

Kinship Care

The “Heart” that Keeps
Children Connected to
Families

A Guide to Exploring the Kinship Care Options





What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care means that a child lives with a relative. This relative may or may not have custody of the child but has assumed care for the child.

Kinship care is a way for children to stay connected to family when they have been voluntarily or involuntarily removed from the care of their parents. Removal may become necessary due to a parent's illness, incarceration, lack of housing, insufficient income, abuse or neglect. Regardless of the reason for kinship care, most children fare better when connections to family and loved ones are maintained.



What Is the Role Of the Kinship Care Provider?

When the local department of social services becomes involved, the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court judge determines whether a child will return to his or her parents or prior custodian, be placed in custody with relatives, or remain in state custody for placement in an approved foster home. When the judge rules that the child will not return home to his or her parents, there are three options for kinship care providers:

1. The court could transfer custody of the child to a kinship care provider (relative).
2. The kinship care provider could become an approved foster family with the local department of social services having custody of the child.
3. The kinship care provider who is a foster parent may choose to adopt the child if the court terminates the rights of the child's parents.

OPTION 1:

Kinship care provider takes custody of a child.

As the child's legal custodian, you can make decisions for the child, such as enrolling the child in school, approving medical procedures, etc. You may need to seek support from community resources such as:

- Financial and Medicaid assistance– You may apply for Child-Only Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) through the local department of social services. The amount of TANF assistance for a child is based on where you live in the state. The assistance increases in modest increments for additional eligible children.
- Child support– Filing for child support is a requirement for obtaining TANF assistance. You may do so through your local Child Support Enforcement office. Support will be pursued from both parents.
- Child services– The local department of social services may make referrals for services deemed necessary for the child.

For all community services, the kinship care provider is responsible for following through with the necessary paper work and for obtaining other resources as needed.



OPTION 2:

Kinship care provider becomes an approved foster family for a child.

The child remains in custody of the local department of social services but is placed with a kinship care provider who is an approved foster family.

- The care provider receives a monthly reimbursement based on the child's age and any difficulty of care needs.
- The local department of social services helps obtain specialized services and support, such as Medicaid eligibility, therapeutic services, etc.
- Health care professionals assist in ensuring that the child's medical, dental and mental health care needs are met.
- Children in the custody of the local department of social services may qualify for additional educational and therapeutic support.

OPTION 3:

Kinship care provider becomes the adoptive parent for a child.

Adoption occurs only after parental rights have been terminated. Adoption is a permanent arrangement, entitling a child to all of the benefits and rights of a biological child within the adoptive family.

- After finalization of the adoption, the kinship care provider has full decision-making authority over the child. The child's birth parents cannot petition the court for the purpose of custody or visitation with the child.
- When the child has been in foster care, the adoptive family may be eligible to receive financial adoption assistance to support the individual needs of the child.
- After termination of parent rights, a biological parent who may have been ordered to pay child support will no longer have this obligation.
- The adoptive parents can access services and support that may be needed by the family such as counseling and crisis intervention.



How Do I Decide If Kinship Care Is Right For Me?

To determine how to be involved, first understand the needs of the child and assess your own abilities. Questions to ask yourself:

- What is my relationship with the child's parents/guardians?
- Will I have my family's support?
- How will this impact my own children and spouse?
- Do I understand the circumstances surrounding this child's removal from the parents?
- How do I feel about those circumstances?
- How will this affect my relationship with the child's parents and extended families?
- Will I be able to set limits with the parents?
- Will I be able to let this child go back home when the time comes?
- Will I be able to offer this child a permanent home if necessary?

- Can I commit the time and energy toward the goal for this child to have a permanent home?
- Will I need financial assistance?
- Will I need assistance to meet the medical, dental or emotional health needs of this child?

What Should I Know About the Child Welfare System?

- A biological parent who has not harmed the child will have preferential consideration for having the child placed with him or her.
- Placement of a child during a protective services investigation (usually the first 1-30 days) does not guarantee that the child will remain with the relative if another living arrangement is in the child's best interests.
- Relatives who come forward as a resource to the child will be considered as preferred potential care providers.
- A home study will be completed for these relatives.



- The home will need to pass a safety inspection.
- A background check is required for any person in the household 18 years or older.
- The Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court judge will be made aware that placement with a relative is an option.
- Most children return to their parents' care within 12 months if circumstances which caused the child to be removed have improved.
- A permanent living arrangement will be made for a child whose parent is unable or unwilling to make the changes.
- A kinship care provider may be asked to consider permanent custody or adoption of the child.

How Can I Become An Approved Kinship Care Foster Parent?

- Apply to become a foster parent at the local department of social services.
- Work with a social worker to complete a home study assessment that provides an in-depth opportunity for the social worker and you to decide if becoming a foster parent is right for you.
- Consent to a criminal background check and a child abuse/neglect record check.
- Complete the local department of social services required training for foster parents.

For more information about kinship care, dial 211 toll-free or visit these Web sites:

www.211virginia.org
(Talk to a real person. Dial 211.)

www.vda.virginia.gov
(Virginia Department for the Aging)

www.giclocalsupport.org— American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

www.famis.org
(Family Access to Medical Insurance Security Plan)

www.dmas.virginia.gov/rcp-home.htm
(Department of Medical Assistance)

www.dss.virginia.gov
(Virginia Department of Social Services)

www.gu.org (Generations United)

Developed by the
Virginia Department of Social Services
Foster Care, Family Preservation Program
7 North Eighth Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219-1849

www.dss.virginia.gov

Thanks for the help and resources that were
shared to develop this brochure specifically for
kinship care providers.

VDSS Mission Statement

*“People helping people triumph over
poverty, abuse and neglect to shape
strong futures for themselves, their
families and communities.”*

