



STATE OF TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**Phil Bredesen**  
Governor

**Viola P. Miller**  
Commissioner

March 15, 2010

Dear Resource Parents:

It is with great pleasure that I present the 2010 Tennessee DCS Resource Parent Handbook. You are to be commended for the time and attention that you focus on our children throughout the state. This agency could not continue our valuable mission of caring for these children with quality services, promoting family-centered care, and advocating for children and families without your help.

As we move forward with the dynamic and challenging improvements to our system, we know that we can continue to count on the support and assistance that we have come to experience from each of you. Resource Parents play an especially crucial role in making sure that our child and family team process works as it should. Together we will continue our quest for best practice standards that address the needs of all children and families in this state.

Our work is about permanency for children, forever families, which every child deserves. Custody is temporary. To those of you who are willing and ready to offer a lifelong commitment to our children through adoption or permanent guardianship, we offer a special, thank you.

I want to offer a very special thanks to each of you who have supported DCS in the national accreditation process. Your assistance has been meaningful and impressive to our peer reviewers. Our foster parent advocates also deserve my heartfelt gratitude. I would like to thank you for your dedication, hard work, and commitment to the well-being of our children.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Viola P. Miller".

Viola P. Miller  
Commissioner



## A Message from Elizabeth Black Executive Director, Office of Child Permanency

Resource Parents and DCS staff from across the state have developed this handbook so that we all have

- a quick and easy guide that explains the various role of Resource Parents,
- a daily reference for the many situations in which Resource Parents find themselves,
- information about rights, finances, and legal situations, and
- online links to DCS policies.

I hope you enjoy this handbook, use it often, and find it helpful. Your value to us and to the children you serve is immeasurable. My heartfelt thanks is extended to you all.







STATE OF TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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Dear Resource Family,

We want good outcomes for children and families, and we cannot accomplish this goal without a partnership with you. Everyone knows that children need nurture, care, and life instruction and Resource Families are tasked with providing these things and so much more. Simply put, without strong Resource Families, we would never be successful in meeting our goals for children and families.

It takes a special skill to be a Resource Parent and someone would say that it is a "calling" or gift to be able to perform in that role on a daily basis. Selfless giving of time and energy and personal finances is given with little expectation of gratitude. DCS knows that resource families make personal sacrifices for our children and families. These sacrifices are made without hesitation or question.

On behalf of the Foster Care and Adoptions Services Division, I thank you for your service to our state and to the children and families in your community. I want to personally thank you for your dedication and efforts to better the foster care system and for your advocacy for our children. Thank you for sending them to school every day, giving them a place at your dinner table, tending to their medical needs, tucking them in at night, preparing them to be successful adults and parents, and knowing them better than we do.

With respect and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Johnson".

John L. Johnson, Director  
Foster Care and Adoptions



## 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.

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CW004-0910

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

## Chapter One

# 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<sup>1</sup>:

- 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 Family Services Worker as quickly as possible if there is an occurrence of an illness or an accident requiring a physician's care or hospital visit.
- Protect the child's personal information by strictly following DCS confidentiality policy and notifying the Family Services Worker 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.
- Provide routine transportation for medical appointments, family visits, and extracurricular activities<sup>2</sup>.
- Support the child as he or she visits with family and report any unusual circumstances to the Family Services Worker.
- Work with the child to develop a Life Book.

- Inform the child's Family Services Worker 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, and
- participate in the team's discussion and join the work toward 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 toward meeting the goals of the permanency plan,
- provide support to their child, both emotional and otherwise as they are capable, and
- 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 toward 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.

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; and

- 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 Family Services Worker, as the representative of the child’s legal custodian, has the following specific responsibilities:

- Oversee the daily care while the child is in out-of-home placement, including regular face-to-face contact with the child and Resource Parent.
- Assure that the child’s medical and dental needs are met.
- Assure that the child and his/her family have reasonable visitation as directed by the court or the Child and Family Team.
- Be available to the child and the Resource Parent.
- Be present for all CFTMs, hearings, and reviews.
- Maintain 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 Parents shouldn’t be “left in the dark.” Resource Parents are bound by the same rules of confidentiality as DCS staff<sup>3</sup>.

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

## **End Notes**

- 1. DCS Policy 16.8, I, 1.*
- 2. DCS Policy 16.8, F.*
- 3. DCS Resource Parents’ Bill of Rights*



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

## Chapter Two

# Types of Resource Homes

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

- A.** The Department of Children’s Services (DCS) 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 they 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.

### **Q. What does it mean to be “dually” approved?**

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

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**

### **Q. What is kinship care and why is it is important?**

**A.** 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 who are willing to assist the child, it reduces the trauma suffered by the child. While the child's life is being disrupted, he or she is at least being placed with someone they know and with whom the child has a connection. DCS offers supports for expedited homes in the form of initial clothing allowances, provider services, assistance with daycare, assistance in securing TennCare 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 DCS 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 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.** This is a legal document 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 remains in effect until the child(ren)'s 18th 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. One 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 to caring for the child until he or she is an adult. The parents' rights do not end as 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 sister, 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; one may also be eligible for TennCare and food stamps.

**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 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 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 Disclosure 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 services. 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 when 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 diseases, 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 treatment or treatment for sexual predatory behaviors may need this type of 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 for discussion and to 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**

## 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 in which Resource Parents can participate.

### **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; and
- most 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.

**Policy Reference: 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 the permanency goal for the child (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.

**Note:** It is important to understand that there is a federal requirement for 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 the 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, another 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,
- cases where a court has determined a child to be abandoned,
- cases where a parent has committed murder or voluntary manslaughter of one of their children, and/or
- 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 the *Criteria to Terminate Parental Rights* should ask the child's Family Service Worker for a copy of form CS-0745.

Exceptions to these requirements can be made 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, and/or
- 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 members works 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 lifelong family for each individual child.



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

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## 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 the 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 lifelong connection.

### Life Books

- Life Books are for children who are in the custody of DCS. The book is meant to preserve and document their history while they are in foster care.
- The Life Book is developed in order to help the child(ren) understand their situation in life and process feelings they might have during this difficult time.
- The book can help a child better understand the separation from his or her parents and gain a sense of “who I am and how I got here” and can give hope for his or her future plans.
- The Life Book should be updated often with important events in the child's life. This can be done with 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 any time 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 Book is an important and valuable gift and can promote attachment.

**Policy Reference:** *16.8 Responsibilities of Approved Resource Parents, Guidelines for Life Story Books*

### Participation on the Child and Family Team

Resource Parents, as caregivers of our children, are critical members of the team that will make important decisions about the care and welfare of the child(ren) in their home. The teaming process means that they will be invited to attend all Child and Family Team Meetings for children placed in their care. 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 the caregivers of our children. If a child is at risk of disruption from a Resource Home, we want to determine if additional supports and/or services to the child or to the Resource Family might stabilize

and maintain the placement. If the child must move to a new placement, then we need the Resource Parents' 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 Resource Families as our partners 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 that the purpose and goal is to provide the opportunity for family and others to participate in developing solutions.
- Watch your nonverbal 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 be sure 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 they are 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. Consider the merits of each idea.
- Maintain your energy throughout the evening.

### **Selecting Resource Parents 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 that helps match needs of children with needs and strengths of the Resource Families. One of the Department's greatest needs is more Resource Homes with the willingness to parent teens. More than 50 percent of children entering custody are teenagers. The Department's job is to find good homes for our children in custody and not to find a particular child that the 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 would the option of adoption become a possibility.

### **Selecting Adoptive Parents for a Child**

If a child has been placed in a Resource Home for six months or more and the permanency goal is changed to adoption, that Resource Family is given the first choice to adopt the child(ren). 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. This information is used to write an Individualized Recruitment Plan, which outlines the next steps in identifying an adoptive home for the child. These steps may include searching the database of available homes that might be a match for the 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(ren). 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 six-month period before adoption can take place. Once the decision is made to adopt, the Permanency Specialist helps the family 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 six-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 his or her 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 Life Book with parents.
- Take/pick up child to/at parent’s home.
- Attend parenting classes with parents.
- Serve as a support to the 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, coworkers 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

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.

## **A.S.F.A. (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 Services?**

A. The Adoption and Safe Family Act is federal child welfare legislation that was passed into effect in 1997. It focuses on improving the safety of children, helping to support our families, helping with adoptions, and finding 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 the child. Those situations could be as follows:

1. The child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months.
2. A court has determined a child to be an abandoned infant.
3. 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 they are as follows:

1. The child is placed with a relative.
2. There is compelling evidence that termination is not in the best interest of the child.
3. 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 valuable 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 they create 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 percent of all permanency plans for children in

custody include adoption as a goal. Almost half of that percentage (21.1 percent) 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 available for adoption, the Resource Parents then have first option to adopt the child.

### **The Termination of Parental Rights (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 ten different reasons that allow the department to terminate a parent's rights.
- These ten 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 led 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.
- 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.

### **Interdependent Living and Post-custody Services for Children Between the Ages of 14 and 23**

The journey toward 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.

Interdependent Living is not a service but a journey that is most successful when young people have the support of a network of caring adults surrounding them. This network may be broken, nonexistent, or undependable for many young people in foster care. It is important to note that Interdependent Living services are not a substitute for permanent connections to caring adults but rather a complement to those relationships.

Resource Parents play a central role in helping adolescents to prepare for life after foster care. 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 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 adolescents for Interdependent Living.

### **Role of the Resource Parent in Preparing a Youth for Independence**

Resource Parents are vital to a youth's preparation for adult living. Resource Parents are a youth's link to the future. The youth will depend on them for direction, encouragement, and nurturing. Officially, planning for Interdependent Living begins at the age of fourteen. In order to identify the young person's strengths and opportunities, the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment is administered before the planning process begins. The Resource Parent completes the caregiver portion of the assessment for a true sense of a youth's life skill needs and abilities. Other important tasks of the Resource Parent are to

- support,
- encourage,
- teach,
- complete the child's Life Book, and
- provide training.

### **Services Available to Prepare Youth for Interdependent Living**

DCS shall provide a continuum of developmentally appropriate Interdependent Living Services for youth/young adults. Eligible youth must receive a full array of services in order to prepare them for Interdependent Living. The Child and Family Team (or Young Adult Team), with the support of the Interdependent Living Specialist is the group of people responsible for identifying each young person's needed services and for development of the Interdependent Living Plan (refer to DCS policy 16.51). The Interdependent Living Plan for each youth age 14–21 is documented in the Permanency Plan. This plan is renewed on an annual basis. There are a number of provisions that DCS makes in preparing adolescents for independence. The plan will include the following:

- **Living arrangements:** Best living arrangements that meet the youth's needs and are conducive to learning Interdependent Living Skills.
- **Training in Living Skills:** These skills are provided by the Resource Parent, the Family Service Worker, and the Interdependent Living Specialist.
- **Skill Areas:** Educational options, sex education, job skills training, basic housekeeping and domestic skills, grocery shopping, obtaining proper health care, managing money and budgeting skills, using public transportation, communication

skills, telephone skills, proper decision-making and problem-solving skills, learning how to establish supportive healthy connections with others, coping with being on one's own, and developing healthy self-esteem and good solid relationships.

- **Special Services:** Treatment and support services where appropriate, consideration of any impairment, and appropriate referral to Vocational Rehabilitation as needed. This also includes referral for tutoring, GED enhancement, and job corps.

There are a number of developmentally appropriate services to prepare young adults for Interdependent Living. These services are directly connected to the Chaffee Foster Care Interdependent Living Services. Some of those services include

- use of Chaffee Interdependent Living Funds;
- assisting youth in obtaining a high school diploma;
- assisting youth in career exploration, vocational training, and job placement and retention;
- providing training in daily living skills, budgeting, and fiscal management skills;
- Interdependent Living Funds, which are accessed through proper processes in the youth's region; and
- other wraparound services such as SAT/ACT testing fees, tutoring services, senior expenses, graduation/GED incentives, and Positive Start grants.

There are many other services as outlined in **Policy 16.53: *Identifying and Accessing Interdependent Living Services.***

## **Post-custody Services**

DCS will provide post-custody services to young adults exiting custody at 18 or 19 years of age (for delinquent youth) and requesting voluntary services from the Department. Youth receiving post-custody services do not remain in state custody but are engaged in a voluntary relationship with DCS that supports the continuation of services, assistance, and support. Eligibility for services is determined based upon the placement at the youth's 18th birthday and an approved educational or job-training plan. Services are youth-specific and are determined by the youth's team. Post-custody services can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Foster care room and board.
- Case management services.
- Financial support for education or job training.
- DCS may provide services to young adults requesting re-entry for voluntary services.
- Post-custody services are provided up to age 21 and may be extended with special approval from the Director of Interdependent Living or designee.

Additional information is available in **Policy 16.54: *Provision of Voluntary Post-Custody Services to Young Adults.***

A foster child may continue receiving support services to promote educational services after successful completion of high school or GED.

- Post-custodial services begin at age 18 up to the age of 21 as long as the youth is actively involved in a full-time postsecondary educational program or vocational/technical school.
- Postsecondary assistance is available to assist young adults in paying for part of their tuition, housing, books, and supplies.
- An Interdependent Living Specialist will be assigned to the youth as early as possible in the youth's teenage years to assist him or her through this process.
- Please refer to ***Policy 16.52 Eligibility for Interdependent Living and Voluntary Post-Custody Services***.

Young adults eligible for DCS Voluntary Post-Custody Services may return to any DCS office, regardless of the county/region that served them while they were in state custody, and request services following a break with DCS. The request must be made prior to the 21st birthday. Young adults age 21 years and up to the 23rd birthday may request Transitional Living Services, provided that funding is available. ***Policy 16.52: Eligibility for Interdependent Living and Voluntary Post-Custody Services*** also provides additional information about this.

In an effort to assist eligible youth in having a successful transition into adulthood, DCS has established a direct pay process to provide a living allowance to young adults who meet eligibility requirements for federal IV-E and Chaffee funds. This is designed to provide the opportunity for a successful transition into adulthood and self-sufficiency through a direct pay living allowance to young adults.

**Policy Reference: 16.56 Interdependent Living Direct Payment Allowance.**

## Transition to Adult Services/DIDS

For a small group of young people with developmental limitations or severe and chronic mental illness, a transition to adult services may be the most appropriate step for them as they reach the age of 18 or 19 (for delinquent youth). Adult services are not provided by DCS but by the Division of Developmental Services (DIDS). These services may be voluntary or decided upon by the youth's conservator 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 transitions to adult services for 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 adult services require a lot of planning and coordination in order to be successful. Additional information can be found in ***Policy 19.7 Transitioning DCS Youth into Adult Behavioral/Mental Health Services*** and ***Policy 19.8 Transitioning Youth into Division of Mental Retardation (DMRS) Adult Services***.



## **Chapter Five – Frequently Asked Questions and Topics of Interest**

## Chapter Five

# Frequently Asked Questions/Topics of Interest

### Youth and Employment

**Q. Are foster youth allowed to hold jobs?**

- A. 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 state/federal child labor laws.
- As a condition of continuing to receive services past the 18th 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 U.S. Department of Labor for specifics on age and hours of work allowed.

### Photo ID Cards

**Q. Do foster children need ID cards?**

- A. 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 Family Services Worker contact the regional Independent Living Program Specialist for a photo ID application form. This form verifies that the youth is in custody. The Family Services Worker must sign the form.
  - Take the youth and the form to the local Department of Safety office to obtain the ID.

### Driver's License

**Q. Can teenage foster children get a driver's license? If so, who signs?**

- A. 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 in doing so is personally accepting financial responsibility for that youth. Should a Resource Parent decide he or she wants to allow the child this opportunity, the following guidelines should be observed.
- If parents are available, they should be consulted.
  - Insurance coverage must be provided by the Resource Parents, the child, or the 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

### **Q. What is the policy regarding marriage of a minor foster child?**

- A.** A child younger than 16 years of age is prohibited by Tennessee law to marry without a waiver from an appropriate court. A child between the ages of 16 and 18 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

**FSW/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.

**YATM/Young Adult Team Meeting.** This is a meeting held with a young adult receiving services from DCS to develop and monitor the Interdependent Living Plan. The team can consist of those persons providing support to the young adult, such as the DCS Educational Specialist, Resource Family, Birth Family, IL Specialist, DCS Psychologists, Service Providers, and Family Services Worker.

**CFTM/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 team is where the focus is on what is in the “best interest” of the child and how we as a team make decisions that will enhance the 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 and Family Services Workers with any questions regarding the medical and dental care of the foster child.

## **Chapter Six – Recruitment and Retention of Resource Homes**

## Chapter Six

# Recruitment and Retention of Resource Homes

## 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 Resource 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 before the public and gives us an opportunity to be personally available to answer questions. Following are examples of general recruitment.

- Public service announcements
- Adoption fairs
- Information booths at community events
- Television and newspaper feature stories
- Adoption Web sites
- 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 recruit 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 who can be difficult 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 media and community resources cannot be used for recruitment until the child is legally free for adoption. This is because we never publicly 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, but 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 who 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 must be updated every six months.

In addition, many children in full guardianship who 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.

## Retention

### 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 for 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 Resource Parents play 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 training 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 Seven – Special Situations**

## Chapter Seven

# Special Situations

### **Q. How many foster children may any one Resource Home care for and how are these decisions made?**

- A.** 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 two children share a bedroom without Team Leader approval.
    - ◇ Children three 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.
  - Ability of Resource Parents to team together with birth families. The Resource Family should have the ability to work with, mentor and assist birth families toward 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.
  - Ability of Resource Parents to team together with the Department toward the best interest of children and families.

### **Q. Are there limitations for Resource Homes?**

- A.** The 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 three foster children in the home.
- No more than three children under the age of three, including the birth children and adopted children, in the home.
- No more than six total children, including the Resource Parents' birth and adopted children, in the home.
- No more than two 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 being given to number of beds available and provision of proper supervision. (See Respite section for additional 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***

**Q. What are the guidelines for Resource Parents working outside the home?**

- A. The following guidelines apply to Resource Parents being employed 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 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***

**Q. 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.**

A. The following guidelines apply:

- Resource Parents should use good judgment when taking on additional responsibilities to ensure that all those in their care are safe and supervised.
- Resource Parents 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.

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

A. 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 to, sell to, or purchase any tobacco materials for a minor.
- **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.
- **Sex.** It is expected that Resource Parents will provide supervision and care to their 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 years of age is aggravated rape or rape of a child; sexual penetration of a child when the victim is 13 years of age and the offender is at least four years older is statutory rape. Birth control options are available to children in custody and questions of this nature should be directed toward 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 allowing such visits. 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 for the beliefs of the child and his or her 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 his or her 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 for ensuring the safe and appropriate use of the computer and Internet by foster children.

**Q. Are Resource Parents allowed to sign permission forms?**

**A.** The following guidelines should be followed with respect to 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.
- Everyday decisions such as school trips, school lunch forms, and 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, and/or 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.

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

- A. The following steps must be taken in the event a foster child becomes a runaway:
- 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 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**

**Q. What are the guidelines for child care (babysitting) arrangements for foster children?**

- A. Parents are cautioned that the following are “general” guidelines. Resource Parents, by virtue of their approval, can use 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 birth through age 9 are not to be left unsupervised.
  - Children ages 10 through 12 may be left unsupervised for a maximum of two hours.
  - Children ages 13 through 14 may supervise younger children for a maximum of four hours.
  - Foster children under age 18 are not to be left unattended overnight.
  - Be aware that a state law effective July 1, 2006, makes it a crime to leave a child age six and younger 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:

- The supervising child has clear expectations and guidelines of what to do.
- The supervising child has a high level of maturity and capability of following through with expectations.
- Consideration must be 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.
- The supervising child has demonstrated an ability to adequately supervise younger children.
- All child(ren) are in a safe environment.
- The supervising child has immediate access to a responsive adult by telephone or in person.
- The supervising child knows what to do in an emergency situation.
- The 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.

### **Tennessee Child Passenger Safety Law**

Resource Parents must observe all facets of the Tennessee Child Passenger Safety Laws as outlined below:

- 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 properly installed. 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.

<b>Child's Age/ Weight/Height</b>	<b>Type of Seat</b>	<b>Location of Seat</b>
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 handheld mobile telephone or a handheld 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.

### **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 the Resource Family and follow through the proper procedures. If the death occurs in a hospital setting, the hospital 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 Tennessee 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 References:** *20.29 Death of a Child/Youth in DCS Custody/Guardianship and 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 included five other brothers as well.)

## **Chapter Eight – Maintaining an Approved Home**

## Chapter Eight

# 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(ren) and written down for the child(ren) 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 be 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 two 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 Foster Care Parents**

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 one 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 with DCS Policies 20.12 and 20.7. Please feel free to request copies of these policies from your RPS worker or your child's Family Services Worker. When a child is placed in your home, make sure to communicate with the Family Services Worker 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 Family Services Worker 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 they are encouraged to provide well-balanced meals. Resource families are also encouraged to accommodate the child's cultural norms when planning menus.

When a child has a medical or dental appointment, the Resource Parents should take the ***Health Services Confirmation and Follow-up form*** and request that the health service provider complete the form. Once completed, a copy of the form must be forwarded to the child's Family Services Worker. For blank copies of this form, please contact your RPS worker or the child's Family Services Worker.

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 the ***Resource Home Prescription Medication Record form***, 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 Family Services Worker each month.

If a child requires hospitalization, he or she is 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 his or her 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 Family Services Worker.

### **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 Family Services Worker.

Resource Parents are encouraged to attend multi-disciplinary team (M-Team) meetings, Individual Education Plan (IEP) development meetings, and 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 Family Services Worker. All consequences for behaviors are to be age-appropriate and timely. All Resource Parents must sign and abide by the ***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, Family Services Worker, 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 more than 50 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 50 miles. For example, if the trip is 55 miles one way, then the Resource Parent can be reimbursed for 5 miles each way.

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

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular 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 occur. 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, depending on the child's wishes. Any issues or questions that may arise should be discussed with the Family Services Worker.

## **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 Family Services Worker 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 he or she moves forward to permanency.

## **Life Books**

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

The Family Services Worker 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 Family Services Worker.

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

The first year after a Resource Home has been approved, Resource Parents must complete 11 hours of in-service training as follows:

- Working with the Education System (2 hours)
- Positive Discipline (3 Hours)
- Plus two of the following four core/required classes (3 hours each)
  - ◊ Working with Birth Parents
  - ◊ Cultural Awareness
  - ◊ Parenting the Sexually Abused Child
  - ◊ Fostering Positive Behavior for Resource Parents

Continued training is required annually. During the second year of approval, Resource Parents must complete 15 hours of training. This must include

- the two remaining core/required classes that were not taken during the first year of approval; and
- appropriate electives totaling at least 9 hours, for a total of 15 total training hours for the year.

Resource Parents who are willing and appropriate to parent youth who have been adjudicated delinquent must complete the Parenting the Youthful Offender class, which totals 9 hours. This class will also give Resource Parents credit for Working with Birth Parents and Positive Discipline classes.

After the first year of approval, Resource Parents must complete a minimum of 15 hours of training annually. Attendance at the annual Regional Resource Parent Conference or the annual conference of the Tennessee Foster Care Association is good way to get several classes at once. Local associations may also offer training at association meetings.

Once all core/required classes are completed, Resource Parents may also access up to five hours of computer-based training per year via the Internet. They may also get up to three hours from reading books and reporting to RPS staff. All Internet and book training should get prior approval from the RPS worker to ensure it is appropriate to receive training credits. The online Foster Parent College is a good resource for Internet training. For more information, please contact your RPS worker. Elective classes from other sources (such as the Resource Parents' employment) may also provide training for Resource Parents. Resource Parents who are interested in taking classes or receiving credits for training delivered outside of DCS should contact their RPS worker to determine for which trainings they can receive credit.

CPR/First Aid and Medication Administration training is 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.

It is important to remember that if the Resource Family is a married or unmarried couple, both members of the couple must complete all training requirements. Also, if any additional adult household members are in a caretaking role, they must also complete the training requirements.

## Resource Home Reassessments

All Resource Homes must be reassessed annually for continued approval. This is done to assure the safety and well-being needs of children placed in Resource Homes are being met. At this reassessment, Resource Parents will be asked to consider your performance as a Resource Parent, including strengths and areas of need. It is important to 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 Resource Parents by their 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 will be conducted, where information for the **Reassessment** form and Home Safety Checklist will be gathered.
- **Authorization for Release of Information** form must be completed by all adult household members.
- An updated copy of driver's licenses, vehicle registrations, and vehicle insurance must be provided. 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.)
- Copies of training certificates for all required training during the reassessment year are to be provide. (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 will be completed.
- Complete the **Monthly Family Financial Income and Expenditures** form and attach proof of all income reported on the form.
- Complete the **Medical Self Report (Annual) Resource Parent/Child** form for all household members.

Additionally, and for obvious good reasons, the federal government requires the Department 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 that all federal requirements are being met.

## Reactivation

If a Resource Home that closed in good standing wishes to re-open, the Resource Family 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 Home Study must be completed. If the home has been closed for less than one year, DCS may choose to complete only a **Reassessment/Reactivation** to reopen 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 CAPS 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. CAPS are time-limited and should last a maximum of 90 days (unless a shorter time frame is required by the CAP). They will be reviewed periodically during the time frame to ensure progress is being made toward 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 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 an Approved Resource Home, 16.16 Denial or Closure of Resource Homes, Protocol for Reactivation or Reclassification of Resource Homes*

**The following were all submitted by Resource Parent Advocate Carla Turner, from various sources.**

### **Foster Child Poem**

You are who you are for a reason.

You're part of an intricate plan.

You're precious and a perfectly unique design,

Called God's special woman or man.

You look like you look for a reason.

Our God made no mistake

He knit you together within the womb,

You're just what he wanted to make.

The parents you had were the ones he chose,

And no matter how you may feel,

They were custom-designed with God's plan in mind,

And they bear the Master's seal.

No, that trauma you faced was not easy.

And God wept that it hurt you;

But it was allowed to shape your heart

So that into his likeness you'd grow.

You are who you are for a reason.

You've been formed by the Master's rod.

You are who you are, beloved,

Because there is a God!

(Unknown Source)

## Soldier

I cry in secret I hurt inside yet the soldier in me never hides.  
I stand so tall and yet so brave, but on the inside I pray to be saved.  
I look inside only to find the memories are yet behind.  
Yet like a soldier I fight and fight trying to hold on for just one night.  
The pain the hurt the guilt itself is all to much for me myself.  
I try to die yet only see God's got another plan for me.  
Now I take it day by day not worrying bout what others say.  
I cry in secret I hurt inside yet the soldier in me never hides.

—Brittany R. (a former foster child)

## A Teenager's Prayer

Each day brings new beginnings

Decisions I must make.

I am the only one to choose

the road that I will take.

I can choose to take the road of life

That leads to great success.

Or travel down the darkened road

That leads to great distress.

Please open up my eyes, dear Lord

That I might clearly see.

Help me stand for what is right

Bring out the best in me.

Help me, Lord, to just say "no"

When temptation comes my way.

That I might keep my body clean

And fit for life each day.

When my teenage years are over

I know that I will see

That life is lived its very best

With you walking next to me.

—Author Unknown

**A hundred years from now...**

**It will not matter how much**

**Money was in my bank account...**

**Where I lived...**

**What type of car I drove...**

**But the World may be different**

**Because...**

**I was important in the Life of a Child**

—positivepins.com

## **Chapter Nine – Rights of Resource Parents**

## Chapter Nine

# Rights of Resource Parents

### Foster Parents' 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;
- (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. 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;
- (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;

- (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 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, and 2, 3.

**Q. How Are Disagreements Resolved?**

- A.** 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 Family Services Worker 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 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 his or her 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 his or her 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 Family Services Worker and supervisor for resolution and if 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 the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (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 and 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 e-mailed to the Executive Director of Child Permanency at <mailto:resourceparenteidcs@tn.gov>. E-mailed requests will be acknowledged via automated e-mail. A request is not considered as being received unless the automated e-mail has been received by the sender.

- b. 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.
- c. 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 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 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.

## **Multi-Ethnic Placement Act**

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

- A.
  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 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?**

- A.** Routine travel is included in the daily Resource Home board rate and is an expectation of being a Resource Parent. Only trips more than 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 but 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 appropriate venue for discussing the need for travel reimbursement for the Resource Family.

## Out-of-State Travel

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

- A.** When traveling out of state a Resource Parent must
1. request permission as far in advance as possible (at least 7-10 days) in order to allow for paperwork to be completed in a timely manner, except in the event of emergencies; and
  2. secure written authorization that has been signed by four DCS staff: FSW, TL, TC, and RA.

## Outings and Overnight Stays

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

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

Outings and overnight stays will be defined as child- or Resource Parent-initiated, in-state outings of less than 48 hours, to a location well known to the Resource Parents, and where 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 his or her Family Service Worker 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 Family Services Worker should be notified of the child(ren)'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 14th day.

The Resource Parents also have appeal rights to the 14-day written Notice of Removal of Child/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 a Resource Home

1. Child and Family Team (CFT) decides that a child needs to be removed from a Contract or DCS Resource Home; DCS Family Services Worker must file a **14-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 **CS-0403 Appeal for Fair Hearing** form, which the Resource Parents may complete and either mail or fax to the address or number listed below. If the allotted time has passed, the appeal will not be heard.
  - If the Resource Parent does file an appeal, the removal of the child is put on hold and 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 his or her parent(s) or legal guardian
  - A Court Order has been issued requiring such removal from the Resource Home
  - 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' 14- Day Removal Notice and Right to Appeal*

### **Respite**

1. Respite is defined as an interval of rest and relief for Resource Parents and/or child(ren).
2. Respite payment is included in the Resource Home board payment. Payments and arrangements for respite care are the responsibility of the Resource Parent(s).
3. If Resource Parents have difficulty finding respite care, the Resource Parent Support Worker and/or Local Foster Care Association can assist in finding families willing to care for the child/child(ren).
4. 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 Ten

# Financial

### Board Rates and Clothing Allowances

- Q. What are the established board rates and clothing allowances?**
- A.** 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 through which they are approved for specific guidelines.

### “Extra” Expenses

- Q. What is the Department’s view on ‘extra’ expenses such as Christmas, birthdays, graduation, and other special expenses?**
- A.** The department’s position on extra expenses includes:
- Christmas.** 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 may be considered as well.
- Birthday.** 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 may be considered as well.
- Graduation.** Through the Chafee Independent Living Funds, there are monies available for graduation and senior year expenses. Resource Parents should refer to the Chafee Funding list and request assistance from their Family Services Worker, Interdependent Living Specialist, and/or the Resource Parent Support Worker in accessing these funds. 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 any 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 preapproved by the Family Service Worker. Out-of-pocket expenses must be adequately documented and receipts must be included.

## **Educational Costs**

The majority of children in the foster care system are educated through local public school systems. 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, Interdependent Living Specialist, Resource Parent Support Worker, and/or Private Contract Provider for assistance in accessing these funds.

## **Medical Expenses**

### **Q. How are medical expenses handled and what expenses are reimbursable to the Resource Parents?**

- A.** 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 immediately.
  - 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**

**Q. Is there a “special” clothing allotment? How much and under what conditions?**

- A.** 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 Family Services Worker, 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.

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

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Amount</b>
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**

**Q. Are Resource Parents expected to give a foster child an allowance? If so, how much?**

- A.** 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 family’s allowance practices on the Resource Parent Recording form following monthly home visits.

## Reimbursement for Damages

**Q. Are Resource Parents eligible for reimbursement of damages done to their property by foster children? If so, what is the process?**

A. 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

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

A. 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

**Q. Should Resource Parents secure liability insurance? If so, where and how?**

A. A Resource Parent under contract with the Department of Children Services may wish to secure liability insurance. If the Resource Parent(s) act "outside the scope of their employment," or in violation of the Department's policies and procedures, or engage 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. The 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 CPAs 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.



## **Chapter Eleven – Legal Issues for Resource Parents**

## 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 Investigations*

Special Investigations Unit staff adheres to the same Child Protective Services policies that are outlined in Chapter 14 of the Department of Children's Services Policy Manual. 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 investigator's 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.

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, including 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 founded (indicated) or unfounded. If a case is indicated, 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 indicated 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 indicated 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 indicated 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. Resource Parents may contact the investigator, SIU supervisor or foster parent advocate to voice concerns. Investigators are under strict time frames 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 and contract agencies and know how to contact your foster parent advocate. Document concerns and potential problems so that they may be addressed, hopefully before an issue becomes a CPS investigation. Plan to attend foster parent events where SIU staff members make 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 heart 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 that 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 e-mail, 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 Parent's "job." The Resource Parent must have been acting within the scope of his or her responsibilities and in compliance with DCS policy and the foster care placement contract to remain within liability.

As long as Resource Parents provide 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 Parents 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 Services 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;

- (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:
  - (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.
- (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 court's 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.
- (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) Fully investigate all of the circumstances relevant to the child's position, marshal every reasonable argument that could 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 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. When any education question or situation comes up the Resource Parent should contact the Family Services Worker. There should always be an "Education Passport" (refer to **Policy 21.14**) provided for every DCS legal custody child by the Family Services Worker. This contains education/school/disciplinary records of the child. If a Resource Parent does not receive this packet, it should be requested from the Family Services Worker. If a child is having disciplinary troubles at school, the Family Services Worker should be contacted immediately (see **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

### Q. What can I tell a physician?

- A. A physician would want to know everything about a child in their care. HIPPA allows for all information to be shared with a physician.

### Q. What can I tell the school?

- A. Private facts about the child's biological family or situation should not be provided to any school official without approval from the Family Services Worker or Education Specialist.
1. It is necessary for the child to be safe; i.e., such as a retraining 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 Family Services Worker to an Education Passport (**Policy 21.14**).

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 Family Services Worker 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 **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 Twelve – Associations and Other Supports for Resource Parents**

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## Chapter Twelve

# Associations and Other Supports for Resource Parents

### Purpose

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

- A. 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 and recreation opportunities for Resource Parents and their families; and
  - bring positive attention and recognition to Resource Parents.

### DCS Support

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

- A. 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 toward 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.

**Participation.** 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.

**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 spokespersons 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, allowing 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.
- 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.
- To have a 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.
- To be part of the local association.

**Policy Reference:** *16.8-Attachment 4-Guidelines for Foster Care Associations*

## **Interdependent Living and Post Custody Services for Children Between the Ages of 14 and 23**

The purpose of the Interdependent Living Program is to build a network of relevant supports and services for youth exiting state custody, in conjunction with regional support workers and youth. Youth who have opted to participate in voluntary post custody arrangements with the Department are provided access to these services and receive ongoing case management through regional offices in the communities where the youth resides.

DCS shall provide a continuum of developmentally appropriate Interdependent Living Services for youth/young adults. Eligible youth most receive a full array of services in order to prepare them for independent living. Some of those services include

- use of allocated Chaffee Foster Care Independence Living Funds;
- Education and Training Voucher (ETV) for post secondary and job training program financed through this program;
- assistance for youth in obtaining a high school diploma;
- assistance for youth in career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention;
- providing training in daily living skills, budgeting, fiscal management skills;
- program focus on key adult living skill sets that have been found necessary for young adults to acquire in order for them to become successful and productive adults in their communities;
- foster care room and board;
- program initiative offers mentoring program for youth in foster care age 14-16;
- provision of ongoing life skill training, housing assistance, educational and job training funding opportunities, and continuing to peer sets through statewide youth board networks; and
- post custody services are provided up to age 21 and may be extended with special approval from the Director of Independent Living or designee.

Please refer to ***Policy 16.51 Provision of Post Custody Services to Young Adults Exiting Care at 18 or 19 Years of Age***. For other services please refer to ***Policy 16.52 Independent Living Services available to Youth/Young Adults 14-21 Years of Age***.

The agency 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. Youth who receive transitional living services may, however, request a change to voluntary post custody services. Approval is dependent upon the youth's eligibility for the services requested.

The agency has also entered into a partnership with Youth Villages to administer the Governor's Mentoring Initiative. This initiative seeks to provide adult mentors for youth ages 14-16. Youth Villages has offered matching funds and staff to recruit, train, and match mentors.

The Interdependent Living Program is also forming partnerships with groups that may expand basic services being provided to youth and young adults in the program.

**Q. When may a foster child continue receiving services beyond the age of 18?**

- A.** A foster child may continue receiving support services to promote educational services after successful completion of high school or GED.
- Post custodial services begin at age 18 and extend to the age of 23 as long as a youth is actively involved in a full-time postsecondary educational program or vocational/technical school.
  - Postsecondary assistance is available to assist young adults in paying for part of their tuition, housing, books, and supplies.
  - An Interdependent Living Specialist will be assigned to the youth as early as possible in the youth's teenage years to assist him or her through this process.
  - Each youth/young adult situation is assessed individually to determine eligibility.

Through the State of Tennessee Independent Living Specialist, a special program to prepare adolescents for independence will be provided. This program offers

- a computer-based assessment of the adolescent's needs and training suggestions for meeting these needs.

## **In-service Training Requirements for Resource Parents**

In the first year after the Home Study approval date, active Resource Parents who are serving Dependent/Neglected or Unruly children and youth must complete 11 hours of continuing education in

1. Working With the Education System (2 hours);
2. Positive Discipline 1 (3 hours); and
3. two of the following four core classes (three hours each): Working With Birth Parents, Cultural Awareness, Parenting the Sexually Abused Child, or Fostering Positive Behavior for Resource Parents.

In the first year after the Home Study approval, active Resource Parents who are serving dependent/neglected or unruly children and youth who have been adjudicated delinquent must complete 14 hours of continuing education in the following courses:

1. Parenting the Youthful Offender (9 hours). This class includes the Working With Birth Parents and Positive Discipline 1 core curriculum.
2. Working with the Education System (2 hours).
3. One of the following three core classes (three hours each): Cultural Awareness, Parenting the Sexually Abused Child, Fostering Positive Behavior for Resource Parents.

Continued training is required on an annual basis. During the second year of participation, active Resource Parents must complete 15 hours of training. During subsequent years, Resource Parents must complete 15 hours of training annually. This training will consist of the following:

- a. Two core classes (3) hours each
- b. Three elective classes

CPR/First Aid and Medication Administration training (both are required to be updated every two years).

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

- A. In-service training credits may be obtained in various ways. Each county is required to update its University Training Consortium Resource Parent mailing list once a year or as changes occur. This is for the purpose of assuring that all Resource Parents are notified, by mail, phone, or e-mail of upcoming Consortium training events. Additionally, Resource Parent Support Workers are asked to personally notify their Resource Parents of these events and to encourage their attendance. In service training credit may be obtained in various ways. Some of the training options are:

**Conferences.** A one-day conference in each region each year offering a variety of workshops selected by the regional training task force.

**TFACA Annual Conference.** TFACA, the Consortium, and DCS will hold an annual conference. This weekend event is a collaboration of the above members who 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. The process for receiving credits for these trainings is as follows:

1. Complete Resource Parent Training Form
2. Complete Sign in sheets
3. Receive a certificate from each completed course. Keep one copy for your records and provide one copy to the Resource Parent support staff in your county.

**One-Day Workshops.** These workshops are offered on critical issues such as sex abuse, discipline, medical issues, etc., on request. The Consortium will make arrangements and assist with these trainings.

**Interdependent Living Training.** This training is available for Resource Parents and staff who work with adolescents to prepare youth for life on their own.

**Computer-based Training.** Resource Parents may access up to five (5) 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. Journals, magazine articles, videotapes, and books may be used for individual study. Foster Parent staff may suggest and help provide these resources.

**Resource Parents cannot remain approved without annual in-service training.**

## Resource Parent Input Into Training

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

**A.** Resource Parents are invited to participate and serve on the local foster care association and the Tennessee Foster Adoptive Care Association, Inc. (TFACA).

Resource Parents are encouraged to contact their Resource Parent Support worker regarding any training needs.