



# Information & Resource Guide for Birth Parents

# Following the Removal of a Child







DC Child and Family Services Agency | 200 | Street SE, Washington, DC 20003 (202) 442-6100 | www.cfsa.dc.gov



### A Message from the CFSA Director

Dear Parents:

If you are reading this Information and Resource Guide, your child, or children, have been removed from your home and placed into foster care. It is an extremely challenging time, and the coming weeks and months will ask much of you: bravery, inner strength and a willingness to keep yourself moving forward.

There's a lot of information to take in and many new people to talk to. Your "to do" list probably feels long and difficult. CFSA is here to help you and to work with you. We want to see you safely parent your child or children at home, and we know it will take a team effort to achieve this goal.

We have written this Guide to give you important information you will need, all in one place. In these pages you'll find details about what CFSA will be asking of you, and what we will ask of ourselves as we go through this process together.

Sincerely,

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Brenda Donald Director

# Introduction: How and Why CFSA Removes Children

District law requires CFSA to have a hotline that receives reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. If a report meets certain conditions, we assign a social worker to look into it, usually within 24 hours of receiving the call. The social worker is required by law to meet with the child, family and others to gather information about the abuse or neglect report.

Then, a team of CFSA social workers, nurses and other staff review the information to determine if child abuse or neglect happened and, if so, whether the children can still be safe at home. In most cases, the children we serve *do* stay at home and we work with the family for a time.

However, by law, we have to protect children from abuse and neglect and so we sometimes must remove children from their home and place them in foster care to keep them safe.

### What happens next?

If your child has been removed from your home, you will soon go to court for an "Initial Hearing." Following this hearing, one of two things will happen:

- 1. Your child goes home on "conditional release." Even though CFSA is recommending foster care for your child, the court decides it is safe for him or her to go home with you, as long as you are working with CFSA to address the safety issues. This is called "conditional release" because there will be conditions or requirements for you to follow.
- 2. Your child goes into shelter care. The Court will decide that your child needs to stay in foster care (also called "shelter care") while CFSA continues to assess your situation and work with you to resolve the safety problems.

After this, a trial date will be set for about three months later. At the trial, your case may be dismissed and your child will go home with no further court-ordered interaction with CFSA; or your child will go home under certain conditions; or your child will remain in foster care.

### What you can do to help your children and family

If the Court decides your child needs shelter care, here are some steps you can take right away:

Identify relatives or close family friends who can help you, or who might be a placement option for your child.

- Give the social worker "transitional objects," to take to your child, like toys, blankets or pictures. These will help make it a little easier for him or her to adjust to being away from you.
- Come to court ready to discuss your family's strengths and needs.
- Participate in an "icebreaker" meeting with the foster parents.
- Go to all scheduled visits with your child.

### Figuring it all out...

There is information about all of these steps – and more – in this Guide. Use the table of contents on the next page to find what you need.

Another way to get the help and information you need is through CFSA's Parent Engagement, Education and Resource (PEER) Support program.

For More Information Contact the PEER Supervisor at 202-727-2624

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# **Important Names and Numbers**

Who	Name	Phone	Email
Social Worker			
Social Worker's Supervisor			
PEER			
PEER's Supervisor			
Your Attorney			
Foster Parent			
G-A-L			
Judge			
Judge's Clerk			

At the end of this Information and Resource Guide you will find calendar pages to help you keep track of your appointments.

# How We Do Our Work at CFSA

CFSA organizes its work into four categories we call "The Four Pillars." They are:

- Front Door
- Temporary Safe Haven
- Well Being
- Exit to Permanence

The Four Pillars express what we believe about working with children and families, and help us in our decision-making.



#### The road to permanency

Because CFSA believes that foster care should be temporary, we are very focused on "permanency" for all the children and families with whom we work. Permanency is a term that means making sure every child has a forever family – a permanent home with parents who are legally responsible for their safety and well-being.

When we think about how each child can get to permanency, we know that the road can be complicated. But, in almost all cases, the first exit from the road is "reunification," meaning our work together will begin with the goal of your child returning home.



We begin the work towards permanency starting day 1.

### Focusing on reunification

If you are reading this Guide, you are at the beginning of your road to permanency with CFSA, and working towards reunification with your child or children. In most cases, the steps to reunification follow this general sequence:



Getting to reunification can take several months, or even up to a year. During that time, CFSA will push you to do the work laid out in your case plan. If you are not doing the needed work, we will move towards other permanency options for your child, such as guardianship or adoption. You will have many conversations about this as you work with CFSA, and there is more information about it in this Guide in the section called "Your Case Goal." Remember! You should also be staying in close contact with your attorney about the work you are doing.

# **Questions Parents Often Ask**

### Why do I keep getting different social workers?

CFSA has social workers who are trained to help families in different ways and at different points in their case. The one you first met is an investigative social worker whose job is to determine if the report of abuse or neglect is true. In the first month of your case, social workers who specialize in family meetings and in assessment and case planning will also be working with you.

Your "on-going" social worker will be the main person you will work with throughout your case. If your child moves to a Maryland foster home, or your social worker leaves his or her position, you will be assigned a different "on-going" social worker. There is more information about building a working relationship with your social worker later in this Guide.

### Who can be the foster parent for my child?

Any member of your family, or a close family friend, can become a foster parent for your child once they are licensed by CFSA. The home and foster parents must meet regulations and background check requirements to show they can provide a safe living environment for your child.

Your family member or friend may be able to get a temporary license, so they can become a foster parent for your child more quickly. Any CFSA social worker you talk to can help you get a relative or family friend connected to the licensing process.

#### When will my child come home?

Most parents working with CFSA want to know how long it will take for their child to come home. While this is a completely understandable question, each case has its own circumstances and goals, so there is no single answer. In most cases, however, the process takes longer than days, weeks or a month. It can take several months, or even up to a year.

You should prepare yourself mentally for the hard work it will take to meet your case goals and resolve any safety issues in your home. You can speed up your child's return by closely following all court orders and action steps in your case plan, working together with your attorney and your social worker, and making all of your visits with your child. If you are not doing the needed work, CFSA will move towards other permanency options for your child, such as guardianship or adoption.

**Tip!** Don't wait for CFSA to get started or to take action – be proactive about making appointments and getting started on the steps in your case plan.

#### How can I change my visit schedule?

Typically, when your case first opens, you will have weekly supervised visits with your child. Most parents want to move as quickly as possible to more frequent visits, and then to unsupervised and/or weekend visits with their children. Your visit schedule is generally left up to you and your social worker, based on the facts of your case and any safety concerns that are present. The social worker will be looking to see how the services and supports you are involved in are having a positive impact and changing the circumstances that led to the removal of your child.

Working the steps in your case plan and coming to all of your scheduled visits is the best strategy for changing your visit schedule. Talk to your attorney and your social worker about it.

### Why is the social worker getting involved in my visits and watching me?

Your visits with your child are one of the <u>most important factors</u> in how quickly he or she comes back home. The judge will always ask CFSA whether you have been making all your visits and how they are going. And, the visits are the main way for you to learn, practice and show CFSA your parenting skills. This is why CFSA social workers and PEERs will be in the visits with you and will be observing and coaching.

**Tip!** Your visits with your child are the only opportunity your social worker has to see your parenting in action. Plan activities for your visits that allow you to show off your best parenting self.

There is more information about this in the section of the Guide called "Visiting With Your Child."

#### When my child comes home, what do I need to do to keep them there?

When your child comes home, he or she will be under a court order called "protective supervision." This means that CFSA is required to monitor your and your child's progress every few weeks and report to the judge. Protective supervision usually lasts for a few months. CFSA

will be looking to make sure you are following through with all the conditions of protective supervision and that your home remains safe for your child – that the problems leading to removal have not returned. The G-A-L (described in the "Lots of New People in Your Life" section of this Guide) also plays an important role in making recommendations to the court. Your attorney can tell you more about the role of the G-A-L in your case.

You can get through this period successfully if you remain cooperative with your social worker and continue to follow your court orders and case plan.

### How can I do this? I am so angry and depressed.

You have just experienced an enormous and frightening loss. The pain of this situation can make it difficult to maintain sobriety, stay out of depression, or care for yourself and others in your home.

Although strong feelings of anger and sadness are to be expected, if at any time you feel overwhelmed and think you may be experiencing a mental health crisis, talk to your social worker about connecting you to a Core Service Agency that can provide you with therapy, medication management and other help. You can also call the "Access Help Line" at 1-888-793-4357, to make the connection yourself.

Most parents in your situation find that this is a good time to reach out for support from trusted friends and family members. If you are working with a CFSA PEER, they can also be a big help. PEERS host monthly support groups for parents who have experienced the removal of their child. This safe, PEER-led environment can help you process what you're going through with people who understand.



## Lots of New People in Your Life

Since your first contact with CFSA, many social workers, agency staff, attorneys and others have begun to get in touch with you. It can be hard to keep everyone straight, understand their different roles, and know what each person expects from you.

### People from CFSA:

- The Child Protective Services (CPS) Social Worker. When CFSA received a report that your child might be at risk, a CPS Social Worker was assigned to the case. This social worker came to your home, met with you, your family, and other members of your community to determine whether or not your child had been abused or neglected, and whether it would be necessary to remove the child from your home in order to keep them safe.
- The On-Going (or "Permanency") Social Worker. Once your child was removed from your home, your case was transferred from the CPS Social Worker to your On-Going Social Worker. The On-Going Social Worker is the person who will be leading your case: working with you and your child and coordinating all activity.
- A PEER. CFSA PEERs (Parent Engagement, Education and Resource Support Specialists) are workers who have personal experience with getting their children back from foster care. PEERs do a one-on-one orientation with all parents who have their children removed, and may be assigned to work closely with you for six-months, to help you resolve the reasons your children came into foster care. This longer PEER assignment will be discussed at your Initial Case Planning Meeting.
- The FTM Coordinator. Following the removal of your child, a staff member from CFSA's Kinship Program will contact you to schedule a Family Team Meeting, or "FTM" (you may have already had one FTM before your child's removal). This FTM Coordinator may also stay in touch with you *after* the meeting to help with any follow-up action steps. There is more information about FTMs in the "Many Meetings" section of this Handbook.
- The Icebreaker Coordinator. Another CFSA staff member will be in contact to schedule a meeting between you and the foster parent who is caring for your child. This meeting is called an "Icebreaker." There is more information about Icebreakers in the "Many Meetings" and "Your Relationship with the Foster Parents" sections of this Handbook.
- The Social Worker from "OWB" (the Office of Well-Being). About a week or so after the removal of your child, a social worker from the Office of Well Being will contact you about coming to the "Initial Case Planning Meeting." At this meeting, more detail will be discussed about why your child was removed from your home and what steps you

will need to take for them to return safely. There is more information about the Initial Case Planning Meeting in the "Many Meetings" section of this Handbook.

#### People from the court system:

- Your attorney. On your first day in court, the judge will assign you an attorney. Your attorney is your legal representative and works for you and your interests. Talk to your attorney about any concerns you have, and about what you can and should discuss with all the other people involved in your case.
- The Assistant Attorney General (AAG). The AAG is the lawyer for the D.C. Government who represents CFSA. The AAG will present evidence to support the claim that your child was abused or neglected. The AAG will represent CFSA at all hearings. You should not talk to the AAG about the case without your own attorney present.
- Your Child's attorney. The attorney for your child, who is appointed by the court, is called the Guardian Ad Litem, or G-A-L. The G-A-L will talk to and visit your child, explain to your child what is happening in the case, and tell the judge how your child is doing. The G-A-L also tells the judge what he or she believes would be best for your child.
- The "CASA" (Court Appointed Special Advocate). CASAs are court-appointed, trained volunteers from the community who work to build a supportive relationship with your child and find out how he or she is feeling and doing in foster care. A CASA may file a written report or come to the court hearing and report directly to the judge. CASAs also talk with CFSA social workers about your child.

There is more information about court in the section of this Guide called "Understanding the Court Process."



## The First 30 Days

For the first month or so following the removal of your child, there will be a lot of activity on your case.

### You will...

- Meet with a PEER for an orientation.
- Meet with your attorney and attend court hearings.
- Attend a Family Team Meeting and the Initial Case Planning Meeting.
- Attend an Icebreaker with the foster parent caring for your child.
- Complete an "affidavit of paternity" (if needed) and provide information about family members who might be helpful with your case.
- Sign information releases for medical, school, and other records, so social workers can talk with therapists or others working with you and your child.
- Help develop and sign your case plan.
- Regularly meet with your on-going social worker and potentially with a PEER.
- Have an assessment with your social worker about your strengths and challenges.
- Have the opportunity to visit with your children. In some very rare situations, you may not be granted visits with your child. Talk to your attorney about this.

#### Your social worker will...

- Get your child's clothing and personal items from your home and bring them to the foster home.
- Get any medications your child needs.
- Arrange for your child to be transported to his or her current school, or arrange for a transfer if needed.
- Meet with your child each week.
- Meet with your extended family members and others in your community to get them engaged in helping you.

- Request your child's birth certificate, social security and health insurance cards from other government agencies.
- Begin referring you to services and resources that were either ordered by the court, or decided on at the team meetings you have attended.

### Your child will...

- Have full physical and dental exams.
- Have assessments on his or her emotional and cognitive functioning.
- Face many complicated and difficult emotions while getting used to being in a new place.
- Visit with you and with any siblings in foster care who are not in the same foster home.



# Building a Working Relationship with Your Social Worker

Building a working relationship with your social worker has one very important purpose: to help you achieve the goals in your case plan so your child can come home.

Sometimes building this relationship is easy – a social worker and family hit it off right away. The personalities are a fit and everyone finds it easy to communicate and work together.

But often it takes some time and effort to make the relationship work. You may not feel comfortable or trusting right away. This is perfectly understandable. But it is also true that your child is likely to come home faster if you and your social worker can work well together as a team.

Here are some things you can do to help build a working relationship with your social worker:

- Show respect and consideration.
- If you are feeling upset, frustrated or angry, take the time you need to cool off and then start again.
- Communicate clearly and openly.
- Be honest and upfront.

You can also expect your social worker to do his or her part to build the working relationship. Your social worker should:

- Be respectful, reliable, and return your calls promptly.
- Treat you and your family members as equal partners in the process.
- Recognize that your time is valuable, and be thoughtful and prepared for each meeting with you.
- Follow-up on agreed-upon tasks.

#### Working your case plan together

As you and your social worker work together on your case plan, there may be times when you feel you are not on the same page about it. Your social worker will want to see a lot of work

from you. They will make determinations about your progress, based on their observations and opinions, and report these to the court.

This may feel unfair. But *you* can be the deciding factor in how your case moves forward by staying with it and not giving up. Don't wait for CFSA to get started or to take action – be proactive. And be cooperative to the greatest extent possible for you.

**Tip!** Make sure your social worker is very specific about what CFSA wants to see from you. It should be written in detail in your case plan, and you should have a copy of the plan. If you have questions or are unsure, ask! If everyone is clear about the expectations from the beginning, conflicts will be less likely later on.

### What if it just isn't working?

If you feel you have tried your best to build a working relationship with your social worker and it just isn't happening, get in touch with his or her supervisor to discuss your concerns.

If you try that, and still don't feel the issue has been resolved, you can call the CFSA Ombudsman – a staff person whose job is to hear your concerns, do an independent review, and work with everyone involved to find a resolution. There is more information about the Ombudsman in the "When You Have Issues or Concerns" section of this Guide.



# Many Meetings

During the first month or so following the removal of your child, you will be asked to attend many meetings and court activities.

Meeting Name	<b>Purpose of the Meeting</b>	Who's There	When	Where
Family Team Meeting (FTM)	<ul> <li>Go over what has happened and begin to identify steps to help your child return home safely.</li> <li>Tip! Bring to the FTM: <ul> <li>People who know you well and can support you.</li> <li>Documentation (and contact information) for services you are in or have already completed.</li> <li>A vision for what you need for your children to come home.</li> <li>An open mind!</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul> <li>You</li> <li>Extended Family</li> <li>CFSA social workers</li> <li>PEER</li> <li>Lawyers</li> <li>Nurses</li> <li>Other support people and involved professionals</li> </ul>	Usually within 72 hours of removal	CFSA
Orientation to CFSA	Learn some basics about CFSA and what you can expect in the coming weeks and months.	<ul><li>You</li><li>PEER</li></ul>	Usually 1-5 days from removal	A place that's convenient for both of you
Initial Court Hearing	CFSA and the G-A-L each make their cases for whether or not your child should stay in foster care. Your attorney makes your case. The judge decides where your child will live until the next court hearing. <b>Tip!</b> You may be feeling angry and upset, but when you come to court, present your best self. Don't "be" what they put on paper about you. Talk to your attorney about what you want to say in court and the best way to get your message across.	<ul> <li>You</li> <li>The judge assigned to your case</li> <li>Your attorney</li> <li>CFSA's attorney (called the AAG)</li> <li>CFSA social worker</li> <li>GAL and/or CASA</li> </ul>	Within 72 hours of removal	DC Superior Court

Meeting Name	Purpose of the Meeting	Who's There When Where
Initial Case Planning Meeting	Identify 1-3 issues that are the key to having your child safely return home. Decide whether you will work with a PEER for 6 months <b>Tip!</b> Bring the same things you brought to the FTM	<ul> <li>You</li> <li>CFSA social worker</li> <li>PEER</li> <li>Professional specialists</li> <li>foster parent</li> <li>Usually within 15 days of</li> <li>removal specialists</li> </ul>
Icebreaker	<ul> <li>Meet the foster parent and get to know each other a little bit. Share information about your child and develop a communication plan.</li> <li><b>Tip!</b> Bring for your child: <ul> <li>"comfort items" like a stuffed animal, picture or toy.</li> <li>Recipes for favorite meals.</li> <li>Haircare products and instructions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul> <li>You</li> <li>CFSA staff</li> <li>Foster parent(s)</li> <li>PEER</li> <li>Usually within 1 week of removal</li> </ul>
Mediation	Outside the courtroom, a discussion to try to come to agreement about whether your child was abused or neglected. Services and visitation are also discussed.	<ul> <li>You</li> <li>Mediator</li> <li>Attorneys for you and CFSA</li> <li>CFSA social worker</li> <li>Within 30 days</li> <li>Of the nearing</li> <li>Hearing</li> <li>Street, NW 202-879-1549</li> </ul>

A PEER, on-going social worker and your attorney can help answer any questions you have about these meetings.

# The Role of Your Family in Your Case

CFSA is a "Kin First" agency. This means we always try to keep children with family members, or with very close family friends, sometimes known as "fictive kin." In order to do this, we will search for, and talk to, people on both sides of your family who might be able to take care of your child and/or help you take the steps needed to have your child come home.

Here's what this looks like:

- At removal. When your child was being removed, the CPS Social Worker asked you for the names of relatives or fictive kin who might be able to be a caretaker.
- Diligent Search. Generally, every 90 days CFSA does "Diligent Searches" for your relatives, looking through public records and making calls and visits to find and talk to them.
- Licensing a home. If your child was placed with a family member, he or she is going through the process of becoming a licensed foster parent. This involves background checks, finger-printing, training and many other steps.

If the agency was not able to find a kin placement, and your child was placed in a traditional foster home, you still have an opportunity to help identify family members who can become licensed as a foster parent for your child.

- **Family Team Meetings.** Your family members are invited to participate in Family Team Meetings (FTMs) to help you work towards reunification with your children.
- Providing support. CFSA will ask your family members to commit to helping you achieve your case goals – by being supportive, helping with transportation, or participating in visits with your child.
- Permanent resource. Down the road, your family members may be asked if they are willing to be a "permanent resource" for your child, meaning by becoming their guardian or adopting them if need be.

Families are complicated, and you may feel angry or uncomfortable about how much they are being included "in your business" – especially if they haven't been around or there are conflicts.

We get it. But, the fastest and best way to get a child out of foster care is by engaging their extended family. CFSA will work with you and your family members to resolve issues and build a cooperative team.

**Tip!** Because CFSA will cast a wide net looking for your family, it's helpful to have an open conversation early on about the various people who may come up. Help direct us to relatives who can best support you.

The search for family is an on-going process. So if you remember someone you forgot to mention, be sure to tell your social worker.



# Your Case Goal

When a child is placed in foster care, "Reunification" (meaning when a child returns home) is almost always the goal. But, in order to keep children's time in foster care as short as possible, CFSA may have to look at other goals as well.

Here's how that works:

- At 6 months: When your child has been in care for about 6 months, the court will hold a "Review of Disposition Hearing" so the judge can find out how things are going. The case goal won't be changed from reunification at this time, but if your efforts have not been strong, CFSA may tell the court that a goal change could be needed, and that we are starting to look at options like adoption or guardianship.
- At 12 months: If your child is still in foster care after 12 months, a Permanency Hearing will be held. If CFSA has not seen enough progress on resolving the issues that resulted in the removal of your child, we will likely recommend to the court that the goal for your child be changed from reunification to adoption or guardianship. CFSA does not want your child to remain in foster care for too long. Through your attorney, you will have the opportunity to say what your position and plans are. The judge will make the final decision.

This is why it is *so important* for you to "hit the ground running" when it comes to working with CFSA. We hope you will take every opportunity to:

- Do what's in your case plan.
- Go to all scheduled visits with your children.
- Meet the foster parents at the icebreaker and then work to build a relationship with them.
- Go to all of the team meetings about your case.

#### "Concurrent Planning"

When it comes to your case goal, you may hear social workers or attorneys use the expression "concurrent planning." This means that while CFSA is helping you work towards reunification, we will also be exploring guardianship or adoption, within your extended family or, possibly, with people you don't know.

Concurrent planning may feel confusing and unfair to you. However, it has been proven to help cases move faster, so your child's time in foster care can be as short as possible.

You have a role to play in concurrent planning:

- Work your case plan!
- Work with CFSA to identify important people in your child's life who could become a potential adoption or guardianship resource, if needed.
- Build a strong relationship with the foster parents in case adoption or guardianship becomes necessary and there are no family members available to care for your child.



# **Understanding Your Case Plan**

All families working with CFSA have a "case plan." This is the document that everyone – you, your family members, CFSA social workers, attorneys, and the judge – will use to keep track of progress on your case and to make important decisions.

#### What's in my case plan?

- **Your case goal.** Your case plan states the goal for your case: reunification, adoption or guardianship.
- The issues to be resolved. Your case plan lists a small number of issues (usually 2 to 3) that are directly related to why your child came into foster care, and that need to be resolved in order for him or her to go home.
- Action steps. Your case plan lays out the action steps needed to get to your goal. These are developed by you and your "team" (the social worker, a PEER if one has been assigned, family members, and other professionals you have been involved with, like your lawyer or therapist). Sometimes the judge will add action steps to the list. The case plan also keeps a record of all the work you do on your action steps.
- Background information. Your case plan has basic identifying information about your family and child (dates of birth, addresses, etc.). It also has results of all of the assessments, evaluations and tests that have been completed on any family members.

#### How is my case plan developed?

The information in your case plan is developed during the many meetings and discussions that happen in the first few weeks after your child comes into foster care.

Once the plan is complete and everyone is in agreement with it, you will be asked to review and sign it. It will then be CFSA's job to make sure you have the help and support you need to take the action steps in the plan.

**Tip!** If you have ANY questions about what's in your case plan, be sure to talk with your social worker, attorney, and/or a PEER about them. And make sure to keep a copy of it – you can put it in this binder!

# Your Relationship with the Foster Parents

As you begin your work with CFSA, you might find that you have lots of different feelings about the foster parents caring for your child:

- You may feel angry about the fact that they have your child and you don't.
- You may feel grateful they stepped-in to help when you were struggling.
- You may feel ashamed or embarrassed about the reasons your child was removed, and believe they will judge you.
- > You may be worried they are looking to replace you in the eyes of your child.

All of these feelings are understandable. But, the fact is that foster parents (including if they are members of your own family) have two main jobs:

- 1) To provide *temporary* care for your child until he or she is able to return home safely, AND
- 2) To help and support you in reunifying with your child.

We encourage you to talk about, and try to work through, any concerns you have about the foster parents, and come to a place of acceptance as soon as possible. This doesn't mean you have to agree with everything they do, or go with every decision they make. It means that you and the foster parents are able to communicate, solve problems, plan activities and make decisions together. This is called "Shared Parenting."

### How "Shared Parenting" Can Help You

When you work together with the family caring for your child, there are many positive results:

- Your child will feel very comforted to know that everyone's talking to each other and there's no need to feel "split."
- Your child will have an easier time adjusting to a temporary home, and then adjusting back to yours when it is safe to do so.
- > The length of time your child is in foster care will likely be shorter.

Building a relationship with the foster parents usually starts with an "Icebreaker" – a facilitated, in-person conversation so you can get to know each other a bit, share important information about your child, and make a plan for communicating with each other. At the end of the

Icebreaker, you will each get a copy of that plan, and your social worker will check-in to see how it's going.

After the icebreaker, shared parenting looks different for every family. Here are some examples.

#### Small shared parenting steps:

- Regular communication by text, email or phone.
- The foster parent gives you updates about what your child has been doing, or asks for your thoughts about how to help your child feel more comfortable.
- The foster parent uses activities and routines (like bedtime prayers, stories or songs) you recommend.

#### Medium shared parenting steps:

- You and the foster parent go to your child's medical appointment or parent-teacher conference together.
- The foster parents help out during parent-child visits.
- > You go to a CFSA family activity together.
- The foster parent calls you to help your child with homework, or to talk with your child after they win an award or have a particularly good day.
- The foster parent asks for your help in having your child follow-through on regular household tasks like cleaning their room or taking out the garbage.

#### Larger shared parenting steps:

- You go to foster family events or activities like reunions, outings, or church.
- You and the foster parents plan an event together (like your child's birthday party).
- The foster parent helps you with some parenting skills that might be hard for you.

### Everyday decisions about your child

CFSA has guidelines for who gets to make decisions about children's daily activities while they are in foster care. The purpose is to make sure children can live as "normal" a life as possible by

doing things like joining a sports team, having a sleepover at a friend's house or taking a school trip.

To provide a "normal" experience, foster parents need to be able to make many daily decisions. But, they do not get to make *all* decisions:

- If an activity the foster parent wants to do with your child conflicts with what's in the court order, the court order must be followed.
- Unless your parental rights have been terminated you have the right to visitation, and to making decisions about religion, education, and medical care. If an activity conflicts with any of these things, your rights come first.
- CFSA has policies that define things like "extended stays" or "higher than normal risk of injury." If an activity conflicts with CFSA policy, the policy has to be followed.
- Your preferences such as whether your child joins a football team or gets hair coloring – must be taken into account.

Once court orders, CFSA policy and your rights and preferences have been taken into account, the foster parent is allowed to make decisions about your child's daily activities.



# Visiting with Your Child

Under most circumstances, you will be able to visit with your child every week. Sometimes the court orders a different initial visiting schedule based on a family's situation. If you are not happy with your schedule – the number of visits or their length — you should discuss it with your attorney and your CFSA team.

### Four different types of visits



Here are some other important things to know about visits:

- CFSA has rooms set aside with toys, books and comfortable furniture.
- You can bring snacks or meals for your child, and books and toys from home that they may enjoy.
- The visit location can be changed as your case moves forward, as long as the court order permits it. If not, talk with your attorney about having the court order changed.
- A CFSA social worker (either your social worker or a Family Support Worker, called an "FSW") will probably be the one to bring your child to the visit. The foster parent may also bring your child.

- For supervised visits, your social worker, a PEER (if one is assigned) or another adult will stay in the room to help and supervise the visit.
- If you had more than one child removed, and they aren't in the same foster home, they will visit with each other at least monthly. Sometimes these sibling visits will be with you, sometimes they will be without you.

### Visits bring-up strong feelings

Parent-child visits can bring-up strong feelings all around.

You will probably be very eager to see your child. You may also feel worried about it: what will it be like for you to be together with someone else in the room watching? Will your child be angry at you? What should you say? What will you do together?

Your child will also be dealing with a lot of different feelings: love, anger, hurt, sadness and confusion all at the same time. It may be very hard for everyone to say goodbye at the end.

**Tip!** Before your visit, talk through your feelings with your social worker, a PEER and other supportive people in your life so you can spend time with your child in a calm and loving state of mind. They can also help you figure out how to answer difficult questions from your child.

The Social Worker and foster parent will help your child talk about his or her feelings as well.

### Why your visits are so important

Your visits with your child are one of the <u>most important factors</u> in how quickly he or she comes back home. The judge will always ask whether you have been making all your visits and how they are going. The visits are also the main way for you to learn, practice and show CFSA your parenting skills.

Because the visits are so important, CFSA staff will use them to coach and guide you on parenting skills related to your child's removal. For example:

If the court found that you neglected your child, the visits are a time to practice new ways of being attentive. If the court found that you used inappropriate discipline, the visits are a time to learn and show new ways of managing your child when their behavior is challenging.

**Tip!** Plan your visits with your social worker beforehand. What activities do you want to do? What supplies might you need (CFSA may have them on hand!)? What skills will you be working on during the visit? Planning will help make sure the visits help move your case forward.

Especially in the beginning, you may feel like you just want the time and space to re-connect and be together – no supervising or practicing. We get it, and the people supervising your visits should be sensitive to this. But your social worker will also encourage you to begin using the visits for parenting practice as soon as possible.

**Tip!** A missed visit can be very difficult for your child. If the social worker knows in advance that you can't be there, your child won't be brought to CFSA (or to the visiting site) to wait for you.

So, if for some reason you can't keep a scheduled visit with your child, reach out to your social worker immediately and let them know. If you can't reach your social worker, contact the supervisor.



## **Understanding the Court Process**

When your child has been removed, you will have a lot of interaction with the DC Family Court. To make sure you put your best foot forward with the court, and do everything you can to have your child returned home as quickly as possible, it's helpful to understand all of the different hearings, who will be involved, and what you can do.

#### Who's who?

Your Attorney. On your first day in court, the judge will assign you an attorney. Your attorney is your legal representative, who works for you and represents your interests. They do not represent what *they* think is best for you – they represent what *you* think is best for you. Your attorney will give you legal advice on what you should or should not say in court.

After the first day, you must visit the Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect (CCAN) to find out if you can continue to have an attorney free of charge. The CCAN office is in room 4415 on the fourth floor of the courthouse. The hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

- The Government Attorney. The Assistant Attorney General (AAG) is the lawyer for the DC Government who will present evidence to support the claim that your child was abused or neglected. The AAG represents CFSA and the District of Columbia's interests. You should not talk to the AAG without your own attorney present.
- Your Child's Guardian Ad Litem. The court appoints an attorney called a guardian ad litem (or G-A-L) for your child. Your child's G-A-L will talk to and visit your child, explain to your child what is happening in the case, and talk to the judge about your child. The G-A-L also tells the judge what he/she believes would be best for your child. Talk to your attorney about what you can discuss with the G-A-L.
- Your CFSA Social Worker. Your CFSA social worker has a very specific role to play in court: to report to the judge what has been going on in your case, and tell the judge where he or she thinks your child should live. Remember that CFSA makes recommendations, but the judge makes the decisions.
- The Judge. Your case will be assigned to a Family Court judge before the first hearing. The judge makes decisions in your case based on the law and the evidence that he or she hears. Judges usually handle a case until it is completed (from initial hearing to the final court date), but sometimes the judge assigned to a case can change.

### When You Will Go to Court

Court Event	Timing	Purpose
Initial Hearing	Within 72 hours of removal	This is the first hearing in your case. You'll get a copy of CFSA's case (called a "petition") saying why the agency thinks your child was neglected or abused.
		The judge will decide where your child will live until the court determines whether he or she was neglected or abused.
		<b>Tip!</b> You will probably meet your assigned attorney for the first time right before you go in for the initial hearing, so there may not be time to talk about anything in detail. Try to have some thoughts and questions ready in advance. Be prepared to say where you would like your child to live if they can't live with you.
Mediation	Within 30 days of the initial	A meeting of everybody involved with your case (including attorneys) to see if an agreement can be reached about whether your child was abused or neglected.
hearing		If you agree your child was neglected or abused, you'll appear before a judge to sign a "stipulation" admitting that. If you don't agree (and you don't have to agree) then the court will hold a trial within about three months.
		Mediation is not in a courtroom and a neutral professional mediator will facilitate the discussion.
		<b>TIP!</b> Discussions during mediation are confidential and can't be repeated to the judge, so you can speak freely. There are some exceptions to this, and you should discuss them with your lawyer.
Pre-Trial Hearing	Before the trial (date set at the Initial Hearing)	The judge will determine if everyone is ready for the trial.
Trial	Within 105 days of removal	The trial, called a "fact-finding hearing," is to decide whether your child was neglected or abused. If the judge decides "no," then the case will be dismissed, you'll take your child home and will not have to be back in court. CFSA may continue to work with you and your family, just not with a court order.
		If the judge decides "yes," he or she will decide where your child should live, and what services should be provided for you and family.

Court Event	Timing	Purpose
Disposition Hearing	Within 105 days of the stipulation or trial (for a removal case).	To discuss the disposition report prepared by the social worker. You will have an opportunity to say where you would like your child to live. The hearing will also confirm where your child will be placed and review the case plan.
Review Hearing(s)	2-3 months after the Disposition Hearing	To look at your progress on resolving the issues that led to the removal of your child. There may be more than one Review Hearing on your case.
Permanency Hearing(s)	Date set at the Disposition Hearing; held at	The judge uses Permanency Hearings to listen to reports about your efforts, and CFSA's efforts to support you. At the first one, the judge will begin to determine if reunification is possible and, if not, to look at other ways for your child to have a safe, permanent home.
	least every 6 months	A Permanency Hearing is held about every six months (or possibly more often) until the case is closed.


# **Supports and Services**

As you work to resolve the reasons your child came into care, you may need supports or services that can be found in the community. Following are some resources that may be helpful.

## Make sure you have your documents

**Tip!** Before they can help you, most services will ask for identification and other documentation (such as a driver's license, social security card or birth certificate). So unless you have all your original documents on hand, your first stop should be one of these organizations that can help you get them:

# Lutheran Social Services 4406 Georgia Avenue NW

Phone: (202) 723-3000

### Salvation Army

1434 Harvard St. NW Phone: 202-250-7705 Walk-in office hours: Tuesday 2 pm – 4 pm

### Foundry United Methodist Church

1500 16th St. NW Phone: 202-332-4010

### Miriam's Kitchen at Western Presbyterian Church

2401 Virginia Ave. NW (near Foggy Bottom Metro) Phone: 202-452-8089

# The DC Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaboratives

There are five community organizations around the city that work directly with CFSA to provide supports near where you live:

Collaborative	Address	Phone/Website
Collaborative Solutions for Communities (Wards 1 & 2)	3333 14th Street NW Suite 200Washington, DC 20010	(202) 518-6737 http://wearecsc.org/
East River Family Strengthening Collaborative (Ward 7)	3917 Minnesota Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20019	(202) 397-7300 http://www.erfsc.org/
Edgewood/Brookland Family Support Collaborative (Ward 5 & 6)	611 Edgewood Street, NE, Suite 106, Washington, DC 20017	(202) 832-9400 http://ebfsc.org/
Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative (Ward 8)	2041 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE, Suite 304, Washington, DC 20020	(202) 889-1425 http://www.fsfsc.org/
Georgia Avenue Family Support Collaborative (Ward 3 & 4)	508 Kennedy Street NW, Washington, DC 20011 4420 Georgia Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20011	(202) 722-1815 http://gafsc-dc.org/

# **More Services**

On the next two pages you will find a list of many helpful resources and services, organized by the kind of help they provide.

**Tip!** Call before you go to make sure the service is being offered at the location and time that you're interested in.



QUICK RESOURCE GUIDE – DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (in alphabetical order by type of assistance requested)

March 31, 2017

### www.CatholicCharitiesDC.org

	EMERGENCY NUMBERS	
Abused Adults Abused Children	DC Adult Protective Services DC Child & Family Services	202-541-3950 202-671-7233
Domestic Violence	National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-7233
	My Sister's Place – 24hr hotline	202-749-8000
	House of Ruth	202-667-7001x515
Human Trafficking	National Resource Center	1-888-373-7888
Mental Health Crisis	DC Mobile Crisis Service-Adult	202-673-9300
	DC Access HelpLine	1-888-793-4357
Rape/Sexual Assault	DC Rape Crisis Center Hotline	202-333-7273
	National Sexual Assault Hotline	1-800-656-4673
Shelter	DC 24-Hour Emergency Shelter Hotline	
Suicide	go to a local emergency room	911
	National Suicide Prevention Hotline	1-800-273-8255
ALL REQUESTS - Infor	mation Hotline	
-		211 or 202-463-6211
		211 01 202 100 0211
	lasses/External High-School Diploma	000 707 0404
Literacy Helpline, dclibrar		202-727-2431
Academy of Hope, (sites Byte Back (computer liter		202-269-6623 202-529-3395
Byte Back (computer liter	acy), or 5 monitoe St. NE	202-029-0090
Budgeting/Debt Counse		
	.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysm	
Capital Area Assets Build	lers (CAAB), 1444 Eye St, NW	202-419-1440
Burial Assistance		
DC Burial Assistance Pro	gram, 645 H Street, NE (ESA Service Ce	nter) 202-698-4112
Case Management/Walk	-in Social Worker Services	
	irginia Ave. NW, M-F 6:30-9:45a; 2:30-5:4	5p 202-452-8926
	.M.E.), 71 "O" St. NW, M-F, 8am intake	202-797-8806
	Good Hope Rd., M-Thurs, 9:30-11:30am	202-265-2400
	<sup>rth</sup> St. NW, Mon, Tues, Thurs, 9-11am or 1-	3pm 202-561-8587
Children's Services		
	tric crisis service – 24/7; ages 6-18)	202-481-1440
Child Care Vouchers, 400	11 South Capitol St. SW	202-401-1440
Urban Alliance (paid inter	202-459-4300	
u u	nempe for high concord contoroy	202 400 4000
Clothing		000 504 0507
Bread for the City, 1640 (		202-561-8587
	0am-2pm. Free; bring your own bag)	202 707 0000
So Others Might Eat (S.C	0.M.E.), 71"O" St. NW (T, F 8:30-11:30)	202-797-8806
Counseling		
	I Health (DMH) 24-Hour Helpline	888-793-4357
	m-3pm (walk-in psychological assessmen	ts) 202-442-4202

Counseling (continued) Family Matters, 45 "I" Street, NW Grief Counseling – Wendt Center, 4201 Connecticut Ave. NW Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program	202-289-1510 202-624-0010 202-673-9319
Dental Care Catholic Charities' Spanish Catholic Center, 1618 Monroe St. NW So Others Might Eat (S.O.M.E.), 71 "O" St. NW	202-939-2400, x4 202-797-8806
Domestic Violence Ayuda, Inc, DASH Resource Clinic, every Wed, 1-3:30pm House of Ruth 202	202-387-4848 202-425-7573 2-667-7001, x515
Disability Services (supported employment, job training, etc.) Department of Disability Services, 1125 15th Street NW	202-730-1700
Economic Security Administration (ESA) Service Centers (former (Food stamps/Medicaid/TANF- all locations. Temporary disability - H S Hours: Monday-Friday 8:15am- 4:45pm; extended hours until 8pm on Anacostia, 2100 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., SE Congress Heights, 4001 South Capitol Street, SW Fort Davis, 3851 Alabama Ave., SE H Street, 645 H Street, NE (also provides temporary disability funds) Taylor Street, 1207 Taylor Street, NW	Street only.) Wednesdays 202-645-4614 202-645-4525 202-645-4500
<u>Eye Care</u> Exams - So Others Might Eat (S.O.M.E.), 71 "O" St. NW Exams - Washington Hospital Center, 110 Irving St. NW Glasses - Prevention of Blindness, 2216 Rhode Island Ave. NE	202-797-8806 202-877-3937 202-269-0203
Family Support Strong Families (DC Dept. of Human Services) Far Southeast Family Strengthening, 2041 MLK Jr Ave. SE	202-698-4293 202-889-1425
Food - Groceries   Capital Area Food Bank Hunger Lifeline   DC Food Finder (sources closest to any DC address)   WWW.   Food Stamps (now called "SNAP", look under "Economic Security Adr   WIC Hotline (Women, Infants, Children – food)   SHARE Program, www.sharedc.org   (pay \$20 for \$40-45 of groceries, EBT welcome)	202-639-9770 dcfoodfinder.org ninistration" sites) 800-345-1942 301-864-3115
Food - Meals S.O.M.E., 71 "O" St. NW, daily, 7-8:30am, 11-1pm Miriam's Kitchen, 2401 Virginia Ave. NW, M-F 6:30-8am; 4:45-5:45p	202-797-8806 202-452-8926
<u>Furniture</u> (call first, you must provide transportation) Central Union Mission, 3182 B Bladensburg Road, NE Mission of Love, 6180 Old Central Ave., Capitol Heights, MD A Wider Circle, Silver Spring, MD	202-526-2427 301-333-4440 301-608-3504

Health Care Affordable Care Act // DC Health Link Catholic Charities' Spanish Catholic Center, 1618 Monroe St. NW So Others Might Eat (S.O.M.E.), 71 "O" St. NW Unity Health Care Clinics (for the under and un-insured) Medicare/Medicaid Insurance (look under " <i>Economic Security Administr</i>	855-532-5465 202-939-2400 202-797-8806 202-715-7901 ration" sites)
HIV Testing/Support Family and Medical Counseling Service, 2041 MLK Jr. Ave. SE, #303 Metro Health, 1012 -14th St. NW, Suite 700	202-889-7900 202-638-0750
Housing Search Resources/ Strategies Housing Counseling Services, 2410 17th Street, NW (session every Thursday at 4pm on looking for housing in DC)	202-667-7006
DHCD Housing Resource Center, 1800 MLK Ave. SE (8:30a–3:30p) Database of housing options: <u>www.dchousingsearch.org</u> Victory Housing (an ADW program) <u>www.victoryhousing.org</u> Check: realtors, City Paper (Thurs), Washington Post (Sat & Sun), cons	202-442-9505 301-493-6000 ider roommate.
Identification/Birth Certificates Salvation Army, 1434 Harvard St. NW (Wed & Thurs, call first) Foundry Methodist Church, (requires an online referral by a social service	202-250-7705
Immigrant-Focused Services Ayuda, 6925 B Willow Street NW Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Clinics, (arrive early, \$60 consultat Tuesdays, 9:30 AM 924 G Street NW Wednesdays, 9:00 AM 1618 Monroe St. NW Catholic Charities' Spanish Catholic Center, 1618 Monroe St. NW CARECEN, 1460 Columbia Road NW, Suite C-1	202-387-4848 tion fee) 202-939-2400 202-328-9799
Job Search Resources Catholic Charities Employment Referrals DC Department of Employment Services (DOES) Jubilee Jobs, 2712 Ontario Rd. NW Samaritan Ministry, 1345 U St. SE (889-7702) or 1516 Hamilton St. NW	202-939-2400 202-724-7000 202-667-8970 202-722-2280
Legal Assistance Bread for the City, 1525 7 <sup>th</sup> St. NW (walk-in Monday 1-3pm) Bread for the City, 1640 Good Hope Rd., SE (walk-in Monday 1-3pm) Catholic Charities Legal Network 202-350-4305 // 202-772-4 Legal Aid Society University Legal Services Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless	202-265-2400 202-587-0527 4325 ( <i>espanol</i> ) 202-628-1161 202-547-4747 202-328-5500
Library (internet, computer classes, movies, free children's programs) Martin Luther King Jr., 901 G St. NW, (or call for 25 branch offices)	202-727-0321
Phone Assurance Wireless, (free phone with 250 minutes/month)	888-898-4888

# Pregnancy/Parenting

Northwest Pregnancy Center, 2702 Ontario Road, NW Capitol Hill Pregnancy Center, 713 Maryland Ave., NE Healthy Babies Project, 4501 Grant Street, NE Catholic Charities' Sanctuaries for Life Program	202-483-7008 202-546-1018 202-396-2809 301-441-1472
Prison OutreachWelcome Home Reentry Program202-Visitors Services Center, 1422 Mass Ave. SE	772-4300, x040 202-544-2131
Rental/Mortgage Assistance (must call for an appointment) Community Partnership/ Virginia Williams, 920 Rhode Island Ave NE Housing Counseling Services, 2410 - 17 <sup>th</sup> St. NW, Suite 100 Salvation Army, 1434 Harvard Street NW, Suite B Salvation Army, 2300 Martin Luther King Ave. SE Catholic Charities' SE Family Center, 2812 Pennsylvania Ave., SE Dept. Housing & Community (mortgages), www.dhcd.dc.gov HUD's Making Home Affordable Program, www.makinghomeaffordable Tenant Survival Guide: http://ota.dc.gov/node/374252	202-526-0017 202-667-7339 202-332-5000 202-678-9771 202-338-3100 202-442-7200 e.gov
Senior Citizens (60+) DC Office on Aging, 441 4 <sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 900	202-724-5622
Shelter (Emergency) & HomelessnessMen801 East, 2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. SE New York Avenue Shelter, 1355 New York Ave. NEWomenNativity Shelter for Women 6010 Ga. Ave NW Open Door Shelter, 425 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street NW Harriet Tubman, 1900 Massachusetts Ave. SEFamilyVirginia Williams, 920 Rhode Island Avenue, NE (Central intake for displaced DC families, 8:30-4pm, M-Th) Capitol Hill Group Ministry, 1338 G Street SE (Mon-Fri 8am-6pm. Shower, computer, phone, laundry, kitch	202-561-4014 202-832-2359 202-487-2012 202-639-8093 202-547-1924 202-526-0017 202-544-3150 nen facilities)
<u>Substance Abuse Treatment Programs</u> APRA Assessment & Referrals, 70 N St. NE, (7am-6pm) Clean and Sober Streets, 425 2 <sup>nd</sup> St. NW (9am-7pm) Detox at DC General, 1905 E St. SE (24 hours)	202-727-8473 202-783-7343 202-698-6080
Transportation (call first) Friendship Place, 4713 Wisconsin Ave. NW Father McKenna Center, 19 Eye St. NW Thrive DC, 1525 Newton St. NW Travelers Aid (stranded travelers) Union Station, 50 Mass Ave. NE	800-263-0583 202-842-1112 202-737-9311 202-371-1937
Utility Assistance311 cDC Energy Assistance Program311 cStrong Families (DC Dept. of Human Services)311 cSalvation ArmyGreater Washington Urban League	or 202-673-6750 202-698-4293 202-332-5000 202-265-8200
Veterans Support DC Vet Center, 1250 Taylor St. NW (8:30am-4:30pm M-F)	877-927-8387

**Tip!** The Department of Human Services also has a comprehensive resource list. Find it here:

<u>https://dhs.dc.qov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/Ho</u> melessResourceSheet 0.pdf.

You can also apply for many different benefits at the same time, here: <u>https://dhs.dc.gov/service/apply-benefits</u>



# When You Have Issues or Concerns

While you are working with CFSA, you may have a concern about how things are going. For example:

- > You feel you are not getting the services you need.
- > You don't agree with a decision the agency has made.
- You don't understand an agency policy or practice and how it's being applied in your case.

If you have a concern like this, we strongly encourage you to talk with your attorney, social worker, and/or his or her supervisor. If you try that, and don't feel the issue has been resolved – or if you don't feel comfortable going through the "chain of command" – you can call the CFSA Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman is a CFSA staff person whose job is to hear your concerns, do an independent review, and work with everyone involved to find a resolution. The Ombudsman is a confidential, impartial, informal resource for families and youth involved with child welfare and for resource parents working with the agency.

The CFSA ombudsman is Marianna Abraham.



202-727-2111 Marianna.Abraham@dc.gov

# Remember...







"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change





# Monthly Calendar

Use these calendar pages to keep track of your appointments

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