

SPECIALIZED CHILD WELFARE SUBJECT MATTER

Family Arrangements

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Policy The Department of Children and Families (DCF) shall support Family Arrangements whenever safe and appropriate to do so.

Definition **Family Arrangement** means a non-legal arrangement in which a parent or guardian allows a third party to assume primary care and supervision of a child, either in or out of the parent's or guardian's home, with DCF support and approval.

Note: The non-custodial parent assuming care and supervision of the child does not constitute a Family Arrangement.

Benefits of a Family Arrangement Family Arrangements:

- are family driven plans – this is an opportunity to engage and partner with families in safety planning
- provide a safe living environment for a child
- reduce disproportionality and disparity for children entering care children as children are more likely to remain in the care of family
- give the family the time and opportunity to resolve issues and concerns and engage in services
- means that children are typically cared for by a relative or someone else they know and with whom they have an established relationship
- encourage and promote relative placement
- can potentially reduce the need for legal intervention

Rule-Out Criteria DCF shall not support or approve a Family Arrangement if:

- the proposed caregiver resides out of state and would require the child to leave the state
- the proposed caregiver or a household member is on the DCF Central Registry
- a court order of protective supervision is in effect for the child who is the subject of the Family Arrangement

Note: In an emergency, an immediate review may be conducted by a DCF manager if it is believed the individual no longer poses a current risk to child safety. The individual may also request an administrative hearing if she or he has not already done so. In either event, the individual shall not be approved as a caregiver until he or she is removed from the Central Registry.

When to Use a Family Arrangement A Family Arrangement may be used when no SDM Safety Factor has been identified. When an SDM Safety Factor has been identified, a Family Arrangement in and of itself may not be sufficient to safeguard the child. A Family Arrangement may be used, however, as a component of a Safety Plan. When a Safety Factor has been identified and a Family Arrangement is being considered, a CR-CFTM shall occur before the Family Arrangement is made or within two business days of an emergent Family Arrangement.

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When to Use a Family Arrangement (Continued)

Note: FASU staff will regularly attend all CR-CFTM 's and/or Pre-CR Meetings.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 21-2-1, "Considered Removal: Child and Family Team Meetings" and "Considered Removal Child and Family Team Meetings Practice Guide".

Family Arrangements:

- shall be used when issues or safety factors can reasonably be remedied within 30 days or less **and** the parents agree, are cooperative and acknowledge the areas of concern;
- are voluntary and are not legally binding (parents retain full legal responsibility and decision-making authority)
- must ensure the safety and well-being of the child through the duration of the Family Arrangement
- shall take into consideration the child's age and needs
- shall take into consideration the caregiver's ability to respond to and meet the needs of all children under his or her care or supervision

Note: Parent/child contact or visitation cannot be restricted during a Family Arrangement.

When the Child has been Placed through an Informal Private Arrangement

If a family has made an informal private arrangement for an alternative caregiver prior to DCF involvement, Day 1 of the Family Arrangement begins when DCF approves the Family Arrangement. The caregiver shall be fully assessed to determine his or her ability to provide safe care to the child in accordance with the policy.

Proposed Caregiver

The proposed caregiver shall understand the issues of concern in the child's home and shall be willing and able to cooperate with the terms of the Safety Plan.

The proposed caregiver shall have an established relationship with the child. The Social Worker shall consider whether the proposed caregiver requires financial support in order to care for the child or will otherwise benefit from the structure and support of formal DCF placement.

Assessment

Family Arrangements shall be thoroughly assessed by the Social Worker, including information obtained through interviews, an assessment of the home and background checks such as:

- the nature and extent of the relationship between the proposed caregiver, child and family
- the caregiver's ability to facilitate contact or visitation between the child and parents or guardians

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Assessment (continued)

- the caregiver's ability to provide safe care and meet the individual needs of the child
- the caregiver's understanding of his or her role and his or her commitment and ability to follow through with the terms of the Safety Plan to ensure child safety

The Social Worker shall meet with the adult caregivers on the same day the Family Arrangement is made. Efforts to meet other household members shall be attempted during that initial visit. If the Social Worker is unable to meet with other household members, he or she shall follow up the next business day.

The Family Arrangement shall be assessed by the Social Worker on an ongoing basis and shall include assessment of any barriers to licensure.

Background Checks

Background checks shall include:

- state and local criminal history checks
- Judicial Department website, protection order registry and sex offender registry checks
- CPS and Central Registry checks

Background checks shall be completed for all household members age 16 years and older prior to the start of the Family Arrangement or when the Family Arrangement becomes known to DCF.

Local police checks shall be requested, if possible, the same day as the Family Arrangement begins.

Results of all background checks shall be documented in the computer system in the "Placement Research Search" tab. (CJIS checks should only be referenced as pass/fail.)

Condition of Home

If the child will be or has left the parent's or guardian's home to live with the proposed caregiver, the Social Worker shall visit the caregiver's home to assess home conditions such as safety hazards, sleeping environment, etc. The home assessment shall be completed at the time the Family Arrangement is decided on, or at the time DCF becomes aware of the arrangement, whichever is earlier.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 21-9 "Safe Sleep Environment" and the "Standards and practices for Safe Sleep Environments Practice Guide."

If the physical condition of the caregiver's home presents safety concerns or safety factors, the home cannot be approved by DCF as a Family Arrangement.

Approval

All Family Arrangements shall be approved by a Program Supervisor and documented in the computer system as a Managerial Narrative.

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Approval (Continued)

When making the decision to approve a Family Arrangement, the Program Supervisor shall consider the following:

- all CPS history of the proposed caregivers and household members
- if a caregiver or household member has substantiated history, the circumstances surrounding the substantiation and whether these issues present current safety or risk concerns to the child
- results of the background checks
- age and needs of the child
- any licensing barriers identified during the assessment process

Note: Consultation with an Office Director may be warranted if results of the background checks indicate pending charges, conviction of a crime of a violent nature or conviction of a substance use-related charge less than five years old. In addition, consultation may be necessary if the parents have pending Juvenile Court involvement at the time the Family Arrangement is being considered to determine whether pursuing a Family Arrangement is appropriate given the case circumstances.

Duration of the Family Arrangement

Family Arrangements are intended to be short term.

If the Family Arrangement is to be considered beyond 30 days, a multidisciplinary team meeting that includes the family and its team shall be held to assist in planning, including, but not limited to, a discussion about safety, progress, service needs and need for legal intervention. This initial meeting shall occur before the end of the third week of the Family Arrangement to allow adequate planning time. These multidisciplinary meetings will continue every 30 days thereafter throughout the duration of the Family Arrangement and will be documented in the computer system.

The Social Worker shall also consult with DCF legal and RRG staff as appropriate.

Monitoring and Supervision

As this is a short-term plan, all cases in which a Family Arrangement is being used (with or without identification of a Safety Factor) shall be reviewed in supervision every other week through the duration of the Family Arrangement to assess continued need and appropriateness for the Family Arrangement, progress and the need for court intervention.

In addition to continually assessing child safety and risk, the Social Worker and Supervisor shall also assess the caregiver's needs in relation to his or her ability to meet the needs of the child while in his or her care.

Note: FASU staff will be notified when a Motion for Order of Temporary Custody is being pursued or when Neglect Petitions have been filed on all cases involving a Family Arrangement.

FASU Staff will assist in the tracking of all Family Arrangements by reviewing the standardized log and following up with CPS staff when the Family Arrangement is being considered for licensure.

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Social Worker Visitation Standard The Social Worker shall visit the home in which the child is living at least every other week through the duration of the Family Arrangement.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 20-1-1 "Purposeful Visitation and Contact Standards" and the "Purposeful Visitation Practice Guide".

Withdrawal of DCF Approval For cases in which a Family Arrangement is used as a component of DCF safety planning efforts, if the parents or guardians of the child are not cooperating with the expectations of the Safety Plan or decide they no longer wish to have the child supervised or cared for by the third party, DCF shall assess the need for court intervention.

Ending of a Family Arrangement A Family Arrangement ends when:

- parent/guardian assumes care of the child
- CPS Case is closed (See Section below - Closing the DCF Case)
- an Order of Temporary Custody (OTC) is granted
- child is committed to the Department
- guardianship transfers to an alternative caregiver
- Protective Supervision is granted
- a new Family Arrangement is made

Note: The filing of a Neglect Petition does not end a Family Arrangement.

Probate Court may be utilized with Program Supervisor approval when doing so would not compromise the safety, permanency, or wellbeing needs of the child/children, nor would the Department anticipate the need for Neglect Petitions and court oversight to ensure compliance by the parents/caregivers or safety of the children.

Closing the DCF Case The SDM Safety Assessment shall be updated when the Family Arrangement ends, and all safety factors have been successfully mitigated and the child is determined to be "safe." At that point, the DCF case may be closed.

There may be special circumstances in which DCF may consider closing its case when the parents or guardians have developed their own private arrangement prior to DCF involvement, or a family decides to make a Family Arrangement permanent. In these circumstances, a legal consult shall be required, and the Office Director shall approve the case closure.

Documentation All Family Arrangements shall be documented in the computer system and include beginning and end dates, the caregiver's contact information, nature of the caregiver's relationship with the child, background checks completed and results, and all case contacts and activity related to the Family Arrangement. (CJIS checks should only be referenced as pass/fail.)

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Documentation (Continued) Results of formal and informal assessments conducted (safety, risk and needs) shall be documented in the computer system.

All Family Arrangements shall be tracked using a standardized log until such time as a statewide DCF report is available.
