

Resource Parent Handbook

When Children Join Your Family: The Team and The Process

When a child enters foster (out-of-home) care, ***CFSA's first priority is to seek willing, able, and eligible primary and extended family members or kin.*** We call this, “**kinship care.**” Sometimes, we are unable to identify relatives for kinship care. Still, we continue to explore relatives throughout the life of the case with a focus on locating and engaging kin within the first 120 days of a case.



Experience and research reinforces the fact that kinship care sustains a child's sense of belonging, which is an essential part of feeling safe and secure.

Joining Your Family Temporarily

Resource parents with availability to accept children into their homes will receive calls from the Placement Unit at any time of day or night. The assigned specialists will do their best to match a child based on your preferences, but sometimes they've contacted all viable resource parents (based on placement preferences and availability) without success. If the team is still in need of an available resource home, they may call you even if the child does not match your desired preferences. Please consider all requests, as our call to you may be one of the last remaining viable options.

Questions that may be helpful when deciding to open your home to a new child:



How long has the child been in foster care? How many other homes have they been in? Why did the child move from the previous resource home? What was reason for the separation from their family? What is the child's permanency goal?



If the child is joining your family from the In-Home Clinical Case Management and Support Administration, can I speak directly with the social worker?



Does the child have any siblings? Does the child have unsupervised visits with the parents? Is there anyone the child cannot see or speak with? Has CFSA identified relatives as kinship care or permanency resources?



For infants and young children, you may ask, what formula does the infant drink? What size diaper does the toddler wear? Is the child already potty trained? Is there a daycare already identified? *Note: If you're considering fostering a baby or toddler, you will be required to have appropriate supplies for a child such as cribs, car seats, strollers, etc. You can discuss any assistance needed with the placement specialist.*



For older children, where does the child go to school? What time is school arrival? Pickup? Will the child require transportation?



Does the child have any food, animal, or skin allergies? If the answer is "yes," do I need any special medicine in case of an allergic reaction?



What size clothes does the child wear? Do I need to buy clothes for the child or will he or she arrive with clothes? *Please note that a child may arrive at your home without clothing, diapers, or other supplies. Having some clothing and supplies available in your home for the age range you anticipate fostering may help the older child feel a little bit better about moving to a resource home.*



Does the child have any special emotional, therapeutic, or medical needs or disabilities? Are there known behavioral triggers that I need to be aware of? Does the child take medication? If so, are there at least 7 days of medicine?

If the child joins your home directly from the hospital –



Can I visit the child at the hospital (if they are not yet discharged)? Can I meet the social worker at the hospital when the child is being discharged?

Once you have agreed to receive a child in your home, the child will be brought to your home with any belongings that may have accompanied them when they came into care and a Passport Folder that includes fact sheets, information about the child, and a list of general and emergency contacts should you have immediate needs.

Pre-Placement Health Screening

By regulation and by policy, each child has a health screening before entering a resource parent's home. These screenings take place at CFSA's on-site clinic, the [Healthy Horizons Assessment Center](#) (HHAC). You and the rest of the child's team will receive information about any health conditions such as asthma, allergies, etc. The screening also gives information about potential nutritional problems or developmental or mental health concerns. The screening may also identify medication needs.



While lots of information can be revealed as a result of the initial screening, some physical and mental health conditions are not easily diagnosed in a single screening. Children may unconsciously mask symptoms, *which is not uncommon*. It is important for you as a resource parent to review the results of the initial screening and to continue being observant for any additional behaviors or concerns that arise as the child becomes more comfortable in the home.



Please communicate your observations about the child's behavior to the social worker.

As a resource parent with daily interactions with the child, you may determine that the child needs additional assessments or a higher level of services. In such instances, you can request a Determination of Intensive Needs and Support (DINS) assessment. Once CFSA completes the DINS assessment, the child might indeed qualify for a higher level of services. In these instances, you may also be eligible for an increased rate that could help supplement the services. *Check with the assigned social worker or your resource parent support worker.*

In addition to the first health screening, CFSA's standard practice includes a 30-day comprehensive medical and dental evaluations. Please discuss your schedule with the social worker so that you may schedule appointments according to a mutually agreeable time. Similarly, you will also schedule other appointments throughout the time the child is in your care, including annual physicals, urgent care visits, summer camp physicals, etc.

Note: If you have trouble identifying a physician for ongoing care for the child, please ask a nurse from HHAC for assistance. It is a good idea to carry the HHAC on-call telephone number with you at all times: 202-498-8456.

Meeting the Social Worker

The family's assigned social worker will schedule a meeting in your home at a time that is mutually convenient within the first three days (72 hours) of a child joining your family.

The social worker will visit your home at least once per month throughout the time you are caring for the child. The social worker will also assess the child's needs as well as your own needs each time there is a visit in your home. The resource parent support worker is also required to make monthly visits to the resource home when you have a child in care with you. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out directly to the social worker or support worker.

Passport Folder

The Placement Passport contains information specific to each child, including copies of the child's birth certificate, Medicaid card, court orders, medical history, etc. Your assigned resource parent support worker (RPSW) and the child's assigned social worker are responsible for gathering all required documents outlined in a placement passport checklist, included in the folder. Either the RPSW or the social worker will deliver this packet of information to you as the child's resource parent.

The Passport checklist is divided into seven sections:

1. **General information**, e.g., an introductory letter, a photo of the child, Social Security Card, etc.
2. **Contact information**, e.g., social work team contacts, emergency contacts, and birth family contacts.
3. **Health information**, e.g., medical screening results, history of medical and dental exams, immunization records, allergies, and specific diagnoses.
4. **Continued care information**, e.g., the child's current case plan, including services and supports.
5. **Education information (as applicable)**, e.g., school enrollment, report cards, educational services.
6. **Court information**, e.g., hearing dates and visitation plans.
7. **Office of Youth Empowerment (for youth age 14 and older)**, e.g., life skills, career counseling, secondary education assistance, financial literacy and savings.

If you have any questions about the information in the Passport folder, please feel free to ask your RPSW who will be happy to answer!

At the time a Child Joins Your Home

You will need to share house rules and guidelines so that new children in your home understand your boundaries. It is important to do this in a delicate way that honors the fact that they are becoming part of a new home life. Especially for older youth, inviting them to be part of making house rules can be very welcoming and inclusive.

CFSA does its best to keep sibling groups in the same home *except* when there is a clinical or court-ordered reason to have siblings in different homes. CFSA also tries to keep siblings (and all children) in their neighborhoods of origin, whenever possible. That way, children maintain a sense of community belonging. They can stay in their same school, maintain their existing friendships, and remain in familiar surroundings.



We've already written this but it's worth repeating: *depending upon the child's family situation, social workers will continue to seek relatives who are willing and able to care for the child in out-of-home care, even after the child has joined your family.* If social workers do locate an appropriate kinship caregiver, the Agency may plan a move for the child into their relative's care. Under these circumstances, the Agency should provide you with 10 days' notice before the move occurs [[DC Code §16-2320\(g\)](#)].

The Family Team Meeting

In most cases, within 7 days of a child being separated from caregivers, CFSA schedules a Family Team Meeting (FTM). This is a critical, time-sensitive opportunity for initiating conversations among the child's family members and the social workers. Even though resource parents do not usually attend the first FTM, the meeting is such an important step that CFSA encourages resource parents to read the online [FTM policy](#).

The Icebreaker Meeting

CFSA encourages social workers to build natural opportunities for birth and resource parents to meet, both initially and continually, and to build a relationship between the two sets of parents for the best interest in the child. If no one has mentioned an icebreaker meeting but you think an icebreaker would be helpful to build a relationship with the birth parent, please let your resource parents support worker and their supervisor know.

Stabilization

Just like all families, resource families experience ups and downs. CFSA is here to support you through a variety of means:

- ▶ **The REACH¹ Support Line 833-443-3775** – The REACH telephone support line provides assistance when you need to talk through a tough situation (e.g., a child who is verbally aggressive or a child who fails to follow house rules, like curfews). Contact the REACH Support line Monday through Friday from 5pm to 12am and on weekends and holidays from 2 pm to 12 am.
- ▶ **Child and Adolescent Mobile Psychiatric Services (ChAMPS)** – When a child's behavior is at risk of harm to self or others, call (202) 481-1440, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ▶ **Ongoing assessments** – Every time a social worker visits your home, she or he should complete an assessment of your needs as a resource parent. Needs can range from furniture to clothing vouchers to services for the child. The social worker also completes informal safety and risk assessments of the child, including risks to placement stability.
- ▶ **Team Meetings** – Team meetings involve the child's birth parents, if appropriate, the guardian *ad litem*, the court appointed child advocate (if applicable), the age-appropriate child, the social worker, the resource parent, and any other relevant team members such as attorneys, school staff, therapists or extended family members. Team meetings are an appropriate vehicle for you as the resource parent to share any placement concerns, recommendations, and solutions. *You should feel free to request a team meeting!*
- ▶ **Coaching and Supports** – Resource parents can take advantage of additional trainings on child development and addressing crises through CFSA's Child Welfare Training Academy. You can also reach out for resource parent group support through CFSA or through the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center. Behavioral support and supervision services are also available for resource parents who have youth with extraordinary needs.

¹ REACH (Recruit, Educate, Advocate, Collaborate, and Help) is a CFSA initiative specific to resource parent recruitment and retention.

If at any time, you need additional services, you can reach out to the child's social worker or your resource parent support worker. You should also feel free to make requests to the social worker's supervisor if you are not getting the response you need. Another option for problem resolution is to contact the DC Office of the Ombudsperson for Children at 202-671-1321 or <https://ofc.dc.gov/> <https://ofc.dc.gov/>.

Disruptions

If you cannot meet the child's behavioral or medical needs or if you feel you are unable to continue caring for the child, your first step is to share your circumstances and concerns with the social worker and the resource parent support worker. If you are convinced that the child in your home is at risk of disrupting for other reasons, the social worker can arrange for a disruption staffing. In these cases, the disruption staffing can serve as a planning tool to determine whether the Agency needs to provide greater support or additional resources to allow the child to remain in your home. *In most cases, avoiding placement disruption is better for the child.* However, if the child does need to leave, the disruption conference can help you and the social worker to decide next steps. *The goal of the staffing is to minimize the potential for additional trauma while exploring how best to increase the child's well-being.*

If you have decided having a child in your home will just not work for you, your family, or the child, you have the right to request a placement change. CFSA requests that you give the Agency 30 days' notice to provide sufficient time to plan for the child's safe departure from your home, *even though* District regulations require that you give a minimum of 10 days' notice, except when the child presents a significant safety issue. The Agency will try to accommodate a change request *AFTER* all efforts to maintain the child in your home have been exhausted by you, the child, and the Agency.

Remember: CFSA is also mandated by law to give you a 10-day notice before moving a child from your home unless the move is ordered by the Family Court or determined to be necessary due to safety needs. In these cases, the court order may dictate that a move occur immediately or within several days. When a Family Court Judge orders a move, the social worker or someone on the child's team will notify you of the decision.