Department of Children's Services

POLICY

16.4 Foster Home Selection and Approval	
Application: DCS Foster Care and Supervisory Staff and Contract Provider Staff	
Authority: TCA 37-4-201-207; Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, TCA 37-5-105(3), 375-106, 39-17-1315; Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, HR 4472; Adoption and Safe Families, P.L. 105-89; Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006,P.L. 109-239 and the Social Security Act; Fostering Connections To Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, P.L. 110-351; Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, P.L. 115-123 (Family First Prevention Services Act, Section 50731, National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards)	**Standards : COA:** PA-CFS 12.02, PA-CFS 12.06, PA-CFS 23-24
Commissioner:	**Date:**
Original Effective Date: 07/01/00 Current Effective Date: 04/11/24	Supersedes: DCS 16.4 03/07/24 Last Review Date: 04/11/24

Glossary:

- Driving Record Check/Moving Violation Record:
  - Each region has designated specific FPS staff who are able to access the Moving Violation Records through an understanding with the Tennessee Department of Safety. This access provides DCS with driving records for each foster parent/individual that provides transportation for DCS children. The report shows speeding and DUI charges and other moving violations. In an attempt to keep DCS children safe while in foster care, these reports are completed prior to approval of a new foster home and during biennial re-assessments of foster homes.
- Family Foster Home
  - Is the home of an individual or family that meets all the requirements of this policy and an approved foster or kinship placement that the state deems capable of adhering to the reasonable and prudent parent standard; a home in which a child in foster care has been placed and resides with the individual or family; provides 24hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or other caretakers.
- Family in "Good Standing":
  - Any fully approved family that is currently taking foster home placements and complied with all on-going training requirements or a family that has decided to close their foster home and discontinue their fostering experience and the system reflects the positive closure reason of "closed in good standing".
- Household Member or Significant Others:
  - A relative or anyone that has an important connection to the applicant via blood or relation. This would include anyone living in the home and involved in the day-today affairs or has access to children placed in the home.
- Parenting Role:
  - The assumption of the primary responsibility for promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood by an adult member/members of a household. Parenting refers to the activity of raising a child and is not specific to a biological connection. The nurturing parent can be a stepparent, foster parent, adoptive parent or guardian.
- Substantiated Report:
  - Any closed CPS case where a preponderance of evidence exists to support that the reported allegation(s) occurred.
- Traditional Applicant:
  - Individuals applying to be a foster parent for children in which they do not have an existing connection and meet the minimal requirements as outlined in this policy.

Policy Statement:

DCS recruits foster parents who are capable to provide for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. This policy is applicable to traditional non-related applicants desiring to become a potential placement resource for children. Approved relative/kinship foster parents desiring to serve children with whom they do not already have a significant relationship must meet all requirements of this policy.

Purpose:
To provide guidelines for identifying and approving qualified foster homes for placement of youth in DCS custody or youth placed into Tennessee.

Procedures:

A. Minimum Requirements and Expectations for Becoming a Foster Parent

Serving as a foster parent or foster family for children in Tennessee is a privilege, not a right. Approved foster parent(s) will not petition to adopt, obtain guardianship, or file for custody of a child/youth in care of DCS unless the child's Child and Family Team (CFT) concurs with the plan and gives written approval. Non-compliance with this section may be grounds for immediate closure of a foster home.

1. An applicant who wishes to become a foster parent must meet the following criteria:

a) Twenty-one (21) years of age. An applicant to be a foster parent for a sibling or other blood relative must be at least eighteen (18) years old;

Note: Some contract agencies have a minimum age requirement of twenty-five (25) for therapeutic foster homes.

b) A legal resident of Tennessee a minimum of three (3) consecutive months prior to approval;

c) A United States citizen or have been approved by the United States Citizen and Immigration Service as a Legal Permanent Resident;

d) All adult household members pass a criminal background check;

e) Applicants must be able to effectively communicate with the Department, the child/children, health care providers and other service providers. At least one applicant in the home must have functional literacy, such as having the ability to read medication labels;

f) Provide documentation of sufficient income or resources to meet household needs prior to the addition of a foster placement;

g) All family pets receive rabies vaccination as required by law with verification of vaccination provided;

h) 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.

i) Household members 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 are put in place to protect children from secondhand smoke.

j) A house, mobile home, housing unit or apartment in which the dwelling and grounds is in reasonable state of repair within community standards. Non-dwellings in questionable repair can be considered for a waiver. A dwelling cannot be used for the purpose of temporary rental (e.g. Air BnB) given the potential liability associated with this type of living arrangement. If a separate living space on the property or sealed portion from the main house is used for rental, adherence to DCS policy regarding such living spaces must be followed.

k) If residing in government housing, written confirmation from the Housing Authority must be provided to complete the home approval process to ensure the applicant's eligibility for housing is not affected if allowed to foster.

2. Applicants are eligible regardless of gender, race, color, or national origin.

3. An applicant that wishes to become a foster parent is expected to participate in the following activities to assist the family in reaching permanency: a) Mentor birth parents; b) Transport children to routine appointments; and c) Participate in Child and family Team Meetings (CFTM), court hearings and other meetings.

4. Approval is a mutual selection process and is based on the applicant's ability to meet specific approval requirements, meet regional placement needs and to promote DCS Standards of Professional Practice. Refer to form ***CS-1217, Acknowledgement of Understanding Regarding Placement Acceptance.***

5. All adult household members that provide a parental/caretaking role (childcare, transportation, discipline, or other support to children) must meet the same training and criminal history requirements as the foster parent applicant.

6. Foster homes wanting to be re-activated or re-classified follow the ***Protocol for Re-Activation and Re-Classification of Foster Homes***. The completion of the new **POPS Tool** is only necessary if there are identified concerns.

7. DCS engages families whose initial interest involved the placement of a youth in the custody/guardianship/jurisdiction of another public agency pursuant to the

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). Refer to the ***ICPC Practice and Procedure Manual*** for details in practice for an inter-jurisdictional placement.

B. Response to Potential Foster Parents

1. On behalf of DCS, a contractual provider will respond to inquiries or referrals providing interested families with an overview of foster parenting, the home study process and approval requirements. The contract provider will assist applicants with the completion of paperwork, criminal background checks and registration for pre-service training. Applicants that meet minimal qualifications and complete pre-service training will be referred for a home study.
2. Foster home referrals submitted to the region through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) are contacted by the assigned regional Foster Parent Support (FPS) worker within seven (7) calendar days of the referral's entry into TFACTS.

C. Home Approval Process

1. The foster home approval process includes the completion of pre-service training, various forms, medical clearance, home safety inspection and a written home study.
2. Foster parent applicant and co-applicant are required to complete TN KEY preservice training. All married couples are required to complete TN KEY regardless if one spouse may be identified as an "Other Adult" residing in the home. Couples in which one spouse is actively serving in the military can begin the home approval process by completing Item 3 of this section and passing a criminal background check. Upon passing the background check, the nonmilitary spouse can complete the home approval process. The deployed military spouse is expected to complete pre-service training and the home study process upon returning home. Enrollment in pre-service training will occur within thirty (30) calendar days.
3. The foster home approval process begins with applicants providing forms ***CS0688, Foster Home Application for Parenting, CS-0559, Authorization for Release of Information and HIPAA Protected Health Information TO or FROM the Department of Children's Services and Notification of Release, CS-0691, Fingerprint Card Information and CS-1221, Waiver Agreement and Statement for Criminal History Checks (VECHS)***. These documents are returned to DCS/contract provider staff prior to or at the beginning of session one of TN KEY training.
4. Once the applicant(s) enters TN KEY training, they are provided access to remaining forms to be completed for the home approval process.

5. On behalf of DCS, a contract provider will make a referral to the home study writer contractor, at minimum, after module two of TN KEY.
6. The foster home study writer conducts interviews with the potential foster parents, together and separately, and individually with all other household members as outlined in the ***Documentation of the Foster Family Home Study*** and the ***Profile of Parenting Study (POPS) Tool.*** A home consultation is also completed using ***CS-0676, Home Safety Checklist.***
7. Each foster parent applicant and each member of the family provides a medical report from a licensed physician, nurse practitioner or equivalent health care professional documenting the acceptable physical and emotional health of all household members. Forms ***CS-0678, Foster Parent/Other Adult Medical Report*** and ***CS-0427, Child's Medical Report*** may be used to document the applicant's current medical status, and other adult or child/youth household members. In cases where a child/youth as a household member has had a well-baby check or physical examination for school within the last twelve (12) months, the applicants may submit the documentation from that appointment.
8. Verifications of valid handgun carry permit, driver's license, vehicle registration, current vehicle liability insurance, current marriage, the previous marriage annulment or divorce decree, births, adoptions and custody matters of children in the home including an adjudication of delinquency, if applicable, are provided by each applicant. In situations where an applicant is separated from their spouse, documentation of a divorce, annulment, legal separation or death of separated spouse has to be obtained prior to moving forward with an adoption.
9. 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.
   Note: Flu season is considered active during the months of October through March. Therefore, all household members are expected to obtain the influenza vaccine as close to the beginning of this time frame as possible. Children under the age of eighteen (18) months will not be placed in the home until proof of vaccination has occurred.
10. Any household member who may provide transportation to a foster child shall provide copies of a valid Tennessee driver's license, vehicle registration, current vehicle liability insurance, and proof of county vehicle inspection (where applicable).
11. References are obtained from three (3) individuals not related to the applicants, as well as one (1) relative reference from each of the applicants. The individuals providing references may not reside in the home of the applicants.

D. Mandatory Pre-Service Training

1. DCS schedules and offers multiple TN KEY groups each month. Contract providers schedule TN KEY groups as required.
2. All traditional applicants attend a TN KEY Informational Meeting to become better oriented to the training and home study approval process prior to attending TN KEY sessions.
3. All traditional applicants are required to complete twenty-five (25) hours of TN KEY Pre-Service training. Relative/Kinship foster parents desiring to foster traditionally will be required to complete twenty-five (25) hours of TN Key Pre-Service training.
4. Therapeutic foster homes are required to complete thirty-one (31) hours of Pre-Service training that includes TN KEY twenty-five (25) hours and a minimum of six (6) hours of therapeutic foster parent training.
5. Although there can be no changes to the TN KEY *Curriculum*, staff can submit a waiver for TN KEY Modification on form ***CS-0921, Waiver of Criminal Convictions, Pre and In-Service Training Requirements, Non-Safety Issues, CPS Substantiations and Educational Requirements*** (refer to form instructions for required signatures) if any of the following TN KEY training formats best meet the needs of the family:
   a) Use of TN KEY training with one individual, rather than in a larger, group format. Upon approval, staff complete and submit form ***CS-1158, Individual TN KEY Training*** to the Office of Training and Professional Development for review and approval.
   b) Substitution of other approved training and past fostering experiences accepted as TN KEY equivalent.

   TN KEY is co-led by a DCS or contract provider staff person who has a minimum of a bachelor's degree, along with a trained DCS or contract provider foster parent. Youth co-leaders are also included in TN KEY Training Sessions as identified and relevant to their expertise.

6. All foster parent applicants and/or any adults living in the household who have a parenting role must complete TN KEY training. Note: Birth parents that are residing in an applicant's home are not required to take TN KEY.
7. A waiver request is not necessary for adults living in the foster home who have no parenting role. Clear documentation in the foster home record is completed to explain why the individuals are exempt from TN KEY training.
8. Older birth or adopted children who are living in the home of the foster parents that turn eighteen (18) years old after the parents are approved, do not have to complete TN KEY, unless they have a parenting role.
9. Foster homes that have been closed for less than two (2) years and were in good standing at the time of closure are not required to re-take initial TN KEY training. Trainers use DCS form ***CS-1229, Foster Parent Pre-Service Refresher Training***

Plan to refresh foster homes closed in good standing for a period in excess of two (2) years on pre-service training components:

a) Conduct an informal verbal assessment to determine an appropriate training plan for the foster family using the guidelines below (b-f).

b) Deliver Pre-Service Refresher training in the home using the outline established.

c) Confirm the last date that parent completed Medication Administration. If more than two (2) years, parents are required to attend a Medication Administration Refresher course via live webinar.

d) Enroll applicants in CPR/FA if their certification has lapsed.

e) Complete a new **Pre-Service Training Assessment** form for the family and submit to the Home Study writer,

f) Foster parents will not be required to attend a TN KEY group. Parents do one of the following after the refresher is completed:

- Receive in-home training on one or more modules as determined by the completed Assessment;
- Attend a TN KEY module or group if the foster parent elects to attend and/or prefers this option to the in-home training requirement;
- Proceed with fostering upon approval of home study.

10. If a home has completed TN KEY training but has remained in pending status for more than one year or a home completes Pre-Service training in another state, the Office of Training and Professional Development must evaluate whether the foster parents are required to retake TN KEY or other recommended courses. If it is decided the family does not need to re-enroll in TN KEY, the rationale is documented in the foster home study.

11. Foster Parent Support (FPS) staff, Trainers and contract providers should consult to exchange/share training and certification information.

12. In addition to the completion of TN KEY training, an applicant completes:

a) CPR/First Aid six (6) hours certification or non-certification class (medical professionals such as doctors or nurses who are certified due to employment can present their current/CPR/First Aid certification to TN KEY trainer or home study writer for approval consideration instead of taking the course). Online CPR/First Aid training is not allowed; and

b) Medical Resources and Information (MRI) four (4) hours. Medical professionals can complete the following online course to fulfill this requirement: ***Medication Administration for Medical Professionals.***

c) Mutual Assessment Process (MAP) Meeting one (1) hour with TN KEY trainer.

E. General Areas of Assessment

During the foster home study process, the foster home study writer or FPS assesses, at minimum, the following areas with the applicants:

1. All areas outlined in DCS Policy ***16.3, Desired Characteristics of Foster Parents***;
2. Understanding of core components of TN KEY; trainers complete DCS form ***CS1227, TN KEY Assessment,*** to document the applicant's pre-service training experience. Foster parent applicants complete DCS form ***CS-1228, TN KEY Mutual Assessment Process Questionnaire***, to document their understanding of the core components of TN KEY. The Home Study writer summarizes both documents in the Training Experience section of the home study narrative;
3. Parenting interests, abilities and willingness to foster certain behavioral characteristics are documented on form ***CS-0962, Foster Parent Applicant Questionnaire;***
4. The home study writer discusses ***CS-0553, Discipline Policy***, and ***CS-0670, Oath to Abide*** ensuring understanding of responsibilities prior to signing/dating the forms.
5. Foster home capacity is not to exceed more than five (5) total children/youth (including birth and adopted children/youth) in a foster home. Refer to ***Guidelines for Foster Home Placements Exceeding Five Total Children in a Foster Home*** for guidance. Any other situation requiring a Placement Exception Request refer to DCS Policy ***16.46, Child/Youth Referral and Placement***);
6. The home's environment for safety and risk, documenting whether the prospective residence meets acceptable sanitary requirements, utilizing form ***CS-0676, Home Safety Checklist*** and the ***Home Safety Checklist Work Aid***. Although this list is not designed to be comprehensive, all items must be complied with and the following areas are assessed and confirmed:
   - **a)** Physical facilities meet the needs of children based on age, gender, sibling group status and any other special needs;
   - **b)** The residence is free of hazards.
   - **c)** The residence has an adequate water supply:
     - ♦ Applicants who rely on well water provide documentation of its safety;
   - **d)** The residence has working toilet and bathroom with tub and/or shower;
   - **e)** The residence has a properly operating kitchen with a sink, refrigerator, stove and oven;
   - **f)** The residence has heating and cooling units in safe operating condition;
   - **g)** The residence has a working telephone (landline or cell phone to connect to local 911 emergency services) or access to a working telephone in close walking proximity. Homes with no telephone access must include emergency telephone procedures in the home's evacuation/safety plan;
   - **h)** The residence has adequate sewage disposal;
   - **i)** The residence has adequate sleeping space:

- Unfinished attics, basements, hallways or other outbuildings may not be used as sleeping rooms;
- Children have their own bed that includes a mattress, box springs (unless they are bunk beds) and bed frame. Platform beds are also acceptable (refer to the ***Protocol for Safe Sleep Education and Delivery of Safe Sleep Furniture*** and/or the ***Home Safety Checklist Work Aid*** if applicable);
- Baby Hammocks, baby boxes or Rock 'n Play Sleepers are prohibited;
- No more than two (2) children share a sleeping room. Exceptions can be considered on a case by case review as outlined in this section per the non-safety waiver guidelines.
- Children three (3) years of age or older may not share the bedroom of the foster parent(s) except for brief periods of illness or emotional distress.
- Children ages four (4) years old and under, of the opposite sex and who are siblings are allowed to share sleeping rooms;

Note: A child's bedroom should be a place of reasonable privacy based on age and development. However, on a case-by-case review, video and audio supervision can be considered to monitor a child for safety. Such a decision is to be discussed and agreed upon by the Child and Family Team and implemented in a Child Safety Plan. A Team Coordinator must attend the CFT and be in agreement for the usage of cameras. The decision is to be included in the CFT summary and reviewed throughout the placement. The need to use cameras for the identified child's circumstances must be evaluated with each new placement. In any situation in which audio/video supervision is approved, the child must be informed of such supervision. Any usage of audio is to be turned off during private discussions between child and DCS and/or contract provider workers.

j) The residence has adequate storage space to allow for clutter free shared living spaces and for each custodial child to store their personal possessions.

7. Pets or domestic animals:

a) In or on the premises of a foster home are kept in a safe and sanitary manner in accordance with state and local laws;

b) All family pets receive rabies vaccination as required by law with verification of vaccination provided. Pets intolerant to the rabies vaccination may be considered for waiver by Central Office with the following provided:

- Documentation from the veterinarian of the pet's negative response to the vaccine or risk of a negative reaction due to age/illness; and
- The pet's likely exposure to rabies (i.e. inside only pet, fenced yard only, frequents dog park, goes hiking with family, etc.).

c) Though there is no limit to the number of pets allowed in a home, this is considered upon final assessment of the home study.

8. The residence is free from rodents and insect infestation.

9. Foster parents who are gun owners adhere to the following:

a) *TCA 39-17-1307* constitutional carry and *TCA 39-17-1351* handgun carry permit laws;

- Provide DCS/contract provider staff with a photocopy of the permit when applicable;
- Each permit carrier is responsible for the renewal of the permit as required by *TCA 39-17-1351* or other applicable law;
- The permit holder provides DCS/contract provider staff with a copy of the gun permit at time of renewal;
- Per *TCA 39-17-1351(r)(1)*, out-of-state handgun carry permits are transferred within six months (6) of establishing residency in TN;
- Foster Parents who possess a handgun permit and choose to carry a weapon in their vehicle complies with *TCA 39-17-1313*.
- Foster Parents who possess a handgun permit and choose to carry a weapon on their person or in their vehicle in the presence of children in their care exercise extreme caution at all times and comply with all applicable state and federal laws while possessing such handgun.
- Foster Parents who meet the requirements of *TCA 39-17-1315* (e.g., law enforcement officer, police officer, bonded and sworn deputy sheriff, director, commissioner, county magistrate, or retired law enforcement) who choose to carry a handgun at all times provide documentation of the written directive required by *TCA 39-17-1315* to DCS/contract provider staff. Such individuals comply with item b of this section (below) regarding storage of weapons and ammunition.

Note: Refer to form ***CS-0670, Foster Parent Oath to Abide.***

b) All firearms, bows and arrows, hunting knives and weapons of any variety are housed and locked in a secure gun cabinet or other secure storage facility inaccessible to children. Gun cabinets with glass enclosures or glass doors are not appropriate. Trigger locks can be used to secure firearms. Keys to the gun cabinet(s) or trigger lock(s) are secured in a separate location. Ammunition is stored and locked separately away from the gun's location.

10. Residential/private swimming pools in Tennessee are required to adhere to ***Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA) National Building Codes*** including, but not limited to, having a pool barrier, locking gate, and pool alarm (***https://www.fenceanddeckconnection.com/pool-code-fencing-boca-codes/***). Homeowners will also adhere to any city and/or county safety ordinances that are in excess of BOCA and provide documentation of compliance by having a copy of local regulations in their home for review. For areas in which there are no pool

ordinances, provide the name and contact information of the city/county official providing information. A print off from the city/county website is also acceptable.

- Any home with a pool, spa or other water safety hazard must create a safety plan. The safety plan is addressed within the home study or in an addendum for already approved foster homes regarding pools or any other water hazards on the property. This safety plan is to be communicated with children placed in the home in conjunction with sharing emergency numbers and other household rules.
- Pool safety includes but are not limited to items listed on form ***CS-4203, Water Hazard/Pool Safety Assessment Tool***. The tool is to be completed during the initial home visit and prior to foster home approval or at installation of a pool/spa at an approved foster home. Any noted concerns or areas of non-compliance are to be documented under noncompliance on form ***CS-0676, Home Safety Checklist***, including a safety plan to address supervision and water safety. The safety plan is not to exceed a two (2) week period. Any extension to this timeframe to address the identified concern must be approved by the Regional Administrator/designee or contract provider, Executive Director/designee.
- Continued water safety is to be assessed during monthly home visits.

11. In an effort to ensure each placement is a drug-free environment foster parents are held to expectations outlined in the ***Protocol for Drug and Medication Expectations for Approved Foster Homes*** and the ***Controlled Substance and Medication Work Aid.***

12. Specific non-safety issues may be waived during the approval process of the foster home. Any considerations for waiver are documented on form ***CS-0921, Waiver of Criminal Convictions, Pre and In-Service Training Requirements, Non-Safety Issues, CPS Substantiations and Educational Requirements***, and clearly identified as a "non-safety issue". The waiver is reviewed and approved by the Regional Director or the contract provider Executive Director or his/her designee before being submitted to Central Office for final approval. Information contained in ***CS-0921*** is documented in the foster home study narrative.

F. Fire Safety

1. Foster homes contain the following:

a) UL-approved, operational smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the home:

- Smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors where children sleep are located in the child/youth's bedroom, or in the hallway adjacent to the child/youth's bedroom.

b) A functioning fire extinguisher for each floor of the residence. The usage of other fire suppressants must be UL-approved.

2. Applicants prepare a floor plan of their home, which identifies the location of all smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers and illustrates evacuation routes in case there is a fire in the home. The evacuation plan and emergency phone numbers are posted in a prominent location inside the home. Only a copy of the evacuation plan is uploaded into the electronic case file.

3. The foster home study writer discusses a fire drill plan with the applicants during the foster home study process. Fire drill plan discussion includes:

a) How fire drills might be conducted in the family home;

b) How each family member would be made aware of the plan;

c) The location where all family members would meet after the home is evacuated; and

d) How family members with special needs will be assisted.

G. Assessment of Relationships

1. The foster home study writer assesses the quality of an applicant's current and past relationships. The foster home study narrative includes an assessment of the potential foster parent's ability to build and maintain trusting and stable relationships with persons including their own children, family members, friends and others significant to the applicant. Significant relationships are assessed based on duration as well as the number of relationships over time. This assessment includes the following:

- Reviewing and discussing the ***Foster Parent Applicant Questionnaire (CS-0962);***
- TN KEY training and ***CS-1038, TN KEY Participant Assessment***;
- Face to face and virtual interviews;
- Contacting the references (***CS-0963, Foster Family Reference Letter and Questionnaire***); and
- Completing of the POPS tool.

2. A conversation is held with each member of the household to assess their attitude about sharing their home with children from the child welfare system.

3. A summary of these conversations is included in the foster home study narrative.

H. Background and Criminal Records Clearance

1. A criminal background check begins immediately or no later than Session One of TN KEY to ensure applicants and other adult household members meet State, Federal and DCS qualifications regarding a criminal history.

2. All findings identified as a result of the criminal history check are documented on form ***CS-0687, Background Check History and IV-E Eligibility Checklist***, with results attached along with form ***CS-0921, Waiver of Criminal Convictions, Pre and In-Service Training Requirements, Non-Safety Issues, CPS Substantiations and Educational Requirements***, when applicable. Such results are reported in the foster home study and maintained in the foster home electronic case file.

Note: For waivers and approvals on misdemeanor and felony convictions, refer to the ***Waiver Tip Sheet for Employment, Volunteering and Custodial Placements***.

3. A complete criminal history check includes the following five (5) checks. The completion of all checks must take into account current, maiden, and any other previous legal names.
4. A local criminal records check from local law enforcement or county court for each jurisdiction resided within the immediate six (6) months preceding application. All criminal charges listed in the local criminal history check for which there is no final disposition (misdemeanor or felony) identified is clarified by obtaining additional documentation from the local court with jurisdiction.
    - Each criminal history records check is to be completed in accordance with policy to ensure timely assessment of foster homes. However, to allow for human error, it is permissible to rectify errors (i.e. incorrect name spelling, DOB, SSN) on such checks. Newly conducted checks that show no results are considered compliant. Checks that show convictions or substantiations of abuse or neglect within the findings that would exclude the applicant from becoming an approved foster home or approved household member as outlined are deemed non-compliant.
5. A TBI/FBI fingerprint check.
6. An Internet Records Clearance for the following registries:
    a) ***National Sexual Offender Registry Clearance***
    b) ***Tennessee Department of Health Abuse Registry Clearance***

Note: Any contract provider using an internet service to complete the required background checks for potential foster parents and/or other adult household members is responsible for assuring that such provider accesses the internet searches listed above. Doing so precludes the need for the provider to complete each individual internet search. Failure to verify that the chosen internet service use the exact sites listed above for each check results in that check being considered invalid. This may cause a home to be identified as noncompliant and result in monetary penalties.

7. A DCS records check includes a check of Child Protective Services (CPS) records in TFACTS. When applicable, FPS staff refers to ***Safety Notice: Conducting an***

Efficient and Effective History Search to ensure accurate search results and document findings on form ***CS-0741, Database Search Results***.

- Contract Agencies submit their DCS records check request on form ***CS0741, Database Search Results*** and send to email box***: EI-DCSProvider.Backgroundcheck@tn.gov.***
- If the adult has resided in another state within the past five (5) years, the FPS/contract provider staff person or designee requests a check from each state's public child welfare agency's child abuse and neglect registry. See the ***Adam Walsh State Contacts for Child Abuse Registries*** for out of state contact information. Refer to the ***Protocol for Requesting Out of State Abuse and Neglect Registry Checks*** for further guidance regarding Adam Walsh checks.
- No foster home is approved if the applicant or any other adult household member has been determined to have been substantiated of child abuse or neglect unless a waiver is granted, and the Due Process Procedures Division overturns the substantiation. This waiver may only be approved by the Executive Director of the Office of Child Safety/designee and documented on form ***CS-0921, Waiver of Criminal Convictions, Pre and In-Service Training Requirements, Non-Safety Issues, CPS Substantiations and Educational Requirements.***
- Specific information related to CPS findings and records involving an applicant is maintained in the foster parent file and addressed in the foster home study narrative.

8. Internet Records Clearance, DCS records check, and local background checks are completed for all adults living on the foster parent's property having the same mailing address. This includes those living in other dwellings (i.e., over-the-road trucks, buildings, campers, mobile trailers, etc.). If any causes for concern are noted, fingerprinting is completed on the individual(s) that prompted the concern. Failure to comply with the requested background checks result in the denial or closure of the foster home. A driving record check/moving violation record check for each household member approved to transport a child/youth.

9. Potential DCS/ contract provider foster parents, as well as any other adult residing in the home, must report any new arrest, indictment, or criminal conviction (either misdemeanor or felony).

I. Documentation and Foster Home Study Requirements

1. The application, autobiography, TN KEY training certificate, forms (mentioned in the policy narrative or listed in the Forms section of this policy), foster home study narratives and all supporting documentation (medical statements, criminal

background checks/clearances, references, etc.) constitute a completed foster home study. This collection of information becomes part of the foster home electronic case file (refer to DCS Policy ***16.23, Foster Home Records***) along with the foster home study writer's recommendation as documented in the foster home study narrative.

2. If the foster home study writer recommends denial of the foster home and the reviewers of the home study disagree with the recommendation, all areas of concern noted in the recommendation must be addressed. Regional staff will discuss each concern with the family and work toward a resolution. An addendum to the home study will document how each concern was resolved and attached to the original home study with required approval signatures.
3. All completed home study narratives include a recommendation statement that clearly defines the age range, capacity (not to exceed five (5) total children), and gender of children for which the family is approved to parent. (Refer to ***Guidelines for Foster Home Placements Exceeding Five Total Children in a Foster Home***). The recommendation statement also includes information regarding the type of physical, emotional, behavioral, and personality traits of children the family will be most successful in parenting. In cases where the study was initially intended for a kinship care placement, a statement regarding the family's capability to meet that specific child/youth's needs are also included.
4. Foster home study approval information is entered into TFACTS. Any documentation related to the approval of the home is uploaded into TFACTS at this time. Any changes that affect the status of the home's continued approval is recorded in a timely manner in the foster home record in TFACTS.
5. A Tennessee DCS foster home studied in response to a request for the placement of a child/youth from another state pursuant to compliance with the ICPC includes two (2) levels of decision making:
   a) The foster home study narrative approves or denies the foster home as meeting DCS requirements as a foster home eligible for children with characteristics as identified in item 3 above; and,
   b) The foster home study narrative approves or denies the placement of the specific child or children or youth identified on form ***CS-0525, Interstate Compact Placement Request (100A) into the specific DCS foster/adoptive home.***
6. A foster home study on Tennessee relatives/kin or other non-related persons being considered as a foster placement for a medically fragile child or special needs child who is in the custody or guardianship of another state's public agency is conducted by a private Tennessee licensed child-placing agency through an agreed upon contract with the sending state agency.

J. Foster Home Approval or Denial

1. A decision on approval or denial regarding the foster home study is made within ninety (90) days of the applicant's completion of TN KEY and any additional required pre-service training for applicants to contract agencies.
    - Any foster home that is anticipated to be approved outside of the 90-day time frame requires an approved extension explaining the circumstances and the expected date for approval. All time frame extensions are required to be documented on form ***CS-1018, Foster Home Extension Request*** and submitted to the Director of Foster Care/Designee for approval. Contract agencies do not require Central Office approval in such instances but are required to document the reason for the delay in approval or denial or any extension on form ***CS-1018***.
2. In accordance with the *Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Children in Foster Care Act of 2006*, an ICPC foster home study, with a decision to approve or deny the foster home, is issued within sixty (60) calendar days of the date of the ICPC referral in TFACTS.
3. If completion of the study or issuance of a decision regarding the ICPC foster home cannot meet the sixty (60) calendar days timeframe, the assigned regional worker documents the reasons for the delay including action steps and a proposed date of completion. Follow-up documentation is included every thirty (30) days until a decision is issued. Notice of the documentation is forwarded to the DCS ICPC Office.
4. The foster home study approval date and the foster home approval date in TFACTS are the same date. The decision regarding the foster home study is not valid until signed by the Team Leader and/or Team Coordinator.
5. In the case of contract provider homes, the decision regarding the foster home study is not valid until signed by a contract provider supervisor.
6. When approved, DCS or contract provider staff:
    a) Notifies the applicants in writing using form ***CS-0702, Foster Home Approval*** clearly defining the age range, capacity (not to exceed five (5) children total), and gender of children for which the family is approved to parent. The approval letter also includes information regarding the type of physical, emotional, behavioral, and personality traits of children the family is most successful in parenting;
    b) Enters the new foster home into TFACTS; and
    c) Upon approval, assist the home in preparing to accept placements according to the age, gender and type of physical, emotional, behavioral and personality traits of the children the family has preference to serve. This includes, but is not limited to, items identified in this policy and the foster parent contract regarding

room and board, clothing, allowance, transportation including car seats, and specialty items needed per the child's needs.

7. DCS/contract provider staff does not approve any foster parent applicant(s) that do not meet the standards outlined in this policy and DCS Policy ***16.3, Desired Characteristics of Foster Parents.***
8. If a foster family is denied, the procedures outlined in DCS Policy ***16.16, Denial, Closure or Suspended Admissions of Foster Homes*** are followed.

K. Types of Foster Homes Defined

1. Once all the above requirements are met and an approval letter issued, the applicant is considered a dually approved foster/adoptive home eligible to accept placements. Foster home sub-types are defined by the type of placements they accept:
   a) Traditional-(short and long-term) non-relative placements;
   b) Relative/Kin-relative placement by blood, marriage or adoption, or nonrelative with an established relationship to the child/family;
   c) Assessment Home-temporary placement for the purpose of assessing the needs of children with moderate to high risk behaviors to determine the most appropriate long-term placement; and,
   d) Respite-short-term care of children for the purpose of providing relief to other foster parents. Refer to the ***Protocol for Respite Care and other Events.***
2. Foster parents who care for children who are adjudicated delinquent, pregnant, or diabetic must complete the specialized training requirements outlined in DCS Policy ***16.9, Required Foster Parent In-Service Training.***

L. Case Transfer

During the course of application, home study or tenure of a DCS foster home, any change of circumstance which triggers a move of that home to another agency, county or region, DCS Policy, ***31.3, Case Transfer Guidelines Between Regions, Agencies, and Facilities*** is followed.

M. Resource Eligibility Team (RET)

In order to ensure that federal IV-E safety requirements are met for funding purposes, the Resource Eligibility Team (RET) reviews the documentation used to support the foster home approval decision. Safety documents for Contract Agencies and DCS foster homes are entered in TFACTS and attached to the foster home's current home study assessment. (Refer to the ***Protocol for Resource Eligibility Team (RET).***

Forms:

CS-0427, Child's Medical Record

CS-0431, Monthly Family Income and Expenditures

CS-0553, Discipline Policy

CS-0559, Authorization for Release of Information and HIPAA Protected Health Information TO or FROM the Department of Children's Services and Notification of Release

CS-0670, Foster Parent Oath To Abide

CS-0676, Home Safety Checklist

CS-0678, Foster Parent/Other Adult Medical Report

CS-0688, Foster Home Application for Parenting

CS-0687, Background Check History and IV-E Eligibility Checklist

CS-0691, Fingerprint Card Information

CS-0702, Foster Home Approval

CS-0709, Foster Home Monthly Visit Checklist

CS-0727, Initial Intake, Placement and Well-Being Information and History

CS-0741, Database Search Results

CS-0782, Family Eco Map

CS-0871, Foster Home Disaster Plan

CS-0921, Waiver of Criminal Convictions, Pre and In-Service Training Requirements, Non-Safety Issues, CPS Substantiations and Educational Requirements

CS-0932, Foster Home Disclosure Acknowledgement

CS-0961 Foster Family Home Study

CS-0962 Foster Parent Applicant Questionnaire

CS-0963 Foster Family Reference Letter and Questionnaire

CS-1158, Foster Parent Individual TN Key Training Plan

CS-1217, Acknowledgement of Understanding Regarding Placement Acceptance

CS-1221, Waiver Agreement and Statement for Criminal History Checks (VECHS)

CS-1227, TN KEY Participant Assessment

CS-1228, TN Key Mutual Assessment Process Questionnaire

CS-1229, Foster Parent Pre-Service Refresher Training

CS-4203, Water Hazard/Pool Safety Assessment Tool

CS-4204, Allowance and Clothing Log

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:

Adam Walsh State Contacts for Child Abuse Registries

Protocol for Drug and Medication Expectations for Approved Foster Homes

Controlled Substance and Medication Work Aid

Guidelines for Foster Home Placements Exceeding Five Total Children in a Foster Home

Protocol for Re-Activation or Re-Classification of Foster Homes

Protocol for Requesting Out of State Abuse and Neglect Registry Checks

Protocol for Resource Eligibility Team (RET)

Protocol for Safe Sleep Education and Delivery of Safe Sleep Furniture

Profile of Parenting Study (POPS) Tool

Profile of Parenting Study (POPS) Tool Manual

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Practice and Procedure Manual

Policy 20.15 Medication Administration, Storage and Disposal

Safety Notice: Conducting an Efficient and Effective History Search

Waiver Tip Sheet for Employment, Volunteering and Custodial Placement.

Home Safety Checklist Work Aid

Documentation of the Foster Family Home Study

Proof of all Reported Income

Results from Police Records Checks