

	<p align="center"><b>Department of Human Services Online Directives Information System</b></p>	<p><b>Index:</b> <b>Revised:</b> <b>Next Review:</b></p>	<p>POL3000 04/09/2024 04/09/2026</p>
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**SUBJECT:** Child Welfare Policy Manual

**POLICY:**

The child welfare policies of the Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), are intended to:

1. Promote and protect the welfare of children by:
  - a. Supporting child abuse prevention programs;
  - b. Receiving and investigating reports of suspected child abuse;
  - c. Providing protection to children who are victims of abuse; and
  - d. Providing services to families to increase caregiver protective capacity.
2. Provide for the temporary care of children whose families cannot ensure their safety and/or meet their basic care needs.
  - a. Foster care services focus on strengthening and rebuilding families to facilitate the child’s safe and timely reunification with their family.
  - b. When reunification is not possible within a reasonable period of time, foster care promotes the permanency of children by arranging for placement in another safe, stable, nurturing home.
  - c. While in care, the comprehensive needs of children are assessed, and services arranged and/or provided to promote their well-being.
3. Provide adoptive homes for children who are in the permanent legal custody of DFCS through the termination of parental rights or a voluntary surrender.
  - a. Documentation of the child’s needs, child specific recruitment, and matching services are provided in an effort to identify an adoptive home that can meet the child’s needs.
  - b. After adoption placement and finalization, adoption services focus on the provision of services to support and strengthen the new family.
4. Provide extended foster care (EFC) for young adults who meet the eligibility criteria and sign a voluntary agreement, to assist them in transitioning to successful adulthood.
  - a. EFC is a voluntary continuation of foster care case management services available to eligible young adults who do not achieve legal permanency in foster care by age 18. EFC provides the opportunity for the young adults to maintain a safety net while they practice their independent living skills.
  - b. EFC aims to maximize young adults’ ability to support themselves, have adequate community support, and learn the necessary life skills.
  - c. The juvenile court has oversight of a young adult’s participation in EFC.

**A. Authority**

Social Security Act of 1935, Titles [VI](#), [IV-B](#), [IV-E](#), and [XX](#), as amended  
45 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Parts [1340](#), [1355](#), [1356](#), and [1357](#)

## **B. References**

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (P.L. 93-247), as amended  
Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272)  
Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89)  
Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L.110-351)  
Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act Public Law (P.L. 113-183)  
Family First Prevention Services Act (P.L. 115-123)  
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964  
Americans with Disabilities Act (P.L. 101-338), as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 12101seq.  
The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-608), 25 U.S.C. § 1901 et seq.  
The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382), as amended by the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-188)  
Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. App. § 501 et seq.  
O.C.G.A. Title 15, Chapter 11 (Juvenile Code of Georgia)  
O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5 (Reporting Child Abuse)  
O.C.G.A. Title 19, Chapter 15 (Child Abuse Protocol and Child Abuse Fatality Committees)  
O.C.G.A. Title 19, Chapter 8 (Adoptions)  
O.C.G.A. Title 30, Chapter 4, § 30-4-5 Prohibition on discrimination against legally blind in matters of child custody, guardianship, foster care, visitation, placement, and adoption  
O.C.G.A. Title 39, Chapter 4 (Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children)  
O.C.G.A. Title 49, Chapter 5, Article 1 (Children and Youth Services), §§ 49-5-1 - 49-5-24  
O.C.G.A. Title 49, Chapter 5, Article 2 (Child Abuse Records), §§ 49-5-40 - 49-5-49  
O.C.G.A. Title 49, Chapter 5, Article 14 (Foster Parents Bill of Rights) §§ 49-5-280 – 40-5-281

## **C. Applicability**

All local county and state level Divisions of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall fulfill the requirements of the aforementioned DHS/DFCS policy.

## **D. Definitions**

### Adoption:

The social and legal process designed to establish a new legal family giving children the same rights and benefits of those who are born into a family.

### Child:

Any person under 18 years of age and is not an emancipated minor. Between 18 and 21 years of age and receiving extended foster care.

### Child Abuse:

1. Physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or other person responsible for the care of such child by other than accidental means; provided, however, that physical forms of discipline may be used as long as there is no physical injury to the child;
2. Neglect of a child by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or other person responsible for the care of such child;
3. Emotional abuse of a child;
4. Sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child;
5. Prenatal abuse of a child by a parent;
6. An act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health; or
7. Trafficking a child for labor servitude.

### Foster Care:

The Foster Care Program provides temporary out-of-home care for children who cannot remain safely in their home. The Extended Foster Care program provide services for eligible foster care youth 18-21 via a voluntary placement agreement.

### Permanency:

In order to grow up to be healthy, self-sufficient adults, children need to experience stability and continuity in a lifetime relationship with a parent and if this is not possible, with a parent substitute. Parent substitute options may include adoption, guardianship, or placement in another planned, permanent setting.

### Prevention:

Any activity, either offered directly by DFCS or by community resources that strengthens a family's ability to provide a safe and protective environment for children.

### Protection:

The necessary actions taken, including court intervention, to provide for a child's safety.

### Report:

Any information received by DFCS, alleging known or suspected instances of child abuse of a child under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is threatened.

### Special Needs Determination:

A child identified as a child with special needs must meet specific Federal and State factors or conditions. To be eligible for Title IV-E adoption assistance, the child must qualify as a child with special needs as defined by state statute and Title IV-E eligibility criteria. Special needs determinations are made by the DFCS Social Services Administration Unit (SSAU).

## **E. Responsibilities**

The Director of the Division of Family and Children Services is responsible for overseeing the development, issuance and updating the requirements and procedures of the Child Welfare Policy Manual (MAN3000).

## **F. History**

N/A

## **G. Evaluation**

The outcomes of this directive are evaluated by:

1. Supervisors of County Divisions of Family and Children Services responsible for reviewing case records each month for compliance with policy and procedures. Additional case record reviews are conducted by program administrators, program directors, county directors and regional staff.
2. The Quality Assurance Unit responsible for evaluating services and policy compliance in each of the 159 county departments.
3. State Office Program Sections responsible for overseeing positive safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children receiving child welfare services.
4. State auditors responsible for determining compliance with applicable state and federal regulations governing child welfare.
5. The Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, to determine state compliance with federal regulations.