



State of South Carolina Department of Social Services

Policies and Procedures: Child Welfare Manual

Subject:	550.1 Voluntary Placement
Chapter:	Foster Care
Effective Date:	07/21/2016
Standards:	Guiding Principles and Standards (GPS) Practice Model
Application:	Child Welfare Services Staff

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The agency shall provide temporary foster care placement when a parent or relative requests a voluntary placement, abuse or neglect is not suspected, and it is in the child's best interests. This section describes the policies and procedures to be followed when a parent seeks to voluntarily place his or her child in foster care.

POLICY:

1. A voluntary placement agreement will only be accepted if placement is in the child's best interest and there is a reasonable expectation of securing a safe, stable, and permanent family for the child (which may include reunification of the child with the parent in a reasonable time period as designated on the agreement).
2. Voluntary placement is limited to 90 days, with the possibility of one 90-day extension.
3. The agency will file a complaint for removal if placement exceeds 180 days or if, at any time, the agency determines that returning the child to the parent would present a substantial and imminent risk of harm that justifies assumption of custody.

PROCEDURES:

Assessment of Request for Voluntary Placement

1. The Foster Care Case Manager shall assess the request for placement to determine whether one of the following conditions exist:

- a. the parent has a temporary mental or physical condition, or situational crisis, that prevents them from performing his or her parental role but that can reasonably be expected to resolve within 90 days;
 - b. the parent plans to relinquish parental rights;
 - c. the parent is in the custody of the agency; and
 - d. The relative caregiver can no longer provide home for the child.
2. If a relative requests voluntary placement of a child in his or her care, the Foster Care Case Manager shall determine whether the relative has legal custody. If the relative does not have legal custody, the worker shall attempt to contact the parent(s) to assess the situation and placement options.

Exploration of Alternatives to Foster Care

1. Prior to accepting a voluntary placement, the Foster Care Case Manager shall explore with the parent alternatives such as supportive services, use of emergency funds, and placement with the non-custodial parent or relative/fictive kin.

Voluntary Placement Agreement

1. If the request for voluntary placement is accepted, parents must sign [DSS Form 1512: Voluntary Placement Agreement](#).
2. Prior to facilitating the signing of the agreement, the worker shall explain to the parent/guardian that:
 - a. the agreement is for 90 days and may be extended for no more than one additional 90-day period;
 - b. if returning the child home does not appear to be possible within 180 days, the agency may file a removal action to seek legal custody; and
 - c. The parent may revoke the voluntary placement agreement and request return of the child within 15 days. However, if the agency believes that a return home would continue substantial and imminent risk of harm to the child, the agency may petition the court for a removal order.

Family Meeting

1. Within three days following placement in foster care, the Foster Care Case Manager shall arrange an initial family meeting to develop a case plan. The worker shall refer the family for family group conferencing.

Extension of Agreement

1. If voluntary placement needs to be extended beyond the initial 90 days, the worker shall execute a new [Voluntary Placement Agreement](#) prior to the end of the 90-day period.

Special Considerations:

IV-E Eligibility

1. For establishing and maintaining IV-E eligibility, refer to [Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility 510.9](#).
2. For voluntary placements, a judicial determination that reasonable efforts were made to prevent removal is not required for IV-E eligibility, as long as the period of voluntary placement does not exceed 180 days without a court order.

Post-Adoption Requests for Placement

1. If a family who has adopted a child from a private and/or international agency requests to voluntarily place child in foster care, a comprehensive assessment must be done to determine the appropriateness of the request. The worker shall refer families experiencing post-adoption difficulties to the Regional Adoptions Office for the completion of this assessment.

DOCUMENTATION:

- Contacts with child and family
- Efforts to support family and/or engage alternative placements
- Copy of agreement
- Copies of court documents and orders, if applicable Copy of IV-E Application

COLLABORATION:

- Foster Care
- Worker DSS Attorney

REFERENCES:

- Legal Citations:
- 42 U.S.C.A. § 672(d) thru (g): IV-E
- Requirements 45 C.F.R. § 1356.22: IV-E regulations
- S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-40: Save Haven for Abandoned Infants

Forms:

[DSS Form 1512: Voluntary Placement Agreement](#)