Department of Children's Services

POLICY

16.3 Desired Characteristics of Foster Parents	
Application: All DCS Foster Care and Supervisory Staff and Contract Agency Staff	
Authority: TCA 37-4-201-207; Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, TCA 37-5-105(3), 37-5-106, 37-4-201 et seq., 36-1-201 et seq. Adoption and Safe Families Act-P. L. 105-89, Safe and Timely Interstate Placement Act of Children in Foster Care Act of 2006 - P.L. 109-239, Social Security Act and Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (HR 4980).	**Standards: COA:** PA-CR I, PA-CFS 22-23
Commissioner:	**Date:**
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Glossary:

- Age or Developmentally Appropriate:
  - As suitable, developmentally appropriate activities for children of a certain age or maturity level based on the capacities typical for the age group and the individual child.
- Normalcy:
  - Collection of age and developmentally appropriate activities, experiences and opportunities that should make up the daily lives of children and youth.
- Reasonable and Prudent Parenting:
  - The standard characterized by careful and sensible parenting decisions that maintain the child/youth's health, safety and best interests.
- To Nurture:
  - To help (something or someone) grow, develop, or succeed
  - To take care of (someone or something that is growing or developing) by providing food, protection, a place to live, etc.

Policy Statement:

The Department of Children's Services (DCS), Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) and DCS Contract Agencies, identify desired characteristics of foster parents to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children/youth served. DCS also sets standards of approval for its foster parents to increase the likelihood of their success in meeting the needs of the children/youth placed in their homes.

Purpose:

The procedures in this policy are for use as a guide in recruiting prospective foster parents.

Procedures:

A. Family Composition

1. Married or single persons may apply to become foster parents. All prospective foster parents are approved based on their ability to meet the needs of children/youth in foster care.
2. Potential foster parent's birth and adoptive children/youth are interviewed and involved in the mutual selection process. Their needs and strengths will be considered during the approval process of the family.
3. Any other household members are also interviewed and involved in the mutual selection process in terms of how they might be affected by or have an effect upon the child/youth that might be placed in the home.

B. Age and Health Requirements

1. The foster parents must be at least twenty one (21) years of age and must be both physically and emotionally healthy enough to carry out the duties of a foster parent (Relatives age eighteen (18) or older may be considered to become foster parents for a sibling or other blood relative).
2. The age and/or health of potential foster parents are considered primarily as it affects the parent's physical energy, emotional capability, maturity, flexibility, and ability to care for and provide permanency for a specific child/youth.
3. All household members (adults and children) must have up-to-date pertussis (whooping cough) and influenza vaccines to foster children under the age of eighteen (18) months old or with significant documented medical needs. Foster parents may request exemption from this requirement on the basis of religious or moral convictions. To request exemption, the foster parent completes CS-4256, Vaccine Exception Declaration for Foster Parents and provides the document to their Foster Parent Support (FPS) worker or contract agency provider, who ensures the document is scanned into TFACTS in the documents section of the foster parent's person home page.

C. Smoking and Health Quality Issues

Foster parents and their guests will not smoke, vape, or use other forms of e-cigarettes or smokeless tobacco inside the home or during transportation of a child in foster care. Precautions will be put in place to protect children from second hand smoke. Children/youth who are medically fragile, or who experience asthma or other breathing-related medical conditions, are not placed into homes with foster parents who smoke.

D. Quality of Relationships

Potential foster parents must have demonstrated the ability to build trusting and stable relationships with other persons including spouse, significant others, children, extended family members or friends. In the home study process, the quality of past and current significant relationships is assessed.

E. Stability

1. The prospective foster family's income must be stable and sufficient enough to meet their family's needs. Expenditures cannot be such that there is a reliance on foster care payment to sustain the household. Families approved by Central Office to

serve as a professional foster parent, may be exempt from this requirement as appropriate.

2. Any applicant that lives in governmental housing or receives a government subsidy/benefit will not be excluded based solely on these situations. Consideration is given to:
    - Physical safety and the environment of the home;
    - Each applicant's ability to parent children/youth involved with the child welfare system; and
    - Ability to meet their daily expenditures, without the dependence on the foster care board payment.
3. Form ***CS-0431, Monthly Family Income and Expenditures***, is completed to demonstrate income stability and applicants provide verification of all reported income.
   The family residence must appear structurally sound and the family should have maintained a stable address without frequent unjustified moves.

F. Transportation

Routine travel is included in the daily foster home board payment; therefore the foster parent should have reliable transportation to include a variety of trips such as: school meetings, Child and Family Team Meetings, family visits, doctor's appointments, family visitation, court, Foster Care Review Board, etc. which is influenced by the individual needs and activities of the child/youth in the home.

G. Motivation

1. The motivation to become foster parents is assessed through the interview process, home visits, TN KEY training interactions and observations.
2. Approved foster parents must continue to demonstrate the motivation to achieve a child/youth's permanency goal and work cooperatively with a child/youth's birth family and DCS in order to retain their approved status.

H. Parenting Ability

Foster parents should possess personal qualities and skills conducive to good parenting which are demonstrated through training and/or past parenting experiences. Foster parents demonstrate the following characteristics:

1. The capacity to integrate a child/youth into the foster family environment with a recognition that the child/youth will likely be suffering debilitating loss and trauma associated with his or her removal from his or her parents and subsequent

placement into state custody. The potential foster parent must be able to understand that, typically, a child/youth's need for state custody is temporary.

2. The ability to preserve the continuity of the child's spiritual, racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identity in a positive manner in conjunction with the following expectations.
   - **a)** The applicants evaluate their own racial prejudices and ability to cope with racial inequities.
   - **b)** They consider other children/youth, extended family, and the community and the impact this will have on the child/youth.
   - **c)** They have a plan to integrate the child/youth into this dual heritage environment while embracing and valuing the child/youth's racial identity.
   - **d)** They provide opportunities for the child/youth to participate in cultural experiences related to his/her ethnic background and interests.
   - **e)** They have the ability to preserve the cultural identity of the child/youth and maintain existing family and community relationships.
3. The ability to accept and care for a child/youth's emotional, physical, psychological, and behavioral needs.
4. The ability to balance the needs of all of the persons in the home, along with those of the foster, adoptive, and kinship care children.
5. The ability to protect a foster child/youth from parental abuse or neglect and support safe interactions or involvement with his/her parents.
6. The ability to request, accept, and receive support needed to maintain a child/youth within their family as long as the child/youth remains in state custody.

I. Reasonable and Prudent Parenting

Through thoughtful decision-making, foster parents support the child/youth's health, safety and best interest while encouraging the child/youth's emotional and developmental growth through the following activities: extracurricular, cultural, enrichment and social activities in order to promote "normalcy" and the ability to engage in healthy developmental, appropriate activities that promote well-being for all children/youth in care. Refer to the ***Protocol for Reasonable and Prudent Parenting*** for additional guidance on activities and opportunities for children/youth in foster care.

J. Ability to Work with Birth Families

Foster parents possess the ability to effectively work with birth families of any child/youth placed in their home by demonstrating the following:

1. The ability to accept and support a child/youth's relationship with his/her birth parent(s), guardian, or other relative filling a parental role.

2. The ability to help a child/youth and his/her birth family achieve the goals of the permanency plan through mentoring and coaching and offering support to the child/youth exiting state custody through reunification or adoption.

K. Ability to Partner with DCS

Foster parent(s) are willing to work with the Department as demonstrated by their ability to:

1. Work constructively within the Department's framework and directly with departmental staff in developing plans to meet the needs of the child/youth and the child/youth's family.
2. Adhere to the departmental policies regarding confidentiality and respect any child/youth or birth family social history information that might be learned or shared with the foster parent.
3. Accept and utilize professional consultation including mental health, medical, and educational assistance that will benefit the child/youth in their care.
4. Provide input to the Department regarding the needs of a child/youth in care.
5. Work in partnership with the Department to make key decisions related to the placement of children/youth and termination of parental rights.
6. Work in partnership with the Department to achieve an appropriate and timely permanency for the child/youth.

L. Trauma Reduction

Foster parents must understand the impact of trauma on children/youth and strive to reduce future traumatic events. The Child and Family Team (CFT) attempts to limit separation of siblings and to reduce the movement of children/youth from foster homes by the guidance of DCS Policy and procedures.

Forms:

CS-0431 Monthly Family Income and Expenditures

CS-0678 Foster Parent/Other Adult Medical Report

CS-4256, Vaccine Exception Declaration for Foster Parents

Note: Contract Agencies may use equivalent forms, provided the content of the forms capture the content of the forms listed above.

Collateral Documents:

Protocol for Reasonable and Prudent Parenting