



Preserving Kinship Connections

Visitation and

Working with Parents



Texas Department of
Family and Protective Services
Child Protective Services



Importance of Kinship Care

Kinship placements allow children to keep a sense of stability and security when they cannot remain with their parents.

Children who live with relatives or fictive kin benefit from being in familiar surroundings and can maintain meaningful relationships and connections with siblings and other family members. Family provides stability and is often willing to continue caring for the children long-term.

However, most Kinship caregivers did not set out to foster or adopt. It can be stressful to suddenly move from being a supportive person in a child's life to their primary caregiver.





The Transition Is Not Always Easy or Smooth

Kinship caregivers are family or friends who have had a close, loving relationship with the parents long before the children were placed in their care.

- The transition from being a fun grandparent, aunt or uncle to taking on a parenting role can be very stressful and sad for kinship caregivers.
- It's normal for caregivers to feel uncomfortable when having to set boundaries about how a child's own parents can interact with their child. However, those boundaries are needed to ensure the child is protected from emotional and physical harm until the parents can get the help they need.
- Know you are not alone. There are many kinship caregivers who understand and have been through many of the same experiences and feelings you are going through. Ask your kinship caseworker about support groups where you can meet other kinship caregivers for mutual support.

Why Kinship Caregivers?

Did you know that Kinship caregivers are also uniquely situated to help support the child's relationship with their parents?

Adults who spent time as children in foster care say that what they grieve most is the loss of relationships with siblings and parents.

Kinship caregivers can help limit grief and loss by allowing safe, appropriate contact with parents and siblings, even if the child cannot ultimately be returned home.



Why Kinship Caregivers?

Children who experience trauma and stress during growing years, establish thought patterns and behaviors that do not benefit the child. Changes in their brains may cause them to overreact to everyday stressors as if they were big traumatic events.

Repeated traumas train the child's brain to react with anxiety, fear or anger even when they are upset about something that doesn't seem very serious.





Why Kinship Caregivers?

When caregivers and parents commit to building positive relationships together, the child experiences less stress and grief. They can focus on meeting their own developmental needs, rather than working so hard to ensure they are safe.

While caring for the child, you are also teaching them boundaries and structure, modeling love and care, and allowing the child to feel safe enough to express their emotions.

When a child has experienced abuse or neglect in their home, both the parents and the child may be stuck in fight, flight, or freeze mode. This means much of their focus and energy are spent avoiding danger.



Why Kinship Caregivers?

Parents who are also victims are left with less energy and time to spend on teaching little people the skills they need to grow and thrive.

Some parents are addicted to substances, struggling with mental health issues or family violence, may not have had good role models themselves while growing up, or just have not learned all of the things children need from parents to grow up healthy and well adjusted.

Kinship caregivers have generally known the parents a long time and may have knowledge of family dynamics that caseworkers or foster parents may not be aware of. This knowledge can be helpful for the caregiver to understand and fulfill unmet needs within the family.



What to Focus on First

When a child is placed in your home, they grieve the loss of not only their parents, but also other family members, pets, their home, their room and belongings, their school, essentially everything that is familiar to them. The first thing Kinship caregivers must do is meet the child where they are; make sure they have their basic needs met and help them feel safe. Think of yourself as a supportive observer.

The second is to allow yourself some space and time to feel your own feelings. Caregivers can feel a range of emotions such as relief, sadness, anger, confusion, hurt, or disappointment at the circumstances that brought the children to their homes. These are all natural reactions, on top of the stress of unexpectedly having a child placed in your home with no time to plan or prepare. For many caregivers, the joy of caring for the child you love is mixed with the grief of losing the freedom to do what you wanted to do, when you wanted to, and worrying how to meet the child's needs.

Gather your support team! Reach out to trusted family and friends who can give you moral support as well as those who may be able to help you manage the day-to-day tasks required to meet the child's needs.



What to Focus on First

In some cases, kinship caregivers may be approved to supervise visits between children and their parents, siblings, or other family members.

When this happens, it's important to keep in mind that even though the child is placed in your home, CPS still has conservatorship (legal custody) of the child and will have some rules for contact with parents.

These include how often, for how long, where the visits may occur, whether they are to be in person or virtual/by phone,



Supervising Visits

It is important to establish rules and boundaries around any contact between parents and their children, so that both parents and caregivers understand their own duties and roles.

This can be uncomfortable, as parents are used to being the sole decision makers of expectations for their children.

Parents may feel upset or angry when someone else sets rules and consequences around their actions and behavior with their children.



Supervising Visits

Parents reactions often come from a place of shame and guilt, but the parent may still want to blame the child's caregiver.

Keep in mind, children will mimic what they see. If they observe healthy, respectful communication between caregivers and their parents, they will pick up on that and learn from it.

If they see parents and caregivers who react with anger and frustration time after time, that is the set of tools we are giving children to deal with their own frustrations.





What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are the limits that we place on ourselves and others to help us feel comfortable. Boundaries may also help protect us from harm.

- Although we may not think about it very often, all of our relationships have boundaries. Good boundaries allow us to share close relationships that are fair to ourselves and others.
- Boundaries work best when each person takes responsibility for their own emotions and actions and acknowledges the needs of everyone to feel safe.
- Caregivers must be able to set boundaries with parents to ensure the child in their care is not asked to deal with situations they are not developmentally ready for.



Unhealthy Boundaries

Many of us carry childhood experiences into adulthood. This includes children observing adults who do not respect the boundaries of other people.

Children without positive role models for setting appropriate boundaries may learn to meet their own needs by putting themselves first and ignoring the needs of others.

Other children may respond in the exact opposite way, putting everyone else's needs first to keep the peace.

People without strong boundaries may try to "save," loved ones from pain by fixing their problems for them. This robs them of the opportunity to learn to do things for themselves or develop problem solving skills.



Setting Boundaries for Visits

When setting expectations for the child having contact with their parents, consider:

- Requirements or recommendations from the caseworker or judge
- The caregiver's house rules
- Having a plan about who will discipline the child, if needed during the visit
- Regular routines for the household, such as school schedules, screen time, hygiene routines, structures around meals and eating, bedtime
- Spiritual beliefs and rituals
- The parents' ability to handle frustration and take responsibility for their own actions
- Teens who may be parenting
- How to handle any consequences if the rules are not followed



Setting Boundaries for Visits

Expectations to Consider:

- Mutual respect is always important
- Anything that CPS states is off-limits for the parent to discuss with the child
- Encourage the parents to follow household expectations. This includes expecting the children to practice skills and complete tasks they can easily do for themselves – do not treat the child like a baby.
- Older children should not have to parent the younger children.
- Discipline should be consistent with what is typical in the caregiver's home.
- Let the parents know that in-home visits supervised by the caregiver may happen less often or even stop altogether, if rules are not followed.
- If visitation must be limited for any reason, explain this to the child so they are not surprised on the day of the visit.



Setting Boundaries for Visits

Provide a written list of rules, expectations and plans to the parents.

Commit to speak positively about the parents in your home and expect parents to speak positively of you as well, in front of the child. Children hear what we say and it hurts them to hear unkind things about their parents.

Communicate directly with the parents, and do not ask or expect the child to relay messages for you.

Focus on the child's needs. Work to reduce your own triggers so that you are better able to address the child's needs.

Encourage open communication and ensure the child feels safe expressing a wide range of feelings to the caregiver or another safe adult.

Ensure the child has what they need to support their emotional health, such as counseling or support groups for the family members of addicts.



Setting Boundaries for Visits

Parents may be more motivated to accept and follow the caregiver's boundaries if caregivers also give them compliments about what they do well. This can also help them to see a light at the end of the tunnel and give them motivation to work toward a goal.

Discuss with the child's caseworker whether the parent can visit more often if they continue to visit the child regularly, and the interactions between the parent and child are going well.





Setting Boundaries for Visits

If the parent is doing well the caseworker may consider allowing:

- Longer visits
- More frequent visits
- Staying later to tuck the child into bed
- Visits during mealtime or bath time
- Bringing along additional family members during visitation
- The parent to attend social functions with the child
- The parent to have brief, unsupervised visits, such as picking the child up from school





Benefits of Family Counseling

If the relationship between the parent and caregiver or the parent and child is not on very solid ground, consider family counseling. A good counselor can help the family work through hurt feelings and any issues that have been historically difficult for the family to discuss.

Parents may be more willing to go along with visitation rules if they are invited to help decide those rules in a counseling setting, instead of just handing them a set of rules and not including their input.

A therapist who already knows the family can also be a valuable resource for problem solving if other problems arise down the road.



Setting Boundaries for Visits

- Communicate clearly about your expectations.
- Remember the child has the least number of choices in this situation. Their physical and emotional safety must be the priority, even though caregivers often care deeply about the parents as well.
- Parents can gain knowledge from role modeling, even if they do not want to or cannot admit this to the caregiver.
- Stick to your word and follow through with what you agree to do.
- Get comfortable with being uncomfortable; remember, this process is hard, and everyone who is a part of the case is going through some amount of adjustment and grief.
- Remember to be patient - parents are often working on their own healing process and it's ok to give grace, while also remaining firm with boundaries.
- Children are like sponges - they are listening even when we don't think they are. If adults are saying negative things about their parents, the child will take it to heart because they know that parent is half of them.



Your Efforts Make a Difference

Kinship caregivers who are educated about the needs of children who have experienced abuse, neglect, family violence, parental substance abuse, and other trauma, are a valuable resource for parents who may lack the skills required to interact well with their child or to manage negative behaviors.

Caregivers who have nurtured the child in their own home and have an established relationship with both the child and the parents, have valuable insights and experience with the family culture. This can make it easier for a kinship caregiver to set up structure, rules and routines for the children in their care.

Parents who can accept advice and role modeling, benefit from Kinship caregiver role modeling. There are also enormous benefits to the children when they see healthy interactions.



Kinship Collaboration Group

This training was created by the Kinship Collaboration Group. If you would like to make a difference in the lives of children and caregivers working with the Kinship program, consider joining our Kinship Collaboration Group after your child's case has been closed.

The Kinship Collaboration Group includes caregivers, regional Kinship staff and State Office Kinship staff; the group meets monthly virtually, as well as in person quarterly, and works together to make a difference in the lives of children in foster care. Talk to your Kinship worker if you are interested in becoming an advocate for the Kinship Collaboration Group.





Thank You



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