



State of Tennessee  
Department of Children's Services

# JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE



# RESOURCE PARENT HANDBOOK



**STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
436 6<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE NORTH  
CORDELL HULL BLDG., 7<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
NASHVILLE, TN 37243**

**BILL HASLAM  
GOVERNOR**

**JAMES M. HENRY  
COMMISSIONER**

March 5, 2013

Dear Resource Parents:

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services extends its gratitude to you and your family for making a commitment to serve as a meaningful resource in a child's life. As resource parents, your support enables our department to continue its mission of providing for and serving our state's most vulnerable children.

Foster children come from every way of life. It is our job to connect those children with stable and devoted families, and ultimately permanency in a caring home. With your help, Tennessee ranks first in the nation in time to permanency for children who have been in custody more than 24 months. Together, we will continue to ensure our children are healthy, protected and on the right course in life.

We would again like to thank all of our resource parents for serving as advocates for Tennessee's children. Your willingness to provide supervision, guidance and nurturing through adoption or permanent guardianship is a testament to your commitment to our state's most vulnerable citizens.

On behalf of the Department of Children's Services, I want to personally thank you for your sacrifice and for opening your home to care for a child. Please take a moment to review our department's 2013 Resource Parent Handbook, designed to offer various tips and tools for your parenting needs.

Sincerely,



Jim Henry  
Commissioner

JMH/ms



STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
436 6<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE NORTH  
8<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, CORDELL HULL BUILDING  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-1290

March 15, 2013

Dear Resource Family:

The belief that all children, in all walks of life, are entitled to safety, permanency and well-being is a basic guiding principle in public child welfare work. For the population of children and youth who face custodial episodes, there are unique challenges, both for the child and for our Department in meeting their individual needs. As a Department, we could not begin to address the multiplicity of challenges without the strength of the partnership that we have with dedicated resource parents.

Each day you "step to the plate" and provide stability and a sense of normalcy for Tennessee's vulnerable in care population. In addition to opening your homes and hearts to children/youth in need, you provide encouragement, nurturing, coaching, mentoring, and uncountable other supports for both short term and long term custodial episodes. You each make sacrifices in your personal lives to enhance the lives of others.

On behalf of the DCS Office of Child Permanency, we "THANK YOU". Thank you for reaching out and being willing to help. Thank you for answering the telephone in the middle of the night when we are seeking a placement. Thank you for transporting, for attending school conferences, CFTM's and court hearings. Thank you for the myriad of efforts that contribute to our shared objective of safety, permanency and well-being in the life of each child that we touch.

With gratitude,

Sandra Wilson, Executive Director  
Office of Child Permanency

John Johnson, Director  
Foster Care and Adoption Services Dear Resource Family:

## Acknowledgements

This Handbook was developed by collaboration from across the state of Tennessee. Resource Parents and DCS staff met together and consulted with each other to bring us this valuable reference tool, a tool to make day-to-day parenting less stressful and more directed. Gratitude is extended to DCS staff and Resource Parents for their dedicated work on this project.



# Table of Contents

## **Chapter One-Team Roles, Team Tasks, and Responsibilities**

Role of Team Members.....	8
---------------------------	---

## **Chapter Two-Types of Resource Homes**

The Expedited Home Study Process.....	11
Kinship Care.....	12
Special Supports for Kinship Homes.....	12
Private Provider Homes.....	14
Shared Homes.....	15
Medically Fragile Resource Homes.....	15
Residential Care.....	15
Wrap-up.....	15

## **Chapter Three- How Decisions Are Made**

The Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) Process.....	16
Permanency Plan .....	17
Quarterly Progress Review .....	17
Permanency Plan Hearing.....	17
Adoption and Safe Families Act .....	18

## **Chapter Four-The Resource Parent's Role in the Child's Permanency**

Life Story Books .....	19
Participation on the Child and Family Team .....	20
Responsibility of Child and Family Team Members .....	20
Selecting Resource Parents for a Child .....	21
Selecting Adoptive Parents for a Child .....	21
Mentoring Birth Family.....	22
Recruiting Resource Parents.....	22
Participation as a PATH Trainer .....	23
A.S.F.A. (Adoption and Safe Families Act).....	23
Dual Approval of Resource Parents.....	24
The TPR Process (Termination of Parental Rights).....	24

## **Chapter 5-Frequently Asked Questions and Topics of Interest**

Frequently Asked Questions and Topics of Interest.....	26
New Terms, Acronyms, and Definitions.....	27

## **Chapter 6- Recruitment and Retention of Resource Homes**

Recruitment.....	28
Retention.....	30
Why Foster Parenting? .....	31

## Resource Parent Handbook

---

### Chapter 7-Special Situations

Special Situations.....	32
Tennessee Child Passenger Safety Law.....	36
Death of a Child/Youth in DCS Custody.....	39
Brothers.....	40

### Chapter 8- Maintaining an Approved Home

Responsibilities of Resource Parents.....	41
Resource Home Addendum Requirements.....	42
Health Needs.....	42
Clothing and Allowance.....	43
Education.....	43
Discipline.....	44
Routine Transportation.....	44
Extracurricular Activities.....	45
Religion.....	45
Case Planning Participation.....	45
Shared Parenting.....	45
Life Books.....	45
Mandatory In-Services Training for Resource Parents.....	46
Resource Parent Training Suggestions.....	48
Resource Home Reassessments.....	49
Reactivation.....	50
Corrective Action Plans (CAPS).....	50
Resource Home Closure Process.....	50

### Chapter Nine-Rights of Resource Parents

Foster Parents Bill of Rights.....	52
SIU Due Process.....	58
The Resource Parent Advocacy Program.....	58
Multi-Ethnic Placement Act.....	60
Travel Reimbursement .....	60
Out-Of-State Travel.....	61
Outings and Overnight Stays.....	61
Removal of a Child from a Resource Home.....	63
The Appeal Process for a Child/Children Being Removed from a Resource Home.....	63
Respite.....	64

### Chapter Ten-Financial

Board Rates and Clothing Allowances.....	65
"Extra Expenses" .....	65
Educational Costs.....	66
Medical Expenses.....	67
"Special" Clothing Purchases.....	67
Allowance for the Child.....	68
Reimbursement for Damages.....	68

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

---

Appealing Financial Decisions.....	69
Liability Insurance and Lawsuits.....	69
Federal Income Taxes.....	69
Day Care Expenses.....	70
DCS Resource Home Board Payment Verification.....	70
On-Line Pay Period Service Letter.....	72
Resource Parent Verification Portal Screen Shots.....	73
 <b>Chapter Eleven- Legal Issues for Resource Parents</b>	
Abuse Allegations and Investigations .....	75
SIU Level I Due Process.....	76
SIU Level II Due Process.....	76
Frequently Asked Questions.....	76
Reporting Abuse and Neglect.....	78
Lawsuits Brought Against Resource Parents.....	78
Guardian Ad Litem.....	78
Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 40: Guidelines for Guardian Ad Litem for Children in Juvenile Court Neglect, Abuse, and Dependency Hearings.....	79
Court Appointed Special Advocate.....	84
Educational Issues.....	84
Confidentiality Guidelines.....	84
Children with HIV.....	85
Placement Contracts.....	86
 <b>Chapter Twelve-Associations and Other Supports for Resource Parents</b>	
Purpose.....	87
DCS Support.....	87
Being a Member of the Tennessee Foster Adoptive Care Association (TFACA).....	88
Independent Living, Transition Planning, Extension of Foster Care and other Services for Youth and Young Adults Between the Ages of 14 and 24 .....	89
Transition to Services for Adults.....	91

# Chapter 1

## TEAM ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

### Team Roles

### Team Tasks and Responsibilities

Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) are the central decision-making point in the life of a child's case. These meetings bring significant persons to the table: birth family, resource parents, teachers, medical professionals, service providers, friends, godparents, and anyone else identified by the family as having significant input to the situation. Meetings are held at critical times: permanency plan development, placement change, return home, termination of parental rights, or whenever a team member believes it necessary to call a meeting. DCS is always present at the meetings and will facilitate the discussion. Decisions must comply with DCS policies and be in the best interest of the child. Safety and well-being must always be preserved.

#### Role of Team Members

**Resource Parents** play a vital role in these meetings, as they bring current and relevant information to the meeting. Critical ways that resource parents are important to the CFTM are as follows:

- Attending and participating in CFTMs
- Providing input to case decisions and permanency plans
- Supporting the implementation of those plans

Additionally, resource parents nurture the child and maintain the balance of the child's existing family. On a daily basis, Resource Parents accomplish the following:

- Provide day to day care
- Tend to emergency medical needs, notifying the FSW as quickly as possible if there is an occurrence of an illness or accident requiring a physician's care or hospital visit.
- Protect the child's personal information by strictly following DCS confidentiality policy and notifying the FSW if anyone inquires about the child's identity
- Contact DCS immediately if the child leaves your home by runaway or with someone unauthorized.
- Assist in the emotional and physical preparation for the child to return to the family home or be placed for adoption

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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- Provide routine transportation for medical appointments, family visits, and extracurricular activities
- Support the child as he/she visits with family and report any unusual circumstances to the FSW
- Work with the child to develop a life book
- Inform the child's FSW of any progress, issue, or need. Particularly advise of any physical or emotional problems, including sexual acting-out behavior or aggression.

The **child** has important responsibilities during the CFTM. If age appropriate, the child should participate in every CFTM. It is critical that the child:

- Acknowledge his/her current family situation
- Adapt to his/her new environment
- Participate in the team's discussion and join the work towards meeting the permanency goals

**Birth family**, particularly biological parents are also a vital part of the CFTM process. Their critical role is to:

- Acknowledge their current family situation
- Work with the team to establish a permanency goal and action steps
- Work towards meeting the goals of the permanency plan
- Provide support to their child, both emotional and otherwise as they are capable
- Provide continuity by maintaining a continuing relationship with the child

Birth parents and biological family have particular responsibilities to DCS. Those responsibilities are as follows:

- Keep DCS informed of current address, phone number, and other contact information
- Work with DCS staff, resource parents, service providers, and child towards the permanency goal
- Keep open communication with DCS. Respond to phone calls, keep appointments, and maintain consistent communication and/or visits with the child.
- Provide a safe, nurturing and loving family for the child's return
- Provide financial support
- Work with the Resource Parents and CFT to provide for your child's needs and meet the permanency goal

## Resource Parent Handbook

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It should be noted that the participation of biological family/birth parents will vary from case to case, however the importance of the biological parents to the child should never be minimized.

**DCS staff** is required to be at every CFTM. Their primary tasks are to:

- Assess the child and family and meet the day-to-day needs of the child
- Facilitate team members in the development of a Permanency Plan that meets the needs of the child and his/her family
- Facilitate activities and/or secure services that assist in the accomplishment of the permanency goals
- Authorize payment of board, clothing, and allowance within the resource home
- Provide supportive services to the Resource Parents as needed and required in order for the Resource Parents to maintain a safe and comfortable living environment and nurturing atmosphere for the child.

The DCS FSW, as the representative of the child's legal custodian, has specific responsibilities:

- Overseeing the daily care while the child is in out-of-home placement, including regular face-to-face contact with the child and Resource Parent
- Assuring that the child's medical and dental needs are met
- Assuring that the child and his/her family have reasonable visitation as directed by the court or the Child and Family Team
- Being available to the child and the Resource Parent
- Being present for all CFTMs, hearings, and reviews
- Maintaining open communication with Resource Parents

Resource Parents need access to information regarding the child's fears, anxieties, history of abuse, and family relationships to enhance their ability to nurture the child. Resource Parent's shouldn't be "left in the dark." Resource Parents are bound by the same rules of confidentiality as DCS staff.<sup>1</sup>

Resource Parents are encouraged to have contact with birth families in order to gather needed information about the child's like, dislikes, favorite foods, fears, and favorite belongings. Resource Parents are also encouraged to mentor birth families in preparation for potential reunification.

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<sup>1</sup> DCS Resource Parents' Bill of Rights

## **Chapter Two**

### **Types of Resource Homes**

#### **What is a Resource Home?**

The Department of Children's Services actively recruits, trains, and provides technical support to individuals and families interested in providing service as resource homes to children in need. In the past, resource homes were often called foster homes. This name grew from a perception that the family was serving as an alternative or surrogate family for the child in need. As the work of providing for the needs of children has grown, a realization has come about that families providing this service are a valued and necessary resource that must be nurtured and supported. In addition to this, families who provide for children in state custody may also be in a position to become a valuable resource to birth families as they work through the issues that led children to be placed in custody, and can become a long-term support for a child, youth, or birth family far beyond the limited time the child or youth is placed in a resource home.

#### **What does it mean to be "dually" approved?**

All homes developed by DCS are approved as "dual" homes. This means that the home may serve as either a temporary placement resource, or may eventually come to provide a permanent home (adoption or permanent guardianship) for the child or children placed. All DCS resource homes are dually approved to serve either role in order to afford children the best opportunities at permanency within the shortest periods of time. If the child's natural family is unable to achieve reunification, the child can find permanency with the resource placement and the trauma associated with placement changes can be reduced.

#### **The Expedited Home Study Process**

The normal process for becoming a resource home takes several weeks of training, full background checks, fingerprinting, reference checks, medical history, and a completed home study as well as other necessary items. There are some circumstances that permit utilizing an expedited process to approve and utilize a resource home for placement. In these circumstances, the potential resource family is either related to the child(ren), or there is a significant pre-existing relationship with the child/family. In these cases, a quick national background check and a home study, followed by a strict review of the recommendations and findings by local regional administration may lead to a contingent approval for expedited placement. The family must complete the fingerprinting process within a very short time frame and must immediately enroll in PATH classes and complete all other training and

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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paperwork just as in the normal approval process, but the child(ren) may be placed in the home immediately upon regional administrative approval.

However, the parent(s) will not be eligible to receive a daily board payment until the home has been fully approved. All adults in a caregiver (parenting) role who reside in the home with the child(ren) must attend PATH classes and complete all requirements to become fully approved. This process takes approximately 120 days to complete if there are no delays. In order to continue to be an approved placement, expedited resource parents/homes are required to meet continued training requirements, provide for the basic needs of the child, and follow DCS policy and procedures with regard to foster children and resource home requirements.

Policy Reference: [16.20 Expedited Custodial Placements](#)

### **Kinship Care - What is kinship care and why is it important?**

Kinship homes are frequently developed utilizing the expedited process described above. When it becomes apparent that a child has to be removed from the primary caregiver, DCS immediately seeks an appropriate alternative placement. If there are family members available that are willing to assist the child, it reduces the trauma suffered by the child. While their life is being disrupted, they are at least being placed with somebody that they know and have a connection with. DCS offers supports for expedited homes in the form of initial clothing allowances, provider services, assistance with daycare, assistance in securing TNCARE coverage, and assistance in meeting the child's medical/dental needs.

DCS actively seeks relatives to develop as resource homes for children in care. Statistics indicate that children fare better when placed with relative caregivers. Additionally, federal mandates require that we complete a full diligent search for relatives at the initial point of contact with a family. As noted above, removal from the primary caregiver is always traumatic for a child, but if a relative/significant other can be located and is appropriate for placement, the trauma can be greatly reduced. Additionally, it is much more likely that the child will achieve permanency more quickly when placed with relatives. Relatives provide consistency and stability for a child in relation to family norms, culture, religion, maintaining relationships with extended family, genealogical history and other important connections that only a relative caregiver can provide.

### **Special Supports for Kinship Homes**

Kinship resource parents are required to follow all requirements/policies/procedures of DCS with regard to care of the children, compliance with visits, appropriateness and continued approval of home, etc. Kinship parents are also required to complete additional training each

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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year, including required core courses. Resource Parent Support can provide more information regarding training opportunities and requirements. Some regions have a designee specifically trained and identified to work with kinship families to assist them through the process of placing relative children; often, this person is known as the Kinship Coordinator.

Policy Reference: [16.8 Responsibilities of Approved Resource Homes](#)

Kinship caregivers require full disclosure of the options available to them to provide care for their relative's children. There are also different options for family/kin who may seek custody of a child through other means than through the kinship foster care program. Families must fully understand and explore each of these options to determine which option is best for the needs of their particular family. The options available to kinship caregivers include the following:

**Power of Attorney:** A legal paper that allows the primary caregiver for the child to make legal, medical and school decisions. With this document, the parent(s) can take the child back whenever they want. A lawyer is not needed for this but both the caregiver and the parent(s) have to sign the document in front of a notary. DCS is not involved with the child or the family.

**Legal Custody:** This is a Custody Order from the Juvenile Court that holds jurisdiction. With legal custody, the relative can make educational and medical care decisions, as well as all other decisions, regarding the child. This Order may also have guidelines regarding the parents' visitation and phone calls regarding the child, as well as an Order for the parent to pay child support. The legal custody would remain in effect until the child(ren)'s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or until the parent(s) are granted a Court Order returning legal custody of the child(ren) to them. If you are the child's sister, brother, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or first cousin, you may be eligible for the Families First "Child Only" Program through DHS. You may also be eligible for TennCare and food stamps.

**Permanent Guardianship:** This is an Order from a Juvenile Court Judge. One has to be committed for caring for this child until he/she is an adult. The parents' rights do not end like with adoption. The Order will address when or if a parent can visit and usually will address child support and how much would be paid. For permanent guardianship to take place, the child(ren) must live in the caregiver's home for at least six months and it should be established that guardianship is in the child(ren)'s best interest. Permanent guardianship can end if the parent shows a change in circumstances and that it is in the best interest of the child(ren). If the relative is a brother, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or first cousin, he or she could be eligible for the Families First "Child Only" Program. One can apply for this at the local DHS office; there may be eligibility TennCare and food stamps, as well.

**Subsidized Permanent Guardianship:** This is an option available to some children in DCS custody who live in kinship foster care with relatives. There are specific criteria for this

## Resource Parent Handbook

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program that include guidelines related to the relationship of the relative to the child(ren). This option is reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is in the best interest of the child. This program is much like permanent guardianship but allows the child to leave DCS custody while allowing the relative to continue to receive monthly financial assistance from DCS. There is no termination of parental rights so parents still have the option to petition the Court for a return of custody to them if they are in a position to do so in the future.

**Adoption:** This is when the Court decrees the caregiver is the legal parent of a child. A Court Order terminates the parents' rights forever. It is up to the caregiver if the birth family has contact with the child. A lawyer is needed for this process. If DCS is involved when the adoption takes place, a monthly adoption subsidy may occur if the child is eligible.

**Relative Caregiver Program:** If the caregiver is a relative and has agreed to care for a family member, he or she may be eligible to participate in the Relative Caregiver Program. The Relative Caregiver Program provides respite and recreational opportunities, support groups for caregivers, children and teens, educational workshops, and emergency financial and/or start-up assistance (if eligible). Caregivers can make contact with the Program at any time while caring for the child(ren). A DCS representative can provide contact information for the Relative Caregiver Program in each region.

Policy Reference: [16.59 Disclosures of Legal Options and Available Services for Relative Caregivers](#).

## Private Provider Homes

DCS is not the only agency to recruit and maintain resource homes to meet the needs of children entering custody. Many children need specialized care and treatment that requires considerable training and support. In these cases, DCS looks to community partners in the form of contract agencies, also known as private providers. These agencies are selected through a competitive bidding process after a rigorous review process. Levels of care denoting different types and intensities of therapy and specific treatment needs are well defined and specific proposals to meet those needs are submitted by various agencies competing to deliver these services to DCS custody children. Examples of the services include trauma therapy, sex offender treatment, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health treatment specifically targeted to diagnosed issues, family centered therapy, and a multitude of other milieus. DCS and contract agencies strive to provide the necessary services in a family based setting. Therapeutic Resource Parents are provided more training and support to care for children whose emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs are more significant than what a traditional resource home can provide. Often, Resource Parents with provider agencies have access to more assistance on-call during evening and weekend hours, and receive more contact visits from caseworkers in the home.

### Shared Homes

There are times when a resource home that is approved through DCS or an agency may need to become a shared home to meet the needs of a child placed in the home. Such times may include situations in which a sibling group is in care and the children require different levels of care. Another instance could arise in which a child in a DCS home experiences a change in circumstance which requires additional supports and services of a provider agency. In these situations, DCS and the provider agency will come to an agreement that the home can be shared between the two, and a specific contract will be negotiated between the Regional Administrator and the Director of the private agency.

Policy Reference: [16.11 Shared Resource Homes](#)

### Medically Fragile Resource Homes

Sometimes, children entering custody have special medical needs that require more expertise for their care. These children may suffer from genetic disease, developmental or physical delays, health concerns requiring universal precautions, or other significant medical issues. If a child enters custody with such needs, the regional Nurse Practitioner will review the child's circumstances and determine whether special medically fragile placement is needed. Resource Parents who wish to become medically fragile providers must undergo specific, intensive training on medical treatment for these children beyond the regular CPR, Medication Management, and First Aid training that all resource parents must complete. Certain provider agencies recruit, train and certify medically fragile resource homes.

### Residential Care

Sometimes, a child's treatment needs exceed what can be offered or accomplished in a family home setting. In these cases, a residential placement may be deemed appropriate. Children diagnosed with a need for intensive drug and alcohol or sexual predatory behaviors may need this type of treatment setting. Children with severe mental health or self-injurious behaviors may need residential psychiatric treatment until they can be stabilized. Some children need treatment that can best be offered in a peer setting such as a group home arrangement.

### Wrap-up

The Child and Family Team Meeting process governs all placement activities for children in custody. After carefully assessing a child/family's needs, this group comes together to discuss and decide upon the best placement setting for children. Most of the time, this placement will be in a family setting with either a DCS resource home, or more preferably in a relative kinship home.

## **Chapter Three**

### **How Decisions Are Made**

Decisions are made about children in foster care through the Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) process, and other reviews described below. Recommendations are made based upon these reviews; however the ultimate decision lies with the court. Here is some information about the CFTM Process and other reviews that you can participate in:

#### **The Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) Process**

Team members include (but are not limited to): birth family, neighbors, Resource Parents, service providers, educational providers, DCS Staff and other agency staff persons. Members of the Child and Family Team can request a meeting at any time to discuss issues of concern. All members of the team are equal and have an equal voice. Resource Parents are encouraged to participate in all CFTMs regarding the children they are parenting. It is a Resource Parent's right and responsibility to attend and offer information that can be helpful to the team. However, Resource Parents should be aware that a birth parent can request that a Resource Parent not attend a CFTM. Common goals of the CFTM are to:

- Learn what the birth family hopes to accomplish
- Set reasonable and meaningful goals
- Recognize and affirm family strengths
- Determine family needs
- Find solutions to meet family needs
- Design individualized supports and services to match the family needs and build upon their strengths
- Achieve clarity about responsibility of assigned tasks
- Develop and achieve a workable case plan for each child and family
- Achieve the ultimate outcome of safety, permanence, and well-being of the child and family
- Importantly, build a team of people who care about the child and family

A "Skilled Facilitator" is required for certain types of CFTMs. The Facilitator is a DCS Case Manager with advanced training in mediation and facilitation of meetings; a Facilitator is especially helpful in challenging situations and is required for the following circumstances: the Initial CFTM and Placement Stability CFTMs. Resource Parents are strongly encouraged to attend any CFTM if there is a possibility that a disruption may occur.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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Policy References: [31.7 Building, Preparing, and Maintaining Child and Family Teams](#), [31.7 Policy Attachment: Stages of the Child and Family Team Meeting](#), [CFTM Protocol](#)

### **Permanency Plan**

The Permanency Plan is a document that states what the permanency goal for the child is (Reunify with Parents, Exit Custody with Relatives, Permanent Guardianship, Adoption, Planned Permanent Living Arrangement), and outlines the steps necessary to achieve that goal. This must be developed within 30 days of the date of custody and is reviewed or updated at least annually. The Permanency Plan must be approved ("ratified") by the court within 60 days of the date of custody. Resource Parents are encouraged to attend the Permanency Plan CFTM and offer valuable input to the team.

**\*\*It is important to understand that there is a federal requirement causing the Department to have an ongoing diligent search for relatives. This process starts within the first 30 days of custody and continues throughout the life of a case.**

Policy Reference: [16.31 Permanency Planning](#)

### **Quarterly Progress Review**

This Review determines the progress made toward accomplishment of the permanency goal, and is conducted by the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB). The FCRB is a group of citizens appointed by the court at 90 days and every six months thereafter. DCS provides the FCRB a written report of the family's progress, and the date of the next review. If a child has a court hearing during the same month that a review by the Foster Care Review Board is due, the court hearing will substitute for this review. Resource Parents and the Child and Family Team should be notified of the FCRB meetings and are encouraged to attend or provide written information for the review.

Policy Reference [16.32 Foster Care Review and Quarterly Progress Reviews](#)

### **Permanency Plan Hearing**

In addition to the court hearing to approve the initial plan, a further hearing will be held within 12 months of custody and every 12 months thereafter until permanency is achieved (or a child turns 18). This hearing is held before the juvenile court judge or referee, or other court of competent jurisdiction. Child and Family Team Members, including Resource Parents, should be notified of the Permanency Plan hearing and are encouraged to attend. Some judges will want to review a case more often than annually. Some will want to see the child in person at the annual court hearing. These requirements differ from court to court and judge to judge. Court hearings are lengthy and confidential. Please be prepared to stay all day.

Policy Reference: [16.33 Permanency Hearings](#)

### Adoption and Safe Families Act

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 is federal legislation (effective 11/19/97) requiring states to consider termination of parental rights in certain situations, including (but not limited to):

- Children who have been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months
- When a court has determine a child to be abandoned
- Cases where a parent has committed murder or voluntary manslaughter of one of their children
- Cases where a parent has committed felony assault that has resulted in serious bodily injury to one of their children

Resource Parents who would like to understand *CS-0745, Criteria to Terminate Parental Rights* should ask the child's Family Service Worker for a copy of the form.

Exceptions can be made to these requirements if:

- The child is in the care of a relative
- There is a compelling reason why filing for termination of parental rights is not in the best interest of the child
- DCS did not provide the child's family the services deemed necessary to return the child to a safe home

If a child is considered "legal risk" (DCS is pursuing termination of parental rights, but may not have legally secured this yet) or in "full guardianship" of the state (all parental rights have been severed), a team of staff members will begin the process of identifying a pre-adoptive placement for the child. The process by which this is done may vary slightly, according to regional protocol. Generally, a team of staff work together to identify approved Resource Families interested in adoption who "match" the needs of the child. Family strengths and needs are compared to the strengths and needs identified for the child. This is a very deep and thoughtful process used to select the best possible life-long family for each individual child.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Resource Parents' Role in the Child's Permanency**

Resource Parents play a vital role in the permanency of our children by preparing them for the next step along the road to permanency. Whether children return to birth family or are adopted, Resource Parents nurture children along the path. They are likely to become the permanent family for our children, or will maintain a life-long connection.

#### **Life Story Books**

- Life Story books are for children who are in custody the custody of DCS. The book is meant to preserve and document their history while being in foster care.
- The Life Story book is developed in order to help them understand their situation in life and process feelings they might have during this difficult time.
- It can help a child better understand the separation from their parents, gain a sense of "who am I and how did I get here?" and can give hope for their future plans.
- The Life Story book should be updated often with important events in the child's life. This can be done by taking pictures, drawings, awards, etc. Resource Parents should be creative with different things to add to the book.
- The book is to go with the child anytime there is a placement change.
- The use of a life book is effective for children who will be placed for adoption as well as for children who will return to their birth families.
- The Life Story Book is an important and Valuable gift and can promote attachment.

Policy Reference: [16.8 Responsibilities of Approved Resource Homes](#), [Guidelines for Life Story Books](#)

### Participation on the Child and Family Team

Resource Parents, as caregivers of our children, as critical members of the team that will make important decisions around the care and welfare of the children in your home. The teaming process means that you will be invited to attend all Child and Family Team Meetings for children placed in your care. We feel that it is imperative that we hear your thoughts, information and ideas. We know that your commitment to the child's welfare and safety will assist us in making a decision that will best meet the child's needs. We hope that the CFTM process will support not only the children and families we serve, but also you, the caregivers of our children. If a child is at risk of disruption from your home, we want to determine if additional supports and/or services to the child or to you might stabilize and maintain the placement. If the child must move to a new placement, then we need your assistance in ensuring that we have all the information about why a move is needed and how to make the change with as little trauma for the child as possible. We need you as our partner when we are working to strengthen families and protect children.

### Responsibility of Child and Family Team Members

- Believe in the group's ability to be effective
- Be respectful and demonstrate courteous behavior to all
- Remember the purpose and goal - to provide opportunity for family and others to participate in developing solutions
- Watch your non-verbal messages
- Listen and seek to understand other points of view
- Communicate cooperative intentions
- Recognize the family's expertise
- Build on strengths - identify, ask about, share, encourage, compliment
- Support the talents and abilities of others
- Be honest, fair, specific and behaviorally descriptive in what you say
- Know your personal biases, prejudices and "hot spots" and control that they do not affect your ability to provide balanced input and leadership in the meeting
- Make sure that what you say is understandable to all
- Speak directly to group members, not about individuals as if not present
- Acknowledge and accept emotions and disagreements as natural and to be expected. Stand in the other person's shoes.
- Separate issues and concerns from the people discussing them

- Stay open, flexible and creative. Considers the merit of each idea.
- Maintain your energy throughout the evening.

### **Selecting a Resource Parent for a Child**

One question we are often asked is, "Can you find us a baby?" There are other appropriate agencies that handle infant adoptions only, which may be a better option to meet that need if adopting an infant is your sole goal. The department plays the role of finding the most appropriate and least restrictive placement for children entering custody. We use the best practice protocol method which helps to match needs of children with the needs and strengths of the resource families. One of the department's greatest needs is more resource homes that have a willingness to parent teens. More than 50% of children entering custody are teenagers. The department's job is to find good homes for all of our children in custody, and not to find a particular child that resource parent dreams of having. It is also very important to keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to reunify families and remedy the issues that brought the children into custody in the first place. If and only if that goal cannot be met, the option of adoption becomes a possibility.

### **Selecting an Adoptive Parent for a Child**

If a child has been placed in a resource home for 6 months or more and the permanency goal is changed to adoption, that resource family is given the first choice to adopt the child/children. If a child is in full guardianship of the state and the current resource family chooses not to adopt, the Permanency Specialist and the child's Family Service Worker will convene a meeting with all of the members of the Child and Family Team to gather information on the child. They use this information to write an Individualized Recruitment Plan which outlines the next steps to identifying an adoptive home for this child. These steps may include searching the database of available homes that might be a match for this child as well as efforts to recruit a totally new resource home. Once a prospective adoptive family is identified; the Permanency Specialist will meet with the family to present the Presentation Summary of the child/children. They will also discuss the child's eligibility for adoption assistance and negotiate a rate if applicable. Full disclosure of all information about a child must be presented to the adoptive family. If the family is interested in the child, visits will begin on a regular basis. If the family seems to be a good match the child is placed in the home. The child must reside in the home for no less than a 6 month period before adoption can take place. Once the decision is made to adopt, the Permanency Specialist helps the family to secure an attorney and obtain an attorney fee letter and subsequent approval. The attorney files a petition to adopt and secures a court date. If the current resource family where the child is placed is adopting the child, the adoption must be completed within 90 days of the termination of parental rights. If the adoptive placement is a new placement, the adoption should be completed within 60 days after the end of the 6 month placement period. In some circumstances an extension can be granted if needed and warranted.

Policy Reference: [CFTM Guidelines for Selecting a Permanent Family](#)

### **Mentoring Birth Family**

Mentoring birth families can be one of the most challenging, but rewarding, roles of resource parents. Many resource parents enjoy this high level of contact with birth families and feel that they are genuinely contributing to the success of the child and their family. There are several ways the resource family can help mentor a birth family; here are just a few:

- transport parent with you to the child's medical appointments,
- call the child's parents on the phone,
- give parents pictures of their child,
- share copies of homework and report cards with family, encourage parents progress,
- talk with the parent at the visit,
- refer to child as "your child" to birth parents,
- help birth parents locate community resources,
- share child's Lifebook with parents,
- take/pick up child to/at parent's home,
- attend parenting classes with parents, and
- serve as a support to family following reunification.

The decision to utilize these strategies should be made with the child's family service worker.

### **Recruiting Resource Parents**

Resource Parents are the single best tool for Resource Parent recruitment. Resource parents can support recruitment in many ways:

- Talking to friends, families, co-workers about the rewards of fostering children
- Participating in pre-service and ongoing training
- Participating on a PATH Expert Panel
- Sharing experiences with new resource parents
- Joining foster parent associations and/or support groups
- Organizing recognition and/or appreciation efforts and events

## Resource Parent Handbook

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Speak with your Resource Parent Support worker today about opportunities to support resource parent recruitment in your area.

### Participating as a PATH trainer

PATH is to be taught by a trainer and a resource parent co-trainer, who has received PATH T4T (Training for Trainers). Having a resource parent co-trainer as part of the training process gives PATH participants first-hand knowledge of what life is really like as a resource parent. The resource parent co-trainer is able to share experiences, advice, and lessons learned with prospective resource parents. This adds a lot of value to the PATH training experience! If you are interested, speak with your Resource Parent Support worker for more information about the requirements and benefits of becoming a resource parent co-trainer.

### ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act)

Q. What does A.S.F.A. stand for?

A. A.S.F.A stands for Adoption and Safe Family Act.

Q. How did A.S.F.A. affect the Department of Children's Service?

A. The Adoption and Safe Family Act was Federal child welfare legislation that was passed into effect in 1997. It focused on improving the safety of children, helping to support our families, help with adoptions, and to find other permanent homes for children.

Q. What does A.S.F.A. have to do with resource parents?

A. It requires states to consider termination of parental rights in certain situations and to seek permanent placement for that child. Those situations could be as follows:

1. The child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months.
2. When a court has determined a child to be an abandoned infant.
3. Cases where the parent has committed murder or voluntary manslaughter of another child of the parent or a felony assault that has resulted in serious bodily injury to the child or another child.

Q. Are there any exceptions to A.S.F.A. and the terminating of parental rights?

A. There are only a few exceptions and are as follows:

1. If the child is placed with a relative.
2. If there is compelling evidence that termination is not in the best interest of the child.

3. If the state agency has not provided comprehensive services to the parent necessary for reunification.

### Dual Approval of Resource Parents

Dual Approval is defined as a home that is approved as both a foster and pre-adoptive home. These homes are viable to children because a child must be in a home for six months before adoption can be pursued. When a child is in custody and placed in a dual approved home, it allows the resource parents to be able to adopt the child at an earlier date. Dual Approved homes minimize trauma to the child because it creates a home environment that is a possible permanent placement for the child. If a home is not foster to adopt, the child may have to be moved to another home if he or she becomes available to adopt. As of 2008 the State of Tennessee shows that 47.6% of all permanency plans for children in custody include adoption as a goal. Almost half of that percentage (21.1%) list adoption as a sole goal. Dual approved homes minimize the number of times a child has to be moved and can create a more stable feeling for the child. The Department of Children's Services philosophy is "First placement, Best placement". Once a child has been in a resource home for a year or more and becomes free for adoption the resource parents then have first option to adopt the child.

### The TPR Process

- Termination of parental rights, otherwise known as TPR is the process of taking away a parent's rights to the child forever.
- There are 10 different reasons that allow the department to terminate a parent's rights.
- These 10 reasons are explained to the parents at each permanency plan meeting and sometimes outside of those meetings so that the parents are aware that this could occur.
- The Department must make "reasonable efforts" with the birth family before filing for TPR. That involves providing services and assistance to the family to help them address the issues that lead to the removal and any new issues that would prevent the family from being reunited.
- TPR is a very difficult legal process and can take a lengthy time to complete in the court system. State law requires the court to hear a TPR case within six (6) months of filing.
- Once TPR is granted, the court will award full or partial guardianship to the Department. Full guardianship gives the Department the right to place a child for adoption.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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- The parents have the right to appeal the TPR decision. The adoptive family must wait 30 days to make sure that the family does not appeal the decision before the adoption process can begin!

## Chapter Five

### Frequently Asked Questions and Topics of Interest

**Youth and Employment:** Foster youth are allowed to work while in school or during summers as long as their grades are acceptable and the employment remains within the guidelines of the state/federal Child Labor Laws.

- As a condition of continuing to receive services past their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, a youth must be employed at least part time.
- Resource Parents may not sign waivers permitting youth to work in excess of state and federal Child Labor Laws.
- Please refer to the Child Labor laws chart from the State of Tennessee and the United State Department of Labor for specifics on age and hours of work allowed.

**Photo ID Cards:** Youth in custody will find many reasons to obtain a state-issued photo ID card. In order to obtain a photo ID for a custodial youth, please follow the steps below:

- Request that the youth's FSW contact the regional IL Program Specialist for a photo ID application form. This form verifies that the youth is in custody. The FSW must sign the form.
- Take the youth and the form to the local Department of Safety office to obtain the ID.

**Driver's License:** Can teenage foster children get a driver's license? Who signs? Department of Children's Services staff may not sign consent for a foster child to secure a driver's license. A Resource Parent may, but is personally accepting financial responsibility for that youth. Should a Resource Parent decide they want to allow the child this opportunity, they should adhere to the following guidelines:

- If parents are available, they should be consulted.
- Insurance coverage must be provided by the Resource Parents, the child, or birth parents.
- The department must verify that the child is properly insured.
- If the child leaves the resource home, the Resource Parent should notify the Department of safety of this fact and of their intent to discontinue financial responsibility.

**Marriage of a Minor:** What is the policy regarding marriage of a minor foster child? A child under 16 years of age is prohibited by Tennessee law to marry without a waiver from an

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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appropriate court. A child between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age cannot marry without the consent of the parents, guardian, next of kin, or party having custody of the child. Please refer to Tennessee Code Annotated 36-3-105, 106 and 107.

### **New Terms, Acronyms and Definitions**

Family in "Good Standing": Any fully-approved family that is currently taking resource home placements and complied with all on-going training requirements. Or, a family that has decided to close their resource home and discontinue their fostering experience and the system reflects the positive closure reason of "closed in good standing".

F.S.W. or Family Services Worker: This is the person you presently know as your child's case manager or your case manager.

Resource Parent/ Resource Home: This is you and your family. This is another name for foster parents/ foster homes.

C.F.T.M./Child and Family Team Meeting: This is the meeting held in conjunction with the biological family, their supports, the Resource Parents, DCS and the child if age appropriate. This teaming is where all focus is on what is in the "best interest" of the child and how do we as a team make decisions that will enhance this child's life.

SIU/Special Investigations Unit: This is a formal unit assigned to investigate child abuse allegations within Resource Homes.

DCS Health Advocacy Unit Nurse: This is the nurse who is available to assist Resource Parents & FSW's with any questions regarding the medical and dental care of the foster child.

## Chapter 6 Recruitment

### Q. What is recruitment?

- A. Recruitment efforts raise awareness of the need for resource homes for children in the child welfare system. Efforts also increase the pool of resource homes so that DCS can make placement decisions based on the best match for a child. Each region is responsible for developing a regional recruitment plan based on the region's specific needs.

Regional recruitment plans consist of measurable goals and desired outcomes. The plans include recruitment activities, community collaboration, staff development, and other strategies designed to ensure the availability of adequate foster families for children needing placement and permanency.

### Q. What are general recruitment efforts?

- A. General recruitment gets the message about our need for resource parents out to the general population. While a general recruitment event is not usually successful at bringing in large numbers of potential resource parents, it does keep our message public and gives us an opportunity to be personally available to answer questions. Examples of general recruitment are:

- Public service announcements
- Adoption Fairs
- Information booths at community events
- Television and newspaper feature stories
- Adoption websites
- Passing out flyers within the community
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Community billboards
- Public speaking
- Notices in community and church bulletins
- Radio interviews

- Monday's Child broadcasts

### **Q. What is targeted recruitment?**

- A. Targeted recruitment focuses on specific families or communities who are best matched to care for specific children in need of resource homes. For example, if regional data tells us that a majority of children entering custody are coming from the north end of the city, we specifically target that area to recruitment resource parents. This keeps children in their home communities and close to their birth families.

### **Q. What is child-specific recruitment?**

- A. Child specific recruitment is often used for children that can be harder to place through general recruitment efforts. Child-specific recruitment means developing an individualized plan for a particular child based on the child's specific needs.

### **Q. What is an individual recruitment plan?**

- A. An individual recruitment plan is required once a child's permanency goal is changed to adoption and a permanent family has not been identified for the child. The plan should be developed even if parental rights have not yet been terminated. If the parental rights have not been terminated, some of the media and community resources cannot be used for recruitment until the child is legally free for adoption. This is because we never publically identify a child who is not in the full guardianship of DCS.

The recruitment plan not only outlines the recruitment tools and strategies that will be used to help in identifying a family, it also identifies the current support resources that are available for the child. These resources can include the child's birth family, friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, DCS and contract agency staff, current and former resource parents, etc. Anyone that has or has had a significant connection to the child is listed as a resource to be explored for the purpose of support and/or permanency. The individual recruitment plan has to be updated every six months.

In addition, many children in full guardianship that have a goal of adoption without an identified permanency family are referred to the FOCUS team at Harmony Adoptions. FOCUS stands for *Finding Our Children Unconditional Support*. The FOCUS team works with DCS to develop and implement the child specific individual recruitment plans.

**Q. Can Resource Parents help DCS recruit new resource homes?**

- A. Yes. DCS knows that foster, adoptive, and kinship parents are our best recruiters. Resource parents can share their experiences with family, friends and acquaintances and have a vital role in recruitment. DCS and resource parents work as partners in recruiting efforts. Resource parents can participate in recruitment events.

Additionally, resource parents know our children. A resource parent will know the significant adults in a child's life and should be consulted when building a child's team.

**Q. What is retention?**

- A. Retention means keeping our resource families in our program. DCS wants our resource parents to feel supported and satisfied. This happens when DCS is responsive to the resource parents' needs.

**Q. What are some retention efforts that DCS provides?**

- A. In most cases, when resource parents are respected and are able to understand the important role they play in a child's life, they will remain resource parents for a long time. Below are some suggestions of how resource parents can be respected:

- Respite care-providing structure around a process that allows resource parents to have a break
- Mentorship program-assigning a seasoned resource parent to nurture a new resource parent
- Appreciation events-hosting events that honor resource parents for their contribution to the child welfare system
- Ongoing support-being available to answer questions and listen to concerns
- Collaboration-recognizing the role a resource parent plays in a child's life and obtaining their input when making decisions
- Support groups-resource parent associations are an important way for resource parents to provide support to each other.
- Training-offer and arrange relevant to issues currently challenging resource parents
- Invite-always, always, always invite resource parents to be a part of the child's team



### Why Foster Parenting?

'Tis the laughter, the giggle  
And the little bitty wiggle  
That endears me.

'Tis for right, not wrong  
With the cooing song  
That enamors me

'Tis the joy, the love  
And God above  
That inspires me.

'Tis for you, little child,  
With the eyes so mild  
That I give, you see.

Give unto you for a precious child!

Donna Litteral  
Resource Parent  
March 31, 2010

## **Chapter 7**

### **Special Situations**

#### **How many foster children may any one resource home care for and how are these decisions made?**

In determining the number and ages of children to be cared for in any resource home, the following factors are considered but not limited to:

- Ability of the Resource Parents- The stamina, capacities and skills of the Resource Parents.
- Space and/or Physical accommodations in the resource home.
  - Unfinished basements, attics, hallways, porches or other outbuildings may not be used as sleeping rooms.
  - Children should have their own bed.
  - It is preferable that no more than 2 children share a bedroom without Team Leader approval.
  - Children 3 years of age or older may not share a bedroom with the Resource Parents, except for brief periods of illness or emotional distress.
  - Children of the opposite sex shall not be allowed to share bedrooms. Exception to this is if the children are siblings that are age 4 or younger.
- Overall stability of the resource family and its effect upon the equilibrium of the family as a unit.
- Resource Parents ability to team together with birth families. The resource family should have the ability to work with, mentor and assist birth families towards the goal of reunification.
  - If difficulties arise in teaming with a birth family, issues should be reported to the Family Service Worker and dealt with individually or in a Child and Family Team Meeting format.
  - Local law enforcement can be contacted in the rare situations where safety of a child or family is believed to be compromised.
- The capacity of the Resource Family to deal with more than one birth family at a time if children are from multiple families.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- Resource Parents ability to team together with the Department towards the best interest of children and families.

### Limitations for Resource Homes

These following limitations are requirements due to the Brian A. settlement agreement and are in the best interest of children and families. DCS needs and requires that Resource Parents assist in maintaining these limits within their homes.

- No more than 3 foster children in the home.
- No more than 3 children under the age of 3, including the birth children and adopted children, in the home.
- No more than 6 total children, including the Resource Parents' birth and adopted children, in the home.
- No more than 2 foster children in a Therapeutic or Medically Fragile Resource Home. (Medically Fragile homes must be a shared home if a DCS home.)
- Respite care for DCS children is a temporary situation and must be discussed with the Family Service Worker and Placement Services Division. Placing children for respite constitutes consideration given to number of beds available and provision of proper supervision. (See Respite section for further information.)
- A waiver for any changes to the above limitations must be placed in the child's case file and notation must be made in the Resource Home file.

Policy Reference: [Requesting a Placement Exception](#)

### What are the guidelines for Resource Parents working outside the home?

- Resource Families are encouraged to be employed outside of their home this shows an ability to meet financial needs of the family. A Resource Family should be financially stable without relying on a board payment.
- The resource Family must provide safe and nurturing day care services to children in their care. Use of the Broker Day Care system is advised if Resource Parents both have a documented need for this service due to full- or part-time employment and as

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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regional funds are available. Please contact your Family Services Worker for assistance with Broker Day Care and follow instructions about attendance and important notifications and redeterminations.

- Care for the children in the event of emergencies is also the responsibility of the Resource Parents. DCS will refer to the Resource Home Disaster Plan (CS-0871) on file for contact information in emergency situations. Please also keep the Case Managers advised in all situations.

Policy Reference: [31.17: Child Care Assistance Program](#)

**What are the limitations on Resource Parents caring for other than DCS foster children within their home? This may include other children and adults needing supervision.**

- Resource Parents should use good judgment when taking on additional responsibilities to ensure that all those in their care are safe and supervised.
- Resource Parent should immediately notify Resource Parent Support staff of any adult who will be in the home for a period of 14 days or more. A full background check, including fingerprinting, will need to be done on these individuals immediately upon learning of their status in the home.

**Limitations placed on the resource home in caring for others or baby-sitting dictate that Resource Families may NOT:**

- Accept children or adults from other agencies unless prior approval is obtained from the Department.

**What are the guidelines for planning social activities for the foster child?**

It is recommended that the Child and Family Team discuss any specific social or religious needs of the child. The Department does have policies related to specific activities.

- Alcohol- It is a misdemeanor to buy or furnish alcohol to any minor.
- Tobacco products- It is illegal to give sell or purchase any tobacco materials for a minor.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- Dating- This is a resource parent decision. The child's social skills, maturity level and ability to be responsible will likely influence a resource parent's decision regarding dating and interaction with peers. Input should also be obtained from the Family Service Worker and birth parents as well.
- Sex- It is expected that Resource Parents will provide supervision and care to the foster child(ren) in order to prevent unwanted sex to the best of their ability. The law states that sex with a child under 13 is aggravated rape or rape of a child; sexual penetration of a child when the victim is 13 and the offender is at least 4 years older is statutory rape. Birth control options are available to children in custody and questions of this nature should be directed towards the Family Service Worker.
- Overnight visits- Foster children may be allowed to spend a night or weekend with a friend if the Resource Parent feels comfortable doing so. Any visit longer than a weekend must be discussed and reviewed within the Child and Family Team meeting. Refer to policy 16.9 Outings and Overnight Stays. Resource Parents are always responsible for the well-being of their foster children to the best of their ability. Contact information and general safety of the child(ren) is paramount. Visits with any birth family members should always be approved by the Family Service Worker.

Policy Reference: [16.8 Attachment: Guidelines for Outings and Overnight Stays](#)

- Religious Activities- Although Resource Families may include their foster children in church attendance, flexibility and consideration toward the beliefs of the child and their family is required. The birth parents may come from a different religious tradition and have strong feelings about that part of their child's life. Any commitment on the part of the child based upon their faith or religion, should be discussed within the framework of the Child and Family Team meetings. This may include, but is not limited to, exceptions in their diet or appearance. This discussion should be at the initial CFTM or as soon as it is identified as an issue for discussion.
- On-line Social Networks- Profile pictures with foster children are not allowed. Posting information about the child's case details is a breach of confidentiality. Blogging about anything related to the foster child or child's family is not permitted. Resource Families may have to have conversations with birth children, family, and friends also about what they can post about the foster child in your home on their pages/sites.
- Internet safety- Resource Parents are responsible to ensure use of the computer and internet by foster children is being completed in a safe and appropriate manner.

## Tennessee Child Passenger Safety Law

- All seats must meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards and be used according to child safety restraint system and vehicle manufacturer's instructions.
- Any child who has special needs and cannot be safely transported in a conventional child restraint requires a doctor's prescription for a specially modified seat. This documentation must be carried with the caretaker at all times.
- Never place an infant or small child (under age 12) in front of an airbag.
- Booster seats require both lap and shoulder belts.
- Resource Parents are encouraged to contact their local safety officer to come to their home to ensure proper installation of child car seats. Often these car seats are not installed correctly and the officer can assure that they are correct. Resource Parents should also be advised not to use car seats that were previously in a car during an accident and to be mindful of expiration dates on car seats as well.

Child's Age/ Weight/Height	Type of Seat	Location of Seat
0-1 year/ 20 lbs. or less	Rear facing	Rear seat if available
1-3 years/greater than 20 lbs.	Forward facing	Rear seat if available
4-8 years/less than 4'9" tall		Booster Seat
Over 8 and 4'9" Belt System		Rear seat
13-17 years Seat Belt System		

Beginning July 1, 2009, text messaging is banned for all drivers under the rules set in **Senate Bill 393**. The new text messaging laws make it a Class C misdemeanor offense to text while using a hand held mobile telephone or a hand held personal digital assistant to transmit or read a written message while the vehicle is in motion. A violation of this law will cost up to \$50 plus court costs not to exceed \$10.

DCS is conducting driver safety checks on all Resource Parents as well as any individuals identified as regularly transporting foster children. These checks are now run during the home study process and at each reassessment period. Anyone who transports foster children should have a valid Tennessee license (within 30 days of residing in Tennessee), as well as current insurance and registration. Current proof of these documents should be provided for Resource Parent files on an ongoing basis.

### **Are Resource Parents allowed to sign permission forms?**

- Permission Forms and releases should be discussed within the framework of the Child and Family Team meeting.
- Biological Parents, Resource Parents and DCS staff should communicate ongoing interests of the child that may require written permission.
- Every day decisions such as school trips, school lunch forms, club permission slips can be handled by the Resource Parent with consideration given to the input of the biological parents. If there is any question or doubt as to approving, always contact the Family Service Worker for consultation.
- All major decisions, such as: surgeries, oral surgeries, counseling, behavioral health services must be reviewed and discussed within the Child and Family Team Meeting with the DCS Health Unit Nurse in attendance and/or informed of the medical need.

### **What should Resource Parents do if a foster child runs away from their home?**

- Resource Parents should immediately call the local, state or other law enforcement in their area to report the child's runaway status.
- Resource Parents should contact the Family Service Worker (FSW) immediately following the notification of law enforcement. On call staff can be contacted after hours and on weekends for emergencies. The emergency hotline number is 1-877-54-ABUSE, unless other instruction has been given for on-call procedures in your area.
- The Family Service Worker, with assistance of the Resource Parents, should complete an Absconder/Runaway/Escapee/ Recovery Checklist (CS-0705) with detailed information and a picture of the child. This form then is presented to local, state or other law enforcement agencies to assist with locating the child.

Policy Reference: [31.2 Responsibilities Regarding Runaways, Absconders, and Escapees](#)

### What are the guidelines for child care (babysitting) arrangements for foster children?

Parents are cautioned that the following are "general" guidelines. Resource Parents, by virtue of their approval, can utilize trusted friends and family to assist with temporary, short-term, child care (babysitting) arrangements. Resource Parents are responsible for making good choices in child care options. Child care guidelines for Resource Parents need to be established on an individual basis for each child and with the approval of the Family Service Worker. Consideration must be given to the physical, emotional, and mental maturity of the child as well as the circumstances if they are expected to supervise younger siblings. General Guidelines are as follows:

- Children 0 through age 9 are not to be left unsupervised.
- Children 10-12 may be left unsupervised for a maximum of 2 hours.
- Children 13-14 may supervise younger children for a maximum of 4 hours.
- Foster children under 18 are not to be left unattended overnight.
- Beware that a state law effective July 1, 2006 makes it a crime to leave a child 6 and under alone or with another child under the age of 13.

While state law and Child Protective Services Policy do not refer to a particular age for children to be left unsupervised, as a "rule of thumb", the age, number of children, and length of time should be based on the following for the supervising child as well as the child(ren) being supervised:

- Supervising Child has clear expectations and guidelines of what to do.
- Supervising Child has a high level of maturity and capability of following through with expectations.
- Consideration given to whether the supervising child or child(ren) needing supervision have a disability and the supervising child's ability to provide for needs in spite of or related to the disability.
- Supervising child's ability to adequately supervise younger children.
- All child(ren) are in a safe environment.
- Supervising child has immediate access to a responsive adult by telephone or in person.

- Supervising child knows what to do in an emergency situation.
- Supervising child has contact numbers readily available.
- Length of time should be based on time of day (day vs. night).
- Children being supervised are responsive to supervision.

### Death of a Child/Youth in DCS Custody

The impact of the death of a child is felt widely and will affect many different people. DCS abides by policy 20.29 to outline the steps to take in these tragic and unfortunate situations. Resource Parents should know that if a child remains in the resource home at the time of their death, the body should not be touched or moved. Law enforcement should be immediately contacted to complete a proper investigation and to transport the body to the proper facility. DCS staff should be notified immediately as well so they can support you and follow through the proper procedures. If the death occurs in a hospital setting, the staff will ensure proper notification takes place. Birth Family notifications should be done by DCS staff and should be done in person if and when at all possible. The Department will provide for the funeral and burial of children who have died while in TN state custody if the birth family cannot be located or is unable to afford the expense.

In planning for funeral arrangements following the death of a child in DCS custody, priority will be given to the birth parents wishes. However, the Family Service Worker shall also consider the wishes of the child's Resource Parents. This is especially true if the Resource Parents have had a close relationship with the child and if the child had been in their home for a significant amount of time. If the two parties are not in agreement, the Family Service Worker or another neutral person will attempt to mediate a compromise.

Policy Reference: [20.29 Death of a Child/Youth in DCS Custody/Guardianship](#), [20.29 Attachment: Death of a Child/Youth in DCS Custody/Guardianship](#)



**Brothers**

They poke you

And tease you

and they drive you insane.

They tickle you

and annoy you

and make you feel like

SCREAMING.

But when it really matters;

They love you

and protect you

and make you feel secure.

They try to make it better

when they know you're feeling hurt.

No matter how many times you fight

or yell at one another

you just can't help

but to love your brothers.

By Ariel Risney, 15

Adopted: July 18, 2005

(Ariel was adopted, along with her two brothers, into a family that now included five more additional brothers as well.)

## CHAPTER 8

### Maintaining an Approved Home

Becoming a Resource Parent takes commitment and dedication. Once approved, you will find that this same commitment and dedication is required to maintain an approved resource home that is in compliance with all DCS Policies and Procedures, as well as the concepts taught in PATH training. This chapter will discuss the responsibilities of an approved resource home.

#### Responsibilities of Resource Parents

In a resource home, household rules must be clearly communicated to the child and written down for the child that is old enough to read and understand. Structured daily household rules may include the following:

- Clear and concise household rules
- Identified acceptable and unacceptable behavior
- Possible consequences for unacceptable behavior

A child placed in your resource home must not be allowed to leave your supervision for extended visits or taken outside of the state without prior written approval. Resource Parents may approve short outings or overnight visits with family and friends of the Resource Parents.

The Resource Parent Support (RPS) team must be notified within one working day of any significant changes in the home. Some of these significant changes may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Change in address
- Additional persons living in the household (or visiting for more than 2 weeks)
- Significant health issues
- Income changes

Failure to report significant changes, especially those related to adults moving into the home, could affect the status of the resource home and may result in termination of foster care board payments, and could possibly cause an overpayment that would have to be reimbursed to the state.

Policy Reference: [3.3 Overpayments Made to Resource Parents](#)

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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If a child should run away from your resource home, the resource parent must report this to law enforcement and the on-call hotline immediately.

Resource Parents must not petition to adopt, obtain guardianship, or file for custody of a child in their home unless DCS is in agreement with the plan and gives written approval.

### **Resource Home Addendum Requirements**

Certain changes that occur in a resource home require the RPS worker to complete addendums to the homestudy. Changes should be reported to your RPS worker immediately. Some of these changes include, but are not limited to, change in address, change in placement preferences, change in phone number, change in employment, change in name, etc. It is extremely important to report new adult household members immediately, including adult children who return to the home after a period of absence. This also includes any adult that may be visiting in the home for more than 14 days. Internet, local criminal background checks, DCS database checks, and fingerprinting must be completed for these adults within 1 working day of their arrival at the resource home. It is of the utmost importance that the new adults, the Resource Parents, and DCS staff work together to make sure all of these things occur. If not reported timely, Resource Parents run the risk of a possible overpayment that would have to be repaid to the state.

(Note: Anyone who resides in the home or shares the same address must be considered a household member. This includes adult children in college who list the resource home address as their address.)

### **Health Needs**

Children placed in your resource home must have their health needs monitored and arrangements made for them to receive routine medical and dental treatment as necessary. Appointments must be made in accordance to DCS Policies 20.12 and 20.7. Please feel free to request copies of these policies from your RPS worker or your child's FSW. When a child is placed in your home, make sure to communicate with the FSW about the child's initial medical and dental needs, and how to get the needed exams within the required timeframe.

In the event of a medical emergency, a resource parent must immediately obtain emergency assistance for the child, the FSW or on-call worker should be notified of this as soon as possible.

Resource Parents must also ensure that a child's nutritional needs are met and are encouraged to provide well-balanced meals. Resource families are also encouraged to accommodate the child's cultural norms when planning menus.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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When a child has a medical or dental appointment, the Resource Parents should take form [CS-0689, Health Services Confirmation and Follow Up Notification](#), and request that the health service provider complete the form. Once completed, a copy of the form must be forwarded to the child's FSW. For blank copies of this form, please contact your RPS worker or the child's FSW.

Resource Parents must follow all doctor's orders for each child in their care. Resource Parents cannot make any changes in a child's treatment unless approved by the physician.

Resource Parents are required to maintain form [CS-0630, Resource Home Prescription Medication Record](#), for each child placed in their care that is prescribed medication. This is required for both short and long term prescriptions. The medication record should be updated daily or as deemed necessary by the prescription. It should be turned in to the child's FSW each month.

If a child requires hospitalization, they are expected to return to the resource home once released by medical staff. Once back in the home, the Resource Parents must maintain follow-up care as directed by the treating physician.

### **Clothing and Allowance**

When a child, first enters state custody, DCS staff are required to make every effort to obtain the child's clothing from their parents or guardians. If the child's clothing is inadequate, DCS may provide an initial clothing allotment. Amounts vary depending on the child's age. Adequate clothing should be provided throughout the length of the child's placement, from money received for the resource parent board payment. All clothing and personal items purchased for the child from clothing allotments or board payments should be given to the child when the placement ends.

Resource Parents should give children an allowance at a rate consistent with the child's age and developmental status. This allowance should be a minimum of one dollar a day and is expected to be provided from the money received for the resource home board payment. Allowance money should be given to the child directly; in an effort to help the child learn money management. Any questions or problems regarding allowance should be discussed with the FSW.

### **Education**

All school-age children must be enrolled in an accredited school setting. They should attend school daily, have their attendance monitored, and have their education needs met according to DCS policy. Any school problems should be reported to the child's FSW.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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Resource Parents are encouraged to attend multi-disciplinary team (M-Team) meetings, Individual Education Plan (IEP) development meetings, as well as other school-related meetings for children in their care.

### **Discipline**

Resource Parents are responsible for maintaining appropriate discipline of the child by correcting the child's behavior when necessary and discussing any problems with the FSW. All consequences for behaviors are to be age appropriate and timely. All Resource Parents must sign and abide by form [CS-0553, DCS Discipline Policy](#). The following forms of discipline must not be used with children in DCS custody:

- Corporal Punishment such as slapping, spanking, or hitting with any object
- Excessive exercising such as running laps, repetitive sit-ups, etc.
- Cruel and unusual punishment
- Assignment of excessive or inappropriate work
- Denial of meals and daily needs
- Verbal abuse, ridicule, or humiliation
- Permitting one child to punish another child
- Chemical or Mechanical restraints, such as (but not limited to) use of psychotropic medications to subdue a child or youth
- Denial of planned visits, telephone calls, or mail contact with birth family, attorney, siblings, FSW, or pre-adoptive family
- Seclusion
- Threat of removal from the resource home

### **Routine Transportation**

Routine travel is included in the resource home board rate and is an expectation of a resource parent. At times, frequent transportation may be required for things such as multiple appointments, alternative school, etc. If an unusual amount of transportation is required, the Child and Family Team will discuss the responsibilities of each team member.

DCS staff, usually your RPS worker, can request reimbursement for trips over fifty miles one way. This may be reimbursed at the regular state travel rate, at the time the travel takes place. Travel will only be reimbursed for the portion that exceeds fifty miles. For example, if the trip is fifty-five miles one way, then the resource parent can be reimbursed for five miles each way.

The Regional Administrator (RA) can approve requests for unique travel situations. The Resource Parents should discuss these situations with the FSW before the trip is made.

### **Extra-Curricular Activities**

Extra-Curricular Activities for children in your care should be encouraged and monitored. DCS will make efforts to request the consent of the birth parents when special activities arrive. However, DCS may give consent or authorize the Resource Parents to give permission for special activities. Resource Parents should assist the child in making appropriate choices in activities. Information on the activities should be regularly communicated with the birth family.

### **Religion**

Resource families should make arrangements for children to participate in the religion or faith of their choice, dependent on the child's wishes. Any issues or questions that may arise, should be discussed with the FSW.

### **Case Planning Participation**

Resource Parents are vital partners to DCS and a valuable part of the Child and Family Team (CFT). Resource Parents should consistently participate in case planning by being an active member of the team, providing input, and supporting the implementation of the permanency plan.

### **Shared Parenting**

Resource Parents share the planning and caring for children with the birth parents, DCS, and private providers. When parental rights are intact, shared parenting must take place through direct contact with the birth family, unless otherwise indicated by DCS and the CFT. Resource Parents must assist the FSW and actively support the visitation plan outlined in the child's permanency plan. Resource Parents are a crucial part of supporting the birth family connection and aiding in the reunification process. If parental rights are terminated or surrendered, the resource parent must continue to respect the child's feelings about the birth family and support the child as they move forward to permanency.

### **Life Books**

Children in DCS custody should have a Life Story Book to document and preserve their history during the time they are in care. It should be maintained in order to help the youth understand their current situation and help them process the feelings they have around significant life events.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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The FSW should assist the resource parent in creating and maintaining a child's Life Book. They should also help the resource parent get life book supplies. The Life Book is the property of the child and must travel with the child to any placement change, as well as when the child reaches permanency.

For suggestions or help with Life Books, please contact your FSW.

### **Mandatory In-Service Training for Resource Parents**

The Resource Parent Training Program offers learning opportunities that support adoptive, foster and kinship parents in their effort to provide a safe, nurturing and loving environment for the children in their care.

Resource parents must receive continuing education training after approval. There are specific classes that resource parents must attend during the first and second year.

*Resource parents are classified as "traditional" or "kinship." The family's status will determine the appropriate training track. During the first year following resource home approval, Traditional resource parents must complete 14 hours of In-service training and Kinship resource parents must complete 17 hours of In-service training.*

- Traditional Resource Parents

#### **Traditional First Year - total of 14 hours**

Working with the Education System - 2 hours  
Helping Children Make Transitions - 3 hours  
Fostering Positive Behavior for Resource Parents - 3 hours  
Child Development - 2 hours  
Cultural Awareness for 1<sup>st</sup> year - 1 hour  
Working with Birth Parents - 3 hours

- Kinship Resource Parents

#### **Kinship First Year - total of 17 hours**

Working with the Education System - 2 hours  
Helping Children Make Transitions - 3 hours  
Fostering Positive Behavior for Resource Parents - 3 hours  
Child Development - 2 hours  
Cultural Awareness for 1<sup>st</sup> year - 1 hour  
Family Role Conflict - 3 hours  
Family Dynamics-3 hours

## Resource Parent Handbook

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During the second year following resource home approval, Traditional and Kinship resource parents must complete 14 hours of In-service training.

- Traditional and Kinship Resource Parents

### **Traditional Second Year - total of 14 hours**

Working with the Education System - 2 hours

CPR/First Aid Refresher- 4 hours

Medication Administration - 2 hours

Parenting the Sexually Abused Child - 3 hours

Cultural Awareness for 2<sup>nd</sup> year - 1 hour

Elective-2 Hours

Resource parents in their **third year** or **thereafter** are required to receive 15 hours of training annually. These hours may be obtained by completing approved elective courses, attending the Annual Resource Parent Conference, Super Saturday events, Foster Parent College, reading and reporting on approved books and videos. In addition, local Tennessee Foster and Adoptive Care Associations (TFACA) may also offer training at association meetings.

Once all post approval In-service courses are completed, Resource Parents may also access up to seven hours of computer-based training per year, via the internet. The online Foster Parent College is a good resource for internet training. For more information regarding this program, please contact your RPS worker. Resource parents who are interested in receiving credit for classes or training delivered outside of DCS, via the internet, books, or videos, should contact their RPS worker to determine whether or not the identified training is appropriate and approved for training hours.

CPR/First Aid and Medication Administration are required prior to approval. These trainings must also be completed once every two years, without lapses. Resource Parents who receive CPR/First Aid training outside of DCS need to ensure that their card or training certificate clearly documents that they have received training in both First Aid and CPR. The Medication Administration Refresher is a two hour course.

Resource Parents who are willing and appropriate to parent youth who have been adjudicated delinquent must complete the 9-Hour Parenting the Youthful Offender course. In addition, resource parents are able to receive credit for Working with Birth Parents at the completion of this course.

Both members of married or unmarried couples must complete all training requirements. Also, if any additional adult household members are in a caretaking role, they must complete all training requirements.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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Resource Parent training is mandatory and must be completed in order to remain an approved home.

### **Resource Parent Training Suggestions**

**How may a Resource Parent make their wishes and concerns known regarding training?**

- Resource Parent suggestions are always welcome. You may email suggestions to [Training.EI-DCS@tn.gov](mailto:Training.EI-DCS@tn.gov).
- Resource Parents are invited to participate and serve on the local foster care association and state Tennessee Foster Adoptive Care Association, Inc. (TFACA).
- Resource Parents are encouraged to contact their Resource Parent Support worker regarding any training needs.

**What training is available to Resource Parents and how are they informed of these events?**

In-service training credits may be obtained in various ways. The Resource Parent Training Calendar is updated on the DCS website. Additionally, Resource Parent Support Workers are asked to personally notify their Resource Parents of training courses, events, and to encourage their attendance.

**In-service training credit may be obtained in various ways. Some of the training options are;**

- DCS ANNUAL CONFERENCE- DCS will hold an annual conference. This weekend event is a collaboration of DCS, TFACA and various community partners that plan, advise, and arrange special trainings that will enhance Resource Parent and staff abilities to nurture and develop children and youth.
- Special Workshops- Special workshops on specific topics are offered through local foster care associations and DCS in conjunction with their regular meetings. Process for receiving credits for these trainings is as follows:
  - Complete Resource Parent Training form
  - Sign-in sheets
  - Receive a certificate from completed course. Keep one copy for your records/one to the Resource Parent support staff in your county.
- Independent Living training- is available for Resource Parents and staff who work with adolescents to prepare youth for life on their own.
- Resource Parents may also access up to seven(7) hours of computer-based training per year, via the internet.
- Other training- Other training options include special events offered by school systems, mental health facilities, and other public services resources.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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Journals, magazine articles, videotapes, and books may be used for individual study. Resource Parent's staff may suggest and help provide these resources.

If you have questions or for additional information regarding Resource Parent Training you may visit the following link:

<http://www.tn.gov/youth/training/rptraining.shtml>

## Resource Home Re-Assessments

All resource homes must be reassessed for continued approval on a yearly basis. This is done to assure the safety and well-being needs of children placed in resource homes are being met. At this reassessment, you will be asked to consider your performance as a resource parent, including your strengths and your areas of need. Please consider this thoughtfully and answer openly and honestly. This is a good opportunity to grow as Resource Parents. This annual review is a joint process that requires participation and interaction between the Resource Parents and DCS. A packet of the required paperwork may be given to you by your RPS worker, and a home visit date scheduled, in advance of the due date, to allow time for review and approval of all reassessment information. The reassessment process for Resource Parents consists of the following:

- A home visit by the RPS worker, where information for the [Reassessment](#) form and [Home Safety Checklist](#) will be gathered
- Completion of the Authorization for [Release of Information](#) form by all adults household members
- Provide an updated copy of driver's licenses, vehicle registrations, and vehicle insurance. Vehicle makes and models on registrations and insurance must match (these should be provided at the time they expire, so the resource home record is always kept in compliance).
- Provide copies of training certificates for all required training during the reassessment year (these should be given to the RPS worker throughout the reassessment year, as the training occurs)
- Local Law Enforcement, Internet Records, Driving Record, and DCS Database background checks will be completed by DCS for all adult household members
- Review and signing of the [DCS Discipline Policy](#), [Resource Parent Oath to Abide](#), and [HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices-Client Acknowledgement](#) forms
- Completion of the [Monthly Family Financial Income and Expenditures](#) form and attach proof of all income reported on the form

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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- Completion of the [Medical Self Report](#) (Annual) Resource Parent/Child form for all household members

Additionally, and for obvious good reasons, the federal government requires us to maintain safety in order to receive federal money. This money provides more services for children in care. Certain portions of the reassessment material (as well as the initial approval material) are maintained on a shared computer drive with Central Office in Nashville to ensure all of these federal requirements are being met.

### **Reactivation**

If a resource home that closed in good standing decides they would like to re-open, they should contact DCS. If the home has been closed for more than two years, the family will need to attend PATH classes again. If the home has been closed for less than two years, but more than one year, a new homestudy will need to be completed. If the home has been closed for less than a year, then DCS may choose to complete only a Reassessment/Reactivation to re-open the home. In addition to the normal reassessment procedures, new fingerprinting and medicals must be completed. Also, homes being reactivated must have up-to-date CPR/First Aid and Medication Administration training before the home can be re-opened.

### **Corrective Action Plans (CAPS)**

Corrective Action Plans must be completed with resource homes when a policy is violated or a validated concern is expressed. The purpose of the CAP's is to make a plan to correct a problem, not to punish the family. These CAPS may be for many things, including training hours, household issues, or concerns identified as a result of a Special Investigations Unit (SIU) investigation. CAPS are completed by the RPS worker and will be approved by the RPS Team Leader. They will be fully discussed with the family and the family will be asked to sign the CAP. CAP's are time limited and should last a maximum of 90 days (unless a shorter timeframe is required by the CAP). They will be reviewed periodically during the timeframe to ensure progress is being made towards correction of the issue. Failure to complete a CAP or repeating the issue that caused the CAP could result in closure of the home.

### **Resource Home Closure Process**

Some resource homes request closure of their home for various reasons. If the home is closed in good standing, it can re-open as described in the Reactivation section of this chapter. If the home is closed involuntarily by DCS, the home will not be closed in good standing. If it is determined that a home should be closed, appropriate DCS staff will meet with the family to discuss the decision for closure. The family will be given a letter stating the reasons for closure and explaining the supervisory review process. Should the family believe that their home was closed unjustly or unfairly, they should follow the directions in the letter to request

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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the supervisory review process. A supervisory review must be requested in writing within ten calendar days of the date of the closure letter. An upper level supervisor will be designated to receive this request and meet with the family to discuss the closure reason.

Policy References: [16.8 Responsibilities of Approved Resource Homes](#), [16.16 Denial or Closure of Resource Homes](#), [Protocol for Re-Assessment, Re-Activation or Re-Classification of Resource Homes](#) .

## **Chapter 9**

### **Rights of Resource Parents**

#### **Foster Parent's Bill of Rights**

- (1) The department shall treat the Resource Parent(s) with dignity, respect, trust and consideration as a primary provider of foster care and a member of the professional team caring for foster children;
- (2) The department shall provide the Resource Parent(s) with a clear explanation and understanding of the role of the department and the role of the members of the child's birth family in a child's foster care;
- (3) The Resource Parent(s) shall be permitted to continue their own family values and routines;
- (4) The Resource Parent(s) shall be provided training and support for the purpose of improving skills in providing daily care and meeting the special needs of the child in foster care;
- (5) Prior to the placement of a child in foster care, the department shall inform the Resource Parent(s) of issues relative to the child that may jeopardize the health and safety of the Resource Family or alter the manner in which foster care should be administered;
- (6) The department shall provide a means by which the Resource Parent(s) can contact the department twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week for the purpose of receiving departmental assistance;
- (7) The department shall provide the Resource Parent(s) timely, adequate financial reimbursement for the quality and knowledgeable care of a child in foster care, as specified in the plan; provided, that the amount of such financial reimbursement shall, each year, be subject to and restricted by the level of funding specifically allocated for such purpose by the provisions of the general appropriations act;

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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(8) The department shall provide clear, written explanation of the plan concerning the placement of a child in the Resource Parent's home. For emergency placements where time does not allow prior preparation of such explanation, the department shall provide such explanation as it becomes available. This explanation shall include, but is not limited to, all information regarding the child's contact with such child's birth family and cultural heritage, if so outlined;

(9) Prior to placement, the department shall allow the Resource Parent(s) to review written information concerning the child and allow the Resource Parent(s) to assist in determining if such child would be a proper placement for the prospective Resource Family. For emergency placements where time does not allow prior review of such information, the department shall provide information as it becomes available;

(10) The department shall permit the Resource Parent(s) to refuse placement within their home, or to request, upon reasonable notice to the department, the removal of a child from their home for good reason, without threat of reprisal, unless otherwise stipulated by contract or policy;

(11) The department shall inform the Resource Parent(s) of scheduled meetings and staffing, concerning the foster child and the Resource Parent(s) shall be permitted to actively participate in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child in foster care. This may include individual service planning meetings, foster care reviews, and individual educational planning meetings;

(12) The department shall inform a Resource Parent(s) of decisions made by the courts or the child welfare agency concerning the child;

(13) The department shall solicit the input of a Resource Parent(s) concerning the plan of services for the child; this input shall be considered in the department's ongoing development of the plan;

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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(14) The department shall permit, through written consent, the ability of the Resource Parent(s) to communicate with professionals who work with the foster child, including any therapists, physicians and teachers that work directly with the child;

(15) The department shall provide all information regarding the child and the child's family background and health history, in a timely manner to the Resource Parent(s) The Resource Parent(s) shall receive additional or necessary information, that is relevant to the care of the child, on an ongoing basis; provided that confidential information received by the Resource Parents shall be maintained as such by the Resource Parents, except as necessary to promote or protect the health and welfare of the child;

(16) The department shall provide timely, written notification of changes in the case plan or termination of the placement and the reasons for the changes or termination of placement to the Resource Parent(s), except in the instances of immediate response for Child Protective Services;

(17) The department shall notify the Resource Parent(s), in a complete manner, of all court hearings. This notification may include, but is not limited to, notice of the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the hearing, and the court docket number of the case. Such notification shall be made upon the department's receiving of this information, or at the same time that notification is issued to birth parents. The Resource Parent(s) shall be permitted to attend such hearings at the discretion of the court;

(18) The department shall provide, upon request by the Resource Parent(s), information regarding the child's progress after a child leaves foster care. Information provided pursuant to this subsection shall only be provided from information already in possession of the department at the time of the request;

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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(19) The department shall provide the Resource Parent(s) the training for obtaining support and information concerning a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the Resource Parent(s);

(20) The department shall consider the Resource Parent(s) as the possible first choice permanent parents for the child, who after being in the Resource Parent's home for twelve (12) months, becomes free for adoption or permanent foster care;

(21) The department shall consider the former Resource Family as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the Resource Parent(s) is to be re-entered into foster care;

(22) The department shall permit the Resource Parent(s) a period of respite, free from placement of foster children in the family's home with follow-up contacts by the agency occurring a minimum of every two (2) months. The Resource Parent(s) shall provide reasonable notice, to be determined in the promulgation of rules, to the department for respite;

(23) (Effective February 1, 1998) Child abuse/neglect investigations involving the Resource parent(s) shall be investigated pursuant to the department's Child Protective Services (CPS) policy and procedures. A CPS case manager from another area shall be assigned investigative responsibility. Removal of a foster child will be conducted pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated and departmental policy and procedures. The department shall permit an individual selected by the membership of the Tennessee Foster Care Association to be educated concerning the procedures relevant to investigations of alleged abuse and neglect by the department and the rights of the accused Resource Parent(s). Upon receiving such training, such individual shall be permitted to serve as advocate for the accused Resource Parent(s). Such advocate shall be permitted to be present at all portions of investigations where the accused Resource Parent(s) are present; and all communication received by such advocate therein shall be strictly confidential. Nothing contained within this item shall be construed to abrogate the provisions of chapter 1 of this title, regarding procedures for investigations of

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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child abuse and neglect and child sexual abuse by the department of children's services and law enforcement agencies;

(24) Upon request, the department shall provide the Resource Parent(s) copies of all information relative to their family and services contained in the personal Resource home record;

(25) The department shall advise the Resource Parent(s) of mediation efforts through publication in departmental policy manuals and the Resource Parent Handbook. The Resource parent(s) may file for mediation efforts in response to any violations of the preceding tenets.

(a) In promulgation of rules pursuant to subsection (a), the department shall provide forty-five (45) days written notification of public hearings, held pursuant to the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in Title 4, chapter 5, to the president of the Tennessee Foster Care Association and the president's designee. (Acts 1997, Ch. 549, &2,3.

### **How Are Disagreements Resolved?**

In 2009, the Tennessee General Assembly amended this legislation to provide Resource Parents with a mechanism to formally submit complaints to DCS when they believe "the department, an employee of the department, and/or an agency under contract with the department, has failed to follow the tenets listed in TCA Section 37-2-415(a), AND when such failure has harmed or could harm a child who is or was in the custody of the department or such failure has inhibited the Resource Parent's ability to meet the needs of a child as in the permanency plan."

There are two requirements to be met:

- a) Failure to follow a tenet of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights; and
- b) Such failure has caused or could cause harm to a custodial child OR such failure has inhibited the Resource Parent's ability to follow the permanency plan.

### PROCEDURE:

#### 1. Report:

Resource Parents should first report to the Department or Private Provider Agency for which they serve as a resource home, whichever is appropriate based on their situation.

a) Resource Parent informs either the DCS Family Service Worker or Private Provider Case Manager immediately of the harm or potential harm to the child OR informs either the DCS FSW or Private Provider case manager of the inhibited ability to comply with the permanency plan.

b) If the Resource Parent believes that the child is in imminent risk of harm, the Child Abuse Hotline should be contacted immediately at 1-877-237-0004.

#### 2. Response:

DCS Regions and Private Providers will follow local protocol to resolve the issue. Each Private Provider and DCS Region should have a written protocol that should be followed in the event of a Resource Parent issue. A copy of this protocol should be provided to Resource Parents during the PATH Training process and should outline the process and provide information to the Resource Parent regarding the Bill of Rights and the Advocates Program.

#### 3. Unsatisfactory or Inadequate Resolution:

a) Resource Parent(s) shall contact either the DCS Family Service Worker (FSW) or Private Provider Case Manager's supervisor. The supervisor will follow steps outlined in local protocol, which will include a CFTM. The supervisor will invite the Regional Resource Parent Advocate to the CFTM.

b) Private Provider Resource Parents may contact the Private Provider Agency Executive Director or their designee to address issues for which resolution has not been achieved.

c) If attempts by the supervisor are not successful, the issue will be reviewed at the DCS Regional Office level. This review shall include an in-person interview between the Resource Parent and the Regional Administrator or designee and a review of the CFTM summary noted above.

i. DCS Resource Parent(s) shall contact the Regional Administrator or his/her Designee in writing.

ii. If the issue cannot be resolved at the Private Provider agency level, Private Provider Resource Parents should contact the DCS FSW and supervisor for resolution and if

## Resource Parent Handbook

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they cannot resolve the issue, may contact the appropriate DCS Regional Administrator or his/her designee, in writing.

- iii. The Regional Administrator or Designee will notify TCCY Ombudsman, the Executive Director of Child Permanency or designee, the Private Provider designee, and the Regional Resource Parent Advocate that a complaint has been received.
- iv. The Regional Administrator may schedule a conference call or meeting with a representative of the Office of Child Permanency, and the Private Provider (if a Provider Resource Parent) to discuss the issue and develop resolution. If necessary, the representative of the Office of Child Permanency may consult with Legislative & Constituent Services (LCS). This step is left to the discretion of the Regional Administrator.
- v. The Regional Administrator/Designee will provide a written response to the Resource Parent and Private Provider, when appropriate, within 30 days of the postmarked complaint. Statewide Lead Advocates and the Division of Foster Care and Adoption will be copied on the response and the TCCY Ombudsman Program will be notified.

### 4. Requests/Notification

If attempts by the RA/Designee are not successful, the Resource Parent may request, in writing, a Central Office review. Requests must be sent via certified mail to:

TDCS- Executive Director of Child Permanency  
436 Sixth Avenue North  
Nashville, TN 37243

- ◆ Requests may also be emailed to the Executive Director of Child Permanency at [mailto:resourceparent\\_eidcs@tn.gov](mailto:resourceparent_eidcs@tn.gov). Emailed requests will be acknowledged via automated email. A request is not considered as being received unless the automated email has been received by the sender.
  - a) The TCCY Ombudsman Program, the Regional Administrator, Tennessee Advocacy Program, and the Private Provider designee (if a Private Provider Resource Parent) are notified that TDCS has received a complaint from a Resource Parent.
  - b) The department shall conduct the review and provide a written response to all appropriate parties within 30 days of the postmark on the written request. The review shall include an in-person interview with the Resource Parent. A representative of the Division of Foster Care and Adoption and others, as appropriate, may be included in the meeting with the Resource Parent. All other

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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parties (Resource Parent Advocate, Private Provider, TCCY Ombudsman, etc.) will be copied on the response.

**Note:** A Resource Parent may make a report or complaint to the TCCY Ombudsman Program at any time.

### **SIU DUE PROCESS**

SIU is the Special Investigations Unit that conducts investigations of allegations of child abuse and neglect that occur while a child is in DCS custody and residing in a DCS or contract agency placement. These investigations are conducted in a timely manner and impartial manner, placing the utmost importance on the safety and well-being of the child. The Special Investigations Unit strives to protect children from harm while being family focused and culturally responsive to the children and families. For more information on the procedures of the Special Investigation Unit please see Chapter 11.

### **The Resource Parent Advocacy Program**

The Advocacy Program was established in 1997 as a result of new legislation surrounding the TN Foster Parent Bill of Rights. Advocates are specially trained to assist DCS and Private Provider Resource Parents when the need arises.

#### **Some of the Quick Facts about Advocacy:**

- Every Resource Parent has the right to an Advocate for representation and support.
- There is a minimum of one advocate in each of the 12 regions.
- The Advocacy Program and DCS work in partnership with one another.
- By law, any resource parent under an SIU investigation has the right to an advocate representation.
- Advocates are well versed in DCS policy and procedure and procedures; they are skilled in providing interpretation and clarification when questions arise.
- Advocates provide assistance, support, and representation to Resource Parents in grievances and appeals with DCS.
- Advocates have the ability to attend meetings at the request of the resource parent
- Advocates are trained to be objective listeners; they are skilled in they are skilled in the assessment, exploration and resolution of issues.
- Advocates always promote the safety and well-being of children.

You can request an advocate by contacting your Resource Parent Support staff person.

## MULTI-ETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT

### **Q. What is the department's position regarding multi-ethnic placements?**

1. The adoptive/foster care placement of a child shall not be delayed or denied on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive parent or the child involved.
2. All relatives who might serve as a child's caregiver (as promptly as possible) must be considered first choice.
3. Any consideration of the race must be narrowly tailored and individualized, focusing on the best interests of the child.
4. Consideration of race as a factor in the selection of criteria requires a review by the Directors of Foster and Adoption Services or their designees.

Policy Reference: [16.2 Multi-Placement Act](#)

## TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

### **Q. What are DCS policies regarding travel reimbursements to Resource Parents?**

Routine travel is included in the daily resource home board rate and is an expectation of being a Resource Parent. Only trips over 50 miles one way or multiple trips made within a week are reimbursable at the regular state travel rate. The extraordinary travel should be discussed and agreed upon in the Child and Family Team Meeting.

Some examples of extraordinary travel may include and are not limited to the following:

- (1) Special school placement where regular school bus run is not available.
- (2) Hospital placement of child where ongoing Resource Parent support is necessary to the child's recovery process.
- (3) Medical, Mental Health, or other types of therapy sessions outside of the 50 miles.

Example of Mileage Reimbursement:

If the mileage is 52 miles one way and 52 miles the other, then the Resource Parent is due reimbursement for 4 miles. Remember that the board rate already includes full transportation cost reimbursement.

A Completed and signed form should be submitted monthly. Mileage should be documented to verify the purpose of each trip.

Child and Family Team Meetings are the means for discussing the need for travel reimbursement to the resource family.

### **OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL**

#### **Q. What are the DCS policies regarding out-of-state travel with a child?**

When traveling out of state a Resource Parent must:

1. Request permission as far in advance (at least 7-10 days) as possible in order to allow for paperwork to be completed in a timely manner - except in the event of emergencies.
2. Secure written authorization that has been signed by 4 DCS staff: FSW, TL, TC and RA.

### **OUTINGS AND OVERNIGHT STAYS**

#### **Q. What is the policy regarding outings and overnight stays?**

##### **A. Outings and Overnight Stays Defined**

Outings and overnight stays will be defined as a child or Resource Parent initiated, in-state, outings of less than 48 hours, to a location well known to the Resource Parents, and that the Resource Parents can ensure appropriate supervision will be provided. This is not intended and must in no way be confused with visitation between a custodial child and their Family Service Worker (FSW), or birth parent.

## **B. Notice of Outings and Overnight Stays**

1. Although Resource Parents may authorize short outings and overnight stays for children placed in their care, the FSW should be notified of the child's location if the outing exceeds four (4) or five (5) hours.
2. Details given about the outings or overnight stays must include:
  - a) The name of the caregiver who will be responsible for the child;
  - b) The location of the child's visit;
  - c) A telephone number where the child can be reached in an emergency; and
  - d) The date of the child's outing, if it is expected to exceed 24 hours.
3. The details of the outings and/or overnight stays may be given verbally and may be given on short notice; however, a minimum 24-hour advance communication with the department is preferred, when possible.

Policy Reference: [16.8 Attachment-Outings and Overnights](#)

## **REMOVAL OF A CHILD FROM A RESOURCE HOME**

All DCS Resource Parents are entitled to a 14-day written notice of removal of child/children from their home. This notice can be waived by the Resource Parent if they choose to do so. This notice will give the Department permission to move the children prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> day.

The Resource Parent also have appeal rights to the 14-day written notice of removal of children from their home if the child has been in the foster home for 12 consecutive months or longer.

### **The Appeal Process for a child/children being removed from Resource Home**

1. Child and Family Team (CFT) decide that a child needs to be removed from a Contract or DCS Resource Home; DCS Family Services Worker (FSW) must file a Fourteen-Day Notice of Removal immediately with the Resource Parents. The appeal form must be given to the Resource Parent at the same time the Notice of Removal is given. A copy of this document must be filed in the child's and resource home chart.
2. The Appeal must be filed within 10 days after the mail date of the written notice.
3. The Resource Parents can file an appeal if the child has been in their care for 12 consecutive months or more.
  - DCS staff must provide the Resource Parents with a form *CS-0403, Appeal for Fair Hearing Form*, which the Resource Parents will complete and either mail or fax to the address or number listed below. If the allotted time is past the appeal will not be heard.
  - If the Resource Parent does file an appeal than the removal of the child is put on hold, the child remains in the care of the Resource Parents.
4. A 14-day written notice of the Department's intention to remove foster child/children from the resource home is NOT required under the following circumstances:
  - The child is returned to their parent(s) or legal guardian.
  - A Court Order requiring such removal from the resource home.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- The Resource Parents request the removal of a child.
  - The child has been in the resource home less than twelve (12) consecutive months.
  - An emergency situation exists where harm or imminent danger exists.
5. The Administrative Procedures Division has 45 business days to receive, schedule, conduct hearings and produce an initial order. It is important that these appeals and the summary be faxed when received.

6. Contact Information:

Administrative Procedures Division  
Department of Children's Services  
1268 Foster Avenue, NIX 1  
Nashville, TN 37243  
Phone: 615-741-1110  
Fax: 615-741-4518

Policy Reference: [16.27 Resource Parents' Fourteen Day Removal Notice and Right to Appeal.](#)

## RESPITE

1. Respite is defined as an interval of rest and relief for Resource Parents and/or children.
2. Respite payments and arrangements is the responsibility of the Resource Parent(s).
3. However if you have difficulty finding respite care your Resource Parent Support Worker and/or Local Foster Care Association can assist you in finding families willing to care for your child/children.
4. Respite payment is included in the Resource home board payment.
5. Resource Parents are allowed up to two days a month or a maximum of 24 days of respite per year. Any family who provides supplemental respite care for a child/youth in the custody or guardianship of DCS must fulfill all requirements outlined by the department.

Policy Reference: [Guidelines for Supplemental Respite Care](#)

## Chapter 10 Financial

### Board Rates and Clothing Allowances

#### What are the established board rates and clothing allowances?

DCS Board Rates are tied to the USDA cost of raising a child in the urban south, and include housing, respite, food, transportation, clothing, and miscellaneous. Please refer to [DCS Policy 16.29](#) for the current board rates. Normal child-related activities and expenses are included in the monthly foster care board rates. Resource Parents for Private Providers should contact the agency in which they are approved for specific guidelines.

#### "Extra" Expenses

What is the department's view on 'extra' expenses such as Christmas, birthdays, graduation, and other special expenses?

The department's position on extra expenses includes:

- |                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Christmas</b> | Voluntary donations to foster children are placed in a special fund which allocates money for special needs including Christmas. Foster Parent Associations also provide and purchase items for Christmas and other times during the year. Additionally, the Faith-Based Community may be utilized to provide gifts to children in foster care. The Community Advisory Boards (CAB) may be considered as well.                   |
| <b>Birthday</b>  | DCS does not provide money for birthday gifts. The expectation is that the resource family will provide necessary birthday items. Many local Foster Parent Associations encourage membership in order to provide birthday gifts and monies for DCS children. Additionally, the Faith-Based Community may be utilized to provide gifts to children in foster care. The Community Advisory Boards (CAB) may be considered as well. |

## Resource Parent Handbook

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**Vacations & Family Trips** DCS does not provide money for family trips/vacations. The expectation is that the resource family will include foster children in family trips or family vacations. If a resource family chooses not to include foster children in family trips or vacations, then respite arrangements must be made with other foster families or approved persons. Consult with Family Service Workers, Resource Parent Support Workers or Provider staff accordingly.

**Graduation** Through the Chafee Independent Living Funds there are monies available for graduation and senior year expenses. Please refer to the Chafee Funding list and notify your Family Services Worker, Independent Living Specialist, and/or the Resource Parent Support Worker for their assistance in accessing these funds for eligible young adults. Some of the expenses that are covered include: testing fees, tutoring, summer school, senior pictures, graduation invitations, year books, and class rings. In order to receive assistance with senior expenses, the Resource Parents and the Family Services Worker should make requests approximately 3-4 months prior to the funds being required. If Resource Parents incur their own graduation expenses, they may not be reimbursed.

**Other Special Expenses** Family Service Workers are required to respond promptly to requests for special items, services, or other assistance on behalf of the child. Before expenditure is incurred the Resource Parents should consider the urgency of the need and discuss it with the Family Service Worker. Out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., travel, clothing, medical, etc.) are only reimbursable if pre-approved by the Family Service Worker. Out of pocket expenses must be adequately documented and receipts must be included.

## Educational Costs

The majority of the children in the foster care system are educated through the local public school system. Justification for any other educational source would have to be approved by the Regional Administrator, Executive Director, and/or Central Office. In instances in which a child has been expelled (and cannot return to school), the Resource Parent should contact the Family Services Worker and Resource Parent Support Worker for assistance. For such costs as summer school, band, etc. the Resource Parents are asked to consult with the Family Services Worker, Independent Living Specialist, Resource Parent Support Worker, and/or Private Contract Provider for assistance in accessing these funds.

### Medical Expenses

How are medical expenses handled and what expenses are reimbursable to the Resource Parents?

Most children in foster care have TennCare coverage. Some children have health coverage from their parents' private insurance. The Resource Parent should check with the Family Service Worker regarding the procedure on paperwork for children not covered by TennCare. Resource Parents may want to remember the following points regarding use of TennCare:

- TennCare Cards for children are sent to the resource home. If you have not received the proper insurance card for the child in your care contact your Family Services Worker today.
- TennCare Cards should always be taken to the doctor, dentists, emergency room, hospital or other medical providers. These providers must run the cards at each visit; do not forget the card(s) for your child(ren).
- The Family Services Worker assigned to your child will help you identify the child's primary health care provider through the child's assigned TennCare MCO (Managed Care Organization).
- Use the child's TennCare number to secure prescription medications for that child.
- Non-TennCare eligible children and their medical needs must be discussed and reviewed with the regional DCS Unit Nurse.

### "Special" Clothing Purchases

Is there a "special" clothing allotment? How much and under what conditions?

In unique or special circumstances, such as a sudden growth spurt by the child, a fire in the foster home, runaways who have returned and lost their clothing, or children who have been in custody an unusually extended period of time may receive an extra or 'special' clothing allotment as per approval of the FSW, Team Leader and/or Team Coordinator. Resource Parents should discuss this request with the Family Services Worker, who will document the need for clothing in writing (memo) and submit to the supervisor for approval. Refer to policy 16.29 (section G) for more information.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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The amount depends on the age of the child, and can never exceed the amount of the initial clothing purchase, currently:

Age Range	Amount
0 through 2 years	\$125.00
3 through 4 years	\$175.00
5 through 12 years	\$200.00
13 years and over	\$250.00

### Allowance for the Child

Are Resource Parents expected to give a foster child an allowance? If so, how much? The regular board rate includes an amount for the child's allowance. This is considered a teaching opportunity for Resource Parents to provide each child with money management skills related to that child's specific age and maturity level. It is important for children to learn how to manage money and it is anticipated that children in foster care will have this experience. The amount of allowance will depend upon the child's age and particular needs. Allowances can be distributed daily, weekly or monthly at a minimum of \$1 per day. The Resource Parent Support Worker should document the families' allowance practices on the Resource Parent Recording form following monthly home visits.

### Reimbursement for Damages

Are Resource Parents eligible for reimbursement of damages done to their property by foster children? What is the process? Resource Parents may be eligible for reimbursement of damages done by a foster child.

The process is as follows:

- Contact your Family Services Worker for assistance in filing a claim with the State Division of Claims.
- The Family Services Worker will see the damages and will receive estimates of costs from the Resource Parent.
- The State Division of Claims Administration Tennessee Claims Commission will process your claim for possible reimbursement.

### Appealing Financial Decisions

May Resource Parents appeal decisions regarding financial matters? What is the process?

The process for appealing fiscal decisions is the same as for any other grievance. Refer to The Foster Parent's Bill of Rights.

### Liability Insurance and Lawsuits

Should Resource Parents secure liability insurance? Where and how?

A Resource Parent under contract with the Department of Children Services may wish to secure liability insurance. If the Resource Parent acts "outside the scope of their employment", or in violation of the Department's policies and procedures, or engages in criminal conduct, then he or she may be sued. If a Resource Parent is sued, the Family Services Worker should be notified in order to consult with the DCS legal division. All lawsuits have strict time limits in which to respond, so Resource Parents should notify their Family Services Worker immediately if they are sued. DCS legal counsel and the Attorney General's office do not provide any representation for alleged criminal acts, whether within the scope of employment or not.

Failure to comply with Department policies or rules relating to care of foster children or acts of gross negligence may place the Resource Parent at legal risk. With this in mind, Resource Parents must decide whether they feel the need to carry liability insurance coverage for any additional potential liability. Claims involving Resource Parents are heard by the Tennessee Claims Committee Administrative body or court, depending on the nature of the suit.

- Many Local Resource Parent Associations have information regarding Liability Insurance and community contacts.

### Federal Income Taxes

Resource Parents should consult the [Internal Revenue Services](#) (IRS), their tax preparers, accountants, or CPA's for current tax laws and information pertaining to custodial children placed in their homes.

### Day Care Expenses

In order for Resource Parents to receive day care services, they should be employed. Usually, "stay at home" parents are not eligible for day care. However, there may be special circumstances in which a child may need to develop a social skill, etc., that day care may be in the best interest of the child. Contact with the Family Services Worker and/or Fiscal staff for regional protocol.

### DCS Resource Home Board Payment Verification

All DCS Resource families are required to verify the daily board rate for each child in their care two times per month. PHONE-IN and online verification calendars' are located on the DCS internet at <http://www.tn.gov/youth/fostercare/fpcalendars.htm>. DCS resource parents are asked to use ONE (1) of the two verification processes below. Do not use both.

#### PHONE IN Verification Process

On designated Verification days, please call the following numbers: **Nashville 361-2823** or **Outside of Nashville 1-877-318-5064**.

Follow voice directions for the PHONE IN process.

- Have resource parent SSN and PIN available.
- Have TFACTS person ID for the child available.
- Know the dates you are confirming for the child: begin date and end date. If there is a question about these dates contact your resource parent support worker in the region.

#### Resource Parent Verification Portal (online)

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services is happy to announce that, as of February 6, 2013, you can verify foster care pay periods online. This new online service was created to address your concerns about the phone in system and offer the resource parents a quick and convenient method of verification.

The online service is simple. When you log in, the system knows you and shows you the children for which you verify; you only have to enter dates and submit. The online system also allows you to request a replacement PIN, which is mailed to you.

You will access the online service with the same information that you use for the PHONEIN system. Just follow the simple steps below:

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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1. Go to <http://apps.tngov/fpv>
2. Enter Resource Parent SSN and PIN to Begin
3. When the verification page loads, enter start and end dates. The dates must be within the same calendar month and for one pay period at a time.
4. You should only enter dates that the child was actually in your home. It is okay to leave a row blank.
5. Review the dates for accuracy.
6. Submit the information.

If submit is successful, you will be taken to a confirmation page and you are done.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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### ONLINE Pay Period Service Letter



State of Tennessee  
Department of Children Services Department of Children's Services  
436 Sixth Avenue North  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Resource Parents,

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services is happy to announce that, starting February 6, 2013, you can verify foster care pay periods online. This new online service was created to address your concerns about the phone in system and offer the resource parents a quick and convenient method of verification.

The online service is simple. When you log in, the system knows you and shows you the children for which you verify; you only have to enter dates and submit. The online system also allows you to request a replacement PIN, which is mailed to you.

You will access the online service with the same information that you use for the PHONE IN system. Just follow the simple steps below:

1. Go to <http://apps.tn.gov/fpv>
2. Enter Resource Parent SSN and PIN to Begin
3. When the verification page loads, enter start and end dates. The dates must be within the same calendar month and for one pay period at a time.
4. You should only enter dates that the child was actually in your home. It is okay to leave a row blank.
5. Review the dates for accuracy.
6. Submit the information.
7. If submit is successful, you will be taken to a confirmation page and you are done.

Note: If any rows were left blank ( not submitted) you can log back in at any time during the 2 day window and verify these. Rows that were submitted should no longer be displayed.

If you have questions or need support, please contact your regional resource parent support worker.

## Resource Parent Handbook

DCS resource parents are required to verify the daily board rate for each child in their care two times per month. Screen shots for Resource Parent Verification Portal are as displayed below.

The image displays two screenshots of the Resource Parent Verification Portal. The top screenshot shows the main page titled "Resource Parent Verification Portal" with the TN.GOV logo. Below the header, the page is titled "Online Resource Parent Verification". It features two columns of information: "What You Will Need" (Resource Parent SSN, PIN Number, Children Placement Dates) and "What You Can Do" (Verify dates on various devices, Record dates on one screen, Request replacement PIN, View phone-in calendars). A "Start" button is present. A section titled "Don't have a PIN?" provides instructions to contact a regional representative. At the bottom, there are links for "Help and FAQs" and "Privacy Statement", and a note that the service uses cookies. The bottom screenshot shows the "Authentication" page, also with the TN.GOV logo. It features a "User Authentication" form with input fields for SSN and PIN, a "Begin" button, and a "Request a replacement PIN" link. Similar to the first page, it includes "Home", "Help and FAQs", and "Privacy Statement" links at the bottom.

# Resource Parent Handbook

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Resource Parent Online Verification Service Survey' on the TN.GOV website. The browser's address bar shows 'http://www.tn.gov/surveys/dcs/fpv/index.shtml'. The page features the TN.GOV logo and navigation links for Residents, Visitors, Businesses, Employment, About TN, and Government. A search bar is visible with the text 'Search TN.gov'. The main content area is titled 'Resource Parent Online Verification Service Survey' and includes a thank-you message: 'Thank you for using the Tennessee Department of Children's Services Resource Parent Online Verification service. This survey helps us evaluate the new online system and how it is working for you.' The survey questions are as follows:

**Compared to the phone system, do you think this new service is:**

- Much easier than the phone
- Somewhat easier than the phone
- Same as using the phone
- Somewhat more difficult than using the phone
- Much more difficult than using the phone

**Did you have any problems using the online verification service?**

- No
- Yes

If you had problems, please tell us what happened

**Compared to the phone, how much time did it take you to submit all your payment dates online?**

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Resource Parent Verification Portal' on the TN.GOV website. The browser's address bar shows 'https://testapps.tn.gov/fpv-app/request-pin'. The page features the TN.GOV logo and the title 'Resource Parent Verification Portal'. The main heading is 'Forgot Your Pin?'. Below the heading, it says 'Please enter the Social Security Number associated with your account.' There are two input fields: 'SSN' and 'Date of Birth'. The SSN field is a three-part box with dashes, and the Date of Birth field is a single box. A 'Continue' button is located below the input fields. At the bottom of the page, there are links for 'Home', 'Help and FAQs', and 'Privacy Statement'.

## Chapter Eleven

### Legal Issues for Resource Parents

#### Abuse Allegations and Investigations

When abuse allegations are made against Resource Parents, they are investigated by a team out of DCS Central Office. This team is called Special Investigations Unit, or SIU. The SIU is supervised out of the Office of Child Safety and investigators are located throughout the state.

Policy Reference: [14.25 Special Child Protective Services Investigations](#)

Special Investigations Unit staff adheres to the same Child Protective Services policies that are outlined in Chapter 14 on the Department of Children's Services Policy and Procedure web page. All information gathered is strictly confidential and strong attention is paid to the privacy of the individuals involved. Resource Parents who are either directly or indirectly involved in an SIU investigation should be aware of certain investigative procedures. Becoming familiar with the process will hopefully ease fears, resulting in better communication and a timely resolution. SIU investigators respond to all kinds of allegations and work with resource parents all over the state on a daily basis. Cooperation, understanding and communication are important aspects for both the investigators and Resource Parents. SIU investigators are highly skilled and respectful of the challenges faced by Resource Parents.

Referrals involving abuse or neglect are made to the DCS Central Intake Hotline at 1-877-237-0004. Hotline staff screens calls concerning abuse or neglect for the entire state. The hotline counselors gather the information and a screening decision is made concerning the allegations and severity. If the referral meets criteria for assignment, it is assigned for investigation. SIU investigators begin an investigation by assessing risk to the child. If a child is currently in the presence of or is being cared for by the alleged perpetrator, it is necessary to take immediate action. This may include, but is not limited to: a safety plan/agreement (depending on the circumstances), immediate response to where the child is located, contact with law enforcement, and/or requesting respite placement until the case can be investigated further. If the alleged perpetrator is a foster parent, notification of the right to an Advocate must be made. If the foster parent does not know the name or have information concerning the Advocate, the Investigator must obtain the information and provide it to the foster parent. It is the responsibility of the foster parent to make contact with the Advocate. It is the investigators responsibility to set up the interview with the child. The interview must be conducted in a neutral, non-threatening and private environment. Typically, investigations are conducted by trained forensic interviewers at Child Advocacy Centers.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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A copy of all sex abuse and severe physical abuse referrals are sent to the District Attorney's office. These cases are worked with a team approach, referred to as CPIT (Child Protective Investigative Team). CPIT teams comprise law enforcement, SIU, District Attorney, medical staff and others as needed. The cases are worked together and the final classification is the result of a team approach.

Investigators will interview the alleged victim first and then all children in the home, included birth and adoptive children. Investigators will talk to all witnesses before interviewing the perpetrator. The perpetrator interview will be conducted by law enforcement and/or the SIU investigator, depending on the seriousness of the allegation. After all information is gathered, a classification decision is made. Cases are either substantiated or unsubstantiated. If a case is substantiated, the alleged perpetrator will receive a letter from the Department concerning the indication and appeal process.

### **SIU Level I Due Process**

**SIU Emergency (formal) File Review:** A due process proceeding is required for all substantiated classifications to individuals who currently volunteer, foster, and/or work directly with children. This includes approved resource or adoptive parents, employees, teachers and child care workers. Exception: This does not include if the substantiated abuse happened when the custody child was on runaway status, trial home visit or on a home pass. SIU does not investigate those types of allegations; they are addressed by local CPS staff.

### **SIU Level II Due Process**

**Administrative Hearing:** A due process proceeding offered to individuals who have been substantiated by the Department. This proceeding is the final process that is offered by the Department and usually follows an emergency file review and is completed by an administrative law judge.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q:** Why is it taking so long and why haven't I heard from anyone?

**A:** Investigators make an initial assessment and try to gather as much information as possible. Typically, they are waiting on a response from law enforcement, the results of a medical exam or statements from witnesses. The investigation does not stop after the initial child interview. There are many factors that can delay the process. You may contact the investigator, SIU supervisor or foster parent advocate to voice concerns. Investigators

## Resource Parent Handbook

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are under strict timeframes for completion (60 days) and cases usually take several weeks to complete.

### Q: How do I prepare for this?

A: Be knowledgeable of DCS policies and keep accurate records. Stay informed and communicate concerns to appropriate DCS staff. Keep a current phone list for DCS staff, contract agencies and know how to contact your foster parent advocate. Document concerns and potential problems so that they may be addressed, hopefully before becoming a CPS investigation. Plan to attend foster parent events where SIU staff makes presentations. This will give you an opportunity to meet the staff and have open dialogue about concerns.

### Q: What can I ask?

A: You can ask about the allegations, but the SIU investigator cannot reveal the identity of the referent. You can ask if you are the subject of an investigation. However, the investigator will decide at what point in the investigation certain information is shared. Cooperation is essential and strict confidentiality rules must be followed.

### Q: Will I know when this is over?

A: Yes, The case closure notification along with recommendations is sent from the SIU investigator to the Regional Administrator. The Regional Administrator then decides where to distribute the information.

### Q: Will my child be moved?

A: Frequently during an investigation, the SIU investigator will ask that a child be placed in respite until a determination is made. If the resource parent is named as the alleged perpetrator, the victim child and resource parent must be separated. This prevents any future allegations being made and protects both parties. The SIU investigator makes the decision to remove a child from the home and the local DCS staff assists with the process.

### Q: Will I be falsely accused?

A: There is a possibility that a child placed in your home may try to manipulate the placement or lash out by making a false allegation. Please know that SIU investigators understand that you have opened your home and hearts to a child. SIU investigators are highly trained and they are sensitive to these issues. They will determine as quickly as possible if there are concerns and make recommendations as needed.

Finally - Stay informed, Be Proactive, Partner with the Department, and Ask  
Questions!!

**KNOW HOW TO REACH YOUR ADVOCATE!!**

### Reporting Abuse and Neglect

Tennessee Law requires anyone who suspects child abuse and/or neglect report it to DCS. There are criminal penalties for not reporting. If a Resource Parent suspects that any child, including the child placed in the resource home, has been abused and/or neglected, it must be reported. The toll-free phone number for the CPS Central Intake is: 1-877-237-0004.

For more information, or to make a report via secure email, please visit <https://reportabuse.state.tn.us/>.

### Lawsuits Brought Against Resource Parents

If a resource parent is sued, the RPSW should be notified immediately. The resource parent may be entitled to representation paid for by the state or for representation by the State Attorney General's office if the alleged negligent or criminal acts were within the scope of the resource parents "job." The resource parent must have been acting within the scope of their responsibilities and in compliance with DCS policy and the foster care placement contract to remain within liability.

As long as a resource parent provides proper care and supervision of the foster child, they are not legally responsible if the foster child should damage someone else's property. Homeowner's insurance may cover damage caused by a foster child. If that is not the case, the resource parent may prefer to make arrangements with the person who suffered the damages.

### Guardian Ad Litem

This is a person appointed by the court to protect the interests of a child in a legal proceeding.

Each child in foster care must, in accordance with state law, be appointed a lawyer, called a Guardian ad litem (GAL), who has certain duties toward foster children who are committed to DCS legal custody as dependent and neglected children. **Rule 40** is included here as a guideline so that resource parents will know what to expect in the required interaction between the GAL and any dependent/neglected child in their care. If resource parents have concerns about a GAL they should communicate their concerns with the child's Family Service Worker.

## Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 40: Guidelines For Guardians Ad Litem For Children In Juvenile Court Neglect, Abuse And Dependency Proceedings

**(a) Application.** These Guidelines set forth the obligations of lawyers appointed to represent children as Guardians ad litem only in juvenile court neglect, abuse and dependency proceedings pursuant to T.C.A. § 37-1-149, Rules 37 of the Tennessee Rules of Juvenile Procedure, and Supreme Court Rule 13. By adoption of these guidelines it is intended that they not be applied to proceedings in other courts that involve child custody or related issues.

**(b) Definitions.** As used in this Rule, unless the context otherwise requires:

- (1) "Guardian ad litem" is a lawyer appointed by the court to advocate for the best interests of a child and to ensure that the child's concerns and preferences are effectively advocated.
- (2) "Child's best interests" refers to a determination of the most appropriate course of action based on *objective consideration of the child's specific needs and preferences*. In determining the best interest of the child the Guardian ad litem should consider, in consultation with experts when appropriate, the following factors:
  - (i) the child's basic physical needs, such as safety, shelter, food, clothing, and medical care;
  - (ii) the child's emotional needs, such as nurturance, trust, affection, security, achievement, and encouragement;
  - (iii) the child's need for family affiliation;
  - (iv) the child's social needs;
  - (v) the child's educational needs;
  - (vi) the child's vulnerability and dependence upon others;
  - (vii) the physical, psychological, emotional, mental, and developmental effects of maltreatment upon the child;
  - (viii) degree of risk;
  - (ix) the child's need for stability of placement;
  - (x) the child's age and developmental level, including his or her sense of time;
  - (xi) the general preference of a child to live with known people, to continue normal activities, and to avoid moving;
  - (xii) whether relatives, friends, neighbors, or other people known to the child are appropriate and available as placement resources;

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- (xiii) the love, affection and emotional ties existing between the child and the potential or proposed or competing caregivers;
- (xiv) the importance of continuity in the child's life;
- (xv) the home, school and community record of the child;
- (xvi) the preferences of the child;
- (xvii) the willingness and ability of the proposed or potential caretakers to facilitate and encourage close and continuing relationships between the child and other persons in the child's life with whom the child has or desires to have a positive relationship, including siblings; and
- (xviii) in the case of visitation or custody disputes between parents, the list of factors set forth in 36-6-106.

### (c) General Guidelines.

- (1) The child is the client of the *Guardian ad litem*. The *Guardian ad litem* is appointed by the court to represent the child by advocating for the child's best interests and ensuring that the child's concerns and preferences are effectively advocated. The child, not the court, is the client of the *Guardian ad litem*.
- (2) Establishing and maintaining a relationship with the child is fundamental to representation. The *Guardian ad litem* shall have contact with the child prior to court hearings and when apprised of emergencies or significant events affecting the child. The age and developmental level of the child dictate the type of contact by the *Guardian ad litem*. The type of contact will range from observation of a very young or otherwise nonverbal child and the child's caretaker to a more typical client interview with an older child. For all but the very young or severely mentally disabled child, for whom direct consultation and explanation would not be effective, the *Guardian ad litem* shall provide information and advice directly to the child in a developmentally appropriate manner.
- (3) The obligation of the *Guardian ad litem* to the child is a continuing one and does not cease until the *Guardian ad litem* is formally relieved by court order. The *Guardian ad litem* shall represent the child at preliminary, adjudicatory, dispositional and post-dispositional hearings, including the permanency plan CFTMs, court reviews, foster care review board hearings and permanency hearings. The *Guardian ad litem* should maintain contact with the child and be available for consultation with the child between hearings and reviews. For a child who is very young or severely mentally disabled, the *Guardian ad litem* should regularly monitor the child's situation through contacts with the child's caretakers and others working with the child and through periodic observations of the child.

### (d) Responsibilities and duties of a lawyer *Guardian ad litem*. The responsibilities and duties of the *Guardian ad litem* include, but are not limited to the following:

- (1) Conducting an independent investigation of the facts that includes:

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- (i) Obtaining necessary authorization for release of information, including an appropriate discovery order;
  - (ii) Reviewing the court files of the child and siblings and obtaining copies of all pleadings relevant to the case;
  - (iii) Reviewing and obtaining copies of Department of Children's Services' records;
  - (iv) Reviewing and obtaining copies of the child's psychiatric, psychological, substance abuse, medical, school and other records relevant to the case;
  - (v) Contacting the lawyers for other parties for background information and for permission to interview the parties;
  - (vi) Interviewing the parent(s) and legal Guardian(s) of the child with permission of their lawyer(s) or conducting formal discovery to obtain information from parents and legal Guardians if permission to interview is denied;
  - (vii) Reviewing records of parent(s) or legal Guardian(s), including, when relevant to the case, psychiatric, psychological, substance abuse, medical, criminal, and law enforcement records; (viii) Interviewing individuals involved with the child, including school personnel, caseworkers, foster parents or other caretakers, neighbors, relatives, coaches, clergy, mental health professionals, physicians and other potential witnesses;
  - (ix) Reviewing relevant photographs, video or audio tapes and other evidence; and
  - (X) Engaging and consulting with professionals and others with relevant special expertise.
- (2) Explaining to the child, in a developmentally appropriate manner:
- (i) the subject matter of litigation;
  - (ii) the child's rights;
  - (iii) the court process;
  - (iv) the Guardian ad litem's role and responsibilities;
  - (v) what to expect before, during and after each hearing or review;
  - (vi) the substance and significance of any orders entered by the court and actions taken by a review board or at a staffing.
- (3) Consulting with the child prior to court hearings and when apprised of emergencies or significant events affecting the child. If the child is very young or otherwise nonverbal, or is severely mentally disabled, the Guardian ad litem should at a minimum observe the child with the caretaker.
- (4) Assessing the needs of the child and the available resources within the family and community to meet the child's needs.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- (5) Considering resources available through programs and processes, including special education, health care and health insurance, and victims' compensation.
- (6) Ensuring that if the child is to testify, the child is prepared and the manner and circumstances of the child's testimony are designed to minimize any harm that might be caused by testifying.
- (7) Advocating the position that serves the best interest of the child by:
  - (i) Petitioning the court for relief on behalf of the child and filing and responding to appropriate motions and pleadings;
  - (ii) Participating in depositions, discovery and pretrial conferences;
  - (iii) Participating in settlement negotiations to seek expeditious resolution of the case, keeping in mind the effect of continuances and delays on the child;
  - (iv) Making opening statements and closing arguments;
  - (v) Calling, examining and cross-examining witnesses, offering exhibits and introducing independent evidence in any proceeding;
  - (vi) Filing briefs and legal memoranda;
  - (vii) Preparing and submitting proposed findings of facts and conclusions of law;
  - (viii) Ensuring that written orders are promptly entered that accurately reflect the findings of the court;
  - (ix) Monitoring compliance with the orders of the court and filing motions and other pleadings and taking other actions to ensure services are being provided;
  - (x) Attending all staffings, reviews and hearings, including permanency plan staffings, foster care review board hearings, judicial reviews and the permanency hearing;
  - (xi) Attending treatment, school and placement meetings regarding the child as deemed necessary.
- (8) Ensuring that the services and responsibilities listed in the permanency plan are in the child's best interests.
- (9) Ensuring that particular attention is paid to maintaining and maximizing appropriate, non-detrimental contacts with family members and friends. (10) Providing representation with respect to appellate review including:
  - (i) Discussing appellate remedies with the child if the order does not serve the best interest of the child, or if the child objects to the courts order;
  - (ii) Filing an appeal when appropriate; and
  - (iii) Representing the child on appeal, whether that appeal is filed by or on behalf of the child or filed by another party.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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### **(e) Responsibilities and duties of a Guardian ad litem when the child's best interests and the child's preferences are in conflict.**

- (1) If the child asks the Guardian ad litem to advocate a position that the Guardian ad litem believes is not in the child's best interest, the Guardian ad litem shall:
  - (i) be made in favor of the child's position, and identify all the factual support for the child's position;
  - (ii) Discuss fully with the child and make sure that the child understands the different options or positions that might be available, including the potential benefits of each option or position, the potential risks of each option or position, and the likelihood of prevailing on each option or position.
- (2) If, after fully investigating and advising the child, the Guardian ad litem is still in a position in which the child is urging the Guardian ad litem to take a position that the Guardian ad litem believes is contrary to the child's best interest, the Guardian ad litem shall pursue one of the following options:
  - (i) Request that the court appoint another lawyer to serve as Guardian ad litem, and then advocate for the child's position while the other lawyer advocates for the child's best interest.
  - (ii) Request that the court appoint another lawyer to represent the child in advocating the child's position, and then advocate the position that the Guardian ad litem believes serves the best interests of the child.
- (3) If, under the circumstance set forth in sub-section (b), the Guardian ad litem is of the opinion that he or she must advocate a position contrary to the child's wishes and the court has refused to provide a separate lawyer for the child to help the child advocate for the child's own wishes, the Guardian ad litem should:
  - (i) subpoena any witnesses and ensure the production of documents and other evidence that might tend to support the child's position;
  - (ii) advise the court at the hearing of the wishes of the child and of the witnesses subpoenaed and other evidence available for the court to consider in support of the child's position.

### **(f) Guardian ad litem to function as lawyer, not as a witness or special master.**

- (1) A Guardian ad litem may not be a witness or testify in any proceeding in which he or she serves as Guardian ad litem, except in those extraordinary circumstances specified by Supreme Court Rule 8, § EC 5-9, 5-10 and DR 5-101.
- (2) A Guardian ad litem is not a special master, and should not submit a "report and recommendations" to the court.
- (3) The Guardian ad litem must present the results of his or her investigation and the conclusion regarding the child's best interest in the same manner as any other lawyer

## Resource Parent Handbook

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presents his or her case on behalf of a client: by calling, examining and cross examining witnesses, submitting and responding to other evidence in conformance with the rules of evidence, and making oral and written arguments based on the evidence that has been or is expected to be presented.

### Court Appointed Special Advocate

Many times, the court will appoint a *CASA*, or Court Appointed Special Advocate, to review the circumstances of a child's case and to report it to the court. The *CASA's* report is based on interviews with significant persons associated with the case, including Resource Parents, and reflects what is in the child's best interests. *CASAs* are trained volunteers. Often, they bring an objective view to the case. They are interested in keeping the child safe while quickly moving the child through the court process. For more information, please visit [National CASA - Court Appointed Special Advocate Association - CASA for Children: Advocating for Abused and Neglected Children](#)

### Education Issues

Every region has an Education Specialist whose sole function is to assist all DCS custody children in education issues (refer to DCS policy [21.14](#)). When any education question or situation comes up the Resource Parent should contact the Family Services Worker (FSW). There should always be an "Education Passport" (refer to DCS policy [21.19](#)) provided for every DCS legal custody child by the FSW. This contains education/school/disciplinary records of the child. If a Resource Parent does not receive this packet, it should be requested from the FSW. If a child is having disciplinary troubles at school, the FSW should be contacted immediately. (See DCS policy [21.16](#))

- School trip authorizations and similar permissions are addressed in policy 16.9 Outings and Overnight Stays, which reviews safe and appropriate parental decision making on an individual basis.
- For children in special education, school systems must recognize and /or appoint an acting or surrogate parent. Resource parents are encouraged to fill this function if otherwise qualified under state law.

### Confidentiality Guidelines

- What can I tell a physician? A physician would want to know everything about a child in their care. HIPPA allows for all information to be shared with a physician.
- What can I tell the school?

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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Private facts about the child's biological family or situation should not be provided to any school official without approval from the FSW or Education Specialist.

1. It is necessary for the child to be safe i.e.; such as a restraining order against a parent.
2. It is necessary for protection of other children.
3. It is part of the Education Passport (refer to section above on Educational issues).

Permanency Plans, psychological of any kind, and court documents are especially private. No documents regarding the child should be provided to a school by a resource parent unless attached by the FSW to an Education Passport (DCS policy [21.19](#))

Medical Information allowed to be shared with schools is limited only to what is necessary to keep the child and others at school safe. If you have any questions regarding sharing of pertinent information please contact the DCS Medical Unit Nurse or any DCS legal counsel.

### **Children With HIV**

Rules governing children with HIV are more stringent than rules governing most other medical issues. However, DCS policy is clear: Resource Parents should be given known information on the child/youth's HIV status or high risk behaviors as part of the existing DCS requirement that Resource Parents be given information about a child/youth's medical and social history.

What about sharing this information with the child's school? Sharing information with public schools is allowed. Determination of the school's need to know should be made in conjunction with medical personnel involved in the management of the child/youth's care and treatment and such disclosure should be to specific school personnel such as the principal and school nurse.

When a Resource Parent has a question about HIV disclosure, treatment, or testing, the FSW and DCS Legal should be consulted.

Policy Reference: [20.22 Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome](#)

### Placement Contracts

In most situations when a child needs a resource family, someone from DCS will call you and talk to you about the child. You will likely be asked to make a decision about accepting the child into your home. Someone from DCS will bring the child to your home. A form [CS-0565, Daily Rate Child Placement Contract](#) should accompany the child. This contract is your authority to care for the child. This contract contains information about what Resource Parents are required to do for children, i.e. health care, education, travel, etc. When you sign the contract, make sure that the other parties have also signed the contract. The DCS employee will leave a copy of the contract with you.

## Chapter 12

### Associations and Other Supports for Resource Parents

#### Purpose

What purposes are served by local and state foster care associations?

Local and State associations serve to:

- Advocate for the rights of foster children
- Advocate for permanency for children
- Advocate for education and training of Resource Parents.
- Assist in recruitment and training of new Resource Parents.
- Provide information on Resource Parent issues and services.
- Advocate for improvement in the quality of resource care services.
- Provide socialization & recreation opportunities for Resource Parents and their families.
- Bring positive attention and recognition to Resource Parents

#### DCS Support

**How does DCS encourage and support foster care associations?**

The Department was instrumental in organizing the first foster care associations and believes strongly in their positive capacities. DCS and Associations have a collaborative team approach with both working towards the common goal of safe, secure and nurturing homes for Tennessee children. This support is demonstrated by:

**Communication** - Encouraging Family Services Workers to communicate their confidence in the local and state associations to new and existing Resource Parents and to inform them of special events and trainings sponsored by local and state associations.

**Participate**- Family Service Workers are encouraged to attend meetings and to be active participants in the associations. The relationship between the associations and DCS staff will benefit from ongoing and mutual team work.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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**Liaison-** The associations are assigned a staff liaison by the DCS Regional Administrator to act as a conduit between the Resource Parents and DCS.

DCS provides the resource and opportunities for additional training and on-going support and resources.

### **Being a Member of the Tennessee Foster Adoptive Care Association (TFACA)**

Purposes and objectives:

- To encourage and motivate participation of Resource Parents and other interested persons or organizations.
- To encourage communications between Resource Parents and others persons concerned with the growth and development of foster children in their care and custody.
- To develop a better understanding by the general public of certain inherent problems in providing foster home care.
- To act as Trustee of any funds or property the association may receive under specific grant or agreements or under any will, or to have and exercise the right to hold and manage such funds.
- To be the spokesman for foster/adoptive parents in Tennessee and children under their care and custody regarding any legislative actions and governmental program affecting their health and welfare.

**There are many advantages of being a TFACA member.**

- To provide a support team and united voice with the State of Tennessee and National Foster Parent association regarding legislation and policies affecting Resource Parents
- To establish a non-profit organization, this allows numerous tax incentives
- To have the help and support of the Foster Parent Advocacy Program addressing questions and problems concerning allegations and offering information, support, and direction.
- To be able to help with the retention and recruitment of Resource Parents through the Advocacy Program.
- To be able to participate and to have a voice and keep current the latest information and developments pertaining to the Resource Parents across the state that can provide a pool of friends for respite care.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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- Eligibility for the scholarship program awarded each year at the State Conference. Recipients are selected from applications turned into the Awards Committee. Potential applicants may be foster, adoptive or biological children of Resource Parents belonging to TFACA.
- TFACA is your voice in creating DCS policies to include legislative changes, board rate increase, etc.
- To be able to share the accessibility to DCS office leaders as a DCS representative is present at each state meeting bringing updated news and any changes occurring.
- To have the opportunity to enjoy a weekend of quality training and fellowship at the annual TFACA conference.
- There are many advantages of being part of the local association.

Policy Reference: [16.8-Attachment 4-Guidelines for Foster Care Associations](#)

### **Independent Living, Transition Planning, and Extension of Foster Care Services for Youth and Young Adults between the Ages of 14-24**

The journey towards independence begins for most young people in their early teens as they begin learning skills and developing relationships that will allow them to successfully navigate a complex world, provide for their daily care needs, and reach their goals. Independent Living Services are not a substitute for permanent connections to caring adults, but rather a complement to those relationships.

Resource parents are vital to a youth's preparation for adult living. Resource Parents are a youth's link to their future, and can provide direction, encouragement and nurturing. The youth's preparation for independence works best in the natural context of a family. Resource Parents have the most knowledge and contact with the young person in their home. They are expected to guide youth and teach them skills for living on their own. Resource Parents observe whether or not a young person has mastered a life skill for living in a certain area; they also have to deal with the difficult behaviors that occur in adolescence, as well as those that result from the adolescent's experience in foster care. Clearly, Resource Parents are an integral part of the service team and are to be encouraged to work as partners with the Department to prepare the youth and young adult to be successful.

The purpose of Independent Living and Transition Planning is to build a network of relevant supports and services for youth in state custody, or exiting state custody to adulthood, in conjunction with regional support workers and youth. Young adults who have voluntarily opted to participate in Extension of Foster Care Services with the Department are provided access

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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to these services and receive ongoing case management through regional offices in the communities where the young adult resides.

DCS shall provide a continuum of developmentally appropriate Independent Living Services for youth/young adults. Eligible youth must receive a full array of services in order to prepare them for independent living. The services youth and young adults need are identified from life skills assessment (for younger youth; you will likely be asked to help complete life skills assessments), engagement of youth and young adults and team members (including resource parents), and from court and foster care review board recommendations.

[DCS Policy 16.51, Independent Living and Transition Planning](#), and associated protocols describe the types of planning that must be accomplished to ensure youth/young adults' needs are met; this planning is done within the Family Permanency Plan, and appears in its own section. Here are some things to know:

- Youth in DCS custody 14-16 years of age have an Independent Living Plan section, which focuses on life skills.
- Youth in DCS custody 17 years of age and older have a Transition Plan section that focuses on their transition from custody as adults.
- Young adults receiving Extension of Foster Care Services have a Transition Plan section that focuses on reaching the completion of an educational goal, or transition to services for adults if they have special needs.

More details about Quality Independent Living and Transition Planning for Youth can be found in the ["Back to Basics"](#) presentation available on the DCS website.

The Independent Living or Transition Plan Section of the Family Permanency Plan should reference the types of Independent Living Services youth and young adults need. DCS Policy [16.53, Eligibility for Independent Living Services](#), and associated protocols describe the categories of Independent Living Services available, to include eligibility for those services. The services may include:

- Life Skills Assessment and Life Skills Instruction/Coaching (you will likely be asked to help with these).
- Independent Living Wraparound Services.
- Post-Secondary Scholarship Services (potentially up to age 24, depending on the service): Education and Training Vouchers (to age 23) or State Funded Scholarship (to age 24).
- Independent Living Allowance: for young adults receiving Extension of Foster Care Services.
- Continuation of Placement Services: for young adults receiving Extension of Foster Care Services.

## Resource Parent Handbook

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- **Contracted Services:** Transitional Living which is provided through a public/private partnership and grant by Youth Villages, Inc., services from Resource Centers (where available).

More details about Independent Living Services can be found in the "[Services Available Under TN DCS IL](#)" [tip sheet](#) available on the DCS web site.

In some cases, young adults ages 18-21 are eligible for Extension of Foster Care Services if they exit DCS custody to adulthood, based on the eligibility guidelines set forth in DCS Policy [16.52, Extension or Re-Establishment of Foster Care Services for Young Adults](#). At any point between emancipating from state custody (at or after 18) and turning 21 years old, otherwise eligible young adults may return to DCS and request to receive Extension of Foster Care Services.

There are times when the team may determine that another option for service, such as Transitional Living, may be more appropriate based on a young adult's needs.

More details about Extension of Foster Care Services to 21 can be found in the "[18 is Not a Magic Number](#)" presentation and the [Youth Handout](#)" available on the DCS website.

## Transition to Services for Adults

For some young people with developmental limitations or severe and chronic mental illness, a transition to services for adults may be the most appropriate step for them as they reach the age of 18 or 19 ( for delinquent youth). Longer term services for adults are not provided by DCS, but by various other programs and service options such as the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). The Department of Mental Health, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, TennCare related services, and Social Security income. These services may be voluntary, or decided upon by the youth's conservator (if one is appointed) when a young person does not have the capacity to make decisions independently. The Child and family Team is also the group of people who plans for transition to services for adults with young people, and there may be other individuals involved to assist the team such as mental health service providers, the DCS regional psychologist, and the regional health unit nurse. Transitions to services for adults require a lot of planning and coordination in order to be successful. Additional information can be found in DCS Policies [19.7, Transitioning DCS Youth with Serious Psychiatric Disorders into Adult Behavioral/Mental Health Services](#) and [19.8, Transitioning Youth to the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \(DIDD\) Adult Services](#).

DCS has entered into a public-private partnership with Youth Villages, Inc. to provide Transitional Living support to youth who exit state custody without significant supports. Approval is dependent upon the youth's eligibility for the services requested.

## **Resource Parent Handbook**

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The Office of Independent Living is also forming partnerships with groups who could expand basic services being provided to youth and young adults in the program such as through contracted Resource Centers. Refer to the ["IL Contact List"](#) to get in touch with your regional Independent Living Specialist for more information.