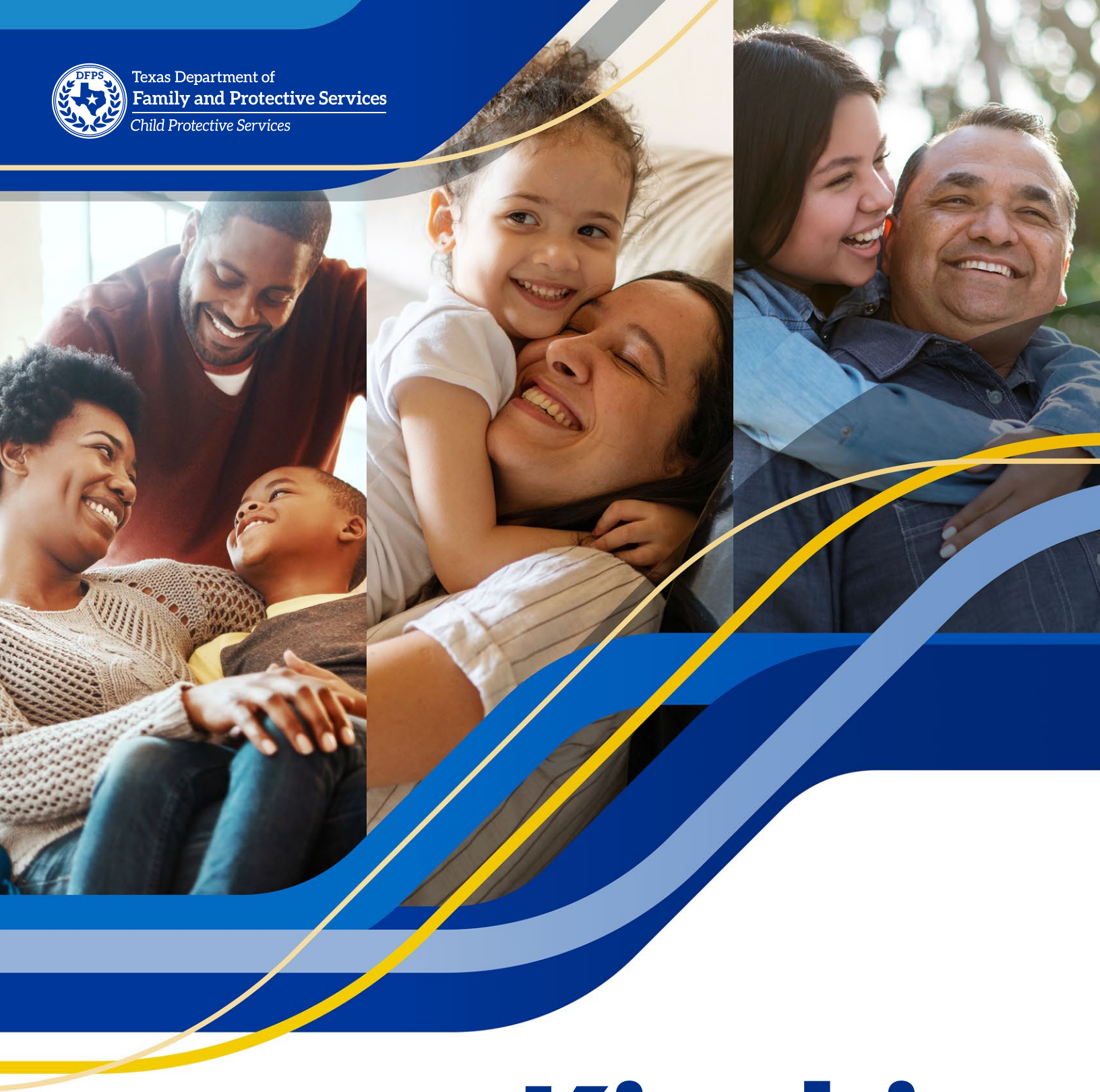




Texas Department of
Family and Protective Services
Child Protective Services



Kinship Manual

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services



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Introduction

Welcome to Kinship Care

Thank you for opening your heart and home to a child who is in Texas' legal custody due to abuse or neglect. This manual is provided to families working with Child Protective Services (CPS) or a Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC). An SSCC is a private agency that contracts with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to provide case management for families working with CPS.

SSCCs are set up to cover regional areas where they have more ties to local resources, which helps them to better serve families in those areas. CPS and each of the SSCC's are considered different divisions within DFPS, but they all work together.

DFPS is responsible for:

- Investigating reports of child abuse and neglect.
- Protecting children from abuse and neglect.
- Helping families become safer, stronger, and more stable.
- Finding permanent homes for children who cannot safely remain with their own families.

This manual will help you learn what to expect while you are caring for a child who is in DFPS's legal custody.





About Kinship Care

What is Kinship Care?

Unfortunately, some children cannot safely live with their parents. In these situations, relatives and family friends often step forward to care for the child. We call this “kinship care.”

Your willingness to take a child into your home shows great commitment and love. We understand that adding a child to your home will create challenges for your family. We are here to help you during this time.

How does a child come into Kinship Care?

When DFPS removes a child from their home, a court must consider placing the child with a relative or family friend.

However, the family can have a say in the placement process. At any time, parents and other family members can recommend a specific caregiver for the child.

DFPS considers the parents’ desires about the care provided to their child whenever possible.

DFPS must prioritize kinship placements prior to any other placement. If placement with a kinship caregiver is unavailable or inappropriate, the child may enter foster care.

What are its benefits?

Kinship Care:

- Provides love and care in a familiar setting.
- Gives parents hope that the child will remain connected to the birth family.
- Allows the child to live with people they know and trust.
- Maintains the child’s sense of identity and positive self-esteem.
- Helps the child make and sustain extended family connections.
- Continues family traditions and memories.
- Helps the child build healthy relationships within the family.
- Supports the child’s need for safety and well-being.
- Creates stability in the child’s life.



My Responsibilities

What needs to happen before the child can live with me?

The placement must be in the child's best interest and determined to be appropriate and safe.

DFPS will conduct a "home assessment," which is a tool that helps us decide if the child will be safe in your care.

As part of the assessment, we check the criminal history and abuse and neglect history of all household members 14 and older.

What am I expected to do?

Kinship caregivers have the following responsibilities:

- Provide a safe and loving home for the child.
- Sign and follow the Kinship Caregiver Agreement, in which you agree to clearly defined expectations and responsibilities.
- Make sure the child completes all necessary health checkups and assessments (see below for more information).
 - *Star Health Medicaid will call you to get the child's medical history, explain benefits, and help you set up appointments.*
 - *If you do not receive a call within 48 hours, call STAR Health Member Services at 1-866-912-6283.*
- Provide services, support, and supervision for the child as outlined in the child's plan of service. This plan discusses the child's needs, how to address them, and who is responsible.
- Follow the Parent-child Visitation Plan.
- Serve as an acting parent role to the child.
- Help the child succeed in school, including working with the school, caseworker, and others to ensure the child receives the services and support they need.
- Work with the caseworker to understand the child's needs. Seek support when needed to help them develop positive behavior patterns.
- Communicate with your conservatorship and kinship caseworkers to support a stable placement for the child.
- Work with staff to plan a permanent living arrangement for the child.
- Ask the child's caseworker for information that will help you care for the child.
- Notify the caseworker and supervisor as soon as possible but no later than one day if the child:
 - *Has a significant change in their health, including mental or behavioral health conditions, enrollment or participation in a drug research program, or initial prescription of a psychotropic medication.*
 - *Is seriously injured or dies.*
 - *Runs away.*
 - *Returns after running away.*
- Notify the caseworker and supervisor within two days if:
 - *A person who makes medical decisions for the child refuses treatment or medication for the child's physical, behavioral, or dental condition.*
 - *There is a change in dosage or discontinuation of the child's psychotropic medication.*
 - *The child has a major achievement, or there is a change in school performance, such as a failing grade that may prevent the child from advancing to the next grade level, or a serious disciplinary event.*
- Notify the caseworker if there is a plan to travel with the child or youth:
 - *For in-state travel, there must be written approval by the caseworker or supervisor for any travel that is more than 72 hours from the home, and for more than 48 hours with a person who is not a caregiver or relative.*
 - *For out-of-state travel (Outside of Texas), there must be written approval by the caseworker or supervisor for any travel that is more than 72 hours from the home and notification to the caseworker by text/phone/email for anything under 72 hours.*
 - *For out-of-state travel (Outside of the United States), there must be caseworker or supervisor approval and require the court's written approval.*

3 in 30

It is important that children in foster care are seen early and often by medical professionals. There are three separate tools for assessing the medical, behavioral, developmental strengths and needs of children and youth entering DFPS conservatorship. Texas statute defines which entry assessment tools are required for each child. These different assessments chart the path for services of children and youth from the beginning of their time in care.

1. 3-Day Medical Exam

This medical screening is intended to provide a baseline of a child's or youth's physical health when they are first removed and enter foster care. As of September 1, 2023, a change to the "Three-Day Exam" policy means that not all children will automatically receive a Three-Day Exam. Children who meet the eligibility requirements at the time that DFPS takes conservatorship will receive an initial medical examination from a physician by the end of the third business day after the child is removed.

The eligibility requirements include if the child was removed for physical or sexual abuse, has an obvious physical injury, has a chronic medical condition, is medically complex, or has a diagnosed mental illness. Each child is assessed individually for these criteria. There are a few exceptions when the child/youth is in an inpatient hospital setting or requiring urgent medical treatment at the time of removal. Although every child does not meet the eligibility requirements for a 3-Day Exam, all youth in foster care may receive an exam by a physician in the event of illness or injury after removal.

2. Texas Health Steps

You must make sure the child receives a Texas Health Steps medical checkup within 30 days of coming into DFPS custody. The Texas Health Steps medical checkup is a detailed physical and medical assessment for the child.

The child must also receive regular preventive healthcare. Texas Health Steps medical checkups are specific appointments that meet recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Children under age 3 need these checkups:

- 3 to 5 days after birth.
- 2 weeks after birth.
- At the following months after birth:
2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 24, and 30.

Children
ages 3–20
years old need
Texas Health Steps
medical checkups at
least once a year (within
one year after the last
checkup and no later than the
child's next birthday).

If the child is 6 months old or older, they must also receive a Texas Health Steps dental checkup scheduled within 60 days of coming into DFPS's legal custody. To find a provider, call STAR Health Member Services at 1-866-912-6283. If the child is younger than 6 months old, they must have a Texas Health Steps dental checkup within 30 days of turning 6 months old. The child should have a Texas Health Steps dental checkup every 6 months until they turn 21 years old.

Note: A regular physical exam cannot take the place of a Texas Health Steps medical checkup. A Texas Health Steps checkup includes a physical exam and other assessments.

3. Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment

The CANS Assessment is a trauma-informed behavioral health assessment. It is based on the child's development and includes a suicide screening. DFPS uses the results of this assessment for service planning, ensuring placement decisions meet each child's needs and making a permanent plan for the child.

All youth ages 3-17 must receive a Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment within the first 30 days after entering care, so that the results can be used to complete the Child Service Plan within the first 45 days. To schedule a checkup, call STAR Health Member Services at 1-866-912-6283.

For assistance in finding a provider, caregivers can contact the online Superior HealthPlan Provider Directory, which includes a list of available physicians, hospitals, drug stores, dentists, and other healthcare providers. You also can call Superior Member Services at (866) 912-6283 for assistance in locating 3 in 30 providers.

Your Regional Well-Being Specialist is a resource to answer questions about any of the three tools and help you coordinate with STAR Health if needed.



Safety, Health, and Early Intervention

Home Safety

Making your home safe is the most important thing to do. Home is a place to relax, explore, play, and enjoy spending time with family. Of course, accidents happen and there will be minor scrapes and bruises along the way, especially as children grow and discover new things. But serious injuries are often preventable.

An accident can happen in any area of your home. Some safety hazards are easy to see, such as leaving cleaning products within a child's reach. Others are less obvious. Here are some common safety precautions caregivers should take:

- Never leave a child alone in the bathtub or around water, including lakes, rivers, ponds, and pools.
- Store guns separately from ammunition, locked, and out of a child's reach.
- Store all medications in a locked box out of a child's reach.
- Do not co-sleep with a child, especially babies and toddlers.

Safe Sleep

The ABCs of infant sleep:

A – Sleep Alone

B – On their Back, with no blankets or bedding

C – In a Crib and cool

S – In a Smoke-free room

Do:

- Do put babies to sleep alone on their backs in a crib or on another firm surface with a tight-fitting bottom sheet. If the baby leaves a dent in the bed, it's too soft.
- Do keep babies away from second-hand smoke.
- Do dress babies lightly and control the room temperature.

Don't:

- Don't put babies to sleep with blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, or bumper pads.
- Don't cover a baby's face or let a baby cover their face with anything.
- Don't let babies sleep with older kids.
- Don't sleep with a baby, especially if you have been using alcohol or took medicine that could make you sleepy.
- Don't put babies to sleep on chairs, sofas, futons, beanbags, or cushions.
- Don't put babies to sleep on soft beds such as pillow-tops, waterbeds, or memory foam. If the baby leaves a dent in the bed, it's too soft.
- Don't expose babies to smoke.

For more safe parenting tips, visit getparentingtips.com.



Behavioral Health

The child may have a hard time adjusting to a new home. The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment helps us understand how we can best support the child.

When CANS is combined with a Texas Health Steps medical checkup, we can see a full picture of a child's strengths and needs. CANS also considers your strengths and input. This helps us create the best plan of service for the child and family.

You will receive a copy of the final assessment and the child's service plan. The service plan may recommend behavioral health services, such as a referral to a therapist. Therapy can address misbehavior, sadness, and anxiety caused by trauma and change of environment.

Asking the therapist about Trauma Informed Care treatment is a great start to address some of these issues. You should try psychotherapy or other forms of behavioral intervention before starting medications.

A doctor must evaluate the child before prescribing psychotropic medications. It is important to learn about all available treatment options, side effects, and label warnings.

However, if a doctor does prescribe a medication, the child should not stop taking it unless advised by a physician. Stopping medications can cause an adverse effect.

Early Childhood Intervention

The child's healthcare provider may refer you to Texas Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) if the child is younger than 3 years old.

ECI helps families access resources and improve the child's development through daily activities. Most services are provided in the home and are available statewide.

What am I expected to do?

- Tell your caseworker and the child's doctor if you have concerns about the child's development or behavior.
- Complete medical or specialized training to care for a child with primary or other special medical needs.



Education

Education is critical to every child's well-being and success. There are many federal and state laws and programs that support educational stability for children in care. If the child is old enough to attend school, including pre-kindergarten, we will give you an education portfolio. The education portfolio has documents you need to enroll the child into school as well as the child's school records.

You must enroll the child in school within two days of their placement. Children in DFPS care can be immediately enrolled in school with only a Designation of Education Decision-Maker Form, but you must submit all other missing records to the school within 30 days. Schools require proof of immunizations but can also give you a grace period (consult with your regional education specialist). Contact the child's caseworker or the education specialist/school foster care liaison if you need help transferring records.

The child can continue going to the last school they attended before entering care, if it is in the child's best interest. DFPS prohibits physical punishment of children in care. If the school asks for your permission to use corporal punishment, you must refuse.

Education in a home setting is allowed unless there is a court order that does not allow the education of the child in a home setting, the court finds that education of the services delivered in the home setting is not in the best interest of the child, or DFPS determines that federal law requires another school setting.

What am I expected to do?

- Enroll the child into school within 2 days.
- Provide the school with the Placement Authorization Form and Education Decision Maker Form at the time of enrollment.
- "Opt out" of corporal punishment.
- Ensure the child attends school regularly.
- Contact the caseworker or regional education specialist if you have concerns about the child's education.

Special Education

Special education is available because of a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which requires public schools to provide special education services to eligible students.

The child must have an identified disability and be struggling with school performance. When a child qualifies for special education, a public school provides services and instruction specific to the needs of that student.

With special education comes 504 accommodations; this term refers to protections and/or accommodations provided to a student with qualifying physical or mental needs. The Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee or team, including parents and educators, reviews the goals of the child and any other identified changes needed to help the child succeed.

The Special Education Process



The Legal Process

What documents will I receive?

At time of placement with a kinship caregiver, the caseworker must review the following forms with the caregiver and provide the kinship caregiver with signed copies:

- **Form 2085KO Placement Authorization**
Kinship or Other Non-Foster Caregiver
- **Form 2085B Attachment B**
Designation of Medical Consenters
- **Form 2279**
Placement Summary and the child's Sexual History Report, Attachment A
- **Form 2085-E**
Designation of Education Decision-Maker
- **Form 0695**
Kinship Caregiver Agreement
- **Kinship Manual**
- **Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care**

You will receive a copy of the child's current service plan and any service plan reviews, which are usually held at least once every six months. You will also receive a copy of the DFPS report to the court at least 10 days before any scheduled court reviews.

What information may I request about the child?

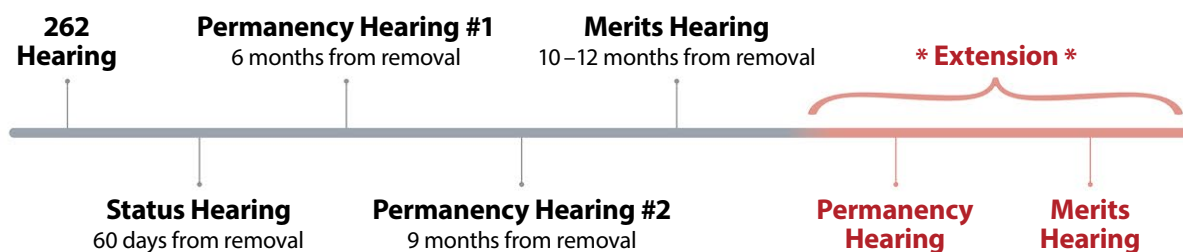
You can request information that you feel is necessary to meet the child's needs. This includes information



about the removal and or history of abuse and neglect, as well as the child's educational, medical, dental, social, emotional, or behavioral history. You can contact the caseworker at any time to request more information or clarification.

You can also request a copy of the child's case record if you take legal custody (permanent managing conservatorship or adoption). Visit DFPS's website for more information about requesting case records: www.dfps.texas.gov/policies/Case_Records/default.asp

The Legal Timeline





What court actions can take place?

The case may involve several different kinds of court proceedings, including those described below.

Emergency Hearings

If a child is removed from their parents' care without a court order, the court will schedule an emergency hearing for the next working day. This hearing allows the judge to learn why a child was removed and decide if the child should remain in custody until the adversary hearing.

Adversary Hearings

The court holds an adversary hearing within 14 days of the child being removed from their parents. At this hearing, the judge decides whether to return the child to the parents, or if the child would be at risk of continued abuse or neglect in the parents' care.

If the judge does not return the child to the parents, the judge may place the child with a relative or close family friend, if that person is appropriate and willing to help. Otherwise, the judge will place the child in foster care.

Status Hearings

The court holds a status hearing within 60 days of the child being in care. This hearing ensures that the parents have a Family Plan of Service and they understand the changes they must make for their child to return home.

Permanency Review Hearings

Six months after the adversary hearing, the court will review the parents' progress on making the appropriate changes from the Family Plan of Service and making sure the child's needs are being met. Before the hearing,

DFPS must:

- Submit a "permanency report," which is a document that gives the agency's view of the parents' progress.
- Make a final recommendation on the plan for permanency for the child.

The court may issue additional orders if the judge thinks it is necessary. The court holds additional permanency reviews every four months while the case is in temporary legal status.

Merits Hearing

Within 12 months after the child comes into DFPS custody, the court will either return the child to the parents or give permanent custody to a relative, close family friend, or DFPS. On rare occasions, the court may extend this time for up to six more months, for a total of 18 months.

Permanency Review Hearings After Final Order

If a court makes DFPS the child's permanent managing conservator, the court will review the child's placement and permanency plans every six months. The court's focus shifts to making sure DFPS keeps moving toward a permanent placement for the child and continues to monitor that the child's needs are met.

Note: *Parents may lose parental rights to their child if they cannot demonstrate that they can keep the child safe. Only a judge or jury can terminate a parent's rights. Decisions for each parent must be made separately. If the judge or jury decides to terminate both parents' rights to a child, the child will be eligible for adoption.*



Do I need to attend court hearings?

Your caseworker must notify you of any court hearings for the child in your care. You should attend the court hearings to hear the judges review of the child's and parents' progress. The judge decides where the child will live while the parents participate in services. During the hearing the judge may ask you for input. If they do you may talk to the judge about how the child is doing or any needs that the child has.

It is important for the child to play an active role in the court process. That's why children 10 years old and older receive their own notice for hearings. The child has the right to attend the hearing and speak to the judge.

You must discuss the notice with the child. This will help the child if they are nervous or confused about the notice or court hearing.

Important Information About Court Hearings

- If you cannot attend a court hearing, notify the caseworker or the child's attorney beforehand and give them an update about the child.
- Talk with the caseworker or the child's attorney after the court hearing to find out what happened at court and if there are new orders that affect the child or your household.

Note: Tell the caseworker or court if you need an interpreter because you cannot speak or understand English and/or if you are hearing or speech impaired.

How can I get an attorney?

If you think you may need an attorney, these contact options may help:

- Call 211 and ask for your local legal aid office.
- The State Bar of Texas lawyer referral service at (800) 252-9690.
- The Texas Legal Services Center (800) 622-2520 or www.tlsc.org

The court will appoint a special attorney for the child, known as attorney ad litem. The court may also appoint a person called guardian ad litem to represent the child's best interests. A guardian ad litem may or may not be an attorney.

What should I expect from caseworkers?

The child will have a caseworker who makes sure the child is safe and properly cared for. The caseworker will:

- Stay in regular contact with you.
- Visit your home at least once a month to see the child.

The caseworker also helps the parents take the necessary steps so the child can return home. You will also have a kinship worker to support you while you are caring for the child. The child's caseworker and kinship worker are your main contacts for the case.

Tell the caseworker if you require any disability or special needs services. The parents and the child's

caseworker together will plan for what needs to happen for the child to return home. If the child's parents do not make these changes and the child cannot return home, the caseworker will make recommendations for where the child should live permanently. This recommendation will be discussed at court hearings and meetings called permanency planning meetings.

What are the possible outcomes for a child in a legal case?

Substitute care is meant to be temporary. It can last from a few months up to a year, but some children do remain in substitute care longer.

In most cases, we first try to return the child to their parent's home. This is our primary "permanency goal" and is called reunification. We also have alternate permanency goals in case that is not possible. Here is an overview of possible permanency goals:

- Reunification.
- Adoption by a relative or non-relative.
- Permanent managing conservatorship to a relative or non-relative.
- Permanent managing conservatorship to a relative or non-relative, with Permanency Care Assistance.
- Joint managing conservatorship.
- Child remains in care and placed with a foster family with DFPS having permanent conservatorship.
- Child remains in care and is placed in some other family arrangement with DFPS having permanent conservatorship.
- Remaining in substitute care while preparing to transition to adulthood (aging out of care).
- Preparation for adult living with community assistance for youth who are at least 18 years old and who have a developmental disability.

Once we have a goal, we create a "permanency plan" to help us achieve it. However, the goal may change over

time, and it often depends on parents making positive changes in their lives and addressing the reasons for the child coming into care. The parents may contest the goal in court if they disagree with it unless the court has already terminated their parental rights.

Note: *Parents can voluntarily give up their parental rights by signing a document called a relinquishment. Signing a relinquishment is a serious matter. Parents should consider it carefully and discuss it with their attorney.*

If the parents sign a relinquishment, the court may terminate their parental rights, which means the parents are no longer the child's legal parents.

At that time, the parents will no longer be responsible for the child. When the child is free for adoption and the appropriate adoptive family (which may be the kinship caregiver) is selected, the child will be placed in a permanent home.

Also note there are some criminal acts that make a kinship caregiver ineligible to adopt a child. In these circumstances, DFPS cannot recommend the placement. However, a judge can order a child placed with such a kinship caregiver on a temporary or permanent basis.

What if the parents have problems caring for their child after the child is returned to them?

Sometimes there is an adjustment period when a child returns home. The parents can ask a therapist, attorney, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteer, and the child's caseworker for help. However, we will remove the child from the home again if the problems present the risk of or result in abuse or neglect. If we remove the child from the home again, we reconsider the child's permanency plan.

We will consider other permanency plans if returning the child to the parent's care is no longer a safe option.

Discipline, Visitation, and Normalcy

How do I discipline the child in my care?

The main purpose of discipline is to encourage good behavior, not to punish the child. Discipline must suit the child's needs and circumstances.

You should consider the child's age, developmental level, specific misbehavior, response to past discipline, and history, including past physical or emotional abuse.

Examples of appropriate discipline include:

- Establishing routines.
- Setting reasonable limits.
- Modeling appropriate behavior.
- Offering choices.
- Giving explanations.
- Repeating instructions.
- Using "time outs."
- Allowing logical or natural consequences.
- Reinforcing desired behavior.

Physical discipline is never appropriate for a child in kinship care. Because of the child's history of abuse or neglect, physical discipline will interfere with the child's ability to build trust, self-esteem, and self-control.

DFPS does not allow physical discipline, including open-handed spanking. Here are some other rules:

- Don't deprive the child of basic necessities, such as food.
- Don't use cruel, harsh, unusual, humiliating, demeaning, or unnecessary punishment.
- Don't threaten the child. This includes telling the child that they cannot see family or will be sent somewhere else to live.

The kinship worker, child's caseworker, and therapist can work together to help you deal with the child's behavior.



What visitation rules must be followed?

We know that the more children visit with their parents, the more likely they are to reunify with them. The court will address visitation issues, including whether someone must monitor or supervise the visits.

If appropriate, parents should visit the child regularly and show their love even though the child is not living with them. If the court orders supervised visits, the person responsible for supervising needs to understand the importance of closely monitoring the visit.

The person supervising the visit must be able to always see the child and hear what is being said to the child. The person must also be willing to stop any behavior or conversation between the parent and child that may be harmful to the child.

The caseworker will help provide you with the visitation plan. The caseworker will help you arrange visits. Contact the caseworker if a family visit must be canceled.



Normalcy

Normalcy is the ability of a child in care to live as normal a life as possible. This is also important in helping them become independent and learn about making good decisions. Examples of this could include staying overnight at a friend's house, attending sports/band summer camp, or a family weekend getaway within Texas.

Caring for a child in care can be hard. Children in care should have normal interaction and experiences within a family and participate in activities. Children in care should also participate in age and developmentally appropriate childhood activities.

There are many rules and requirements to follow, and some caregivers find it so difficult that they give up or stop trying.

As a result, some children in foster care miss out on the benefits and fun of normal childhood activities. Whenever possible, children and youth in foster care should have the chance to participate in normal childhood activities.

That's why federal law allows kinship caregivers to make decisions using what's called the "reasonable and prudent parent standard."

What is the reasonable and prudent parent standard?

There are many ways to describe what a reasonable and prudent (careful or cautious) parent would do.

A parent who is both reasonable and prudent makes decisions carefully and considers the benefits and the possible dangers. This helps the parent come to a sensible decision in the child's best interest.

When using the reasonable and prudent parent standard, caregivers must take "reasonable steps" to decide if an activity is a good fit for a child based on the child's age, maturity, and abilities. There are many ways to decide whether an activity is a good fit for a child.

Here are a few examples of reasonable steps:

- Have information about the child so you can make informed decisions. If you feel you do not have enough information, speak with the child's caseworker.
- Think about the type of activity as well as the child's mental and physical health and behavioral abilities.
- Think about where the activity will be held, who the child is going with, and when they will return.
- Consider the potential dangers of the activity and what safety issues and supervision the child needs to prevent possible harm.
- Think about all the information you have gathered and ask, "Is this an appropriate activity for a child this age?"

This law does not apply to parental visits. For information about visits, see the section titled "What visitation rules must be followed?" This law only applies to normal childhood activities, such as sports, sleepovers, and field trips.

It allows you, with the appropriate information and training, to make decisions that let kids be kids.



Assistance and Resources

What assistance and financial resources are available to help?

You may be eligible to receive assistance and financial resources to help in raising the child. You can find more information at the end of this manual in the Helpful Resources section.

For most government assistance, you need the following:

- Texas driver's license or another picture ID.
- A Social Security number for each adult and child (or proof that an application has been made for a number).
- A document that provides proof of relationship to the child.
- Proof of income.
- Proof of assets.
- Proof of rent and utilities costs.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

If you are related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption, the Temporary Assistance for Needy

Families (TANF) program may provide financial assistance and Medicaid for the child. TANF provides cash payments to help families pay for food, clothing, housing, and other essentials.

One-Time TANF for Relatives

A once-in-a-lifetime payment of \$1,000 to certain relatives caring for one or more related children. This help can be given to the relative only one time, no matter how many other related children live in the home or if other children move in. This includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, and brothers (this includes great-grandparents, great-aunts, and great-uncles) who care for a child who gets TANF, are 25 or older, and meet the income qualifications.

Kinship Caregiver Reimbursement Program

The Kinship Reimbursement Payment is a monthly payment per child of up to half of the daily basic foster care reimbursement rate paid to a foster family home. If the kinship caregiver qualifies, then they will receive the monthly payments for up to twelve months.

You can ask your kinship worker for more information about the program.

Post-Permanent Managing Conservatorship Annual Reimbursement

If you obtain permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) of the child, and all other eligibility requirements are met, you may request a \$500 annual reimbursement for child-related expenses for the three years following the award of PMC, or until the child reaches age 18, whichever comes first.

State College Tuition Waiver

If you became the child's permanent managing conservator on or after September 1, 2009, the child may be eligible for free state college tuition. The youth must enroll by their 25th birthday. For more information, talk to the child's caseworker or your kinship worker.

STAR Health

Most children in care are covered by STAR Health Medicaid, which includes medical, dental, vision, behavioral health, and prescription healthcare services. STAR Health Medicaid will also cover most training that you need to care for a child with primary medical needs. To use these services, you must use healthcare providers in the STAR Health network.

Star Health has a tool on its website called Health Passport. It allows you to see the child's health information like immunizations, doctor visits, medications, and dental visits.

You can use STAR Health Passport if:

- You are named the child's medical consentor (this will usually happen).
- The child is enrolled in STAR Health Medicaid.

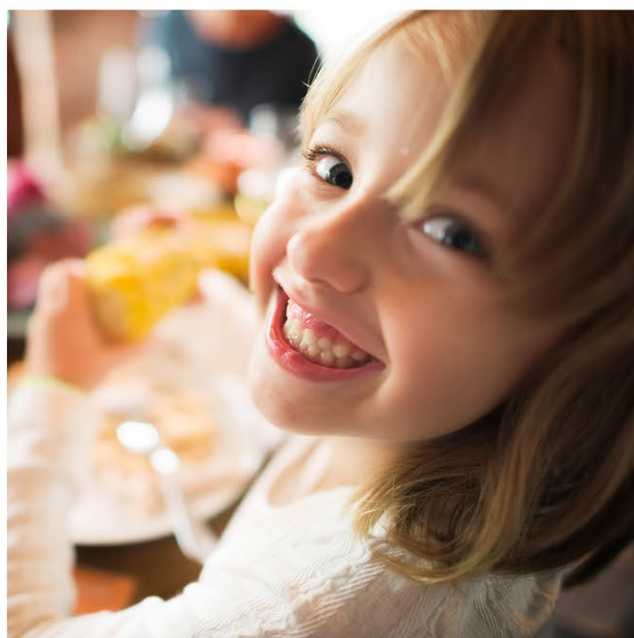
Ask your child's caseworker or kinship worker about using Health Passport.

Daycare Assistance

You may qualify for daycare assistance if you meet certain criteria. As funding allows, DFPS provides full-time day care services during spring break and summer vacation for children who attend a full-time school program. Caregivers must meet the employment eligibility criteria. Talk to your kinship worker or the child's caseworker for more information.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is also known as food stamps. SNAP helps low-income families buy nutritious food from grocery stores. When applying to SNAP ask about possible free lunch programs.



Women, Infants, and Children Program

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program can help grandparents and other relatives buy nutritious food for the children in their care. WIC offers food assistance and nutritional screening to low-income pregnant women, women with infants 11 months or younger, and children younger than 5.

Supplemental Security Income

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assists grandparents and other relatives raising children who are blind or disabled. Managed by the U.S. Social Security Administration, SSI provides a cash benefit to the child.

To qualify for benefits, the child must be younger than age 18 and meet the SSI disability, income, and asset criteria. Children younger than age 18 are eligible for

Social Security benefits under Old-Age Survivors and Disability Insurance if the child's parent is collecting retirement or disability insurance benefits, or if the parent is deceased.

Grandparents and other relatives can apply for benefits on behalf of the child based on the work record of the child's parent.

Survivor Benefits

Survivor benefits provide monthly payments to eligible family members of people who worked and paid Social Security taxes before they died.

The child could get a monthly payment and may be eligible for Medicare based on the work history of the family member who died.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) helps working people with children. It is available to grandparents and other relatives if they work and have at least one "qualifying child" living with them.

To qualify, the relative and child must live in the same home in the United States for more than six months of the year. Talk to your tax preparer about whether you may qualify for this tax credit.

The Fostering Connections Act

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act is a federal law that affects potential kinship caregivers. When a child is removed from their home, the law requires DFPS to:

- Notify the child's relatives about the removal.
- Tell the child's relatives they can apply to become a foster parent.





- Tell the child's relatives about other options regarding placement and ways to support the child while in placement.

Foster Home Verification for Kinship Caregivers

Prospective or current kinship caregivers can pursue foster home verification if they are interested in supporting a child in care who is placed in their home, regardless of the child's permanency plan.

To remove many of the barriers kinship caregivers have to address while going through the verification process, Health and Human Services developed separate kinship standards specifically for kinship caregivers.

These separate standards allow kinship caregivers to become verified more easily while focusing on the child's safety and well-being.

Becoming a verified foster home provides additional financial assistance while caring for a child. However, foster care placements are meant to be a temporary arrangement until the permanency plan can be achieved for the child.

What about SSI and child support?

Foster care payments and other financial assistance may affect the amount you can receive in SSI or Survivor Benefits on behalf of the child. If you have questions or concerns about SSI or Survivor benefits, contact your local Social Security office.

Child support is considered income when determining how much financial assistance you will receive for caring for the child. Child support payments might also be sent to DFPS while you are being paid as a foster parent to help cover the costs of the child's care. You should discuss child support questions or concerns with the child's caseworker.

What is adoption?

Adoption is the legal process allowing children to legally join families different from their birth parents. It is a lifelong commitment to a child.

In CPS cases, adoption becomes an option if the child cannot return to their birth parents' home. If that happens, CPS may ask the court to terminate the parents' rights to the child and permanently place the child with another family.



A child can also become legally eligible for adoption if both birth parents give up their parental rights.

What is adoption assistance?

The adoption assistance program helps eligible families cover some of the costs of adopting a child with special needs. The benefits may include:

- Monthly payments and Medicaid coverage for the child until they are age 18. These benefits may last to age 21 if the child is 16 or older when you sign the

adoption assistance agreement, and the child meets certain educational or vocational requirements.

- Reimbursement for certain adoption fees.

To receive adoption assistance benefits, you must sign an adoption assistance agreement with DFPS before a court finalizes your adoption. Post-adoption services, program counseling, therapy, and other services for the child and your family may also be available.

Talk to an adoption specialist about adoption assistance and extended adoption assistance.



Permanency

What is Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC)?

Permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) is a legal term in Texas used in child custody cases. It means that a judge appoints a person to be legally responsible for a child without adopting the child.

The court can give PMC to someone other than a parent, including DFPS, a relative, a close family friend, or a foster parent. Only a judge can give PMC to another person. The judge decides the rights and responsibilities, depending upon the specific situation.

When someone other than a parent is named as permanent managing conservator, they are given the right or duty to:

- Physically possess the child.
- Choose moral and religious training.
- Provide clothing, food, shelter, and education.
- Provide and consent to medical, psychiatric, psychological, dental, and surgical care.
- Get the child's medical records.
- Receive money that supports the child.
- Hold or give out money that benefits the child.
- Consent to get married.
- Consent to join the armed forces.
- Represent the child in legal issues.
- Make legal decisions.
- Decide where the child lives and goes to school.
- Make other decisions that the child's parent would normally make.

Once the court names you permanent managing conservator, the judge will dismiss DFPS from the case. This means DFPS will no longer be involved with the

child or your family. This also means DFPS will not provide services such as case management, day care, and post-placement services.

If you are the child's kinship foster parent, you will not continue to receive foster care payments after you become permanent managing conservator. "Foster parent," means you have completed the process to become a foster parent through a child placing agency.

NOTE: *In some situations, parents may have some rights, even if you are granted permanent managing conservator. If you are permanent managing conservator and decide to adopt later, you may do so privately but you will not receive adoption assistance.*

Post-PMC Services in Houston, Corpus Christi, and Rio Grande Valley

Families in the Greater Houston and certain South Texas areas who have been granted PMC of a child through DFPS can receive post-permanency services.

These services are available to help the child and family:

- Adjust to permanency.
- Cope with any history of abuse or neglect of the child.
- Avoid permanent or long-term removal of the child from the PMC family setting.
- Information and referrals.
- Casework services and service planning.
- Parent groups.
- Parenting programs.
- Counseling services.
- Respite care reimbursement.
- Crisis intervention.

Contact the child's caseworker to request information about accessing these services.

What is Permanency Care Assistance?

In September 2010, Texas began a financial assistance program to help kinship foster parents who sign an agreement with DFPS and subsequently take permanent, legal custody of the child. This is called the Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) program, which helps children and youth who could not be reunited with their parents or adopted.

It gives another permanent option to children who might otherwise grow up in foster care. PCA provides financial support to kinship caregivers who want to give a permanent home to children. It also includes healthcare for the child.

What are the eligibility requirements for PCA?

To be eligible for PCA you must:

- Apply to become a foster parent.
- Care for the child as a foster parent for at least six months.

- Negotiate and sign a PCA agreement.
- Go to court to get permanent managing conservatorship of the child.

Here are some other PCA requirements:

- DFPS must determine that reunification and adoption are not appropriate permanency options for the child.
- The child must demonstrate a strong attachment to you.
- You must have a strong commitment to caring permanently for the child.
- Older youth must be consulted about the PCA plan.
- You must negotiate, sign, and abide by the PCA agreement, which takes effect on the date you receive permanent managing conservatorship.
- DFPS must have temporary or permanent managing conservatorship of the child on the day before the court transfers permanent managing conservatorship to you.

PCA payments begin the month after the court transfers permanent managing conservatorship to you. If the agreement is not signed before the transfer of permanent managing conservatorship, eligibility is lost permanently.





What is the amount of the PCA monthly payment?

The amount of financial support you receive depends on the assessment of the child's needs at the time the PCA agreement is signed.

Enhanced Permanency Care Assistance

Enhanced Permanency Care Assistance is intended to reduce financial barriers for kinship caregivers caring for children with a higher level of needs.

Older Youth and Permanency Care Assistance

PCA benefits will continue until the youth turns 21 years old, if:

- The youth was at least 16 years old when you signed the PCA agreement, and
- The youth meets certain educational or employment eligibility requirements.

If you have permanent managing conservatorship and receive PCA benefits, the youth can also still apply for educational training vouchers and free college tuition.

Permanency Care Assistance Successor Guardian

A Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) successor is a person who is appointed to permanently care for the child if the kinship caregiver dies or becomes incapacitated. Appointing a successor preserves the child's eligibility for PCA benefits.

The PCA successor may receive PCA payments if all the following conditions are met:

- You (the kinship caregiver) complete an amendment to your PCA agreement to name a potential successor, or the court names another individual to assume legal custody of the child.
- The PCA successor's background check information meets DFPS standards.
- The PCA successor signs a PCA agreement with DFPS.
- The PCA successor submits to DFPS proof demonstrating that the court has given him or her legal custody of the child.

Education and Training Voucher Program

Youth who entered Permanency Care Assistance after age 16 and have not turned age 21 may be eligible for the federal Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program.

The ETV Program helps youth to participate in post-secondary, vocational, or technical programs.

However, the youth receive ETV funds only after they use all other types of educational assistance, such as Pell grants, scholarships, and the Texas tuition and fee waiver. If these other financial aid programs do not cover the cost of attendance, the youth may receive up to \$5,000 per year in ETV funds.

For more information, talk to the child's caseworker, kinship worker, adoption caseworker, or Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) caseworker.



Important Definitions

Adversary hearing

A court hearing within 14 days after DFPS removes a child. The court determines whether to return the child to their home. Parents receive notice of this hearing. If the child is not returned home, the parents will be asked to provide names of people who might be willing to serve as temporary caregivers of a child.

Attorney Ad Litem/Guardian Ad Litem

The court will appoint a special attorney for the child, known as attorney ad litem. The court may also appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the child's best interests. The guardian ad litem may or may not be an attorney.

Community-Based Care

This is the new Texas foster care model. Community-Based Care allows local communities to meet children's and their families' unique and individual needs by tapping into the strengths and resources of their own community. Community-Based Care utilizes Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCC). The SSCC is responsible for finding foster homes or other living arrangements for children in state care and providing a full range of services, including case management.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

A person who has received the court's approved training and has been certified by the court to appear

at court hearings as a volunteer advocate on behalf of the child.

Child Plan of Service

The Child's Plan of Service discusses the child's needs, how to address them, and who is responsible. Some of the needs outlined in the plan include safety, supervision, education, medical and dental, developmental, emotional, and social needs.

Child Protective Investigations (CPI)

Child Protective Investigations examines reports of child abuse or neglect to determine if any child in the family has been abused or neglected. Investigators decide if there are any threats to the safety of all children in the home. If so, they determine whether the parents are willing and able to adequately manage those threats to keep children safe. If DFPS decides that children aren't safe, the investigator starts protective services.

Child Protective Services (CPS)

CPS partners with families and communities to address child abuse and neglect by practicing in a way that ensures safety, permanency, and wellbeing for the children and youth they serve.

Conservatorship (Legal Custody)

When a child is in the temporary managing conservatorship of DFPS, the state of Texas is acting

as the child's guardian while the parents work their service plan. A child is in the permanent managing conservatorship of Texas if the court has signed a final order stating that they cannot return to their parent's home and appointed the state of Texas to be legally responsible for the child.

Family Group Conference

A conference in which the child's family and trusted friends agree on a plan to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being for the child while seeking or maintaining family placement and support.

Family Plan of Service

The Family Plan of Service is an agreement between DFPS and the child's parents. It explains what the parents need to do and the services DFPS will provide to help the parents make those changes. The parents must follow the service plan for the child to return home.

Final Order

A court order that determines the new permanent legal relationship at the conclusion of a DFPS conservatorship case. The final order may return a child to a parent, grant permanent managing conservatorship to a relative or DFPS, or terminate a parent's rights to the child.

Foster Home

A home where a child is placed with a caregiver who has completed the verification process to provide temporary care; kinship care involves a connection to family and other loved ones, whereas foster care might not.

Foster or Kinship Home Assessment

A report on the safety and appropriateness of the home of any person requesting placement of a child for whom DFPS is the managing conservator.

Kinship Placement

The placement of a child in the home of a relative or family friend when parents cannot keep the child

safe. While the case is open, the state of Texas has conservatorship (legal custody) of the child.

Kinship Worker

The caseworker who works with the kinship caregiver to provide education, support, advocacy, and training. This worker can be assigned from Child Protective Services or a Single Source Continuum Contractor.

Permanent Managing Conservatorship

Permanent legal responsibility for the child given through a court order. Permanent managing conservatorship continues until the child turns 18 or is emancipated (a legal process that allows minors to become independent of their parents or legal guardians before they turn 18), unless changed by a court order.

Permanency Conference

When children are in foster care, permanency planning is a process that involves meeting with all concerned parties (foster parents, relatives, social workers, etc.). They meet to determine a permanent living arrangement for the child, known as a permanency plan.

Child Plan of Service

A written plan developed by all persons involved in the child's case with an interest in the child's well-being and safety. The plan addresses the child's needs, how to address those needs, who is responsible, and the achievement of permanency goals.

Status Hearing

A court hearing in which the Family Service Plan is discussed, and services identified in the plan are court ordered. The court holds a status hearing within 60 days of DFPS receiving temporary managing conservatorship of the child.

Termination of Parental Rights

A legal action that results in a parent losing all parental rights to their child.

Helpful Resources

211 Texas

211 Texas helps Texans find the services they need. If you are looking for assistance with things like food, housing, or childcare, dial 211 or (877) 541-7905. For more information, visit: www.211texas.org

Case Information or Complaints

The DFPS Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) reviews complaints about CPS cases. OCA also answers questions about CPS policy and processes.

You can reach OCA at (800) 720-7777 or www.dfps.texas.gov/Contact_Us/Questions_and_Complaints/OCA.asp.

Child Care

If you need to find childcare, you can search the state's database of regulated childcare. The database allows you to compare how well each day care meets state standards. For more information, visit: www.txchildcaresearch.org.

The Child Care Services program of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) helps eligible parents with childcare costs. The eligibility requirements vary depending on where you live. For more information, visit: www.twc.state.tx.us/programs/child-care-services-program-overview.

Child Abuse or Neglect

Report child abuse or neglect to the Texas Abuse Hotline. You can file a report by phone at 800-252-5400 or online at: www.txabusehotline.org. If the report is urgent, please call the hotline. Call 911 in an emergency or life-threatening situation.

Early Childhood Intervention Services

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is for families with children younger than three years old who have developmental delays or disabilities.

You can find out more about ECI at: www.hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services

Facebook

The Kinship Program has a Facebook Page. This page gives you information about community activities, resources, and much more. Please visit us at www.facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers, and don't forget to like us!

Families Raising Children of Color

Pact is a nonprofit organization that provides articles, book lists, links, and other information for families raising children of color. For more information, visit: www.pactadopt.org

Foster Home Verification

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange explains the process for becoming a verified foster parent or adoptive home. You can also find a list of child placing agencies separated by region, that can work with families to verify them. For more information, visit: https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/About_TARE/Foster_Care/default.asp

Generations United

The mission of Generations United is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. For more information, visit: www.gu.org

Head Start Program

Head Start promotes the growth and development of children ages 3 to 5 years old from low-income families. Early Head Start provides learning and development services for families with children up to age 3. For more information, visit: www.txhsa.org



HHSC Foster Care Ombudsman

The Foster Care Ombudsman listens to and helps children currently in foster care.

The ombudsman's office:

- Makes sure children understand their rights while in foster care.
- Reviews a child's questions and complaints about their case.
- With a youth's permission, works with other people to improve their care.

A child can contact the Ombudsman for Children and Youth at (844)286-0769.

For more information, visit: www.hhs.texas.gov/services/your-rights/hhs-office-ombudsman/ombudsman-children-youth-foster-care

Kinship Care Website

DFPS is committed to providing all important information to kinship caregivers. This website captures everything that is important to know, along with helpful links for resources. For more information, visit: www.dfps.texas.gov/kinship

Kinship Quarterly Newsletter

Kinship Quarterly is a newsletter for kinship caregivers. It keeps you informed of changes that affect you, resources that are available, and fun stuff CPS does in your community.

You can find the newsletter here:
www.dfps.texas.gov/kinship

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP (also known as food stamps) provides monthly assistance to qualifying families based on household size and income. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission uses current poverty guidelines to assess eligibility. You must provide proof of your household income when you apply. For more information, visit: www.hhs.texas.gov/services/food/snap-food-benefits

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF provides monthly financial assistance to qualifying families so they can better care for children. This program also helps children who don't have parental support or care. Children who are eligible for TANF are also eligible for Medicaid health care assistance. For more information, visit: www.hhs.texas.gov/services/financial/cash/tanf-cash-help

Texas Education

The Texas Education Agency oversees and provides resources to public school districts, including special education services and other federal programs to help students with special needs. For more information, visit www.tea.state.tx.us.

Special Ed Texas provides information and resources to help you understand your child's disability, your rights, and responsibilities under the



Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and help schools and caregivers work together to support the development and delivery of services to children with disabilities in Texas.

For more information, call 855-773-3839 or visit <https://www.spedtex.org/#>

Texas Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (TXGRG)

TXGRG provides resources for Grandparents who are raising Grandchildren for any unforeseen reason. They advocate for grandparents' voices. They have branched out to the majority of Texas.

The TXGRG will provide support to all kinship caregivers, even if they are not grandparents. For more information, visit: www.txgrg.com

Texas Legal Services Center

Family Helpline: (844) 888-6565

The Helpline is staffed with attorneys that are familiar with CPS cases and information. They can give legal advice.

Virtual Court Navigator: (866) 979-4343

Virtual Court Navigators (VCNs) cannot give legal advice but can assist with finding a low-cost attorney or forms.

Attorney Chat: texaslawhelp.org

Users can chat with an attorney and get legal advice.

Lone Star Legal Aid

<https://www.lonestarlegal.org/>

Provides civil legal services to low-income clients in the Houston and East Texas areas.

Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid

<https://www.trla.org/>

Provides free civil legal services to indigent residents of central, south, and west Texas, as well as migrant and seasonal farmworkers throughout the state of Texas.

Texas State Law Library Online

<https://www.sll.texas.gov/>

Your Texas Benefits

You can find out what benefits and services you may qualify for by using the prescreening tool at www.yourtexasbenefits.com. After you use the tool, you can apply for help.



Chain of Command

Always leave voicemail.

Allow 24 hours for your call to be returned.

Attempt 3 times before moving up the chain.

- Caseworker (CPS or SSCC equivalent)
- Supervisor
- Program Director
- Program Administrator
- Regional Director
- Texas DFPS Office of Consumer Affairs
1-800-720-7777

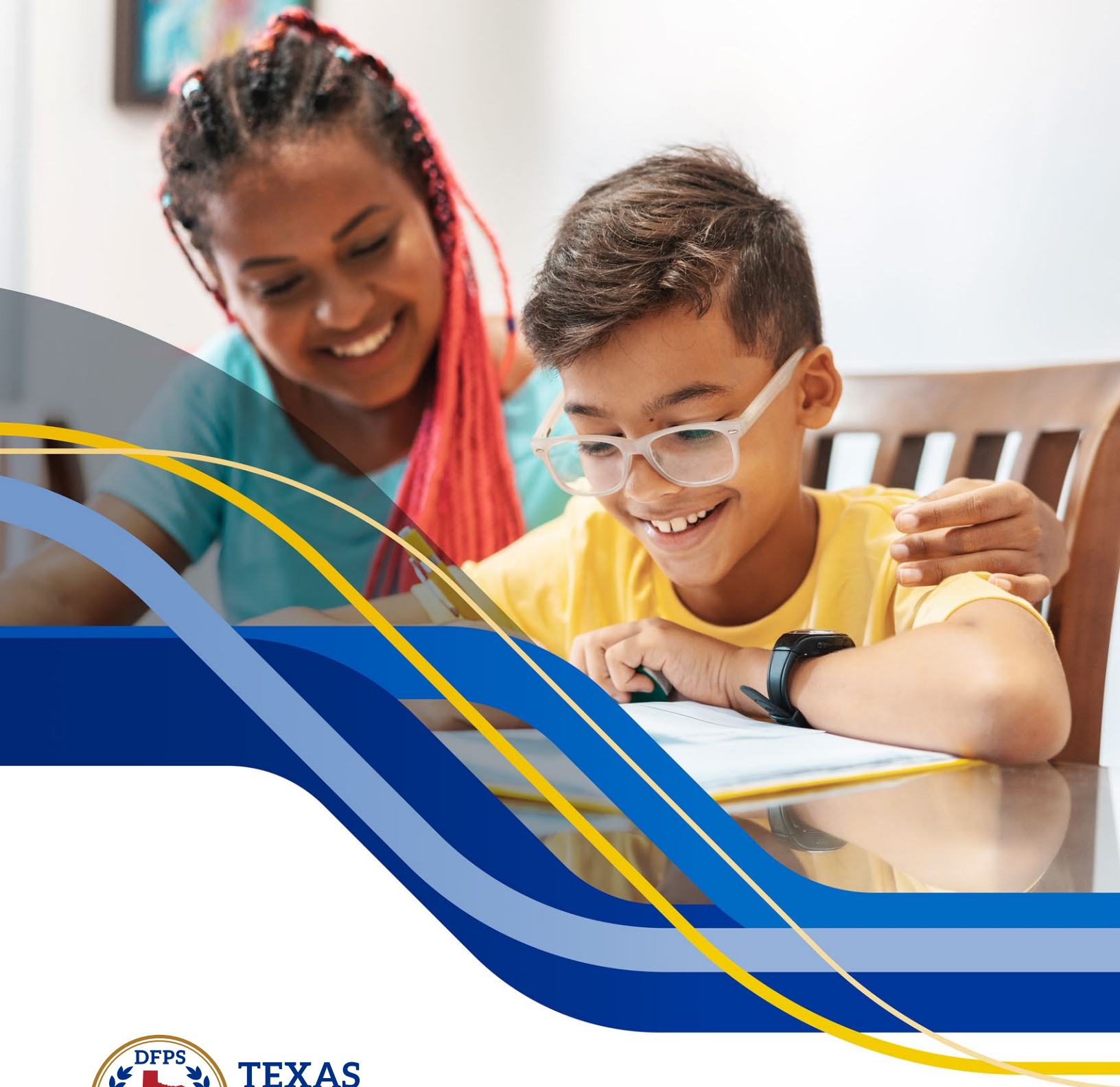


Notes



Notes

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TEXAS
Department of Family
and Protective Services

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DFPS Kinship Care
Website
dfps.texas.gov/kinship

Kinship Caregivers
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