

Kinship Care and Guidance for Application

To make kinship care a realistic alternative, the following principles have been developed. For each principle, guidance is offered so that agencies can help members of the extended family system become the most positive resource possible in helping to resolve the problems within the child's family of origin which necessitated the child's placement.

1. The child welfare agency should identify adults who are potential kinship caregivers as part of a philosophy that says kinship care should receive first consideration when a child is removed from his parents.
 - When it is determines that it is appropriate for a member of the extended family system or a person with whom the child has a relationship to be used as a placement resource, an assessment of the selected family should be completed.
 - The placement decision should be based on a careful, culturally responsive assessment of the strengths and needs of the child and the birth family and the ability of the kinship caregiver to meet these needs.
 - Assessments should include considerations of :
 - a. The nature and quality of the relationship between the child and the caregiver;
 - b. The ability and desire of the caregiver to protect the child from abuse, neglect or other maltreatment.
 - c. The safety of the home and the ability of the caregiver to provide a nurturing environment for the child;
 - d. The health status of the caregiver(s);
 - e. The supports to which the family has access;
 - f. The commitment to working with the birth family; and
 - g. Regulatory requirements
 - If the decision is made that kinship care is not the appropriate choice for the child, the agency should decide how or if extended family members could support and participate in the child's service plan.
 - When it is determined that agency custody is neither appropriate nor necessary the potential caregiver should be informed of the function they may fulfill on behalf of the child. The information provided should explain at least the following possibilities:
 - a. The county agency, as custodian, may recommend to the court that custody be awarded to the family with whom the child is residing.

- b. The child could remain in the legal custody of the birth family but reside with the caregiver.
 - c. In both of the above cases, the home would not be considered a foster family residence and would not be eligible for any foster care per diem.
 - d. The agency with legal custody of the child will determine what level of services, if any, are necessary.
2. The child welfare agency should inform potential caregivers in writing of their right to be considered as placement resources.
- The written statement can be a standardized form containing at least the following information:
 - a. An explanation of foster care;
 - b. Foster care licensing standards;
 - c. The caregiver's responsibilities;
 - d. An explanation of how medical costs will be covered;
 - e. The level of agency involvement a caregiver can expect;
 - f. Goal alternatives for the child.
3. The child welfare agency should inform potential caregivers in writing of their right to receive foster care payments.
- The written statement can be a standardized form containing the following information:
 - a. An explanation that caregivers who are functioning as approved foster parents are entitled to receive reimbursement/payment as would non-relative foster parent; and
 - b. An explanation of the payment process including the amount and schedule for payment.
4. The child welfare agency should inform potential caregivers in writing of their right to seek waiver of certain licensing requirements which do not effect the health, safety or welfare of the children.
- Agency staff should review Chapter 3700 Foster Family Care Regulations with the caregivers.
 - In particular, the age of the caregiver and the caregiver status relating to a health appraisal are two areas in which child welfare agencies should be flexible and willing to consider a waiver.
 - Agency staff should review the process of applying for waivers.
5. The child welfare agency should provide written notice of its decision to deny approval to a potential caregiver as a foster parent. The agency should provide the applicant information regarding his or her right to appeal such a decision.
6. Agencies should provide substitute caregiving families with relevant supportive services.

- The level of services should be individually determined and based on the needs of the child, the birth parent(s) and the resources of the caregiver.
 - The tendency of providing a less intense level of service when care is given by a caregiver needs to be avoided.
7. Planning permanency is as important for children in substitute care as for children in traditional foster care. The requirements set forth by The Adoption and Safe Families Act should be followed with substitute care placements the same as they are followed with traditional foster care.
8. Agencies should provide caregivers the opportunity to learn the skills that will be most helpful to them.
- Agencies should provide caregivers education and support to compliment and/or increase their parenting skills.
 - Agencies should provide caregivers education and support to assist them in addressing the issues, which brought the child into care.
 - Agencies should provide training opportunities that will be relevant, beneficial, and of interest to the caregiver.
 - Agencies should be creative in making education and support training opportunities accessible to caregivers.
 - Agencies should provide training opportunities in a manner that recognizes the caregivers' knowledge of the family situation and the uniqueness of their ability to help remedy family problems.
9. Agencies should provide caseworkers with a working understanding of substitute care and the manner in which the agency views and utilizes substitute care.