

Frequently Asked Questions

Why might children be placed in formal kinship care?

Children are placed in formal kinship care by a judge in response to allegations of severe neglect, physical/emotional abuse, and/or sexual abuse.

What happens before a child is placed with me?

A court must decide that it is in the child's best interest for them to be placed in your care. Prior to placement, DFPS will complete a "home assessment," which is a tool that helps determine the safety of your home. DFPS will check the criminal history and abuse/neglect history of all the members in your home who are 14+ years old.

What are the long-term permanency options for children in kinship care?

- 1) Reunification with parents.
- 2) Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC): a judge appoints the relative or fictive kin to be legally responsible for the child, without adopting the child. Kinship caregivers with PMC are eligible for Post-Permanency Services.
- 3) Adoption. Kinship families who adopt will have access to Post-Adoption Services.

What is a child placing agency (CPA)?

Child placing agencies work in partnership with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to train parents and find homes for foster/adoptive children. While all CPAs must adhere to the State's minimum standards for operation, their specific policies and procedures may differ substantially.

What are the requirements for becoming licensed?

- Requirements differ depending on the agency (CPA), but generally include the following:
- At least 21 years old
- Financially stable (some form of steady income-which can include child support payments, TANF, SSI, etc.)
- 1 bed and 40 sq. ft. per child in the home
- No more than 6 children in the home, including biological, adoptive, foster, and children for whom you provide childcare (exceptions may apply)
- Vaccinated pets
- High school diploma or GED (competency testing is available if neither of these requirements are met)
- Agency application: references, home study, fire safety inspections, CPR/First Aid certification, TB testing, background checks and fingerprinting for household members 14 years+
- Annual training hours
- Non-physical discipline agreement (no spanking)

How long does it take to become licensed?

The process could take a few months or up to an entire year, depending upon how quickly you move through the training and documentation. Because there are time constraints related to the legal timeline, it is in the best interest of the kinship caregiver to connect with a child placing agency and complete home verification as quickly as possible.

What is the legal process for children in formal kinship care?

After a child is placed in kinship care, DFPS will continue to assess what is in the best interest of the child (see “Navigating the Legal System” on page 15). Children may be reunited with their parents (usually following a “service plan,” whereby the parents demonstrate the ability to provide safe and nurturing care). Alternatively, an extended family member or close friend may be willing to assume responsibility for the child (kinship care). Typically, a child’s case will last 15-18 months, but any number of factors may prolong or abbreviate the process.

Do I have to be married or a stay-at-home parent to provide kinship care?

No. There is no requirement that a kinship caregiver be married or stay-at-home. However, as with any other parenting circumstance, arrangements must be made for taking children to daycare, school, medical/dental appointments, etc.

Do I have to own a home to become a kinship/adoptive parent?

No. There is no requirement that kinship caregivers own a home. However, moving to a new home during the licensing process requires an update to your home study. Children must have adequate living space as required by the DFPS Minimum Standards.

How much does it cost to become licensed?

There are miscellaneous costs associated with the licensing process (background checks, fingerprinting, TB testing, fire inspection, CPR certification, etc), however some CPAs may cover or reimburse these costs. Licensed families are given a monthly stipend to assist with the costs of caring for a child. This stipend is based on their child’s level of care (which is determined by the state). Children are also provided with medical and dental insurance through Medicaid and qualify for nutritional assistance through WIC. Additional resources may be available depending upon the needs of the family (i.e. childcare voucher, transportation, etc).

If I begin the licensing process and find out I am not eligible, will the child(ren) in my care be removed by CPS?

No. The home verification process is meant to approve families for additional support services. This should not be viewed as an exclusionary process. Basic background checks and a home assessment have already been completed in order to deem your home safe for the child(ren).

How much does it cost to adopt through kinship care?

The cost to adopt through kinship care is minimal. In many (but not all) cases, the adoptive family will qualify for a state subsidy, which covers all legal fees, grants health care coverage, and offers ongoing monthly stipends.

What are the responsibilities of a kinship caregiver?

Kinship caregivers are expected to provide daily care, nurture, and support to the children in their home. This includes advocating for children in their schools and communities, acting as a positive role model, and helping children to learn the life skills necessary to thrive in adulthood.

Kinship caregivers are required to keep up-to-date documentation for the children, inform caseworkers of progress, adjustments, and any problems that may arise, including illnesses, accidents, or the need for therapeutic services.

What ongoing support or training is available for kinship caregivers?

There are several CPAs that work primarily with kinship families. In addition, some nonprofits and faith-based communities in Houston are committed to making sure families are well-supported

and thriving. There are a growing number of support groups, parents' night outs, resource closets, Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) trainings, and other helpful resources.

What is WIC and how does it work?

WIC is a federal government program that serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5. WIC seeks to provide nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care. All children currently in foster care under the age of 5 qualify for WIC.

Keep in mind the following when setting up WIC:

- The monthly household income disclosed on the WIC form is the child's income, which is the daily kinship reimbursement rate x 30 days per month (not the kinship caregiver income).
- WIC is most helpful when purchasing baby formula for infant placements.
- All infants are started on Similac Advance formula unless an alternative order is given by the pediatrician. If your child requires a different formula, be sure to get a prescription from your pediatrician.
- When the child turns 1 year old, additional food items may be covered by WIC, if needed (these items are brand and size-specific according to WIC guidelines).
- Call ahead to schedule your first WIC appointment and ask what documentation you will need to bring. Also, confirm whether you will need to bring the child to the first appointment.
- At your first appointment, you will receive a debit card with the child's prescription and a pin number. This card can be used for purchasing WIC-approved items.
- Always check to see if the child needs to be present for an appointment.
- Online training is required to be completed periodically. These can be completed online (write down your certificate number and take it to your next appointment).
- Most grocery stores accept WIC, but it's important to verify before purchasing.

What is NCI and how does it work?

NCI is a state-wide government program that offers financial aid for child care so that the cost doesn't prevent parents from attending work and/or school. This program is available to licensed kinship families, regardless of their income, if:

- The child is assessed at a Basic level of care.
- Both kinship caregivers work full-time or a single kinship caregiver works full-time (at least 40 hours/week).
- Child is not in adoptive placement (signed adoptive placement paperwork).

Not all childcare facilities accept NCI payment. There have been instances where the childcare facility does not officially accept NCI, but they agree to accept the NCI negotiated rate from the State provided the kinship caregiver pays the difference between the NCI rate and normal tuition.

Licensed kinship caregivers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible as the approval process can take a few months.

Should I attend court hearings?

Unless discouraged by the child's Attorney Ad Litem, it is recommended that kinship caregivers attend court hearings, most importantly the status and permanency hearings. This allows kinship

caregivers to stay updated on the child's case and provides an opportunity to advocate for the child.

Should it really be this hard?

In short, yes. Trauma that happens in relationship must be healed in relationship. And this is hard work. Progress often feels like two steps forward and one step back. As a kinship caregiver you play an important role, but it often takes a team of professionals to meet the needs of a child who has come from a hard place. Lean into your community, and do not be afraid to seek professional help from your agency, health care providers, and therapists.