

Child Welfare Services

KINSHIP FOSTER CARE PROGRAM



OKLAHOMA
Human Services






Kinship Orientation

Welcome to the Kinship Foster Care Program! Thank you for opening your heart and home to a child you know and care about who has come into Oklahoma's care due to abuse or neglect. Your willingness to take a child into your home shows a great deal of commitment and love.

This booklet is provided to help you become more aware of different aspects of

A photograph of a woman and a young boy lying on their stomachs on a grassy lawn. The woman is on the left, wearing a white shirt, and the boy is on the right, wearing a red hoodie. Both are smiling at the camera. The text is overlaid on the image.

We understand that an additional child in your home brings new challenges and changes that impact your family. Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) is here to help by offering the support you may need in adjusting to an additional family member living in your home.

the Child Welfare System as it pertains to the Kinship Foster Care Program.



What is Kinship Foster Care?

When a child can no longer remain safe in his or her own home due to abuse or neglect, OKDHS seeks to place the child with someone who the child or parents know. These placements are with people who are related to the child by blood, marriage, adoption, or by an emotional tie or bond. Kinship caregivers may be grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles, nieces or nephews, cousins, godparents, or neighbors. When you accept placement of a child with whom you have a relationship, you are providing kinship foster care, which makes you a Kinship Resource Home/Parent.

How Does a Child Come into Kinship Foster Care?

When a child has been abused or neglected and OKDHS determines that a parent is unable to safely protect the child or provide adequate care, OKDHS intervenes to ensure that the child is protected and cared for.

When determining placement of a child, preference shall be given to relatives and individuals who have a kinship relationship with the child. OKDHS will make diligent efforts to place the child with a kinship caregiver, provided the child's needs are met and safety is ensured.

What are the Benefits of Kinship Foster Care?

- Allows the child to live with people they know and trust.
- Provides parents with a sense of hope that their child will remain connected to the family.
- Lessens the impact of loss, grief and uncertainty for both the child and the parents.
- Preserves the child's history, culture and identity.
- Creates a sense of stability in the child's life.

Initial Placement

Kinship foster care is a unique program because the child can be placed with a family member or kin before all of the regular foster home requirements for approval have been met. The child is placed with family members or kin quickly and with the least amount of disruption in his or her life as possible.

How does this happen, and why? The purposes of placing a child with a kinship caregiver are to ease the transition because the caregivers are known to the child, maintain connections to the community and family of origin, preserve culture, language and family traditions, and improve the likelihood of siblings remaining together.

Initial Kinship Approval Process

A child may be placed in a kinship home prior to completion of the Resource Family Assessment and pre-service training.

The child welfare (CW) or resource family specialist completes the following initial kinship approval process before a child is placed:

- The resource family specialist or another CW specialist makes a home visit to talk with you about your willingness and ability to meet the child's needs, even if it is for a short time, and completes an Initial Kinship Placement Agreement.
- The resource family specialist or another CW specialist completes a records check for each adult household member to determine if there is CW history or if other services have been provided. A juvenile services search is completed on all children 13-17 years of age who are not in OKDHS custody.
- The resource family specialist or another CW specialist completes a house assessment, which is a walk-through of your home to assess its physical safety and outside surroundings.
- The resource family specialist or another CW specialist completes a Request for Background Check. This request is submitted to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation for each person in the household who is 18 years of age and older. The check provides information about the criminal history, driving record and sex

offender registry. If you have lived in Oklahoma for less than five years, you will have to obtain an equivalent background check from the previous state(s) in which you lived.

- You will complete a Resource Family Application.
- The resource family specialist or another CW specialist will ask you to provide the names of three personal references.

Who's Who?

OKDHS has several different types of specialists whose roles within OKDHS are very different. Here is a general list of the different types of specialists and their responsibilities. We hope this list helps you understand what each one does.

Child Protective Services Specialist

- Responds to calls when a person suspects a child is being abused or neglected.
- Evaluates reports of abuse and/or neglect, assesses child safety, assesses the risk of future maltreatment and the need for protective services and then assists in coordinating services.
- Makes a recommendation to the District Attorney's office whether or not a child is safe in the home.

Permanency Planning Specialist

- Is the primary specialist for the biological family and child.
- Works with the child's parents to identify services to help correct the conditions that resulted in the child being placed in OKDHS custody.
- Visits you and the child on a monthly basis and informs you of family visits, court hearings and other information important to the child's case.
- Talks with the foster family when they have questions about the child, including arranging medical, visual and dental appointments.
- Reports to the court and explains the progress the child's parent(s) has made on the Individualized Service Plan (ISP) and makes recommendations to the court about the child's status while in out-of-home care.
- Responsible for making placement recommendations for the child.

Resource Family Specialist

- Works with both kinship and traditional foster families.
- Assists the family with meeting OKDHS requirements such as training, background checks, and completion of the resource family assessment.
- Is responsible for monthly foster care reimbursement and assists the family with child care, if eligible.
- Provides additional support to the family through phone calls, visits, and yearly in-service training.

Contract Resource Family Assessment Specialist

- Contracts with a private agency to complete Resource Family Assessments, also known as a home study.
- Is a subcontractor, not an OKDHS employee.
- Assists OKDHS in getting the assessment completed as quickly as possible. It is important for you to meet with the subcontractor and provide the requested documents and information.
- Completes a minimum of two in-home visits with you and your family. The subcontractor will interview everyone in the home.
- An approved resource family assessment, along with fingerprints and training, must be completed before you receive monthly foster care maintenance payments.

Child Welfare Supervisors

- Each of the above mentioned specialists, with the exception of the Contract Resource Family Assessment Specialist, has an immediate supervisor who is available to answer questions.

Financial Assistance

We understand the financial strain placed on your budget by taking in additional children on such short notice. To assist you with the initial placement, OKDHS can offer up-front financial support to assist you. Here are some questions that you may have thought about.

Q. I was told that payment began the day the child was placed in my home. Is that correct?

A. No, that is not correct. However, you may be eligible for stipends to help offset the cost of care while you are in the process of completing all requirements to be an approved resource home.

Q. The child is already in my home and I have already spent a lot of money. When will I start getting paid?

A. OKDHS makes maintenance payments when your home is fully approved as a Kinship Resource Home. If you are related to the child, you may apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for the child at your local OKDHS office. Please apply immediately.

Q. What is a training stipend?

A. You may be eligible for a one-time training stipend, paid in two parts. The initial stipend of \$375 is paid when you are enrolled in the 27 hours of pre-service training. Enrollment in training is the responsibility of your resource family specialist. The final stipend of \$375 is paid when you have completed

the pre-service training. This money is to help you with gas, babysitting or other expenses so you can attend training. The child must be in your home to receive the training stipends.

Q. Am I eligible for a Kinship Start-Up Stipend (KSUS)?

A. Kinship families who have not been approved for payment and have not been an approved resource in the last five years may be eligible for the one-time KSUS. This money helps meet the additional financial needs that result from having a child placed in your home.

Q. How much is the KSUS?

A. The KSUS is equivalent to the monthly foster care maintenance payment according to the age of the child. The child must be in your home for 15 consecutive days in order to receive the stipend.

Q. Do the stipends come to me automatically?

A. You must have a signed foster care contract and a contract number assigned before payment can be made.

Q. How will I receive the receive the stipends and monthly reimbursement?

A. You will receive your payment on a MasterCard debit card or through direct deposit to your bank.

Q. Can I receive foster care maintenance payments and TANF payments at the same time?

A. No. Notify your TANF worker immediately when you

have been approved for foster care maintenance payments. The amount of your last TANF payment is automatically deducted from your foster care maintenance payment so an overpayment will not be created. You cannot receive the full amount of the maintenance payment or the full amount of any other type payment through the Social Security Administration for a death benefit of the child's parent, Supplemental Security Income, or child support. Notify your resource family specialist immediately about any monies you receive on behalf of the child so you will not have an overpayment.

Before you receive any money, you must have:

- Signed a Fixed Rate Kinship Foster Care Contract. The contract will be sent to Child Welfare Services Foster Care Section for a contract number to be assigned.
- Provided copies of your Social Security card and driver's license.
- A debit card that has been pinned. This card comes to you by mail in a plain white envelope. Please do not mistake it for junk mail. You may also request direct deposit instead.

Approval Process

Your home is approved for the monthly foster care maintenance payment when the following requirements are completed.

- A contract has been signed by the kinship resource parents.
- Completion of *Guiding Principles for Oklahoma Resource Families* Pre-Service Training (27 hours).
- FBI fingerprint background check results have been received and reviewed for all adults in the home.
- The Resource Family Assessment is completed and the OKDHS supervisor has approved it. You will receive a signed copy of the assessment.

Your resource family specialist will assist you in the following:

- Completing the application packet.
- Enrolling you in training.
- Obtaining a contract number.
- Setting an appointment for fingerprints
- Completing your child care request, when applicable.
- Providing additional forms to complete as part of the Resource Family Assessment process.

This is a list of documents that you will need before your home is approved. Having these documents ready when the resource family specialist or contractor meets with you to

complete the resource family assessment will speed up the process toward approval.

- Copy of your current marriage license, if applicable.
- Copy of all divorce decrees, if applicable.
- Copy of legal separation document, if applicable.
- Immunization records for each child in your family who is not in OKDHS custody.
- Copy of vehicle insurance verification.
- Copy of driver's license for each applicant.
- Copy of social security cards for each applicant.
- Copy of current pet vaccination records.
- Copy of Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Military Duty, DD Form 214.
- Income verification.

Initial Meeting

You will be invited to an initial meeting once the child is placed in your home. This is the first meeting between the child's parent(s) and the kinship resource parent(s) and provides an opportunity to share information about the child's needs.

Family Time and Supervision

The permanency planning specialist for the child's case will meet with you and discuss the family time, or visitation, schedule and supervision responsibilities. The child's assigned permanency planning specialist or your resource family specialist will be able to assist in answering questions related to family time and supervision.

Visitation is a right

The child and parent or parents have a right to regular visitation.

Visitation is available to the children and families involved with CW, unless visitation is not in the child's best interests, taking into consideration:

- Protection of the life and physical safety of the child; or
- Protection of the child from being traumatized by contact with the parent; and
- The child's expressed wishes.

Frequency of parent-child visitation

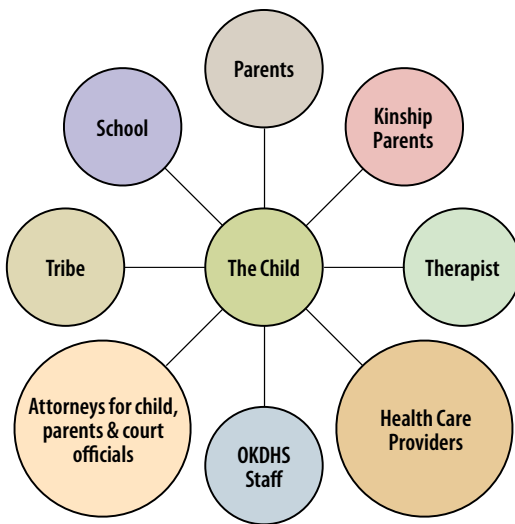
Family visitation begins no later than one week after the child's removal and a visitation schedule that considers the needs of the child is developed.

Frequent, purposeful visitation contributes to successful placement and reunification and reduces the time to reunification. Visitation is the single most predictive factor in whether a child is successfully reunified. Parent-child visitation is a high priority of the child welfare specialist.



The Child's Team

You, as a kinship resource parent, along with the permanency planning specialist, the child's parents, and other professionals involved with the family, work together in planning for the child (see the diagram below). Many people are involved in a team effort to reunite the child with his or her own family or when this is determined not to be in the child's best interest, to establish another permanent home for the child. You are a vital member of the child's team, and the information you have regarding the children placed in your home is very important to a successful outcome.



The Child's Team

Services

OKDHS is the guardian of the child while in your care and responsible for providing services. OKDHS provides you with assistance in accessing supportive services for a child in your care.

Medical Care, Dental Care and Mental Health

OKDHS custody children receive medical care through SoonerCare, Oklahoma's Medicaid program. All children in OKDHS custody and residing in out-of-home care are assigned to and receive their medical benefits through SoonerCare. When the SoonerCare case is certified, two medical cards are sent to the local OKDHS office. The permanency planning specialist retains one and the other is given to the kinship resource parent. As a kinship resource parent, you can use SoonerCare to access any medical, dental, counseling, or trauma-based services a child placed in your home may need. If you have additional questions, please contact your resource family specialist.

Child Care

Q. My husband and I both work every day and I can't afford to pay for child care. What can I do?

A. When both kinship resource parents work 20 hours or more per week each, OKDHS can pay child care expenses. Verification of employment must be provided, including the days of the week and hours of the day that are worked, when the application for child care is made. You may also be eligible for child care if you are enrolled in an educational or training program. If you need child care, talk to your resource family specialist immediately.

Q. I don't work but sometimes I have appointments and errands to run and I don't want to take the child with me. Will OKDHS pay for child care or who can I leave them with?

A. OKDHS cannot pay for child care in the situation that you mentioned. It is important that you identify "informal caregivers" who can watch the children when they cannot go with you.

Policies

You will learn more about some of the important OKDHS policies about being a kinship resource family for a child in OKDHS custody. The following are policies that you need to know now.

Discipline

This is an important subject. There is no difference in regards to the discipline techniques, be it a kinship or traditional resource family. Physical discipline such as spanking, swatting

and slapping on the hands are neither appropriate nor approved forms of discipline. OKDHS prohibits the use of any form of physical discipline on a child in OKDHS custody, even when a kinship relationship exists.

Confidentiality

Case-specific information about a child in OKDHS custody or the child's family is confidential and is not shared except when obtaining services for the child.

Religion

The religious preference of the child in OKDHS custody and the child's parents, when appropriate, is considered when integrating the child into your family.

Smoking

Kinship resource parents or anyone else cannot smoke in the home when a child is placed in the home. Nor can they smoke in the automobile when transporting a child.

Legal

When a child is placed in OKDHS custody, the family's case will be reviewed through the Juvenile Court system from the initial removal of the child until a decision has been made to return the child to his or her own home or to make another permanent placement and custody determination. As a kinship resource parent, you also have the right to attend court hearings and provide written information to the court about the child placed in your home. Your assigned permanency planning and resource family specialist answer questions and provide you additional information on the case status, upcoming court hearing dates, and how to file a written court report.

If you have a problem or any questions, contact the child's permanency planning specialist or your resource family specialist.

TRAINING INFORMATION

Beginning Date: _____ Ending Date: _____

LOCATION: _____

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Resource Specialist	Phone Number
Resource Specialist Supervisor	Phone Number
Child's Permanency Planning Specialist	Phone Number
Permanency Planning Supervisor	Phone Number

OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCE INFORMATION

Foster Care and Adoption Support Center	1-800-376-9729 or www.okfosters.org
General Resource Information	211 or www.211oklahoma.org
Bridge Resource Family Handbook	Request a copy from your resource family specialist
SoonerCare Helpline (contact to find a medical provider who accepts Medicaid)	1-800-987-7767
WIC (Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program)	Contact your local Health Department
Other	
Other	





OKLAHOMA Human Services

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