

STANDARDS FOR CHILDREN’S HOMES IN GUYANA

The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security recognizes it has an obligation to set out a framework for childcare in policy and law and to ensure that childcare provision meets minimum standards in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Progress is being made in developing legislation to protect children which will eventually set out the legal framework for Minimum Standards.

The standards below represent the development of a practice quality framework for looking after children who need placement in a Children’s Home. These standards will contribute to the realization in full of the right of each child to be cared for by his/her parents¹ and to grow up in their family environment unless the family care is significantly harmful to the child in which case alternative nurturing family care arrangements are to be sought. Poverty should not be a reason for a child needing a care placement.

These Standards have been prepared by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security in consultation with the Managers of the Children’s Homes. The Standards for Children’s Home are based on international standards in the UNCRC, but are also shaped by research into current practice and knowledge of good practice. In summary these standards are an assurance given by Government and the service provider of a measurable level of quality in service provision. The Standards are voluntary but many of the Managers of the Homes have already signed a declaration that they are willing in principle to work towards the implementation of these standards in their Homes. The Standards are meant to be attainable and realistic and not beyond the capacity of Homes to meet most of them with support and guidance.

Each “Standard” is headed by an “outcome for children” and followed by “expected practice.” All three of these elements are important. The “outcome for children” is to remind “Homes” and their staff that it is the children who must benefit from the care provided by the Home. The “Standards” are agreed statements of a measure of quality of services and require a quality assurance mechanism to implement them. This will be carried out by the Inspector of Homes and the Visiting Committee. The “expected practice” is what the children and visitors to the home would expect to be able to observe. It is evidence that the Home is working to meet the Standards.

The Person in Charge of a Home is expected to complete a MoHSSS Children’s Homes registration document, this will, after being signed by all parties provide the necessary agreement for the Home to look after children. As part of this agreement the Home will agree to be visited by an Inspector from the MoHSSS and members of the Visiting Committee. At the registration stage for existing Homes, the Home and the MoHSSS will have agreed in outline the improvements that need to be made by the Home in order for it to begin to meet the Standards. It will be the future Regulations and Laws that provide an approved baseline for the quality of services

¹ CRC Article 9

1 THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Respect for the rights of children in the Home

Outcome for Children: the children live in an environment where all of their rights are respected

Standard: the Management Committee, the Person in Charge and staff ensure that all the children are protected and respected. There is evidence that the Home respects all the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and systematically applies the general principles in its practice.

Expected Practice

- Children are informed of their human rights and those of others. The following general rights are ensured:
 - **Non-discrimination:** the Home is able to protect all the children from any form of discrimination and to take positive action to promote each child's rights. Internal guidelines and staff supervision make it clear that discrimination, prejudice, or oppressive behaviour or language is not acceptable, in relation to any of the following: race, culture, age, gender, disability, religion, sexuality or political views.
 - **The best interests of the child:** the care provided is purposeful and responsive to the best interests of each child living in the Home. All decisions taken by staff in the Home regarding the care and protection of children are in the child's best interests. This is evident from the placement planning, case reviews and other recorded decisions.
 - **Survival and development:** all children in the Home are helped to feel safe and secure. The Home makes sure that the child is given the necessary freedom and encouragement to achieve and develop. The Home will monitor the child's health, educational achievement and developmental milestones. The case records in the Home will be used as a monitoring tool.
 - **Children's participation and influence:** the environment in the Home is participatory and the children are consulted regarding decisions which affect them. Each child has a right to participate in decisions in accordance with his/her age and maturity. This must include all decisions about childcare placements and discharge, which should be made through a suitable legal process and consultation, and be periodically reviewed.
- **Complaints Procedures:** the Home has a complaints procedure that is known to all children and staff. It is written down and children know those to whom they can go, to register a grievance. It is the mechanism through which violations of rights can be reported. Any complaint will be addressed without delay and the complainant kept informed of progress.

Knowledge of parents, family and home community. The right to a name and to know one's family history and relatives

Outcome for children: from the earliest age children begin to form their own identity, know their parents, their relatives and family history.

Standard: the Home does not replace the child's family and the child is helped by the Home to grow up with a sense of belonging to that family and an understanding of his/her background

Expected Practice

- All children have a name.
- The child has photographs of his/her family and mementoes from Home.
- If the child is very young when abandoned a memory book is prepared by the Home.
- The Home does not try to deny a child the right to know of his/her parents and background.
- Important events in the child's life in the Home are recorded with photographs and documents wherever possible.

Contact with family and community

Outcome for children: children are able to maintain constructive contact with their families, relatives, friends and others who play a significant role in their lives.

Standard: Homes encourage parents, relatives and friends to visit regularly, unless this is not in the child's best interests. If a visit is prevented the reason must be explained to the child and recorded in the child's file.

Expected Practice:

- It is part of internal regulations that parents, relatives and friends be encouraged to visit on a weekly basis or more often if seen as appropriate. Telephone communication is encouraged.
- There are facilities for contacting significant people in the children's lives.
- Staff meet with parents and/or relatives and the child during their visit. This is noted in the child's file.
- Children attend social events outside of the Home, e.g. youth clubs, sports clubs, children's parties, festivals. Links with their school peers and their families in the community are encouraged.
- With agreement from the Child Protection Service children are encouraged to visit their relatives.

PLANNING AND LEGALISING CHILDREN'S CARE

Statement of the Home's purpose. The home has written aims and objectives

***Outcome for Children:** children and young people are supported and guided through the process of moving to the Home. They know what services they can expect from the Home, how they will be cared for and who they are likely to share with. A clear statement of how the Home operates is available for parents and others needing this information.*

Standard: the Home has a statement of purpose which has been developed and reviewed with the involvement of the Management Committee and key stakeholders, including children. Staff understand it and agree to work to it.

Expected Practice:

- The Home has a written mission statement or statement of purpose which is on display.
- The internal regulations governing the operation of the Home are available to all who wish to read them, and explained to each child individually.
- Each child is assisted to understand the rules, his/her rights, responsibilities and has access to resources at the Home.
- The child and family experience the process of placement as caring and respectful.
- According to evolving capacity, the child has been kept informed and participated in the decision-making at each stage of the placement process.

Registration and inspection

***Outcome for Children:** children live in a home that is properly registered, vetted, inspected and committed to improving its standards and quality of care.*

Standard: the Home is registered and cooperates with the Child Protection Service in working to improve standards of care for children.

Expected Practice

- The Home has completed all registration formalities with the Ministry which includes :
 - Names of Management Committee.
 - Named Person in Charge who is suitably qualified and experienced.
 - Stated maximum number of resident children and the ages of children it will cater for. Also the number of its care staff not including cooks, guards and secretarial staff.
- The inspector and visiting committee visit the Home on a regular basis. Their comments and reports are studied and acted upon by the Staff and Management Committee.

Formalising the Care Arrangements

Outcome for Children: *the children are only placed in the Home after it has been properly decided that it is in their best interests and the decisions are ratified through the courts.*

Standard: children are not admitted to the Home unless the assessment and decision making processes have been completed and formalised.

Expected Practice

- Children will not be admitted to the Home or leave without the written authority of the Child Protection Service.
- There are court orders in the files on each child.
- The Home will work with the Child Protection Service to formalize care arrangements for all the children in the Home through obtaining court orders.

Assessment and care plan

Outcome for Children: *children's needs are comprehensively assessed and written care plans outline how these needs will be met and the care plan implemented.*

Standard: The Home works with the Child Protection Service to ensure that the children are properly assessed, appropriately placed and their care plans implemented.

Expected Practice

- Appointment of key carer or worker for each child within the Home.
- The home has a copy of the assessment and care plan.
- Staff know of each child's care plan and their role in expediting the plan.
- Staff understand the needs of each individual child.

Reviews

Outcome for Children: *Each child's needs and development are reviewed regularly in the light of their care and progress at the Home. The situation regarding the child's family is also reviewed to see if the child needs to remain in the Home. The child and his relatives have opportunity to fully participate in this process.*

Standard: a periodic case review is held on each child every 6 months.

Expected Practice

- Parents and relatives are invited to attend and participate.
- Health workers and the teacher are encouraged by the Home to attend.
- Members of staff of the Home and any relevant others attend and submit a written report or give a verbal report at the review on progress being made towards the tasks identified in the Care Plan.
- The review records the child's participation and opinions.

- Each review states whether continued residential care is in the child's best interests.
- If the decision of the review is that the child is to remain in the Home for a further period the reasons must be explained to the child.
- Staff ensure that the review documentation clearly states what is recommended and what is expected to be delivered by staff members and any others over the next 6 months.

Moving into and leaving the Home

***Outcome for children:** children are able to move into and leave the Home in a planned and sensitive manner.*

Standard: staff help the children feel accepted in the Home and where agreed in the Care Plan assist the child to return to his/her family or to a substitute family and reintegrated into the community.

Expected Practice

- Where possible children visit the Home before placement, particularly if they are transferred from another Home.
- Staff explain to the child the reason for admission.
- Immediately on admission the child is introduced to all the children and staff; the child is shown around the Home and knows where to go or who to ask to access resources.
- Staff assist the child with any issues relating to leaving the Home, such as change of placement, return to family or living with another family.
- The Home is in constant contact with Child Protection Service over issues appertaining to home life.

Children's individual case files and case records

***Outcome for Children:** children's needs, development and progress are recorded in the Home's case files and these reflect the child's individuality.*

Standard: all case files are complete. Case recording is of high standard, is up to date and is available for inspection at any time.

Expected Practice

- Each child's case file in the Home contains;
 - Personal and family details and case histories
 - An Assessment
 - A Care Plan
 - Case Review Notes
 - Education Reports
 - Health Information
 - Copy of Court Order
 - Significant events or happenings while the child is in the home.
- The records are kept in a secure place.

- **ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE HOME**

The Person in Charge

***Outcome for Children:** the children's progress is monitored by the Person in Charge of the Home who is responsible and accountable for the welfare of all the children in the Home.*

Standard: the Person in Charge of the Home visits the Home everyday, unless there is good cause for absence which is agreed by the Management Committee.

Expected Practice

- At all times there is a person on duty who is in charge of the Home, this will either be the Person in Charge or a named Deputy.
- The Management Committee will agree on which staff can be Deputies.
- A daily log of important events that happen will be kept by the staff in the Home and counter signed each day by the Person in Charge.

Monitoring

***Outcome for Children:** the care of children accommodated in the Home is monitored and continually adapted in the light of information about how the Home is running.*

Standard: the Person in Charge of the Home is aware of the impact of the Home's regime and environment on the children and will regularly, in consultation with children, staff and as necessary the Management Committee and the Child Protection Service, make changes to improve the quality of life in the home.

Expected Practice

- Regular staff meetings are held and minutes kept.
- The home is visited by the Management Committee at least monthly. The Management Committee will provide oral and written feedback to the Person in Charge and the children.
- All the children and staff meet monthly to discuss issues raised by children and staff and to propose practical actions. These will be noted so they can be monitored.
- The Home will cooperate with the Inspector and Visiting Committee and work to put in place agreed improvements.

Management of the Home

Outcome for Children: children enjoy the stability of an efficiently run Home.

Standard: the Person in Charge and the members of the Management Committee are suitable people to run an organization concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Expected Practice

- Children feel comfortable at the Home.
- The stability of the Home allows children to develop their potential rather than make them fit into a strict regime for the convenience of staff.
- The Home is flexible in its approach to children so as to best cater for their needs and to assist them develop self-confidence and personal success.
- The Home has a bank account and keeps proper accounts. There is good financial planning so that the expenses incurred in running the home are met.
- Records are kept of donations in cash and in kind.

Management committee

Outcome for Children: the care of the children and the administration of the Home is overseen by a management committee, that is responsible for guiding the running of the Home, for ensuring that staff fulfill their duty of care to the children, for overseeing the accounts and for appointing senior staff.

Standard: the Management Committee is accountable for the welfare and care for the children in its Home and for the keeping of these standards.

Expected Practice

- The Management Committee will know the staff and children in the Home.
- The Management Committee will comprise of respected local persons.
- The members, roles, responsibilities and duties of the management committee will be in the Home's Registration Document.
- The Management Committee will hear any issues which either staff or children wish to bring and will make their decisions in the best interests of the child/children.
- The Management Committee will do everything in its power to assist the Home reach the required Standards.

STAFFING

Adequacy of staffing

Outcome for Children: children receive the care and services they need from competent staff.

Standard: The competence and capacity of staff must be satisfactory in relation to the fulfilment of the Home's mission, the care plans, placement plans and needs of individual children in the home, the number and mix of children in the Home.

Expected Practice:

- The Home has a full complement of trained staff. This applies overall and on individual shifts.
- The Person in Charge facilitates and enables the staff to undertake training
- All staff should be over 18 years of age.
- Staff help the children towards meeting the Care Plan.

Sufficient staffing

Outcome for Children: staff are sufficient in number, experience and qualification to meet the basic needs of the children at all times.

Standard: the Home will employ sufficient staff to be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to meet the minimum levels stated in the registration document and expected practice below.

Expected Practice:

- The Home will keep a record of staff that are on duty.
- Where there are girls in the Home a female care staff member is on duty at all times.
- Where only one member of staff is on duty at any time, a risk assessment has been carried out and recorded in writing, identifying any likely risks to children, staff and members of the public, and this has demonstrated that there is no unacceptable level of risk from such an arrangement.
- At night there will always be at least one carer on duty who is situated where they can hear of any trouble.
- Staff/carer - child ratios will depend on the age of and needs of the children in the Home. The staffing levels must be set in the Registration Agreement. The following are guidelines:
 - For babies and children under 5 years old; 1 staff member to 2 children is required,
 - For children 5 - 12 years old; 1 staff to 5 children,
 - For 13 - 17 years old; 1 staff member to 7 children.

Staff support, training and development

***Outcome for Children:** children are looked after by staff that are trained, supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare.*

Standard: staff receive training and development opportunities that help them acquire the skills to meet the needs of the children and the purpose of the Home.

Expected Practice

- Staff are properly supervised at all times.
- Staff performance is regularly evaluated, at a minimum this should be annually.
- All staff are trained in the child protection procedures.
- Staff are trained in first aid, fire safety and what to do if there is an emergency.
- New staff are properly inducted into the home.
- Staff training is provided; alternative methods include, homes running a joint course, open distance learning via a university-MoLHSSS-NGO consortium, a release course, in-service training.

5 SAFEGUARDING THE CHILD WHILE IN THE HOME

5.1 Policy and Procedures for “Keeping Children Safe”

Outcome for Children: children are protected from violence, abuse and exploitation. An appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse.

Standard: the Home has a clear written policy or arrangements to make sure children are kept safe from harm.

Expected Practice

- The Home has: the policy or arrangements for keeping children safe from harm that are approved and endorsed by the Management Committee.
- The Home has clear procedures in place that provide step-by-step guidance on what action to take if there are concerns about a child’s safety or welfare. These procedures and the name of a person outside the Home who can be contacted in the event of reported abuse are prominently displayed in the Home.
- All significant events concerning the abuse or exploitation of a child accommodated in the Home are notified by the person in charge of the Home or contact person to the Child Protection Service.
- The consequences of breaking the “Keeping Children Safe Policy” are clear and linked to disciplinary procedures.
- There are well-publicised ways in which staff, children or relatives can raise concerns, confidentially if necessary, about unacceptable behaviour by a member of staff with the Child Protection Service.

5.2 Vetting of staff and visitors

Outcome for Children: there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with children in the Home and there is monitoring of visitors to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers.

Standard: there are policies and procedures or agreed ways of recruiting staff and for assessing their suitability to work with children, including police and reference checks. Visitors are monitored.

Expected Practice:

- No staff member is employed without references and a criminal records/police check.
- Any person known to have abused a child will not be allowed to visit any child unless agreed to by the child and the Child Protection Service.

5.3 Relationships between staff and children

Outcome for Children: children enjoy safe and caring relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect.

Standard: the Management Committee must provide written guidance on appropriate standards of behaviour of adults towards children, especially for those staff who are responsible for caring for the children in the Home.

Expected Practice

- Codes of conduct/behaviour include statements about the responsibility of adults and children to treat one another with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness.
- The Person in Charge and staff promote a culture that ensures children are listened to and respected as individuals.
- The consequences of breaking the rules are clear and linked to the Home's disciplinary processes.

5.4 Behaviour management

Outcome for Children: children are assisted and encouraged to develop socially acceptable behaviour and there is constructive staff response to inappropriate behaviour.

Standard: there is guidance on expected and acceptable behaviour of children towards other children and towards adults.

Expected Practice

- There is no corporal punishment.
- The home has alternative, positive ways of managing the behaviour of children that do not involve physical punishment or any other form of degrading or humiliating treatment.
- Children are given explanations by staff as to why any particular behaviour is deemed unacceptable.
- Children who are away from the Home without permission are responded to positively when they return. The police and Child Protection Service are notified of absences without authority.

6 QUALITY OF CARE

6.1 Support to individual children

Outcome for Children: children receive individual support and attention. Each child feels welcomed, safe and comfortable at the Home.

Standard: staff in the Home understand each child's individual needs and problems.

Expected Practice

- Each child is allocated a caregiver who has full knowledge of the child's circumstances and is able to offer the child support, guidance and care.
- Staff are respectful to the children.
- The views of each child are listened to and taken into account.
- The way the home functions does not routinely or unnecessarily diminish any child's independence or opportunity to make everyday choices.

6.2 Preparation for adulthood and leaving the Home

Outcome for Children: children receive care and assistance which helps to prepare them for and supports them into adulthood and for returning to the community.

Standard: the Management Committee, person in charge and staff support children through the stages of development into adulthood and into leaving the Home.

Expected Practice

- Management Committee, Person in Charge and staff display strong professional attributes, stewardship, independence, team work. They are honest, dependable, non-judgmental and are able to develop appropriate interpersonal relationships.
- The staff act as appropriate role models and help children make the right choices.
- Children are given increasing responsibilities in line with their evolving capacities.
- Children are helped to form appropriate relationships with their family, foster parents, other children in the community, teachers and community leaders.
- Reintegration processes are in place to help children settle back into family life.

6.3 Consultation with children

Outcome for Children: children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the Home is run; no child is assumed to be unable to communicate their views.

Standard: children's opinions are sought over key decisions which are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Expected Practice

- There are systems in place for implementing this standard, such as written agreements, one to one interviews, key worker sessions and children's or Home's meetings.
- Staff take into account the religious, racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of children and their families.
- Significant views, discussions and expressed opinions are recorded promptly.
- The opinions and views of children on all matters affecting them, including day to day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted.

6.4 Personal appearance, clothing, requisites and personal money

***Outcome for Children:** children feel confident in their appearance and are able to dress in an individual style.*

Standard: children are encouraged and assisted to choose their own clothes and personal requisites.

Expected Practice

- Children's right to privacy is respected.
- Children are helped to develop their own style and manner of appearance appropriate to the occasion and circumstances.
- There are facilities for children to store their own property.
- Children learn the value and use of money.
- Children are not asked to share clothes.
- Children are taken or assisted to go to the shops and markets.
- There is privacy in regard to washing facilities.
- Children enjoy a sense of personal space.

6.5 Leisure and activities.

***Outcome for Children:** children are able to pursue their particular interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged by staff to engage in leisure activities or sports.*

Standard: Management and staff will ensure that facilities for sport and leisure are made available for use by the children in the Home

Expected Practice:

- Staff monitor children's participation in sport and recreational activities.
- Children are able to play sports in the community with children from outside the Home
- There is equal opportunity for recreation and sports for both boys and girls and for all ages.

7 NUTRITION, HEALTH, EDUCATION & RELIGION

7.1 Nutrition; provision and preparation of meals.

Outcome for Children: children enjoy healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs; they have opportunities to plan, shop for and help prepare meals.

Standard: the Home serves food that is well prepared and provides a balanced diet. The kitchen is clean and is inspected so as it meets all food safety and health regulations.

Expected Practice

- Withdrawal of food is never used as a disciplinary measure.
- The home observes established religious practices as regards food and diet.
- Clean and safe drinking water is always available.

7.2 Good health and well-being

Outcome for Children: children live in a healthy and clean environment.

Standard: staff ensure that through their example and guidance that children maintain good health, daily personal hygiene and maintain a clean environment.

Expected Practice

- High standards of hygiene are promoted, soap, towels and clean clothes are in good supply and made available.
- The Home is clean and well maintained; cleaning materials are easily accessible.
- There is no discrimination against persons living with AIDS or other illnesses.
- Children are asked to assist to keep tidy their own living space in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Mosquitoes, and other insects or vermin that carry disease are kept under control.
- Mosquito nets are provided.
- Bed wetting is dealt with in a sensitive and hygienic manner.

7.3 Health care, medical treatment and administration of medicines within the Home

Outcome for Children: children's health needs are met and their welfare is safeguarded by the Home's policies and procedures for administering medicines and providing medical treatment.

Standard: children's health needs are monitored through regular checks. When health problems are identified the best medical services and treatment are provided.

Expected Practice

- Each child will be given a medical check up when admitted to the Home. Any health problems that come to light will be addressed.
- All children will have at least an annual medical check up during their stay in the Home.
- A health worker is employed by the Home or visits frequently.
- All children are immunized according to WHO/MoH standards.
- There is a secure store for drugs.
- A well stocked First Aid Kit is available at the Home.
- At least one staff member on duty is trained in first aid.
- If children do not have their own rooms a sick bay will be provided.

7.4 Education

***Outcome for Children:** children receive good quality education from local schools or nurseries according to their age.*

Standard: every child of school age attends a community school and is helped to achieve.

Expected Practice

- The education of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of preparation for adulthood.
- Staff will always encourage children to reach their highest potential.
- There are facilities for self study in the Home.
- Children take their education in community schools so they feel part of the local community, and not within the Home.
- There are qualified staff who can help children with school assignments and homework.

7.5 Religion

***Outcome for Children:** children can practice their own religion.*

Standard: it is the policy of the Home that children are enabled to practice their own religion without hindrance.

Expected Practice:

- Children are enabled to go to their respective place of worship and to meet their religious leader.
- The books necessary for their religious reading are made available.
- Religious food requirements and dress codes are respected by the home.
- Children with different religious beliefs do not face any discrimination.

8 ENVIRONMENT OF THE HOME

8.1 Location, accommodation and size of the Home

Outcome for Children: children live in safe, pleasant accommodation providing sufficient space to meet their needs and are not isolated from the community.

Standard: the home is made safe and has a family atmosphere not an institutional one.

Expected Practice

- There is good interaction between community members and the children in the Home.
- Children are able to socialize and develop interpersonal skills.
- There is sufficient space for each child to enjoy the right to privacy.
- Children enjoy home-like accommodation, decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use.
- No home should have more than the maximum number of children laid out in the Registration Agreement.
- Boys and girls sleep in separate rooms, in clearly defined separate areas. Each child has his/her own bed.
- There are adequate facilities for children to keep and store personal possessions.

8.2 Toilets, bathrooms and washing facilities

Outcome for Children: the children enjoy using facilities that are clean, sufficient in number and of a high standard.

Standard: children are provided with facilities that are adequate, safe, hygienic and user friendly.

Expected Practice

- Children's privacy is respected when washing.
- There are separate facilities for boys and girls.
- Sufficient wash facilities and toilets are available and in working order. The guideline is one toilet and shower for every seven children.

8.3 Safety and security

Outcome for Children: children live in homes that provide physical safety and security.

Standard: the Home has the necessary safety certificates and has taken all necessary precautions to protect children from fire, flood and the elements.

Expected Practice

- There are regular fire drills and emergency procedures are understood by staff and children.
- There are fire escapes where necessary.
- There are fire extinguishers and staff and children know how to use them.
- The Home is secure from unauthorized visitors.