

Kinship Manual

2INGAGE



Kinship Care

Kinship Manual

Welcome to Kinship Care. Thank you for opening your heart and home to a child who is in the state's legal custody due to abuse or neglect.

This manual is provided to you by Child Protective Services (CPS), a division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), and 2INGage, a child welfare collaborative focused on meeting the unique needs of Texas children and families. 2INGage is responsible for:

- Protecting children from abuse and neglect.
- Helping families become safer, stronger and more stable.
- Finding permanent homes for children who cannot safely remain with their own families.

This manual will help you learn what to expect while you are caring for a child who is in 2INGage's legal custody.

What is Kinship Care?

Unfortunately, some children cannot safely live with their parents. In these situations, relatives and family friends often step forward to care for the child. We call this "Kinship Care."

Your willingness to take a child into your home shows great commitment and love. We understand that adding a child to your home will create challenges for your family. We are here to help you adjust to your additional family member.

How does a child come into Kinship Care?

When CPS removes a child from his or her home, a court considers placing the child with a relative or family friend. The court asks the parents to give 2INGage contact information for relatives or family friends who could at least temporarily care for the child.

When placing a child, the court considers the child's needs as most important. However, the family can have a say in the placement process. During a Family Group Conference, family members can recommend a specific caregiver for the child. 2INGage also takes into account the parents' desires about the care provided to their child whenever possible. If placement with a relative is unavailable or inappropriate, the child may enter foster care.

What are the benefits of Kinship Care?

Kinship Care:

- Provides love and care in a familiar setting.
- Gives parents hope that the child will remain connected to the birth family.
- Allows the child to live with people he or she knows and trusts.
- Maintains the child's sense of cultural identity and positive self-esteem.
- Helps the child make and sustain extended family connections.
- Continues family traditions and memories.
- Helps the child build healthy relationships within the family.
- Supports the child's need for safety and well-being.
- Creates stability in the child's life.

For generations, extended families have played significant roles in the rearing of children.



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If the judge does not return the child to the parents, he or she may decide to place the child with a relative or close family friend if that person is appropriate, available, and willing to help.

What needs to happen before the child can live with me?

The placement must be in the child's best interest. Before the placement, we conduct a "home assessment," which is a tool that helps us decide if the child will be safe in your care. As part of the assessment, we check the criminal history and abuse and neglect history of all household members 14 and older.

What am I expected to do?

Kinship caregivers have the following responsibilities:

- Provide a safe and loving home for the child.
- Sign and follow a written agreement with 2INGage in which you agree to clearly defined expectations and responsibilities.
- Make sure the child completes all necessary health checkups and assessments (see below for more information). Star Health will call you to get the child's medical history, explain benefits, and help you set up appointments. If you do not receive a call within 48 hours, call STAR Health Member Services at 1-866-912-6283.
- Provide services, support and supervision for the child as outlined in the child's service plan.
- Communicate with your conservatorship and kinship caseworkers to support a stable placement for the child.
- Work with 2INGage staff to plan a permanent living arrangement for the child.
- Ask the child's caseworker for information that will help you care for the child.

Notify the caseworker and supervisor as soon as possible but no later than one day if the child:

- Has a significant change in his or her health, including mental or behavioral health conditions, enrollment or participation in a drug research program, or initial prescription of a psychotropic medication.
- Is seriously injured or dies.
- Runs away.
- Returns after running away.

Notify the caseworker and supervisor within two days if:

- A person who makes medical decisions for the child refuses treatment or medication for the child's physical, behavioral, or dental condition.
- There is a change in dosage or discontinuation of the child's psychotropic medication.
- The child has a major achievement or change in school performance, including a failing grade that may prevent the child from advancing to the next grade level, or a serious disciplinary event.

Texas Health Steps

You must make sure the child receives a Texas Health Steps medical checkup within 30 days of coming into CPS custody. The Texas Health Steps medical checkup is a comprehensive physical and medical assessment for the child.

The child must also receive regular preventive healthcare. Texas Health Steps medical checkups are specific appointments that meet recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Children under age 3 need these checkups:

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Caseworkers are the people you usually talk to about the child in your care

- 3 to 5 days after birth.
- 2 weeks after birth.
- At the following months after birth: 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 24, and 30.

Children ages 3–20 years old need Texas Health Steps medical checkups at least once a year (within one year after the last checkup and no later than the child’s next birthday).

If the child is 6 months old or older, he or she must also receive a Texas Health Steps dental checkup scheduled within 60 days of coming into CPS’s legal custody. To schedule a checkup, call STAR Health Member Services at 1-866-912-6283. If the child is younger than 6 months old, he or she must have a Texas Health Steps dental checkup within 30 days of turning 6 months old. The child should have a Texas Health Steps dental checkup every 6 months until he or she turns 21 years old.

NOTE: A regular physical exam cannot take the place of a Texas Health Steps medical checkup. A Texas Health Steps checkup includes a physical exam and other assessments

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths

All children ages 3–17 years old must have a Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment within 30 days of coming into CPS custody. CANS is a comprehensive behavioral health assessment for the child. It helps provide a full picture of a child’s strengths and needs to ensure the best plan of service for the child.

All children ages 3–17 years old must receive a CANS re-assessment once a year.

You can schedule a CANS assessment by calling STAR Health Member Services at 1-866-912-6283.

NOTE: CANS is more than just a regular psychological exam. A psychological exam cannot take the place of a CANS assessment.

Safety

Making your home safe is one of the most important things to do. Home is a place to relax, explore, play and enjoy spending time with family. Of course, accidents happen and there will be minor scrapes and bruises along the way, especially as children grow and discover new things. But serious injuries are often preventable.

An accident can happen in any area of your home. Some safety hazards are easy to see, such as leaving cleaning products within a child’s reach. Others are less obvious. Here are some common safety precautions caregivers should take:

- Never leave a child alone in the bathtub or around water, including lakes, rivers and pools.
- Store guns separately from ammunition, locked and out of a child’s reach.
- Store all medications in a locked box out of a child’s reach.
- Do not co-sleep with a child, especially babies and toddlers.

Safe Sleep

The ABCs of infant sleep:

A - Sleep alone

B - On their back, with no blankets or bedding

C - In a crib and cool

S - In a smoke-free room

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Parents can voluntarily give up their parental rights by signing a legal document called a relinquishment.

Do:

- Do put babies to sleep alone on their backs in a crib or on another firm surface with a tight-fitting bottom sheet. If the baby leaves a dent in the bed, it's too soft.
- Do keep babies away from secondhand smoke.
- Do dress babies lightly and control the room temperature.
- Do breastfeed and use pacifiers. Both may lower risk of sudden death.

Don't:

- Don't put babies to sleep with blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, or bumper pads.
- Don't cover a baby's face or let a baby cover his or her face with anything.
- Don't let babies sleep with older kids.
- Don't sleep with a baby, especially if you have been using alcohol or medicines that make you sleepy. Don't sleep with a baby when you are very tired.
- Don't put babies to sleep on chairs, sofas, futons, beanbags, or cushions.
- Don't put babies to sleep on soft beds such as pillow-tops, waterbeds, or memory foam. If the baby leaves a dent in the bed, it's too soft.
- Don't expose babies to smoke.

Behavioral Health

The child may have a hard time adjusting to a new home. The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment (see above for more information) helps us understand how we can best support the child. When CANS is combined with a Texas Health Steps medical checkup, we can see a full picture of a child's strengths and needs. CANS also takes into account your strengths and input. This helps us create the best plan of service for the child and family.

You will receive a copy of the final assessment and service plan. The service plan may recommend behavioral health services, such as a referral to a therapist. Therapy can address misbehavior, sadness, and anxiety caused by trauma and change of environment. You should try psychotherapy or other forms of behavioral intervention before starting medications.

A doctor must evaluate the child before prescribing psychotropic medications. It is important to learn about all available treatment options, side effects, and label warnings. However, if a doctor does prescribe a medication, the child should not stop taking it unless advised by a physician. Stopping medications can cause an adverse effect.

Child Development

Caring for an infant or toddler can be challenging, but there are many resources available to help. For example, the Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines can help families support child development and learning. The guidelines are available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese at the Texas The Children's Learning Institute's website: <https://childrenslearninginstitute.org/resources/itelg/>

If you are concerned the child in your care is not developing like other children the same age, use the free online screening tool at www.easterseals.com/mtffc/asq. It only takes a few minutes to take one of the Ages & Stages Questionnaires. Results will help you see if the child is developing on schedule and alert you to concerns to discuss with your healthcare provider. Please note that the results do not provide a diagnosis. The tool is only intended for children five years old and younger.

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Children in DFPS' managing conservatorship must be treated with respect and dignity

Your child's healthcare provider may refer you to Texas Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) if the child is younger than 3 years old. ECI helps families access resources and improve their child's development through daily activities. Most services are provided in the home and are available statewide. You can learn more about ECI at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's website: hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services. Find the nearest ECI program by calling (877) 787-8999.

What am I expected to do?

- Tell your caseworker and the child's doctor if you have concerns about the child's development or behavior.
- Complete medical or specialized training to care for a child with primary or other special medical needs.

Education

Education is critical to every child's well-being and success. There are many federal and state laws and programs that support educational stability for children in CPS custody. If the child is old enough to attend school, including pre-kindergarten, we will give you an education portfolio. The education portfolio has documents you need to enroll the child into school as well as the child's school records.

You must enroll the child in school within two days of his or her placement. You can enroll the child without documentation, but you must submit all records to the school within 30 days. Schools require proof of immunizations. Contact the child's caseworker or the school foster care liaison if you need help transferring records.

The child can continue going to the last school he or she attended before entering substitute care, if it is in the child's best interest.

2INGage prohibits corporal punishment of children in substitute care. If the school asks for your permission to use corporal punishment, you must refuse.

Contact the caseworker if you have concerns about the child's education.

What am I expected to do?

- Enroll the child into school within 2 days.
- Provide the school with the Placement Authorization Form and Education Decision Maker Form at the time of enrollment.
- "Opt out" of corporal punishment.

What court actions can take place?

The case may involve a number of different kinds of court proceedings, including those described below.

Emergency Hearings

If CPS removes a child from his or her parents' care without a court order, the court will schedule an emergency hearing for the next working day. This hearing allows the judge to learn why CPS removed the child and decide if the child should remain in CPS custody until the adversary hearing.

Adversary Hearings

The court holds an adversary hearing within 14 days of CPS removing the child from his or her parents. At this hearing, the judge decides whether to return the child to the parents, or if the child would be at risk of continued abuse or neglect in the parents' care. If the judge does not return the child to the parents, the judge may place the child with a relative or close family friend if that person is appropriate, available, and willing to help. Otherwise, the judge will place the child in foster care.

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Kinship Placement—Child living in the home of a relative or family friend.

The court also holds an adversary hearing when CPS seeks a court order to remove a child from his or her parents. This happens when an emergency removal is not necessary.

Status Hearings

The court holds a status hearing within 60 days of placing the child in foster or kinship care. This hearing ensures that the parents have a family service plan and understand they must follow the plan for the child to return home.

Permanency Court Reviews

Five months after the first adversary hearing, the court will review the parents' progress on meeting the requirements of the family service plan and making sure the child's needs are met. Before the hearing, 2INgage must:

- Submit a "permanency report," which is a document that gives the agency's view of the parents' progress.
- Make a final recommendation on the plan for permanency for the child.

The court may issue additional orders if the judge thinks it is necessary. The court holds additional permanency reviews every four months while the case is in temporary legal status. Within 12 months after the child comes into CPS custody, the court will either return the child to the parents or give permanent custody to a relative, close family friend or 2INgage. On rare occasions, the court may extend this time for up to six more months, for a total of 18 months.

Permanency Review Hearings After Final Order

If a court makes 2INgage the child's permanent managing conservator, the

court will review the child's placement and permanency plans every six months. The court's focus shifts to making sure 2INgage keeps moving toward a permanent placement for the child and continues to monitor that the child's needs are met.

Please Note: Parents may lose parental rights to their child if they cannot demonstrate that they can keep the child safe. Only a judge or jury can terminate a parent's rights. Decisions for each parent must be made separately. If the judge or jury decides to terminate both parents' rights to a child, the child can be placed for adoption.

Do I need to attend court hearings?

You should always go to court when you get a notice or a phone call about a hearing for the child in your care. The judge will review the child's and parents' progress at the court hearing. The judge also will decide where the child will live while the parents participate in services. You should talk with your caseworker about upcoming court hearings so you know when and where they are going to be held. The judge may ask you for input in the hearing. You are allowed, but not required, to talk to the judge about how the child is doing or any needs that the child has.

It is important for the child to play an active role in the court process. That's why children 10 years old and older receive their own notice for hearings. The child has the right to attend the hearing and speak to the judge.

You must discuss the notice with the child. This will help the child if he or she is nervous or confused about the notice or court hearing.

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Food stamps help low-income families buy nutritious food from local food stores, this assistance is available to qualifying families, elderly people, and single adults

Important Information About Court Hearings

- If you cannot attend a court hearing, notify the caseworker beforehand and give the caseworker an update about the child.
- Talk with the caseworker after the court hearing to find out what happened at court and if there are new orders that affect the child or your household.

Note: Tell the caseworker or court if you need an interpreter because you cannot speak or understand English or if you are hearing or speech impaired.

How can I get an attorney?

You can find an attorney by calling:

- Your local legal aid office.
- The State Bar of Texas lawyer referral service at (800) 252-9690.
- The Legal Hotline for Texans at (800) 622-2520.

The court will appoint a special attorney for the child, known as an attorney ad litem. The court may also appoint a person called a guardian ad litem to represent the child's best interests. A guardian ad litem may or may not be an attorney.

What should I expect from caseworkers?

The child will have a caseworker who makes sure the child is safe and properly cared for. The caseworker will stay in regular contact with you and visit the child at least once a month. The caseworker also helps the parents take the necessary steps so the child can return home. In most areas, you will also have a kinship development worker to support you while you are caring for the child. The caseworker and kinship specialist are your main contacts at 2INGage.

If you live in an area without kinship specialist, the child's caseworker will give you information and help you get services for the child.

Tell the caseworker if you require any disability or special needs services. The parents and the child's caseworker together will plan for what needs to happen for the child to return home. If the child's parents do not make these changes and the child cannot return home, the caseworker will make recommendations for where the child should live permanently. This recommendation will be discussed at court hearings and meetings called permanency planning meetings.

What is going to happen to the child?

Substitute care is usually temporary. It generally lasts from a few months up to a year, but some children do remain in substitute care longer.

In most cases, we first try to return the child to his or her home. This is our primary "permanency goal" and is called reunification. We also have an alternate permanency goal in case that is not possible. The alternate goal could be one of the following:

- Adoption by a relative.
- Permanent conservatorship by a relative.
- Adoption by an unrelated family.
- Permanent conservatorship by an unrelated family.
- Care by a foster family with 2INGage having permanent conservatorship.
- Care in some other family arrangement with 2INGage having permanent conservatorship.
- Remaining in substitute care while preparing to transition to adulthood.

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Relatives may supervise visits to help the child and parent spend positive time together.

- Preparation for adult living with community assistance for youth who are at least 18 years old and who have a developmental disability.

Once we have a goal, we create a “permanency plan” to help us achieve it. However, the goal may change over time, and it often depends on parents participating in services. The parents may contest the goal in court if they disagree with it, unless the court has already terminated their parental rights.

Please Note: Parents can voluntarily give up their parental rights by signing a document called a relinquishment. Signing a relinquishment is a serious matter. Parents should consider it carefully and discuss it with their attorney. If the parents sign a relinquishment, the court may terminate their parental rights, which means they are no longer the child’s legal parents. At that time, the parents will no longer be responsible for the child. When the child is free for adoption and the appropriate adoptive family (which may be the kinship caregiver) is selected, the child will be placed in a permanent home. Also note there are some criminal acts that make a kinship caregiver ineligible to adopt a child. In these circumstances, DFPS cannot recommend the placement. However, a judge can order a child placed with such a kinship caregiver on a temporary or permanent basis.

What if the parents have problems caring for their child after the child is returned to them?

Sometimes there is an adjustment period when a child returns home. The parents can ask a therapist, attorney, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteer

and the child’s caseworker for help. However, we will remove the child from the home again if the problems present the risk of or actually result in abuse or neglect. If we remove the child from the home again, we reconsider the child’s permanency plan. We will consider other permanency plans if returning the child to the parent’s care is no longer a safe option.

How do I discipline the child in my care?

The main purpose of discipline is to encourage good behavior, not to punish the child. Discipline must suit the child’s needs and circumstances. You should take into account the child’s age, developmental level, specific misbehavior, response to past discipline and history, including past physical or emotional abuse. Examples of appropriate discipline include:

- Establishing routines.
- Setting reasonable limits.
- Modeling appropriate behavior.
- Offering choices.
- Giving explanations.
- Repeating instructions.
- Using “time outs.”
- Allowing logical or natural consequences.
- Reinforcing desired behavior.

Physical discipline is not appropriate for a child in kinship care. Because of the child’s history of abuse or neglect, physical discipline will interfere with the child’s ability to build trust, self-esteem and self-control.

DFPS does not allow physical discipline, including open-handed spanking. Here are some other rules:

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Any prospective or current kinship caregiver can pursue foster home verification, if they are interested in supporting a child in DFPS conservatorship who is placed in their care

- Don't deprive the child of basic necessities (such as food).
- Don't use cruel, harsh, unusual, humiliating, demeaning or unnecessary punishment.
- Don't threaten the child. This includes telling the child that he or she cannot see family or will be sent somewhere else to live.

The kinship specialist, child's caseworker and therapist can help you deal with problem behavior.

What written reports will I receive from 2INGage?

You will receive the Placement Summary. This form tells you about:

- The child's school and educational needs. The child's medical, dental and mental health history.
- The child's social and family information.
- Other information that will help you meet the child's needs.

You will receive a copy of the child's current service plan and any service plan reviews, which are usually held at least once every six months. You will also receive a copy of the 2INGage report to the court at least 10 days before any scheduled court reviews.

What information may I request about the child?

You can request information that you feel is necessary to meet the child's needs. This includes information about the removal and or history of abuse and neglect, as well as the child's educational, medical, dental, social, emotional or behavioral history. You can contact the caseworker at any time to request more information or clarification.

You can also request a copy of the child's case record if you take legal custody (permanent managing conservatorship or adoption).

What visitation rules must be followed?

The court will address visitation issues, including whether someone must monitor or supervise the visits. If appropriate, parents should visit the child regularly and show their love even though the child is not living with them. If the court orders supervised visits, the person responsible for supervising needs to understand the importance of closely monitoring the visit. The person supervising the visit must be able to see the child at all times and hear what is being said to the child. The person must also be willing to stop any behavior or conversation between the parent and child that may be harmful to the child. The caseworker will help you arrange visits. Contact the caseworker if a family visit must be cancelled.

Normal Childhood Activities

Caring for a child in DFPS custody can be hard. There are many rules and requirements to follow, and some caregivers find it so difficult that they give up or stop trying. As a result, some children in foster care miss out on the benefits and fun of normal childhood activities. Whenever possible, children and youth in foster care should have the chance to participate in normal childhood activities. That's why federal law allows kinship caregivers to make decisions using what's called the "reasonable and prudent parent standard."

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Need an attorney? Call 1-800-252-9690 or the Legal Hotline for Texans at 1-800-622-2520

What is the reasonable and prudent parent standard?

There are many ways to describe what a reasonable and prudent (careful or cautious) parent would do. A parent who is both reasonable and prudent makes decisions carefully and considers the benefits and the possible dangers. This helps the parent come to a sensible decision in the child's best interest.

When using the reasonable and prudent parent standard, caregivers must take "reasonable steps" to decide if an activity is a good fit for a child based on the child's age, maturity, and abilities. There are many different ways to decide whether an activity is a good fit for a child. Here are a few examples of reasonable steps:

- Have information about the child so you can make informed decisions. If you feel you do not have enough information, speak with the child's caseworker.
- Think about the type of activity as well as the child's mental and physical health and behavioral abilities.
- Think about where the activity will be held, who the child is going with, and when they will return.
- Consider the potential dangers of the activity and what safety issues and supervision the child needs to prevent possible harm.
- Think about all the information you have gathered and ask, "Is this an appropriate activity for a child this age?"

This law does not apply to parental visits. For information about visits, see the section titled "What visitation rules must be followed?" This law only applies to normal childhood activities, such as sports, sleepovers, and field trips.

It allows you, with the appropriate information and training, to make decisions that let kids be kids.

What assistance and financial resources are available to help?

You may be eligible to receive assistance and financial resources to help in raising the child. You can find more information at the end of this manual in the Helpful Resources section. For most government assistance, you need the following:

- Texas driver's license or other picture ID.
- A Social Security number for each adult and child (or proof that an application has been made for a number).
- A document that provides proof of relationship to child.
- Proof of income.
- Proof of assets.
- Proof of rent and utilities costs.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

If you are related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program may provide financial assistance and Medicaid for the child. If you qualify for TANF and are a grandparent, great grandparent, or great-great grandparent, you may be eligible for an additional one-time payment of \$1,000 (called a "TANF Grandparent Grant") to help buy initial items for the child.

Kinship Caregiver Reimbursement Program

Eligible kinship caregivers may qualify for a monthly reimbursement. These monthly payments are time-limited and may be paid for up to 12 months.

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Keep track of important information and documents regarding the child in your care

You can ask your kinship specialist for more information about the program. If you obtain permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) of the child, and all other eligibility requirements are met, you may request a \$500 annual reimbursement for child-related expenses for the three years following the award of PMC, or until the child reaches age 18, whichever comes first.

College Tuition and Fees Assistance

If you became the child's permanent managing conservator on or after September 1, 2009, the child may be eligible for free college tuition at:

- Public colleges or universities.
- Public medical schools.
- Public dental schools.
- Public junior colleges.
- Public technical institutes.

The child must enroll by his or her 25th birthday. For more information, talk to your kinship development worker or the child's caseworker.

Medicaid/Insurance

Most children in CPS custody are covered by STAR Health Medicaid, which includes medical, dental, vision, behavioral health, and prescription healthcare services. STAR Health Medicaid will also cover most training that you need to care for a child with primary medical needs. To use these services, you must use healthcare providers in the STAR Health network

Star Health has a tool on its website called Health Passport. It allows you to see the child's health information like immunizations, doctor visits, medications, and dental visits. You can use STAR Health Passport if:

- The court or 2INGage names you the child's medical consenter (this will usually happen).
- The child is enrolled in STAR Health Medicaid.

Ask your caseworker or kinship specialist how to use Health Passport.

Daycare Assistance

You may qualify for daycare assistance if you meet certain criteria. Talk to your kinship specialist or the child's caseworker for more information.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is also known as food stamps. SNAP helps low-income families buy nutritious food from grocery stores (refer to the Helpful Resources section at the end of this manual).

Women, Infants, and Children Program

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program can help grandparents and other relatives buy nutritious food for the children in their care. WIC offers food assistance and nutritional screening to low-income pregnant women, women with infants 11 months or younger, and children younger than 5. Apply for WIC at (800) 942-3678 or at a local WIC office.

Supplemental Security Income

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provides assistance for grandparents and other relatives raising children who are blind or disabled. Managed by the U.S. Social Security Administration, SSI provides a cash benefit to the child.

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*Have a
case-specific
concern?
Contact the
concern line at
877-942-2239*

To qualify for benefits, the child must be younger than age 18 and meet the SSI disability, income and asset criteria. Children younger than age 18 are eligible for Social Security benefits under Old-Age Survivors and Disability Insurance if the child's parent is collecting retirement or disability insurance benefits or if the parent is deceased. Grandparents and other relatives can apply for benefits on behalf of the child based on the work record of the child's parent.

For more information, contact a Social Security representative at (800) 772-1213 or go to www.ssa.gov/pubs/10085.html.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) helps working people with children. It is available to grandparents and other relatives if they work and have at least one "qualifying child" living with them. To qualify, the relative and child must live in the same home in the United States for more than six months of the year. This tax credit is particularly useful because the relative can get a refund even if he or she does not owe income tax.

The Fostering Connections Act

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act is a federal law that affects potential kinship caregivers. When CPS removes a child from his or her home, the law requires 2INGage to:

- Notify the child's relatives about the removal.
- Tell the child's relatives they can apply to become a foster parent.
- Tell the child's relatives about other options regarding placement and ways to support the child while in placement.

In September 2010, Texas began a financial assistance program to help kinship foster parents who sign an agreement with 2INGage and subsequently take permanent, legal custody of the child. This is called the Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) program.

Foster Home Verification for Kinship Caregivers

Prospective or current kinship caregivers can pursue foster home verification if they are interested in supporting a child in CPS custody who is placed in their care, regardless of the child's permanency plan. Becoming a verified foster home provides additional financial assistance while caring for a child. However, foster care placements are meant to be a temporary arrangement until the permanency plan can be achieved for the child.

Kinship Foster Home Verification Requirements

To become a kinship foster home, you must successfully complete the "verification" process. You must pass extensive criminal and child protective services background checks, as well as other minimum standards.

Below are some things you should ask yourself to decide if foster home verification is the right path:

- Are you at least 21 years old and a responsible, mature adult?
- Do you have steady income?
- Will you complete an application with the help of 2INGage staff?
- Will you share information about your background and lifestyle through a home screening?
- Will you provide references from relatives and friends?

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A Service Plan (also called a Family Service Plan) is an agreement between 2INGage and the parents of children in foster or kinship care.

- If you are married or divorced, can you show proof?
- If you are married, are you and your spouse both willing to become foster parents?
- Do you have a high school diploma or a GED, or can you pass a test that includes basic reading, writing and math?
- Can you agree to a home screening that includes interviews with everyone who lives in your home?
- Will you and all people in your house, age 14 and older, submit to a criminal history and a child abuse and neglect history check?
- Will you submit fingerprints for FBI criminal history checks for all adults, 18 years and older, in your house?
- Will you attend 25 to 35 hours of training to learn about abuse and neglect and how it affects children?

Other things to consider:

- Do you have enough sleeping space?
- Will you agree not to use physical discipline?
- Will your home likely pass fire, health and safety inspections?
- Are your pets vaccinated or are you willing to get them vaccinated?
- Will you learn CPR and first aid and become certified?
- Will you and all other people in your house be screened for tuberculosis (TB)?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be eligible for foster home verification. If you have questions or concerns about the verification process, contact the child's caseworker, your kinship specialist, 2INGage Foster/Adoptive Home Development staff or a private child placing agency.

Learn more by visiting: <https://2ingage.org/>

What about SSI and child support?

Foster care payments and other financial assistance may affect the amount you can receive in SSI on behalf of the child. If you have questions or concerns about SSI, contact your local Social Security office.

Child support is considered income when determining how much financial assistance you will receive for caring for the child. Child support payments might also be sent to CPS while you are being paid as a foster parent to help cover the costs of the child's care. If you are paid as a foster parent, you may not be able to receive child support payments on behalf of the child. You should discuss child support questions or concerns with the child's caseworker.

What is adoption?

Adoption is the legal process allowing children to join families different from their birth parents. It is a lifelong commitment to a child. In CPS cases, adoption becomes an option if CPS and the child's birth parents cannot resolve the issues that made it unsafe for the child to live at home. If that happens, CPS may ask the court to end the parents' rights to the child and permanently place the child with another family. A child can also become legally eligible for adoption if both birth parents give up their parental rights.

What is adoption assistance?

The adoption assistance program helps eligible families cover some of the costs of adopting a child with special needs. The benefits may include:

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The Child Care Management Services (CCMS) program of the Texas Workforce Commission helps eligible parents with the cost of child care.

- Monthly payments and Medicaid coverage for the child until he or she is age 18. These benefits may last to age 21 if the child is 16 or older when you sign the adoption assistance agreement and the child meets certain educational or vocational requirements.
- Reimbursement for certain adoption fees up to \$1,200.

To receive adoption assistance benefits, you must sign an adoption assistance agreement with CPS before a court finalizes your adoption. Post-adoption services, program counseling, therapy and other services for the child and your family may also be available.

State College Tuition Assistance

If you adopted a child through 2INgage, he or she may be eligible for free tuition at a Texas public college if one of the following is true:

- You adopted the child on or after September 1, 2009, and the child enrolls in college by his or her 25th birthday.
- The child receives a monthly adoption subsidy and Medicaid. In this case, there is no time limit for enrolling.

What is permanent managing conservatorship?

Permanent managing conservatorship, or “PMC,” is a legal term in Texas used in child custody cases. It means that a judge appoints a person to be legally responsible for a child without adopting the child. The court can give PMC to someone other than a parent, including 2INgage, a relative, a close family friend or a foster parent. Only a judge can give PMC to another person.

The judge decides the rights and responsibilities, depending upon the specific situation. When someone other than a parent is named as permanent managing conservator, he or she is given the right or duty to:

- Physically possess the child.
- Choose moral and religious training.
- Provide clothing, food, shelter and education.
- Provide and consent to medical, psychiatric, psychological, dental and surgical care.
- Get the child’s medical records.
- Receive money that supports the child.
- Hold or give out money that benefits the child.
- Consent to get married.
- Consent to join the armed forces.
- Represent the child in legal issues.
- Make legal decisions.
- Decide where the child lives and goes to school.
- Make other decisions that the child’s parent would normally make.

Once the court names you permanent managing conservator, the judge will dismiss 2INgage from the case. This means 2INgage will no longer be involved with the child or your family. This also means 2INgage will not provide services such as case management, day care and post-placement services. If you are the child’s kinship foster parent, you will not continue to receive foster care payments after you become permanent managing conservator. (“Foster parent” means you have completed the process to become a foster parent through a child placing agency.) If you are permanent managing conservator and decide to adopt later, you will not receive adoption assistance.

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Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) provides monthly financial assistance to qualifying families so they can better care for children.

What is Permanency Care Assistance?

The Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) program helps children and youth who could not be reunited with their parents or adopted. It gives another permanent option to children who might otherwise grow up in foster care. PCA provides financial support to kinship caregivers who want to give a permanent home to children. It also includes healthcare for the child.

What are the eligibility requirements for Permanency Care Assistance?

To be eligible for Permanency Care Assistance (PCA), you must:

1. Apply to become a foster parent.
2. Care for the child as a foster parent for at least six months.
3. Negotiate and sign a PCA agreement.
4. Go to court to get permanent managing conservatorship of the child.

Here are some other PCA requirements:

- 2INGage must determine that reunification and adoption are not appropriate permanency options for the child.
- The child must demonstrate a strong attachment to you. You must have a strong commitment to caring permanently for the child.
- Older youth must be consulted about the PCA plan.
- You must negotiate, sign and abide by the PCA agreement, which takes effect on the date you receive permanent managing conservatorship.

- 2INGage must have temporary or permanent managing conservatorship of the child on the day before the court transfers permanent managing conservatorship to you.

PCA payments can begin the month after the court transfers permanent managing conservatorship to you. If the agreement is not signed before the transfer of permanent managing conservatorship, eligibility is lost permanently.

What is the amount of the Permanency Care Assistance monthly payment?

The amount of financial support you receive depends on the child's authorized service level at the time the PCA agreement is signed.

The payment for a child with a Basic service level is up to \$400 per month. The payment for a child with a Moderate or above service level is up to \$545 per month. These payments are similar to adoption assistance payments.

Older Youth and Permanency Care Assistance

PCA benefits will continue until the youth turns 21 years old, if:

- The youth was at least 16 years old when you signed the PCA agreement.
- The youth meets certain educational or employment eligibility requirements.

If you have permanent managing conservatorship and receive PCA benefits, the youth can also still apply for educational training vouchers and free college tuition.

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Permanency Care Assistance Successor Guardian

A Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) successor is a person who is appointed to permanently care for the child if the kinship caregiver dies or becomes incapacitated. Appointing a successor preserves the child's eligibility for PCA benefits.

The PCA successor may receive PCA payments if all of the following conditions are met:

1. You (the kinship caregiver) complete an amendment to your PCA agreement to name a potential successor, or the court names another individual to assume legal custody of the child.
2. The PCA successor's background check information meets 2INGage standards.
3. The PCA successor signs a PCA agreement with 2INGage.
4. The PCA successor submits to 2INGage proof demonstrating that the court has given him or her legal custody of the child.

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

Youth who entered Permanency Care Assistance after age 16 and have not turned age 21 may be eligible for the federal Education and Training Voucher program. The program helps youth to participate in post-secondary and vocational or technical programs. However, the youth receives Education and Training Voucher funds only after he or she uses all other types of educational assistance, such as Pell grants, scholarships, and the Texas tuition and fee waiver. If these other financial aid programs do not cover the cost of attendance,

the youth may receive up to \$5,000 per year in Education and Training Voucher funds.

For more information, talk to the child's caseworker, kinship specialist, adoption caseworker, or Preparation for Adult Living Program caseworker.

Important Terms

Adversary hearing — A court hearing within 14 days after DFPS removes a child. The court determines whether to return the child to his or her home. Parents receive notice of this hearing. If the child is not returned home, the parents will be asked to provide names of people who might be willing to serve as temporary caregivers of a child.

Attorney Ad Litem/Guardian Ad Litem – The court will appoint a special attorney for the child, known as an attorney ad litem. The court may also appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the child's best interests. The guardian ad litem may or may not be an attorney.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) – A person who has received the court's approved training and has been certified by the court to appear at court hearings as a volunteer advocate on behalf of the child.

Family Group Conference – A conference in which the child's family and trusted friends agree on a plan to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being for the child while seeking or maintaining family placement and support.

Final Order – A court order that determines the new legal relationship at the conclusion of a 2INGage conservatorship case. The final order may return a child to a parent, grant permanent managing conservatorship to a relative or 2INGage, or terminate a parent's rights to the child.

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Foster Home Screening/Home Assessment – A report on the safety and appropriateness of the home of any person requesting possession of a child for whom 2INGage is the managing conservator.

Kinship/Relative Placement – The placement of a child in the home of a relative or family friend when parents cannot keep the child safe.

Kinship Specialist – The caseworker who works with the kinship caregiver and provides education, support, advocacy and training.

Permanent Managing Conservatorship – Permanent legal responsibility for the child given through a court order. Permanent managing conservatorship continues until the child turns 18 or is emancipated (has his or her minority status removed), unless changed by a court order.

Permanency Conference – When children are in foster care, permanency planning is a process that involves meeting with all concerned parties (foster parents, relatives, social workers, etc.). They meet to determine a permanent living arrangement for the child, known as a permanency plan.

Family Service Plan – An agreement between 2INGage and the child's parents. It explains what the parents need to do and the services 2INGage will provide to help the parents make those changes. The parents must follow the service plan for the child to return home.

Child Service Plan – A written plan developed by 2INGage and all persons with an interest in the child's well-being and safety. The plan addresses the child's needs, how to address those needs, who is responsible and the achievement of permanency goals.

Status Hearing – A court hearing in which the Family Service Plan is discussed and services identified in the plan are court ordered. The court holds a status hearing within 60 days of 2INGage receiving temporary managing conservatorship of the child.

Substitute Care – A temporary setting for children who are unable to remain safely in their own homes. Substitute care includes foster care, kinship care and placement in a residential care facility.

Temporary Managing Conservatorship – A legal order giving all of the following:

- The right to physical possession of the child.
- The duty of care, control and protection.
- The responsibility to provide for the child's physical and emotional needs.

Termination of Parental Rights – A legal action that causes a parent to lose all rights to the child.

Helpful Resources

Kinship Quarterly Newsletter

Kinship Quarterly is a newsletter for kinship caregivers. It keeps you informed of changes that affect you, and resources that are available. You can find the newsletter by searching for Kinship Quarterly on the DFPS Website: [HERE](#).

2-1-1 Texas

2-1-1 Texas helps Texans find the services they need. If you are looking for assistance with things like food, housing or child care, dial 2-1-1 or (877) 541-7905. You can also search for help in your community by visiting the 2-1-1 website:

<https://www.211texas.org/>

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Your Texas Benefits

You can find out what benefits and services you may qualify for by using the “prescreening tool” at www.yourtexasbenefits.com. After you use the tool, you can apply for help.

Facebook

The Kinship Program has a Facebook Page. This page gives you information about community activities, resources and much more. Please visit us at <https://www.facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers>, and don’t forget to like them!

Alcohol and Drug Information

The American Council for Drug Education is a substance abuse prevention and education agency. Learn more at www.acde.org.

Child Care

If you need to find child care, you can search the state’s database of regulated child care. The database allows you to compare how well each daycare meets state standards. For more information, visit <https://childcare.hhs.texas.gov/Public/ChildCareSearch>.

The Child Care Services program of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) helps eligible parents with child care costs. The eligibility requirements vary depending on where you live. To learn more, visit TWC’s website at: www.twc.state.tx.us/programs/child-care-services-program-overview.

Child Abuse or Neglect

Report child abuse or neglect to the Texas Abuse Hotline. You can file a report by phone at 800-252-5400 or online at: www.txabusehotline.org. If the report is urgent, please call the hotline. Call 911 in an emergency or life-threatening situation.

Early Childhood Intervention Services

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is for families with children younger than three years old who have developmental delays or disabilities. You can find out more about ECI at: hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services.

Families Raising Children of Color

Pact is a nonprofit organization that provides articles, book lists, links and other information for families raising children of color. For more information, visit www.pactadopt.org.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP (also known as food stamps) provides monthly assistance to qualifying families based on household size and income. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission uses current poverty guidelines to assess eligibility. You must provide proof of your household income when you apply. For more information, visit <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/food/snap-food-benefits>

Grandparents

Many organizations provide information to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, such as:

- AARP at <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2020/parents-grandparents-disagree-poll.html>.

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Head Start Program

Head Start promotes the growth and development of children ages 3 to 5 years old from low-income families. Early Head Start provides learning and development services for families with children up to age 3. For more information, visit the Texas Head Start Association's website: www.txhsa.org.

Social Security Card and Benefits

You do not have to be the child's legal guardian to obtain a new or replacement Social Security card for the child. U.S. citizens need a copy of their birth certificate or baptismal record.

SSI provides monthly financial help to low-income elderly, blind or disabled individuals, including children.

Social Security dependent's benefits are paid to children younger than 18 on the record of a parent who is collecting retirement or disability benefits from Social Security. Survivor's benefits are paid to children younger than 18 on the record of a parent who has died. If you are caring for a child receiving these benefits, you must apply to receive these benefits. Visit <https://www.ssa.gov/> for more information.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF provides monthly financial assistance to qualifying families so they can better care for children. This program also helps children who don't have parental support or care. Children who are eligible for TANF are also eligible for Medicaid health care assistance. For more information, visit: yourtexasbenefits.hhsc.texas.gov/programs/tanf.

Case Information or Complaints

The DFPS Office of Consumer Relations (OCR) reviews complaints about CPS cases. OCR also answers questions about CPS policy and processes. You can reach OCR at (800) 720-7777 or OCR@dfps.state.tx.us.

HHSC Foster Care Ombudsman

The Foster Care Ombudsman listens to and helps children currently in foster care. The ombudsman's office:

- Makes sure children understand their rights while in foster care.
- Reviews a child's questions and complaints about his or her case.
- With a youth's permission, works with other people to improve his or her care.

A child can contact the Ombudsman for Children and Youth at 1-844-286-0769. For more information, visit

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/your-rights/hhs-office-ombudsman/ombudsman-children-youth-foster-care>

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