

How Do I Decide if Kinship Care is Right for Me?

Deciding whether to provide kinship care means understanding the child and family's needs and your own abilities. Ask yourself:

- Can I commit the time and energy that will be needed to help this child and family?
- Will I have my own family's support and how will this impact them?
- How do I feel about the child's separation from his or her family?
- How will this affect my relationships with the child's parents and other family members?
- Will I be able to set limits with the child and with the parents?
- Will I be able to let this child go back home when the time comes?
- Will I be able to offer this child a permanent home if necessary?
- What kind of help will I need and where will I get it?

If I Can't Take the Child into My Home . . .

Even if you aren't able to take the child into your home right now, having ongoing contact can make a **critical difference** in his or her life and adjustment. There are many ways to do this:

- Keep in regular contact with the child through telephone calls, emails, or letters.
- Visit the child and invite him or her to family or community events.
- Attend family meetings with the child's CFSA case management team. Your knowledge of the child and family can help strengthen the case plan and support progress.
- Tell us about other relatives or close family friends who can be part of the team.

CFSA can help you stay connected to the child. If you don't have the social worker's name or number, call the Kinship Program Manager at **(202) 727-7328**.

Free Legal Advice & Services are Available from These and Other Organizations:

- Bread for the City Legal Clinic: **(202) 386-7616**
- Children's Law Center: **(202) 467-4900**
- DC KinCare Alliance: **(202) 505-5803**
- George Washington University – Family Justice Litigation Clinic: **(202) 994-7463**
- Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia: **(202) 628-1161**
- Neighborhood Legal Services Program: **(202) 832-NLSP (6577)**

DC Child and Family Services Agency
200 I Street SE, Washington, DC 20003
(202) 442-6100 • www.cfsa.dc.gov • <http://dc.mandatedreporter.org>
www.fosterdckids.org • Facebook/CFSADC • Twitter@DCCFSA

DC CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY

Kinship Care:



A Guide to Exploring Your Options



The information in this brochure is not legal advice. A list of organizations providing legal advice can be found on the back of this brochure.



*** GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

How Did the Family Get Here?

If you discover that children in your extended family have been (or may be) separated from their parents, you might be wondering how this happened.

DC law requires the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) to have a hotline for reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. If a report meets certain conditions, we assign a social worker who must meet with the child, family and others to gather information. 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 CFSA serves do stay at home, and we work with the family for a time. Unfortunately, in some cases CFSA determines that a child cannot remain safely at home and, with an order from the DC Family Court, the child is placed into foster care.

What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care is when children live with a relative or close family friend who cares for them. It is a way for children who have been (or may be) separated from their parents' care to stay attached to their family.

Why Get Involved?

Going into foster care is very traumatic for most children. They fare much better when they stay connected to loved ones.

How Can I Get Involved?

There are different ways to provide kinship care for a child. Two options that may help prevent placement in foster care are getting custodial power of attorney or a court custody order.

Custodial Power of Attorney

- DC law allows a parent to identify someone (other than a parent) with whom his or her child will live. Custodial Power of Attorney is the document that gives that person temporary authority to enroll the child in school and make other educational or medical decisions.



- Custodial Power of Attorney is a legal agreement, but it is NOT a court order. There is no specific time limit on it, and it can be terminated by the parent at any time.

Court Custody Order

- In a Court Custody Order, a judge decides whether there are good reasons to give custody to someone who is not the mother or father. The order establishes where a child will live, and who has the right to make decisions about the child.
- With a Court Custody Order, you can make most decisions about a child's daily life, such as about education and medical care. The order usually has guidelines for parent visits or contact.
- This arrangement can end any time a judge enters another court order, or automatically when the child turns 18.

What Help is Available?

- At the end of this brochure is a list of organizations that provide free legal advice and support that can help you with either of the above arrangements.
- If you have legal custody, you may be eligible for TANF, Medicaid or Food Stamps through the Department of Human Services. For information, call **(202) 727-5355** or go to **<https://dhs.dc.gov/page/benefits-dhs>**.
- Whether you have legal custody or not, if you are the grandparent, great-grandparent or great aunt/uncle, reside with the child, and you meet certain income limits, you may qualify for financial help from CFSA's Grandparent Caregiver Program (GCP). For more information about the GCP, call **(866) 362-5461** or visit **www.kinshipdc.org**.

If a child must be separated from his or her parents to remain safe, you can become an approved kinship foster parent.

Becoming a Kinship Foster Parent

- If the court orders separation of a child from his or her parents due to abuse or neglect, CFSA will be given legal custody and you can be licensed to be the child's foster parent.
- You can receive a "temporary license" (so the child can come live with you quickly), followed by a full license. The licensing process involves a home study, background checks, finger-printing, training and other steps.
- Day-to-day decisions about the child will be made by you, the parent(s), and CFSA together.
- Most children return to their parents' care in about 12 months if the circumstances causing the separation have improved.
- Down the road, if a child cannot return home, you may be asked to adopt the child or become the guardian.

What Help is Available?

- As a kinship care provider, CFSA would work closely with you, and you would receive a monthly subsidy to meet the child's needs in your home.
- Other supports, such as Medicaid, mental health and other therapeutic services, educational supports and some transportation, are also available.
- The CFSA Kinship Program Manager can provide more information about becoming a kinship care provider. Call **(202) 727-7328**.