

CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES
STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

STANDARDS FOR OUT-OF-HOME CARE SERVICES

6.3 COMBINED CERTIFICATION AND APPROVAL FOR FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Council on Accreditation Standards

The Council on Accreditation Standards S14.7 (Services for Adoptive Applicants) and S21.8 (Foster Parent and Kinship Caregivers) link to and support Standard 6.3 *Combined Certification and Approval for Foster Care and Adoptive Families*.

Administrative Code

The Ohio Administrative Code Rules 5101:2-5-091 (Criminal Records Check Required for Certain Prospective Employees and Certified Foster Caregivers); 5101:2-5-13 (Required Agency Policy); 5101:2-5-20 (Application for an Initial Family Foster Home Certificate); 5101:2-5-21 (Agency Assessment of an Initial Application for Family Foster Home Certificate); 5101:2-5-22 (Recommendations for Initial Family Foster Home Certification or Denial of Initial Family Foster Home Certification); 5101:2-5-23 (Form and Duration of a Family Foster Home Certification); 5101:2-5-28 (Cause for Denial of Initial Certification, Denial of Re-certification or Revocation of a Family Foster Home Certificate); 5101:2-5-33 (Foster Caregiver Orientation and Training); 5101:2-7-02 (General Requirements To Be Certified As A Foster Caregiver) through 5101:2-7-15 (Transportation); 5101:2-48-011 (Agency Adoption Policy); 5101:2-48-04 (Adoption Policy); 5101:2-48-06 (Restrictions Concerning Provision Of Adoption Services); 5101:2-48-10 (Release Of Adoptive Assessment and Related Information); 5101:2-48-12 (Completion of a Home Study Report); and 5101:2-48-12 (Completion of a Home Study Report) address Standard 6.3 *Combined Certification and Approval for Foster Care and Adoptive Families*.

*Items with an asterisk indicates that this Standard is based on effective practice, however, it does not currently comply with the Ohio Administrative Code (which requires the applicant complete the certification and approval process regardless of ineligibility).

I. Philosophy

Children are entitled to out-of-home placement and permanent homes, which are safe, stable, and provide for their physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, educational, social and developmental needs. In keeping with the philosophy "one placement per child", timely and thorough assessments of applicants as certified foster families and as approved adoptive families maximize the likelihood of permanency for children, minimizing multiple placements. The assessment of foster and adoptive homes requires a strong partnership between the agency and the potential caregiver.

II. Outcome

Families care for and aid in the transition of children toward permanency through reunification or adoption.

III. Evaluation

FACSIS events, CPOE and the Federal Health and Human Services outcomes may be considered when evaluating this standard. In addition, the CFSA may consider the following:

- number of personal responses made to prospective applicants within two working days;
- number of summarized information packets sent to prospective applicants within three to five days of the inquiries;
- number of prospective applicants per year;
- number of prospective applicants qualifying per year;
- number of prospective applicants completing all necessary paperwork per year;
- number of prospective applicants completing all training requirements per year;
- number of prospective applicants certified or approved per year;
- number of foster or adoptive families recruited, certified or approved from targeted neighborhoods;
- number of foster families that transfer or terminate license per year.

IV. Standards for Implementation

A. Inquiries

Child and Family Services Agencies acknowledge that an expedient response to foster care and adoption inquiries is critical to the recruitment process. Introducing prospective applicants to these programs exposes them to the needs of children and families', requirements for fostering and adopting, and increases the public's understanding of the foster care and adoption processes in Ohio.

- 1) The designated CFSA representative should personally respond to each prospective applicant within two working days of receiving the inquiry.
- 2) All inquiries made to staff representatives should be forwarded immediately to the designated CFSA representative to provide the personal response within two working days.
- 3) CSFAs should send the following summarized information within 3-5 working days to those inquiries that are interested in continuing with the licensing and approval process:
 - a. CFSA mission/purpose statement;
 - b. statement of general need for foster and adoptive homes that meet the current needs based on target populations (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, special needs, geographic location);
 - c. statement regarding available options and opportunities to foster and/or adopt;
 - d. certification and approval requirements including:
 - i. the application process;
 - ii. the training and schedule of training events;
 - iii. the home study process;
 - iv. the home safety and fire inspection;
 - v. a copy of the marriage certificate and/or divorce decree, complete financial statement, complete medical form, authorization for release of information (ROI), access to criminal records information and five references (no more than two related);
 - f. summary of minimum state requirements to become an approved foster/adoptive applicant;
 - g. summary of CFSA foster care and adoption policies and the Ohio Adoption Guide; and
 - h. availability of on-site/website review of Ohio's children.

B. Qualifying Application Requests

Agencies acknowledge that inclusive practices for qualifying foster or adoptive applicants increase the pool of families available for children when needed for placement. The focus of inclusivity is to challenge the agency's attitudes of "screening out" candidates to one of "screening in" appropriate candidates.

- 1) All applicants need to be viewed in terms of the agency and state policies for foster or adoptive homes. Considerations for continuing with the licensing and approval process are:
 - a. prospective applicant is at least 21 years old*;
 - b. prospective applicant has not been convicted of a felony as defined in the Ohio Revised Code and the Ohio Administrative Code;
 - c. prospective applicant's marital/live-in status has been stable twelve months prior to the application;
 - d. prospective applicant has not had involvement with a CFSA that would cause the CSFA to deem the applicant ineligible.

**This standard is based on effective practice, however, it does not currently comply with the Ohio Revised Code (which allows 18 year olds to unilaterally apply for, and be approved to, foster and/or adopt).*

C. Foster Care and Adoption Services for Individuals Directly Affiliated with the Agencies

Agencies believe that a conflict of interest exists for an agency staff member, Board member, or member of the Citizens Review Board to receive foster care and adoption services from the agency with which these individuals are affiliated. The agency should link these prospective applicants to another agency, which should provide comparable and timely services (e.g., homestudy, updates, placement, support, supervision) that would have otherwise been provided by the originating agency. The referring agency should document having done so.

D. Certification/Approval Process

Certifying/approving a foster/adoptive home is based on a process of mutual assessment of the applicant's suitability. Both the applicant and the CFSA must fully participate in the process to assure the decision to certify and approve the home is based on accurate, thorough, and complete information. CSFAs should use assessment methods that are culturally appropriate to the applicant and assist applicants in meeting basic qualification requirements. The certification/approval process should be as expedient as possible.

- 1) The foster family/adoption application should be provided within three working days of the request.
- 2) The CFSA should initiate the certification and approval process within ten working days of receiving the application form.
- 3) When the CFSA determines the applicant to be ineligible for certification and approval, the CFSA will inform the applicant of the reason of ineligibility and their right to voluntarily withdraw the application, and sends the applicant written notification and a copy of the agency grievance process within five working days.

**This Standard is based on effective practice, however, it does not currently comply with the Ohio Administrative Code (which requires the applicant complete the certification and approval process regardless of ineligibility). It is recommended that an Ohio statewide database be developed to track the foster/adoptive homes that have been denied for*

licensure and/or recertification. It is also recommended that CFSA's can access an Ohio statewide database to check for abuse/neglect reports on foster/adoptive applicants.

- 4) As part of the certification and approval of the home, the staff should schedule a minimum of four face-to-face contacts, two of which are in the family's home:
 - a. one of the interviews should involve each member of the household individually, including any children over the age of four as appropriate to their ages and level of understanding;
 - b. two interviews should involve the primary caregiver(s);
 - c. if there are two caregivers, one joint interview should occur;
 - d. one joint interview with the entire household members.

Face-to-face visits should include a discussion regarding the roles, responsibilities, and differences between fostering and adoption.

- 5) The certification and approval process should include, but not be limited to, the following components:
 - a. participation and completion in the agency's pre-service training;
 - b. applicant's prior history with any children services agency;
 - c. completed criminal background check (BCI and I, FBI, local records) on the applicant and all adult household members;
 - d. completed juvenile record and Children Services check on all children in the household age 10 and over;
 - e. medical history (including, but not limited to: drug and alcohol abuse and treatment, and treatment for psychological/psychiatric disorders);
 - f. documentation of income and expenses/financial statement form;
 - g. five references (two can be relatives) from individuals who know the applicant family and can comment on the applicant's ability to interact with children;
 - h. approved fire inspection report;
 - i. completed assessment form;
 - j. approved safety audit;
 - k. individual interviews with each member of the applicant family over the age of four;
 - l. approval and documentation of the applicant's emergency and alternative care plan, and applicant's support system to assist in the care of the children;
 - m. history of each family member including childhood and family experiences which reflect the individual's psychological and social adjustment;
 - n. history of applicant's relationships, including marital, primary, extended family, and significant others;
 - o. exploration of stressors and applicant's response to these, their coping skills, and problem-solving abilities;
 - p. exploration of infertility, and other loss issues of applicant(s);
 - q. exploration of the family's ability to accept individual differences and unique attributes;
 - r. exploration of disciplinary techniques, positive and negative aspects of parenting, as well as parenting children with a history of abuse and neglect;
 - s. applicant's ability to recognize and acknowledge family member's feelings and needs, including their own;
 - t. exploration of the applicant and extended family's view of foster care/adoption;
 - u. exploration of the applicant's interest in foster care/adoption of any sibling should other biological sibling need placement in the future;

- v. applicant's expectations of child/family relationship, the ability to support the child's coping with past, the understanding of identity issues, including child's potential desire to search and connect with biological family;
 - w. determination of the applicant's ability and willingness to parent, as well as partner and work as a team with the biological family and agency, including the willingness to become a mentor/co-parent with the biological family;
 - x. assessment of the applicant's capacity and willingness to value, respect, appreciate, support, and educate a child regardless of the child's racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage, spirituality, background, and language;
 - y. determination of the applicant's strengths and needs to parent children in need of a placement;
 - z. discussion regarding the child's gender, age, race, and special needs who may be placed in the home;
 - aa. other as identified by the CFSA.
- 6) Barring circumstances outside of the CFSA control, the assessment process should be completed within ninety days from the time the CFSA receives the completed application form and the applicant has completed the required pre-service training and necessary documentation.
- a. When the applicant fails to follow through with assessment process requirements, the CFSA should contact the applicant to discuss the applicant's continued level of interest. When the certification and approval process is terminated due to a lack of follow-through by applicant, the CFSA should notify the applicant within thirty days prior to termination.
 - b. Notification should include the reason for the termination, the CFSA grievance process, (the State "fair hearing" process when applicable), and a description as to how the application may be reactivated. Termination should occur within sixty days of the completed pre-service training and provided application form.*
- 7) The staff should notify the applicant in writing of the assessment determination within five working days of the decision. The staff should prepare a letter for the applicant which outlines the following:
- a. date of the CFSA decision;
 - b. determination of applicant's status regarding fostering and/or adoption;
 - c. characteristics and number of children approved to foster/adopt;
 - d. homestudy update process;
 - e. reason for the determination; and
 - f. CFSA grievance process.
- 8) When, at any time during the assessment process the applicant requests a delay or hold on the process, and when the CFSA and the applicant mutually agree to delay the study, the applicant should be sent a letter documenting the request. A copy should be placed in the applicant's file. While delays can be common, the process must be completed in a year. After twelve months of the initial application, the process will be terminated by the CFSA.

E. CFSA Responsibilities to Foster/Adoptive Families

- 1) During the foster care certification and approval process, the CFSA should present and explain to the family the agency's responsibilities to the foster/adoptive family which include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. description of the agency's mission, values, expectations and goals as they relate to foster/adoptive families;
- b. the organizational structure of the agency and how the foster/adoptive family will receive support within that structure;
- c. a clear description of the roles and responsibilities of the agency staff and the rights and responsibilities of the foster/adoptive family;
- d. a discussion of the ways the agency will work to assist the foster/adoptive family with acquiring the information and skills needed to perform the role, as well as the ongoing training opportunities available within the agency and the community;
- e. the matching and placement process, along with the family's role in finding the right child for their home (see Standard 6.1, *Placement of Children in Out-Of-Home Care*);
- f. the general visitation plans for children with their parents, siblings and other identified significant persons and the foster/adoptive family role with these primary family members;
- g. the family's role with partnering with birth families and agency, including open adoption;
- h. the agency's policies for accessing and maintaining the child's health care and educational needs;
- i. the information that will be shared with the foster/adoptive family regarding the child, including the case plan, child's medical, behavioral, social, legal and educational history, reasons for placement, special needs of the child and particular challenges the family may face and resources available to service those needs and challenges;
- j. periodic review requirement for foster/adoptive family including the training needs assessment and ongoing training requirements;
- k. the established rate scale for fostering and availability of adoption subsidies;
- l. process for securing permanency for children in care and the foster/adoptive family role;
- m. processes and resources available for problem resolution in lieu of placement disruption;
- n. available agency supports for the ongoing mental health of the foster/adoptive family (see Standard 6.8, *Supports for Foster Caregivers* and 8.12 *Post-Adoption Services*);
- o. agency policy on liability/damages incurred as a result of the child in the foster/adoptive family home;
- p. processes available through the agency for resolution of conflicts and concerns, as well as the process to investigate rule violations and allegations of misconduct through the third party structure; and
- q. availability of agency and community family support associations as a vehicle to ensure the foster/adoptive family's ongoing voice in child welfare solutions.

F. The Rights of Family Caregivers

- 1) During the certification and approval process, the CFSA should present and explain to the family, the scope of their rights, which include but not be limited to the following:
 - a. to be respected, valued, and have his/her opinions be heard and included as a member of the child's treatment team in the decisions being made affecting the life of children placed in the caregiver's home;
 - b. to not be discriminated against, including but not limited to, on the basis of the religion, race, color, creed, gender, national origins, age, sexual orientation or physical handicap;

- c. to receive the agency's current policies and procedures which clearly outline the rights, responsibilities and roles of the foster caregiver, the agency and the child's family and methods of conflict resolution;
- d. to receive information regarding the placed child including the case plan, child's medical, behavioral, social, legal and educational history, reasons for placement, special needs of the child and particular challenges the family may face and resources available to service those needs and challenges;
- e. to receive appropriate and reasonable guidance and support from the recommending agency, including the means by which the caregiver can contact the agency 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the purpose of receiving assistance;
- f. to participate in pre-service training, ongoing training and appropriate programming for all members of the family which enhance the skill and ability to cope in the role as a caregiving family;
- g. to be informed, prior to placement and during placement, of issues relative to the child and his/her family which may jeopardize the health and safety of the caregiver family or alter the manner in which foster care is administered;
- h. to refuse placement of a child within the caregiver's home, or to request (upon reasonable notice to the agency) the removal of a child from the home for good reason, without the threat of reprisal*;
- i. to receive support in dealing with family loss and separation when a child leaves a home;
- j. to be considered for a child formerly placed in the caregiver's home who returns to foster care;
- k. to be considered as the permanent family for the child in their home who is legally available for adoption;
- l. to receive and provide regular (quarterly, at minimum) feedback on both the agency and family performance;
- m. to receive adequate and timely reimbursement for the approved expenses of the child in care;
- n. to participate in the development and implementation of a respite plan that meets the needs of the child and the family;
- o. to receive, upon request, a copy of information that is legally allowable relative to the caregiver family and services contained in the foster home record of the agency;
- p. to be provided a fair, timely and impartial investigation of complaints concerning the caregiver's home, including a respectful process for resolution of conflicts regarding the role as caregiver with the agency and be able to seek out support persons of the caregiver's choice who will agree to comply with confidentiality;
- q. to participate in, and communicate regularly with, associations for caregiving families and support groups;
- r. to be free to question agency's policies and practices and be free of maltreatment without fear of reprisal; and
- s. to receive written conflict resolution and grievance policies that are consistent with due process.

G. Family Responsibilities to the Child and CFSA

- 1) During the certification and approval process, the CFSA should present and explain to the family, the scope of their responsibilities, which include, but not be limited to the following:
 - a. make decisions on behalf of the child in the day to day parenting role;

- b. treat the child in care and the child's family with dignity, respect and consideration;
- c. provide care and services that are responsive to the child's needs and support the relationship between the child and his/her family;
- d. recognize problems in the home that require outside advice and assistance and to seek help;
- e. respect the confidentiality of information received;
- f. understand and work toward the plan related to the child in the home;
- g. advocate for the best interest of the child in care and his/her family;
- h. participate as a member of the child's treatment team, including but not limited to attending SARs and conferences;
- i. support the visitation plan for the child with the parents, siblings and other identified significant others, and participate as appropriate;
- j. accompany the child, and possibly the family, to medical, physical, psychological and other needed appointments and services, and submit the reports to the CFSA;
- k. maintain accurate and relevant records regarding the child's activities and progress;
- l. assist in enrolling and participating in the child's involvement in school;
- m. report serious illnesses/accidents of family members or members of household;
- n. discuss with the agency and report changes/additions in family or household composition and prior to change, whenever possible;
- o. report housing relocations prior to move;
- p. agree not to accept additional placements from other agencies without the approval by the CFSA that holds the family's license and to abide by the CFSA decision regarding the same;
- q. report any arrests or criminal charges or convictions within 24 hours for all members of the household;
- r. request permission from the CFSA if the child will be leaving the CFSA jurisdiction for more than 24 consecutive hours;
- s. sign-off, and abide by, the CFSA rules, policies, procedures governing the CFSA foster care and adoption programs.

H. Training

Formal orientation and pre-service trainings introduce the prospective applicant to the needs of the child requiring foster care and adoption, and to the challenges and responsibilities of both.

- 1) Agency should offer an Orientation Training on a regular basis that introduces prospective applicants to the foster care and adoption process and to the agency.
- 2) The CFSA should schedule and conduct Pre-Service training on a quarterly basis, at minimum, and/or agency should refer the applicant to other resources for similar training if training is not available.
- 3) Each applicant should attend and complete the Pre-Service Training, as prescribed by the CFSA prior to the completion of the home study process.
- 4) Pre-Service should include a thorough review, and allow for discussion regarding the differences between fostering and adoption and the responsibilities inherent in each.

- 5) The Pre-Service process should assure that the applicant has access to experienced foster and/or adoptive parents who can assist in providing hands-on information regarding fostering and adopting a child.
- 6) Families who parent adolescents should receive, within the first year of service, the CFSA self-sufficiency/independent living training provided to caregivers and staff as outlined in Standard 8.3, *Caregiver and Staff Training*.

V. Financial Implications

Costs associated with Standard 6.3, *Combined Certification and Approval for Foster Care and Adoptive Families* total:

30 hours per family x \$89.25/hour = \$2,677.50 per family.