

DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER

Children's Services #2-00

TO: COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: Standards for Children's Services

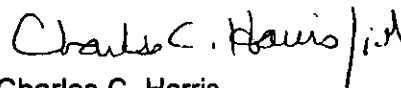
DATE: June 14, 2000

ATTENTION: CPS Social Workers and Supervisors
Foster Care Social Workers & Supervisors
Adoption Social Workers & Supervisors
Program Managers, Children's Services

The Standards for Children's Services are attached for your information. These standards reflect current law and policy and are effective July 1, 2000.

Please make certain that all affected staff receive a copy of the Standards for Children's Services. If you or your staff have questions about the standards, please contact the Policy and Planning Team at (919) 733-4622.

Sincerely,



Charles C. Harris
Chief, Children's Services

Standards for Children's Services

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- PM #1 The agency shall provide regular community awareness and public education programs on:
- recognizing and reporting abuse, neglect and dependency; and
 - community coordination and cooperation in service provision.
- PM #2 The Community Child Protection Team shall operate in accordance with state law and policy, which requires the review of active cases and fatalities, that has a broad based membership.
- PM #3 Work schedules of staff shall be sufficiently flexible to meet client needs.
- PM #4 Each agency shall have specific written procedures for receiving CPS reports and for providing supervisory support for decision making 24 hours a day.
- PM #5 Social work supervisors and social work staff shall complete pre-service and in-service training required by state law and the Division of Social Services.
- PM #6 Average caseload sizes shall be no greater than:
Child Welfare Intake: 1:100 a month;
Investigative Assessment: 1:12 families at any time;
CPS Case Planning & Case Management: 1:12 families at any time;
Foster Care and Adoption Caseloads: 1:15 children at any time;
Post-Adoption Service Casework: 1:15 families at any time;
Recruitment: 1:200 foster and adoptive families a year;
Licensure: 1:32 foster and adoptive families at any one time;
Training 1:120 foster and adoptive parent training a year; and
Home studies: which do not generate a fee 1:120 families a year.

- PM #7 Supervisor/worker ratio shall not exceed an average of one FTE supervisory position to five FTE social work positions.
- PM #8 The agency shall be able to readily access information that provides:
- the number of FTE staff positions budgeted;
 - the number of FTE staff positions filled;
 - the number of reports received and the number of reports screened out, by month and year;
 - the number of open investigative assessments by month and year;
 - the number of investigative assessments requiring more than 30 days to complete, by month and year;
 - the number of case planning and case management cases, by month and year;
 - the number of children who are in agency custody and/or placement responsibility and demographic data;
 - the number of children waiting adoptive placement;
 - the number of children who experienced adoption disruption before the final decree has been entered;
 - the number of licensed foster care homes; and
 - the number of other child welfare related services/cases provided.
- PM #9 The agency shall follow the confidentiality requirements which are contained in law and policy.
- PM #10 The agency shall have access to sufficient attorney time in order to accomplish effective delivery of children's services.
- PM #11 The agency shall have a written plan for ongoing recruitment of foster/adoptive families for the children it places that complies with MEPA/IEP and is approved by the Division of Social Services.
- PM #12 The agency shall have a written policy that the agency discusses with and provides to prospective adoptive and foster parents in reference to rights responsibility and procedures, including licensure and Adoption Assistance. At a minimum, the information shall outline descriptions of the children needing placement, the availability of Adoption Assistance, the compensation package for children needing placement, the procedure for requesting and receiving post-adoptive services, and referral procedures to other child-placing agencies for families they are unable to serve.

- PM #13 The Permanency Planning Action Team shall be composed of a minimum of five persons, including a person from the agency in a management position responsible for children's services, the child's social worker and a community member.
- PM #14 The Agency Adoption Committee shall be composed of a minimum of three persons, including a person from the agency in a management position in children's services, the child's social worker(s) responsible for the placement and adoption functions of the child's case, and any other person required by law.
- PM #15 The agency shall have a written policy stating that pre-adoptive legal risk placements may be considered when in the child's best interests. Barriers and legal constraints must be discussed with the potential adoptive parents. Until the child is legally free for adoption, all requirements of foster care, including licensure, shall be followed unless a court order sanctions the placement.
- PM #16 The agency shall have a written protocol and procedure to respond to adoption placement disruption/dissolution. The agency shall track and record the number of, and reasons for, disruptions/dissolutions.
- PM #17 At a minimum, the agency shall provide compensation to foster parents at State-established board rates. The agency shall provide funds for clothing and personal needs allowance when the child is in agency custody or placement authority.
- PM #18 The agency shall ensure that a discussion regarding discipline occurs with licensed placement providers (foster parents, licensed non-kin, residential care providers, etc.) The agency shall provide written policy and require an agreement to follow the policy as indicated by signatures. The written policy shall address the following issues regarding:
- child discipline must be appropriate to the child's chronological age, mental age, emotional make-up, and experience;
 - no cruel, severe, or unusual punishment will be tolerated;
 - deprivation of a meal for punishment, isolation for more than one hour, verbal abuse, humiliation, or threats about the child or family will not be allowed; and

- corporal punishment is prohibited.

PM #19

The agency shall make post-adoption services available to every adoptive family, as appropriate.

Children's Services Standards for Service Delivery

- #1 The agency has the statutory responsibility to screen reports and to intervene in situations meeting the legal definitions of:
- abuse,
 - neglect, and/or
 - dependency.
- #2 All CPS reports are to be documented:
- in writing, in a structured format, and
 - at the time the report is received.
- #3 CPS reports that are not accepted for investigative assessments require:
- a two party review;
 - that one of the parties must be in a management position, and all persons participating in the intake decision must sign the intake form; and
 - a written notice to the reporter, unless waived or anonymous, within five work days after receipt of the report stating the report was not accepted for investigative assessment.
- The notice shall include:
- information regarding the process by which the reporter may obtain a review of the agency's decision not to accept the report for investigative assessment;
 - whether or not the report was referred to the appropriate state or local law enforcement agency; and
 - referrals to outreach services or other agencies as appropriate.
- #4 CPS reports accepted for investigative assessment require:
- a written notice to the reporter, unless waived or anonymous, within five work days after receipt of the report stating that the report was accepted for investigative assessment, and
 - information as to whether or not the report was referred to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

#5 All reports shall be assessed and assigned promptly in order to ensure that face to face contact is initiated within the time frames mandated by law.

#6 The agency shall respond immediately when a report is determined to be a high-risk situation as a result of abuse, neglect or dependency. High-risk situations which require immediate response include but are not limited to:

- a child at imminent risk of harm resulting from neglect;
- physical abuse of a preschool child;
- a child under the age of six is left alone;
- a child being sexually abused;
- a child being tormented or tortured;
- a child in a life threatening situation;
- a child under the age of 12 who self-refers or refuses to go home;
- a report of a child's death as a result of maltreatment and there are other children present in the home or if it is unknown if there are other children; and
- anytime the agency determines that an immediate response is indicated.

If response to a high-risk situation is not immediate, there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts made and to show adequate follow up response to protect the child.

#7 In all reports accepted for investigative assessment, face to face interviews shall be conducted with all alleged victim children within the statutory time requirements, or there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts made to see the child within these timeframes and documentation that the child was seen as soon as possible.

#8 All children living in the home, in a non-institutional setting shall be considered as alleged victim children when there is any allegation of abuse, neglect or dependency.

#9 Interviews during the investigative assessment shall be conducted in the sequence least likely to cause further risk to the alleged victim, or there shall be documentation that reflects the rationale for the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

#10 Effective interviewing strategies and techniques shall be used which are appropriate to the child's developmental

level. Documentation shall explain the inability to interview the child.

- #11 Face to face interviews with the parents or primary caretakers with whom the child resides shall be conducted the same day the child is seen. If interviews are not conducted on the same day as the child is seen, there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts made or rationale for delaying the interview that does not compromise the safety of the child.
- #12 The safety/protection plan shall be in writing and shall be developed to address the safety issues and the parents or primary caretakers capacity to ensure safety for the children. When a safety/protection plan is not indicated, there shall be documentation that supports this decision.
- # 13 Face to face interviews with non-primary caretakers known to be living in the child's household shall be conducted within seven days of initiating the investigative assessment, or there shall be documentation to reflect efforts made.
- # 14 A face to face interview with the alleged perpetrator shall be conducted during the course of the investigative assessment, or there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts made.
- #15 The home where the alleged victim child resides shall be visited during the investigative assessment, or there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts made.
- #16 As a part of a thorough investigative assessment, the agency shall:
- interview all persons named at the time of the report as having information relevant to the investigative assessment or document why these contacts were not made; and
 - contact other persons or agencies known to be currently involved with the family or known to have knowledge of the situation or document why these contacts were not made.
- #17 All allegations, whether contained in the original report or revealed during the course of the investigative assessment, shall be documented and addressed and any potential risk to the child shall be thoroughly assessed.

#18 Medical and psychological resources, such as Child Medical Evaluation Program/Child Mental Health Evaluation Program shall be utilized, as appropriate in the assessment of alleged victims of neglect and/or physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

#19 When a child is alleged to have a medical condition, disease or illness, relevant to the allegation, the agency shall consult the medical provider treating the condition. This consultation shall be focused on determining the family's assertions about that medical condition, or there shall be justification for why this was not done.

#20 As a part of a thorough investigative assessment, the agency shall:

- review its Children's Services records for previous contact with the family; and
- conduct a Central Registry check unless the agency has conducted such a check in the 60 days prior to the new report, or the agency is providing ongoing children's services to the family.

#21 Until the case is closed or transferred, the agency shall maintain sufficient contact during the investigative assessment to:

- ensure the safety of the child;
- assess ongoing risk;
- monitor the safety/protection plan; and
- ascertain family strengths.

Documentation should reflect diligent efforts made to have frequent contact or the basis for what the agency considers as sufficient contact.

#22 When a report that is not accepted for investigative assessment includes information that a child may have been physically harmed in violation of any criminal statute by a non-caretaker, the agency shall:

- give immediate verbal notification to the district attorney or his designee;
- send subsequent written notification to the district attorney within 48 hours;
- give immediate verbal notification to the appropriate local law enforcement agency; and
- send subsequent written notification to the appropriate local law enforcement agency within 48 hours.

- #23 After finding evidence that a child may have been abused by a parent, guardian, or caretaker, the agency shall:
- give immediate verbal notification to the district attorney or his designee;
 - send subsequent written notification to the district attorney within 48 hours;
 - give immediate verbal notification to the appropriate local law enforcement agency; and
 - send subsequent written notification to the appropriate local law enforcement agency within 48 hours.
- #24 Documentation of the investigative assessment shall:
- include a description of the on-going assessment of risk, safety, and health of the child;
 - describe actions taken and services provided;
 - support the rationale for the agency involvement and service delivery on an on-going basis, and
 - be prompt and current within seven days.
- #25 The investigative assessment case decision shall:
- be a shared decision, including at a minimum, the worker and the worker's supervisor or supervisor's designee or staffing team;
 - be correct based on the legal definitions;
 - document specific caretaker behavior that resulted in harm to the child or clarify the absence of risk of harm; and
 - be made within 30 days, or there shall be documentation to reflect the rationale to extend the investigative assessment beyond 30 days.
- #26 Within five work days of the completion of the investigative assessment, the reporter shall be given written notice of the agency's findings, any actions being taken, and the process for requesting a review by the district attorney of the agency's decision not to file a petition. If the reporter waives the right to notice or is anonymous this does not apply.
- #27 The investigative assessment case decision will be reported to:
- the caretakers or parents alleged to have abused or neglected the child;
 - the primary caretakers or parents with whom the child resided at the time the agency initiated the investigative assessment;

- other parents as appropriate;
- any agency in which the court has vested legal custody;
- the licensing authority as appropriate; and
- the Central Registry.

#28

The agency shall complete an Initial Family Risk Assessment at the time of the case decision to substantiate abuse, neglect, or dependency with sufficient information to:

- determine a suitable plan of intervention; and
- determine what is needed to ensure the removal of the condition, situation, or persons that continue to threaten the safety, health or well being of the child.

Documentation shall be reflected on the Initial Family Risk Assessment Worksheet.

#29

Risk Assessment updates shall be completed when the child remains in the home and CPS Case Planning and Case Management services are being provided or the child is in placement and reunification is the plan. The Risk Assessment process shall be documented on the Family Risk Assessment Worksheet and shall be completed at the following intervals:

- when court action is considered more than 30 days following the case decision;
- at least once every six months to assist in decision making concerning a child's safety, health or well-being;
- within 30 days prior to the placement of the child back in the removal home;
- when the circumstances change around the risk issues; and
- within 30 days prior to closure to reflect a reduced risk level and support the decision to close the case.

At all times the Risk Assessment should reflect the current circumstances of the family.

#30

At the time the case decision is made to substantiate abuse, neglect, or dependency and the child remains in the home, there shall be an Initial Case Plan developed which is based upon the Risk Assessment and reflected on the initial Risk Assessment Worksheet. This shall be effective only until the Family Services Case Plan is developed with the family.

#31

A family shall be seen by a social worker within one week after substantiation of abuse, neglect, or dependency to

begin the transition from the investigative assessment phase to case planning and case management, unless there is documentation of diligent efforts made and/or rationale for the delay.

#32

Case Planning and Case Management contacts shall include at a minimum:

- face to face contact with both the victim child and the parents or primary caretakers at least twice a month; and
- contact with a person or persons significant to the case twice a month as appropriate.

The documentation shall reflect diligent efforts made to achieve this level of contact or rationale for the reduction in the frequency of contact.

#33

The Family Services Case Plan (FSCP), Part A, the Service Agreement, shall be developed to provide a basis for working with the family. It shall:

- be based on the Family Risk Assessment or on a written family assessment;
- be developed jointly with parents or primary caretakers;
- contain objectives/activities that are measurable, time-limited, describe specific desired outcomes, and identify necessary behavior changes;
- specify the outcomes or consequences resulting from following the plan successfully or not; and
- reflect progress or lack of progress of the family in each of the updates or revisions.

#34

Family Services Case Plan; Part A, Service Agreement, shall be:

- completed within 30 days of the investigative assessment case decision, or
- completed within 30 days of the removal of the child from the home when reunification is the plan; or
- updated at least every three months or whenever family circumstances warrant a change.

If the plan is not completed within 30 days, documentation shall reflect diligent efforts made or rational for extra time to develop the plan.

If the plan is not updated, documentation shall reflect diligent efforts to engage the family or rational for continuing the previous plan.

- #35 The agency shall provide, arrange for, and coordinate interventions and services, as needed, that shall focus on child safety and protection, family preservation and the prevention of further abuse or neglect.
- #36 Documentation of CPS Case Planning and Case Management shall:
- include a description of the on-going assessment of risk, safety, and health of the child;
 - describe actions taken and services provided;
 - support the need for continuing agency involvement; and
 - be prompt and current within seven days.
- #37 The agency shall terminate CPS Case Planning and Case Management when:
- parents or caregivers are willing to provide a safe home and demonstrate their ability to do so, or
 - the agency receives legal custody or placement responsibility.
- #38 Documentation shall:
- support the rationale for case closure; and
 - indicate that the decision was a shared decision made by the social worker and the CPS supervisor or supervisor's designee.
- #39 The agency shall notify the family in writing that the case is closed for Child Protective Services within a week of the agency's decision to close the case.
- #40 The agency shall make efforts to protect the child in his own home and to prevent placement. If the child must be removed, the removal shall require supervisory approval.
- #41 The parents shall be appropriately prepared for placement by explaining:
- the reason for the removal;
 - appropriate details about the placement;
 - what to expect from the placement provider and social worker;
 - how to reach the social worker or agency;
 - when the next contact with the child will occur, and
 - the legal process.
- #42 The child shall be prepared to his level of understanding explaining:

- the reason for the removal;
- appropriate details about the placement;
- what to expect from the placement provider and social worker;
- how to reach the social worker or agency;
- when the next contact with his parents will occur; and
- when the next contact with his siblings will occur.

#43

When removal from the home is required, the agency shall assess whether any relatives are willing and able to care for the child. The agency shall evaluate if such placement would be in the child's best interest.

#44

When temporary custody (12 or 24 hours) is initiated, the agency shall document compliance with the following requirements:

- that the child would have been endangered if the social worker first had to obtain a court order;
- that the child was returned to the parents or persons from whom the child was removed unless a petition or motion for review was filed and an order for secure or non-secure custody was obtained;
- that the parents were notified that they could be with the child while the court determined the need for secure or non-secure custody.

#45

Any petition initiated by the agency, by which a child comes into agency custody or placement responsibility, shall allege all of the conditions which would invoke jurisdiction.

#46

Upon filing a petition, a non-secure order should only be requested when a child is at imminent risk. A hearing shall be held within 7 days when a child is removed from home by a non-secure order and may be postponed for no more than 10 business days with the parent's consent. The non-secure order shall give specific sanction for a placement other than a licensed placement provider.

#47

Prior to the non-secure hearing, the agency must provide the following information to the court:

- the identification and location of any missing parent, including efforts undertaken to locate and serve the missing parent;
- the identity of any relative of the child who is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the child in a safe home;

- whether it would be in the child's best interest to be placed with any relative; and
- whether there are other children remaining in the home, from which the child was removed, the findings of the investigative assessment and actions or services provided for the protection of the other children.

#48

The court order resulting from the non-secure hearing shall contain language stating:

- that reasonable efforts have been made to prevent or eliminate the need for custody or if reasonable efforts requirements were precluded by an immediate threat of harm to the child;
- that continuation in the home would be contrary to the safety, health and welfare of the child or it would be in the child's best interest to be removed;
- that the child's placement and care are the responsibility of the county Department of Social Services; and
- that the agency is to provide or arrange for foster care or other placement.

#49

If a child comes into care as a result of an adjudication of undisciplined behavior or delinquency, the court order shall contain the required language in reference to placement responsibility, best interest of the child and reasonable efforts. If the court order does not contain appropriate reasonable efforts findings, the agency shall file a motion for the court to make such a finding.

#50

In the event a child is ordered into agency custody by a court sitting on other than juvenile matters, the agency shall file a juvenile petition alleging abuse, neglect and/or dependency, and the agency shall obtain a non-secure custody order. This action should be done at the time the court ordered the agency to obtain custody. The petition should be based upon the court's reason for ordering the action and any other information known to DSS in reference to the child.

#51

When the child enters DSS custody or placement responsibility, the child shall be assessed for funding eligibility. This assessment must be documented on the DSS 5120, and supported by court orders and verification of the eligibility status. Reviews shall be conducted at least every six months or whenever circumstances change that

would affect eligibility. Reviews shall be documented on the DSS 5120-A.

- #52 A child in the custody or placement responsibility of an agency shall be placed in a foster home or facility licensed by the State or in another placement approved by the juvenile court.
- #53 When the initial placement is with relatives or other non-licensed persons, documentation shall show that the agency assessed the placement resource before making the placement. If continuing placement is recommended or planned with a non-licensed relative or other non-licensed person, the agency shall conduct a thorough assessment of the placement provider. This assessment shall be documented on the Kinship Care Assessment form.
- #54 The agency shall arrange for and maintain a single, stable living arrangement for each child based on the needs and attachments of the child. This placement shall be within his own community. A child will be moved only when it is in his best interest and there are clear indicators documented to support the necessity of the move. Documentation shall reflect diligent efforts made to maintain a single placement in the child's community or reasons why this is not possible.
- #55 Siblings shall be placed together whenever possible, unless contrary to the child's developmental, treatment, or safety needs.
- #56 If siblings are separated there shall be a written visitation plan. Frequent and regular ongoing contact shall be arranged and facilitated, or there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts made or rationale for the decision not to have contact.
- #57 The record shall contain photographs of the child taken at least once a year. These photographs shall be labeled with the name of the child and date taken.
- #58 A log shall be maintained in each child's record which reflects the child's complete placement history, including the names of foster parents, dates of placements and dates and reasons for changing placements.

#59 There shall be face to face contact between the social worker, the child and the placement provider at least once within the first week of initial and subsequent placements in order to assess the child's adjustment, or there shall be documentation to reflect diligent efforts.

#60 A child must be referred for a physical examination within one week of initial placement or there shall be documentation to justify why the examination is not needed.

#61 A child must be referred for dental, developmental, psychological, educational and medical assessments when needed.

#62 Within one week of placement, a visitation plan for the parents to visit their children shall be jointly developed with the child's parents and placed in the record. A signed visitation plan shall be current at all times. Whenever circumstances warrant a change in visitation, a new visitation plan will be developed with the parents within 7 days. There will not be any unsupervised visitation unless approved by the court.

#63 The Health Status Component shall:

- be completed within 7 days of the initial placement;
- be updated at least every 6 months or when circumstances change; and
- be given to initial and subsequent placement provider(s) within 7 days.

This information shall be updated at least every 6 months and is designed to coincide with updates of the Family Services Case Plan, Part B. The reverse side of the Health Status Component Form may be provided to the physician for the purpose of summarizing the results of medical examinations. Documentation shall reflect dates the revisions were made and the information were given to the placement providers.

#64 The Education Status Component shall:

- be completed within 7 days of the initial placement
- be updated at least every 6 months or when circumstances change.

- be given to initial and subsequent placement provider(s) within 7 days.

The information shall be updated at least every 6 months and is designed to coincide with updates of the Family Service Case Plan, Part B. Documentation shall reflect dates the revisions were made and the information was given to the placement provider.

- #65 The agency shall use a concurrent planning process to develop alternative permanent plan options. The concurrent plan shall be documented on FSCA, Part A and Part B, as long as reunification is the plan.
- #66 A Family Service Case Plan, Part B, Case Plan, shall be developed within 30 days of the child coming into custody or placement responsibility and must be updated at least every six months.
- #67 When a child must be moved from one placement resource to another, parents shall be notified in writing prior to the move or within two weeks after the move if notification could not occur beforehand.
- #68 The first Permanency Planning Action Team review shall take place within 60 days of the child coming into agency custody or placement responsibility. The second review shall occur within 90 days of the first review, but no more than 150 days of the child coming into agency custody or placement responsibility. Subsequent reviews shall occur at least every six months thereafter. The team activities shall be documented on the Family Services Case Plan, Part C, Case Review Document.
- #69 Participants to be invited to attend the Permanency Planning Action Team include, but are not limited to, the following:
- the child's parent(s), unless parental rights have been terminated through relinquishment or by court order. Notification to parents must state their right to attend and to have their attorney present at the meetings;
 - the child if 12 or older;
 - the foster parents/caregiver/adoptive parents;
 - community resource persons, at least one of whom is not responsible for the case management or delivery of services to the child or parents; and
 - the Guardian ad Litem.

Documentation of notifications shall be reflected in the child's record unless all are maintained centrally. Exclusion of any participant should be documented.

- #70 The social worker shall have face to face contact with the child at least monthly. The agency shall have more frequent contact when indicated by the child's needs. The need for less frequent contact must be documented in writing and the documentation should include the level of contact expected.
- #71 When reunification is the permanent plan, there shall be at least one face to face contact with the parent(s) or persons from whom the child was removed every month. The agency shall have more frequent contact when indicated by the child's needs. The need for less frequent contact must be documented in writing.
- #72 A minimum of two contacts per month shall be made by the child's social worker with a person or persons significant to the case other than the placement providers. The agency shall have more frequent contact when indicated by the child's needs. The need for less frequent contact must be documented in writing.
- #73 There shall be monthly contact with the placement provider in reference to the child's needs and progress, which shall be documented in the child's record. Documentation shall reflect diligent efforts made to have contact.
- #74 In cases where a contractual party is conducting the required contacts, the agency shall request regular status reports and have face to face contact with the child at least once a quarter, or there shall be documentation to reflect efforts made or rationale for not making the contact.
- #75 The agency shall ensure that the foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, or relatives providing care for a child are notified of any court review or hearing to be held about the child and of their opportunity to be heard in court.
- #76 At each dispositional or review hearing the social worker shall prepare a court report and shall be prepared to present information in the court hearing as required by GS 7B 906.

At a minimum, information to be provided to the court should include:

- services which have been offered to reunite the family, or whether efforts to reunite the family clearly would be futile or inconsistent with the juvenile's safety and need for a safe, permanent home within a reasonable period of time;
- where the juvenile's return home is unlikely, the efforts which have been made to evaluate or plan for other methods of care;
- goals of the foster care placement and the appropriateness of the foster care plan;
- a new foster care plan, if continuation of care is sought, that addresses the role that the current foster parent will play in the planning for the juvenile;
- reports on the placements the juvenile has had and any services offered to the juvenile and the parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker;
- an appropriate visitation plan;
- if the juvenile is 16 or 17 years of age, a report on an independent living plan developed with the juvenile;
- when and if termination of parental rights should be considered; and
- any other criteria the court deems necessary.

#77 The court order resulting from each dispositional hearing shall contain language in reference to reasonable efforts and best interest as defined in N.C.G.S. 7B-507.

#78 Judicial review hearings shall be held:

- within 90 days of initial disposition; and
- every six months thereafter.

#79 A hearing designated as a permanency planning hearing must be held to develop a plan to achieve a safe permanent home for the child within:

- 30 days after the plan is changed from reunification to another permanent plan; or
- 12 months after the initial order removing custody.

#80 The order from the Permanency Planning hearing shall include specific findings as to the best plan of care to achieve a safe, permanent home for the child within a reasonable period of time.

- #81 When a child has been placed outside of the home for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the agency shall initiate a proceeding to terminate the parental rights unless;
- the permanent plan is guardianship or custody with a relative or other suitable person;
 - it is not in the child's best interest; or
 - the agency did not provide the services when reasonable efforts are still required to return the child to a safe home.
- #82 A petition for Termination of Parental Rights shall be filed within 60 days of the agency's decision that the goal is adoption or within 60 days of the hearing that determines that the plan is adoption unless the court makes other findings.
- #83 A Family Service Case Plan, Part AA, Plan for Permanence, shall be developed within 30 days of the decision to change the plan from reunification and shall be used until a permanent plan is achieved. Part AA, Plan for Permanence, shall be updated at least every 6 months or when circumstances change. The development of Part AA, Plan for Permanence documents the implementation of the concurrent plan. If the plan is not updated, documentation shall reflect the rationale for continuing the current plan.
- #84 If a parent has relinquished a child or parental rights have been terminated on at least one parent, court reviews shall be held every 6 months until a petition for adoption is filed.
- #85 The child's statement shall not be the sole determinant whether the decision for the permanent case plan will be adoption. Documentation shall reflect discussions with the child and support given to the child to accept the permanent plan when reunification is not the plan.
- #86 The agency shall develop a child specific written strategy for recruitment of an adoptive home, unless a family has clearly been identified. The written strategy shall be developed within 30 days of adoption becoming the permanent plan. The strategy may be reflected on the Family Service Case Plan, Part AA, Plan for Permanence, or be a separate document.

- #87 The child must be listed on the Adoption Resource Exchange within 30 days of being legally free for adoption, unless a permanent family has been identified.
- #88 Within 30 days from the time a child has been cleared for adoption, the agency shall assess the child's eligibility for Adoption Assistance. This may occur before an adoptive family has been identified and shall not be based on the income of the adoptive parent. The eligibility must be reflected on DSS Form 5012.
- #89 When a child becomes legally free for adoption, the agency shall give priority to the child's placement provider (relative, court approved non-relative, foster-family) who is willing and able to adopt the child unless there is documentation that it is not in the child's best interest. If such a plan is not implemented, the agency shall give priority to other relatives/kin who have been assessed and are determined to be an appropriate resource for the child.
- #90 Documentation of Child Placement interventions shall:
- include a description of current progress toward the goals and objectives stated in the Family Services Case Plan;
 - describe actions taken and services provided; and
 - be prompt and current within seven days.
- #91 The DSS 5094/5095 shall be maintained in the record and shall accurately reflect the current situation of the child and reflect updates for required activities.
- #92 The Voluntary Placement Agreement shall be used for minors only when there would be no risk to the child if he were to remain at home or be returned home at the parent's request. The agreement shall be signed by the agency and the parent or guardian.
- #93 A Voluntary Placement Agreement may be used for youth between the age of 18 and 21 or emancipated minors so that they may remain or re-enter the agency's placement authority. The agreement shall be signed by the agency and the youth.
- #94 Placement of unemancipated minors made by Voluntary Placement Agreement shall not exceed 180 consecutive

days without a court hearing that results in a judicial determination that the placement is in the best interest of the child. If the VPA is renewed, a petition must be filed and a hearing held prior to the end of the second 180 days.

#95

The agency shall conduct a written, standardized assessment with a youth who is 16 years old or older and who is in foster care, to determine his need in making the transition from foster care to independent living. A copy of a thorough assessment must be contained in the youth's record. Areas that must be assessed are:

- education;
- vocation/job skills;
- basic living skills; and
- personal, social, and emotional development.

#96

Family Services Case Plan Part D (Independent Living Component) shall be:

- developed no more than 30 days following the youth's 16th birthday; (or entry into foster care if over age 16);
- based on the independent living written assessment with the strategies and goals reflected; and
- maintained with updates documented in the youth's record at least every six months.

#97

A youth who is in foster care and is sixteen years or older must be offered Independent Living Services as indicated by the standardized assessment. If a youth refuses services, documentation of the refusal shall be included in the case record. Services shall remain available to any youth in foster care up to the age 18, or until 21 at county option, or for any youth up to age 21 who was once eligible for Independent Living Services.

#98

When a Child Protective Services Report involves an allegation against a placement provider, there shall be:

- an immediate and initial assessment by the home county of risk of harm to the child in foster care and to all other children in the care of the provider. This assessment shall be documented as a part of the investigative assessment in the child's placement record.
- removal of the child only when the assessment of harm indicates that the risk of harm to the child supersedes the positive strengths of that child's relationship to the placement providers. If the child was removed,

documentation must reflect rationale for removing the child from the home.

- documentation in the child's placement record that does investigative assessment findings and case decision; and
- documentation in the placement provider's record that does not contain any identifying information regarding the alleged victim child. Documentation in the placement provider's record shall be limited to the immediate assessment of the risk of harm and the ability of the placement providers to care for the child and the outcome of the investigative assessment.

#99

In cases where the care of children in agency custody or placement authority is provided by kin, whether licensed or not, the agency and kinship care provider shall discuss and develop an agreed upon child specific discipline plan.

#100

The agency shall ensure that all licensing and re-licensing activities are completed so that the license is current for any active foster home.

#101

The license application and relicensure packets shall be written and presented to foster parents applicants for review and their signature. A copy of the signed assessment will be provided to the foster family. The agency shall discuss with them the reasons for not licensing or renewing their license.

#102

The licensing social worker shall make, a minimum of one supervisory face to face contact every quarter. At least one visit shall be made in the foster parent's home every 6 months. Each foster parent in the home shall be seen at least every 6 months. The time between visits shall not exceed 90 days.

#103

Documentation of services to the foster parents shall:

- include a discussion of the foster parent's ability to provide care for the children in the home;
- include a description of the services and supports to the foster parents and to maintain and improve the care of the children and to enable them to participate as a part of the team in planning for permanence for the child;
- include a copy of the training log; and
- be prompt and current within seven days.

- #104 A log shall be maintained in the foster parent's record which includes the names of each child placed in his care, the dates of placement, and the date and reason for each child leaving the foster parent's home.
- #105 The agency shall document in writing the assessment of the family's suitability for the placement of an adopted child.
- #106 A copy of the written pre-placement assessment and recommendation shall be given to the adoptive applicants. If the applicants are not accepted by the agency as potential adoptive parents, the agency shall discuss with them the reason a child will not be placed with them.
- #107 The agency shall document a discussion with adoptive parents about the child's eligibility for Adoption Assistance. This discussion must be held prior to the filing of an adoption petition and must include a description of all components available. The components that must be offered are:
- cash assistance;
 - vendor payments;
 - medicaid; and
 - post adoption services.
- #108 There shall be a signed Adoption Assistance agreement between the agency and the adoptive parents prior to the entry of the final decree for any special needs child. The decision not to enter into such an agreement is exclusively the adoptive parent's decision.
- #109 When a child is placed in an adoptive home there shall be face to face contact within the first week of the adoptive placement and at least monthly face to face contacts with both the child and the adoptive parents until finalization of the adoption, or documentation shall reflect diligent efforts made to have contact or the rationale for less frequent contact.
- #110 Documentation in the adoptive family case record shall describe:
- a mutual assessment;
 - ongoing agency contacts;
 - adjustment of the child and the family with the placement;
 - service needs and services provided; and
 - be prompt and current within seven days.

