver and all household members)

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8. City and State within the last five years where the relative resided or adults age 18 and older resided within the last five years. (This information is needed to check the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry).

B. Home Environment

1. Appearance and State of Repair/Maintenance Issues
2. Cleanliness
3. Soundness of Physical Dwelling
4. Appearance of Electrical Wiring System, Fixtures and Outlets
5. Appearance of Gas Lines and Heating and Cooking Appliances
6. Availability and Condition of Running Water Indoors
7. Availability and Condition of Toilet Facilities Indoors
8. Appearance of Household Furnishings
9. Availability and Appearance of Storage Facilities (closets, cabinets, pantry, bookshelves, etc.)
10. Availability of working smoke alarms inside the house.
11. Appearance of child safety proofing for young children.

C. Home and Personal Safety Issues, Practices and Concerns

1. Swimming or Wading Pools, Ponds, Lakes, etc.
2. Trampolines
3. Animals
4. Environmental Hazards
5. Weapons
6. Electrical Wiring
7. Waste (garbage, trash, animal feces, etc.)
8. Unlocked and Inoperable vehicles, appliances, etc
9. Dangerous porches, steps, doors, etc.
10. Inadequate Fencing
11. Access to busy streets and/or highways

D. Views and Practices of Child Supervision

1. Swimming or Wading Pools, Ponds, Lakes, etc.
2. Trampolines
3. Animals (Are inoculations current) – Obtain a copy for file.
4. Environmental Hazards
5. Weapons
6. Electrical Wiring
7. Waste (garbage, trash, animal feces, etc.)
8. Unlocked and Inoperable vehicles, appliances, etc.
9. Dangerous porches, steps, doors, etc.
10. Inadequate Fencing
11. Access to busy streets and/or highway

E. Discuss the following and document:

1. What are the sleeping arrangements?
2. Does the family have an operable telephone? Are emergency numbers posted or in reasonable access to the telephone?
3. Does the family own a vehicle? If not, describe the mode of transportation readily available.
4. Is the liability insurance current?

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5. Does the family member identified as a driver have a valid driver's license?
6. Does the family have required child restraint devices?
7. Is the relative employed? Obtain proof of income.
8. Does the relative own/rent residence? Obtain lease or mortgage. Are there provisions in the lease for the relative to move another person into the home?

Before a placement is made with the relative:

1004.1.4

Requirement

The Case Manager and the Supervisor reviews the information from the initial relative home visit, safety and home assessment (See 1004.1.3), history check, and criminal records checks (See 1004.1.8) on all individuals 18 or older in the household. The Supervisor approves the placement of the child with the relative if all information is acceptable according to the guidelines and requirements of the agency.

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Home Visit Within 14 days of the placement with the relative caregiver:

1004.1.5

Requirement

The Case Manager will make a home visit to the relative placement's home. The Case Manager shall assess and document the adjustment of the child and relative caregiver to the child's placement, including but not limited to determining whether the child or relative caregiver is experiencing any problems that require the Case Manager's attention and response.

1004.1.5 PROCEDURES:

1. The Case Manager shall talk with the child in private and document (if age and developmentally appropriate) how he/she is feeling about living with the relative caregiver.
2. The Case Manager shall also talk with the relative caregiver about how he/she and other family members are adjusting to having the child placed with him/her and how the child is adjusting to the placement.
3. The Case Manager shall explain and discuss with the relative caregiver the permanency outcomes that might occur for a child depending on the progress of the child's parents in resolving the issues that caused the child to be unsafe at home.

Relative Care Assessment completed within 30 days of the referral date

1004.1.6

Requirement

The RCA must be completed within thirty days of the initial placement with the relative or within thirty days of the referral to a CCFA provider or OTI.

Note: Information completed/compiled prior to child's placement may be incorporated into the Relative Care Assessment.

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1004.1.6 PROCEDURES:

All domains and areas being evaluated pertain to the parent's or relative caregiver's home for purposes of considering it as an acceptable placement resource for a specific child or sibling group. The suggested format includes, but is not limited to, a review of all the domains or areas listed below.

A. Data Section

1. Date Evaluation Initiated
2. Identify Child
3. Relative Name and Spouse (if married)
4. Clarify Relative's Relationship to the Child
5. Reason for Evaluation
6. Household Composition (Names, ages, gender, relationship to child and other household members, etc.)
7. Prior DFCS Involvement (relative caregiver and all household members)

B. Domains and Areas Evaluated (includes, but is not limited to):

1. Interpersonal Relationship between Parent and Child
2. Interpersonal Relationship between Parent and Relative Caregiver(s)
3. Interpersonal Relationship between Relative Caregiver(s) and Child
4. Interpersonal Relationships with the Child(ren) Being Placed
5. Household Members/Key Data
6. Living Arrangements
7. Sleeping Arrangements
8. Employment History, if appropriate
9. Current Financial Status
10. Health History/Current Status (all family members)
11. Marriage Status
12. Education Status
13. Discipline Views and Practices
14. Corporal Punishment Views and Practices
15. Commitment to Abide by State Prohibition of Corporal Punishment
16. Practices and Views on Maintaining Parental, Sibling and Other Family Ties
17. Interpersonal Relationships with Other Household Members
18. History of Criminal Activity (Mandatory for all persons age 18 and older); includes Live Scan CRC, both GCIC and NCIC and Sexual Offenders Registry @ <http://www.ganet.org/gbi/sorsch.cgi> or through IDS, under the Protective Services Data Systems (PSDS) See 1004.1.2
19. Residence Check completed by law enforcement on the address of the relative for the previous five years. The residence check should note all calls for the address.
20. Drug Screening – Primary Caretaker(s) – Comprehensive Drug Screen Report conducted and signed by a qualified health professional (includes testing for marijuana/cannabinoids (THC), cocaine, amphetamines/methamphetamines, opiates, ecstasy and phencyclidine (PCP)).

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21. Medical Statement indicating that primary relative caregiver(s) does not have any health concerns or conditions which impedes their ability to care for the child (ren) or places them at risk. All health related concern which, otherwise, precludes them from consideration as a placement resource for the child(ren) must be addressed. It must be dated within 12 months prior to the completion date of the evaluation. The Case Manager or CCFA Provider must document that no member of the household appears to have a communicable disease, emotional impairment or physical impairment which could pose a threat to the health of the related children or affect the ability of the relative caregiver to provide routine daily care and evacuate the child safely if necessary. If there is reason to believe that a member of the household's health and physical well-being may be a threat to the health or safety of the related child, a medical statement may be requested from any household member.

Note: The Medical Report (Form 36) may be substituted for the medical statement to expedite the approval process for the relative becoming a resource parent.

22. Follows the procedures for checking the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry from any state that the relative caregiver or any adult household member over the age of eighteen has resided in within the past five years. Document that none of the adults living in the home appear on the named registries. This requirement is a federal mandate as per the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006.

Satisfactory results of this registry check must be received before the RCA can be approved. This is also a requirement for approval as a resource parent. This check is initiated within the first week of the child's placement in the home.

C. Home Environment:

1. Appearance and State of Repair/Maintenance Issues
2. Cleanliness
3. Soundness of Physical Dwelling
4. Appearance of Electrical Wiring System, Fixtures and Outlets
5. Appearance of Gas Lines and Heating and Cooking Appliances
6. Availability and Condition of Running Water Indoors
7. Availability and Condition of Toilet Facilities Indoors
8. Appearance of Household Furnishings
9. Availability and Appearance of Storage Facilities (closets, cabinets, pantry, bookshelves, etc.)
10. Availability of working smoke alarms inside the house.

D. Home and Personal Safety Issues, Practices and Concerns

1. Swimming or Wading Pools, Ponds, Lakes, etc.
2. Trampolines
3. Animals
4. Environmental Hazards
5. Weapons
6. Electrical Wiring
7. Waste (garbage, trash, animal feces, etc.)
8. Unlocked and Inoperable vehicles, appliances, etc.
9. Dangerous porches, steps, doors, etc.
10. Inadequate Fencing
11. Access to busy streets and/or highways

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E. Views and Practices of Child Supervision:

1. Swimming or Wading Pools, Ponds, Lakes, etc.
2. Trampolines
3. Animals
4. Environmental Hazards
5. Weapons
6. Electrical Wiring
7. Waste (garbage, trash, animal feces, etc.)
8. Unlocked and Inoperable vehicles, appliances, etc.
9. Dangerous porches, steps, doors, etc.
10. Inadequate Fencing
11. Access to busy streets and/or highways

F. Explore:

- ☐ Family and Community Resources
- ☐ Birth and Extended Family's Strengths and Needs
- ☐ What are the sleeping arrangements?
- ☐ Does the family have an operable telephone? Are emergency numbers posted or in reasonable access to the telephone?
- ☐ Does the family own a vehicle? If not, describe the mode of transportation readily available.
- ☐ Is the liability insurance current?
- ☐ Does the family member identified as a driver have a valid driver's license?
- ☐ Does the family have required child restraint devices?
- ☐ Is the relative employed?
- ☐ Does the relative own/rent residence? Obtain a copy of the lease or mortgage.
- ☐ Are there provisions in the lease for the relative to move another person into the home?

G. Other:

- ☐ Two References Required
- ☐ Additional Pertinent Observations and Concerns Must be Discussed and Documented
- ☐ Review the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA) if it is available and Initial Case Plan to determine if there are factors that should be considered in a determination for placement with the relative caregiver.
- ☐ The Case Manager or CCFA Provider completing the RCA must attend and participate in the FTM or MDT held during the thirty-day CCFA period. Information from the meetings may be included in the RCA.

Results of Evaluation (Findings and Conclusions)

Summary and Recommendations

Complete Name(s), Signature(s), Titles and Date(s) on all Required Documents and/or

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Forms

Note: The RCA must be completed on a non-custodial parent, being considered for placement of the child.

See Fiscal Chapter 1016. or Appendix A, Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment/Wrap-Around Standards for reimbursement cost and referral fees for the RCA.

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Approval of Relative Care Assessments:

The responsibility for recommending approval of a relative care assessment rests with the County Department of Family and Children Services office that conducted the study and will ultimately have to supervise the home if placement is made. If the child is placed outside of the county, (See 1004.1.7) Initial placements may be made on the merits of the favorable home visit, safety and home assessment, history check and criminal records check on all individuals 18 or older in the household. (See Section 1004. 1.3 before a placement is made with the relative).

1004.1.6 PRACTICE ISSUE

1. The success of the placement can be positively impacted by
 1. the extent of the family's preparation for meeting the child's needs,
 2. the family's familiarity with and commitment to abide by the agency's requirements regarding children in out-of-home placements,
 3. the accuracy of the family's perceptions of the requirements for managing the child and his/her needs (i.e., medical, physical, emotional, educational, and/or behavioral issues).
2. Placement with relative caregivers may not be appropriate when:
 - a. abuse or neglect has been substantiated on the relative resource,
 - b. safety concerns are identified,
 - c. they are unable to meet the minimum on-going needs of the child,
 - d. parental interference in the placement would negatively affect the child,
 - e. they are not willing to accept the placement,
 - f. they are openly or passively hostile or negative toward the parent or child,
 - g. they are unable or unwilling to protect the child from risks or harm from others, and/or
 - h. they are unable or unwilling to comply with agency or court ordered visitation plans.
 - i. review of the criminal records check using the guidelines outlined in Section 1014.27 is not in compliance with the state and federal requirements.

Out-of-County Placement

1004.1.7

Requirement

No child shall be placed by one county department of social services in another county's jurisdiction without prior notification and approval of that county department of social services.

If the relative placement resource resides in another county, the Case Manager shall notify and/or coordinate with the other county to arrange when, where, and by whom a RCA is to be conducted.

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Every effort must be made to honor a request by one county department of social services to assist in the protection, provision of services and placement of children.

1004.1.7 Procedures

1. The Case Manager shall request an RCA from the county in which the relative resides. If the receiving county decides that they are unable to complete the assessment, approval may be granted to the legal county of the child to complete the assessment or to refer the RCA to an approved CCFA/Wrap-Around Provider.
2. The Case Manager will initiate an Out of Town Inquiry (OTI) by directing a request to the attention of the Boarding County Director for an initial home visit for immediate placement and a Relative Care Assessment (RCA). The Case Manager sends correspondence via email or mail requesting the RCA. The request must include the case name, child's name, date of birth, reason for placement, relative's name, address, telephone number, relationship to child, and date child entered foster care.
3. The boarding county (county where the relative resides) shall decide if they will complete the initial home visit, the RCA, or grant permission for the legal county or approved CCFA provider to complete the requirements for the initial home visit and/or RCA. The county's reply may be given verbally and followed up by email or mail. The information from the initial home visit must be forwarded to the boarding county before placement is made. The boarding county must be in agreement with and approve the placement before the legal county proceeds with placement.
4. If placement is approved, supervision of the placement will not begin until a written request for supervision is received along with copies of the following case information: a copy of the home evaluation, current case plan, current court order, CCFA assessment, signed Form 451, CPS Investigative conclusion report, child's social security number or copy of card, copy of the child's birth certificate, and the IV-E eligibility determination.

Criminal Records Checks on Relative Caregivers

1004.1.8

Requirement

A state and national Live Scan Criminal Record Check (GCIC and NCIC) is required for all relative caregivers and adults (age 18 and over) residing permanently or temporarily in the home and having access to children. Live Scans must be initiated immediately following the placement of a child in the home.

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1004.1.8 PROCEDURES

1. Review and provide a copy of the Explanation for Securing Criminal Records Checks for Relative Caregivers form to the relative caregiver.
2. Designate an agency representative in the county department to receive and safeguard the results of each records search.
3. See Forms Online for the Awareness Statement that must be signed and retained in the county.
4. Have each applicant sign a Form 404, Consent for Criminal Records Check, which is contained in Forms Online.
5. See 1016 Fiscal in the Foster Care Services Manual for instructions related to charging the expense for fingerprinting to UAS Code 511.29.

Or

6. Contact the Office of Investigative Services (OIS) at (404) 463-2480 during normal business hours and request a criminal records check on the relative caregiver and household members. If after-hours call the OIS on-call agent at 404-798-0217. Results will be available on the same day.
7. Make arrangements for the Live Scan CRC to be completed.
8. Review the information from the Live Scan Criminal Records Checks with the Social Services Supervisor to determine if the results meet state and federal requirements and to safeguard the safety and security of children considered for placement in the home.

Note: A satisfactory local criminal records check or criminal records check completed by OIS must be completed prior to placement with the relative caregiver. Relatives accepting placements must be clearly informed that the child (ren) will be removed, if it is determined that the family is ineligible based upon information contained in the GCIC or NCIC report.

Enhanced Relative Rate

1004.1.9

Requirement

The Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) provides financial support to assist relative caregivers with the basic care of a related child in the custody of DFCS placed in their home. The relative caregiver must have an approved RCA, and the child must be in the custody of DFCS.

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1004.1.9 PROCEDURES

1. The availability of ERR shall be discussed with all relatives interested in being considered a placement resource for a child in DFCS custody. Relatives residing in a different county or state are, also, offered this option for a child for whom they wish to provide a placement resource.

Note: Section 1004.1.13 discusses family relocations.

2. The relative caregiver(s) and the agency representative must sign the ERR Agreement Form.
3. ERR payments begin after the Department receives a completed and signed Enhanced Relative Rate agreement from an approved relative.
4. ERR eligibility begins the first day of the month following the approval by the Case Manager. The child may not receive double funding in the same month (i.e. TANF and ERR payments or overlapping Foster Care per diem and ERR payments).
5. If the agency is the payee for child's SSI, Child Support, or other payments the Case Manager must ensure that the relative understands that the payments will continue to be received by the agency. The agency will determine if the relative caregiver is eligible to receive the ERR and/or other support payments during the month. (See Section 1004.10)

1004.1.9 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Relative caregivers, who obtain guardianship or custody of the child, until he/she reaches age 18, are not eligible and cannot be approved for ERR. (See Section 1004.10)
2. Biological or adoptive parents are never eligible and cannot be approved for the Enhanced Relative Rate.

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Eligibility for Enhanced Relative Rate

1004.1.10

Requirement

Eligibility for Enhanced Relative Rate is directly related to a specific child.

1004.1.10 PROCEDURES

1. The child must be:
 - a. a child placed with a relative approved by the agency after receiving a favorable RCA, the CCFA, if available, and meeting all other requirements.
 - b. a child whose available monthly benefits or support is \$400.00 or less.
2. To calculate ERR payments, the Case Manager must compute 80% of the current foster care per diem for the child's age.
 - a. If a child receives benefits/support (child support, SSI, Social Security benefits) of \$400.00 or less, the child is eligible for ERR. The Regional Accounting department will charge ERR payments to UAS Code 542.
 - b. If the support is more than \$400.00, the child is ineligible for ERR. If the available support is reduced at a later date, the relative caregiver may receive the ERR.
3. The following procedures must be implemented promptly by designated county staff:
 1. The Case Manager completes and submits Form 529 to accounting department to initiate ERR payments.
 2. The Case Manager notifies the Family Independence staff on Form 713 to terminate any TANF payments being paid for the child's care. As TANF payments are made for the entire month, ERR payments are initiated the first day of the month eligibility is determined.
4. All required documents to initiate the payments promptly must be in place to assure continuity of services and payments on the child's behalf. As long as the child is eligible for the service or benefit, this transition should not result in:
 - a. A break in financial payments for the child's care,
 - b. A break in Medicaid coverage, or
 3. A break in childcare services.

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5. ERR eligibility renewal and approval occurs annually until the child achieves permanency or reaches age 18 (may be extended to age 19 to allow child to graduate from High School), unless

- The placement disrupts or terminates, resulting in the removal of the child from the home.
- Child is on runaway status (If 30 days or longer, ERR payment will terminate)
- Child dies.
- Child is incarcerated (i.e., in jail, RYDC, etc.) and not expected to be released prior to 18th birthday.
- Child returns to the parent(s), with or without court or agency approval.
- Child marries.

NOTE: These changes or conditions require that prompt notification using Form 529 is sent to the accounting department, so proper action can be taken to stop payments.

6. The Case Manager submitting a form 529 to the accounting department to terminate the ERR payments effective the month after the child turns 18 (or 19, if graduating), unless another policy requirement terminates it sooner.
7. The Case Manager is responsible for giving advanced, written notification of the date payments will cease to the family and the youth.

The Enhanced Relative Rate Application and Agreement Form

1004.1.11

Requirement

The Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) Application and Agreement Form must be properly completed for each child, signed and dated by the relative caregiver and the County Director or Designee to be effective.

1004.1.9 PROCEDURES:

1. The Social Services Case Manager in the county with legal custody of the child is responsible for obtaining all required documentation. The selected relative placement resource and authorized staff shall sign the ERR Application and Agreement.
2. If a child is placed with a relative resource in another county (boarding county), the child's Case Manager (legal county) shall provide the above information to the family's (boarding county's) Case Manager. This must be made available prior to completing the agreement. Obtaining and forwarding the completed and signed ERR Agreement to the legal county is the responsibility of the Family's (boarding county's) Case Manager. The ERR payments are the responsibility of

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- the Regional Accounting department serving the DFCS legal county (county of legal jurisdiction).
3. If placement is considered with a relative caregiver in another state, assistance in obtaining and forwarding a completed and signed copy of the ERR Agreement from the relative caregiver should be requested from the family's Case Manager in the other state following ICPC guidelines.
 4. If a child is placed with a relative by a private agency, it is the responsibility of the child's Case Manager to request a completed and signed copy of the ERR Agreement from the private agency.
 5. A copy of the agreement is forwarded to the county or state where the child is being boarded. Copies of the same are always provided to the family.

Enhanced Relative Rate Renewal

1004.1.10

Requirement

Enhanced Relative Rate cases must be renewed annually by the County DFCS.

1004.1.12 PROCEDURES

1. The county DFCS office responsible for issuing the ERR payments shall notify the family of the need for renewal 45 days prior to the end of the first year of approval for ERR.
2. The Case Manager makes arrangements to make a home visit. During the home visit the Case Manager will:
 - a. Update applicable information from the last approved RCA.
 - b. Discuss agency's plans to move child toward permanency, if reunification is no longer viable with the parent(s). Discuss alternative permanency options with the relative and supports available (Adoption, Guardianship and Permanent Custody).
 - c. Review the findings of the renewal with the SS supervisor.
 - d. The SS Supervisor will approve the renewal of the home and the continuation of the ERR.
 - e. The family and agency representative must sign a new ERR agreement with the current amount of the ERR designated on the form.

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Status Change

1004.1.13

Requirement

Status changes in ERR households must be reported promptly to the legal county.

1004.1.13 PROCEDURES

The Social Services Case Manager

1. Notifies the accounting department in the legal county (county of legal jurisdiction of the child) when any of the following situations occur:
 - a. The child's financial benefits or support increases or decreases.
 - b. The name of the payee changes.
 - c. The address of the payee changes.
 - d. The ERR is no longer needed.
2. Notifies the relative caregiver(s) and appropriate service providers involved with the family that the Enhanced Relative Rate has terminated.

Enhanced Relative Rate Family Relocations

1004.1.14

Requirement

Enhanced Relative Rate payments shall continue if a family moves, including out of county or state.

1004.1.14 PROCEDURES

1. If the family moves to another county within the state:
 - a. The family should notify the county Department prior to moving out of county. Upon receipt of notification of the family's intent to relocate to another county, the Case Manager from the child's legal county promptly coordinates the supervision of the relative home with the DFCS staff in the new county of residence.
 - b. A letter shall be written to the DFCS office in the new county of residence notifying them that a child in the legal custody of the agency (and placed with a relative) has plans to or has relocated to their county. The letter should request a follow-up visit to the family's new residence. The purpose of the visit is to update the RCA and agreement, and assure the child's wellbeing and that the placement continues to meet agency requirements. The letter should, also, request ongoing

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- monitoring of the child's placement with submission of a minimum of quarterly supervision documentation. The letter should, also, indicate the date of the annual renewal and request that it is completed and submitted to the legal county to assure continuity of ERR payment.
- c. Upon receipt of a favorable recommendation for placement to continue in the home with ERR payments and supervision, the current legal county Case Manager forwards a copy of the case record (required documents which may include, but not limited to, RCA and Agreement Forms, court orders etc.).
 - d. The current (legal county) Case Manager notifies the family in writing and provides the SSCM's name, address and telephone of in the new county and reminds them of the requirement to notify the agency immediately if there are changes in circumstance(s).
 - e. Unless the court transfers jurisdiction of the case, DFCS staff in the county of legal jurisdiction, retains primary responsibility for the placement case and required court hearings and reports. The legal county accounting department is responsible for forwarding ERR payments as long as the family is approved. In most instances the original court involved with the case retains its jurisdiction.
2. The family moves to another state:
- As long as DFCS retains custody of a child, monthly supervisory contact is required. The legal county notifies the other state of the child's status and relocation to their state with an official ICPC referral request for services. As jurisdiction is with the Georgia court, the county DFCS office assures that:
- a. Notifications of the child's custody and approval for ERR are sent through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to the other state following any current ICPC guidelines governing placement with a relative in another state.
 - b. A request is made for a written report, based on a home visit and face-to-face interview of the child (if appropriate) and family; and contains a copy of the custody court order and the RCA, ERR Agreement, and the CCFA along with the following identifying information:
 - 1. Parents' names.
 - 2. Name(s) of relative caregiver(s)
 - 3. Child's name and date of birth.
 - 4. New address
 - 5. Date of move
 - 6. Specific services requested

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- c. Monthly ERR payments and the annual renewal will continue to be the responsibility of the legal county DFCS office. (See Renewals, Section 1004.)
 1. The legal county Case Manager or other designated staff shall send a renewal notification letter to the family at least 45 days prior to the expiration of the annual certification period along with an explanation of the requirements to renew the RCA and ERR agreement and continue ERR payments.
 2. The legal DFCS office sends a copy of the renewal notification letter, through ICPC, along with a request for assistance in completing the annual RCA renewal and ERR agreement.

Georgia will continue to be responsible for ERR payments for a child (ren) as long as a Georgia court retains legal jurisdiction and the child is in the custody of the DFCS and remains eligible.

Relative Foster Care

Research has determined that children thrive best in their families. For many years it has been the practice of relatives to parent related children when the children's parents cannot. When children enter foster care, individuals related to the child (blood, marriage or adoption) are considered first over a non related individual as a placement resource for the child. Preserving relationships with family members is crucial to a child's sense of safety and well-being. The Department is committed to advocating and implementing a stronger partnership with extended family to better serve the needs of children who are placed in foster care. It is the Department's preference that all relatives are approved as resource parents and receive a foster care per diem. The goal of relatives becoming foster parents is to ensure that the child has services to address his/her needs. Supportive services are provided to the family with the intent of establishing and achieving a permanency plan for the child.

1004.1.15

Requirement

Any relative resource who accepts care of a child, in a county department's custody, must be presented with information on becoming a relative foster parent. Staff must also discuss the following:

1. Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) may be eligible to receive until approved as a resource parent.
2. Subsidized Guardianship (SG) and Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship (ESG)
3. Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) and Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy (ERCS)
4. Permanency planning for the child (Reunification, Adoption, Custody with a Fit and Willing Relative, Guardianship and Another Planned Permanent Arrangement).

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1004.1.15 PROCEDURE

The Case Manager discusses and explains the requirement for becoming an approved relative foster parent.

1. The relative must be approved as a Relative Foster Parent within 180 days of the child being placed in the home. The Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) is terminated if the home is not approved within 180 days of the child being placed in the home if the circumstances are related to the relative's non compliance in the approval process. When there are extraordinary circumstances, the Regional Director's approval is required for a one time extension of the 180 time period to approve the relative as a resource parent.
 - a. The home is assessed and must meet the same requirements as an unrelated (regular) foster home.
 - b. The Case Manager submits information on a Form 713 (interoffice communication) to the RD unit in the county or region. Follow-up with the relative will occur within five (5) business days.
2. Provided criteria for foster care status is met, reimbursement is made by foster care per diem which is a higher payment amount than the ERR or including the child in a TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) grant.
3. The relative caregiver may receive ERR (as long as eligibility requirements are met) until approval of the home for a foster care per diem.

1004.1.15 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The financial impact of bringing another person into a household can be devastating to a family's budget. It can result in furthering the emotional trauma already experienced by the child, if the strain results in the relocation of the child. For this reason, it is imperative that prior to placement of the child, the Case Manager helps the family take a realistic look at the long range impact the child's presence may have on the family's circumstances and budget. Such issues are discussed before a decision is made to place the child with the relative.
2. Documentation in the case record shows that this information was discussed with the relative caregiver and indicates his/her understanding of the requirements for becoming a resource parent and the receipt and termination of the ERR. The Case Manager reviews the Financial Agreement Form with the relative and obtains a signature. The relative receives a copy and a copy is filed in the case record.

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TANF Benefits As An Option for a Child in Care

1004.1.16

Requirement

Any relative who wishes to apply for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits for the support of a child, in agency custody is given the opportunity to do so, if the child is placed in their care. When the relative is approved to receive the ERR or Foster Care Per Diem, the child will be removed from any TANF case.

1004.1.16 PROCEDURES

The Case Manager makes referrals and offers assistance to relatives who wish to apply for any benefits needed to provide care for a child, in agency custody, and placed or being considered for placement in their home. The relative may elect to apply for TANF until approval is granted for the Enhanced Relative Rate (ERR) or a Relative Foster Care Per Diem.

1. If the relative elects to receive TANF benefits, the amount of money will be less than the foster care per diem and ERR.
2. The Case Manager advises the relative to discuss all requirements and time restrictions with staff in the Office of Financial Independence (OFI) as these constraints may affect their continued eligibility.
3. The Case Manager refers the relative to the appropriate OFI staff to complete the TANF application process and for current information or requirements regarding benefit options and other eligibility criteria.
4. Once the relative is approved for any relative care subsidy or Foster Care per diem, the Case Manager will send notice to the OFI Case Manager to remove the child from the TANF case.

Support Services for Relative Caregivers

1004.1.17

Requirement

The availability of any service necessary to develop, approve, support and/or maintain a child in a relative placement is made known to the relative caregiver and assistance provided in accessing the same.

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1004.1.17 PROCEDURES

In order to facilitate the prompt and successful placement of a child into a relative's home, the availability of any state or local resources for addressing any service needs the parent(s) or relative family have are explored and assistance offered, as appropriate, in accessing the same.

1. The county department develops and implements a plan for offering or arranging services geared toward support group activities or other training and/or enrichment programs targeting the needs of its relative population.
2. Review with and obtain the signature of the relative on the Support to Relative Handouts. Posted at:
<http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR-DFCS/menuitem.8237042e9dbda3aa50c8798dd03036a0/?vgnextoid=35b7dcf444674010VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=69e92b48d9a4ff00VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD> .

1004.1.17 PRACTICE ISSUE

1. The Case Manager helps the family understand the value in holding family team meetings as one means of promoting family continuity on behalf of the child. Emphasize that such meetings are held to address many family issues, particularly those that address safety and protection of the child, as well as, how each member can contribute to or support a plan of action to help expedite the child's return home.
2. Discuss and explore the availability of potential resources with the family to include:
 - a. Services available to the child, parent(s), and relative caregiver.
 - b. Services identified in the Case Plan
 - c. Prevention of Unnecessary Placement (PUP) funds and Homestead.
 - d. Supplemental Supervision, if eligible (requirements must meet the eligibility standards as determined by CAPS) and appropriate based on relative caregiver's absence from the home due to gainful employment.
 - e. Initial and annual clothing allowance (see Fiscal Services Section 1016).
 - f. Other unusual expenses/needs
 - g. Medicaid or other medical coverage
 - h. Referrals to mental, physical or emotional therapy.
 - i. Training and educational support needs of relative caregiver.

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Monitoring/Supervision of Relative Placements

1004.1.18

Requirement

The wellbeing and progress of a child placed in a relative care home is monitored through monthly, in-home, face-to-face contacts. Every other month, contact with the child and family must take place in the relative caregiver's home.

1004.1.18 PROCEDURES

The extent of agency monitoring of the placement is contingent upon the adjustment of the child and family after placement of the child, the quality of care being provided the child, and/or the relative's cooperation with the Case Plan requirements.

The Case Manager:

1. Documents collateral contacts incorporating all feedback and/or findings.
2. Schedules monthly contacts with the relative caregiver, respecting their schedule and time constraints.
3. Updates the file, to include observations, recommendations and other pertinent information and/or changes in circumstance, each time there is contact with the family (whether a scheduled or otherwise).

1004.1.18 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Face-to-face contact with the child and family is made and documented in the file each month.
2. Every other month contact with the child and family must take place in the home. See Section 1101.15 Minimum Contact Standards for Children In Care

Permanency Decision Requirement for Relative Homes

The safety and well-being of the child must be considered when planning for permanency. Most experts agree that a child's healthy development is supported by the security of a family committed to rearing the child to adulthood and beyond.

1004.1.19

Requirement

A Permanency plan is initially selected within the first 30 days following removal, and it is documented in the initial case plan. The plan is reviewed periodically by the court and DFCS to evaluate its continued appropriateness.

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1004.1.19 Procedures

1. Permanency planning is initiated when a child enters foster care and is assessed until the child achieves permanency through reunification, adoption, placement with a fit and willing relative, guardianship or another planned permanent living arrangement.
2. Relative caregivers are encouraged, before placement of a child in the home, to commit to the child on a long term basis (until the child reaches adulthood).
3. Engage the family in permanency planning for the child. Also, include children and youth in the planning when appropriate.
4. Permanency options and timelines are presented to and discussed with the relative caregiver. Concurrent planning should also be explored.
5. Consider the following (along with age of child and other factors) with the family when determining the most appropriate plan for permanency if reunification is not possible.
 - a. Does the intended caregiver have an adequate support system, if so, what does it look like? If not, what is needed? What can DFCS and the family members do to resolve the issue?
 - b. Can the intended permanent caregiver and her/his social support system protect the child from maltreatment without the monitoring and assistance of DFCS? If so, how? If not, what can DFCS and the family members do to resolve this?
 - c. Does the intended permanent caregiver understand the supports (subsidies, child support, child care, etc.) that may or may not be available? If not, what can DFCS and the family members do to resolve this?
 - d. Did the intended permanent caregiver with her/his support system, make an informed decision concerning permanence?

1004.1.19 PRACTICE ISSUES

Court-sanctioned decisions for non-reunification (whether permanent custody to relatives, long term foster care, legal guardianship, termination of parental rights, or adoption) are in compliance with ASFA requirements.

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Case Reviews and Permanency Decisions

1004.1.20

Requirement

All children in the Foster Care System must have a Judicial, Citizen or Panel Case Review to be in compliance with PL 96-272. If the court does not mandate a child to have a Judicial or Citizen Review, a Panel Case Review is substituted by the county department. **(Refer to 1008.21, Practice Issues and Procedures for details).**

1004.1.20 PROCEDURES

1. The Case Manager reviews the case, at a minimum, once every six months after the date of placement and assures that the Case Plan is appropriate, timely and meets the service needs of the child and parent(s).
2. The child's case is recommended for closure when (a) all the goals in the Case Plan have been achieved and/or a determination made that it is safe for the child to return home; (b) an alternative permanency decision made when favorable circumstances for the child's return to birth parents do not exist; or (c) the child has either emancipated from care or died.

1004.1.20 PRACTICE ISSUE

A statutory provision of PL 96-272 requires a Periodic Case Review for all children in care, including those in the care of relatives. This Public Law requires that certain protections be met. **(See Foster Care Services Chapter 1008 for detailed description of Case Review mandates).**

Discipline and Corporal Punishment

1004.1.21

Requirement

Agency policy prohibits physical and emotional punishment of all children placed in agency custody. **(Refer to Foster Care Manual Chapter 1015.20, Discipline Other Policy Violations).**

1004.1.21 PROCEDURES

1. It is the Case Manager's responsibility to make this mandate known to any relative wishing to be a placement resource.

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2. The worker discusses alternative forms of discipline as outlined in Chapter 1015.20 and recommends that relatives sign up for any locally available parenting classes, relative support groups or similar classes.
3. The Case Manager obtains the signature(s) of the relative provider(s) on the Form 29RC. Posted at: <http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR-DFCS/menuitem.8237042e9dbda3aa50c8798dd03036a0/?vgnextoid=35b7dcf444674010VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=69e92b48d9a4ff00VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD>

1004.1.21 PRACTICE ISSUES

Children are placed in the care of the local county departments because they are neglected, abandoned, or at risk of some form of abuse. Therefore, agency policy prohibits physical, mental, or emotional punishment of the child by anyone, including relatives.

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1004.2

RELATIVE CARE SUBSIDY

The Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) program enables the Department to provide financial support for children transferred from the temporary legal custody of the Department, by the courts, to the legal custody **(through age 18 or 19 if child will graduate high from school)** of an approved relative caregiver. A non-reunification court order must precede the issuance of a custody order for subsidy eligibility. By accepting custody, the relative agrees to be the caregiver and indicates his/her commitment to ensure the safety, protection and general wellbeing of the child until the child reaches the age of eighteen. Further, the relative must agree:

- To submit to an annual review of the child's circumstances authorize and approved by DFCS,
- To comply with the mandatory 3-year review required by the court,
- To comply with DFCS and the court requirements regarding changes in circumstances that must be reported.

The purpose of RCS is to financially assist relatives providing a permanent home for a child formerly in agency custody. The RCS payments are available to help defray basic expenses that otherwise may jeopardize the child's opportunity to experience stability and permanence. Subsidy payments must be used for the child's needs or expenses, such as the following abbreviated list:

- A. Clothing, including any special clothing needs due to size, allergies, etc.,
- B. Special dietary needs such as special foods or supplements,
- C. Medical and dental care,
- D. Special educational needs not covered by P.L. 94-142,
- E. Child care expenses, and/or
- F. Mental Health services or counseling, if recommended.

RCS eligibility begins the day legal custody is transferred to the relative and may continue through the month of the child's 18th birthday (or age 19 if child will graduate from high school). The child's continued eligibility will be reviewed by DFCS annually and at any period the agency becomes aware of changes in circumstance. Relatives are to be informed of and assisted with determining which financial support program (i.e. Relative Foster home per diem, Enhanced Relative Rate, Relative Care Subsidy, Enhanced Relative Care Subsidized Guardianship, etc.) will be most beneficial in maintaining stability and permanence for the child. It is not mandatory for relatives to participate in the RCS program. Relative caregivers may elect to participate or to decline with an option to participate at a later date.

When termination of parental rights has occurred, the child (ren) no longer has a legal relationship with their blood relatives. Therefore, in such cases, these caregivers are not eligible for financial support through the RCS program. However, if TPR is not completed on both parents, relatives of the parent, whose parental rights are intact, remain eligible for RCS.

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General Requirements

1004.2.1

Requirement

The RCS program has two categories of eligibility payments:

- Relative Care Subsidy (RCS)
- Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy (ERCS)

Payments for both categories begin after DFCS receives a non-reunification court order, a completed and signed Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) Application and Agreement from an approved relative, and notification from the court transferring the child from the Department's temporary legal custody to the legal custody (until age 18) of the relative.

1004.2.1 PROCEDURES

1. The availability of RCS or ERCS shall be discussed with all relatives interested in accepting custody of a child currently in DHR custody. Relatives in a different county or state are also offered these options for a child for whom they wish to provide a permanent home.

Note: Section 1004.2.9 discusses family relocations.

2. The relative caregiver(s) and the agency representative must sign the RCS Application and Agreement (Form 45) designating which program they are applying for RCS or ERCS. After Form 45 is signed, the Case Manager must petition the court to transfer legal custody (until age 18) of the child to the relative.
3. A copy of the dated and signed RCS Application (Form 45) and the court order transferring legal custody (until age 18) is maintained by the agency in the child's record and the relative caregiver's RCS file. One copy of the application and the court order should be provided to the relative caregiver of the child for whom custody is given.
4. RCS or ERCS eligibility begins the first day of the month in which legal custody is awarded to the relative caregiver. The child may not receive double funding in the same month (i.e. relative receives TANF or foster care per diem in the month in which legal custody is transferred. RCS payment will begin the following month). Emphasize that participation in RCS or ERCS is optional.
5. If the agency is the payee for child's SSI or other payments before custody is transferred, the Case Manager must send notification to the appropriate authorities, so that such payments are diverted to the relative caregiver following the transfer of legal custody. A signed copy of the notification must be given to the relative caregiver and a copy placed in the relative caregiver's RCS or ERCS file.

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6. Biological parents who successfully petition the court and have legal custody of their child returned to them are not eligible for RCS or ERCS payments.

Eligibility for Relative Care Subsidy and Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy

1004.2.2

Requirement

Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) and Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy (ERCS) are directly related to a specific child. Once approved for RCS or ERCS, the child remains eligible until case closure.

1004.2.2 PROCEDURES

1. Eligibility requirements are:

- a. The child must have a completed Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment.
- b. The relative caregiver must have received a favorable Relative Care Assessment (RCA).
- c. Legal custody (until age 18) of the child has been transferred to the relatives, (as defined by blood, marriage or adoption)
- d. The child's available monthly benefits or supports must be \$ 400.00 or less (excluding the child's wages). Verify the child's monthly benefits or supports (i.e. SSI, or child support except the child's wages) and retain the verification in the RCS file.

If the child's benefits or supports are \$400.00 per month or less, the child is eligible for RCS or ERCS payments. Payments should be charge to UAS Code 553. If the child's benefits or supports are more than \$400.00, the child is ineligible for RCS or ERCS.

- If the child's benefits or supports are reduced at a later date, the relative caregiver may reapply for RCS or ERCS.
 - Payments must be suspended during any months the child's benefits or supports exceeds the monthly \$400.00 maximum.
2. Relative caregiver(s) must sign Form 45, Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement. The completed Form 45 must be maintained in the relative caregiver file and a copy provided to the relative.
 3. Prior to the court transferring custody to the relative caregiver, the Case Manager must review the RCS/ERCS Application and Agreement and RCS/ERCS program guidelines with the relative caregiver.

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4. The Relative caregiver(s)' household income must not exceed \$150,000 to qualify for the Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy rate. Household income must be verified and documented.

Completing the Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement Form

1004.2.3

Requirement

A Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement Form 45 must be properly completed, signed and dated by the relative caregiver and the County Director or Designee to be effective.

1004.2.3 PROCEDURES

1. The selected relative placement resource and authorized staff shall sign the Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement after the court issues a non-reunification court order. The relative must indicate the RCS or ERCS program option on the Form 45 and provide all required documentation.
2. The agreement must be signed and in effect prior to the transfer of legal custody to the relative caregiver.
3. The county department that had temporary legal custody of the child is responsible for obtaining a completed and signed court order verifying legal custody has been transferred to the relative caregiver.
4. If a child is placed with a relative caregiver in another county (boarding county), the child's Case Manager shall provide the above information listed in #3 to the family's (boarding county's) Case Manager. This information must be made available prior to completing the agreement. Obtaining and forwarding the completed and signed Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement to the legal county is the responsibility of the Family's (boarding county's). The RCS payments are the responsibility of the Regional Accounting department serving the DFCS legal county (county of legal jurisdiction, after placement case is closed).
5. If transfer of legal custody of a child (until age 18) from DFCS is being considered with a relative caregiver in another state, assistance in obtaining and forwarding a completed and signed copy of the RCS Application and Agreement from the relative caregiver should be requested from the family's Case Manager in the other state.
6. If a child is placed with a relative caregiver by a private agency, it is the responsibility of the child's Case Manager to request a completed and signed copy of the RCS Application and Agreement.
7. The completed and signed RCS Application and Agreement shall be maintained by the county with legal jurisdiction through the month of the child's 18th birthday (or age

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19 to meet high school graduation goals), unless the RCS agreement and RCS payments are terminated sooner for any reason other than the child's age.

8. A copy of the agreement and appropriate court orders are forwarded to the county where the child is being boarded. Copies of the same are always provided to the relative caregiver and child as appropriate.

Relative Care Subsidy Payments

1004.2.4

Requirement

Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) payments are made in the amount of \$10.00 per day per child, to assist in meeting the child's needs.

1004.2.4 PROCEDURES

1. Eligibility for a RCS payment requires:
 - a. The relative caregiver to complete and receive a favorable recommendation on the relative care assessment (RCA),
 - b. The relative caregiver to receive a favorable recommendation for placement of the child, on the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA), or on an updated CCFA assessment completed from a previous assessment, and
 - c. The relative caregiver be recommended for and accept legal custody (until age 18) of the child from the agency by the court.
2. RCS payments are charged to UAS Code 553.
3. In order for the relative caregiver to continue receiving payments, a renewal must occur annually unless:
 - a. The placement disrupts or terminates, resulting in the relative being relieved of custody. The relative must notify the agency if any of the following disruptions occur:
 - Child is on runaway status for 30 days or longer. (RCS payment must be terminated). Reinstatement of RCS payments must be justified and approved by County Director, if child returns after 30 days.
 - Child dies.
 - Child returns to agency custody based on CPS findings.
 - Child is incarcerated for 30 days or longer (i.e., in jail, RYDC, etc.) or child's release date is not prior to his/her 18th birthday.

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Reinstatement of RCS payments must be justified and approved by County Director, if child returns after 30 days.

- Child is returned to the parent(s), with or without court or agency approval.
 - Child marries.
 - Parental rights terminated.
- b. The child receives personal benefits or supports which is more than \$400.00 per month.
- c. The child reaches his or her 18th birthday or until high school graduation, up to age of 19.
- d. The child is not enrolled in a public or private school system.

NOTE: These changes or conditions require that prompt notification be sent to accounting department, so proper action can be taken to stop subsidy payments.

Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy Payments

1004.2.5

Requirement

Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy (ERCS) rates are paid in the amount of 80% of the current foster care per diem rate based on the child's current age at the time legal custody is transferred to the relative caregiver. ERCS must be used to assist in meeting the child's needs.

Income verification **must be** provided in addition to meeting all eligibility requirements outlined in Relative Care Subsidy. (See 1004.2.2)

1004.2.5 PROCEDURES

1. Relative caregiver must provide proof of income. The most recent Federal Income Tax return or copies of the most recent four paycheck stubs are acceptable forms of income verification for all employed household members.
2. Eligibility for a RCS payment must meet the following criteria:
 - a. The relative caregiver must complete and receive a favorable recommendation on the Relative Care Assessment (RCA),
 - b. The relative caregiver must receive a favorable recommendation for placement of the child, on the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA), or on an updated CCFA assessment completed from a previous assessment, and

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- c. The relative caregiver must be recommended for and accept legal custody (until age 18) of the child from the court.
- 3. ERCS payments are charged to UAS Code 553.
- 4. In order for the relative caregiver to continue receiving payments, a renewal must occur annually unless:
 - a. The placement disrupts or terminates, resulting in the relative being relieved of custody. The relative must notify the agency if any of these disruptions occur:
 - 1. Child is on runaway status for 30 days or longer. (RCS payment must be terminated). Reinstatement of RCS payments must be justified and approved by County Director, if child returns after 30 days.
 - 2. Child dies.
 - 3. Child returns to agency custody based on CPS findings.
 - 4. Child is incarcerated for 30 days or longer (i.e., in jail, RYDC, etc.) or release date is not expected prior to his/her 18th birthday. Reinstatement of RCS payments must be justified and approved by the County Director, if child returns after 30 days.
 - 5. Child is returned to the parent(s), with or without court or agency approval.
 - 6. Child marries.
 - 7. Parental rights terminated.
 - b. The child receives personal benefits or supports which is more than \$400.00 per month.
 - c. The child reaches his or her 18th birthday or until high school graduation, up to age of 19.
 - d. The child is not enrolled in a public or private school system.
 - e. The relative caregiver's household income exceeds \$150,000.00 per year.

NOTE: These changes or conditions require that prompt notification be sent to the accounting department, so proper action can be taken to stop subsidy payments.

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Relative Care Subsidy and Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy Payment Initiation

1004.2.6

Requirement

The county department initiates Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) or Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy upon:

1. The receipt of a signed and dated Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement, and
2. Notification from the court that legal custody (until age 18) has been transferred to the relative.

1004.2.6 PROCEDURES

1. The designated county staff must complete the following:
 - a. The Case Manager must submit a copy of the Form 45 to the accounting department to initiate RCS or ERCS payments.
 - b. The Case Manager must send the Form 529 to end foster care payments being paid on the child's behalf. The day after the last day of per diem eligibility, RCS or ERCS payments are initiated (i.e., per diem eligibility ends on the 15th, RCS or ERCS eligibility begins on the 16th).
 - c. The Case Manager must notify the Economic Support Case Manager on Form 713 to terminate any TANF payments being paid on the child's behalf. As TANF payments are made for the entire month, RCS or ERCS payments are initiated the first day of the month following the custody transfer provided all other RCS or ERCS criteria are met.
 - d. The Case Manager must close the case in the Internal Data System (IDS), and place a copy of all actions and notifications in the child's case record.
 - e. The County Director or designee must designate a person to manage the RCS and/or ERCS relative caregiver's file, monitor payments and complete the required annual (agency) and 3-year (court) reviews.
3. All required documents to initiate the payments promptly must be in place to assure continuity of services and payments on the child's behalf. As long as the child is eligible for the service or benefit, this transition should not result in:
 - a. A break in financial payments for meeting the needs of the child's,
 - b. A break in Medicaid coverage, or
 - c. A break in childcare services.

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Duration of Payments

1004.2.7

Requirement

RCS or ERCS payments are available through the month of the child's 18th birthday. Exception granted for a child in high school up to age 19.

The Case Manager is responsible for submitting the required notices to the accounting department to terminate RCS or ERCS payments effective the month after the child turns 18 or upon high school graduation up to age 19, unless another policy require termination sooner.

When termination of payments is required, the Case Manager is responsible for giving a one-month advance written notice to the relative caregiver and the youth.

Relative Care Subsidy Renewal

1004.2.8

Requirement

Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) cases must be renewed annually by the county DFCS office responsible for issuing the RCS and ERCS payments RCS renewal process requires a home visit, which includes a face-to-face interview with the relative caregiver and child (if age and mentally capable).

1004.2.8 PROCEDURES

1. The county DFCS office responsible for issuing the RCS payments shall notify the relative caregiver 45 days prior to the end of the approval year of certification, of the need for renewal by sending the Relative Care Subsidy Annual Renewal Report, Form 51.
2. Prior to renewal certification approval, the Case Manager must conduct a face-to-face visit, at which the child and the relative caregiver must be interviewed separately. The visit must be documented in the RCS or ERCS file and include dates and names of participants.
3. A copy of the signed and dated renewal form must be retained in the relative caregiver's file.
4. If the relative caregiver responds to the renewal letter indicating his/her desire to continue receiving RCS or ERCS, the following procedures must be taken:
 - a. The relative caregiver and the agency must sign a new Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement, Form 45, with the current amount of RCS or

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ERCS designated on the form. Only the amount allowable by current policy may be extended.

- b. If the relative caregiver fails to respond to the renewal letter within thirty (30) days, his/her payments shall be withheld (temporarily suspended) until he/she contact the agency and complies with requirements.
- c. Notifications of suspensions or other financial status changes shall be sent to agencies involved with the relative caregiver (SSA, the courts, partner agencies providing financial support/services to the family, etc.).

Status Change

1004.2.9

Requirement

The relative caregiver must promptly report to the legal county all household changes.

The Case Manager must notify the relative caregiver(s), youth and appropriate service providers involved with the family when the RCS or the ERCS is terminated.

1004.2.9 PROCEDURES

The Case Manager must notify the accounting department in the legal county (county of legal jurisdiction of the child) when any of the following situations occur:

- a. The child's financial benefits or supports increases or decreases.
- b. The name of the payee changes.
- c. The address of the payee changes.
- d. The Relative Care Subsidy is no longer needed or wanted.
- e. The Relative caregiver's household exceeds the annual \$150,000.00 maximum income.

Family Relocations

1004.2.10

Requirement

Relative Care Subsidy/Enhanced Relative Care Subsidy payments shall continue if a family moves, including out of county or state.

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1004.2.10 PROCEDURES

1. If the family moves to another county within the state:
 - a. The relative caregiver should notify the county Department prior to moving out of county. Upon receipt of notification of the family's intent to relocate to another county, the legal county Case Manager promptly coordinates the transfer of a RCS/ERCS case with the new county of residence to avoid any disruption in payments.
 - b. A letter must be written to the DFCS office in the new county of residence notifying them of the family's RCS/ERCS status, relocation to their county and requesting a follow-up visit to the family's new residence. The purpose of the visit is to update the Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement with the new address, and assure the child's wellbeing.
 - c. Upon receipt of a favorable recommendation for the home to remain on RCS or ERCS status, the current legal county Case Manager forwards a copy of the entire Relative Care Subsidy record to the new county DFCS office and notifies the accounting department in both counties of the change. This should include all initial and subsequent documentation (RCS Agreement Forms, court orders, payment records, etc.). This information is needed when completing the periodic reviews and/or court reports.
 - d. The current (legal county) Case Manager notifies the relative caregiver in writing whom he/she may contact in the new county if he/she have problems or questions regarding RCS/ERCS problems or issues and reminds the relative caregiver of the requirement to notify the agency immediately if there are changes in circumstance(s).
 - e. DFCS, in the county of legal jurisdiction, retains primary responsibility for maintaining and managing the RCS or ERCS file and the required periodic agency and court reports. The legal county's Regional accounting department is responsible for forwarding subsidy payments as long as the child remains eligible.

2. The family moves to another state:

While RCS or ERCS homes do not require monthly supervision, the legal county notifies the other state of the child's status and relocation to their state. As jurisdiction is with the Georgia court, the county DFCS office assures that:

- a. Notifications of the child's custody and subsidy status are sent through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to the other state following any current ICPC guidelines governing permanent custody/legal custody (until age 18) transfer cases. Note that DFCS and the juvenile court require annual (DFCS) and three-year (court) reports on the child's well being and functioning; for DFCS to establish continued eligibility for RCS payments. Refer to the 1004.2.9 procedures.

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- b. A request is made through ICPC for a written report, based on a home visit and face-to-face interview of the family and child (if appropriate); and contains a copy of the custody court order, Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment and the Relative Care Subsidy Application and Agreement along with the following identifying information:
- Parents' names
 - Name(s) of relative caregiver(s)/permanent legal custodian(s)
 - Child's name and date of birth
 - New address
 - Date of move
 - Identifying information from the court of jurisdiction and DFCS agency responsible for continuation of the subsidy payments and mandatory court (three-year) and agency (annual) renewal reports
- c. Monthly RCS or ERCS payments and the annual renewals will continue to be the responsibility of the legal county DFCS office. (See Renewals, Section 1004.2.7)
- The legal county Case Manager or other designated shall send a renewal notification letter to the relative caregiver at least 45 days prior to the expiration of the annual certification period along with an explanation of the requirements to renew the RCS agreement and continue RCS or ERCS payments.
 - The legal DFCS office sends a copy of the renewal notification letter, through ICPC, along with a request for assistance in completing the annual renewal agreement and certification.
 - Georgia will continue to be responsible for RCS or ERCS payments for eligible children as long as a Georgia court retains legal jurisdiction and the child remains eligible.
- d. Notify the other state and the relative caregiver that RCS/ERCS payments will be suspended for failure to comply with the renewal process.

Record Maintenance

1004.2.11

Requirement

The Relative Care Subsidy or ERCS file must be maintained separately from the child's case record for the purpose of conducting the mandatory annual renewal of the subsidy payments.

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1004.2.11 PROCEDURES

1. The Relative Care Subsidy or ERCS file, not the family or child case record(s), is to be kept in the county following the court order transfer of temporary legal custody (until age 18) from DFCS to the relative and closure of the placement case so that information will be available for annual renewals of subsidy payments.
2. All subsidy-related eligibility determination information is to be maintained in the Relative Care Subsidy or ERCS file.
3. When the RCS or ERCS file is closed it shall be sent to the county Department's closed files for retention in accordance with agency requirements for closed cases.

Subsidized Guardianship

1004.2.12

Requirement

Subsidized Guardianship (SG) payments may be considered for a relative caregiver after a child has been in custody of DFCS for a minimum of twelve months and reunification with the birth parents is unlikely. Refer to the Foster Care Services manual Section 1006.6 for procedures in selecting guardianship as the permanency plan for a child in DFCS custody.

1004.2.12 PROCEDURES

The availability of SG shall be discussed with all relatives interested in accepting legal guardianship of a child currently in DHR custody. Relatives in a different county or state are, also, offered this option for a child for whom they wish to provide a permanent home.

Note: Section 1004.2.12 discusses family relocations.

1. The relative caregiver(s) and the agency representative must sign the SG Application and Agreement (Form 45SG). The relative shall sign Form 45SG, prior to the Guardianship of the child (until age 18) is granted by Juvenile court.
2. A copy of the dated and signed SG Application and Agreement and the court order granting guardianship to the relative is maintained by the agency on behalf of the child. One copy of each is provided to the relative caregiver of the child.
3. SG eligibility begins the first day of the month guardianship is awarded to the relative caregiver. The child may not receive double funding in the same

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month (i.e. TANF and SG payments or overlapping Foster Care per diem and SG payments). Emphasize that participation in SG is optional.

4. If the agency is the payee for child's SSI or other payments before custody is transferred, the Case Manager must send notification to the appropriate authorities, so that such payments are diverted to the relative caregiver following the transfer of custody. A signed copy of such notification must be given to the relative and a copy placed in the caregiver's SG file.
5. The relative caregiver must submit an application to the Office of Child Support Enforcement or SSI (If applicable). A copy of the application must accompany the SG Application and Agreement.
6. Biological parents who successfully petition the court and have legal custody of their child returned to them will never be eligible for Subsidized Guardianship payments.

Eligibility for Subsidized Guardianship

1004.2.13

Requirement

1. The child must be:
 - a. A child in the temporary custody of the agency for a minimum of twelve (12) months and reunification is unlikely with the biological parents.
 - b. A child with a relative approved by the agency after receiving a favorable RCA, Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment and meeting all other requirements.
 - c. A child who was transferred from the legal custody of DHR to the guardianship of a relative, (as defined by blood, marriage or adoption,) through Juvenile court.
2. To calculate SG payments, the Case Manager must compute 80% of the current foster care per diem for the child's age.
 - a. If a child receives supports (child support, SSI, Social Security benefits) less than \$400.00, the child is eligible for SG. Accounting department will charge SG payments to UAS Code 552.
 - b. If the support is more than \$400.00, the child is ineligible for SG. If the available income is reduced at a later date, the relative caregiver may reapply for SG.

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Subsidized Guardianship Payment Initiation

1004.2.14

Requirement

Subsidized Guardianship payments are initiated by the county department following (1) the receipt of a completed, signed and dated Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, and (2) notification from the court that guardianship has been granted to the relative.

1004.2.14 PROCEDURES

Relative caregiver(s) must be notified of the child's eligibility and the amount of subsidy payments if they accept guardianship from the court, and that the funds are to be used for the child's needs and expenses.

1. The Case Manager must describe the available financial options and requirement (REL foster home per diem, SG, RCS, TANF, etc.). CM must obtain relative caregiver(s) signature on the Supports to Relative Caregiver's Guide. A copy is provided to the relative and one is filed in the SG file.
2. The relative's signature on a completed Form 45SG, Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, must be obtained and filed in the child's case record
3. The Case Manager reviews the form and program guidelines with the relative caregiver prior to the court hearing transferring permanent custody.
4. Designated counting staff must promptly implement the following procedures:
 - a. The Case Manager completes and submits Form 45 to accounting department to initiate SG payments.
 - b. The Case Manager sends the Form 529 to end any foster care payments being paid on the child's behalf. The day after the last day of per diem eligibility, SG payments are initiated (i.e., per diem eligibility ends on the 15th, SG eligibility begins on the 16th).
 - c. The Case Manager notifies the Family Independence staff on Form 713 to terminate any TANF payments being paid for the child's care. As TANF payments are made for the entire month, SG payments are initiated the first day of the month following the custody transfer provided all other SG criteria are met.
 - d. The Case Manager closes the IDS case, and places a copy of all actions and notifications in the child's case file.
 - e. The County Director designates a person to manage the SG record, monitor payments and complete the required annual (agency) review.
5. All required documents to initiate the payments promptly must be in place to assure continuity of services and payments on the child's behalf. As long as the child is eligible for the service or benefit, this transition should not result in:

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- ☐ A break in financial payments for the child's care,
- ☐ A break in Medicaid coverage, or
- ☐ A break in childcare services.

Subsidized Guardianship Payments

1004.2.15

Requirement

Subsidized Guardianship (SG) payments are available in a per day amount for the child to assist in meeting the needs of the child.

1004.2.15 PROCEDURES

1. Families eligible for a SG payment must meet the following criteria:

Note: There is no financial eligibility to qualify for SG as there is to qualify for Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship (ESG). See Section 1004 1.29.

- a. Complete and receive a favorable recommendation on the relative care assessment (RCA).
- b. Complete and receive a favorable recommendation on the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA), or update to an assessment done previously on this child, and
2. Be recommended for and accept guardianship of the child from the juvenile court.
3. The family receives a monthly payment to help defray the cost of day-to-day needs and expenses of the child placed in their permanent custody.
4. SG payments are charged to UAS Code 542
5. SG eligibility renewal and approval occurs annually until the child reaches the age of 18 or until high school graduation up to age 19, unless
 - a. The placement disrupts or terminates, resulting in the relative being relieved of guardianship.
 - b. Child is on runaway status (if 30 days or longer, SG payment will terminate.
 - c. Child dies
 - d. Child returns to agency custody based on CPS findings
 - e. Child is incarcerated (i.e., in jail, RYDC, etc.) and not expected to be released prior to 18th birthday
 - f. Child returns to the parent(s), with or without court or agency approval.
 - g. Child marries.

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6. Payments/supports received from CSE, SSI etc. on behalf of the child exceed \$400.00.

NOTE: The relative must notify the agency if any of these disruptions occur. These changes or conditions require that prompt notification is sent to the accounting department, so proper action can be taken to stop subsidy payments.

Duration of Payments

1004.2.16

Requirement

SG payments are available through the month of the child's 18th birthday. The payments may continue until the child reaches age 19 if he/she will graduate from High School.

1004.2.16 PROCEDURES

1. The Case Manager is responsible for submitting the required notices to the accounting department to terminate SG payments effective the month after the child turns 18 (or 19 if he/she will graduate from High School), unless another policy requirement terminates it sooner.
2. The Case Manager is responsible for giving advanced written notification of the date the payments will cease to the family and the youth.

Completing the Subsidized Guardianship Application

1004.2.17

Requirement

A Subsidized Guardianship (SG) Agreement Form must be properly completed for each child, signed and dated by the relative caregiver and the County Director or Designee to be effective.

1004.2.17 PROCEDURES

1. The Case Manager in the county with legal custody of the child is responsible for obtaining all eligibility information and court documentation that is needed to complete the initial Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, Form 45SG.
2. The selected relative placement resource and authorized staff shall sign the Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement.

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3. The agreement must be signed and in effect prior to the Juvenile court granting guardianship to the relative.
4. If a child is placed with a relative resource in another county (boarding county), the child's Case Manager shall provide the above information to the family's (boarding county's) Case Manager. This must be made available prior to completing the agreement. Obtaining and forwarding the completed and signed Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement to the legal county is the responsibility of the Family's (boarding county's) Case Manager. The SG payments are the responsibility of the accounting department in the DFCS legal county (county of legal jurisdiction, after placement case is closed).
5. If guardianship of a child is being considered with a relative caregiver in another state, assistance in obtaining and forwarding a completed and signed copy of the SG Application and Agreement from the relative caregiver should be requested from the family's Case Manager in the other state.
6. If a child is placed with a relative by a private agency, it is the responsibility of the child's Case Manager to request a completed and signed copy of the Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement.
7. The completed and signed agreement shall be maintained by the county with legal jurisdiction through the month of the child's 18th birthday, unless the agreement and subsidy payments are terminated sooner for a reason besides the child's age.
8. A copy of the agreement and appropriate court orders are forwarded to the county where the child is being boarded. Copies of the same are always provided to the family, also.

Renewals

1004.2.18

Requirement

Subsidized Guardianship cases must be renewed annually by the County Department.

1004.2.18 PROCEDURES

1. The county DFCS office responsible for issuing the SG payments shall notify the family of the need for renewal 45 days prior to the end of the first year of certification for payments by sending the Subsidized Guardianship Annual Renewal Report, Form 51SG.
2. A copy of the signed and dated renewal form must remain in the Subsidized Guardianship file for the family.

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3. If the family responds to the renewal letter indicating their desire to continue on SG status, the following procedures must be followed:
 - a. The family and the agency must sign a new Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, Form 45SG, with the current amount of Subsidized Guardianship designated on the form. Only the amount allowable by policy may be extended.
 - b. If the family fails to respond to the renewal letter within thirty (30) days their payments will be withheld (temporarily suspended) until they contact the agency and comply with requirements.
 - c. Notifications of suspensions or other financial status changes shall be sent to agencies involved with the family (SSA, the courts, partner agencies providing financial support/services to the family, etc.).

Status Change

1004.2.19

Requirement

Status changes in SG households must be reported promptly to the legal county.

1004.2.19 PROCEDURES

The Case Manager assigned responsibility for SG cases

1. Notifies the accounting department in the legal county (county of legal jurisdiction of the child) when any of the following situations occur:
 - The child's financial benefits or support increases or decreases.
 - The name of the payee changes.
 - The address of the payee changes.
 - The Subsidized Guardianship is no longer needed.
2. Notifies the relative caregiver(s) and appropriate service providers involved with the

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Family Relocations with Subsidized Guardianship

1004.2.20

Requirement

Subsidized Guardianship payments shall continue if a family moves, including out of county or state.

1004.2.20 PROCEDURES

1. If the family moves to another county within the state:
 - a. The family should notify the county Department prior to moving out of county. Upon receipt of notification of the family's intent to relocate to another county, the Case Manager from the child's legal county promptly coordinates the transfer of a Subsidized Guardianship case with the new county of residence to avoid any disruption in payments.
 - b. A letter shall be written to the DFCS Director in the new county of residence notifying them of the family's SG status, relocation to their county and requesting a follow-up visit to the family's new residence. The purpose of the visit is to update the SG Application and Agreement, assure the child's well-being and that the placement continues to meet agency requirements.
 - c. Upon receipt of a favorable recommendation for the home to remain on SG status, the current legal county Case Manager forwards a copy of the entire SG record to the new county DFCS office and notifies the accounting departments in both counties of the change. This should include all initial and subsequent documentation (SG Agreement Forms, court orders, payment records, etc.). This information is needed when completing the periodic reviews and/or court reports.
 - d. The current (legal county) Case Manager notifies the family in writing whom they may contact in the new county if they have problems or questions regarding SG and reminds them of the requirement to notify the agency immediately if there are changes in circumstance(s).
 - e. Until such time the court transfers jurisdiction of the case, DFCS staff in the county of legal jurisdiction, retains primary responsibility for maintaining and managing the SG file and required periodic agency and reports. The legal county accounting department is responsible for forwarding subsidy payments as long as the family remains eligible. In many instances the original court involved with the case will retain its jurisdiction. This will also require responsibility for monitoring the SG status to remain with the original legal county DFCS Case Manager or designated staff.

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2. The family moves to another state:

While SG homes do not require monthly supervisory contacts, the legal county notifies the other state of the child's status and relocation to their state. As jurisdiction is with the Georgia court, the county DFCS office assures that

- A. Notifications of the child's custody and subsidy status are sent through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to the other state following any current ICPC guidelines governing permanent guardianship transfer cases. Note that DFCS requires an annual review and report on the child's well being and functioning. The review establishes continued eligibility for SG payments.
- B. A request is made for a written report, of a home visit and face-to-face interview of the child (if appropriate) and family. Included in the request is a copy of the permanent custody court order and the SG Application and Agreement along with the following identifying information:
 - 1. Parents' names.
 - 2. Name(s) of relative caregiver(s)/permanent legal custodian(s).
 - 3. Child's name and date of birth.
 - 4. New address.
 - 5. Date of move.
 - 6. Identifying information from the court of jurisdiction and DFCS agency responsible for continuation of the SG payments and agency (annual) renewal reports
- C. Monthly SG payments and the annual renewal for SG will continue to be the responsibility of the legal county DFCS office.
 - 1. The legal county Case Manager or other designated staff shall send a renewal notification letter to the family at least 45 days prior to the expiration of the annual certification period along with an explanation of requirements to renew the SG agreement and continue SG payments.
 - 2. The legal DFCS office sends a copy of the renewal notification letter, through ICPC, along with a request for assistance in completing the annual renewal agreement and certification.
 - 3. Georgia will continue to be responsible for SG payments for eligible children as long as a Georgia court retains legal jurisdiction and the child remains eligible.

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Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship (ESG)

1004.2.21

Requirement

Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship (ESG) payments begin after the Department receives a completed and signed Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement from an approved relative verifying that the relative caregiver(s) income is less than \$150,000, a juvenile court order and notification from the court, transferring the child from the Department's temporary legal custody to granting legal guardianship to the relative.

1004.2.21 PROCEDURES

1. The availability of ESG shall be discussed with all relatives interested in accepting permanent custody of a child currently in DHR custody. Relatives in a different county or state are, also, offered this option for a child for whom they wish to provide a permanent home.

Note: Section 1004.3.19 discusses family relocations.

2. The relative caregiver(s) and the agency representative must sign the ESG Application and Agreement (Form 45ESG). The relative shall sign Form 45ESG, prior to the Guardianship of the child (until age 18) is granted by Juvenile court.
3. A copy of the dated and signed ESG Application and Agreement and the court order granting guardianship to the relative is maintained by the agency on behalf of the child. One copy of each is provided to the relative caregiver of the child.
4. ESG eligibility begins the first day of the month guardianship is awarded to the relative caregiver. The child may not receive double funding in the same month (i.e. TANF and subsidy payments or overlapping Foster Care per diem and subsidy payments). Emphasize that participation in ESG is optional.
5. If the agency is the payee for child's SSI or other payments before custody is transferred, the Case Manager must send notification to the appropriate authorities, so that such payments are diverted to the relative caregiver following the transfer of custody. A signed copy of such notification must be given to the relative and a copy placed in the relative caregiver's ESG file.
6. The relative caregiver must submit an application to the Office of Child Support Enforcement or SSI (If applicable). A copy of the application must accompany the ESG Application and Agreement.
7. Biological parents who successfully petition the court and have legal custody of their child returned to them will never are eligible for Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship payments.

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Eligibility for Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship

1004.2.22

Requirement

1. The child must be:
 - a. A child in the temporary custody of the agency for a minimum of twelve (12) months and reunification is unlikely with the biological parents.
 - b. A child with a relative approved by the agency after receiving a favorable RCA, comprehensive child and family assessment and meeting all other requirements.
 - c. A child who was transferred from the legal custody of DHR to the guardianship of a relative, (as defined by blood, marriage or adoption,) through Juvenile court.
2. To calculate ESG payments, the Case Manager must compute 80% of the current foster care per diem for the child's age.
 - a. If a child receives supports (child support, SSI, Social Security benefits) less than \$400.00, the child is eligible for ERR. Accounting department will charge ESG payments to UAS Code 542.
 - b. If the support is more than \$400.00, the child is ineligible for ESG. If the available income is reduced at a later date, the relative caregiver may reapply for ESG.

Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship Payment Initiation

1004.2.23

Requirement

Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship (ESG) payments are initiated by the county department following (1) the receipt of a completed, signed and dated Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, and (2) notification from the court that guardianship has been granted to the relative.

1004.2.23 PROCEDURES

1. Relative caregiver(s) must be notified of the child's eligibility and the amount of subsidy payments if they accept guardianship from the court, and that the funds are to be used for the child's needs and expenses.

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2. The Case Manager (CM) must describe the available financial options and requirements (REL foster home per diems, ESG, RCS amount and requirements, TANF, etc.). CM must obtain relative caregiver(s) signature on the Supports to Relative Caregiver's sheet. A copy is provided to the relative and one is filed in the SG file.

Note: If the relative exceeds the income limit, the Case Manager will advise the relative of his/her eligibility for the ESG.

3. The relative's signature on a completed Form 45SG, Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, must be obtained and filed in the child's case record.
4. The Case Manager reviews the form and program guidelines with the relative caregiver prior to the court hearing transferring permanent custody.
5. The following procedures must be implemented promptly by designated county staff:
 - a. The Case Manager completes and submits Form 45 to accounting department to initiate SG payments.
 - b. The Case Manager sends the Form 529 to end any foster care payments being paid on the child's behalf. The day after the last day of per diem eligibility, SG payments are initiated (i.e., per diem eligibility ends on the 15th, SG eligibility begins on the 16th).
 - c. The Case Manager notifies the Family Independence staff on Form 713 to terminate any TANF payments being paid for the child's care. As TANF payments are made for the entire month, SG payments are initiated the first day of the month following the custody transfer provided all other SG criteria are met.
 - d. The Case Manager closes the IDS case, and places a copy of all actions and notifications in the child's case file.
 - e. The County Director designates a person to manage the SG record, monitor payments and complete the required annual (agency) review.
6. All required documents to initiate the payments promptly must be in place to assure continuity of services and payments on the child's behalf. As long as the child is eligible for the service or benefit, this transition should not result in:
 - A break in financial payments for the child's care,
 - A break in Medicaid coverage, or
 - A break in childcare services.

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Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship Payments

1004.2.24

Requirement

Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship (ESG) payments are available, in a per day amount at 80% of the current foster care per diem rate for the child, to assist in meeting the needs of the child for relative

1004.2.24 PROCEDURES

1. Families eligible for a ESG payment must meet the following criteria:
2. Complete and receive a favorable recommendation on the Relative Care Assessment (RCA).
3. Complete and receive a favorable recommendation on the Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment (CCFA), or update to an assessment done previously on this child, and
4. Be recommended for and accept guardianship of the child from the juvenile court.
5. ESG payments are charged to UAS Code 542.
6. ESG eligibility renewal and approval occurs annually until the child reaches the age of 18 (may continue until 19 if child will graduate from High School), unless
7. The placement disrupts or terminates, resulting in the relative being relieved of guardianship. The relative must notify the agency if any of these disruptions occur:
 - a. Child is on runaway status (If 30 days or longer, SG payment will terminate)
 - b. Child dies
 - c. Child returns to agency custody based on CPS findings
 - d. Child is incarcerated (i.e., in jail, RYDC, etc.) and not expected to be released prior to 18th birthday
 - e. Child returns to the parent(s), with or without court or agency approval.
 - f. Child marries.
8. The child receives or becomes eligible for support payments greater than \$400.00 per month.
9. The relative caregiver(s) income is less than \$150,000.00 as determined by the most current Federal Income Tax return. If the relative does not have a Federal Income Tax return, a notarized statement is acceptable with the reason the

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Federal Income Tax Return is not available, yearly income, and source of income.

NOTE: These changes or conditions require that prompt notification be sent to the accounting department, so proper action can be taken to stop subsidy payments.

Duration of Payments

1004.2.25

Requirement

ESG payments are available through the month of the child's 18th birthday. The payments may continue until the child reaches age 19 if he/she will graduate from High School.

1004.2.25 PROCEDURES

1. The Case Manager is responsible for submitting the required notices to the accounting department to terminate SG payments effective the month after the child turns 18 (or 19 if he/she will graduate from High School), unless another policy requirement terminates it sooner.
2. The Case Manager is responsible for giving advance; written notification of the date the payments will cease to the family and the youth.

Completing the Subsidized Guardianship Application

1004.2.26

Requirement

A Subsidized Guardianship (RCS) Agreement Form 45SG must be properly completed for each child, signed and dated by the relative caregiver and the County Director or Designee to be effective.

1004.2.26 PROCEDURES

1. The Case Manager in the county with legal custody of the child is responsible for obtaining all eligibility information and court documentation that is needed to complete the initial Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement, Form 45SG.
2. The selected relative placement resource and authorized staff shall sign the Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement.
3. The agreement must be signed and in effect prior to the Juvenile court granting guardianship to the relative.

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4. If a child is placed with a relative resource in another county (boarding county), the child's Case Manager shall provide the above information to the family's (boarding county's) Case Manager. This must be made available prior to completing the agreement. Obtaining and forwarding the completed and signed Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement to the legal county is the responsibility of the family's Case manager (boarding county). The SG payments are the responsibility of the accounting department in the DFCS legal county (county of legal jurisdiction, after placement case is closed).
5. If guardianship of a child is being considered with a relative caregiver in another state, assistance in obtaining and forwarding a completed and signed copy of the SG Application and Agreement from the relative caregiver should be requested from the family's Case Manager in the other state.
6. If a child is placed with a relative by a private agency, it is the responsibility of the child's Case Manager to request a completed and signed copy of the Subsidized Guardianship Application and Agreement.
7. The completed and signed agreement shall be maintained by the county with legal jurisdiction through the month of the child's 18th birthday, unless the agreement and subsidy payments are terminated sooner for a reason besides the child's age.
8. A copy of the agreement and appropriate court orders are forwarded to the county where the child is being boarded. Copies of the same are always provided to the family, also.

Renewals

1004.2.27

Requirement

Subsidized Guardianship cases must be renewed annually by the County Department.

1004.2.27 PROCEDURES

1. The county DFCS office responsible for issuing the SG payments shall notify the family of the need for renewal 45SG days prior to the end of the first year of certification for payments by sending the Subsidized Guardianship Annual Renewal Report, Form 51SG.
2. A copy of the signed and dated renewal form must remain in the Subsidized Guardianship file for the family.
3. If the family responds to the renewal letter indicating their desire to continue on SG status, the following procedures must be followed:
 - a. The family and the agency must sign a new Subsidized Guardianship Application

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- and Agreement, Form 45SG, with the current amount of Subsidized Guardianship designated on the form. Only the amount allowable by policy may be extended.
- b. If the family fails to respond to the renewal letter within thirty (30) days their payments will be withheld (temporarily suspended) until they contact the agency and comply with requirements.
 - c. Notifications of suspensions or other financial status changes shall be sent to agencies involved with the family (SSA, the courts, partner agencies providing financial support/services to the family, etc.).

Status Change

1004.2.28

Requirement

Status changes in ESG households must be reported promptly to the legal county.

1004.2.28 PROCEDURES

The Case Manager assigned responsibility for ESG cases

1. Notifies the accounting department in the legal county (county of legal jurisdiction of the child) when any of the following situations occur:
 - a. The child's financial benefits or support increases or decreases.
 - b. The name of the payee changes.
 - c. The address of the payee changes.
 - d. The Subsidized Guardianship is no longer needed.
2. Notifies the relative caregiver(s) and appropriate service providers involved with the family that the Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship has terminated.

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Family Relocations

1004.2.29

Requirement

Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship payments shall continue if a family moves, including out of county or state.

1004.2.29 PROCEDURES

1. If the family moves to another county within the state:
 - a. The family should notify the county Department prior to moving out of county. Upon receipt of notification of the family's intent to relocate to another county, the Case Manager from the child's legal county promptly coordinates the transfer of an Enhanced Subsidized Guardianship case with the new county of residence to avoid any disruption in payments.
 - b. A letter shall be written to the DFCS office in the new county of residence notifying them of the family's ESG status, relocation to their county and requesting a follow-up visit to the family's new residence. The purpose of the visit is to update the ESG Application and Agreement, assure the child's well-being and that the placement continues to meet agency requirements.
 - c. Upon receipt of a favorable recommendation for the home to remain on ESG status, the current legal county Case Manager forwards a copy of the entire ESG record to the new county DFCS office and notifies the accounting departments in both counties of the change. This should include all initial and subsequent documentation (SG Agreement Forms, court orders, payment records, etc.). This information is needed when completing the periodic reviews and/or court reports.
 - d. The current (legal county) Case Manager notifies the family in writing whom they may contact in the new county if they have problems or questions regarding ESG and reminds them of the requirement to notify the agency immediately if there are changes in circumstance(s).
 - e. Until such time the court transfers jurisdiction of the case, DFCS staff in the county of legal jurisdiction, retains primary responsibility for maintaining and managing the ESG file and required periodic agency and reports. The legal county accounting department is responsible for forwarding subsidy payments as long as the family remains eligible. In many instances the original court involved with the case will retain its jurisdiction. This will also require responsibility for monitoring the ESG status to remain with the original legal county DFCS Case Manager or designated staff.

NOTE: It is the court's discretion to maintain or negotiate a transfer

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of jurisdiction to another venue. Responsibility for ESG eligibility renewals and issuance of payments is the responsibility of DFCS staff in the county of legal jurisdiction.

2. The family moves to another state:

While ESG homes do not require monthly supervisory contacts, the legal county notifies the other state of the child's status and relocation to their state. As jurisdiction is with the Georgia court, the county DFCS office assures that

- a. Notifications of the child's custody and subsidy status are sent through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to the other state following any current ICPC guidelines governing permanent custody transfer cases. Note that DFCS requires an annual review and report on the child's well being and functioning. The review establishes continued eligibility for ESG payments.
- b. A request is made for a written report, based on a home visit and face-to-face interview of the child (if appropriate) and family; and contains a copy of the permanent custody court order and the ESG Application and Agreement along with the following identifying information:
 1. Parents' names.
 2. Name(s) of relative caregiver(s)/permanent legal custodian(s).
 3. Child's name and date of birth.
 4. New address.
 5. Date of move.
 6. Identifying information from the court of jurisdiction and DFCS agency responsible for continuation of the ESG payments and agency (annual) renewal reports.
- c. Monthly ESG payments and the annual renewal for ESG will continue to be the responsibility of the legal county DFCS office.
 1. The legal county Case Manager or other designated staff shall send a renewal notification letter to the family at least 45 days prior to the expiration of the annual certification period along with an explanation of the requirements to renew the ESG agreement and continue ESG payments.
 2. The legal DFCS office sends a copy of the renewal notification letter, through ICPC, along with a request for assistance in completing the annual renewal agreement and certification.
 3. Georgia will continue to be responsible for ESG payments for eligible children as long as a Georgia court retains legal jurisdiction and the child remains eligible.

1004.1.3

Relative Foster Care (REL)

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Requirement

Any relative resource who accepts care of a child in a county department's custody shall be encouraged to complete requirements for approval as a resource parent.

1004 1.3 PROCEDURES

The SSCM must discuss and explain options for providing financial support or reimbursement to relatives who are approved and agree to be a placement resource for a child related (blood, marriage or adoption) to them.

6. If the relative elects to apply for REL, the home must be assessed and must meet the same requirement as a regular foster home.
7. Reimbursement will be made, provided criteria for foster care status is met, by foster care per diem, which is a higher per diem payment than including the child in a TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) grant.