



# KINSHIP FOSTER CARE

Relatives Caring for Children in DCS Custody



**ARIZONA**  
DEPARTMENT  
*of* CHILD SAFETY

WE APPRECIATE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIVES OF THESE CHILDREN AND WANT TO SUPPORT YOUR EFFORTS. IF THERE IS ANYTHING YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR DCS SPECIALIST FOR A CLEARER, MORE DETAILED EXPLANATION SPECIFIC TO YOUR SITUATION.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

DCS Specialist's Name:

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DCS Specialist's Telephone Number:

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DCS Specialist's Email:

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DCS Supervisor's Name:

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DCS Supervisor's Telephone Number:

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DCS Supervisor's Email:

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Child's Attorney/GAL Contact Info:

.....

Kinship Support Specialist Contact Info:

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For issues or concerns with a DCS case, please contact the DCS Family Advocate at: 1-877-527-0765 or (602) 364-0777

To get help for a life-threatening medical emergency: 911

To contact the DCS Child Abuse Hot Line including nights, weekends and holidays: 1-888-767-2445

For questions about medical and behavioral health services call Mercy Care DCS Comprehensive Health Plan (Mercy Care DCS CHP) at 602-212-4983, toll free, 1-833-711-0776 (TTY/TDD 711) or visit [mercycaarez.org](http://mercycaarez.org).

For questions about services and supports for children with disabilities, call Division of Developmental Disabilities Health Care Services: 602-771-8080 or 1-800-624-4964 (toll-free in AZ)

To receive information about becoming licensed as a foster parent: 1-877-KIDS-NEEDU (543-7633) Option 1

For questions about supports and resources available to kinship caregivers: 1-877-KIDS-NEEDU (543-7633) Option 3

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## INTRODUCTION

If you are an adult relative or person who has a significant relationship with a child who the Department of Child Safety (DCS) has placed in your home, you are a kinship foster caregiver.

The children come to you in a time of crisis, which is often very emotional for both you and the children. Your life has been changed and you will likely need support for both yourself and the children as you face the challenges ahead.

By welcoming these children into your home, you are helping them stay connected to their relatives, culture, and community. The most important benefit of kinship foster care is for children to be able to live with someone who knows them, who loves them and who will provide the best care possible.

DCS is grateful to your commitment to the child(ren) placed in your home. This booklet explains Arizona's Kinship Foster Care Program and details the financial, emotional and practical assistance that is available through DCS and from our community partners.



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*"It was a big shock when I got the phone call that DCS had my grandchildren. They were asking if I would take them in. I worried about having enough money to feed and clothe them, about having enough space for them in my apartment, and about being able to watch after them and keep working at my job. But in spite of my worries, I jumped at the chance to keep those children with me so I would know that they were safe until they could go back to their mother."*

– a grandmother raising her grandchildren

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DCS IS INVOLVED?

DCS has filed papers with the court and followed court processes to make the children "dependent wards" of an Arizona court under the care, custody and control of DCS. DCS and the court become very involved in making decisions about the children. The court must give permission to have the children "placed" with you. DCS and private agencies complete home studies and make recommendations regarding whether or not the children should be placed with you. This court and DCS involvement is what sets kinship foster care apart from informal kinship care. Also, DCS offers supports to relatives caring for their related children in an open DCS case.



WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Foster care is a safe place for a child to live when the child cannot live with his/her parents. Children enter foster care because of abuse or neglect. Foster parents help children grow by providing them with stability, affection, consistency, and nurturing.

Foster care is temporary; it is not meant to be forever. Children usually continue to visit their own families until they are able to be returned to the custody of their parents.

WHAT IS KINSHIP FOSTER CARE?

Kinship foster care is a very important DCS program to support children to remain in a loving family environment. We recognize that when children must be removed from their parents and placed into foster care, being placed with and cared for by a relative is better for the children than if they were sent to live with strangers in a licensed family foster home.

Kinship foster caregivers can be licensed or unlicensed. The differences will be explained more fully over the course of this booklet.

HOW CAN I BECOME AN UNLICENSED KINSHIP FOSTER CAREGIVER?

In Arizona, the basic requirements to become a kinship foster caregiver are as follows:

- You must be at least 18 years old;
- All adults in the home must clear DCS and criminal background checks;
- DCS will visit your home and you must pass a home study; and
- You must meet basic health and safety requirements.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, call the KIDS NEEDU line: 1-877-543-7633, option 1.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR ALL ADULTS IN THE HOME?

If there is a record of a serious crime(s) for any adult living in the home, you may not be able to be a kinship foster caregiver as long as that person lives in your home. If there is someone living in your home who has any substantiated record of child abuse or neglect, you cannot be a kinship foster caregiver in most cases, as long as that person lives in your home.

If you or any adult living in your home has been convicted of, is awaiting trial, or ever committed crimes against children or vulnerable adults, serious violent crimes, arson, felony drug offenses within the past 10 years, kidnapping or robbery, you should discuss the exact nature of the crime with your DCS Specialist. Some crimes will prevent you from being able to be a kinship foster caregiver and some crimes will not. For more details, talk with the DCS Specialist.

I HAVE A JOB. CAN I STILL WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME AND BE A KINSHIP FOSTER CAREGIVER?

Yes. Kinship foster caregivers, whether licensed or unlicensed, can work outside the home. If you work, child care can be provided through Department of Economic Security (DES) for the children placed with you by DCS (You may apply directly to the Department of Economic Security/Child Care Administration for assistance with child care for your own children). DES covers the standard DES rate. Please be sure to ask the daycare about any extra fees or costs above the standard DES rate as you will be responsible for the extra costs.



## WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT DURING THE DCS VISIT AND HOME STUDY?

Someone representing DCS or another contract agency will come to your home to see if the area is clean and safe for children. That person will talk with you and everyone else who lives in the home, and will also contact the people you gave as personal references.

After visiting your home the DCS representative will write up the information in a home study. The home study will include:

- The safety of your home for the children to live there;
- How you can meet the needs of the children;
- How you discipline children;
- Others who live in your home and how they feel about the children moving in;
- How you care for the family already living with you; and
- Your physical health (because you have to be healthy enough to care for the children).



The home study is sent to the court for approval. DCS will make a recommendation to the court regarding the children living with you. The court will ultimately decide if the children can live with you. This process can consist of multiple visits.

## IF A CHILD IS PLACED WITH ME, WILL THE DCS SPECIALIST SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHILD WITH ME?

Yes. In order to provide the best care for the children, you will need information about the children. You are a part of the team that makes decisions and contributes to the future of the children.

## IF A CHILD IS PLACED WITH ME, WHAT CONTACT WILL I HAVE WITH THE DCS SPECIALIST?

You may call or email the DCS Specialist to ask questions, give information about the child, or make requests. Additionally, you should expect that the specialist will have contact with you through phone calls and/or visits on a monthly basis. During these visits, the DCS Specialist will want to speak to the child alone, and will also want to speak to you about a number of issues involving the care of the child. You will be asked questions such as:

- Has the child been to a dentist or doctor in the past 30 days?
- Have you noticed anything of concern about the child's state of mind or behavior?
- How are things going at school for the child?
- Is the child eating and sleeping well?

- How are visits with parents/siblings going?
- Is the child participating in any hobbies or activities?
- How does the child get along with the other children and with adults in the home?
- What is your personal opinion about how the child is doing in your home? (For example, do you have any concerns or needs regarding the child?)
- Is your family experiencing stress that may be a barrier to you being able to keep the child, and what might help reduce that stress?

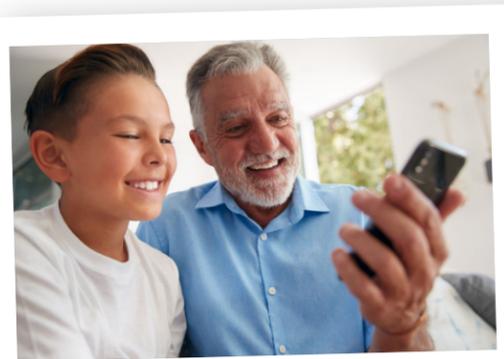
The DCS Specialist will also discuss permanency with you and will explain any court orders that may affect you or the child.

## WHO ELSE MIGHT BE CONTACTING ME OR COMING INTO MY HOME?

The assigned DCS Specialist will be your main and ongoing contact regarding the child, the case, and your resource needs. However, there are many service providers you will possibly meet. A parent aide or case aide may be involved in transportation or other activities for you and the child. Employees of the behavioral health system may visit your home to assess the behavioral health needs of the child, which may include "Rapid Response" or ongoing behavioral health needs. Each child will be assigned a guardian ad litem, or GAL. The GAL is an attorney who represents the best interests of the child in court. There may be another attorney to represent the child's (usually for older children and teenagers) wishes and desires about the case and his or her future. There may also be a Court Appointed Special Advocate or CASA, who is a volunteer that helps to monitor and report the child's progress to the court.

If you have expressed interest in becoming licensed, you may also get a telephone call from a licensing agency. They will inform you about what is involved in the licensing process to see if this is something you want to pursue.

You can expect a call from the child's health plan, Mercy Care DCS CHP, who can assist you with getting medical care and behavioral health services.



## IF A CHILD IS PLACED WITH ME, WHAT WILL DCS EXPECT OF ME?

You are expected to provide for the care and supervision of the children in the same manner as you are responsible for your own children.

- You will be asked to provide transportation for the children to some appointments and/or visits. DCS will also be able to help.
- You will be expected to support the goals of the case plan for the child and family. (More information about the case plan appears later in this booklet.)
- You must agree to and support the DCS parenting time/visitation plan for the children and parents.

## WHAT IS A DCS CASE PLAN?

A written document called the case plan tells the people involved in the child/family's case what the DCS goal is for the children and family. That goal is for the children to have permanency in their lives. The case plan documents the changes needed in the family, and details the services and supports available to help the parents and/or children make those changes. The case plan also contains a parenting time/visitation plan that spells out who, when and how the parents, siblings, other relatives and friends will have contact with the children while they are living with you.

For most children placed in kinship foster care, the case plan permanency goal is family reunification, meaning return to the child's parents. Services are provided to help the parents achieve this goal. Those services, tasks, time frames and expectations of the parents are stated in the case plan.

When family reunification is not possible, another permanency goal is chosen. Adoption by a relative/kin is the next preferred permanency goal for a child. For some children, legal guardianship with a relative/kin may be chosen as the permanency goal for a child.

- You must agree to follow the DCS discipline policy. Physical discipline, such as spanking or forcing a child to eat or hold hot sauce or soap in their mouth, is not permitted.
- You will be asked to communicate important information about the children to the DCS Specialist and to make notes of medical and dental appointments and immunizations. The DCS supports children to remain in their "home" school. If the children need to change schools, you will be responsible for enrolling them. The **Notice to Providers (Out-of-Home, Educational and Medical)** form will confirm to the school that you are authorized to enroll the children and be involved in their schooling. To ensure the children's educational needs are met, you should provide the DCS Specialist with any important education-related information including grades, any testing completed for special education services, the results of the tests and any recommendations that are made.
- You will be expected to cooperate with DCS in allowing visits (both scheduled and unscheduled) to your home from the DCS Specialist.

- You must follow through with any recommendations regarding medications or counseling services arranged for the children.
- You will be invited and encouraged to participate in various meetings involving the child, such as:
  - Case plan staffings;
  - Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings;
  - Child and Family Team meetings (CFTs);
  - Foster Care Review Board hearings (or FCRBs); and
  - Juvenile court hearings.

At these meetings, services, placement and case plans for the children and family will be discussed. You can voice your opinion as well as give information about the children.

## WILL I GET A COPY OF THE DCS CASE PLAN?

Yes, you will receive the DCS case plan after the children are placed with you. You will also receive the "Child's Placement Packet" with information about each child, including any special needs of the children. This includes the **Notice to Providers (Out-of-Home, Educational and Medical)** form and/or medical card for the children.

If the children are in school, you will be provided with a copy of the **Notice to Providers (Out-of-Home, Educational and Medical)** to provide to the school to let the school know the children are placed with you.

## WHAT KIND OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO ME AS A KINSHIP FOSTER CAREGIVER?

Kinship foster caregivers will receive some financial assistance to provide for the needs of the children placed into their care. The amount of financial support varies, depending on whether you are a licensed kinship foster caregiver or an unlicensed kinship foster caregiver. Both licensed and unlicensed caregivers will receive a daily clothing and personal allowance and when needed, special payments. There is also other financial assistance to children who qualify (cash assistance through DES).

**Daily clothing and personal allowance** will be provided to help pay for clothing and an allowance for the child. Ask your DCS Specialist for a copy of the current rates and fees schedule.

**Special payments** are made to help meet special needs of the children. These are usually one-time payments and may be for clothing on an emergency basis, for school supplies, or graduation expenses. You must ask the DCS Specialist if your situation is covered under one of these categories. Your specialist can tell you the amount of these payments. The amounts are also listed separately on the fees schedule.





**Cash Assistance (CA) - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** is cash issued monthly through the Department of Economic Security (DES)/ Family Assistance Administration (FAA). The child may be eligible for these benefits if other funds, such as Social Security (disability, death benefit or other social security payments) are not being paid on their behalf. If you are a kinship foster caregiver who is NOT licensed, you may apply for this "child only" assistance on behalf of the child. You must fill out the application FA-001, which will be provided to you by a staff from DCS, the DCS Specialist or can be downloaded and printed from

the DCS Website. You may also visit the DES Website or a local DES Office to obtain an application. Complete the application, apply for cash only, and only for the child or children placed with you. Ensure you give the application to your DCS Specialist, or a assigned DCS support staff, to be submitted. Do not take the application to a DES office.

You will be contacted by FAA staff and an interview will be scheduled, which may be in person or on the telephone. It is important to keep all appointments with FAA. If you miss an appointment, the benefits may be delayed or even stopped.

You will be asked to provide personal and contact information regarding the parents of the child. If you have such information, you should give it to the FAA staff member. FAA must share that information with the Division of Child Support Services (DCSS), which is also a part of DES. After the interview, final eligibility of the child will be determined. You will receive a letter from FAA containing a case number and a determination of the child's eligibility (approved or denied). If the child is eligible, you will be receiving monthly cash benefits via an EBT or debit card. If the child is found ineligible, inform your DCS Specialist that the child was denied.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, formerly known as food stamps, may be a possibility, if you apply and are found eligible. The application for SNAP will include everyone in your home and is based on the income of your family. You can apply for SNAP at an FAA office or apply online at [www.healthearizonaplus.gov](http://www.healthearizonaplus.gov).

**Women, Infant and Children (WIC)** provides assistance with nutritious foods, nutrition education, and referrals. WIC serves pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants and children under the age of five who meet the WIC eligibility guidelines. Children in care meet these guidelines and are counted as a household of one, and are eligible for services. Kinship families can go to any WIC office and receive services the same day for the child or children placed in their home by DCS. WIC requires the Notice to Provider as proof that the child or children are placed by DCS and the children will need to be at the appointment in person. To find a clinic in your area: [clinicsearch.azbnp.gov](http://clinicsearch.azbnp.gov) or call 1-800-252-5942.

ARE NECESSARY MEDICAL, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, DENTAL, AND VISION CARE SERVICES COVERED FOR THE CHILDREN?

Health benefits for children placed with you by DCS are covered under Mercy Care DCS Comprehensive Health Plan (Mercy Care DCS CHP). To learn more about the child's health benefits, you can view or download the Mercy Care DCS CHP Member Handbook at <https://www.mercycareaz.org/members/chp-members/handbook>.

You will receive Mercy Care DCS CHP Member ID cards for each child placed in your care either by mail or from your DCS Specialist. Until you get the cards, use the **Notice to Providers (Out of Home, Educational and Medical)** form the DCS Specialist gives you. You can use these cards at doctor and dental offices, and also at pharmacies for prescriptions. Check first with the doctor the child has been seeing to be certain he or she accepts this insurance plan. If you prefer, you can also choose a different primary care provider (PCP) and dentist who takes this plan.

You do not have to pay deductibles or copayments for covered health care services. Ask the child's doctor to bill Mercy Care DCS CHP for the co-pay amount.

WHAT OTHER KINDS OF SUPPORT ARE AVAILABLE?

There are a number of services that can be provided to both licensed and unlicensed kinship caregivers depending on your situation and the needs of the child in your care. They must be requested either by you or the DCS Specialist. Some services are only available for limited periods of time. Ask your DCS Specialist if any of these might help you take care of the children:

- **Behavioral/Mental health services** include counseling or therapy for the children (and possibly yourself and other family members helping to take care of the children in your care).
- **Parent aide services** give training in family life skills, and may help with transportation and supervision of visits between the children and their parents.
- **Parenting skills training** adds to your parenting knowledge and skills.
- **Other community services referrals** assist you and the children. Kin often report that attending a kinship support group is the most important thing they do each month, because they get to spend time with other kinship caregivers like themselves and benefit from their experience and advice.
- **Transportation services** help you keep medical and other appointments for the children.
- **Child care** provides supervision while you work or seek employment, attend school or training, etc., and/or socialization for the child placed by DCS.



- **Referrals to DES programs** if appropriate (such as the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Service programs).
- **Referrals to community programs** for kinship caregivers providing emotional support, mentoring, practical and legal advice or wellness activities for you, and other programs for the children.
- **Respite care** provides temporary care and supervision of a child(ren) to relieve the caregiver for a limited period of time. Unlicensed kinship caregivers can receive up to 300 hours per fiscal year per child.

## WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER ABOUT BECOMING A LICENSED KINSHIP FOSTER CAREGIVER?

Most relatives/kin start out as unlicensed kinship foster caregivers and then make a decision either to become licensed kinship foster caregivers or remain unlicensed kinship foster caregivers. There are many additional supports available for licensed kinship foster caregivers, but licensure may not be the best plan for everyone. The decision is up to the individual caregiver. Talking things over with the DCS Specialist or a representative from a licensing agency may be helpful in making the decision.

Discuss these options openly with your specialist. If you both agree that licensing is a good idea for your particular situation, review the qualifications for licensing below. In general, DCS recommends that kinship foster caregivers become licensed in order to get as much support for the care of the children as possible.

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES TO GETTING LICENSED?

As a licensed kinship foster caregiver, you will receive the foster care rate for each child placed in your care by DCS, to help pay the costs of having the child in your family. You will have a licensing worker to assist you and provide support. You will still be eligible for child care, as well as respite care, which is special child care so you can have a break for yourself and/or your own family. You will be provided initial and ongoing training to help you understand and be better able to handle behaviors of the children that may come up because of the trauma they have suffered by abuse or neglect by their parents, or due to other special needs. The training will also help you understand the court system, which is now a big part of the lives of the children and your family. The licensing agency can also provide you with support groups and mentors, people you can talk to who are experienced licensed kinship caregivers and can "show you the ropes."

Some people think that becoming licensed means that DCS will require you to care for other children (not related to you). This is NOT true. Whether or not to take in other children is ALWAYS up to you. However, if you choose to, you could also have other children placed in your home (unless you received a kinship waiver to get licensed).

When you become licensed, you will no longer be eligible for the TANF child only monthly payments or the Kinship Stipend mentioned earlier. If you are receiving TANF for the children, you must contact an FAA office to stop those TANF payments when you become licensed. If you are receiving the Kinship Stipend, you must contact your DCS Specialist to stop those payments.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO BECOME A LICENSED KINSHIP FOSTER CAREGIVER?

In order to be licensed, you must:

- Be at least 21 years old;
- If you are married, your spouse must also apply to get licensed;
- Be fingerprinted for a criminal history records check and get a fingerprint clearance card (this applies to everyone 18 and older living in your home);
- Be a legal resident of the United States;
- Own, lease or rent your home, mobile home, apartment, condominium, or townhouse;
- Meet health and safety requirements and correct problems found during the inspection of your home;
- Have transportation available and a means of communication with emergency services, the DCS Specialist, police, etc.;
- Have a bed and storage space for the children;
- Be in good general health (a statement from a doctor is required);
- Have enough income to take care of your own family (aside from the DCS children);
- Provide names and contact information for personal references;
- Attend required hours of training;
- Work with a foster home licensing worker to complete a study of your family and home; and
- Sign and agree to follow the DCS Discipline Policy.

## IS IT TRUE THAT SOME OF THE LICENSING RULES DO NOT APPLY TO KINSHIP FOSTER CAREGIVERS?

In order to make it easier for kin to become licensed, certain non-safety licensing standards may be waived, on a case-by-case basis. This means that kin do not always have to meet certain standards (such as space accommodations and income requirements) that are applied to other licensed foster caregivers.

Standards about criminal and DCS histories or the legal residency of the caregiver and other persons residing in the home cannot be waived.



## WHAT CAN I DO TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT BECOMING LICENSED?

Let your DCS Specialist know that you are interested in becoming licensed. Community licensing agencies schedule frequent orientation sessions about licensing where representatives from the various licensing agencies give an informative presentation. You will need to choose a licensing agency to work with and can find out when an orientation session is being held in your area by calling 877-KIDS-NEEDU or 877-543-7633 Option 1. Some orientation sessions have child care available and some do not. By calling this number, you can also get written information on licensing sent to you. You can also go online to <https://dcs.az.gov/adoption> for more information.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CHILD PLACED IN MY HOME CANNOT RETURN TO HIS/HER PARENTS?

Sometimes, even though DCS works with the parents, the parents do not make the changes necessary for their home to be safe and nurturing for their children. Federal law gives the parents about 12 to 18 months to make changes. If they do not make the necessary changes, DCS needs to identify either your home as a permanent home, or find another permanent home for the children.

If the children cannot safely be reunited with their parents, adoption or legal guardianship may be permanency options for them. Federal law states that grandparents and other relatives must be considered first to provide permanency. If no relatives are willing or able to provide permanency for the children through adoption or guardianship, then adoption or guardianship by non-relatives may be pursued.

Permanency decisions are serious and often difficult decisions made by the service team (of which you as a kinship foster caregiver are a member) and the court. It is important that you understand what permanency is and the legal permanency choices that may be available to you. Discuss this with your DCS Specialist so you will be prepared and not surprised if these decisions must be made.

For children who cannot return to their parents, adoption is the most permanent plan. Adoption requires the termination of the birth parents' rights. Adoptive parents have all the legal rights and responsibilities of birth parents. Guardianship is an option when returning to the birth parents or adoption are not in the best interests of the child. Guardians have the legal right and responsibility to make decisions for the child. Guardianship does not require termination of the birth parent's rights.

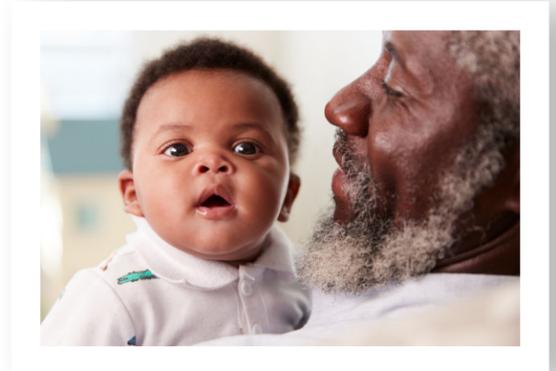


## IF I ADOPT OR BECOME A LEGAL GUARDIAN, CAN I RECEIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE?

Sources of income available for children while in DCS care, like Personal and Clothing Allowance, Kinship Stipend, TANF Cash Assistance, and foster care maintenance payments, are no longer available to children who are adopted or who are placed with a permanent guardian. There are different sources of monies, called subsidies, available for eligible adopted and guardianship children. The subsidy for adoption must be applied for BEFORE the adoption is finalized. The subsidy for guardianship may be applied for after the guardianship is finalized.

You may apply for adoption subsidy for a child you are adopting and it may include a monthly maintenance payment. The amount of the payment is based on the special needs of the child, but it cannot be more than the foster care rate. **Adoption subsidy must be approved before the adoption is final.** The child is enrolled with AHCCCS to cover medical expenses, and may be added to your own health insurance plan.

You may apply for a guardianship subsidy for a child for whom you are granted Title 8 guardianship through the Juvenile Court. Your DCS Specialist will help you apply for this subsidy. Health care coverage by AHCCCS is available for the child through the Department of Economic Security.



## THE GUARDIAN ONLINE PROVIDER PORTAL

The "Guardian Online Provider Portal" is a web-based portal for caregivers to view information about the children in their care and to view and approve monthly invoices in order to receive stipend payments. The Department highly recommends that caregivers use the Guardian Provider Portal. If you do not currently have access to the Guardian Provider Portal, but would like to use it, please call the DCS Warmline at 1-877-543-7633 option 3 to get set up. Do not attempt to log in to the portal until you have been set up. Once you are set up and log in, if a child in your care does not appear in the Guardian Portal, please call the DCS Warmline at 1-877-543-7633 option 3.







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