



**Ten Steps Public Child Welfare Agencies Can Take to Support
Children in Safe and Stable Kinship Families
September 23, 2009**

**Required by provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act*

Search and Engagement

****1. Develop protocols to ensure that staff has exhausted every possible avenue to identify, locate, and engage extended family options for children before they are placed in non-relative foster care.***

- Use all available human resources – children and youth, parents, maternal and paternal relatives, youth, and community members – to identify extended family networks for the child.
- Ensure that public agency staff and private providers have access to and training on the best possible technology to search for relatives.
- Attempt to identify relatives at every step in the child welfare process, including when children first come to the attention of the system, during investigations, in court hearings, and in all team decision making/family group meetings, etc.
- Assign internal agency staff to review and approve every placement in non relative foster care to ensure a diligent search has been exhausted.

****2. Implement a policy of “full disclosure” to ensure that all prospective kinship caregivers are educated about the full range of options available to them for care and support of children:***

- Develop policies to ensure that staff and/or providers inform relative caregivers of their right to be foster parents for children involved in the child welfare system, as well as other options for involvement and support.
- Clearly educate caregivers about all legal options available to them – including becoming a licensed foster parent, unlicensed foster care, legal custody, power of attorney and others – and ensure that they understand the

implications of each of these options, including services available to the children, community supports, and financial assistance

- Ensure that decisions about whether or not a child enters state custody are based on and balanced with a clear and thorough assessment of risk and safety, regardless of whether relative placement options are available.
- Develop policies that articulate zero tolerance for intimidation of or threats to relatives about the decisions that they make regarding the best options for care and support of the child (i.e. “if you don’t take legal custody of this child we will place them with a stranger.”)

Kinship Assessment and Licensing

3. *Ensure that public and private child welfare agencies have the full range of tools needed to assess and approve relative homes in a timely manner:*

- Develop a team approach to relative placements so that responsibility for assessment and approval does not fall solely on investigative staff.
- Develop strong relationships with local law enforcement to ensure required background checks are completed in a timely manner.
- Ensure that relative home studies are completed in a timely manner.

4. *Develop standardized processes for approving case by case waivers across county, region, and state and ensure that it is well understood by public agency staff and providers.

- Identify which licensing standards are most commonly waived for relatives and educate staff on the rationale for these exceptions.
- Clarify which types of licensing standards require a higher level of waiver approval and create efficient channels for the approval process.

5. *Provide foster parent training that is relevant to the needs of prospective kinship foster parents.*

- Ensure that foster parent training acknowledges that kinship caregivers have a pre-existing relationship to the child/ren that is qualitatively different from non-related foster parents.
- Provide opportunities during orientation sessions or initial training sessions to help kinship caregivers address the immediate needs of the children placed in their care – emotional; financial, health, legal, educational, etc.

- Allow multiple training opportunities to allow kinship caregivers to share their experiences and common frustrations with other kinship families.
- Provide flexibility in training requirements (i.e. provisions for in home training or fewer training hours) so that relatives can receive training as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- If possible, develop a specialized training for kinship foster parents.
- Utilize kinship resource families as trainers and/or co-trainers so they can share their perspectives with new kinship caregivers

Support for Kinship Families

6. *Ensure that children living with kin and their parents receive the same level of attention to safety, permanency and well-being as children living with non-relatives:*

- Provide reunification services to parents of children in kinship foster care.
- Monitor and support children living in kinship foster care in the same manner as children living with non-relatives.

7. *Provide the same level of financial assistance for kinship foster parents as all other foster parents*

- Identify and remove barriers to timely assessment and licensing of kinship foster homes so that they can receive foster care subsidies as soon as possible.
- Use creative funding opportunities so that kinship foster parents can receive support as soon after they begin caring for children.
- Ensure that children living with kin have access to specialized foster care rates to meet identified special needs.

8. *Dedicate public agency staff and/or private providers with specialized knowledge about kinship care to work with and monitor kinship families:*

- Assign staff with passion, knowledge, and skill for kinship care to engage and support kinship families at all points of contact with the child welfare system.

- Empower kinship units, staff and private providers to develop partnerships with other community providers that can help meet the needs of children living with kin.
- Develop kinship-specific provisions in contracts to ensure that private providers understand kinship policy and preferences and employ staff skilled at working with kinship families.

9. *Develop partnerships with other public systems and community agencies that can help to meet the unique needs of kinship families:*

- Collaborate with a range of public agencies (i.e. TANF, aging, housing, child support, and Medicaid) to ensure that children in kinship care receive the public benefits to which they are entitled and that those agencies understand the unique needs of kinship caregivers.
- Partner with community-based organizations that serve kinship caregivers, particularly those in the senior/adult services community, to ensure that kinship care families can access needed community supports.
- Identify or develop community support groups for kinship caregivers.
- Collaborate with legal aid, local law firms and bar associations, and clinical programs to ensure that kinship caregivers have access to high quality advice about their legal options.

Data Collection

10. *Track key child welfare data to understand the experiences of children in and out of state custody who are living with kin*

- Track data on initial placements, placement moves, and permanency outcomes for children living with kin.
- Track the experiences of children who are diverted from foster care to live with kin to understand re-entry dynamics.