Kinship Care:

Relatives and Suitable Others

THANK YOU

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

Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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WHAT IS KINSHIP CARE?

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) uses "kinship care" to refer to the full-time care of a child by relatives, suitable others (friends or unrelated kin) or relative defined by tribal code or custom (licensed or unlicensed). Currently, more than half of the children and youth experiencing foster care in Washington state are placed in kinship care. Caring for a child is a significant responsibility and DCYF is committed to supporting you during this time.

This publication provides information about:

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

Yes, your kinship child is in foster care. DCYF considers children who are in DCYF care and custody to be in "foster care" or "out-of-home care."

Do other kinship caregivers feel overwhelmed and confused?

Yes, many kinship caregivers feel overwhelmed and need support. The Alliance CaRES program can provide resource referrals and additional support. CaRES is made up of peer caregivers (past and present) so they have an idea of what you may be going through.

Contact the CaRES team at **alliancecares@uw.edu** or (206) 221-4913.

Tip: *Grab a folder or binder and put all the paperwork you've received in it. Whenever you go to a meeting or meet with a caseworker, bring it with you and add to it. This way, you have what you need when speaking with different professionals*

WITHIN THE FIRST 10 DAYS OF PLACEMENT

The first couple of days can feel all-consuming. Here is a little insight into what you may experience.

FAMILY TEAM DECISION MAKING (FTDM):

A FTDM meeting happens within 72 hours of children being placed in out-of-home care. Sometimes the FTDM can occur before the child is placed out-of-home. Caregivers are notified and strongly encouraged to participate. The parent(s) must agree for you to participate in this meeting. At the meeting, participants learn about the safety concerns that caused the child to be removed from their parent(s).

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. Read the *Dependency Court Process for Caregivers*(CWP_0065) brochure for more court-related information: **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0065**

HEALTH AND SAFETY VISIT:

A Health and Safety visit is a technical term for when the case worker from DCYF visits you and your kinship child at home. These visits happen during the first week of placement and then monthly. The caseworker will check in on how things are going, look at where the child sleeps, and talk about the child's well-being. They'll also spend some time alone with the child to hear their perspective.

FAMILY TIME VISITS:

Visitation is critical to strengthening and preserving the family bond and achieving successful reunification. Foster parents and kinship caregivers are essential partners in maintaining connections between children in out-of-home care and the people who are important to them. For more information see our *Caregiver Tip Sheet* (22-1714) at **https://dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/22-1714** and Family Time Visitation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/FamTimeFAQs.pdf**

What You'll Need To Do:

COMPLETE BACKGROUND CHECKS:

Remember all household members, ages 16 and older, must submit and pass a background check, and those aged 18 and older must submit fingerprints.

APPLY FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORTS:

Initial License: Approximately two weeks after placement, you can apply for an Initial License (see Kinship Licensing section for more information). However, there is a lag between placement, issuing the Initial License, and the first payment. The Initial License entitles a kinship caregiver to reimbursement like a foster parent. But it can take as long as 60 days for the funds to come to you so in the mean time we encourage you to apply for the Non-Needy TANF grant.

The Non-Needy Relative Grant is for kinship caregivers and not just relatives. You just need to be unlicensed and be caring for someone else's child. You are strongly encouraged to apply to receive immediate financial support for the child in your care.

The Non-Needy TANF Grant provides a monthly payment to unlicensed caregivers for eligible children in their care.

Eligibility is based on the child's income and does not consider your income. You may be asked for information about your income, but this won't impact the child's grant. For more information, visit **https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/non-needy-relative-loco-parentis-and-legal-guardian-grant**.

You can apply online at **https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/** or visit your local Community Services Office (CSO). 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.

These videos can provide support while completing your application:

- Application Overview: **https://youtu.be/o6RXcMAFvOw**
- Online Application: **https://youtu.be/XqXKPqWXzvk**
- Paper Application: **https://youtu.be/etCN_dbPMnQ**

Good Cause Waiver: If you are concerned that Child Support Enforcement will go after the parents for child support, ask the CSO staff about a Good Cause Decision. In certain cases, child support will not be considered against the parents.

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.

The **interim voucher** (or the child's existing Medicaid) will allow you, as the caregiver, to access medical care for your kinship child. The medical provider should be able to find the child's insurance information. **(https://www.coordinatedcarehealth.com/content/dam/centene/Coordinated%20Care/foster-care/pdfs/508_AHCC-InterimVoucher.pdf**)

SCHOOL:

Keep children enrolled in the school they are currently attending unless a "best interest determination" is completed. The FTDM or other shared planning meetings are great places for the "best interest determination" conversation to occur.

If a new school placement is approved, use information included in the placement paperwork from the caseworker to enroll the child in a new school.

If you need additional help, contact the caseworker or ask to speak with the school district's foster care liaison. **(https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/foster-care/foster-care-liaisonsdcyf-contactsschool-contacts**)

WHO YOU WILL MEET

Different professionals will contact you about your kinship child. If you have any questions about who these individuals are and what information you can discuss with them, please ask your caseworker or their supervisor.

Knowing who to call for different things can be hard. There is a publication called *Who to Contact Guide* (LIC_0081) that can be found at **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/LIC_0081**

How will I know if the caseworker changes?

- Transfers to new caseworkers happen. Caseworkers do their best to inform caregivers when a case is transferred.
- 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 for 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). (**https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0073**)

The DCYF caseworker will be your main point of contact. The caseworker's focus is to:

- Keep children safe
- Ensure children's well-being
- Help the family reunify or establish a permanent plan
- Work with caregivers

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.

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.

Tip: Take a moment to either write down or put in your cell phone the name, phone number, and email for your caseworker and their supervisor (this information is also in the placement paperwork you received). You may be getting a lot of phone calls and it's important to pick up the phone or call the staff back as soon as you can.

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

Let the caseworker know when and how you prefer to be reached (phone, text, and email). Ask the caseworker for their preferences, too.

What if I can't remember the caseworker's contact information?

Your first resource is the child's caseworker. If you don't know the caseworker or office's phone number, please visit **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/contact-us** .

Another option is to review the *Who to Contact guide* (LIC_0081): **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/LIC_0081**

Alliance CaRES:

Around the first week, you will hear from the CaRES program. The CaRES team can provide support and referrals to other resources, including support groups. You can also reach them at **alliancecares@uw.edu** or 206-221-4913.

Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET):

A worker will contact you within 30 days of placement to help assess the child's needs. If the CHET report identifies any medical needs for your kinship child, call Apple Health Core Connections at 1-844-354-9876 and ask for help with health care coordination. For educational needs, contact your local school district.

Ongoing Mental Health (OMH) screener:

A worker will contact you as part of the follow-up to the CHET assessment. They will screen your kinship child (ages 3 through 17) for emotional/behavioral health needs. You can request an OMH referral at any time.

Child Advocates, Guardians ad Litem (GAL), and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA):

Their role is to advocate for children in court. The kinship child's advocate may visit your home.

Child's Attorney:

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

Licensing Division (LD) staff:

They will contact you to offer an initial license and help you sign into the caregiver application portal (WA CAP). Find more information about initial licenses in our *Initial License Q&A* (CWP_0115): **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0115**

Remember, you can always find your LD/CPA worker's contact information listed in WA CAP under "Need help?" on the side of the page.

What if I have a general question or want to learn more?

For general non-case specific questions, contact the Alliance CaRES at **alliancecares@uw.edu** or by calling 206-221-4913. For case specific questions, reach out to your case worker.

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

NAVIGATING A NEW ROLE

You are a family member and a kinship caregiver; juggling these roles may be challenging. You may have sad or disappointed feelings about why you need to care for your kinship child. 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 to meet other kinship caregivers with similar experiences. Contact the Alliance CaRES at **alliancecares@uw.edu** or 206-221-4913 to learn about support groups.

Talk to your caseworker at monthly visits, during shared planning meetings, over the phone, or via email to share what you are experiencing.

Another helpful resource is the *Caregivers Guidelines for Supporting Normal Childhood Activities for Children and Youth Experiencing Out-of-Home Care* (CWP_0078) **(https://dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0078)**.

Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave

In some cases, you may be eligible for the Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave. Check out the eligibility guidelines and how to apply at **https://paidleave.wa.gov/app/uploads/2021/06/Parents-guide-V.5-FINAL.pdf**

Family Time Visits

Family Time visits allow children, siblings, and parents to stay connected while children are experiencing out-of-home care. Depending on the case, a Family Time provider, other family members, or even you may supervise visits. You need to make the children available for prearranged visits.

Services and Referrals

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

ABOUT KINSHIP LICENSING

DCYF is committed to placing children and youth with kinship caregivers and supporting caregivers through the licensing process. The following section will provide you with the basic information needed to proceed with both an initial license and a full kinship or foster care license.

❶ Becoming an Approved Caregiver

A "walkthrough," home study, fingerprint background checks, and a kinship license gather similar information, but they are all different processes. Here is a quick explanation of each, please talk to your Licensing Division (LD) worker for more details.

WALKTHROUGH:

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. Both the walkthrough and background checks are required at the time of placement.

FINGERPRINT BACKGROUND CHECKS:

Required within 14 days of placement for all household members 18 and older. We will set up an appointment for you to complete your fingerprinting. The appointment information usually comes via email.

INITIAL LICENSE:

Optional, temporary, and issued for up to 90 days to provide funding while you complete the full licensing process.

HOME STUDY:

An in-depth evaluation that ensures children are cared for by a person(s) who 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 care for children.

KINSHIP LICENSE:

Builds off the information collected during the home study. We encourage you to get this optional license because you'll complete most of the steps during the home study, and licensing comes with the most ongoing financial support and resources that DCYF can provide.

Also, kinship caregivers may choose to get licensed to care for children and youth who are not relatives or family friends. There are additional licensing requirements, but those can be built off your kinship license.

Remember, we are here to support you no matter which path you choose.

2 Licensing Division Worker vs. Child Welfare Caseworker

You will work with people from both the Licensing and Child Welfare Divisions. Each has a different role.

Licensing Division (Home Study/ Licensing Worker)	Child Welfare (Caseworker)
• Provides support, resources, and guidance through the home study and licensing process. • Maintains licensed kinship homes by providing ongoing support and completing kinship license renewals. • Investigates licensing concerns and allegations of abuse.	• Provides support and resources to caregivers (licensed or unlicensed). • Responsible for payments, visitation, and reporting to the court. • Schedules monthly health and safety visits with the child and caregiver, coordinates team meetings, and ensures other required services are in place. • Creates the child's case plan while working with the child's family, caregiver(s), Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), and others involved.

3 Initial License

We realize many kinship caregivers unexpectedly open their homes to children who cannot safely remain in their own homes. The Initial License is a way to help alleviate the financial strain of having a new child join your home. Once the Initial License is issued, the caregivers can claim foster care payments for 90 days while working towards full licensing.

It can take 45 to 90 days to receive your first foster care reimbursement for your Initial License. In the meantime, you may be eligible for other supports through your caseworker and our community partners, such as Non-Needy TANF, as outlined in Financial Supports on page 4.

But remember, once you start receiving monthly foster care reimbursement, you must report the change of income to the CSO by the 10th of the following month to avoid an overpayment. See Public Benefits and Foster Care Maintenance on page 11 for more information.

Read the publication *Initial Licensing Process* (CWP_0115) for more information about the Initial License: **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0115**

4 Benefits of Getting Licensed

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. The child will benefit from the supports available through licensing.

Below are some of the benefits you'll receive:

- The greatest amount of ongoing financial assistance that DCYF can provide.
  - If you become licensed, the children in your care are eligible to receive monthly foster care maintenance payments to assist in meeting their needs. At a minimum, you will be reimbursed:
    - $722 per month for each child you are caring for age 0-5
    - $846 per month for each child you are caring for age 6-11
    - $860 per month for each child you are caring for age 12+ for the initial license
    - $1,202.50 per month for each child you are caring for age 12+ for the kinship license
  - You may continue to receive a monthly foster care reimbursement for young adults over 18 who choose to remain in Extended Foster Care.
  - Visit the caregiver supports page for more information: **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/caregiver-supports-project**
- An assigned Licensing Division worker who can help with questions and share resources.
- Access to the Foster Parent Reimbursement and Liability Plan **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/5000-case-support/5200-foster-parent-liability-plan**.
- Two days of retention respite each month
- Access to training specifically designed for kinship caregivers

5 Steps for Getting Licensed

1. First, decide if you want to get licensed through the state or a Child Placing Agency (CPA). *Review the CPA and Tribal CPA Contact List for Kinship Licensing* (LIC_0147) to find a CPA that specializes in kinship licensing: **https://dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/LIC_0147**.
2. Complete an application in the Washington Caregiver Application Portal (WA CAP).
3. Meet with your assigned worker for home visits and interviews.
4. Your assigned LD/CPA worker will write your home study based off your application, home visits, and interviews.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET LICENSED?

The Kinship License is unique to each situation. If you are issued an Initial License, all efforts will be made to complete the licensing process within 90 days from the date your Initial License was issued.

HOW DO I FIND MY LD/CPA WORKER?

Once you set up a WA CAP account, you can find your LD/CPA worker's contact information listed in WA CAP under "Need help?" on the side of the page.

6 Public Benefits and Foster Care Maintenance

WILL FOSTER CARE PAYMENTS IMPACT MY PUBLIC BENEFITS?

Yes. Foster care payments are considered the child's income. They are countable when determining cash and food benefits administered by DSHS when including the foster child in the assistance unit (household).

This increase in income may decrease your benefit amount or cause some of your assistance unit's benefits to close due to going over the specific program's income limit. See the Economic Services Administration (ESA) Treatment of Income Chart for more information. **(https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/income-table-contents/treatment-income-chart)**

- **Impacts to payments:** Similar to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), foster care is meant to meet a child's basic needs. Foster care benefits reduce the grant dollar-for-dollar. *For example: If you are receiving $888 in TANF benefits and start receiving $800 in foster care. The TANF benefit would be reduced by $800, leaving an $88 benefit.*
- **Impacts on basic food:** Foster care income is considered unearned income that impacts food benefits. Food benefits are calculated on a case-by-case basis, factoring in other income, deductions like shelter costs and utilities, and the number of people in the household.

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

If you have other people receiving benefits in the assistance unit, you may choose to remove the child receiving foster care payments from the cash or food assistance unit, so their income won't be counted when determining benefits.

If you choose to remove the child receiving foster care from the assistance unit, the TANF and food benefits will be based on a smaller household size but will not include the foster care income when determining benefits for these programs.

If you choose to keep the child in the assistance unit, the foster care income will be used to determine the benefits.

When reporting this change, you can ask your DSHS worker to do a "trial eligibility" to explain how each option would impact your benefits.

WHAT ARE MY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS TO OTHER AGENCIES?

If you receive cash or food benefits, you must report changes required under WAC 388-418-0005 **(http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=388-418-0005)** by the tenth day of the month following the month the change happened.

For example: If you received your first foster care payment reimbursement in August, you must report this by Sept. 10.

For food benefits specifically, you must report a change in income if the income puts your combined assistance unit's income over 130% of the federal poverty level for your household size. You will find this amount on your food approval letter.

HOW CAN I REPORT CHANGES?

There are several ways you can report changes to the department:

- Online at **https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/** (report a change).
- In person at your local Community Services Office (CSO Locator: **https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-locations?field_geofield_distance%5Bdistance%5D=100&field_geofield_distance%5Bunit%5D=3959&field_geofield_distance%5Borigin%5D=&field_office_type_tid%5B0%5D=9651**
- In writing using the *Change of Circumstances* form (14-076) **(https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/forms/word/14-076.docx)**. Drop the form off at an office, fax to 888-338-7410, or mail to: DSHS - CSD Customer Service Center PO Box 11699, Tacoma, WA 98411-6699
- Using MyDocs Attachment Service **(https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/MyDocs_FAQs_December_2022.pdf)**
- Over the phone, Monday – Friday between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. at 1-877-501-2233

Other agency programs eligibility and rules may change. It's always best to contact that program directly with specific questions.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Provided by DCYF and community partners.

Alliance CaRES: helps kinship caregivers understand the licensing process and provides ongoing support through mentorship, training, support groups, and events. Connect with CaRES for help understanding the complex child welfare and court system, managing challenging behaviors, and partnering with others to support children and youth experiencing foster care: **alliancecares.org**, **alliancecares@uw.edu**, or 206-221-4913.

American Indian and Alaskan Native resources: Visit **http://washingtontribes.org** for more information.

Child Care: Employed caregivers may access child care through their assigned caseworker.

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

Concrete Goods: Ask your caseworker about Concrete Goods that can be used to purchase necessary items to help unlicensed kinship caregivers meet the needs of children in their care. Your licensing division worker can buy items required for a kinship license. Be sure to ask for support if needed.

DCYF Website: The Kinship Care page on the DCYF website is full of resources and information. Visit **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/foster-parenting/kinship-caregivers**.

Kinship Navigators: will listen to your experiences, share information and referrals to community resources, and offer support groups for kinship caregivers. Learn more by visiting **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 (8 a.m. – 5 p.m.) or emailing **AHCCTeam@coordinatedcarehealth.com**. You can also visit the website at **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**.

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 guardianship is in the child's best interests.

For a guardian to be eligible for this benefit, they must be licensed for at least six consecutive months, and the child must have lived with them for at least six consecutive months. To find out more about R-GAP benefits, visit **https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4340-guardianships/43401-guardianship-assistance-program-gap-and-extended-guardianship-assistance** 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**.

Support Groups: These 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 of raising your grandchild, niece, nephew, or other relatives. You can laugh, cry, lean on, and learn from others walking in your shoes. To find a support group near you, go to: **https://alliancecares.org/** or **www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/kinship-care-support-services**

Training: Caring for children is hard work, and working with the child welfare system can be confusing. DCYF's training partner, The Alliance, has a variety of free trainings to help at **https://risewiththealliance.org**. We encourage you to start with Kinship Core Training. It focuses on caring for relatives or family friends who are experiencing foster care. (**https://cpe.socialwork.uw.edu/alliance-courses/content/kinship-core-training**)

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Visit **www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC/Eligibility** or call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

FEEDBACK AND CONCERNS

DCYF Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: Call 1-866-363-4276 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 and concerns about your interactions with DCYF. You can call them at 1-800-723-4831 or email **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. You can call them at 1-800-571-7321 or message them online at **ofco.wa.gov**.

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CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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