



# **Adoption Adoption Procedures**

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## **ADOPTION PROCEDURES**

Adoption services at the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) are designed to direct various aspects of the adoption process. An important goal of the program is to prepare and ready the child to accept a new family and facilitate the child's move into a new home. CCDCFS recruits, screens, develops, and prepares a pool of adoptive homes for children who have been permanently separated from their families. In addition, CCDCFS must identify and select families who can meet the best interests and special needs of an individual child.

### **Children in Need of Adoptive Families**

The Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services is responsible for the adoption of "waiting" children who are in the permanent custody of the agency. Children waiting for adoption are likely to have a special need or circumstance. A child with "special needs or circumstances" is a child who, prior to adoptive placement, has at least one of the following characteristics which may be a barrier to adoption or a barrier to the child being sustained in an adoptive home without financial assistance because the child:

- Is in a sibling group that should be placed together.
- Is a member of a minority or ethnic group.
- Is six years of age or older.
- Has remained in the permanent custody of a Public Children's Service Agency (PCSA) or a Private Child Placing Agency (PCPA) for more than one year.
- Has a medical condition, physical impairment, mental retardation, or developmental disability.
- Has an emotional disturbance or behavioral problem.
- Has a social or medical history or the background of the child's biological family has a social or medical history which may place the child at risk of acquiring a medical condition, a physical, mental, or developmental disability or an emotional disorder.
- Has been in the home of his/her prospective adoptive parents as a foster child for at least one year and would experience severe separation and loss if placed in another setting due to his/her significant emotional ties with these foster parents as determined and documented by a qualified mental health professional.
- Has experienced previous three or more adoption disruption or multiple placements.

**More specifically, in Cuyahoga County, "waiting children" are African American children of all ages, especially sibling groups, and Caucasian children over the age of eight and in sibling groups.**

### **Geographic Region Served by CCDCFS**

- Adoptive homestudies and pre-service training are available for all Cuyahoga County residents who desire to adopt a child with "special needs or circumstances." The child may or may not reside in Cuyahoga County.
- CCDCFS provides courtesy supervision for any Cuyahoga County adoptive family whose adopted child was placed through another county or state agency as a special needs placement and the child has special needs or circumstances.
- Adoptive homestudies and 36 hours of pre-service training classes are provided to non-Cuyahoga County residents who live in a county which is contiguous to Cuyahoga County. The prospective applicant must wish to adopt a child with special needs or circumstances who is in the custody of Cuyahoga County when the adoptive applicant's home county is unable to initiate an adoptive assessment within a reasonable amount of time.
- CCDCFS conducts courtesy adoptive homestudies for out of county CSB/DHS staff wishing to adopt a child with special needs or circumstances.
- An adoptive family approved by any Ohio agency or out of state agency may adopt children in the custody of CCDCFS.
- CCDCFS will not release copies of homestudy documents to the applicant. The agency will, however, duplicate and release documents, except references, within 15 days to state certified public/private adoption agencies in Ohio and other states when a **child with special needs/circumstances** has been identified for adoptive placement by the applicant through that agency. There is no cost to the applicant. All requests for release of adoptive homestudies for children not meeting the agency eligibility requirements for a child with "special needs or circumstances" will be honored. **If the applicant desires that their approved homestudy be transferred to another agency for the purposes of adoption of any child who is not a "waiting child", fees will be assessed to the family for the preparation/reproduction of the assessment packet.**

## **Eligibility Requirements:**

**Child Desired:** The majority of waiting children in the Permanent Custody of CCDCFS have special needs or circumstances and are eligible for adoption. If an applicant wishes to adopt a child with no history of child abuse, neglect or dependency, they will be referred to another agency for adoption services.

**Relatives wishing to adopt:** CCDCFS conducts adoptive homestudies for relatives who indicate a desire to adopt a related child. Relatives must meet the same eligibility requirements and follow the process as outlined in this procedure.

**Age:** All adoptive applicants must be at least 18 years of age. The applicant may specify if they wish to have a homestudy completed for both foster care and adoption.

Probate Court will be notified by the involved parties to respond to a request to verify when an adult who consents to be adopted was in the agency's custody on the date of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Marital Status:** Applicants can be married or single. Married applicants must be married for at least one year. Individuals who are cohabitating are not considered married. Applicants who are divorced or legally separated must be so for at least one year.

**Finances:** There is no minimum income required to adopt. However, adoptive applicants must demonstrate their ability to meet the basic needs of the present family system (excluding foster children) such as housing, food, clothing, medical, transportation, etc. Total family income must be from the applicant's own source of income and cannot include foster care payments, adoption subsidies, TANF, or Disability Income. Documentation of the applicant's current income is required.

Adoption subsidies may be available to assist with the expenses of the adopted child. **CCDCFS does not charge fees for adoption services for applicants adopting children with special needs or circumstances.**

**Housing:** Adoptive applicants must reside in safe and sanitary housing with ample space to accommodate an adopted child. Housing must pass a safety and fire inspection. The adopted child must have their own bed but may share a room with another child of the same sex, if appropriate. No family member can be displaced to make room for an adopted child.

**Race, Color, National Origin:** See: Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services "Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) Standards of Conduct Policy" via (Appendix A).

**Criminal Record:** All prospective adoptive parents and all adults living in the prospective adoptive home are required to be fingerprinted. Fingerprints are taken after the successful completion and submission to CCDCFS recruitment staff of the JFS 01691 "Application for Child Placement" and other required supporting

documents. Fingerprints of the applicants are taken by CCDCFS recruitment staff at the time of submission of the completed application packet. Adults living in the prospective adoptive home may be fingerprinted at the same time as the applicants, or they may schedule an appointment with the CCDCFS recruitment staff to be fingerprinted at a later date but prior to approval of the adoption homestudy. Fingerprints are sent to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) for processing. Applicants must document their residency for the past ten (10) years. There is no cost to the applicant for fingerprinting. If the applicant is found to have a criminal record, a review of the record is made by the Assessor to determine if the offense is or is not permissible for adoptive applicants under the Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-48-10 and Ohio Revised Code 2901.01-2925.02, 3716.11, 2151.86, and 5153.166. (Note: Criminal records checks conducted by BCI are not public records and are not permitted to be released to the applicant or transferred to another agency or entity.) In addition, all members of the adoptive applicant's household, ages 12-18 require a criminal records check. The youth's criminal history may or may not prohibit the adoptive applicant's approval for adoption.

**Failure to disclose any criminal background of any household member will result in discontinuation of adoption services.**

**History with CCDCFS:** If an adoptive applicant has been involved with CCDCFS in the past due to allegations of abuse, neglect or dependency, additional assessment or documentation may be needed. Results of the assessment may make the family ineligible to foster or adopt.

**Additional Assessments:** CCDCFS reserves the right to request or require additional assessments which can include psychological/psychiatric evaluations, additional medical screening, substance abuse assessments, and review of past records, etc. Refusal to comply with any request can result in discontinuation of adoption services. Some additional assessments may be at the cost of the applicant.

The **Adoption Process** consists of the following components: inquiry, pre-service training, application, additional required documents (application packet), assessment (more commonly known as "homestudy"), identification/selection, pre-placement visitation, pre-finalization/services, finalization, and post-finalization.

## **INQUIRY PROCESS**

Individuals interested in adopting may contact the agency by phone, in person, or in writing. The Recruitment Department provides timely and equal services to all inquirers.

See: Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services "Foster and Adoptive Recruitment Policy" via (Appendix C).

CCDCFS Recruitment Department (216-881-5775) is responsible for intake, and if the inquirer resides within Ohio, the following information will be provided within seven (7) working days:

- A copy of the JFS 01675 "Ohio Adoption Guide: Handbook for Prospective Adoptive Families, or the weblink to access the guide;
- Instructions on how to get an application for adoption;
- A copy of the CCDCFS adoption procedures;
- A copy of the CCDCFS Foster/Adoption Handbook;
- Information about the types of children available for adoption at CCDCFS;
- Information about the eligibility requirements including the criminal records check requirement, how to obtain an application and a summary of the assessment process;
- The CCDCFS policy statement of non-discrimination;
- Upcoming pre-service training schedules and other promotional information;
- If appropriate, the Recruitment Department invites prospective applicants to attend the next pre-service training class. If time permits, a reminder card is sent to the inquirer prior to the first class. Additional reminder cards are sent in the event that the inquirer does not attend the first class.
- If the inquirer resides out of state and has an approved homestudy, within seven (7) working days, CCDCFS sends the inquirer a copy of the JFS 01675 or the weblink to access the guide electronically and the CCDCFS Foster/Adoption Handbook. In addition, if the inquirer is interested in a specific child, they are given the child's social worker's phone number.
- If the inquirer resides out of state and does not have an approved homestudy, within seven (7) working days, CCDCFS sends the inquirer a copy of the JFS 01675 or the weblink to access the guide electronically and the CCDCFS Foster/Adoption Handbook. In addition, the inquirer is informed if they will need a completed and approved homestudy for their state of residence to be considered for a waiting child in Ohio.
- If the inquirer is a resident of Ohio and does not qualify for homestudy services at CCDCFS, the Recruitment Department provides the inquirer the name, address, and phone number to the Public Children's Services Agency (PCSA) in the inquirer's home county.
- The Recruitment Department maintains a tracking database on each inquirer which indicates the follow-up services provided to each inquirer.
- All CCDCFS adoption recruitment activities and materials are in compliance with MEPA- and Title VI, the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, 25 U.S.C.A., 1901, et seq., as amended, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The following statement is located in the CCDCFS Foster/Adoption Handbook and is mailed to inquirers: "CCDCFS does not deny any person the opportunity to become a foster caregiver or an adoptive parent on the basis of race, color or national origin of that person, or of the child involved. CCDCFS does not delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of race, color or national origin of the foster or adoptive parent, or the child involved."

## PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

Attendance at pre-service training is mandatory by State law for all foster and adoptive applicants and includes both members of a couple. The training is 36 hours in length. During training, additional informational materials are distributed to prospective parents. These materials include the agency mission statement, application, pre-service training schedules and make up information, pre-service training handbook, summary of the agency adoption procedure and information about the types of children available for adoption. During the first session, participants are given an overview of the foster care/adoption policies program assessment and placement process. Staff is available to answer questions and concerns.

Adoption, foster care and relative applicants are trained jointly on the following topics: abuse/neglect, importance of birth parents, impact of separation, promoting attachment, normal child development, the impact of abuse and neglect, parenting children who have been sexually abused, communicable diseases, discipline and behavioral challenges, health/safety issues, foster/adoptive caregiving, 3 hours of cultural issues including cross cultural parenting and diversity issues and adoption related issues. The trainers use a combination of lectures, guided group discussion, panel discussions, audio-visual materials, experiential and small group activities to assist the learning process.

If an applicant needs assistance during training due to language or communication difficulties, the agency arranges interpretation services at no cost to the applicant. Applicants needing interpretation services should contact the Recruitment Department at (216) 881-5775 to schedule interpreter services prior to training.

If needed, applicants are given information regarding “make ups” for missed sessions. **The pre-service training requirement will not be considered complete until all sessions have been attended by the applicant or by both applicants of a couple.** There is no admittance into class after the start time scheduled for that class. Each pre-service training class is valid for 18 months from the date of completion of the class. If at the 18<sup>th</sup> month the homestudy has not been approved, the applicant will be expected to repeat the expired class session. CCDCFS requests that all application packets be submitted in a timely manner no later than twelve months after completion of your first pre-service class to allow staff the allotted six months to complete the homestudy, per Ohio Administrative Code rule 5101:2-48-12. Prospective applicants are allowed to begin a round of pre-service training up until session number 3. After session number 3, a prospective applicant will be instructed to wait until the next round of pre-service training begins through DCFS. For applicants transferring from other agencies, CCDCFS considers training completed on a case-by-case basis. Applicants may be required to repeat or complete additional training sessions.

Recruitment and pre-service orientation training materials/packets explain information regarding but not limited to: requirements to become a foster/adoptive parent; agency and community resources and support; waiting children’s

characteristics; the Ohio Administrative Code rules for licensing and or approving foster/adoptive homes, and the paperwork for submission to begin the homestudy process for adoption. Information includes statements regarding falsification on the application, during the homestudy process, and in the Large Family Assessment JFS (01530) for those families planning to adopt who currently have, or plan on having, 5 or more children residing in their home at the time of the homestudy.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Prospective adoptive parents receive the JFS 01691 “Application for Child Placement” and other required supporting documents (application packet) at pre-service training. (However, a request for an application may be made at any time to the Recruitment Department.) Prospective adoptive parents may submit their application and other required documents to CCDCFS staff working at preservice for review. This application packet is reviewed by CCDCFS staff and must be completed as follows prior to the prospective applicants mini-interview and submission:

- Each section must be filled in completely and accurately.
- Each Application must include **Two Relative References and Three Non-Relative References.** If two applicants, each applicant must list a biological relative reference. All addresses and phone numbers must be complete with only one reference per address.
- The applicant must note if they are pursuing adoption of a specific identified child currently in foster care of a PCSA by providing the child’s name and, if applicable, their relationship to the youth.

During the pre-service training, the applicant has the opportunity to submit the application, have it reviewed by a staff member, and ask specific questions during a mini-interview. If the application and other supporting required documents are completed and ready for submission, the applicant is provided a copy of the notary forms to review, then they are fingerprinted, and the application is notarized. If the applicant needs assistance completing the application, they may request help from the trainers or staff present at the training. Applicants may also call the Recruitment Department (216-881-5775) for assistance.

**If the applicant desires to adopt a child with no history of child abuse, neglect, or dependency, the application is returned to the applicant with a referral to another adoption agency which can provide desired services and placement.**

If an applicant needs assistance in completing the application, arrangements can be made with the Recruitment Department to provide help before pre-service training or at another time convenient to the applicant.

The application is then processed by the Recruitment Department.

Applicants receive correspondence within seven (7) business days of the assessor receiving the case. Correspondence from the agency is followed as outlined in the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services "Foster and Adoptive Homestudy Completion" policy via (Appendix F).

Any adoption application knowingly submitted by the applicants with false statements or documents will not be used to begin the adoption homestudy. If the assessor determines that a false statement or document was knowingly made or submitted during the homestudy process or after the homestudy was approved, CCDCFS will follow the procedures according by Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-33-13 where such cases are referred to the prosecutor in the county where the adoptive applicant resides.

If there is a child who has not yet been finalized for adoption and has been placed in an approved adoptive home where the adoptive parents or other household members knowingly makes a false statement in an approved adoptive homestudy, any updates, or in a large family assessment, the adoptive parents or other household members are guilty of the offense of falsification. The assessor reports such incidents of falsification according to the procedures in Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-33-13. See: Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services policy "Falsification of Adoptive Application/Homestudy" via (Appendix D).

If any of the following apply, the application to adopt will be denied by CCDCFS:

- The applicant, or any adult member or member aged 12-18 of the applicant's household, has been convicted of a criminal offense not permitted under the Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-7-02.
- A member of the applicant's household aged 12-18, has been convicted of a criminal offense that if the youth had been an adult, the offense would not be permitted under the Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-7-02.
- The applicant does not meet eligibility requirements as outlined in the Adoption Procedure. (See: Eligibility Requirements on page 4).
- The applicant does not desire to be studied for or to adopt a child with special needs or circumstances as described on page one of the Adoption Procedure.
- The applicant's current or past issues which interfere with his/her ability to be an adoptive parent such as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, etc.

Following the initial interview and a review of the applicant's initial documentation, the applicant is notified of the agency's decision to begin or deny homestudy services. Homestudy services will be denied or discontinued if:

- The requested documentation is not received despite numerous requests.
- The applicant refuses to be interviewed.

- The applicant refuses to complete a financial disclosures form.
- The applicant refuses to cooperate with a physical, psychological or substance abuse evaluation or refuses to provide any needed documentation.
- Information is made available that determines the applicant to be ineligible.
- The applicant or any adult member of the household refuses to be fingerprinted or complete a criminal records check.
- The applicant has falsified information on the application, or any documentation or made inaccurate statements to the assessor.
- The applicant refuses to allow a safety or fire inspection of the home.

### **Joint Foster Care and Adoption Application Process**

Some adoptive applicants may desire to make a simultaneous application to foster and adopt children. All applicants have a right to pursue a joint application and homestudy assessment process. CCDCFS is able to provide joint homestudy services. Prospective parents desiring joint approval/certification must meet the eligibility and assessment requirements of both programs. Joint program applicants must be at least 18 years of age.

### **ADOPTION ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The adoption assessment or “homestudy” consists of several face-to-face interviews between the assessor and the applicant and their family. The interviews are an important component of the homestudy process. These meetings provide an opportunity for the prospective adoptive family and the assessor to become acquainted. The assessor’s role is to become familiar with the prospective family’s personalities, lifestyle, strengths, and limitations. Likewise, the prospective adoptive family is able to gain more insight about the adoptive process and begin to build a relationship with the agency.

The interview process may feel very intrusive for some individuals. Discussions with the assessor may include such topics as childhood experiences, relationship issues, thoughts about adoption and birth parents, beliefs about parenting and discipline, and feelings about sexuality. The interviews are designed to assist the applicants in assessing their ability to provide lifelong care to a child with special needs or circumstances.

There are several face-to-face interviews with at least one taking place in the applicant(s) home. The assessor will also conduct individual interviews with all family members including the children as well as a meeting with the entire family. Applicants are encouraged to be flexible with the schedules to accommodate the interviews.

In addition, the assessor must review all required documentation, discuss arrangements for a fire inspection and conduct a safety inspection of the home. This is to ensure that the child will be placed in a safe, sanitary environment capable of meeting the child's needs.

A "safe home" will:

- be maintained in a clean, safe, and reasonable state of repair.
- be adequately heated, lighted, and ventilated.
- have access to a telephone for emergency situations.
- have an indoor working bathroom and toilet facility connected to an indoor plumbing system.
- be free of potentially hazardous materials, weapons, and equipment in and around the home. Dangerous items will be secured in a safe place and inaccessible to children.
- ensure that any ammunition, arrows, or projectiles for weapons are stored in a locked area separate from the disarmed weapon.
- have working "UL approved" smoke detectors on each level of occupancy.
- have only "UL approved" kerosene heaters (if applicable).
- have a "UL approved" fire extinguisher.

The assessor reviews all documentation as well as information gathered during the interviews and conducts an assessment with the applicant regarding their ability to successfully parent an adopted child. This is discussed with the applicants and together, the applicants and the assessor must reach a mutual determination regarding the age, gender, race, special needs and circumstances, and number of youths the applicant will be approved for potential adoptive placement.

The assessor will complete a JFS 01530 "Large Family Assessment" at the time of the adoption homestudy when:

- A family has a total of five or more children residing in the home at the time of the home study, including foster children and children in kinship care, or;
- A family will have a total of five or more children residing in the home based upon the number of children residing in the home at the time of the home study, including foster children and children in kinship care, and the number of children the family will be approved to adopt.

The assessor prepares a written document which compiles and summarizes the information gathered during the homestudy process to present to the agency for approval or denial of the adoption homestudy. The homestudy process is completed within 180 days of the date the completed application was submitted which initiated a homestudy for any applicant seeking a child with special needs or circumstances.

The applicants are notified by letter of the approval or denial of their adoption homestudy.

The notification of approval of their adoption homestudy includes:

- Date of approval
- A description of the type of child the applicant desires to adopt
- Information about the adoptive homestudy update process, if applicable

The notification of denial of their adoption homestudy includes:

- An explanation of the reason for denial
- A description of procedures for agency review – See: “Appeals of Denials and Revocation Recommendations of Foster Care Licensure and Adoption Approval” via (Appendix E)

### **Transfer of Adoption Applicants from Other Agencies**

Adoptive applicants may transfer their homestudy to CCDCFS. However, CCDCFS will not consider any homestudy received directly from the applicant. Approved homestudies must be sent by the current adoption approval agency. Prospective adoptive parents desiring to transfer to CCDCFS may be declined if the family does not meet agency requirements for adoptive services or may be required to complete additional requirements to be considered as a CCDCFS approved adoptive family.

- Notification is sent to the public children services agency in the county in which the prospective adoptive resides within ten (10) days after the initiation of a homestudy according to section 3107.013 of the Revised Code.
- Notification is sent to the public children services agency in the county in which the prospective parent resides of an impending adoptive placement no later than then (10) days prior to the placement of the child in the adoptive home.

### **Review of Homestudy Documents by Applicant**

Occasionally, prospective adoptive applicants request to review homestudy documents. This is permissible; however, documents may only be reviewed at the agency and may not be photocopied or removed from the building. Applicants may get copies of a redacted version of their homestudy upon written request. Applicants **only** get a copy of their homestudy with the references, fingerprints, etc., removed. It is for their use only and cannot be submitted to any agency for consideration of a child for the purposes of a foster care placement or adoptive placement.

NOTE: References and medical exam reports are confidential and may not be reviewed by the applicant.

See: Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services “Foster/Adoptive Parent Request for Access to Foster Parent Case Record” via (Appendix G).

### **Release of Homestudy Documents to Other Agencies**

CCDCFS will not release copies of homestudy documents to the applicant for the purpose of transferring their homestudy to another agency. The agency will, however, duplicate and release documents, except references, within 15 days to state certified public/private adoption agencies in Ohio and other states when a **child with special needs/circumstances** has been identified for adoptive placement by the applicant through that agency. There is no cost to the applicant. All requests for release of adoptive homestudies for children not meeting the agency eligibility requirements for a child with “special needs or circumstances” will be honored. **If the applicant desires that their approved homestudy be transferred to another agency for the purposes of adoption of any child who is not a "waiting child", fees are assessed to the family for the preparation/reproduction of the assessment packet.**

### **Updating the Adoption Homestudy**

The homestudy shall be updated every two (2) years from the date of approval of the initial homestudy in accordance with Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-48-12.1. The homestudy shall be amended, if applicable, in accordance with Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-48-12.2. The agency shall notify the adoptive parent(s) of the expiration of the homestudy not fewer than 90 days or more than 150 days prior to the expiration date. The notification shall identify any information or documentation that is required for the homestudy update and be completed on the JFS 01531, “Notice of Expiration and Reapplication for a Foster Home Certificate or Adoption Homestudy Approval.” Following agency notification to the adoptive parent, if the adoptive parent fails to either reapply or voluntarily terminate prior to the expiration date of the approval, the homestudy approval shall expire. If the family wishes to have an adoption homestudy approval after the expiration date, they shall re-apply through the initial homestudy application process.

### **Notification of the Adoption Process to the Current Caregiver**

The current caregivers and, if applicable, their licensing agency are notified when Permanency Custody is being sought. At that time, the current caregivers are given the opportunity to express their interest in being considered as a candidate to adopt the child. Caregivers must notify the agency in writing regarding their decision. In addition, the time the child has been in placement with the caregiver will count towards the required six (6) months of placement for an adoption finalization.

## **OPENNESS IN ADOPTION**

One value of The Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services is to secure permanency for children who are in the permanent custody of the agency. The children available for adoption commonly have emotional ties to biological family members such as parents, sibling, grandparents, and other extended family members. At times, it is in the best interests of the child to arrange and facilitate some level of openness in the adoption. The decision is made on a case-by-case

basis and may include the child's birth parents, siblings, extended family members, or other important individuals in the child's life. In addition, the child may benefit from an ongoing relationship with the previous caregiver and their family. The adoptive family makes the ultimate decision as to whether there will be openness in the adoption as there is no Open Adoption law in the State of Ohio.

### **SELECTION OF A FAMILY FOR A CHILD**

CCDCFS actively seeks to identify and select agency approved adoptive families who can meet the best interests and identified special needs and circumstances of children who are in the permanent custody of the agency. Children being placed for adoption by CCDCFS can only be placed with prospective families who have an approved adoptive homestudy. If the prospective adoptive family lives outside the State of Ohio, they shall comply with the rules of the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC).

The first step in the matching and selection process is the identification of the child's best interests and special needs and circumstances. This is done by assessing the current and future needs of the child as outlined in the Child Study Inventory, the child's case plan, medical history, education summaries, psychological/therapy reports, case notes and other appropriate documentation. In addition, the child's desires are considered on an age-appropriate basis.

\*Criteria for matching adoptive parents to available children, include, but are not limited to consideration of placing siblings together and preference to placing with relatives and foster caregivers.

Prospective families for the child are then identified based on their ability to meet the child's best interests and special needs and circumstances on a lifelong basis. There are individuals who may be considered as potential adoptive parents for the child:

- Whenever possible and in the best interest of the child(ren), sibling groups should not be separated.
- Any adult kin, or the child's current foster caregiver, when the following apply: the adult has expressed an interest in adopting the child and already has an approved adoptive homestudy, or has submitted the required JFS 01691 "Application for Child Placement" or the JFS 01692 "Application for Adoption of a Foster Child or Sibling Group" or the adoption application or equivalent document that is required in the state the adult resides in at least five (5) business day prior to the scheduled matching conference.
- Placement with the adult would establish permanency for the child and be in the best interest of the child.
- A foster caregiver with whom the child has resided in the past, whose placement would be in the best interest of the child and who is approved for adoption pursuant to Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-48, or the laws of the state where the previous foster caregiver now resides.

- Any other approved adoptive parent(s) who is accepting of the child's characteristics, who has expressed an interest in adopting the child, and whose placement would be in the best interest of the child.

However, when the waiting child is of Native American heritage, priority for adoptive placement is given to the child's tribe or another Native American family. CCDCFS complies with all aspects of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA) regarding decision-making for and placement of Native-American Children.

### **Matching Conference Process**

A **matching conference** (a structured decision-making process to select the most appropriate family to be matched with the child) is scheduled to discuss and determine which of the identified adoptive families can best meet the child's best interests and special needs. The matching conference is conducted by a facilitator and those invited to participate in the matching conference.

- The child's previous child protection specialist and supervisor, the child's assessor and supervisor (for the first matching conference only)
- The child's child protection specialist, if different from the assessor above
- Any professional who has the specific assignment of recruiting families for children who are awaiting adoption if there are no families identified for the child being presented in the matching conference
- The child's specific recruiter
- The child, if in their best interest and if deemed appropriate by CCDCFS
- The worker representing a family in the matching conference
- If an adult kin or current foster caregiver has submitted an application less than 14 days prior to the matching conference (the necessary parties shall be invited to the matching conference upon receipt of the application)
- The Guardian ad Litem (GAL)
- The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
- Any other professional who may have knowledge of the child's history and current needs that will be helpful to determine the child's placement needs
- The CCDCFS MEPA Monitor
- The ODJFS MEPA Coordinator

At a minimum, the following individuals shall participate in the matching conference and be included in the placement decision-making process: the adoption caseworker for the child, their supervisor, the worker for any prospective adoptive families who will be presented at the matching conference, and any child-focuses or child-specific recruiter working on behalf of the child.

Identifying and selecting a family to adopt is based on the best interests and special needs and circumstances of the child. The agency maintains compliance with Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and in compliance with Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994. A statement of assurance that the agency shall maintain

Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, 25 U.S.C.A 1901, et seq, the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, as amended by Section 1808 of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, 42 U.S.C. 622(b)(9), 671(a)(18), 674(d) and 1996(b)(hereinafter “MEPA”) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C.2000d, et seq, as they apply to the adoption process (hereinafter “Title VI”), do not supersede the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978.

The agency has the availability of a state hearing when an adoptive family believes that an adoptive placement was denied or will be denied solely for the reasons of RCNO and/or geographic location. See: “Multi-Ethnic Complaints of Alleged Discrimination in the Foster Care or Adoptive Process” via (Appendix B).

### **FORMAL ADOPTION PRESENTATION**

When an approved adoptive family has been selected for a child, the family is contacted and given information about the child. If the family indicates that they would consider adoptive placement of the child, the prospective parents are asked to attend a **formal presentation**. The formal presentation is a meeting attended by the child’s child protection specialist and supervisor, the prospective adoptive family and their Adoption Assessor and other individuals who may assist in presenting information about the child such as the child’s foster parents, therapists, teachers, and *Guardian ad Litem*.

Prospective parents are encouraged to take notes and ask questions during the presentation. The following materials are reviewed and discussed. Copies of these materials are provided to the prospective parents:

- Child Study Inventory (CSI)
- ICCA (Individual Child Care Agreement)
- JFS 01616 “Social and Medical History” Form
- Medical history summary
- Placement summary
- Summary of psychological and therapy reports
- Summary of school reports
- Eligibility for adoption subsidies
- JFS 01667 “Adoption Information Disclosure” Form

The adoptive family must be shown the child’s Lifebook and pictures. It is not necessary for the prospective parents to make a final decision at the meeting. The family is encouraged to take time to discuss the child and the potential impact of adoption on the family. The family informs the agency within one week of their decision to proceed with the adoption. Should the prospective adoptive parents feel that they are not appropriate candidates to adopt the child, they may decline and be reconsidered for a different child in the future.

## PRE-PLACEMENT PROCESS

Once the prospective family has acknowledged their desire to adopt the child(ren), a pre-placement visitation plan is developed by the child's social worker and the Adoption Assessor with input from the foster and adoptive families.

A pre-placement plan may consist of the following components:

- Initial meeting of the child, usually at the foster home
- First visit, usually an activity on neutral territory such as the movies, ball game, park, skating rink, etc.
- Several day visits (number depends on the needs of the child)
- Overnight and weekend visits (number depends on the needs of the child)
- Placement of the child in the adoptive home

The adoptive parent(s)' responsibilities during the pre-placement process include developing a positive relationship with the child's foster family, providing transportation to and from visits, reporting visitation progress to the child's social worker and the Adoption Assessor, participating in Team Decision Making meetings (TDM's) regarding the child, learning about the child's need from the foster parent, social worker or training classes and other activities as deemed necessary to assist the child with making a smooth transition. Adoptive parents must begin to establish a day-to-day routine for the child.

There is no formal time frame for the duration of pre-placement visitation. Visitation is based solely on the best interests and needs of the child(ren).

On or before the day of adoptive placement, the adoptive parents receive any additional documentation, information, materials or items the birth parent requested be passed on and the child's Lifebook. Prior to placement, the adoptive parents sign the JFS 01654 Adoptive Placement Agreement form and is given Adoption Subsidy information.

## ADOPTION SUBSIDIES

**Adoption Subsidies** are financial and service assistance given to the adoptive family to assist with meeting the child's special needs. Subsidies are available for children with special needs or circumstances who meet the eligibility criteria. **There is a monthly workshop provided free of cost by the agency which reviews current adoption subsidy procedure.** Informational packets are available at the workshop. Specific information regarding the child and family's program eligibility will be given by the child's social worker.

There are several types of programs for which the child and family may be eligible. The current programs available are:

- **Title IV-E Adoption Assistance** is a federally funded program. Most children placed for adoption by CCDCFS are eligible. If the child is found eligible, this program offers a monthly cash allowance and/or a Medicaid card for the child.
- **State Adoption Maintenance Subsidy** is a program funded by the State of Ohio. Recipients of this program may receive a monthly cash allowance and the child may be eligible to receive a Medicaid card. The child must be found ineligible for the federal program to be eligible for the State Program.
- **Special Services Subsidy** is a program funded by Cuyahoga County for children who are adopted from CCDCFS. Services such as therapy, emergency respite care, etc. may be paid through this program once the adoption is finalized. Eligibility for this program is on a case-by-case basis and requires specific documentation of the child's special need and the need for the identified services. There are specific criteria that must be met to receive funding.
- **Non-recurring Adoption Expenses** is a subsidy program which covers the one-time costs of the adoption process such as legal or court fees, home study physical or psychological exam costs or long-distance travel for pre-placement visits. Documentation of expenses is required, and the funds are not received until after the adoption is finalized. Families may receive reimbursement for up to \$1,000 for qualified expenses.
- **Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy (PASSS)** provides monies for services related to physical or mental health needs. The adoptive parents must make application in the county in which they reside once the adoption is finalized. The program is only offered to Ohio residents. The services must preserve the placement and strengthen the adoptive family unit. Application must be made prior to services rendered.
- **ALL SUBSIDIES ARE BASED UPON THE AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL, STATE AND COUNTY FUNDS**

All adoptive families are given specific information regarding their child and family's eligibility when the child has been identified and accepted for placement by the adoptive family. All applications for subsidy must be made to the agency (or county) holding permanent custody of the child. In situations involving a PCPA the families are to apply for subsidy in the county in which they reside. **Adoptive parents are encouraged to attend a workshop presented by the adoption staff explaining subsidy programs, policies and procedures.**

### **PRE-FINALIZATION SERVICES**

Following the placement of the child in the adoptive home, the child's social worker and the family's Adoption Assessor will continue to provide case management

services to the child and family and will regularly visit the home to provide support, encouragement, and information during the adjustment period. The social worker and/or Assessor may provide referrals for counseling, diagnostic, therapeutic, medical, and educational services. In addition, the social worker and Adoption Assessor are available for crisis intervention as needed.

Adoptive parents are expected to assume all responsibilities upon placement such as transportation to appointments, financial responsibility, guidance, nurturing, continuance of medical/psychological service provision and day-to-day care. Adoptive parents must also cooperate with the legal mandates of the agency such as court hearings, Administrative Case Reviews, subsidy requirements and TDM's.

Each family is reviewed by the Adoption Assessor regarding their training needs relative to the needs of the child(ren). The number of suggested hours will vary according to the family's knowledge and experience as well as the child's special needs and circumstances. For example, new parents caring for an adopted child who has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are encouraged to complete a class on that subject. Training classes are available to all parents free of cost at Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services. All training needs must be met prior to finalization.

When the child(ren) is in a home on adoptive placement status, no foster child(ren) is placed in the home prior to the finalization of the child on adoptive placement status. Approval may be attained for special circumstances.

## **POST FINALIZATION**

Finalization is a court hearing which grants the adoptive parent(s) full rights and responsibilities as the "legal" parent of the child(ren). Following finalization, the agency is no longer required to provide case management services to the child or family. After the court hearing, the child and family's cases are closed. However, the agency continues to be available to provide services such as crisis intervention, additional information, training/education or may make referrals to community agencies to provide services. Post finalization services are available at any time the adoptive parents or adoptee requests assistance. Adoptive families are encouraged to continue to attend ongoing training, monthly cluster meetings and adoptive parent support groups. There are no costs for any services provided directly by CCDCFS.

Adoptive families who receive some form of adoption subsidy are required to complete an annual redetermination process. Failure to do so can result in termination of subsidy.

**Families can adopt more than once!!!** An adoptive family may reapply to adopt as soon as the current placement is finalized. Should a sibling of the current child become available, the family may apply to adopt that child prior to finalization. A family who has finalized the adoption of a child within the previous two years may simply update their approval by submitting a new application to the agency. The Adoption Assessor follows the guidelines for an "update". An interview(s) is

conducted to assess the adjustment of previously adopted children and the family and the potential impact of a subsequent adoption on the family system. If significant time has passed since the original approval, the adoptive parent(s) may be required to complete another criminal records check, provide current documentation, complete additional training, or meet other requirements due to procedure changes or revisions which occurred since the original approval. Subsequent adoption must follow the agency procedures for assessment, identification/selection, pre-placement, subsidy, post-placement, and post-finalization services.

## [Appendix A](#)

<b>Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) Policy Statement</b>
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<b>Policy Chapter:</b>	<b>Substitute Care</b>
<b>Policy Number:</b>	<b>6.01.12</b>
<b>Policy Name:</b>	<b>Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) Standards of Conduct</b>

<b>Original Effective Date:</b>	12/11/2006
<b>Revision Date(s):</b>	12/01/2017, 09/01/2014, 09/01/2012, 09/14/2009
<b>Current Revision Date:</b>	04/01/2021
<b>Approved By:</b>	Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To ensure that Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) standards of conduct are published and followed.

**SCOPE:** All CCDCFS employees, agency foster and adoptive caregivers and contracted providers shall follow this policy.

### **POLICY**

#### **I. Standards:**

The Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) has established the following **Standards of Conduct** with regard to the performance of employees and contractors/providers related to compliance with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by Section 1808 of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, 42 U.S.C. 622(b)(9), 71(a)(18), 674(d) and 1996(b) (MEPA) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq (Title VI), as they apply to the foster care and adoption process. These Standards of Conduct prohibit policies, procedures or actions which serve to:

- A. Delay or deny any person the opportunity to become a foster caregiver or an adoptive parent on the basis of race, color or national origin of that person, or of the child involved; or
- B. Delay or deny any placement of a child in foster care or for adoption on the basis of the race, color or national origin of the foster caregiver(s), of the adoptive parent(s) or of the child involved.

## PROCEDURES

- I. **Permissible Actions:** MEPA and Title VI permit the following actions as they apply to the foster care or adoption process:
- A. Asking about the honoring of any initial or subsequent choices made by prospective adoptive parents or foster caregivers regarding what race, color, or national origin of child the prospective adoptive or foster caregivers will accept.
  - B. Honoring the decision of a child over twelve years of age to not consent to an adoption unless the court finds that the adoption is in the best interest of the child and the child's consent is not required.
  - C. Providing information and resources about adopting a child of another race, color or national origin to prospective adoptive parents or foster caregivers who request such information and making known to all families that such information and resources are available.
  - D. Considering the request of a birth parent(s) to place the child with a relative or non-relative identified by name.
  - E. Considering the race, color or national origin of the child as a possible factor in the placement decision when compelling reasons serve to justify that the race, color or national origin need to be a factor in the placement decision and the MEPA review process has been completed. Even when the facts of a particular case allow consideration related to the race, color, or national origin, this consideration shall not be the sole determining factor in the placement decision.
  - F. Promoting cultural awareness, including awareness of cultural and physical needs that may arise in the care of children of different races, ethnicities, and national origins as part of the training which is required of all applicants who seek to become adoptive parents or foster caregivers.
  - G. Agencies are required to document verbal comments, verbatim, or describing in detail any other indication made by a prospective adoptive or foster caregiver or their family member living in the household or any other person living in the household reflecting a negative perspective regarding the race, color or national origin of a child for whom the prospective adoptive family or foster caregivers have expressed an interest in adopting or fostering. The documentation shall indicate whether those comments were made before or after completion of the cultural diversity training which is required for all adoptive or foster caregiver applicants. Documentation shall be included in the family's homestudy, update, or an addendum to the homestudy or update prior to consideration of placement or a matching conference. A matching conference is the process of determining the most appropriate adoptive family for the child based on the child's special needs. The matching

committee shall consider the information to determine if it will impact the placement.

**II. Prohibited Actions:** MEPA and Title VI prohibit the following actions as they apply to the foster care or adoption process:

- A. Using the race, color or national origin of a prospective foster or adoptive parent to differentiate between adoptive placements.
- B. Honoring the request of a birth parent(s) to place a child with prospective foster or adoptive parent(s) of a specific race, color or national origin, unless the birth parent(s) identifies a relative or non-relative by name and that person is found to meet all relevant state child protection is in the best interests of the child.
- C. Requiring a prospective adoptive family to prepare or accept a transracial adoption plan.
- D. Using “culture” or “ethnicity” as a proxy for race, color or national origin.
- E. Delaying or denying placement of a child based upon the geographical location of the neighborhood of the prospective foster or adoptive family whenever geography is being used as a proxy for the racial or ethnic composition of the neighborhood, the demographics of the neighborhood; or the presence or lack of presence of a significant number of persons of a particular race, color, or national origin in the neighborhood or any similar purpose.
- F. Requiring extra scrutiny, additional training, or greater cultural awareness of individuals who are prospective foster or adoptive parents of children of a different race, color or national origin than required of other prospective foster or adoptive parents.
- G. Relying upon general or stereotypical assumptions about the needs of children of a particular race, color or national origin.
- H. Relying upon general or stereotypical assumptions about the ability of prospective foster or adoptive parents of a particular race color or national origin to care for or nurture the sense of identity of a child of another race, color, or national origin.
- I. “Steering” prospective foster or adoptive parents away from parenting a child of another race, color, or national origin. “Steering” is any activity that attempts to discourage prospective foster or adoptive parents from parenting a child of a particular race, color or national origin.
- J. Requiring an ongoing foster care or adoption worker or contractor to justify a proposed placement for the reason that the race, color or national origin of the child is different from that of the family whom the worker is proposing as the child’s foster caregiver or adoptive parent.

**III. Prohibition on Retaliation:**

CCDCFS’ employees and contractors/providers may not intimidate, threaten, coerce, discriminate against or otherwise retaliate against any individual who makes a complaint, testifies, assists or participates in any manner in an investigation related to alleged discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in the foster care or adoption process.

#### IV. MEPA Complaint Procedure:

Any person who believes that CCDCFS, any other public or private Ohio adoption or foster care agency has policies or procedures that violate MEPA and Title VI may file a complaint. In addition, anyone who believes that he or she was intimidated, threatened, coerced, discriminated against or otherwise retaliated against in some way because he or she made a complaint, testified, assisted or participated in any manner in an investigation related to alleged discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in the foster care or adoption process may also file a complaint. Individuals who may file a complaint include but are not limited to the following:

- A foster or adoptive parent or other member of a foster or adoptive family
- A prospective foster or adoptive parent or other family member
- An employee or former employee of CCDCFS or of any other Ohio adoption or foster care agency.
- An adoptive family who believes that a placement was denied or will be denied, solely for reasons of geographic location of the family has available the right to a state hearing.

Individuals who wish to file a complaint must complete the "Discrimination Complaint Form" (JFS 02333). This complaint may be filed with any of the following:

- CCDCFS Community Relations Unit, 3955 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland Ohio 44115; (216) 432-CARE (2273), 1-800-321-0322, or,
- The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, Bureau of Civil Rights, 30 East Broad Street, 30<sup>th</sup> Floor, Columbus Ohio 43215-3414; (614) 644-2703 or 1-866-227-6353, (TTY) (614) 995-9961 or 1-866-221-6700 or,
- **A complaint may also be made to:** Region V Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 233 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 240, Chicago, Illinois, 60601. (312) 886-2359, (fax) (312) 886-1807, (TDD) (312) 353-5693.
- Any other public or private Ohio foster care or adoption agency.

If the complaint is filed with this agency's Community Relations Unit or with any other public or private Ohio foster care or adoption agency, that individual or agency must forward the complaint within 3 business days to the Bureau of Civil Rights of ODJFS for investigation. ODJFS must complete the investigation within 90 days of receipt of the complaint, unless unusual circumstances prevent it from completing the investigation within that timeframe. ODJFS will provide a copy of the investigation report to the complainant and to the agency that is the subject of the complaint.

#### V. Additional Information:

Employees or contractors/providers who desire more information about MEPA and Title VI as related to the adoption and foster care process may contact:

- CCDCFS Community Relations Unit  
(216) 432-CARE (2273)  
1-800-321-0322

## **VI. Enforcement Requirements:**

These standards of conduct include enforcement requirements to be used whenever an agency employee or contractor/provider engages in discriminatory acts, policies, or practices involving race, color, or national origin in the foster care or adoption process as determined by the Bureau of Civil Rights of ODJFS upon completion of the investigation conducted pursuant to rule 5101:2-33-03 of the Ohio Administrative Code.

For CCDCFS employees, these enforcement requirements shall include employee discipline in accordance with either Sections 4 or 4.01 and 7.01 through 7.07 of the Cuyahoga County Employee Handbook or similar provision of a collective bargaining agreement between Cuyahoga County and a union.

For contractors/providers performing foster care or adoption services on behalf of CCDCFS, these enforcement requirements shall include discipline in accordance with the contractor/provider's personnel policy. Enforcement requirements for contractor/provider subcontractors shall include corrective action and may include contract termination.

These enforcement requirements are applied in accordance with applicable employment law and union contracts.

## **VII. Corrective Action Plan:**

CCDCFS shall provide for the submission of a corrective action plan whenever an investigation conducted by ODJFS, pursuant to rule 5101:2-33-03 of the Administrative Code, results in a finding that an agency employee or contractor/provider engaged in discriminatory acts, policies, or practices. If the finding involves a discriminatory act, policy or practice by a contractor/provider or subcontractor, CCDCFS shall develop the corrective action plan in collaboration with the contractor/provider or in collaboration with the contractor/provider and subcontractor.

The corrective action plan shall:

- Address how CCDCFS will prevent future violations by that employee or contractor/provider or subcontractor, and
- Be submitted to ODJFS within thirty days of notification of the findings of the investigation.

CCDCFS shall provide a copy of these Standards of Conduct to each employee or contractor/provider who is:

- Engaged in the placement of children into foster care or for adoption, or

- Engaged in the recruitment, assessment, approval, or selection of foster or adoptive families.

If these Standards of Conduct are revised, employees and contractors/providers shall receive a copy of the revised Standards of Conduct within thirty days of the completion of any revisions. New employees or contractors/providers shall receive a copy of the written Standards of Conduct within thirty days of their hire date or the effective date of their contract. Contractors/providers shall ensure that these Standards of Conduct are provided to and understood by their employees and subcontractors.

**SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-33-11  
Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-48-13  
Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-42-18.1

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedure Manual**

Policy 6.01.10 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) Monitor  
Policy 6.01.11 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) Complaints of Alleged  
Discrimination in the Foster Care or Adoptive Process

Adoption Procedures: A Summary of Agency Policy and Procedures

## Appendix B

### **Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) Policy Statement**

**Policy Chapter:** Substitute Care  
**Policy Number:** 6.01.11  
**Policy Name:** Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) Complaints of Alleged Discrimination in the Foster Care or Adoptive Process

**Original Effective Date:** 02/01/2005  
**Revision Date(s):** 02/01/2018, 12/01/2017, 09/01/2014, 02/01/2013, 09/14/2009  
**Current Revision Date:** 04/01/2021  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To outline the policy and procedures for filing and responding to complaints of alleged discriminatory acts, policies or practices in the foster care or adoption process that involve race, color or national origin.

**SCOPE:** This policy applies to all employees, clients and services of the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services.

#### **POLICY**

- A. Any person may file a complaint alleging a discriminatory act, policy or practice involving race, color or national origin (RCNO) in the foster care or adoption process of CCDCFS or any person or entity affiliated with CCDCFS.
- B. Any person, including but not limited to, an employee or former employee of a Public Children's Services Agency, Private Child Placing Agency, or Private Non-custodial Agency or a member of a family which has sought to become a foster caregiver or adoptive parent, may also file a complaint alleging that he or she was intimidated, threatened, coerced, discriminated against or otherwise retaliated against in some way by CCDCFS because he or she has made a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing in connection with an allegation that CCDCFS engaged in discriminatory acts, policies, or practices as it applies in the foster care or adoption process.

#### **PROCEDURES**

- A. The individual filing a complaint shall use the JFS 02333 "Discrimination Complaint Form." These forms are available, on request, through the community relations unit of CCDCFS and available on the Cuyahoga County website.

- B. The complaint shall be filed within two years from the date of the occurrence of the alleged discriminatory act; or two years from the date upon which the complainant learned or should have known of a discriminatory act, policy or practice. The complaint may be filed with:
1. CCDCFS Community Relations Unit, 3955 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland Ohio 44115 (216) 432-CARE (2273), 1-800-321-0322, or,
  2. The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, Bureau of Civil Rights, 30 East Broad Street, 30<sup>th</sup> Floor, Columbus Ohio 43215-3414; (614) 644-2703 or 1-866-227-6353, (TTY) (614) 995-9961 or 1-866-221-6700 or,
  3. Region V Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 233 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 240, Chicago, Illinois, 60601. (312) 886-2359, (fax) (312) 886-1807, (TDD) (312) 353-5693.
- C. Any complaint alleging discrimination involving race, color or national origin in the foster care or adoption process received by CCDCFS will be forwarded to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) within three working days of date of receipt of the complaint.
- D. Nothing in this policy shall prohibit an individual from filing a complaint with the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights or other such entity.
- E. The Grievance Review Policy, 2.03.05, does not apply to allegations involving race, color or national origin.
- F. CCDCFS, if the subject of the complaint, shall not initiate, conduct, or run concurrent investigations surrounding the complaint or take any further action regarding the complainant or subject of the complaint until the issuance of the final investigation report by ODJFS, unless otherwise approved by ODJFS.
- G. CCDCFS, if the subject of the complaint, shall cooperate fully with ODJFS during the course of the investigation and shall submit any information requested by ODJFS not later than fourteen days from the date of the request, unless otherwise agreed upon.
- H. Each PCSA, PCPA or PNA shall provide a written notice of the procedures for any complaints of discrimination in the foster care or adoption process that involve RCNO within thirty days of the effective date to all foster caregivers certified or in the process of certification and to all individuals who have approved adoptive homestudies or who are participating in the adoptive homestudy process on the effective date of this rule.

**SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-33-03  
Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-48-24

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedure Manual**

Policy 6.01.10 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) Monitor

Policy 6.01.12 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) Standards of Conduct

Adoption Procedures: A Summary of Agency Policy and Procedures

## [Appendix C](#)

# Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services CCDCFS Policy Statement

**Policy Chapter:** Substitute Care  
**Policy Number:** 6.02.01  
**Policy Name:** Foster and Adoptive Recruitment

**Original Effective Date:** 01/01/1998  
**Revision Date(s):** 10/01/2017, 10/01//2015, 11/04/2009  
**Current Revision Date:** 05/01/2021  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To provide a framework for the recruitment of foster and adoptive families who are capable of meeting the various needs of children in care.

**SCOPE:** This policy guides the activities and philosophy of the Recruitment Department as well as informs the staff of the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS), and the community of the ongoing diligent efforts to recruit families which reflect the diversity of the children for whom foster and adoptive families are needed.

## POLICY

- A. CCDCFS conducts continuous activities designed to recruit, support and retain an adequate pool of foster and adoptive families who can meet the specific needs of the children in the temporary and permanent care of CCDCFS.
- B. CCDCFS does not delay or deny any person the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent based on race, color, national origin, handicap, age, religion, creed, ethnicity, gender identity expression or sexual orientation.
- C. All recruitment activities and materials comply with the Multiethnic Placement Act 42 U.S.C.A.1996, as amended (MEPA), The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (5101:2-42-48 to 5101:2-42-58 of the Administrative Code), 25 U.S.C.A. 1091, as amended, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.
- D. CCDCFS develops annual recruitment plans for both foster care and adoption. The annual recruitment plan is due on June 30th every year to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and addresses the upcoming state fiscal year.

## PROCEDURES

- I. CCDCFS maintains a full-time Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Department; the duties of which includes the development and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment plan.

- II. The Recruitment Plan is submitted to ODJFS every year. It includes a description of the characteristics of foster children served by the agency such as their (age, developmental/emotional/physical needs; race, color, national origin, gender identity and sexual orientation).
- A. Each year, statistics for the current year are compiled and reported which describes the characteristics of children in custody of the agency and state who were either served in foster care or are available for adoption by age, gender, race, level of care, ethnicity, culture and developmental status.
  - B. The racial and ethnic diversity of children served is compared with the racial and ethnic diversity of approved adoptive families waiting to adopt through CCDCFS.
  - C. CCDCFS recruits' families for different level of care needs and also utilizes its own Therapeutic Foster Home program to service children who require specialized care. CCDCFS continuously assesses each child's current and future needs as outlined in the Child Study Inventory, the child's case plan, medical history, education summaries, psychological/therapy reports, case notes and other documentation to appropriately match and select a foster home and or adoptive home that will be able to maintain the child at the level of care that is needed and determined by the Placement Department. The agency partners with a network of agencies that recruit, train, match, and select foster homes needed for children in our custody who require a higher level of intensive care and supervision.

Adoption assessments and Pre-Service Orientation Training are provided for Cuyahoga County residents who seek to adopt a "special needs" child.

A "special needs" child as defined by OAC 5101:2-1-01 is a child who has, at least, one (1) of the following needs or circumstances that may be a barrier to a child being sustained in a substitute care placement or adoptive home without financial assistance because the child:

- is a member of a sibling group who should be placed together;
- is a member of a minority or ethnic group;
- is six (6) years of age or older;
- has remained in permanent custody for more than one (1) year;
- has a medical condition, physical impairment, or developmental disability;
- has an emotional disturbance or behavioral problem;
- has a social or medical history or the background of the child's biological family has a social or medical history which may place the child at risk of acquiring a medical condition, a physical, mental or development disability or an emotional disorder;
- has been in the home of his/her prospective adoptive parents as a foster child for at least one (1) year and would experience severe

separation and loss if placed in another setting due to his/her significant emotional ties with the foster parents, as determined by a qualified mental health professional; or

- has experienced previous adoption disruption or multiple placements.

Interested individuals seeking to adopt a non-special needs child will be referred to other agencies for adoptive services.

- D. CCDCFS uses diverse methods to disseminate general information regarding the children served by the agency. CCDCFS develops and implements an annual campaign to inform communities and recruit for foster/adoptive families for the population of children CCDCFS has in temporary/permanent custody. This plan includes, but is not limited to, participation at community events and activities, development of brochures, pamphlets, flyers of children in permanent custody including an online photo gallery, responding to inquiries and a provision of Pre-Service Orientation Training at the agency and in the community.
- E. CCDCFS uses specific strategies to reach all parts of the community, such as, targeted recruitment campaigns and general recruitment campaigns.
1. **Targeted Recruitment Campaigns** are used to attract families to meet the needs of specific groups such as adolescents, minority children from birth to 18 years of age, medically fragile or emotionally disturbed, sibling groups and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+.
  2. **Child Specific Recruitment Campaigns** are conducted for children in permanent custody for whom adoption is the plan and a family has not yet been identified.
  3. **General Recruitment Campaigns** embraces all agency staff and currently licensed foster parents who wish to partake in foster/adoptive recruitment efforts. The agency utilizes data driven approaches to strategically target and guide recruitment activities. CCDCFS Recruitment staff attends established community events and provides information tables for our foster and adoptive program. Youth panels are presented to audiences at Pre-Service Orientation Training, where potential families learn about all children in care, especially about the older population. Recruitment materials are also disseminated to communities, faith-based organizations to increase awareness and recruit interested persons and local businesses.
  4. Prospective foster parents are recruited primarily from Cuyahoga County. Families from noncontiguous counties, who contact CCDCFS, are referred to their county's Public Children's Service Agency (PCSA). Prospective adoptive applicants are recruited from Cuyahoga County. Approved adoptive families are recruited statewide and nationwide for the purpose of adopting waiting children.

- F. CCDCFS uses various strategies to assure prospective foster caregivers have access to the application process.
1. The Recruitment Department is accessible to the community by phone during regular working hours (8:30 a.m.– 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday). Voice mail is available to the public at other times. Interested persons may also have face to face contact with the recruitment staff during regular working hours. Recruitment staff are available at other times by appointment.
  2. No potential foster/adoptive parent applicant is screened out by the recruitment staff prior to Pre-Service Orientation Training and/or the home study process. No screening is practiced based on a family's race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, age, handicap, religion, color, creed, gender identity expression, sexual orientation or geographic location. The recruitment staff provides all inquirers with the same information and requirements to become a foster and adoptive parent(s). There are no fees associated with the foster care certification or adoption approval.
  3. The Recruitment Department tracks all inquiries and enters information into a database. Every phone call, inquiry, informational correspondence, training class invitation, training class attendance and completion record, application and follow-up/reminder cards are tracked in the database. Information and requirements are sent within seven days of an inquiry including information on the characteristics of waiting children, such as, age, gender, race, and ethnicity, developmental, emotional and physical needs. In addition, the CCDCFS policy statement of non-discrimination is also sent to prospective applicants.
  4. Pre-Service Orientation Training is a service that is continuously scheduled throughout the year with a series of rounds offered on specific weekdays, evenings, and weekends. This training is provided through the North Central Ohio Regional Training Center (NCORTC), in conjunction with the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP). Current dates and times of sessions can be found on the OCWTP website under [NCORTC Training Calendars](#). Applicants may cross over to different rounds to accommodate their schedules. **Pre-Service Orientation Training is valid for twelve months from the time the applicant begins their first session of training, in order to give the applicant ample time to submit their application for foster care/adoption. If that time expires, prospective applicants must repeat the training.**

5. There are 12 sessions of training that must be completed. Families are permitted to begin a round of training up until session 3. After session 3, additional prospective applicants must wait and begin at the start of the next scheduled round.
  6. NCORTC provides Pre-Service Orientation Training for prospective applicants. Upon licensure for foster care, the licensing agency is responsible for the payment of the Pre-Service Orientation stipend, regardless of where the applicants completed their training.
- G. CCDCFS uses various strategies to train staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, ethnic and economic communities. All recruitment staff members are trained to work effectively with diverse cultures, races, and economic situations. Training is constant through attendance at staff meetings, conferences, direct supervision, and interaction with the community at events and training seminars sponsored by the OCWTP.
- H. CCDCFS works with other professionals to overcome linguistic barriers (including hearing impairment). Interpreters are available, if an applicant needs assistance due to language or communication difficulties. Interpreters assist applicants during Pre-Service Orientation Training with the paperwork and the home study. The Ohio Relay number is provided on recruitment materials. A foster caregiver or applicant shall have functional literacy to be able to read and write at the level necessary to participate effectively in the community in which they live. A foster caregiver or applicant must be able, or have the means, to communicate with: any child placed in the home, the recommending agency, health care providers and other service providers working with the family or children.
- I. All CCDCFS foster caregiver recruitment activities and materials are in compliance with MEPA - and Title VI, the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, 25 U.S.C.A, 1901, et seq., as amended, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The following statement is located in the CCDCFS Foster/Adoption Handbook and is mailed to inquirers of both programs. "CCDCFS does not deny any person the opportunity to become a foster caregiver or an adoptive parent on the basis of race, color or national origin of that person, or of the child involved. CCDCFS does not delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of race, color or national origin of the foster or adoptive parent, or the child involved."

**SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-5

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-7

Ohio Revised Code Section 5103.031

Multiethnic Placement Act 42 U.S.C.A.1996, as amended (MEPA)

Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (5101:2-42-48 to 5101:2-42-58 of the Administrative Code), 25 U.S.C.A. 1091, as amended (ICWA)

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA)

## [Appendix D](#)

<b>Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) Policy Statement</b>
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<b>Policy Chapter:</b> Substitute Care
<b>Policy Number:</b> 6.03.05
<b>Policy Name:</b> Falsification of Adoptive Application/Homestudy

<b>Original Effective Date:</b> 03/15/2007
<b>Revision Date(s):</b> 09/01/2017, 08/01/2014
<b>Current Revision Date:</b> 11/01/2020
<b>Approved By:</b> Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To outline administrative procedures when there is probable cause to believe that falsification of an adoptive application or home study has knowingly occurred.

**SCOPE:** This policy pertains to adoptive applicants and approved agency adoptive resource families. This policy also pertains to all Adoption and Resource Management staff within the Resources and Placement Department.

### **POLICY**

- I. CCDCFS makes every effort to ensure that children who must be removed from their homes are cared for in a safe, stable, and nurturing family setting by caregivers who can meet their individual needs.
- II. CCDCFS conducts the adoptive family application and homestudy process in accordance with Ohio Administrative Code rules as set forth in Chapter 5101:2-48, 5101:2-33-11 and 5101:2-33-13 governing adoption services.

### **PROCEDURES**

#### **I. ADMINISTRATIVE FALSIFICATION**

- A. The assigned CCDCFS assessor reports in writing a person who knowingly makes a false statement on an application or homestudy document during the homestudy process to the Senior Supervisor and/or Deputy Director for the Resources and Placement Department within three (3) days of the assessor's determination of possible falsification.
- B. The written statement includes, but is not limited to:

1. The original application completed by the applicant, or written documentation of the false statement provided by the applicant or adoptive parent.
  2. Documentation verifying the information reported on the application or in the homestudy by the applicant is knowingly false.
- C. The Senior Supervisor or Deputy Director reviews the documentation and makes a determination as to whether it is probable that falsification has occurred. Within ten (10) days of the determination of falsification, the assessor notifies the applicant in writing that the information submitted to the agency has been determined to be knowingly false.
- D. The notice includes procedures for an agency review. In addition, the notice includes all of the following information:
1. Date the notice was mailed.
  2. A copy of the documentation alleged to be knowingly falsified, as well as a written explanation of the falsification.
  3. A statement indicating that all cases in which it is determined by the agency the applicant made knowingly false statements will be referred to the county prosecutor office in the county the applicant(s) reside.
  4. A statement indicating the homestudy process has been discontinued because the agency has probable cause to believe the information provided by the applicant on the JFS 01691, "Application for the Placement of a Child" or during the homestudy process is knowingly false.
  5. If the homestudy process has already been completed, then the agency shall include the following statement:
    - a. The agency will not present the family at a matching conference, pursuant to rule 5101:2-48-16 of the Administrative Code if it is determined a false statement or document was knowingly provided.
    - b. The agency will not release a homestudy for sharing or transferring, pursuant to rule 5101:2-48-19 of the Administrative Code if it is determined a false statement or document was knowingly provided.
    - c. A homestudy will not be filed with the court for finalization purposes pursuant to section 3107.031 of the Revised Code if it is determined a false statement or document was knowingly provided.
  6. A statement that the adoptive applicant or adoptive parent has the right to respond to the allegation of falsification.
  7. A statement indicating that if the applicant(s) fails to respond within the ten (10) day period the applicant(s) application is considered

withdrawn, and the action of refusing to respond to allegations of knowingly making false statement(s) has resulted in the applicant(s) termination of the homestudy process by voluntary withdrawal.

- E. The notification letter is mailed to the applicant by certified mail. In addition, the notification letter may be delivered to the address of the applicant(s) or given to the applicant(s) directly.
- F. If the applicant responds within ten (10) days of the date of receipt of the written notice alleging falsification, the Deputy Director for Resources and Placement and/or designee is responsible for reviewing information received from the adoptive applicant within twenty-one (21) days of receipt of the applicant(s) response.
- G. The review includes but is not limited to:
  - 1. A face-to-face meeting with the adoptive applicant, and all relevant witnesses, if available.
  - 2. Issuance of a final investigatory report to the adoptive applicant(s) that is the subject of the investigation. The report includes the allegations, relevant background information deemed appropriate by the agency, the results of the investigation and recommendation of whether or not the agency found probable cause to indicate the applicant(s) made knowingly false statements on the application for child placement or during the homestudy process.
- H. The final investigative report shall be completed and mailed to the adoptive applicant no later than thirty (30) days after the receipt of the adoptive applicant's or adoptive family's response to the allegation.
  - 1. If unanticipated circumstances require additional time to complete the review or to issue the final report, CCDCFS notifies the adoptive applicant that is the subject of the investigation of the need for additional time. The extension is no longer than fourteen (14) days after CCDCFS notifies the applicant(s) of the need for additional time to complete the investigatory report.
  - 2. The extension shall be documented in the adoptive family's record.
- I. Upon completion of the final investigation report:
  - 1. If determined there has been **no** falsification made by the applicant(s), CCDCFS resumes the homestudy process if the applicant(s) choose to proceed. The homestudy is completed within one hundred eighty (180) days from re-commencement.

2. CCDCFS refers all cases to the county prosecutor in which there is probable cause to believe that falsification of an adoptive application or homestudy has been committed under section 2921.13 of the Revised Code.
  3. If the adoptive applicant was still in the homestudy process, the agency shall close the adoption homestudy as if the applicant has voluntarily withdrawn from the homestudy process.
  4. If the adoptive homestudy was approved prior to the investigation of falsification, then the following limitations are in place:
    - a. The adoption homestudy shall not be presented at any matching conference, pursuant to rule 5101:2-48-16 of the Administrative Code.
    - b. The adoption homestudy shall not be released to another agency for sharing or transferring purposes, pursuant to rule 5101:2-48-19 of the Administrative Code.
    - c. The adoption homestudy shall not be filed with the court for finalization purposes pursuant to section 3107.031 of the Revised Code.
- J. The adoptive family case record includes all documentation which supports the agency's action in determining the results and recommendation of the internal investigation.

## II. **ADMINISTRATIVE FALSIFICATION PROCEDURES WHEN AN ADOPTIVE CHILD IS PLACED**

- A. When an adoptive child is placed in an adoptive parent(s) home and the adoptive parent(s) or other household member(s) knowingly made a false statement that results in the assessor's reassessment of an approved or updated homestudy, the prospective adoptive parent(s) or other household member(s) may be guilty of the offense of falsification under section 2921.13 of the Revised Code. The assessor will report incidents of falsification in accordance to the procedures of this policy procedure of this policy.
- B. CCDCFS determines within twenty-four (24) hours of completing the agency's internal review or investigation, if there is probable cause related to the adoptive child's safety and well-being to remove the child from the adoptive parent(s) home pending the results of an Intake investigation.
- C. CCDCFS upon an internal investigation refers all cases to the county prosecutor in which there is probable cause to believe that falsification of an adoptive application or homestudy has been committed under section 2921.13 of the Revised Code.

### **SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-33-13

## [Appendix E](#)

### Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) Policy Statement

**Policy Chapter:** Substitute Care  
**Policy Number:** 6.02.12  
**Policy Name:** Appeals of Denials and Revocation Recommendations of Foster Care Licensure and Adoption Approval

**Original Effective Date:** 09/21/2009  
**Revision Date(s):** 12/01/2017, 09/01/2014, 02/01/2013  
**Current Revision Date:** 04/01/2021  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To establish a fair and timely process for licensed or approved caregivers to appeal a recommendation for denial or revocation initiated by CCDCFS.

**SCOPE:** This policy pertains to all CCDCFS licensed or approved caregivers, all CCDCFS staff and where applicable, the non-CCDCFS foster parents who are caring for children in the custody of CCDCFS.

#### **POLICY**

- A.** This policy governs all issues related to the **certification, recertification or revocation** of a foster home certificate or **approval** of an adoptive home.
- B.** The Ohio Administrative Rules for Foster Homes (OAC 5101:2-5, 2-7) and Adoptive Families (OAC 5101:2-48) are a part of the Ohio Administrative Code and CCDCFS has no authority to change these rules. Foster or adoptive families or applicants who disagree with these rules shall refer their complaints to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services in Columbus, Ohio.

#### **PROCEDURES**

- A. For Denial of Foster Care Certification or Adoption Approval:**

This procedure applies to all recommendations for denial EXCEPT when the applicant has applied for adoption approval and there is a determination that probable cause exists that falsification may have occurred on an adoption application or homestudy document. In those circumstances please refer to Policy 6.03.05 - Falsification of Adoptive Application/Homestudy.

1. The assigned CCDCFS assessor/supervisor reports in writing the reasons for the recommendation of denial of the foster home license/adoption approval to the Chain of Command Senior Manager within three (3) business days of the decision. This information is reviewed by the Senior Manager and if they are in agreement with the recommendation, the documentation is forwarded to the Senior Manager for Recruitment who is not part of the direct chain of command within one (1) business day.
2. The written statement includes, but is not limited to:
  - a) A copy of the original application completed by the applicant.
  - b) Documentation verifying the information reported on the application or in the homestudy which led to the recommendation.
3. The Senior Manager for Recruitment reviews the documentation and makes a determination as to whether denial is an appropriate recommendation. Within fourteen (14) calendar days of the determination, the assessor notifies the applicant by completing the ODJFS 1315 "Notification of Recertification or Revocation of a Foster Home Certificate" (This is also used for Adoption approval denials or revocation).
4. The notice includes procedures for an agency review and contains all of the following information:
  - a) Date notification letter is prepared by the assessor
  - b) Mailing address of the applicant(s)
  - c) A statement indicating the homestudy process will discontinue because the agency has upheld the decision to recommend denial of the licensure or approval
  - d) A copy of the information that indicates the need for a recommendation for denial or revocation
  - e) Documentation verifying the information reported on the application (JFS 01691) or in the homestudy which led to the recommendation
  - f) The applicant(s) right to an agency review to respond to the information which led to the recommendation
  - g) A statement indicating that if the applicant(s) fail to respond within the fourteen (14) day period, the foster parent's information and supporting documentation will be forwarded to the State of Ohio for review (on foster care licenses or dual licenses only). For adoption only approvals those who do not respond to the allegations the adoption only homestudy approval will be closed.

5. The notification letter is mailed to the applicant by certified mail. In addition, the notification letter may be delivered to the address of the applicant(s) or given to the applicant(s) directly.
6. If the applicant responds within fourteen (14) calendar days of the date of receipt of the written notice alleging falsification or other rule violation, Senior Manager for Recruitment is responsible for reviewing information received from the Foster Care applicant within twenty-one (21) calendar days of receipt of the applicant(s) response.
7. The review includes, but is not limited to:
  - a) A face-to-face meeting with the applicant, and all relevant witnesses, if available.
  - b) Issuance of a final investigatory report to the applicant(s) that is the subject of the investigation. The report includes the allegations, relevant background information deemed appropriate by the agency, the results of the investigation and recommendation of whether or not the agency found Ohio Administrative Code rule violations on the application for child placement or during the homestudy process.
8. The agency notifies the applicant(s) no later than ten (10) business days after the agency review. This notification details the findings of the meeting and any actions taken by the agency. If unanticipated circumstances require additional time to complete the review or to issue the final report, CCDCFS notifies the applicant that is the subject of the investigation of the need for additional time. The extension is no longer than fourteen (14) calendar days after CCDCFS notifies the applicant(s) of the need for additional time to complete the investigatory report.
9. Upon completion of the final investigation report:
  - a) If it is determined there are not grounds for the recommendation, CCDCFS resumes the homestudy process if the applicant(s) choose to proceed.
  - b) The homestudy is completed within one hundred eighty (180) days from re-commencement.
10. The foster care/adoptive family case record includes all documentation which supports the agency's action in determining the results and recommendation of the internal investigation.

**B. Denial of Recertification or Revocation of a Foster Home/Adoptive Home:**

This procedure applies to all recommendations for revocation or denial of recertification EXCEPT when there is an adoption approval and there is a determination that Probable Cause Exists that Falsification May Have Occurred on an Adoption Application or Homestudy Document. In those circumstances, please refer to Policy 6.03.05 - Falsification of Adoptive Application/ Homestudy. Note:

1. The assigned CCDCFS assessor with supervisor approval reports in writing the reasons for the recommendation for denial of recertification or revocation of foster home license/adoption approval to the Chain of Command Senior Manager within three (3) business days of the assessor's/supervisors' decision for the recommendation. This information is reviewed by the Senior Manager and if they are in agreement with the recommendation, the documentation is forwarded to the Senior Manager for Recruitment who is not in the direct chain of command within one (1) business day.
2. The written statement includes, but is not limited to:
  - a) A copy of the original application completed by the applicant.
  - b) Documentation verifying the information reported on the application or in the homestudy which led to the recommendation.
3. The Senior Manager for Recruitment reviews the documentation and makes a determination as to whether denial/revocation is an appropriate recommendation. Within fourteen (14) calendar days of the determination, the assessor notifies the applicant by completing the ODJFS 1315 "Notification of Denial of Initial Certification, Recertification or Revocation of a Foster Home Certificate" (This is also used for Adoption approval denials or revocation)
4. The notice includes procedures for an agency review and contains all of the following information:
  - a) Date notification letter is prepared by the assessor
  - b) Mailing address of the applicant(s)
  - c) A statement indicating the homestudy process will discontinue because the agency had upheld the decision for denial of recertification or revocation
  - d) A copy of the information that indicates the need for a recommendation for denial or revocation
  - e) Documentation verifying the information reported on the application (JFS 01691) or in the homestudy which led to the recommendation

- f) The applicant(s) right to an agency review to respond to the information which led to the recommendation
  - g) A statement indicating that if the applicant(s) fail to respond within the fourteen (14) day period, the foster parent's information and supporting documentation will be forwarded to the State of Ohio for review (on foster care licenses or dual licenses only). For adoption only approvals those who do not respond to the allegations the adoption only homestudy/approval will be closed.
5. The notification letter is mailed to the applicant by certified mail. In addition, the notification letter may be delivered to the address of the foster/ adoptive caregiver(s) or given to them directly.
  6. If the applicant responds within fourteen (14) calendar days of the date of receipt of the written notice alleging falsification or other rule violation, the Administrator and/or Deputy Director for Resources and Placement is responsible for reviewing information received from the Foster Care applicant within twenty-one (21) calendar days of receipt of the applicant(s) response.
  7. The review includes, but is not limited to:
    - a) A face-to-face meeting with the applicant, and all relevant witnesses, if available.
    - b) Issuance of a final investigatory report to the applicant(s) that is the subject of the investigation. The report includes the allegations, relevant background information deemed appropriate by the agency, the results of the investigation and recommendation of whether or not the agency found Ohio Administrative Code rule violations on the application for child placement or during the homestudy process.
  8. The agency notifies the applicant(s) no later than ten (10) business days after the agency review. This notification details the findings of the meeting and any actions taken by the agency. If unanticipated circumstances require additional time to complete the review or to issue the final report, CCDCFS notifies the applicant that is the subject of the investigation of the need for additional time. The extension is no longer than fourteen (14) days after CCDCFS notifies the applicant(s) of the need for additional time to complete the investigatory report.
  9. Upon completion of the final investigation report:
    - a) If determined there are not grounds for the recommendation, CCDCFS resumes the homestudy process if the applicant(s) choose to proceed.

- b) The homestudy is completed within one hundred eighty (180) days from re-commencement.
10. The foster care/adoptive family case record includes all documentation which supports the agency's action in determining the results and recommendation of the internal investigation.

**SEE ALSO:**

The Ohio Rules for Foster Homes  
Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-5, 2-7

The Ohio Rules for Adoptive Families  
Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-48

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedure Manual**

Policy 6.03.05 Falsification of Adoptive Application/Homestudy

## [Appendix F](#)

<b>Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) Policy Statement</b>
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<b>Policy Chapter:</b> Substitute Care
<b>Policy Number:</b> 6.02.06
<b>Policy Name:</b> Foster and Adoptive Homestudy Completion

<b>Original Effective Date:</b> 06/27/2008
<b>Revision Date(s):</b> 12/01/2017, 09/01/2014, 10/01/2012, 08/06/2009
<b>Current Revision Date:</b> 04/01/2021
<b>Approved By:</b> Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To outline the requirements for conducting a Foster Care or Adoptive Homestudy.

**SCOPE:** This policy applies to all CCDCFS caseworkers who perform Foster Care and Adoptive Homestudies and to anyone submitting an Application for Child Placement to the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS).

### **POLICY**

- A. All Homestudy Assessors must adhere to the requirements set forth by the Ohio Administrative Code as it pertains to Foster Care and Adoption, and all applicable Agency policies and procedures.
- B. All Applicants must submit a completed JFS 1691 "Application for Child Placement". This application is submitted to the Recruitment Department. It is processed through the department and logged into all applicable systems.
- C. All Applications for Child Placement received by CCDCFS are reviewed by a Resource Department Supervisor prior to being assigned to a Homestudy Assessor.
- D. All applicants must be a legal resident of the United States and reside in the State of Ohio and meet the specifications of the Agency's Recruitment Plan.
- E. All adult household members require an abuse and neglect report history search in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). (Note: A SACWIS search must be conducted in 10 days for all new household members.)
- F. All applications require a Central Registry search on each adult household member.  
(Note: This is required, in addition to the SACWIS search, if the agency has access to SACWIS and must be conducted in 10 days for all new household members.)

- G. All applicants and adult household members require a National Sex Offender Registry Search located at <https://www.nsopw.gov/>. The results are reviewed prior to the homestudy approval or update. The applicant may be denied based solely on the results of the search.

## PROCEDURES

- A. The Homestudy Assessor sends an introductory letter to the applicant within seven (7) business days of receiving the case.
- B. The Homestudy Assessor conducts a Face-to-Face visit with the applicant, in the applicant's home, within fourteen (14) business days of receiving the case assignment.

This visit includes:

1. completion of an initial safety assessment (JFS 1348 "Safety Audit of a Foster Home"),
2. a discussion regarding any areas of concern,
3. a discussion regarding all required paperwork, and
4. a discussion detailing what the process of the homestudy entails.

- C. The Homestudy Assessor requests three (3) unrelated references and obtains references from all adult children of the applicant. If an applicant has no adult children, the Assessor requests two (2) references from other relatives. This is completed by mailing the requests within thirty (30) days of receiving the case.
- D. The agency obtains additional references if the applicant was previously certified as a foster caregiver or provided care and supervision of children.
- E. All household members must be interviewed face-to-face based on his/her age and development. At least one of the interviews with each household member *MUST* take place within the home.
- F. A total of three (3) visits must take place in the home during the course of the homestudy.
- G. When the homestudy involves relatives and the child is already placed in the home, the Homestudy Assessor schedules a Family Team Meeting with the child's Worker of Record (WOR) and the family, as needed to address concerns.
- H. The Assessor may request additional information to be provided by the Applicant if:
  1. an applicant or household member has suffered a serious illness or injury within the past year; or,

2. the Assessor determines it to be necessary to ensure the safety, health, or care of any foster child who may be placed in the home.
- I. When the placement of a foster or adoptive child brings the number of children residing in the home to a total of five (5) or more, including biological, kinship, foster, and adoptive children, the Assessor completes the JFS 01530 "Multiple Children / Large Family Assessment and attaches it to the completed JFS 01673 "Assessment for Child Placement ."
- J. The last visit to the home *MUST* occur within (30) days prior to the transfer of the case to the Resource Manager (RM) unless the RM was the Assessor completing the homestudy.
- K. All homestudies are completed within (120-180) days of the agency receiving a completed application. Any need to extend the completion date is approved by the Supervisor.
- L. If an applicant decides to voluntarily withdraw at any point during the homestudy process or the application is returned, the Assessor provides the applicant with a Voluntary Withdrawal Form and closes the case within thirty (30) days of receiving the withdrawal.
- M. Prior to returning an application to a family, the Assessor photocopies the application, detaches the homework section, crosses off each individual page of the original application and returns it to the family. The Assessor includes a letter documenting the decision to return the application and the reasons why. The applicant is notified that their Pre-service Training Certificate is valid for 18 months from the date of the first class attended.
- N. Any decision to formally deny an application for child placement is in accordance with O.A.C. section 5101:2-5-26 and includes the following:
  1. If there are children in custody placed in the applicant's home; or, the applicant is under consideration for purposes of potential child specific placement, a team meeting is called prior to any enforcement action being taken. All parties to the case are invited to the team meeting which is scheduled by the Resource Manager for the purpose of reviewing the issues surrounding the case.
  2. Notification to the applicant is documented on the JFS 01315 "Notification of Denial of Initial Certification, Recertification or Revocation of a Foster Home Certificate".
  3. Notification to the applicant is sent via regular and certified U.S. Mail.
  4. Notification includes the reason for the decision to recommend denial of initial certification and the specific law or rules with which the applicant is allegedly not in compliance.

5. Notification of the decision to recommend denial of initial certification also includes the method for requesting an appeal via CCDCFS Policy 6.02.12 “Appeals of denials and revocations recommendation of foster care licensure and adoption approval”.
  6. Notification to the applicant also includes a statement to the fact that the final decision to deny the initial certification will be made by ODJFS.
- O. Applications submitted for Adoption Approval Only which is thought to be knowingly falsified are subject to the requirements of agency policy 6.03.05 “Falsification of Adoptive Application/Homestudy”.
- P. *ALL* cases submitted for Supervisory review includes the Homestudy Completion Checklist and is formatted in the appropriate manner.

**SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-5  
Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-7  
Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-33  
Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-48

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedure Manual**

Policy 6.02.12 Appeals of Denials and Revocations Recommendations of Foster Care Licensure and Adoption Approval

Policy 6.03.05 Falsification of Adoptive Application/Homestudy

## Appendix G

### Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) Policy Statement

**Policy Chapter:** Substitute Care  
**Policy Number:** 6.02.19  
**Policy Name:** Foster/Adoptive Parent Request for Access to Foster Parent Case Record

**Original Effective Date:** 01/11/2010  
**Revision Date(s):** 12/01/2017, 09/01/2014, 02/01/2013  
**Current Revision Date:** 03/01/2021  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** To establish guidelines for the release of foster/adoptive parent records to the named foster/adoptive parent. These records may be shared as outlined below upon the written request of the foster parent.

**SCOPE:** This policy applies to any foster/adoptive parent who is licensed, has requested licensure or has been recommended for licensure or adoption approval by CCDCFS and all resource managers. The policy will be adhered to by all foster/adoptive parents, relative caregivers, and agency staff members.

#### **POLICY**

It is the policy of CCDCFS to respond to all requests for copies of foster/adoptive case records in a uniform manner. All requests for foster/adoptive records must be reviewed and redacted as required by this policy prior to releasing any information.

#### **PROCEDURES**

- A. If a foster parent requests a copy of their record, the request must be made in writing.
- B. Upon receipt of the request, the agency sends the request to the Senior Manager in the unit which the record is housed for review.
- C. The Senior Manager contacts the current Supervisor and Resource Manager, if the case is active. If the case has been closed, the last assigned Supervisor and Resource Manager will be contacted, if applicable.
- D. The Resource Manager and Supervisor reviews the case.

- E. The Senior Manager reviews the record, following the attached checklist regarding what information may be disseminated. The information that can be shared is copied. If there are questions or concerns regarding disseminating information, staff must consult with the Civil Prosecutor.
  - 1) Any and all information regarding children placed in the home is redacted from all forms.
  - 2) Any and all information regarding biological families of children placed in a foster home is redacted from all forms.
- F. Two copies of the record are made. A second review is conducted to ensure all the approved information is present.
- G. The attached checklist is completed and placed in the record to document what information was reviewed and released.
- H. The record is scanned, and a file of what information was released is attached electronically to the record in the system. The second hard copy is given to the Deputy Director of Resources and Placement.
- I. The information to be released is reviewed and approved by the Deputy Director of Resources and Placement. A cover letter, signed by the Deputy, is enclosed with the released information.
- J. If there is more than one parent on the foster parent license or adoption approval, both parents have the right to a copy of this record.

**SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-33-23  
Case Records for Children Services

**FORM**

Request for Foster Parent and/or Foster-Adopt Record – Documentation Checklist