

# Kinship Care: Relatives and Suitable Others

*Thank you for stepping forward to support and care for your kinship child and their family!*



## If I'm a kinship caregiver caring for my kinship child, are they still in foster care?

Yes, your kinship child is in kinship foster care. DCYF considers children who are in our care and custody to be in "foster care." There are children in kinship care that are not under DCYF's care and custody. This situation is frequently referred to as "informal" kinship care.

## What is Kinship Care?

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) uses the term "kinship care" to refer to the full-time care of a child by relatives and suitable others. "Suitable others" is used to refer to unrelated kin. Across Washington State, at least 44,000 children are being cared for by a grandparent, and this is just one type of kinship care! Kinship care provides unique benefits for children, and it can include some unique challenges for the relatives and unrelated kinship caregivers who provide care. DCYF is committed to supporting you as you care for your kinship child.

This resource provides information that is especially helpful right after your kinship child is placed in your home. We encourage you to talk with your kinship child's caseworker about resources and information included in this publication.

## Within the First 10 Days of Placement

**Family Team Decision Making (FTDM):** An FTDM meeting takes place within 72 hours of children being placed in out-of-home care. Caregivers are notified and invited to participate. At the meeting, participants hear about the safety concerns that caused their kinship child to be removed from their parent. If you can participate, you are strongly encouraged to attend.

**Court:** A shelter care hearing is held within 72 hours of children being placed in out-of-home care. You will be notified and may attend. For more court information, ask your caseworker for the "Dependency Court Process for Caregivers" brochure.

**School:** School and educational stability are very important for children and youth. Keep children enrolled in the school they are currently attending until a "best interest determination" is completed. If a new school placement is approved, use information included in the placement paperwork from the caseworker. If you need help, please contact the caseworker or ask to speak with the school district's "foster care liaison." The FTDM or other shared planning meetings are a great place to have the best interest determination conversation.

**Medical:** Children need to have an initial health screen within five days of placement and a well-child exam before their 30th day of placement.

An interim voucher (or the child's existing Medicaid) will allow the caregiver to access medical care. Ask the provider to look up the child's Medicaid card. Even if it's not with Coordinated Care, the provider should be able to see the child's Medicaid eligibility.

**Health and safety visit:** A caseworker will visit you and your kinship child in your home during the first week.

**Background checks:** All household members age 16 and over must submit and pass a background check, and those age 18 and older must submit fingerprints.



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### How will I know if the caseworker changes?

Caseworkers do their best to inform caregivers when a case transfers to a new caseworker. Transfers can occur for a number of different reasons including the legal status of the case or workload. If you haven't heard from your caseworker or believe there may be a new caseworker, please attempt to contact the previous worker and ask them to share with you the name and contact information for the new caseworker. You can also email the supervisor or Area Administrator using the process described in the *Caregivers Communication Guide (CWP\_0073)* available online at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP\\_0073.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0073.pdf) or in Spanish at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP\\_0073SP.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0073SP.pdf).

## Who You Will Meet

**The DCYF caseworker** will be your main point of contact. The caseworker's focus is to keep children safe, ensure children's well-being, and to help the family reunify or establish another permanent plan. They make efforts to return children to their parents, partner with families to create a case plan, and report progress and challenges to the court. If you believe your kinship child needs support or services or if you need assistance to continue caring for your kinship child, let the caseworker know. Over the next 30 to 45 days, you will be contacted by different professionals. If you have any questions about who these individuals are and what information you can discuss with them, please ask the caseworker or supervisor. Share with the caseworker the best way and times to reach you, and plan together how to best communicate.

You can expect the caseworker to visit you and your kinship child at least once a month. Visits are a combination of scheduled and unannounced. Also, your child's case may transfer to a new caseworker.

Take a moment to write down the caseworker's name, phone number, and email (this can also be found in the placement paperwork you receive):

### Caseworker

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**The DCYF supervisor** supports the caseworker and is another person you may see or hear from more frequently. If you cannot reach your caseworker, please contact their supervisor.

Take a moment to write down the supervisor's name, phone number, and email:

### DCYF Supervisor

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



### Do other kinship caregivers feel overwhelmed and confused?

Yes, many kinship caregivers feel overwhelmed and need support. Here are two quick suggestions that may help; first, get in touch with the Alliance CaRES program by emailing [alliancecares@uw.edu](mailto:alliancecares@uw.edu) or by calling (206) 221-4913. The CaRES team can provide support and referrals to other resources. Next, grab a folder or binder and place in it all the paperwork you've received so far. Whenever you go to a meeting or meet with a caseworker, bring your folder or notebook with you and add your notes to it. This will help you locate documents and refer to them when speaking with different professionals.

## Who You Will Meet (Continued)

A **Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET)** worker will contact you within 30 days of placement to help assess the child's needs. After you get the CHET report from the CHET worker, caregivers can call Apple Health Core Connections at 1-844-354-9876 and ask for help with health care coordination for needs identified in the CHET.

An **Ongoing Mental Health (OMH) screener** will contact you as part of the follow up to the CHET assessment. They will screen your kinship child (ages 3 through 17 years old) for emotional/behavioral health needs. Children and youth who remain in care over six months are automatically considered; however, you can request an OMH referral at any time.

**Child Advocates, Guardians ad Litem (GAL), and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)** advocate for children in court.

A **Child's Attorney** may visit your home. Children and youth over age 12 may have an attorney, and children and youth whose parents' rights have been terminated will have an attorney.

**Licensing Division staff** will work with you to complete your home study and will discuss the benefits of getting licensed. The home study is used by DCYF to decide whether or not an adult can care for a child experiencing foster care. It includes information about a family's history and current family dynamics, home environment, health, and resources. The DCYF caseworker will make a referral to the Licensing Division, and they will complete the home study.

An approved home study is required for the continued placement of the children in your home. Learn more about the home study and benefits of getting licensed by reviewing the information on page 4.

## Navigating a New Role

You are a family member as well as a kinship caregiver; juggling these roles may be challenging. You may have sad or disappointed feelings about why your kinship child needed to be placed in your care. You may need to use new or different parenting approaches with your kinship child. These feelings and experiences are normal. Consider attending a support group where you can meet other kinship caregivers who share similar experiences. Talk to your caseworker at monthly visits, during shared planning meetings, over the phone, or via email and share what you are experiencing.

## Family Time Visits

Family Time visits are opportunities for children, siblings, and parents to stay connected while children are experiencing out-of-home care. You may be asked to assist with Family Time, and you need to make the children available for prearranged visits. Visits may be supervised by a Family Time provider depending on the case.

## Services and Referrals

Stay up to date on medical, dental and other appointments. Your kinship child may be referred for other services like counseling, too. Share with the caseworker the dates, times and purpose of appointments.

## We thought we completed a home study because a caseworker walked through our home and completed background checks. Another caregiver mentioned I might want to get licensed. What's the difference?



A “walkthrough,” home study, and license gather similar information, but they are different. Here is a quick explanation of each and a few benefits of getting licensed as a foster parent.

“Walkthrough” is the term DCYF staff use to refer to a quick review and assessment of a caregiver’s home when kinship children need an emergency placement. The walkthrough includes a household safety inspection and background checks for all household members over the age of 16.

A home study is an in-depth evaluation that ensures that children will be cared for by a person(s) that can meet their unique needs and provide a safe and nurturing home. A home study is required for every caregiver to be an ongoing placement resource (including relatives and unrelated kin). In addition to background checks and a walkthrough, the home study includes application materials, references, interviews, a more detailed home inspection, and, in some scenarios, recommendations to help caregivers prepare for a child to be placed in their home.

Foster care licensing builds off of the information collected during the home study. To become licensed, caregivers also need to complete additional forms and training requirements, including orientation, Caregiver Core Training (CCT), first-aid, blood-borne pathogens, and CPR.

Reading and thinking about these requirements may sound overwhelming.

Getting licensed is a process, and our goal is to support you through the experience. Licensing provides the greatest long-term financial support available to kinship caregivers. Many caregivers say that training helped them feel better prepared and supported and appreciated getting to meet other kinship caregivers and foster parents.

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, “But I want these kids to go home to their parent(s). This isn’t supposed to be a long-term placement.” We support you in wanting your kinship child to go home. In fact, reunification is our first and primary goal, but we know that sometimes a parent may need more support or time to learn new behaviors. Even if you think your kinship child will be placed with you for a short period of time, we encourage you to get licensed and begin benefiting from the supports available through licensing.

## Other Resources Available to You

*This alphabetical list includes resources that are provided by DCYF and our partners. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is highlighted first because we hope you will apply for TANF as soon as possible if you are eligible.*

**TANF:** TANF is an important financial resource that provides a monthly payment to unlicensed caregivers for eligible children in their care. **You are strongly encouraged to apply!**

Apply online at [www.washingtonconnection.org](http://www.washingtonconnection.org) or visit your local Community Services Office. While you may be asked for information about your income, your TANF eligibility will not be based on your income because you are a kinship caregiver. If you are applying in person or calling to ask questions about TANF, be sure to let the person you are speaking with know that you are an unlicensed kinship caregiver.

If you need help completing your application, our partners at the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Long Term Support Administration have created three videos that can help.

- Application Overview: <https://youtu.be/o6RXcMAFvOw>
- Online Application: <https://youtu.be/XqXKPqWXzvk>
- Paper Application: [https://youtu.be/etCN\\_dbPMnQ](https://youtu.be/etCN_dbPMnQ)

**Alliance CaRES:** The Alliance Caregiver Retention, Education and Support (CaRES) program can provide support and help you learn more about the benefits of and process to become licensed. Contact CaRES at [alliancecares@uw.edu](mailto:alliancecares@uw.edu) or visit [alliancecarescommunity.org](http://alliancecarescommunity.org).



## Other Resources Available to You (Continued)

### American Indian and Alaskan Native resources:

Please visit <http://washingtribes.org> for more information.

**Child care:** Employed caregivers may access child care through the assigned caseworker.

**Clothing vouchers and transportation reimbursement:** Access through the assigned caseworker.

**Concrete funds:** Ask your caseworker about concrete funds that can be used to purchase needed goods and supplies to help unlicensed kinship caregivers meet the needs of children in their care.

**Foster care licensing:** Visit [www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/become-a-foster-parent](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/become-a-foster-parent) to learn more and review the information on page 4 of this resource.

**Kinship Navigators** provide support to kinship families. They are available to listen to your experiences, share information and referrals to community resources, and provide support groups for kinship caregivers. Learn more information by visiting [www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services-kinship-care/kinship-care](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services-kinship-care/kinship-care).

**Medical coverage:** Children in out-of-home care are enrolled in Apple Health Core Connections (AHCC) for Medicaid coverage. Caregivers and youth can reach AHCC staff by calling 1-844-354-9876 (8am – 5pm), or by email anytime of the day at [AHCCTeam@coordinatedcarehealth.com](mailto:AHCCTeam@coordinatedcarehealth.com). You can also visit the website at [www.coordinatedcarehealth.com/members/foster-care.html](http://www.coordinatedcarehealth.com/members/foster-care.html) to find a provider, get details on benefits and services, or access member resources.

American Indian and Alaskan Native children may opt into AHCC, but are not automatically enrolled. Please contact Fostering Well Being (FWB) for Health Care Coordination at (360) 725-2626 or [fwb@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:fwb@dshs.wa.gov).

**Relative Guardianship Assistance Program (R-GAP):** While reunification is the preferred outcome – sometimes that is not possible. The R-GAP may provide a subsidy for children placed with a qualified licensed relative when it is determined during a shared planning meeting that a guardianship is in the child's best interests. There are a few steps that must occur for a guardian to be eligible for this benefit. The first step is for child to have lived at least six consecutive months with the relative caregiver who has been licensed for at least six consecutive months. An additional requirement for eligibility is to be Title IV-E eligible. To find out more about R-GAP benefits visit: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/4340-guardianship/43401-relative-guardianship-assistanceprogram-r-gap](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4340-guardianship/43401-relative-guardianship-assistanceprogram-r-gap) or ask your assigned caseworker.

**School District Foster Care Liaisons:** School District Foster Care Liaisons can help answer questions and resolve concerns. To find your foster care liaison, please visit [www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/foster-care/foster-care-liaisonsdcyf-contacts](http://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/foster-care/foster-care-liaisonsdcyf-contacts).

**Support Groups:** We want you to know you are not alone. Support groups are ways for kinship care families to offer social and emotional support to one another. Support groups are a safe place to discuss the joys and challenges raising your grandchild, niece or nephew, or other relatives. You can laugh, cry, lean on, and learn from others who are walking in your shoes. To find a support group near you go to:

- [www.alliancecarescommunity.org/support-groups](http://www.alliancecarescommunity.org/support-groups)
- [www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/kinship-care-support-services](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/kinship-care-support-services)



### What's the best way to stay in touch with the caseworker?

The best way to stay in touch with the caseworker is using the arrangements that you and the caseworker agree to. Let the caseworker know how (phone, text, and email) and when during the day you like to communicate. Ask the caseworker for their preferences, too.

If you'd like to learn more about what's happening at DCYF, please sign-up to receive informational emails by visiting [www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/email-service](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/email-service).

## Other Resources Available to You (Continued)

**Training:** The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence offers Kinship 101, Relative/Kinship Caregiving: Navigating Change in Family Dynamics, Relative/Kinship Caregiving: Supporting the Child in Your Care, and other classes for caregivers. Visit [www.allianceforchildwelfare.org](http://www.allianceforchildwelfare.org).

**Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Visit [www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC/Eligibility](http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC/Eligibility) or call the Family Health Hotline at 800-322-2588.

## Feedback and Concerns

### DCYF Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline:

Call 866-ENDHARM (866-363-4276) 24 hours a day/seven days a week to report child abuse or neglect.

### DCYF Office of Constituent Relations:

This office can address case-specific concerns as well as concerns about your interactions with DCYF. They can be reached by phone at 800-723-4831 or by email at [ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov).

### Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds:

This office receives and may investigate complaints about action or failure to act for children or families involved with DCYF. They can be reached by phone at 800-571-7321 or online at [ofco.wa.gov](http://ofco.wa.gov).