



State of South Carolina

Department of Social Services

Policies and Procedures: Child Welfare Services

Subject:	Family Foster Home Standards of Care
Authority:	S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550
Standards:	Guiding Principles and Standards Practice (GPS) Model
Application:	Child Welfare Services Staff
Purpose:	
Through setting clear, uniform, and comprehensive expectations for foster families, the agency seeks to place all children in its care in homes where they will thrive and be safe. This section summarizes the family foster home standards of care found in S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 and provides guidance for the staff in charge of monitoring whether these standards are implemented and maintained. For a complete explanation of family foster home standards refer to S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 .	
Policy Statement:	
DSS staff assess, monitor, and enforce family foster home standards of care as set forth in S.C. Code of Regulations 114-550 . This policy is a summary of the standards of care found in State regulations. If there is any conflict between the standards outlined in this policy and the standards outlined in S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 , the regulations are the controlling authority on family foster home standards of care. For a complete explanation of family foster home standards of care, DSS staff must refer to S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 .	
Policy Administration:	
The Child Welfare Services Permanency Division is the owner of this policy, and the Director or the Director's designee will review this policy at least annually from the date published in the Child Welfare Manual or as needed due to changes in law or practice.	
Procedures:	
A. Foster Family Household Expectations	The following standards of care are to be maintained by all foster families: 1. The child's daily routine shall be planned to promote the development of good health habits. 2. Each child shall be provided with adequate health and hygiene aids. 3. Space for each child's possessions shall be provided. 4. The family foster home (defined as house, mobile home, housing unit or apartment) shall be able to comfortably accommodate a foster child as well as the foster family's own family, including the

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	provision of proper sleeping arrangements for the foster child and foster family. - Each child in care shall be provided with his or her own bed and storage space; however, same sex siblings may be allowed to share a bed or storage. - No child may routinely share a bedroom with an adult, and except for a child up to twelve months of age, no child may share a bedroom with an adult unless DSS or the child placing agency staff document that extenuating circumstances exist. - Children of the opposite sex sleeping in the same bed must be limited to siblings under the age of four years. - Children of the opposite sex sleeping in the same room must be limited to children under the age of four years. - Children shall sleep within calling distance of an adult member of the family, with no child sleeping in a detached building, unfinished attic or basement, stairway, hall, or room commonly used for anything other than bedroom purposes. - No biological children of the foster family shall be displaced and made to occupy sleeping quarters prohibited in (ii), (iii) and (iv) above because a foster child is placed in the home. - The top level of bunk beds shall not be used for children under six years of age. - Co-sleeping or bed-sharing, when a parent and infant share a sleeping surface (such as a bed, sofa, or chair) is prohibited. - Home has adequate lighting, ventilation, and proper trash and recycling disposal if recycling is available. - Home is free from rodents and insect infestation. - Home has proper water heater temperature.
B. Contact with Birth Family	- If deemed appropriate by DSS or the child placing agency, the foster family must cooperate in assuring that foster children are able to maintain regular contact with their birth parents, siblings, and other significant relatives. - Unless advised otherwise by DSS, the foster family should confirm that they, their families, and all foster children understand the temporary nature of foster care and should work with the agency to establish permanency for the children through reunification with the birth family, adoption, legal guardianship, or legal custody with kin or fictive kin.
C. Medical and Health Services	Foster parents shall follow instructions and suggestions of providers of medical and health related services. If receiving medication, a child's prescription shall be filled on a timely basis and medications shall be administered as prescribed, and otherwise be kept secured.

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	a. Foster parents must prevent the child's access, as appropriate for his or her age and development, to all medications. b. Foster parents must administer the medication to the child or be in the presence of the child for the child to self-administer, as appropriate for his or her age and development. 2. Foster parents shall establish routine dental and wellness visits for the child. 3. Foster parents shall obtain emergency medical treatment immediately as need arises, and shall notify DSS and child placing agency staff, no later than 24 hours of receiving such care. 4. If the primary source of payment for medical care is Medicaid, foster parents must confirm that the child's card is always accessible. 5. Foster parents shall contact DSS for coordination of any elective or nonemergency surgical procedures as far in advance of the procedure(s) as possible. 6. Any injuries sustained by a foster child must be reported as they occur and no later than 24 hours of incident.
D. Critical Incident Reporting	Foster parents are responsible for notifying DSS and/or the child placing agency staff as soon as possible when a critical incident has occurred such as: 1. The death of any child in the home; 2. An attempted suicide by the child; 3. The child being caught with a weapon or illegal substance; 4. The child being charged with a juvenile or adult offense; 5. The child being placed on homebound schooling or being suspended or expelled from school; and 6. The child leaving the home without permission and not returning.
E. Education Requirements	1. Religious education is to be in accordance with the expressed wishes (if any) of the birth parents. 2. School attendance shall be in accordance with state law requirements and shall be in accordance with the ability and in the best interests of the child. a. The foster parents must ensure that each foster child has access to education, educational opportunities, and related services.

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	b. Foster parents must emphasize the value of education and encourage and support children in their care to fully participate in educational activities. c. DSS will choose which school the foster child attends. d. DSS will not pay for costs associated with private tuition. 3. Unless extenuating circumstances exist, foster parents shall not home school foster children. DSS must approve any such plan and adhere to policy 510.6.1 Education Needs – Homeschooling Children in Foster Care.
F. Foster Family Parenting	1. All discipline must be reasonable in manner, moderate in degree, and responsibly related to the child's understanding and need. a. Discipline shall be constructive or educational in nature (e.g., withdrawal of privileges). b. Cruel, inhumane, and/or inappropriate discipline is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to the following: i. Head shaving or any other dehumanizing or degrading act; ii. Prolonged/frequent deprivation of food or serving foster children meals which are not as nutritionally adequate as those served to other family members or requiring children to be isolated from other family members when eating; iii. Deprivation of mail; iv. Slapping or shaking; v. Pattern of threats of removal from the home as punishment; and vi. Disciplining a child for a medical or psychological problem over which he/she has no control (e.g. bedwetting, stuttering, etc.). c. All foster homes are subject to South Carolina laws relating to child abuse and neglect. d. The use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline (or in any other circumstance) is prohibited. 2. Household chores and tasks assigned to foster children shall be appropriate for the ability of the child, similar to responsibilities assigned to other children, and geared toward teaching personal responsibility. 3. Foster parents must assist older foster adolescents in their care in learning skills that are necessary for successful independent living. 4. When determining whether to allow a foster child to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities, foster parents shall use the reasonable and prudent parent standard and shall make careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while at

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	the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child. Reference 760.3 Reasonable and Prudent Parenting for policies, procedures, and guidance related to this standard.
G. Safety Regulations	1. Infants and children shall not be left without competent supervision. 2. Children's records and reports shall be kept confidential and shall be returned to DSS when a foster child leaves the foster home. 3. Firearms and any ammunition must be separately stored, locked, unloaded, and inaccessible to children. a. In addition to firearms, the following weapons must be stored in an inoperative condition in a locked area inaccessible to children: air guns, BB guns, hunting slingshots, and any other projectile weapon. b. In addition to ammunition, arrows and projectiles for such weapons must be stored in a locked space separate from the weapons. 4. Weapons must not be transported in any vehicle in which the child is riding unless the weapons are made inoperable and inaccessible. 5. Foster parents who are also law enforcement officials and can document that their jurisdiction requires them to have ready and immediate access to their weapons may be exempt from these weapon requirements provided the foster parents adopt and follow a safety plan approved by the agency. 6. Foster parents must be able to secure/supervise access to in-ground or above-ground swimming pools over which the foster family has a right of control and shall maintain adequate supervision during periods of swimming. 7. The foster parent's home must meet the following standards concerning swimming pools, wading pools, hot tubs, and spas: a. Access to swimming pools and wading pools shall be controlled by a device or method that promotes safety of children, including a latch, lock, protective fence, protective cover, or other device or method which enhances child safety. b. Swimming pools must be equipped with a lifesaving device, such as a ring buoy. c. If the swimming pool cannot be emptied after each use, the pool must have a working pump and filtering system. d. Hot tubs and spas must have safety covers that are locked when not in use. e. Foster parents must closely supervise the child in foster care when the child is near any swimming pool or body of water.

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	When foster parents cannot supervise, they must restrict the child access to swimming pools or bodies of water. The child must never be left to swim alone. f. Foster parents must provide water safety instruction to the child in foster care as appropriate for his or her age and development if the home is adjacent to any body of water or has a swimming pool. Water safety instruction addresses key knowledge and skills on how to be safe around water and does not necessarily mean swimming lessons. g. Foster parents must follow the below guidelines: i. Maintain the swimming pool in safe condition, including testing and maintaining the chlorine and pH levels as required by the manufacturer's specifications; ii. Lock all entry points when the swimming pool is not in use; iii. Remove or secure any steps or ladders to the swimming pool to make them unusable when the pool is not in use; and iv. Set up and maintain wading pools according to the manufacturer's instructions, and empty and store them when not in use. 8. Fire escape plans must be developed, posted, and routine drills conducted. 9. A plan for how the family will respond and travel in the event of a disaster (e.g., a hurricane evacuation) must be developed and shared with DSS or child placing agency. Reference Disaster Response Policy for more guidance. 10. All pets must be kept current with rabies vaccinations and proof of such vaccination must be provided. Pets must not pose a safety concern. DSS or the child placing agency will determine what constitutes a safety concern.
H. Family Foster Home Requirements	1. Applicants and current licensed families must make themselves reasonably available on an ongoing basis to DSS or the child placing agency for statutorily required contacts or other contacts DSS or the child placing agency deems necessary. DSS or the child placing agency has the right to make unannounced visits, and to talk to any foster child on an as-needed basis. 2. Board payments shall be utilized for expenses including, but not limited to reimbursement for a foster child's board, school expenses, food, clothing, incidentals, minor medical needs, and other expenses. 3. Foster homes shall not provide full time care for more than five foster children, with the total number of children residing in the household not to exceed eight, including the foster parent's own

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	children, children of other household members, and other children residing in the household, except when keeping a sibling group together, keeping a child in his or her home community, returning a child to a home in which he or she was previously placed, complying with a court order, or when a court has determined that such placement is in the children's best interests. 4. No more than two of the five foster children referenced above may be classified as therapeutic foster care placements unless one of the exceptions applies. If one of the exceptions applies, no more than three of the five foster children may be classified as therapeutic foster care placements. a. No more than two (2) infants (age birth to one year) shall be placed in the same foster home without prior approval from DSS or child placing agency management staff. b. No foster home shall exceed the number of children stipulated on its issued license without permission from DSS or child placing agency staff. c. No foster home shall accept children referred by another public or private source without obtaining the permission of DSS or child placing agency staff prior to the actual placement. 5. A foster family is required to notify DSS or child placing agency staff of any significant change in the family/home including, but not limited to: a. Any structural changes in the home; b. Plans involving a change of residence; c. Any major changes in the health of anyone living in the home; d. Change in marital status and the addition of any occupants to the home; e. Significant changes in finances; and/or f. Criminal and/or child abuse allegation charges and/or investigations. 6. No unrelated lodger or boarder shall be allowed to move into a foster home without the agency's concurrence. Foster children may be placed or remain in a foster home where there is an unrelated lodger or boarder or roommate after necessary safety checks have been made and a written concurrence obtained from DSS or the child placing agency. Anyone over the age of eighteen years and living in the home must undergo a FBI based fingerprinting, SLED, Sex Offender (State and national), and child protective services history check. If children are already in placement, an affidavit must be submitted by the household member confirming there is no such record. The license must be
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	amended to a Standard with Temporary Waiver until the results of the submitted checks have been received. 7. Applicants or current foster families must advise DSS or the child placing agency staff prior to opening a commercial childcare service (day care) or other business in the home.
I. Foster Parent Assurances	1. Foster parents shall transport children in accordance with state public safety and vehicle restraint laws. 2. Foster parents must not use any illegal substances, misuse alcohol by consuming it in excess amounts, or misuse legal prescription and/or nonprescription drugs by consuming them in excess amounts or using them contrary to as indicated. 3. Foster parents, household members, and their guests must not smoke or vape in the family foster home, in any vehicle used to transport the child, or in the presence of the child in foster care.
J. Licensing	1. Failure to comply with one or more of these standards may result in removal of a foster child or revocation of a foster family license. 2. DSS shall apply the above Standards of Care, including the requirement to exercise the reasonable and prudent parent standard, to all family foster homes (including those managed by private child placing agencies) and group homes in which children are placed. DSS shall further ensure that the exercise of this standard is required as a condition in each contract entered between the state and any private entities that provide placement for foster children. 3. Each applicant shall be assessed for compliance with the S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 and the Family Foster Home Standards of Care during the initial license assessment and continuously after the issuance of a foster home license for the licensing period. For detailed information on each, reference S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550, 741 Foster Family Initial Licensing Assessment and 760.1 Home Visits & Foster Family Contacts. 4. Upon receiving a family's license, the Foster Family Licensing Support Coordinator (FSC) or the Child Placing Agency shall provide the family with a copy of the S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 and the Family Foster Home Standards of Care as part of the family's information and welcome packet. 5. The initial licensing case manager or the Child Placing Agency will review the Standards of Care policy and the S.C. Code of Regulations Section 114-550 and provide the family with copies. The Family Support Case Manager will review the S.C. Code of

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	Regulations Section 114-550 and the Family Foster Home Standards of Care policy as needed.
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Forms:

	739 Child Welfare Services Disaster Response 741 Foster Family Initial Licensing Assessment 760.1 Home Visits & Foster Family Contacts 760.3 Reasonable and Prudent Parenting 510.6.1 Education Needs – Homeschooling Children in Foster Care
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