

# Resource Parent Handbook

## Chapter 9 – Team Members: It Takes a Village to Do This Work

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### What is Teaming?

Imagine sitting in a rowboat with your best friend. You are rowing one oar, and your friend is rowing the second oar. What happens when you are pulling in one direction and your friend is pulling in the opposite direction? Yep, the rowboat moves. But it moves in a circle. It doesn't move forward.



Now imagine you are one of eight rowers in a race. Each team member sits in a different position in the boat, but they must all row with the same rhythm if the boat is going to glide smoothly and quickly over the water to win the race. If just one crew member pulls an oar differently, not only can the race be lost for everyone in the boat, but that

one crew member can literally flip the boat over! While dramatic, this boating example genuinely shows the importance of teaming in rhythm.

When a child enters foster (out-of-home) care, that child's family – ideally – is the "ninth person" in the boat, calling out their own rhythm and their own pace toward case closure. The social worker is akin to the "team coach," first ensuring the child's safety and well-being, then reinforcing team members' roles and responsibilities, and finally, coordinating team meetings and services for the child and family in order to achieve the permanency goal.

As the resource parent, you become a very important team member simply because – next to the birth family - you are now the primary expert on the child's daily activities and behaviors, the child's likes and dislikes, progress or lack of progress, and efforts to adapt to the out-of-home care experience. Along with the other team members supporting the child on this journey, you may also become one of the child's strongest advocates.

Strong team formation, along with successful team functioning and coordination are all keys to a child's successful pathway to case closure. To start off on the right foot, it helps to understand the basic roles of each team player. The following descriptions of team member roles, including yours, are very simplified and do not include all of the many roles

and responsibilities expected for a solid team to help achieve a positive permanency outcome.

## Team Members

**Members of the Child's Birth Family** - A child's birth parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles are all potential team members. Ideally, birth family members support the parent or caregiver from whom the child was separated. As a resource parent, you will likely engage directly with family members. You may even be asked to supervise visitation between children, parents, and siblings.



**Extended Family or Fictive Kin** - Children might have a close relationship with a family friend who is not related (fictive kin). There might also be a relative who was not close to the child but might want to help after learning that the child is in foster care. Fictive kin and relatives can be valuable supports for the child and for the birth parents. CFSA expects social workers to engage fictive kin and extended family as part of a child's team.



**Resource Parents** - *Your role on the team is critical.* Care and nurturing of children in your home helps strengthen each child's well-being and positive development. You will also be sharing with the rest of the team, including the birth family, some of your daily experiences with the child. This essential information helps the team to develop a better understanding of the child, the progress the child has made, and what interventions and services CFSA might need to put in place.



**Social Worker** - In addition to ensuring child safety, social workers regularly engage all team members, and assess children, families, and resource parents for needs and services. Social workers are also responsible for updating you on court hearings, inviting you to attend, and reinforcing your opportunity to be heard. If the goal of reunification is no longer possible, the social worker may also ask if you are interested in becoming a permanency option.



**Resource Parent Support Worker (RPSW)** - The assigned RPSW helps with the transition of a child into your home, placement stability, crisis response, emotional support, skill building, coaching, and advocacy. RPSWs also help with concrete supports, e.g., initial clothing allowances and respite services.



**Family Court Judge** - Child maltreatment cases usually have one judge assigned throughout the case. The judge may order services for a child or birth parents, as applicable, and legally set the permanency goal, terminate parental rights, as applicable, and finalize custody, guardianship, and adoptions.



**Guardian ad litem (GAL)** - The GAL is an attorney appointed by the Family Court to represent the best interests of the child. GALs may perform a variety of



roles, both during and outside of court proceedings, including that of advocate and advisor to the age-appropriate child.

**Assistant Attorneys General (AAGs)** - The District's Office of the Attorney General assigns several AAGs to represent CFSA in Family Court and to perform numerous



duties on behalf of CFSA in cases related to child maltreatment, e.g., advising social workers on legal issues, preparing for trial, and leading the legal representation of the Agency during neglect trials. These AAGs are co-located at CFSA headquarters.

**Attorneys for Birth and Resource parents** - A child's team likely includes attorneys representing the child's birth parents. As for resource parents, there are circumstances



where you may choose to be legally represented (e.g., if you are interested in adopting the child in your care).

**Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** - CASAs are volunteers who agree to



invest their time and energy in children after appointment by a Family Court judge. A CASA reports directly to the judge. Reports include the CASA's view of the case status after an investigation, advocating for the child based on those facts, monitoring the case, and often supporting and mentoring the child.

**School Staff** - A child in school, or even in daycare, can be emotionally attached to a teacher, a coach, a school social worker, counselor, or other staff member.



Often these school-based staff can provide a tremendous amount of insight into the child's status and progress, especially since they also spend a great deal of time with the child during the school day. As resource parent, you may be interacting with school staff on a regular basis.

**Service Providers** - Children in out-of-home care might need an array of services to help them adjust to separation and out-of-home care. Services might range



from a school tutor, a mentor, therapist, or a career counselor for older youth.

Social workers often invite these individuals to team meetings at any given time throughout the continuum of the child's case. Family members may also be engaged with service providers, including community-based services provided by CFSA's contracted neighborhood Collaboratives.

## Team Engagement

CFSA expects social workers to encourage team member involvement in the child's case planning process. Successful engagement requires social workers, resource parents, and the rest of the team to present with and promote the following team qualities:



**Empathy** – Each team member strives to understand the feelings of the family and child, as well as the feelings and experiences of other team members.



**Mutual Respect** – The value and benefits of mutual respect cannot be overstated for working as a successful, functional team. Mutual respect follows empathy and honesty as integral parts of case-planning collaboration. Respecting staff and their clinical decisions, even if there isn't agreement on the final decision, is a key component of genuine teaming.



**Positive Regard** – Positive regard among team members serves a purpose greater than our own: ensuring effective team functioning for the best interest of the child. Even if we don't like a team member for one reason or another, positive regard includes professional courtesy, which requires us to stand outside of our own egos. Simple but not easy! Still, it's a commitment we each need to make when working on a team.



**Respect for Diversity** – All team members dedicate themselves to case planning with all other team members without judgement, bias, or set beliefs about other people's cultures, religions, education, financial status, lifestyles, and gender identifications.



**Collaboration during the Service Planning Process** – Ongoing collaboration requires ongoing dedication from each team member. Some team members will find this easier than others. Remember you have options for support, including other seasoned resource parents who can offer advice based on their successful partnership with the Agency and their years of experience stabilizing and reunifying children.



## Understanding and Working through a Family's Challenges –

Birth parents are not the sum of one incident. All of us are more than our worst moments, and some “worst moments” have more significant consequences than others. Many factors bring families to the moment when the Agency acts to separate children for their protection. And we must all realize that parents who have a child in out-of-home care are experiencing their own grieving process. They may appear defensive, angry, and even rude. *Be assured that it is not your job to fix the family's challenges.* Still, understanding challenges and approaching the family with compassion, absence of judgment and support, no matter what you feel personally, can powerfully assist a family's path to success.

**Remember: the permanency goal for all children is reunification for the first 12 months of a case, unless otherwise stated. We count on you to support the child and the child's goal without bias, judgment, or efforts to sway opinion. Children in your care need to feel that you support their natural love for their parents, despite whatever situation brought them into your home.**

## Confidentiality

Respect for birth families' privacy and confidentiality is a fundamental right for every child and family served by the District's child and family well-being system. ***REMINDER! Both DC law and [CFSA policy](#) require that all CFSA staff, resource parents, and contract agencies keep confidential all client information known (in any form). All team members need to respect and honor the privacy of the families and children we serve, including images, names, and circumstances.***

Confidentiality is imperative. We cannot overemphasize the importance of protecting a child and family's personal information. ***CFSA expects all resource parents to protect the identity of children and families by not posting images or video on social media and by not engaging or otherwise contacting children or families served by CFSA through social media.*** Doing so puts client confidentiality at risk and is a violation of a child and family's privacy. CFSA expects you to use only secure methods of communication, such as email, telephone, and text messaging to correspond with children in your care, as well as with the child's family members.

Per DC law and CFSA's [Confidentiality policy](#), any individual who knowingly violates confidentiality guidelines is subject to civil or criminal liabilities, including a minimum of a \$1000 fine or imprisonment for a maximum of 60 days, or both. Further, any person who knowingly obtains mental health information from a mental health professional, mental health facility, or data collector, under false pretenses or through deception is guilty of a

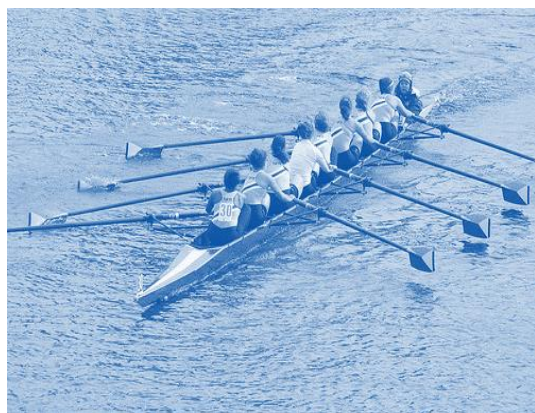


misdemeanor and may be fined up to \$5,000 or imprisonment for a maximum of 90 days, or both.

## Teaming Challenges

All human relationships are complicated. And so is teaming. Different team members with different roles have opinions based on their responsibilities, areas of expertise, and experiences. A guardian *ad litem* assigned to a child may have one view, while an attorney for the birth mother has another. As the resource parent, you will have one view and the social worker may have another. Sometimes you will strongly disagree or misunderstand a social worker's decision. Remember: the social worker has a macro-level view of the case and sees many different angles. As a result, the social worker makes every effort to consider holistic decisions that are most promising for the child, their long-term stability, and their ability to thrive.

Some resource parents have shared with advocates that they do not always feel treated like team members by social workers. Social workers have sometimes shared that some of their resource parents don't understand their role, and the limits of what social workers can legally share with them.



Even on the best day, teaming can be frustrating. You may remember being told one thing during pre-service training, but then in practice it may play out differently than expected. Maybe you tried to advocate for the child, but the system wall shows up again and your direct experience seems to be ignored.

On any given day, when teaming gets complicated and challenging, you have more than one option. You can express yourself to the social worker. If you feel that your concerns are not resolved, you can reach out to the social worker's supervisor. If you still feel your concerns are not resolved, you can contact the program manager, who makes decisions at a higher level. You can also contact the District of Columbia's Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

You also have the option to know what you know, to be patient, and with professionalism, to use "strategic communication" whenever possible.

## Strategic Communication

*Strategic communication...means communicating the best message, through the correct channels, to the right people, at the right time and using feedback from this process to stay focused on...goals.<sup>1</sup>*

Timing is important! Our best communication occurs when we are clear-headed, thoughtful, and aware of our audience. Long before we speak, we have to ask ourselves: What are we sincerely trying to say? What are team members sincerely able and willing to hear? What will they automatically tune out?

You must always remember that to truly fulfill your role as a resource parent, you will be required to use some level of strategic communication with other team members. If you can remember that we are all working toward the shared goal of the child's best interest within a complicated government system, and if you can maintain a respectful and collaborative relationship with each team member, you will have a powerfully qualitative impact on a child's path to permanency. You will also be a positive example for other team members, including the child and even the social worker.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.simpplr.com/glossary/strategic-communications/>  
Resource Parent Handbook  
Chapter 9 - Team Members: It Takes a Village to Do This Work  
Page 7 of 7