



# GEORGIA THRIVE TOOLKIT

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR BEHAVIORAL  
HEALTH & WELLBEING AT THE  
GEORGIA HEALTH POLICY CENTER

Early infant childhood mental health is defined as “the developing capacity of the child from birth to 5 years old to form close and secure peer relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; explore the environment and learn; all in the context of family, community and culture,” according to Zero to Three.

**mindworks** | GEORGIA  
GEORGIA | THRIVE

# CONTENTS

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Background .....  | 3 |
| The Safe Babies Approach .....  | 3 |
| What Is the Difference Between the<br>Infant Toddler Court Program and<br>Other Courts? ..... | 6 |
| Frequently Asked Questions .....  | 7 |
| Checklist for Starting a Georgia<br>THRIVE Site .....   | 8 |
| Georgia THRIVE Partners .....   | 9 |

# BACKGROUND

The Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health & Wellbeing at the Georgia Health Policy Center, in collaboration with Mindworks of Georgia, received funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration to implement an Infant Toddler Court Program in Georgia over the next four years. Georgia THRIVE aims to establish Infant Toddler Court Programs across Georgia that foster a cohesive child welfare and court system. This program will deliver culturally sensitive and trauma-informed services to children aged 0-3 and their families, fostering safe and stable communities where families can thrive.

The mission of Georgia THRIVE is to improve the well-being of families and young children by strengthening the system of care, transforming courts, closing the pipelines to child welfare system involvement, and eliminating racial disparities to achieve a safe, permanent home to grow and thrive. The program's vision is to establish a well-coordinated child welfare and court system that provides trauma-responsive and culturally competent services to young children and their families resulting in safe, stable communities where individuals thrive.

Additionally, Georgia THRIVE aims to create additional community-based resources to support families in communities, including fathers/fatherhood parental figures.. Collaborations between child welfare and court systems and service providers can deliver supportive services to decrease reunification time for children while providing resources that proactively support families and promote health equity.

## PARTICIPATING SITES

- Family Connections (Athens-Clarke County)
- Easter Seals North Georgia (Gwinnett County)
- Troup County Board of Commissioners (Troup County)

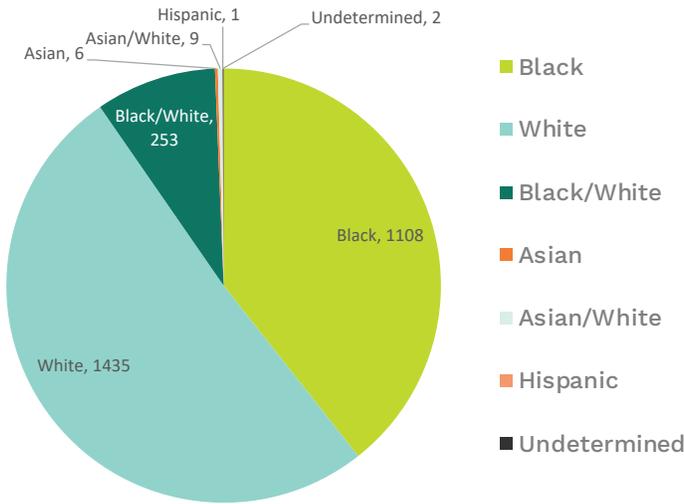


## THE SAFE BABIES APPROACH

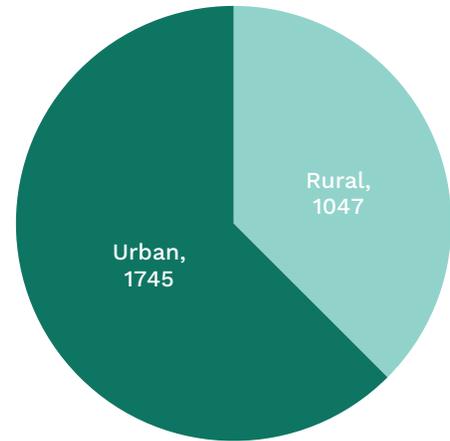
The Safe Babies Approach is designed to reduce the time required for children in foster care to reach a permanent safe home while simultaneously fostering healthy early childhood development. The Safe Babies Approach also focuses on enhancing family resilience and building community capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect. Zero to Three developed the Safe Babies Approach to support the long-term and short-term overall well-being of children aged 0-3 and their families.

# GEORGIA 2023 DEMOGRAPHICS

Children in Foster Care 0-3 by Race (n = 2,815)



Children in Foster Care 0-3 by Locations



## THE SAFE BABIES APPROACH CONSISTS OF FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS

**Enhanced oversight and collaborative problem-solving:** The Safe Babies Approach emphasizes the significance of regular review hearings to closely monitor case progress through respect, kindness, and compassion.

**Expedited, appropriate and effective services:** Ensuring timely availability of services tailored to the needs of children and their families through comprehensive personalized plans based on their lived experiences.

**Trauma-responsive support:** Responding to trauma intentionally and compassionately to recognize and understand what families have gone through. This can be achieved by amplifying both parent and foster family voices, facilitating meaningful family interactions, and cultivating parental connections.

**Continuous quality improvement:** Maintaining optimal methods to encourage reflection and evaluation through data collecting and utilizing data to generate enhancements.

**Interdisciplinary, collaborative and proactive teamwork:** Collaboration between key partners, professionals, and communities to work together to create innovative solutions and eliminate systemic obstacles.

### Safe Babies Approach

- Enhanced oversight and collaborative problem-solving
- Expedited, appropriate and effective services
- Trauma-responsive support
- Continuous quality improvement
- Interdisciplinary, collaborative and proactive teamwork

# THE SAFE BABIES COURT TEAM APPROACH

The Safe Babies Approach utilizes interdisciplinary collaborations, proactive teamwork, trauma-responsive support, continuous quality improvement, expedited, appropriate and effective services, enhanced oversight and collaborative problem solving to deliver better outcomes for infants, toddlers and their families.



## Team members involved include:

**Community coordinator:** Provides expert support at all levels and aspects of the Safe Babies Approach. Responsible for facilitating all family thrive meetings, seeking out community resources to support infants/toddlers and their families, and operating as a support for family members and professionals.

**State coordinator:** Works closely with Georgia THRIVE sites as a point of contact to provide direct support and development of guidelines and processes.

**Child welfare agency representative:** Responsible for planning for permanent placement and increasing stability for the infant/toddler and family.

**Parent peer support:** Provides support to the parent through lived experiences.

**Judge:** Responsible for creating a collaborative courtroom environment and engaging families through trauma-informed practices while advocating with community members.

**Other staff:** Can include an attorney, special assistant attorney general, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) attorney, parent attorney, Guardian ad Litem, court-appointed special advocates, child attorney, treatment providers (mental health and substance use), parent aides, educators, foster parents, or Medicaid Part B and C (Special Education Preschool, Babies Can't Wait) program representatives.

## Active Community Team Meetings

An Active Community Team consists of community partners that include parents and community members with lived experiences in the child welfare system, resource caregivers, parent advocacy organizations, community-based organizations, service providers, and other key stakeholders. The Active Community Team meets to collaborate on efforts to improve access to comprehensive prevention, early intervention, and therapeutic services and support for families with young children.

## Georgia THRIVE Meetings

A Georgia THRIVE Family Team Meeting includes the family enrolled in Georgia THRIVE and their identified supports (child welfare caseworker, child’s attorney, parent’s attorney, child welfare agency attorney, providers supporting the child and family, and community coordinator). Georgia THRIVE Meetings engage families in collaborative, proactive case planning that centers decision-making on the child’s developmental need for safe, stable, and nurturing early caregiving relationships and the individualized needs of each family member.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE INFANT TODDLER COURT PROGRAM AND OTHER COURTS?

Families that were enrolled in the Infant Toddler Court Program are able to reach reunification 4 months earlier than traditional dependency courts. Additionally, all children have developmental assessments and are provided with services.

### Infant Toddler Court Program versus Traditional Dependency Court

| Infant Toddler Court Program  | Traditional Dependency Court   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family hearing every 30-45 days</li><li>• Hearings are conducted with trauma-informed approach</li><li>• There is an increased collaboration between family, DFCS case manager, and court staff</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family hearing every 3-4 months</li><li>• Hearings could be potentially adversarial</li><li>• There is less collaboration between family, DFCS case manager, and court staff</li></ul> |

### Infant Toddler Court Program versus Family Treatment Court

| Infant Toddler Court Program  | Family Treatment Court   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open to eligible families specifically for children ages 0-3</li><li>• The family is served as a whole</li><li>• Each family has their own staffing time which is placed on a separate docket and not attended by other families</li><li>• Collects data surrounding the child welfare case and the entire family unit’s progress and services as a whole</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open to eligible families with a child of any age</li><li>• Focuses on the specific needs of the parent while they complete treatment</li><li>• Families have a gallery style type of staffing which is often utilized</li><li>• Collects data surrounding parent follow through and success with the family treatment court program</li></ul> |

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **When is Georgia THRIVE introduced to the families?**

Georgia THRIVE is introduced to families as soon as possible after the child(ren) enter foster care. The program could be introduced just before or after the preliminary protective hearing.

## **Can families self-refer to the Georgia THRIVE Program?**

Georgia THRIVE is a voluntary program and families can self-refer or be referred by outside entities such as DFCS or the court. Eligible families must have children ages 0-3 placed in foster care.

## **What does enrollment to Georgia THRIVE consist of for the families?**

Enrollment consists of explaining the program to the parent(s) and if they are interested and it is clinically appropriate, then explaining the program consent and release of information and having the parent(s) sign each form. The DFCS case manager will need to sign the release of information and consent forms for the children. Enrollment also includes an orientation to the program and data collection.

## **When does enrollment into Georgia THRIVE occur?**

Enrollment into Georgia THRIVE can occur as early as the preliminary protective hearing.

## **Will families enrolled in Georgia THRIVE require additional time with the judge?**

Families enrolled in Georgia THRIVE will be placed on a separate court docket, specifically for the Georgia THRIVE program and will see the judge every 30-45 days.

## **Are there both THRIVE team meetings and court hearings?**

Yes, typically the THRIVE team meetings occur at least once a month and the Georgia THRIVE court hearings are held every 30 to 45 days. THRIVE team meetings take place prior to the Georgia THRIVE court hearing.

## **How often does the community coordinator meet with the family vs the DFCS worker?**

The family meets with the Georgia THRIVE-appointed community coordinator during the THRIVE team meetings and has regular, frequent contact providing enhanced care management and care coordination. The family meets with their DFCS case manager on a more frequent basis in order to receive expedited referrals to evidenced based assessments and timely solutions to challenges when they develop.

## CHECKLIST FOR STARTING A GEORGIA THRIVE SITE

1. Lead or be a member of an existing community coalition.
2. Have existing partnership with local juvenile court judge and/or team.
3. Evidence-based home visiting agency is in the proposed service area.
4. Have a child-parent psychotherapy provider in the proposed service area.
5. Implement the Infant Toddler Court Program locally with fidelity to the Safe Babies Approach model.



## **GEORGIA THRIVE PARTNERS**

Administrative Office of the Courts

Chris 180

Court Improvement Initiative

Court-appointed special advocates

Division of Family and Children Services: both the state and local office

Douglas County Juvenile Programs Administration Department

Douglas County's Zero to Three

Early Head Start and Head Start (federal and state)

Family Connection Athens-Clarke County

Family Ties

Georgia Association for Infant Mental Health

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

Georgia Department of Public Health

Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students

Georgia Voices

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

Health Resources and Services Administration

Motherhood Beyond Bars

Office of the Child Advocate

Parent Leaders

Retired and current juvenile court judges

Zero To Three

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Adverse Childhood Experiences

<https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/files/2020/08/ACEs-one-pager-essentials-final.pdf>

Considering Childhood Trauma in the Juvenile Justice System: Guidance for Attorneys and Judges

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/resources/child\\_law\\_practiceonline/child\\_law\\_practice/vol\\_32/november-2013/considering-childhood-trauma-in-the-juvenile-justice-system--gui/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol_32/november-2013/considering-childhood-trauma-in-the-juvenile-justice-system--gui/)

Early Infant Childhood Mental Health

<https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health and Adverse Childhood Experiences

<https://geears.org/research/resources/>

Meeting Families Where They Are: My Journey to Help Transform Child Welfare

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/open-letter/meeting-families-where-they-are-my-journey-to-help-transform-child-welfare/>

Parent Leaders Are Vital for Stronger Early Childhood Systems

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/resource/parent-leaders-are-vital-for-stronger-early-childhood-systems/>

Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep23-06-05-005.pdf>

Questions Every Judge and Lawyer Should Ask About Infants and Toddlers In the Child Welfare System Bench Card

<https://www.ncjfcj.org/bench-cards/questions-every-judge-lawyer-infants-and-toddlers-in-the-child-welfare-system-bench-card/>

Supportive Care for Perinatal Substance Use

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/supportive-care-for-perinatal-substance-use/>

Understanding the Substance Use Landscape

<https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/programs-impact/understanding-substance-use-landscape.pdf>

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