

# Kinship Caregiver Guide

Updated 2/3/2017



Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families

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# Section 1

## Immediate Needs and Licensing

# Immediate Needs

The child in your care may have needs that cannot wait. You as the kinship caregiver have concerns as well. The purpose of this Immediate Needs checklist is to help us discuss some of the most common needs over the first several days. We encourage you to ask about resources you think you may need to support your family.

## Immediate Needs Assessment

Ask yourself the following questions and write down your thoughts on the Success Planning Tool (page 6 of this packet). If age appropriate, you might also get input from the child in your care.

Medical	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What are the medical needs of the child?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does the child have any private medical insurance? DCYF staff ensure that all children receive uninterrupted medical care.
Food, Clothing, and Safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does the child need a crib or bed? If the child will use a crib, please read the Safe Sleep tip sheet included.
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does the child need a proper car seat or booster seat?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you have access to formula and diapers, if needed?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does the child need WIC? WIC services provide milk, cheese and other food to children up to age 5. All children in the DCYF system are eligible. The RI hotline for WIC is 1-800-842-7434.
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you have access to enough food? Do you know if the child has any food allergies?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What clothes and outerwear do you have for the child? If needed, do you know clothing and shoe sizes?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do you have age-appropriate toys and activities for the child? What are his/her interests?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What are the child's routines related to food and sleeping?
School	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is there anything you would like more information about (for example, how to change a diaper, or dietary needs for a young child or a teen)?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If the child is old enough, where is s/he currently enrolled in school or preschool?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What supports would you need, if any, to keep the child enrolled in this school?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In what school programs does the child participate? What supports do you need to keep the child involved in these activities?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If you need to transfer the child to a different school, what local options are available?
Caregiver	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is the child signed up for school lunch? School lunch is free for children in the DCYF system.
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If you are working, what are your child care needs?
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you aware of reimbursements for expenses? Foster Board payments, funds for clothing, free child care, and other financial resources may be available. See page 12-13 of this guide.
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What other immediate questions and concerns are on your mind?

# Licensing Requirements

Kinship caregivers, like all foster parents, must be properly licensed to ensure the safety of the child in care. Some of the requirements may feel intrusive; however, after a traumatic event, it is important to make sure that the needs of the child can be met in his or her foster home.

We want to partner with you to make the process as clear and simple as possible. There are eight steps to licensure, some of which may be happening at the same time. Kinship caregivers have up to 180 days to obtain their license.

## Eight Steps to a Kinship Caregiver License

1	Preliminary Assessment	Kinship caregivers applying to take the child under their care will provide basic information, agree to background checks, complete a physician release form, and sign an agreement. <b>This will be done on the day the child is placed in your home.</b>
2	Fingerprinting	All household members 18 and older must be fingerprinted. You must complete fingerprinting within <u>7 business days</u> of receiving the child. <b>Call 401-528-3470 to schedule as soon as possible.</b>
3	Kinship Training	Kinship caregivers must sign up for six hours of orientation. Trainings occur over two nights, during three-hour sessions. Trainings alert your family to resources and help you understand special needs of children who have been removed from their homes. <b>Call 401-528-3612 to schedule your training. You will be paid for your time.</b>
4	Application Materials	Within 3-4 weeks, a packet will come in the mail that includes many important documents, including background check information, a detailed questionnaire and a personal reference form. <b>Fill out all information and return in the pre-stamped envelope provided.</b>
5	Recent Physical	A doctor you have seen recently needs to confirm that you are generally in stable health and able to provide foster care. It will not be necessary for your family to provide medical records. <b>Please make sure you have had a recent physical.</b>
6	Safety Inspection	Your home must be inspected and approved for fire safety by a DCYF safety inspector. <b>An inspector will call you to schedule a home inspection.</b>
7	Lead Inspection	If you have young children in the house, lead can be dangerous. Homes built before 1978 with a child under the age of 6 must have a lead Certificate of Conformance. <b>A licensing worker will give you information about getting a certificate if you need it.</b>
8	Home Study	Home studies ensure that the home is safe and that the placement is a good fit for the child's needs. All members of the household must be present. <b>A licensing worker will call to schedule these meetings.</b>

Have more questions about licensing? Call the DCYF Licensing Unit at 401-528-3656.

# Success Planning Tool

## Immediate Needs

Look over the Immediate Needs page (see page 4). Make notes about resources to which the child and your family would like to be connected.

Medical:

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Food, Clothing, and Safety:

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School:

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Caregiver Needs:

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## Licensing Appointments:

My fingerprinting appointment ...

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

My two training orientation classes are scheduled for ...

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Time 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Date 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Time 2: \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions

What questions do you have at this time? Your child's social caseworker or your licensing worker can support you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Upcoming Appointments:

Person you will speak with: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting location or phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Person you will speak with: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting location or phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

# Section 2

Resources, Expectations and Advice

# What is Kinship Care?

When a child cannot live with his or her parents, relatives often take over the full-time responsibility of caring for that child. This is called kinship care (also known as “relative care”). Kinship caregivers provide ongoing stability, support, and guidance.

Kinship care can be temporary, meaning the child eventually returns home or moves to another home. Kinship care can also be permanent, meaning the kin caregivers will care for the child until he or she becomes an adult.

Sometimes the kinship caregiver is not even a blood relative. Any adult who has close ties to the family can be considered for kinship care. You may have been asked to care for the child because you are a family friend, a school teacher or coach, or a fellow church member. Regardless of the type of kinship care arrangement, the kinship caregivers’ voluntary commitment to devote their lives to the child in their care can be a courageous, life-changing decision.

It is DCYF’s job to support you as the kinship caregiver. The purpose of this section of the guide is to help you understand the DCYF system, your roles and responsibilities as a kinship caregiver, and resources that are available to your family.



# Understanding a DCYF Case

This page is meant to help you understand the major steps in a DCYF case. However, each case and every family is unique. We know it is complicated, and we will help you through every step.

## What is happening:

DCYF has different units working to determine how best to support a family that has come to our attention.

You were identified as a family who could support the child. One of the DCYF workers has placed the child with you, and we need to get you established as a kinship caregiver.

## Some people you may meet:

- DCYF units (Child Protective Services, Intake, Family Services Unit, Kinship Finders)
- Juvenile Probation officers
- RI Training School staff
- DCYF placement workers
- Child's social caseworker
- Finger printer
- Safety inspectors
- Kinship training coordinator

**Removal**  
Child may be in need of placement outside of home.



**Placement**  
Child is placed with kinship caregivers.



**Support**  
Many things are happening at once to support and resolve the case:

<p><b>Development and support of Kinship Caregivers (you)</b> You may meet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinship trainers</li> <li>• Your licensing worker</li> <li>• Support organizations in your community</li> </ul>	<p><b>Services for child and family</b> You may meet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child's social caseworker</li> <li>• Medical/other clinicians</li> <li>• Visitation supervisors</li> <li>• Support groups</li> </ul>	<p><b>Legal proceedings</b> You are not required to attend, but you or the child may be required to follow court orders. You may meet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judges</li> <li>• Lawyers</li> </ul>
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**Permanency**  
Child is found a permanent home. Possible outcomes can include:

<p><b>Reunification</b> Child is reunited with family of origin whenever possible.</p>	<p><b>Adoption</b> Termination of parental rights occurs, and permanent parents are chosen.</p>	<p><b>Guardianship</b> Temporary parents are chosen.</p>
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# Permanency

You may often hear us talk about “permanency.” It is our goal and legal obligation, under state and federal law, to make certain that all children we serve have legal, permanent families to love and care for them.

Our first goal is to find ways to allow children to live safely with their parents. We need your input and your perspective as we work to reunify the child and parents. We will meet with you on a regular basis to talk about how you are doing in caring for the child and how you think that the child is doing. You may also be asked to provide information to the Family Court regarding the child in your home.

When reunification cannot happen in a timely manner, we look for others to provide this permanent care. A federal law called the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) is important to this process. Generally, the law requires that the state move to terminate parental rights (sometimes referred to as “TPR”) when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. For more information, visit [www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/legal-court/fedlaws/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/legal-court/fedlaws/). If necessary, your child’s caseworker may speak with you about TPR, adoption, guardianship, or other options to provide a permanent home and family for the child.



# Visitation

Visitation is considered at the heart of reunification. A child needs to see and have regular contact with their parents and siblings (when separated), as these relationships are the foundation of healthy child development. Even when reunification is not likely, parents, siblings, and extended family continue to be important in a child's life.

Visitation helps to:

- Maintain parent-child attachment;
- Preserve the child's sense of belonging as part of a family and community;
- Reduce a child's sense of abandonment;
- Preserve family history, medical history, and culture;
- Promote psychological well-being; and
- Signal to parents that the agency wants to help them reconnect with their child.

Talk with your child's social caseworker if you have ideas about people who could host visits, visitation activities, or locations that would support bonding between the child and parent.

## Seven Things You Can Do to Support Successful Visitation

- 1 Always follow the visitation plan as directed by Family Court and the child's social caseworker.
- 2 Have children ready for each visit, including clothes, supplies, diapers, formula, bottle, or other food as needed.
- 3 Be willing to make adjustments to accommodate visitation whenever feasible.
- 4 Share information with the parent about the child's daily life, as long as it's agreed to in the service plan. Include parents in activities when possible.
- 5 During visits, model healthy parent-child interaction. Visitation is a great time to demonstrate and practice nurturing parenting skills.
- 6 Allow the child to express feelings before and after visits.
- 7 Document a child's behavior related to visits. Share this information with your child's social caseworker.

# Benefits and Reimbursements

Many benefits and financial resources are available to support the child in your care. Please read through the services below and talk with your DCYF team if you have questions.

In general, the foster child in your care has an income of \$0.00. This may make the child eligible for benefits such as school lunch programs. However, if you the adult are receiving state financial assistance for yourself or your own children, please speak with your personal case manager to discuss eligibility.



## Foster Board Payment

Kinship parents may be eligible for payment to support the child's needs. The initial payment rate is as follows:

Newborn-3 years of age	\$17.95 daily/\$125.65 weekly
4-11 years of age	\$19.26 daily/\$134.82 weekly
12 years+	\$21.01 daily/\$147.07 weekly

This rate will be reassessed within 30 days of placement and every 6 months thereafter. Checks are sent monthly, typically mid-month. Additionally, the foster board will provide a \$25 birthday check and a \$40 Christmas/holiday check to buy gifts for the child.

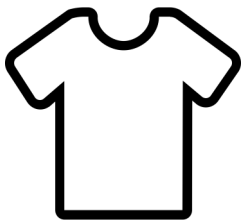
To inquire about foster board payment, please contact DCYF at 401-528-3502 and ask to speak to a representative in the Management & Budget Office. In order for foster board payment to begin for kinship providers, all household members who are 18 years or older must first be fingerprinted.



## Transportation

Transportation costs may be reimbursed for medical appointments, dental appointments, vision appointments, counseling and mental health appointments, and authorized family visitations. The reimbursement rate is \$10 one way or \$20 round trip. Please keep track of trips and ask the child's social caseworker for a reimbursement form. You can also download a form at [www.fosterforward.net/dcyf-transportation-reimbursement-program](http://www.fosterforward.net/dcyf-transportation-reimbursement-program).

# Benefits and Reimbursements (Continued)



## **Clothing, Cribs and Beds**

Through your foster board payment, clothing allowances are provided three times per year (spring, late summer, early winter). The payment is as follows:

Newborn-3 years of age	\$100
4-11 years of age	\$150
12 years+	\$250

Upon initial placement, an emergency voucher can be requested by contacting the child's social caseworker.

The nonprofit organizations Foster Forward (401-438-3900) and The Village (401-285-1510) offer gently used clothing, cribs, beds, toys, and other baby equipment.



## **Medical Care, Dental Care, and Nutrition**

DCYF staff ensure that all children receive uninterrupted medical care and that those delivering that care are reimbursed in a timely fashion. The child will likely receive his or her medical card within 8 to 10 days. If you have questions about medical and dental care for the child, please ask the child's social caseworker. If you need additional help, contact DCYF at 401-528-3502 and ask to speak with Medical Benefits.

*WIC (Women, Infants & Children)* — Children in foster care up to age 5 are eligible for food and nutrition support. Please call 1-800-942-7434 to be connected to a local WIC office and make an appointment. At the appointment the child will be screened, and the foster parent will speak with a nutritionist about the child's food needs. When appropriate, the family will be provided with referrals, prescriptions, and vouchers/checks for healthy food and formula.

# Helpful Advice in the Early Days

During the kinship training sessions, you will receive much more information about how to address the special needs of the child in your care. We offer some advice on issues we commonly see with DCYF cases:

**Make them an equal part of your family from the first day.**

You may feel the desire to provide the child with special treatment; however, it is generally better to help them develop routines and participate in normal family activities. This will help them break bad behaviors and can help the child settle into the new environment.

**Children need to hold healthy relationships with adults.**

This is vital for child development. Find ways to spend time with the child in your care. Help them connect with you, other children, and important adults in their lives.

**Children will likely be loyal to their parents.**

Families are complicated. Even if a child has been harmed by his or her parents, the child loves them and often wants to be with them. If the child cannot live with them, the child wants to know that his or her parents are OK. It is critical that as a kinship caregiver you do not talk in negative terms about the parents of the child in your home. A child can become confused and often experience divided loyalties when the person caring for the child speaks negatively about the child's parents. If you are struggling with this issue due to family history or your own anger at the child's parents, it is important to talk about this with your child's social caseworker.

**Be on the lookout for unhealthy behaviors.**

Unhealthy behaviors may include sleeping problems, eating problems, hyperactivity, sexual acting out, withdrawal and rejection, and hoarding. If you notice any of these behaviors, discuss strategies to address these issues with your child's social caseworker.

# Important Rules to Follow

It would be impossible for us to summarize the state regulations for you here. We will mail you a copy of the regulations with your kinship caregiver application packet. If you would like to read the regulations now, please visit our website at [www.dcyf.ri.gov/foster/](http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/foster/).

Below are some of the regulations that are asked about most commonly.

## Foster Parent Regulations: Frequently Asked Questions

Topic	Explanation
Discipline	<b>All forms of corporal punishment are unacceptable.</b> The law prohibits kinship caregivers from any type of corporal punishment, including hitting and spanking. The child has already been through a traumatic separation; caregivers must now take the role of healers. When discipline is necessary, use the opportunity to teach the child in your care. Depending on the situation, you might find ways to help them understand their feelings and needs, learn healthy behaviors, feel good about themselves and their relationships with others, learn about consequences from their choices, and even understand how their past trauma affects their reactions to stress or threat.
Medical Treatment	Parents must give permission for non-routine medical procedures (such as a surgery) and use of psychotropic medication. If you are unsure whether the child is allowed to receive a particular medical or dental treatment or procedure, please speak with the child's social caseworker.
Child Activities	Use good judgment when deciding in which activities the child can participate (such as birthday parties, afterschool activities, and sleepovers). Use best judgment and include the parent or the child's social caseworker when unsure.
Travel	Please do not take the child out of the State of Rhode Island overnight without first discussing with the child's social caseworker. Often, an overnight trip will require express permission from the child's parent or Family Court.
Religious Observation	You should respect the religious beliefs of the child's parent or guardian. You may not require any religious observance of a child in your care, except with written permission by the child's parent or guardian.
Appearance	You may not significantly alter the child's appearance (such as piercings or significant changes in hairstyles) without the parent's permission. Use best judgment and include the parent or the child's social caseworker when necessary.
Photographs	It is not permitted that you share information or post pictures of the child on social media. However, you are encouraged to take pictures and share them with loved ones, including the child's parent.

# Programs and Resources for Children

It is important that the child in your care have access to programs and activities that will support healthy growth and development.

Please read through the descriptions of programs and feel free to contact organizations. If age appropriate, we encourage you to discuss these opportunities with the child in your care.

If you are looking for something specific, please ask your DCYF team. Also, many school- and community-based activities (including athletics) provide scholarships and supports to families.

Program/Service*	Ages Eligible	How to Learn More
<b>Mental health and behavioral counseling</b>	0-18	If you believe the child would benefit from counseling, please speak with your DCYF team about referral options.
<b>Specific activities for children in foster care</b> Provides free events for kids to meet and connect with other children in foster care	0-18	The Village for RI Foster & Adoptive Families 401-285-1510 rhodeislandvillage@gmail.com
<b>Youth Enrichment Fund &amp; Teen Grants</b> Offers up to \$300/year to participate in activities including arts, athletics, church programs, school clubs and trips, computers, and prom expenses	0-21	Apply online at <a href="http://www.fosterforward.net">www.fosterforward.net</a>
<b>Before- and after-school programs</b> Provides students with meaningful activities outside of the school day, tailored to the unique needs of each school population; programs may allow children to enjoy art, athletics, science, technology, theatre, homework help, dance, and just plain fun.	5-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak with the guidance counselor at the child's school about local programs.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://exceed.ri.gov">exceed.ri.gov</a> and click on "Programs" to read descriptions and ratings for school-age programs.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.ride.ri.gov">www.ride.ri.gov</a>. Under the "Students &amp; Families" tab, click on "After-School &amp; 21st Century CLCs."</li> </ul>
<b>Real Connections</b> Connects youth with positive, long-lasting adult role models	12-21	Kate Bronner 401-438-3900, ext. 108 kate.bronner@fosterforward.net
<b>ASPIRE Initiative</b> Helps young people impacted by foster care to get on the path to financial independence by teaching them to save toward a purchase goal; includes funding to open a bank account and a dollar-for-dollar match for money saved	14-24	Victoria Ferrara 401-438-3900, ext. 105 victoria.ferrera@fosterforward.net or Nadine Lopes at ext. 127
<b>Life Skills Program</b> Prepares youth for life after foster care; children are paid for completing Life Skills courses	16-21	Melisa Loa 401-438-3900, ext. 134 melisa.loa@fosterforward.net
<b>YESS Aftercare Program</b> Assists students in planning for adulthood and connecting to resources	18-21	Jessica McCluskey 401-438-3900, ext. 204 jessica.nievera.mccluskey@fosterforward.net



# Programs and Resources for Caregivers

You have taken on a tremendous responsibility to support the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child in your care. The child may have many needs in the coming days and months; but you also may need resources that can support your caregiving efforts and help navigate the foster care process.

As a kinship caregiver in Rhode Island, you have access to:

Free Child Care	There is free child care as needed for caregivers who work outside of the home. Child care is provided up to age 12 in most circumstances. The child care center or home must be licensed by DCYF in order to qualify. Visit the website <a href="http://exceed.ri.gov">exceed.ri.gov</a> if you need help finding a provider. If you need a child care option with evening hours, you might try The Learning Academy in North Providence at 401-354-8400, or the Charles St. Community Center in Providence at 401-272-3252.
Foster Parent Help Line (800-655-7787)	There is a Foster Parent Help Line at 1-800-655-7787. You may phone the hotline at any time to get connected to resources, help navigate the system, or address any challenges you're experiencing with the child in your care. An experienced foster parent will call you back within 24 hours.
Foster Parent Mentor Program	The Foster Parent Mentor Program matches you with an experienced foster parent who can help you through experiences and help get you access to resources. Mentors are seasoned foster parents who know the ins and outs of the system. They are committed to building a relationship with you during your first year as a newly licensed foster parent. For more information, contact Stacy Smith at 401-438-3900, ext. 124, or visit <a href="http://www.fosterforward.net">www.fosterforward.net</a> .
Coaching and Support Groups	The Village for RI Foster & Adoptive Families also offers Foster Parent Coaching as well as Monthly Support Groups to help caregivers meet other families, discuss concerns in a safe environment, and help connect you to options and resources. Contact The Village by phone at 401-285-1510 or by email at <a href="mailto:rhodeislandvillage@gmail.com">rhodeislandvillage@gmail.com</a> .
Respite Care	If you need temporary relief (planned or an emergency) of your kinship caregiver duties, a respite care provider may be available to the child. If you think you may need access to respite care, please speak with your DCYF team about your options.
RI Parent Information Network	The Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) assists families by providing information, training, education, and advocacy to achieve their goals for health, education, and socio-economic well-being. For a complete list of services and upcoming workshops, visit <a href="http://www.ripin.org">www.ripin.org</a> .

# Your Resource Contacts

This page is meant to help you keep track of members of your team at DCYF and other community contacts who can help your family get the support they need to have a successful journey.

## Primary Contacts

Your Licensing Worker: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to reach: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Child's Social Caseworker: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to reach: \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Resources

Person or Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
What they can help with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to reach: \_\_\_\_\_

Person or Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
What they can help with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to reach: \_\_\_\_\_

Person or Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
What they can help with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to reach: \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Important Contacts

DCYF Emergency Hotline\* (24 hours a day) 1-800-742-4453 (1-800-RI-CHILD)  
\*Use to report an abuse/neglect, or to report an emergency situation  
RI Foster Parent Association Hotline (24 hours a day) 1-800-464-3399  
RI Department of Human Services 1-800-DHS-3322 or 401-462-5300



# Thank you.

[www.dcyf.ri.gov](http://www.dcyf.ri.gov)

