

STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Montgomery, Alabama

TO: DIRECTORS, COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF HUMAN RESOURCES

FROM: Margaret Bonham, Director
Family Services Partnership

SUBJECT: Group Preparation and Selection Process (GPS) for
Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parents

This is to clarify the procedures to be used in preparing prospective foster or adoptive parents. It is the expectation that the GPS Process or Deciding Together be used in all counties. The Family Services Partnership will continue to offer GPS and Deciding Together leader certification training as timely as possible in an effort to ensure that you have and maintain GPS or Deciding Together capability. To ensure the integrity and uniformity of the process, clarify any possible misinterpretations of the components of GPS and describe the manner in which the components are to be implemented, we are providing the following guidance:

- **Ten GPS Meetings:** These group meetings are to be held once a week over a ten-week period of time. This enables the prospective parents to go through the process at a pace conducive to adult learning, allows room for understanding and growth in the Twelve Skills for Successful Fostering/Adopting, and provides them with the time necessary to make a decision that will have tremendous impact upon their families. Deciding Together consists of at least seven meetings that must have at least one week in between meetings.
- **GPS Co-leading Teams:** The ten meetings are to be facilitated at a minimum by co-leading teams composed of at least one staff person and at least one foster or adoptive parent, both of whom **must** be certified GPS leaders. This reinforces the model approach to partnerships in parenting by demonstrating a working relationship between the agency and parents. It reinforces the skill of working in partnership that will be expected of parents when they are approved. There can be more leaders leading the group. For example, there could be two agency persons and one foster parent. The teams should also be balanced by the amount of material each leader presents and every effort should be made to be sure that there is an equal share of presentations. Deciding Together is to be led by the agency representative.

- **Attendance at Meetings:** All prospective parents are expected to attend all ten meetings. If a parent misses a meeting, he and/or she will be expected to make up the missed session with the GPS leader. Deciding Together material can be used for this purpose. If the prospective parent is married, because both parents will be involved in the parenting of a child placed in their home, it is an expectation that both will attend all ten sessions and both will be involved in the family consultations. If, for some reason, both are not able to attend a majority of the ten sessions together, Deciding Together should be utilized to prepare the family.
- **Meeting Notes:** Within a day or two following each of the ten meetings, co-leaders are to meet together, discuss the meeting, and prepare written notes for each family. These become a part of the family's record, or portfolio.
- **Family Consultations / Home Study Process:** The (agency) co-leader will conduct the family consultations and complete all written documentation regarding the family. The foster/adoptive parent may be present for the consultations if they and the family are comfortable with that arrangement. The home study must be completed by the leader who has been involved in the 10 meetings with the family. All reapprovals need to be conducted by GPS certified leaders as well.
- **Family Portfolio:** This is the agency's record of the foster/adoptive family. A Family Portfolio may be organized in different ways. Following are the items that should be included in all portfolios:
 - Decision Page (approval or disapproval related to the Criteria for Selection, written in paragraph form or standard agency form)
 - Partnership Profile
 - Summary and Recommendation
 - Family Profile (original and modifications)
 - References
 - Final Strengths/Needs Work Sheet (distributed during Meeting Nine and completed by parents for Meeting Ten)
 - Partnership Development Plan – Completed at first family consultation by leader with the parents.
 - Professional Development Plan (completed at end of the ten Group Preparation and Selection meetings by the parents with the leader)

- Medical Records, Other Records, Checklists
- Strengths/Needs Weekly Work Sheets (completed by parents)
- Notes from Family Consultations (completed by leader)
- Meeting Notes (weekly narrative process notes completed by leaders)
- EcoMap
- Letter(s) to a birth parent
- Letter(s) to a child
- Photographs of family to be shared with children and/or birth families
- Recertification information
- Other information required by our agency

Please ensure that GPS leaders in your counties or agencies are implementing GPS in accordance with these guidelines. If a more detailed review of the process is needed, each certified leader has a GPS Implementation Guide, which covers the elements of implementation. We appreciate your commitment to effective implementation of GPS in order to prepare families who can provide a parallel level of commitment to the children in their care.

This administrative letter will not be printed and distributed in hard copy due to cost containment measures. Staff must access the documents from the shared drive using the following paths:

Administrative Letter: **F:\Shared\Fcs\Cwpolicy\Als&mems\adminltr\AI7069.doc**

Questions about this letter or procedures for GPS and Deciding Together should be directed to Cris Moody or Cecelia Ball, Program Managers, Office of Child Welfare Training. You may also email questions to the them by using the Global Address list or telephone them by calling (Attnet) 220-9500 or (Reg. Number) 334-242-9500.

MB/CM

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