

Overview Of Kentucky's Kinship Care Program

What is Kinship Care?

The Kinship Care Program has been established to facilitate permanency for children who have been or may be removed from their home. Kinship Care is an alternative to foster care placement.

- It may be provided to children who may otherwise be placed by the Cabinet in foster care due to:
 - Death of both parents; or
 - A substantiated finding of abuse or neglect by the Cabinet per KRS 600.020(1); or by another state that arranges for placement of a child per the Interstate Compact, and;
- A determination has been made that placement with a relative versus a non-relative is in the best interest of the child; and
- The child meets the technical eligibility TANF requirements in 921 KAR 2:006.

The three (3) primary agencies involved in the Kinship Care Program are the Divisions of Family Support, Child Support and Protection and Permanency. Child Care resources may also be a critical component to the Kinship Care Program.

The Goal of Kinship Care

The ultimate goal of Kinship Care is permanent custody with a caregiver relative if returning the child to the parent(s) is not a viable option. (*A caregiver relative for the Kinship Care Program is defined as an adult who is related to the child by blood, marriage or adoption.*) The SSW is to continue to work with the birth parent(s) in an attempt to reunite the child with the parents during the six (6) months prior to the court report. If it is determined that the best interest of the child is permanent custody with a caregiver relative, the SSW is to make this recommendation to the court.

When is Kinship Care Considered

The Social Service Worker (SSW) is to consider Kinship Care on every child at risk of placement in foster care due to abuse or neglect or death of both parents of the child. It is to be documented in the case record that this program was discussed as an option for the child.

The SSW is to complete a relative home study when a relative makes application for Kinship Care and shall determine if a relative for Kinship Care is approved through an assessment utilizing the Relative Home Evaluation Outline. The SSW is to include in the Relative Home Evaluation the need for Start-up Cost, and, if so, the recommended amount and purpose for which the funds will be used, if granted, by the caregiver relative.

Services for Kinship Care Providers

Start-Up Costs: If the SSW determines that a one (1) time Start-Up Cost is needed, based on the Relative Home Evaluation Outline, a payment may be provided for the purpose of meeting the **immediate and critical** (within 90 days of placement in the home) needs of the child. The SSW is to disregard the caregiver's income and resources.

The FSOS is to review the Home Evaluation and may approve Start-up Costs for the following items:

- Clothing, which may be purchased only after the community resources have been accessed;
- School Supplies, which may be purchased only after the school has issued a list of needed supplies and the caregiver relative has accessed a Family Resources and Youth Services Center for supplies (FRYSC) ;
- Additional furniture, which has been determined to be needed in the home evaluation, or;
- A deposit for a living arrangement.
- Attorney fees. (90 day timeframe does not apply to attorney fees)

Child Care: If a Kinship care provider needs day care, they will need to apply directly with the DCC Service Agent in their area. Kinship care relatives must qualify for day care benefits in the same manner as other individuals, requiring an eligibility factor and income guidelines established by 922 KAR 2:160.

Respite Care:

The SSW may, through supervisory channels, request Respite for the caregiver relative only as a last resort to prevent disruption of the placement. The Respite request is submitted to the Director of the Division of Protection and Permanency for a case-by-case review. Only the Director of Division of Protection and Permanency has the authority to approve payments for Respite. Respite Care is defined as continuous care for a period of at least twenty-four (24) hours for this Standard of Practice.

Other Services:

According to the needs of each individual case, Kinship Care providers may need counseling, parenting training and/or a connection with a support group. The SSW can offer any of these services to help insure continued placement with the relative to eliminate any unnecessary moves for the children.

Case Planning and On-going Services

The SSW is to develop a concurrent plan for reunification with the parent(s) if at all viable and permanent custody with the Kinship caregiver relative in all Kinship Care cases. A Kinship Care case is a child protection case. The SSW is to open only one case in TWIST. If the caregiver relative resides in a different county from the birth parent, the Social Service Workers are to share the case. The primary case responsibility remains in the county where the birth parent(s) resides until the child returns home or the caregiver relative is granted permanent custody.

The SSW develops a Family Case Plan with the caregiver relative and others, as appropriate, when a case is opened for Kinship Care. The SSW is to coordinate with the caregiver relative to attend and participate in all planning conferences. If attempts to reunify the child with birth parents are unsuccessful, the goal becomes permanent custody to the caregiver relative.

The Family Case Plan is to delineate the arrangements for visitation specifically with other family members who placed the child at risk, and should include the duration of visits. The Family Case Plan is to be updated when a change occurs in the household composition as designated in the case planning Standards of Practice.

The SSW shall provide Ongoing In-Home Services to the family receiving Kinship Care until the caregiver relative has permanent custody of the child or for a minimum of six months beginning with the date of placement.

The SSW shall after six (6) months from the initial date of entry into home of the caregiver relative receiving Kinship Care:

1. Review the placement to determine if Kinship Care is still in the best interest of the child;
2. Prepare a court report with recommendation(s) regarding permanent custody; and,
3. Make a request that the case be re-docketed for the court to determine permanent custody.
4. The SSW is to address the following in the court report:
 - Visitation;
 - Relationship with caregiver relative;
 - Child support issues, and;
 - Continuing medical and/or counseling services needed by the child.

If the child was placed in the home of a caregiver relative by another state through the Interstate Compact, the SSW is to provide Ongoing In-Home Services for six (6) months or until permanent custody is achieved from the time the caregiver relative is approved by DCBS. If a caregiver relative refuses to accept permanent custody of the child, the SSW is to:

- Consider other placement options;
- Take the case back to court for review with a recommendation for permanency; and
- Notify the Family Support Worker and request discontinuance of Kinship Care payment.

Aftercare Plan and Case Closure

The SSW is to develop with the caregiver relative an Aftercare Plan prior to closing the case. The Aftercare Plan addresses any ongoing issues that relate to the family's needs for the safety, well-being of the child and stability. These issues may include visitation guidelines, services such as counseling, access to medical services, etc.

The SSW is to notify the caregiver relative of changes in services or notification of case closure using the DPP-154A at least two (2) weeks prior to a change or case closure. The SSW is to provide the DPP-154 to the caregiver relative when a case is to be closed. The SSW is to provide written notification to workers in all other program areas providing services of the SSW's plan to close the case.