



Department of Public Health and Human Services  
*Child and Family Services Division*

# KINSHIP CARE



Considered  
high

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This handbook was developed to help your family understand Kinship Care. When the state or tribe has determined that a child is unable to live in his own home, Kinship Care is often the best option for the child. A child will be placed with the child's family when it is in the best interest of the child, and when the home is approved by the Department.

For Native American children under The Indian Child Welfare Act, ICWA, specific placement preferences are required, with placement with members of the child's extended family as the first option. Although the majority of families care for their children without legal intervention, this handbook will focus primarily on those situations where formal legal action is required in order to insure the safety and well-being of the children involved.

Please ask your Child Protection Specialist, Family Resource Specialist, or Permanency Planning Specialist for further information about kinship care.

Department of Public Health &  
Human Services  
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# *The Importance of Family Connections*



## **What is kinship care?**

Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing, teaching and protection of children by relatives, members of a child's tribe, or other adults who have a relationship that the child, youth or family recognizes as significant. The tradition of extended family and other significant adults caring for children when the child's parents are unable to do so is a strong value in all cultures. For generations, extended families have played significant roles in the raising of children, guiding young parents through the daily challenges of parenthood. They also have assumed a more direct role in caring for their relatives when the child's birth parents were having a difficult time or were unable to safely care for their children. Relatives not only cared for children in time of need but also served as important teachers of culture and values. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles, have always provided an important safety net for children. In Native American cultures extended family, elders, and other adults in the community play significant roles in the parenting and teaching of children.



Kinship care can be informal or formal depending on the circumstances involved. Informal care involves kin parenting children as a result of a decision by the family. Formal kinship care is the parenting by kin as determined by the District Court or Tribal Court, the Division of Child and Family Services, or Tribal Social Services. There are times when informal kinship care becomes formal kinship care if intervention by the state or the tribe is needed to insure the safety and well - being of the children.

Formal kinship placements through the state or the tribes can involve both licensed and un-licensed kin families. A kinship family is not required to become licensed. Licensed kin families are required to meet the same state or tribal licensing standards and training requirements as non-kin licensed foster parents. Kinship care is the first option considered and assessed when a child is being placed in out-of-home care by Child and Family Services. Child and Family Services gives preference to the use of kinship caregivers when placement with kin is in the best interests of the child and the caregiver's home is approved by the Department.

**The commitment entered into by providing kinship care is one that insures a child's safety and keeps him connected with family.**



<p><b>Benefits</b></p>	<p>Kinship care allows children to live with people they know and trust. It creates a sense of stability and continuity in a child’s life.</p> <p>Kinship care helps children maintain their ties to family and community and lessens the trauma of separation from birth parents.</p> <p>Kinship care helps to stabilize family situations and ensures children’s safety, while preserving and strengthening family relationships</p> <p>Kinship care supports the ongoing transmission of a child’s family identity, culture, and ethnicity.</p> <p>Kinship care helps insure long –term permanency for children that are not able to return home as kin are frequently willing to adopt or become permanent guardians when reunification is not possible</p> <p>Child and Family Services gives preference to kinship caregivers when placement with kin is in the best interests of the child.</p>
<p><b>Decision Making</b></p>	<p>All decisions regarding school, medical treatment are made in conjunction with your Child Protection Specialist. Consent for major life decisions remains with the birth parents if parental rights have not been terminated.</p> <p>You are an important member of a team of individuals who are responsible for the safety and well-being of the child in your care. Your thoughts, observations and ideas are very important.</p>
<p><b>Financial and Medical Assistance</b></p>	<p>As a kinship parent you may be eligible to receive financial assistance from various sources. As a licensed kin foster parent, you are eligible to receive a monthly payment from the Division of Child and Family Services or Tribal social services programs. A child placed in a licensed kinship foster home is eligible for foster care payments and foster care related Medicaid.</p> <p>If you are not licensed, you may be eligible to receive “Child- Only” Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Food Stamps. Supplemental Security Income or SSI may also be available dependent on the child’s disability and financial eligibility. Children in an unlicensed home may be eligible for Medicaid through the Office of Public Assistance.</p> <p>Adoption or Guardianship subsidies may be available if you receive Legal Guardianship or adopt the child in your care through the District or Tribal Court. Indian children that are adopted through a Tribal Customary Adoption process may also qualify for a subsidy.</p>
<p><b>Relationship with the Birth Family</b></p>	<p>The primary plan for the child in your care is to return him/her to the birth parents, in most circumstances. Maintaining the child’s relationship with his/her parent (s) is a crucial part of the process. In most situations this involves regular contact between the child and the parents. Your ability to remain objective in your relationship with the child’s parents will be crucial. Your ability to work with the placing agency, at times against the wishes of the birth parents, is also crucial</p>

## **What are the characteristics of a successful Kinship parent?**

- Love of family and a willingness to help in the healing process
- An awareness that healing does not come quickly
- A commitment to your values and cultural traditions and a willingness to share with the children in your home as appropriate
- A love of children and parenting
- The ability to respect the child's values, cultural traditions and religious beliefs
- A good sense of humor and talent for keeping life in perspective
- The ability to handle unexpected changes, stresses, and challenges
- Patience and perseverance
- The willingness to change or adapt to meet the unique needs of the child
- The ability to stay objective and support the progress of both parents.
- The ability to recognize and accept conflicting loyalties
- The ability to accept and successfully navigate family pressures
- The willingness to support a plan of reunification or other permanency for the child in your care
- Tolerance for and understanding of the child's conflicting feelings about their parents
- The willingness to seek out appropriate services for the child and family.
- The ability to operate successfully as a team member

## What are some of the requirements to become a Kinship parent?

- Kinship families who wish to become licensed for foster care or approved for adoption or guardianship are required to meet the same state or tribal licensing standards and training requirements as non-kin applicants
- Kinship parents and all adults living in the home must undergo a fingerprint-based criminal background checks and child protective services checks in order to be fully-licensed by CFSD or the appropriate tribe.
- Unlicensed Kinship families are required to submit a fingerprint based criminal background records check; an on-line Montana motor vehicle check; and a child protection check of all adults residing in the home.
- A signed Kinship Agreement



## Permanency Options for Kinship Parents

What if the child can't be returned to the birth parents?

**Adoption-** Through the legal adoption process, the adopting parent(s) become the legal parent(s) of the child. The legal rights of the birth parent(s) are terminated by the court. Adoption can include a subsidy provided by the state. The subsidy may include a monthly payment and Medicaid for the child.

**Customary Adoption-** Culturally-Based Permanency for Native American youth and families. Customary adoption is defined as a traditional tribal practice, ceremony or process, recognized by the tribal community, which gives a child a legally recognized permanent parent-child relationship with someone other than the child's birth parent. Customary adoptions are completed through tribal courts and require a tribal court to have legal authority over the child being adopted, prior to granting the adoption. Customary adoption modifies the custodial and legal relationship of the birth parents with the child but does not terminate the birth parent's emotional relationship with the child, the child's relationships with the birth parent or extended birth family, or the extended family's relationship with the child. The legal rights of the birth parent(s) remain intact. A monthly subsidy payment may be available for children who meet eligibility criteria.

**Legal Guardianship-** Legal guardianship offers kinship parents an opportunity to assume legal and physical responsibility for the child, without severing parental rights. Guardianship is a legally sanctioned relationship that can only be dissolved by the court. Guardianship may be considered when neither reunification nor

adoption is in the child's best interest. Guardianship may include a monthly subsidy payment, dependent upon the child's eligibility.



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## What if I need help?

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Your child's Child Protection Specialist can help you find the services you need. They will help you access counseling and therapy services as needed for the child in your care and for your family. These services should be obtained from a Medicaid provider if possible. If you need additional assistance in obtaining counseling or therapy services, you may contact your medical provider or call the Medicaid Recipient Hotline at 1-800-362-8312, the Children's Special Health Services Hotline at 1-800-762-9891, or log on to [www.dphhs.state.mt.us/hpsd/medicaid/index.htm](http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/hpsd/medicaid/index.htm) for more information and assistance.

## Resources for Children and Kinship Families

- Children's Mental Health Services- your local community mental health centers, Indian Health Services, private licensed therapists/counselors
- Inpatient psychiatric care- Shodair Children's Hospital in Helena
- Youth Mental Health Case Management- AWARE Inc., local community mental health centers
- Foster Parent Support Groups
- Family Group Decision Making Meetings
- School Based Mental Health programs
- Family Based In-Home Services
- Child Development/Head Start Center Services
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana
- Community Parent Support Groups
- Community parenting classes



- Your local Office of Public Assistance and Medicaid office

## **On Line Resources for Children and Kinship Families**

- Montana State Foster and Adoptive Parent Association- [www.msf-apa.org](http://www.msf-apa.org)
- National Foster Parent Association - [www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)
- Educational Advocacy- [www.pluk.org](http://www.pluk.org)
- National Resource Center- [www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp)
- North American Council on Adoptable Children- [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)
- Montana State University State Extension “Grandparents raising Grandchildren Project” [www.montana.edu/wwwhd/grg/index](http://www.montana.edu/wwwhd/grg/index)
- AARP Foundation Grandparent Information Center  
[www.aarp.org/life/grandparents](http://www.aarp.org/life/grandparents)
- Generations United [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)
- Kinship Information Network [www.kinsupport.org](http://www.kinsupport.org)
- Child Welfare League of America [www.cwla.org/programs/kinship](http://www.cwla.org/programs/kinship)
- Children’s Defense Fund  
[www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageNavigator/policy\\_cw\\_kinship](http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageNavigator/policy_cw_kinship)
- Children of Prisoners Library <http://www.fcnetwork.org/cpl/cplindex.html>
- Casey Family Programs-  
[www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/CommitmentToKin.htm](http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/CommitmentToKin.htm)
- National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) [nicwa.org](http://nicwa.org)
- Kincare Blog- For Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and other Kinship Relatives <http://www.kincare.blogspot.com/>
- A Kinship Guide to Rescuing Children for Grandparents and Other Relatives As Parents (2008)- Chicago Road Publishing, PO Box 1073, Okemos, MI 48805. [info@chicagoroadpublishing.com](mailto:info@chicagoroadpublishing.com)

## **How do I get started?**

Contact your local Child and Family Services Division office and ask to speak to a Family Resource Specialist, or Permanency Planning Specialist for assistance. More information is available on the Department's website [www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov) or Call 1-866 9FOSTER or e-mail at [askaboutfostercare@mt.gov](mailto:askaboutfostercare@mt.gov)

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