STANDARDS OF APPROVAL FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES

Arkansas Department of Human Services
Division of Children and Family Services

Our mission is to keep children safe and help families.
DCFS will respectfully engage families and youth
and use community-based services and supports
to assist parents in successfully caring for their children.
We will focus on the safety, permanency,
and well-being for all children and youth.

CARE * COMMIT * CONNECT

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STANDARDS OF APPROVAL FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Human Services (DHS), acting through the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), serves as the court-appointed legal custodian for children in foster care and has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that each child has the best possible foster care experience and that appropriate long-term plans are made. DCFS is a licensed Child Welfare Agency and all of its approved foster homes must be in compliance with all licensing requirements and DCFS policies. Foster Home means a private residence of one or more family members that receives from a child placement agency any minor child, juvenile member of a family in need of services, or dependent or dependent-neglected juvenile who is unattended by a parent or guardian in order to provide care, training, education, custody or supervision on a 24 hour basis, not to include adoptive homes. Although the licensing standards' definition of a foster home does not include adoptive homes, DCFS foster and adoptive homes must meet the same licensing standards to comply with federal funding regulations. *While this booklet describes the standards of approval for both foster and adoptive homes, for the sake of brevity, references are only made to foster home, foster parent, etc. rather than foster or adoptive home, foster or adoptive parent, etc.*

Foster care is founded on the premise that all children have a right to a safe and supportive environment in which to grow. Foster care is a program designed to provide a safe, stable, family-like placement in a DCFS approved foster home, provisional foster home, or licensed facility for a child who needs care temporarily, because the birth/legal family is unable to ensure the health and safety of the child due to social, emotional, economic, and/or physical reasons. The purpose of foster care is to provide a healthy home and community experience for the child while the conditions which caused the placement away from the birth/legal family are being resolved. Thus, foster care is intended to be temporary. The length of a child's stay in foster care will depend a great deal on the conditions which caused the placement and the time and the resources available to resolve them. The foster home placement should be the least restrictive, most family-like setting consistent with the child's special needs. It should be in close proximity (within 50 miles) to the child's parent/legal guardian.

DCFS, the foster parents and all other involved parties will work toward achieving permanency for the child, preferably, by reunifying the child with the birth/legal parents. Persons wanting to adopt a child should not regard foster parenting as an alternative to adoption.

TYPES OF FOSTER HOMES

Regular Foster Homes

Regular foster homes are ones in which the foster parents agree to provide 24 hour care for a particular child in foster care. DCFS signs an agreement with foster parents that the family will care for the child as a family member until such a time as a permanent plan can be developed and implemented for that child. The foster parents will be given pertinent information about the child in foster care. This includes reasons for placement, circumstances for removal from the parent's home, where siblings are placed, a copy of the case plan and family visit plan. They will be kept informed concerning plans for the child's future. In many instances it will be appropriate for foster parents to reach out to the birth/legal parents. However, contact with the birth/legal parents must be approved by the court.

DCFS will evaluate applicants based on their personal qualifications as well as the physical characteristics of their home to determine special qualifications of the prospective foster family. Evaluation is considered with regard to special training and expertise, experience, and preference as to the numbers, ages, sex and characteristics of children who may be placed in the home.

Regular foster homes may also elect to serve as informal respite homes. An informal respite home is an approved DCFS foster home that can provide temporary care (no more than 7 continuous days at one time) for children in out-of-home placements when the children's full-time foster family is unable to do so and a member of the foster family's support system cannot assist.

Provisional Foster Homes

In an effort to preserve family connections and expedite placement of children, the Division may place a child in foster care with a relative or fictive kin if one has been identified and is appropriate. Relative means a person within the fifth degree of kinship to the child by virtue of blood or adoption. Fictive kin means a person not related to the child by blood or marriage , but who has a strong, positive, emotional tie to the child and has a positive role in the child's life, such as a godparent,

neighbor, or family friend. This type of placement is classified as a Provisional Foster Home. The purpose of opening a provisional foster home is to enable DCFS to make a quick placement for a child with a relative or fictive kin with whom a bond already exists. Provisional foster homes must meet certain requirements, which include an expedited Child Maltreatment Central Registry check, an expedited State Police Criminal Record check, a vehicle safety check, and a visual inspection of the home to verify that the relative/fictive kin and the home meet standards.

Once opened as a provisional foster home, DCFS staff works with the provisional foster parents in that home to bring them into full compliance within six months. Provisional foster homes that are not in full compliance at the end of six months must be closed and the children removed or the relative/fictive kin must have been granted permanent custody by the court. Provisional foster homes will not be paid a board payment until the relative meets all of the licensing requirements and DCFS standards, and is reclassified as a regular foster home.

Children in foster care are in DHS custody and, therefore, must remain in licensed or approved foster homes, shelters, or facilities until a relative's/fictive kin's home is opened as a provisional home, regular foster home, or the court grants custody to the relative or other person after a written, approved home study is presented to the court.

APPROVAL OF FOSTER HOMES

The Division is responsible for selecting an appropriate foster home placement for each child who enters foster care. The home must meet foster home standards and the individual child's needs for the duration of placement. In order to have an appropriate foster home for each child in foster care, to minimize the risks involved in placement of a child in foster care, and to ensure that the child in foster care will not be moved from one foster home to another, it is necessary to select families on the basis of careful assessment. The purpose of the assessment process is to:

- evaluate the applicants' personal qualifications and physical requirements of the home outlined in this publication;
- educate prospective foster parents on the characteristics of children in foster care;
- evaluate their ability to meet those needs; and,
- evaluate the applicants' compliance with the Minimum Licensing Standards and DCFS policy requirements for foster homes.

The home assessment is a mutual selection process. It involves several components including, but not limited to, background checks, an in-home consultation visit, 30 hours of pre-service training, CPR and Standard First Aid training (no placements can be made in the foster home until the foster parents have obtained CPR and First Aid certification), a home study, and ongoing consultation with the prospective foster parents to ensure that all appropriate criteria related to both compliance and quality are met. Prospective foster parents, with the exception of provisional foster parents, are highly encouraged to attend an Information Meeting before the in-home consultation visit. Throughout the process the families should ask themselves if they truly believe they can provide the physical and emotional care that is necessary to support children during their time in foster care.

At least one parent in the foster home must be able to communicate effectively in the language of the child. However, this does not apply to foster parents for infants or short-term emergency placements. It is necessary to improve the skills of existing foster parents through on-going training and supervision following pre-service training. Foster parents are required to earn 15 hours of continuing education each year.

STANDARDS OF APPROVAL

Standards of approval include minimum licensing standards as well as DCFS policy requirements. Foster home standards are based on the personal qualifications of applicants and household members as well as the physical standards of their home. Families must continue to meet the standards for the duration of their service as a foster home.

PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF APPLICANTS & HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

In a two-parent home, each person will be joint applicants and each will actively participate in the approval process. This joint family commitment will be reevaluated annually.

STANDARDS OF APPROVAL FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES

Personal characteristics: Applicants must have the personal characteristics which enable them to assume the responsibility of caring for children in foster care. These personal characteristics include:

1) The capacity to love and care for children and respond to children's needs;
2) The capacity and willingness to give love, affection, and care to a child without expecting the child to return this love and affection;
3) The willingness to allow for socialization of the child in foster care with his/her peers;
4) Flexibility in their expectations, attitudes, and behavior in relation to meeting the needs of children;
5) Ethical standards and values which are conducive to the well-being of children;
6) The ability to accept a child's background without passing moral judgment on the child or the child's birth/legal family;
7) The ability to accept and strengthen a child's relationship with his or her birth/legal family;
8) The ability and willingness to accept, understand, and utilize training, guidance and supervision from the child-placing agency or other professional people in order to meet the needs of children in care and their families of origin;
9) Emotional stability, including a satisfactory method of handling angry feelings;
10) Satisfactory and stable adult relationships, which may or may not include a partner, but does include satisfactory, meaningful, and supportive relationships with several relatives and/or friends;
11) The ability to function adequately in their chosen life style; i.e., ability to enjoy and accept the responsibility of their job, their family life, their friends, and their personal lives;
12) An acceptance of their own childhood experiences;
13) An absence of any qualities which indicate that they could abuse children;
14) The capacity to absorb the presence of a child in care without undue disruption to their own family life; the ability to cope with the departure of the child in foster care; and
15) The maturity to exercise good judgment and appropriate use of authority, along with the youthful qualities of vitality and flexibility which are necessary to care for children.

Age: Applicants must be age 21 or older. Applicants will not be approved as a foster home if one or both applicants are under the age of 21. A policy waiver must be obtained if one or both applicants are younger than age 21 (which may only be approved in rare circumstances for provisional homes) or age 65 or older or when one or both foster parents of a currently opened foster home reaches age 65.

Health: Applicants must provide the Division with the health history of each household member. This history will include physical and mental health services and treatment received. A physical examination of each household member is required prior to approval. Documentation will be via the CFS-404: General Medical Report. The findings of the physical examination must verify that all household members are free of any physical or emotional health conditions which would adversely affect the welfare of a child in foster care. A psychological examination may also be required.

A physical disability in either applicant that does not interfere with the ability to give adequate care to a child will not be a barrier to approval as a foster parent. The impact of the disability on the individual should be evaluated. This will include how it affects their personality and whether it may have significance to a specific child in foster care.

Approved foster parents must keep the Division informed concerning any changes in their physical or mental health. Annual physical examination documentation by use of the CFS-404 is necessary for all household members. Immunization for all children in a foster home (birth/legal children of the foster family and children in care) must be kept up to date.

Relationship Stability/Family Composition: In an effort to provide a high-level of support for children in foster care, two-parent homes are encouraged. Both parents should demonstrate a strong commitment to fostering. The couple must demonstrate a stable relationship. In assessing relationship stability, considerations may include major life changes such as:

- Death or serious illness among family members
- Marriage, separation, divorce, or other significant changes in the couple's relationship
- Addition of household members (e.g., birth, adoption, aging relative moving in)
- Loss of or change in employment

Marriages and divorces will be verified. Applicants must provide a copy of their marriage license to verify marriage and a copy of their most recent divorce decree to verify divorce.

Single parent households are welcome particularly for those children whose need for a two-parent household is not a crucial aspect of the care required. In a single parent home, the major life changes listed above will also be considered when assessing the person's ability to be an effective foster parent.

All foster parents should have a strong support system in order to assist them in their role as foster parents and, in turn, better serve children in foster care. Applicants with professional training, such as nurses, may be desirable for children with special needs. Other adults (grandparents, aunts, etc.) and children who are a part of the household will be assessed regarding how they may be affected by the presence of a child in foster care and also the effect they themselves may have on the child in care.

A foster home may not house or admit any roomer or boarder. A roomer or boarder is:

A. a person to whom a household furnishes lodging, meals, or both, for a reasonable monthly payment; and,
B. not a household member.

A household member is a resident of the home who:

A. owns or is legally responsible for paying rent on the home (household head); or,
B. is in a close personal relationship with a household head; or,
C. is related to a household head or a to person in a close personal relationship with a household head.

Any household member who resides in the home for more than 3 cumulative months in a calendar year must clear the following background checks: Arkansas Child Maltreatment Central Registry, Arkansas Adult Maltreatment Central Registry, Arkansas State Police Criminal Record Check, and FBI Criminal Background Check.

In situations where an existing single foster parent plans to marry, a reevaluation will be conducted on the family. DCFS staff must ensure that the future spouse is interviewed to discuss his/her compliance with the "Personal Characteristics" as outlined in this publication. The intended spouse must complete and pass all background checks and attend pre-service training. All unmarried foster parents must be advised at their approval orientation to notify the Division as soon as they are aware of any plans to marry so that the application process can be initiated on the intended spouse.

In situations where existing foster parents plan to divorce, a reevaluation will be conducted on the family to determine if the family still meets all other licensing standards to ensure the health and safety of the children placed in the home.

Maximum Capacity: Foster homes will have no more than 5 unrelated children in care. The foster home may care for up to 8 children if they are all related to each other. A foster home will have no more than 8 children in their home, including their own children. This includes placement and respite care. Including the foster parents' biological children, the foster home may have no more than 2 children under the age of 2 and no more than 3 children under the age of 6. The sole exception to the above limits will be in those instances in which the placement of a sibling group in a foster home with no other children in the home would exceed the limits.

Eight related children from the same sibling group may be placed together in the same foster home. In this instance, the total number of the foster parent's children who reside in the home will determine the number of children from one sibling group that may be placed together in the home.
For example:

0 children of the foster parent and 8 children that are related (to each other)
1 child of the foster parent and 7 children that are related (to each other)
2 children of the foster parent and 6 children that are related (to each other)
3 children of the foster parent and 5 children that are related (to each other) or unrelated

In addition, the number of children in a foster home will be determined by the stamina, capacities, and skills of the foster parents, by physical space available for children, and by the foster parents' ability to meet the needs of all children present in the home. At no point will a foster home also serve as a licensed Child Care Facility. There will be no exceptions.

Foster parents must have legal custody or guardianship of any children (other than children in foster care) in the home that are not their birth children or relatives. Foster parents will not keep children for more than one child-placing agency. Foster parents will not provide babysitting or child care services for other children on a regular basis in their home.

Birth/legal children of the prospective foster parents will take part in the foster home assessment. The extent of their involvement will be determined by their age and level of maturity. These children must be in agreement with their parents' decision to become foster parents. Their agreement must be reevaluated annually.

Religion: Children in foster care will have opportunity for religious, spiritual, and ethical development. Foster parents will respect the religious preferences of children in foster care and their birth/legal family. They must be able to present their own religious beliefs to children in foster care in such a way as to take into consideration the child's own religious background. The foster parents must never force their own religious beliefs on a child in foster care whose religious background differs from their own. Foster parents will arrange transportation to religious services for a child when necessary. However, applicants' lack of a religious affiliation or a religious faith will not be a barrier to their approval as foster parents.

Education: The level of formal education attained by the prospective foster parents must be sufficient to allow them to function in their community, in their employment, and in their home. For example: foster parents should be able to follow physician's instructions, read labels on medication, and administer proper dosages of medication. The level of their aspirations for children will correspond with a particular child's ability. Their awareness of local educational facilities is important to children in their care. Foster parents will have a positive attitude toward both academic and vocational education and be willing to meet the child's individual needs.

Financial Stability: The family must have sufficient, reliable income to ensure the family's stability and security, without a board payment. Applicants must provide documentation of sufficient financial resources to meet their needs. A copy of their tax return and recent paycheck stubs will be placed in the foster home record. Management of income will be considered more important than amount of income. One should know that the foster care board payment that foster parents receive is strictly to meet the needs of the child placed in their home. Foster parenting is not a way to make money or earn extra income for the foster parents.

Employment: Both parents may be employed outside the home, but it is strongly encouraged that one parent remains at home with a child in foster care for as long as necessary after placement to provide security and initial adjustment for the child. Careful consideration will be made before infants and preschool children are placed in a single-parent home or in a home where both foster parents have outside employment. Placing school-age children (to include young children in preschool or day care programs) will also be done on the basis of careful evaluation of what is best for each child. Suitable plans for the care and supervision of children in foster care before and after school, during school holidays and vacations, and when children are ill and absent from school must be made and approved by the Division. Arrangements for a suitable caretaker must be made ahead of time to prevent last minute arrangements that could result in an inappropriate caretaker.

If employment is seasonal, the family must have compensatory income or savings in the off seasons. Demands made on foster parents' time by overtime work, revolving shifts, etc., are considered pertinent to their ability to provide adequate care for a child in foster care.

Background Checks: Applicants and all household members 14 years of age and older, excluding children in foster care, must consent to a Child Maltreatment Central Registry Check in all the states in which they have lived in the past five years, and in their state of employment, if different. Household members must have no history of true abuse and/or neglect.

Applicants and all household members 18 and one-half years of age and older, excluding children in foster care, must consent to an Adult Maltreatment Central Registry Check. The Division will repeat the Child Maltreatment and the Adult Maltreatment Central Registry Checks every two years on all persons required to have the check.

Applicants and all household members age 18 and one-half years or older, excluding children in foster care, must consent to an Arkansas State Police Criminal Record Check. The Division will repeat an Arkansas State Police Criminal Record Check every two years on any person required to have the check. Household members with criminal convictions may, under some circumstances, request an Alternative Compliance. (See section on Alternative Compliance & Policy Waiver Requests.) Foster parent applicants will complete CFS-341 to certify in writing that household members age 14 through 17 do not have criminal records.

An FBI fingerprint-based Criminal Background Check will be conducted on applicants and all household members 18 and one-half years of age or older, excluding children in foster care. This check need not be repeated.

Vehicle Safety Check: DCFS will check the driving record (violation points) for each applicant and other applicable members of the household. The Arkansas State Vehicle Safety Program sets the maximum number of traffic violation points a foster parent may be allowed.

Knowledge of Child Growth and Development: The applicants must have a working knowledge of child growth and development; including knowledge of child care, milestones in development, first aid, and nutrition. Awareness of the emotional needs of children is as important as awareness of the physical needs of children.

Corporal punishment is not allowed in a DCFS foster home. Foster parents are expected to use time-outs, denial of privileges, and explanation of expectations, etc., as disciplinary measures. Additionally, neither a foster parent nor DCFS can give permission to the school to spank a child in foster care.

The care and development of children will be maintained as follows:

Daily Activities

1) Foster parents will provide structure and daily activities designed to promote the individual physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional development of the children in their home.
2) Foster parents will cooperate with the Division to help the children in foster care maintain an awareness of their past, a record of the present, and a plan for the future.
3) Foster parents will keep a life book for each child in their care that includes periodic photographs of the child and a record of the child's memberships, activities, and participation in extracurricular, school, or church activities.
4) Foster parents will ask children in their care to assume work responsibilities reasonable for their age and ability and commensurate with those expected of their own children.

Clothing and Personal Belongings

1) Foster parents will, with the assistance of the Division, provide each child with his/her own clean, well-fitting, attractive, seasonal clothing appropriate to age, sex, individual needs, and comparable to the community standards.
2) Foster parents will include children in the selection of their own clothing, whenever possible and appropriate.
3) Foster parents will allow children to bring their personal belongings to the foster home and acquire additional belongings.
4) Foster parents will send all personal clothing and belongings with the children when they leave the foster home.

Discipline and Control

1) Foster parents will train and discipline children with kindness and understanding.
2) Foster parents will establish well defined rules which set the expectations and limits of behavior that are relevant to the child's level of growth and development, which are applied in a consistent manner.
3) Foster parents will teach and train each child with techniques that stress praise and encouragement; discipline should be positive rather than negative.
4) Foster parents will not subject children to verbal abuse, derogatory remarks about the children or their family members, or threats of removal from the foster home.
5) Methods of discipline that are unacceptable for use by foster parents with children in foster care include but are not limited to:

a. Cruel, severe, or humiliating actions, such as washing mouth with soap, taping or obstructing child's mouth, placing painful or unpleasant tasting substances in mouth, on lips, etc.; placing child in dark areas; any kind of humiliation in public;
b. Physical punishment inflicted in any manner, such as spanking hitting, pinching, pulling hair, slapping, kicking, twisting arm, forced fixed body positions, etc.;
c. Denial of meals, clothing, shelter, withholding implementation of the case plan, or any denial of basic rights;
d. Denial of visits, telephone, or mail contacts with family members;
e. Assignment of extremely strenuous exercise or work;
f. Locked isolation of any kind;
g. Punishment of any kind for poor toilet habits.

Health Care

1) Foster parents will cooperate with the Division in medical and dental care planning for children in their care.
2) Foster parents will make medical and dental appointments as needed. Foster parents should accompany the child to the initial health screening and any on-going physical or mental health services provided. If this is not possible, the foster parent will be available by telephone to the person conducting the screening. The foster parent will consult with the health care provider about the child's health care needs.
3) Foster parents should be involved in the comprehensive health assessments of the children in their care.
4) Foster parents will report any corrective or follow-up medical or dental care the child needs to the Division.
5) Foster families must have their own transportation available and will be responsible for arranging transportation for children in foster care to all necessary medical and dental appointments. Area Directors may grant a waiver in situations where provisional foster families have been recruited specifically for a child.

Education

1) Foster parents will enroll each school-age child in an accredited school within 5 school days of placement.
2) Foster parents will cooperate with the Division and take part in the selection and arrangement for educational programs appropriate for the child's age, abilities, and case plan.
3) Foster parents will attend school conferences concerning children in their care and plan with school personnel when there are school problems.
4) Foster parents will report serious situations that may require Division involvement to the Division; for example, any situation that may affect the case plan or a situation that puts the child in jeopardy of suspension or expulsion.

Religious and Ethnic Heritage

1) Foster parents will recognize, encourage, and support the religious beliefs, ethnic heritage, and language of children in their care.
2) Foster parents will arrange transportation to religious services or ethnic events for a child whose beliefs and practices are different from their own and who wishes to attend such events.
3) Foster parents will not coerce children into participation in religious activities or ethnic events against their will.

Acceptance of Division Regulations

1) Foster parents must abide by DCFS policies and accept the Division's supervision.
2) Foster parents should strive to provide continuous care for each child placed in their home until such time as a permanent plan is implemented for each child.
3) If either the foster parents or the Division decides that a placement is not appropriate, the parties will discuss issues related to the placement and determine what adjustments are needed to provide a more suitable placement for the child.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE HOME

Interior of the Home

1) Interior of the home must be clean and free of physical and health hazards.
2) Home must have adequate light, heat, ventilation, and plumbing for safe and comfortable living.

3) Home must have adequate space for privacy, play, and study for all household members. *A copy of the current floor plan of the home with room dimensions of all rooms used for sleeping must be filed in the foster home record.*
4) Home must have sufficient seating for the family to eat together.
5) Each child in foster care will be provided adequate space for storing clothing and personal belongings, in or near their bedroom.
6) The number of children in foster care placed in a foster home will be limited by the number of persons who can satisfactorily live within the physical limits of the home. *Space requirements may be waived on a case-by-case basis for provisional foster homes.*
7) Heating devices, such as radiators, fireplaces, wood stoves, gas or electric heaters, and steam and hot water pipes within reach of children must be screened or otherwise protected.
8) Fire hazards, such as dangerous or defective heating equipment, flammable materials, defective electrical appliances or electrical cords, excessive use of extension cords, etc., must be corrected or eliminated.
9) Interior halls and doors must not be blocked or cluttered to prevent easy passage or exit.
10) All garbage and other wastes must be kept in a suitable covered receptacle and disposed of in such a way as not to constitute a health or safety hazard.
11) Home must have at least one flush toilet, one sink with running water, and one bath or shower with hot and cold water.
12) Cleaning supplies, insecticides, gasoline, hazardous tools, knives, or similarly dangerous objects must be stored out of reach of children or kept in locked closets or drawers.
13) Liquor and other alcoholic beverages must be stored out of reach of children.
14) All firearms must be unloaded; maintained in a secure, locked location; and stored separately from ammunition.
15) Operational smoke detectors must be located within 10 feet of the kitchen and each bedroom.
16) The cooking area must contain an operational chemical fire extinguisher.
17) Home must have an operational telephone or working cellular phone that is accessible to all children.
18) Emergency phone numbers (911, fire, ambulance, and responsible adult to contact in case of emergency) must be posted near each telephone.
19) All household pets must have proof of current rabies vaccinations. Documentation will be filed in the foster home record.
20) Home should have adequate toys that are safe and developmentally appropriate for children who will be placed in the home.

Sleeping Arrangements

1) Children in foster care must sleep in a bedroom, not in a living room, dining room, or any other room where others may pass through.
2) Each bedroom must have at least 50 square feet of floor space per occupant.
3) Bedrooms must have windows which provide natural light and ventilation.
4) Each bedroom used for a child in foster care must have a window to the outside which is capable of serving as an emergency escape.
5) Bars, grilles, grates, or other items that block access to a bedroom window are permitted only if they can be removed from the inside without the use of a key, tool, or force greater than that required for normal operation of the window. In this event, each such bedroom must contain a working smoke detector.
6) No more than 4 children will share a bedroom.
7) Each child in foster care must be provided a comfortable bed, in good condition.
8) Children of the opposite sex will not share the same bedroom if either child is 4 years old or older, except for a mother in foster care with her child.
9) No children will share a bed if either child is 4 years old or older; and any applicable children sharing a bed must be the same sex.
10) No child under 6 years of age will occupy a top bunk.
11) Children in foster care, except infants less than 2 years of age, will not share a sleeping room with adults. In the case of a grandparent to a child, the age would increase to 4.
12) Each child in foster care will be provided with clean bedding, in good condition, that will be laundered at least weekly, or as needed.

Exterior of the home

1) Home must be accessible to community resources needed by children in foster care.
2) Premises of the house, including the yard, garage, carport, any storage areas, and the basement and attic (if applicable and accessible), must be free from physical hazards which would endanger the safety of children.
3) Yard must be free of dangerous debris, trash, uncovered cisterns, etc.
4) Yard must be large enough to provide ample play space for children.
5) A fence or barrier must prevent a child's access to a busy street or highway, body of water, or dangerous area.
6) If the applicants reside in a manufactured home, the home must be properly installed and stabilized. If the manufactured home is located in a mobile home park, there must be sufficient fenced play space outside.
7) Outdoor play equipment must be safe, hazard-free, and properly anchored.
8) Home must have at least two exterior doors situated to provide safe exit, or the home must have a written statement from the Fire Department that an alternative escape route is approved. *Approval must be filed in the foster home record.*

Transportation

1) Applicants must have their own mode of transportation available for children in their care to participate in necessary school, recreation, and medical activities.
2) All vehicles owned by the applicants must have liability insurance. *Documentation of liability insurance must be filed in the foster home record.*
3) Any vehicle used to transport children in foster care must be maintained in compliance with Arkansas motor vehicle laws and must be insured.
4) Applicants, and anyone else who would transport children in foster care, must have a valid driver's license.
5) Children must be transported according to Arkansas law, including, but not limited to, use of safety belts, child safety seats, and smoking restrictions. *Current law requires a child safety seat for children who are age 5 and younger and children who weigh less than 60 pounds. All other children must be restrained by safety belts. Current law prohibits smoking in any motor vehicle in which a child who is less than 14 years of age is a passenger.*

Medication

1) All over-the-counter medications must be stored in an area not readily accessible to children, and all prescription medications must be locked.
2) Foster parents must be aware of possible side effects of all medications and administer them only in accordance with directions on the label.
3) Foster parents must log all medications at the time the medication is administered and the logs must include the following:
   a. Child's name
   b. Time and date
   c. Medication and dosage
   d. Initials of the person administering the medication
4) Age-appropriate children will be provided a daily supply of medication (over-the-counter or prescription) for use when the child is away from the home during the times the dose is needed. Examples include pain relievers, fever reducers, and anti-inflammatory and other related medications, or prescribed antibiotics or inhalers. These medications must be logged at the time they are given to the child.

Ownership of Home: If the applicants do not own the home in which they live, the person who owns the home must verify in writing that he/she has no objections to the applicants caring for children in foster care in the home. *This verification will be filed in the foster home record.*

Water Supply: Home must have a continuous supply of sanitary drinking water. If the source is not a municipal water system, the water must be tested and approved annually by the Arkansas Department of Health. This approval will be kept in the foster home record. If a water supply does not pass inspection, an alternate compliance of the water supply agreement (CFS-480) must established with the family, approved, and filed in the foster home record. If the family will use bottled water (and purified water for bathing if infants or children under the age of 5 will be placed in the home), this must be noted on the CFS-480, signed by the foster parents, and updated annually. Neither a policy waiver nor an alternative compliance is required to

accompany CFS-480 if the agreement to use bottled water is noted on this form and signed by the foster parents. Home must also have a safe sewage disposal system.

Emergency Planning: Family must have a plan for evacuating the house in the event of a fire and a plan for seeking shelter during a storm or tornado. The escape plan must outline the exits in the home, must be approved, and must be posted within the home. Foster parent must share the evacuation plan with each child and make sure each child understands the procedures at the time he or she is placed in the home. Foster parents will conduct emergency evacuation drills when each new child enters the home and at least quarterly thereafter. All drills will be documented and the documentation placed in the foster home record. This documentation will reflect:

a. The date and time of the drill;
b. The persons participating in the drill; and
c. The length of time needed to clear the home.

Accessibility of the Home: The foster home must be accessible throughout the year to fulfill the needs of children in foster care and to ensure access to available education and religious training, recreation, parental visiting, supervision by the Division and medical care. The accessibility of the home will be judged in relation to the applicants' ability to transport children for medical care, etc.

Neighborhood: The neighborhood/community in which the foster home is located should be accessible, provide a healthy environment, and be free from health hazards, dangerous objects accessible to children, and incidents of violent crime.

ALTERNATIVE COMPLIANCE & POLICY WAIVER REQUESTS

DCFS bases its standards of care and character on the Child Welfare Agency Licensing Act (CWALA). If it is believed that an applicant possesses special abilities or circumstances which would make them good foster parents in spite of their inability to meet a standard, the county office may request an approval for an alternative compliance or a policy waiver.

An **alternative compliance** is a request for approval from the Child Welfare Agency Review Board (CWARB) to allow a licensee to deviate from the letter of a regulation, provided that the licensee has demonstrated how an alternate plan of compliance will meet or exceed the intent of the regulation. What is proposed as an alternative to compliance with policy or standards will comply with the intent, if not the actual requirement.

Child Welfare Licensing requirements state that any person who is required to have a criminal check under the law and who pleads guilty or nolo contendere to, or is found guilty of any of the offenses listed in the licensing standards unless the conviction is vacated or reversed, shall be presumed to be disqualified to be an owner, operator, volunteer, foster parent, adoptive parent, member of an agency's board of directors, student intern, or employee in a child welfare agency after the completion of his or her term of confinement, probation, or parole supervision. This presumption may be rebutted in the following manner:

1) The applicant must petition the board to make a determination that the applicant does not pose a risk of harm to any person;
2) The applicant must bear the burden of making such a showing; and
3) The board in its discretion may permit an applicant to be an owner, operator, volunteer, foster parent, adoptive parent, member of an agency's board of directors, or an employee in a child welfare agency notwithstanding having been convicted of an offense listed upon making a determination that the applicant does not pose a risk of harm to any person served by the facility.

In making this determination, the board will consider the following factors:

1) The nature and severity of the crime.
2) The consequences of the crime.
3) The number and frequency of crimes.
4) The relation between the crime and the health, safety, and welfare of any person, such as:
   a. The age and vulnerability of victims of the crime.
   b. The harm suffered by the victim.

c. The similarity between the victim and persons served by a child welfare agency.
d. The time elapsed without a repeat of the same or similar event.
e. Documentation of successful completion of training or rehabilitation pertinent to the incident.
f. Any other information that bears on the applicant's ability to care for children or any other relevant information.

The following crimes require an Alternative Compliance:

(A) Criminal attempt
(B) Criminal complicity
(C) Criminal conspiracy
(D) Criminal solicitation
(E) Assault in the first, second, or third degree
(F) Aggravated assault
(G) Aggravated assault on a family or household member
(H) Battery in the first, second, or third degree
(I) Breaking or entering
(J) Burglary
(K) Coercion
(L) Computer crimes against minors
(M) Contributing to the delinquency of a juvenile
(N) Contributing to the delinquency of a minor
(O) Criminal impersonation
(P) Criminal use of a prohibited weapon
(Q) Communicating a death threat concerning a school employee or student
(R) Domestic battery in the first, second, or third degree
(S) Employing or consenting to the use of a child in a sexual performance
(T) Endangering the welfare of a minor in the first or second degree
(U) Endangering the welfare of an incompetent person in the second degree
(V) Engaging children in sexually explicit conduct for use in visual or print media
(W) False imprisonment in the first or second degree
(X) Felony abuse of an endangered or impaired person
(Y) Felony interference with a law enforcement officer
(Z) Felony violation of the Uniform Controlled Substance Act
(A)(A) Financial identity fraud
(B)(B) Forgery
(C)(C) Incest
(D)(D) Interference with court ordered custody
(E)(E) Interference with visitation
(F)(F) Introduction of controlled substance into the body of another person
(G)(G) Manslaughter
(H)(H) Negligent homicide
(I)(I) Obscene performance at a live public show
(J)(J) Offense of cruelty to animals
(K)(K) Offense of aggravated cruelty to dog, cat, or horse;
(L)(L) Pandering or possessing visual or print medium depicting sexually explicit conduct involving a child
(M)(M) Sexual solicitation
(N)(N) Permanent detention or restraint
(O)(O) Permitting abuse of a minor
(P)(P) Producing, directing, or promoting a sexual performance by a child
(Q)(Q) Promoting obscene materials
(R)(R) Promoting obscene performance
(S)(S) Promoting prostitution in the first, second, or third degree
(T)(T) Prostitution

(U)(U) Public display of obscenity
(V)(V) Resisting arrest
(W)(W) Robbery
(X)(X) Aggravated robbery
(Y)(Y) Sexual offenses
(Z)(Z) Simultaneous possession of drugs and firearms
(A)(A)(A) Soliciting money or property from incompetents
(B)(B)(B) Stalking
(C)(C)(C) Terroristic act
(D)(D)(D) Terroristic threatening
(E)(E)(E) Theft of public benefits
(F)(F)(F) Theft by receiving
(G)(G)(G) Theft of property
(H)(H)(H) Theft of services
(I)(I)(I) Transportation of minors for prohibited sexual conduct
(J)(J)(J) Unlawful discharge of a firearm from a vehicle
(K)(K)(K) Voyeurism

An alternative compliance may NOT be requested by any individual who has pleaded guilty or nolo contendere to, or has been found guilty of any of the following offenses as he or she is permanently disqualified from being a foster or adoptive parent per ACA § 901-28-409(h)(1):

1) Abuse of an endangered or impaired person, if felony
2) Arson
3) Capital murder
4) Endangering the welfare of an incompetent person in the first degree
5) Kidnapping
6) Murder in the first or second degree
7) Rape
8) Sexual assault in the first or second degree

An alternative compliance may NOT be requested by any prospective foster or adoptive parent with a felony conviction for the following offenses, as no child in foster care may be placed in that individual's home:

1) Child abuse or neglect
2) Spousal abuse or domestic battery
3) A crime against children, including child pornography
4) A crime involving violence, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide, but not including other physical assault or battery

A prospective foster or adoptive parent may request an alternative compliance for a felony conviction for physical assault, battery, or a drug-related offense if the offense was not committed within the past 5 years.

The board's decision to disqualify a person from being an owner, operator, volunteer, foster parent, adoptive parent, member of an agency's board of directors, or an employee in a child welfare agency under this section will constitute the final administrative agency action and will not be subject to review.

The DCFS Director will review all available information concerning a request for an Alternative Compliance to ensure that enough documentation is available to comply with the above requirements.

A **Policy Waiver** is a request to deviate from the letter of the DCFS Policy, procedures, and standards. Policy waiver requests are approved by the DCFS Director. The following require a policy waiver:

1) Any misdemeanor conviction, except for minor traffic violations
2) Driving under the influence (DUI) or Driving while intoxicated (DWI)
3) Any issues not in compliance with DCFS Policy

All policy waiver and alternative compliance requests will be approved or denied based on the individual circumstances of the foster parent applicant. Safety and welfare of the child(ren) involved will be paramount.

If a foster parent or applicant has questions or concerns regarding alternative compliance or policy waiver requests, he or she should consult the designated Resource Worker.

DENIAL OF A FOSTER HOME

Any applicant who does not meet all standards of approval for a foster home, or for whom a policy waiver or alternative compliance is not approved, will be denied the ability to become a foster home. No standard contained in PUB-04: Minimum Licensing Standards for Child Welfare Agencies can be waived without prior approval of the Child Welfare Agency Review Board. Documentation or reasons a home was denied for placement of children will be made in the case record, and the applicant will be informed in writing of the reasons for denial.

PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

DCFS will consider the preferences of the foster parents when seeking to place children in that home. Once a family is approved, DCFS and the foster parents will sign CFS-462: Initial Foster Home Agreement which includes the following:

A. Expectations and responsibilities of the Division, the staff, and the foster parents.
B. Services to be provided.
C. Financial arrangements for the children placed in the home.
D. Authority the foster parents can exercise for the children placed in their home.
E. Actions that require DCFS authorization.
F. Legal responsibility for damage or risk resulting from children in their home.
G. DCFS's process and procedures for investigating complaints.
H. DCFS's procedure for giving advance notice of termination of a placement except for documented emergencies.

The age and characteristics of children for whom the foster parents have expressed preferences will be considered when placing children in a foster home. Each family has special qualifications and limitations and each child in foster care has specific needs. Each child will be placed with a family who best meets his or her individual needs. Each time a child is placed in the foster home, DCFS and the foster parents will sign CFS-462A: Initial Foster Home Agreement Addendum.

REEVALUATION OF A FOSTER HOME

The Resource Worker will monitor the foster home at least quarterly for continued compliance with the standards of approval and will complete CFS-475B: Quarterly Monitoring Checklist for Foster Home and file it in the foster home record.

The Resource Worker will complete an annual reevaluation (i.e., no later than the anniversary month of the foster home's approval) of the foster home to ensure that they continue to meet all standards and policy requirements. The Resource Worker will complete CFS-475C: Reevaluation Checklist for Foster/Pre-Adoptive Home and will file it in the foster home record. Any foster home that does not continue to meet standards will be closed for placement of children in foster care.

Other than annual reevaluations, foster homes will be reevaluated if the event of any of the following major life changes:

A. Death or serious illness among the members of the foster family.
B. Marriage, separation, or divorce of foster parents.
C. Loss of or change in employment status by either foster parent.
D. Change in residence.
E. Suspected maltreatment of any child in the home.
F. The addition of family members (e.g. birth, adoption, aging relatives moving in).
G. Any other major life changes for the foster family.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIVISION

A. The Division is responsible for selecting a foster home specifically trained and suited to a child's special needs.
B. The Division is responsible for the proper implementation of a permanency plan for a child.
C. The Division will supervise all children in foster care placements. Children in out-of-home placement will be visited regularly and such visits will take place no less than weekly for the first month of placement into foster care or a new foster home. Visits after the first month in care will occur monthly in the foster home, with the worker maintaining weekly contact with the child through the following settings: school, parental visits, during transportation to medical appointments, court hearings or via telephone. Visits may be scheduled or unannounced. A portion of the visitt will be set aside for separate and private conversation between the Family Service Worker and the child to assess the quality of care being provided.
D. The Division will evaluate the specific strengths, needs, preferences, and experience of each foster home. This will be used to determine the number, ages, sex, and characteristics of children who will be placed in the home. These determinations will consider the foster parents' own family life. No child may be placed in a foster home in violation of the limitations established in this assessment or the foster parents' preferences.
E. The Division will make training available to the foster parents. Training will be at times and locations that will enable the foster parents to meet their training requirements. Assistance to the foster parents with reimbursement for transportation and child care will be provided by the Division, as needed.
F. The Division will provide support services, such as emergency, respite care, child care, transportation, crisis and after-hours intervention, counseling, and foster parent mentors for the foster parents. These services will be available, as needed, to assist in providing proper care or to prevent the disruption of a child's placement.
G. The Division will not place children with any foster parents who have not satisfactorily completed the required 30 hours of pre-service training.
H. The Division will not place children with any foster parent who has not satisfied the annual in-service training requirement of 15 hours that comes due at the end of the second year. The Division may make an exception for any foster parent whose annual in-service training hours are no more than 60 calendar days overdue.
I. The Division will keep a record for each child that includes legal documents (e.g., birth certificate, social security card, court orders). The Division delegates the responsibility for the day-to-day care of the child in foster care to the foster parents. Foster parents will be provided with the following information for every child placed in their home:
   1) Full and complete information about the child, except as prohibited by law.
   2) Health care information regarding the child, including:
      a. The child's Medical Passport and any revisions, as on-going medical or mental healthcare information regarding the child becomes available.
      b. The child's Client Medical and Psychological Information (CFS-6012) completed within 7 days of the Comprehensive Health Assessment and provided to foster parents within 5 days of completion or revision.
      c. The Child's Health Plan (CFS-368) completed within 14 days of completion of the Comprehensive Health Assessment and provided to foster parents within 5 days of completion or revision.
   3) Reasons for the child's placement and circumstances leading to removal from the home.
   4) Probable length of placement.
   5) A copy of the child's case plan and visitation plan from the Case Plan (CFS-6010) and any revisions to either within 5 days of completion.
   6) Other information pertinent to the provision of services to the child, as the individual situation warrants.
   7) CFS-462: Initial Foster Home Agreement
   8) CFS-462A: Foster Home Agreement Addendum

J. The foster parents will be notified of all staffings and judicial case reviews for children in foster care placed in their home. Foster parents will be provided the opportunity to have input in shaping the case plan. Foster parents' roles and the roles of the child's Family Service Worker will be clearly defined with regard to carrying out each of the specific tasks of the child's case plan. While foster parents are responsible for the day-to-day care of children placed in their home, DCFS retains legal responsibility for supervision, decision making, and ensuring continuity of care for the child. If parental rights have not been terminated, biological parents should also be included in major decisions pertaining to their children.

K. All child maltreatment allegations concerning any person in a foster home will be investigated in accordance with the Child Maltreatment Act § 12-18-602.

If any child in foster care is the subject (alleged offender or alleged victim) of an allegation of child maltreatment, the Division will notify the child's family, the OPLS attorney, Child Abuse Hotline, the CASA, and the attorney ad litem. The attorneys ad litem for all other children placed in the home will be notified as well. The safety and welfare of any child in foster care will be paramount.

Priority I Allegations: For all Priority I allegations, if the alleged offender is a foster parent or any other member of the foster family household, then all the children in foster care in that home will be removed from that foster home. If the alleged offender is a child in foster care, then he or she will be removed from that home and placed in a foster home without any other children.

Priority II Allegations: When any foster home is the subject of a Priority II child maltreatment allegation, an evaluation will be conducted on an individual basis to determine if the child(ren) can safely remain in the home during the investigation. If it can be shown that it is in the best interest of any of the children currently placed in that foster home, a protection plan may be considered to allow any or all of the children in foster care to remain in a home involved in a maltreatment report. If the safety and welfare standards of the Division cannot be met, and the children cannot safely remain in the home, the children will be removed and placed in another approved foster home.

While any foster home is being investigated because of a maltreatment allegation, Priority I or II, no additional children may be placed in the home.

If the Priority I or II allegation report is unsubstantiated, consideration will be given to returning any children who were removed from the foster home as a result of the allegation. This will be determined by holding a staffing so that all stakeholders may have input. The decision made will depend on the best interest of the child.

If the report of Priority II maltreatment is an investigative true finding, the protection plan must be reevaluated if the children are allowed to remain in the home during the hearing process.

For all investigative determinations where allegations of Priority II child maltreatment are found true and up-held by the administrative hearing, the well-being of each child who is in the home will be re-assessed on an individual basis. If it can be shown that it is in the best interest of any child to remain in that home, then a waiver or alternative compliance, depending on the situation, may be considered so that the home may remain open to care for that child.

In cases where the foster home is allowed to remain open, if the foster parents wish to be considered for the placement of additional children, an Individualized Training Plan will be developed and completed before any additional child is considered for placement in that home.

L. The Division will continually monitor the appropriateness of the placement.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOSTER PARENTS

A. Foster parents will comply with the objectives of the foster care program by providing care and supervision in a family environment for every child in foster care placed in their home by the Division. This care and supervision will include experiences associated with normal family life and an opportunity for the child to develop to his or her full potential emotionally and physically.

B. Foster parents will recognize that foster care is a temporary arrangement until a permanent plan can be established and implemented. Foster parents will cooperate with the Division by respecting the rights of the child's birth/legal parents, participating in training offered by the Division, accepting the Division's supervision of any child placed in their home, and participating in periodic reevaluations of the home. The foster parents will cooperate with the Division by recognizing that the Division sees foster care as a temporary but integral step in achieving permanency for the child. They will agree to allow visits with parents, siblings, and other appropriate relatives, as scheduled by

the Division. Foster parents will agree to provide a home for the child in care as long as that placement is appropriate for the child.

C. Foster parents will provide continuous care for any child placed in their home until the permanency plan can be implemented, unless there is agreement between the Division and the foster parents that the placement is not appropriate.
D. Foster parents will agree to participate in pre-service training and continuing education programs, as specified by policy.
E. Foster parents will provide direct care and have decision-making authority concerning the child's daily living. However, they may not make independent major decisions that have far-reaching effects on the child's life, such as consents for surgery, military service, or marriage. They should not make decisions that have far reaching effects for the child's personal appearance without consulting the Family Service Worker.
F. Foster parents will provide reasonable opportunities for mail/phone contact and visits with parents/legal guardians and with siblings.
G. Foster parents will notify the Division immediately of serious illness, accidents, or any unusual circumstances affecting the health, safety, physical, or emotional well-being of the child in foster care.
H. Foster parents will share the primary responsibility of helping children in foster care who are age appropriate to develop independent living skills along with the child's assigned FSW and Transitional Services Coordinator.
I. Foster parents will sign an agreement with the Division to provide foster care, CFS-462: Initial Foster Home Agreement, and a separate agreement for each child in foster care placed in the home, CFS-462A: Foster Home Agreement Addendum.
J. Foster parents will maintain absolute confidentiality of private information about children in their care and their birth/legal family. It is understood that the foster family interacts with others. Nevertheless, information about the child's history, or information which the child wishes to keep private must not be discussed with others. Policies, activities, and programs of the Department of Human Services are discussed publicly in generalizations only. Identification of particular cases or children must not be made without prior approval.
K. Foster parents will make every effort to give the Division advance notice if it becomes necessary to request removal of a child placed in their home. When a foster parent requests a child in foster care be removed from their home, excluding an emergency that places the child or a family member at risk of imminent harm, the foster parent must attend a staffing to discuss what services or assistance may be needed to stabilize the placement. The staffing will be held within 48 hours of notification by the foster parent to have the child removed from their home. The child in foster care, the child's attorney ad litem, and a CASA, if appointed to the case, will be notified so that they can attend and participate in the staffing and planning for the child's placement. If the placement cannot be stabilized, the foster parent will continue to provide for the child in care until an appropriate alternative placement is located, but this will not be longer than 5 business days after the staffing. These efforts will serve to reduce the number of placements of children in foster care.
L. Foster parents will maintain records in accordance with Division procedures and forms for the children placed with the family. This includes both health and progress records.

FOSTER PARENT LIABILITY

Foster parents must carry homeowner's or renter's insurance and general liability insurance, which may be included in the homeowner's policy.

Any claims that are not covered by home owner's insurance for damages or destruction to a foster parent's personal property or to the property of others due to the actions of a child placed in a foster home will need to be filed with the Arkansas Claims commission. Foster parents or the individual can request the appropriate application to submit a claim by contacting the Arkansas Claims Commission, 101 E. Capitol Ave., Suite 410, Little Rock, Arkansas 72201, Phone (501) 682-1619, www.claimscommission.ar.gov.

Prior to filing a claim with the Claims Commission, the foster parents or the individual will need to contact the local DCFS county office to provide information needed to complete an incident report. This incident report will be submitted to Central Office by county staff and will be used to assist the Claims Commission in processing the claim.

According to Act 941 of 1989: "Family foster parents approved by a child welfare agency licensed by the Department of Human Services shall not be liable for damages caused by their children in foster care, nor shall they be liable to the children in care nor to their parents or guardians of the children placed in their home for injuries to the children in foster care caused by acts or omissions of the family foster parents unless the acts or omissions constitute malicious, willful, wanton or grossly negligent conduct."

DCFS CONTACT PERSONS

CHILD'S NAME:_____

FAMILY SERVICE WORKER:

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

RESOURCE WORKER:

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

FSW SUPERVISOR:

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

TRANSITIONAL SERVICES COORDINATOR (if applicable):

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

COUNTY SUPERVISOR:

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

CHILD'S ADOPTION SPECIALIST (if applicable):

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

AREA DIRECTOR:

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____

FAMILY'S ADOPTION SPECIALIST (if applicable):

_____

EMAIL:_____

WORK PHONE:_____

CELL PHONE:_____