



WHAT IS FOSTER CARE OR OUT OF HOME PLACEMENT?

Foster care or out-of-home care occurs in a situation that requires a child to live, for a period of time with people who are not the child's parents/guardian. If the Department of Child Safety, with the approval of the courts, determine that a child is unsafe in the home, the child will be removed from the home and placed (out of home) where the child can be safe. The Department of Child Safety, representing the State of Arizona is required to place the child in the least restrictive placement that meets the child's needs. If a child is moved into out of home care, they may live in one or more different types of placements such as:

1. Kinship Care (Relatives)
2. Emergency Shelter
3. Family Foster Home
4. Therapeutic Foster Home
5. Group Home
6. Residential Treatment Center
7. Voluntary Extended Foster Care

WHY WOULD MY CHILD BE PLACED IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE?

There are various reasons why your child may be placed in out-of-home care. Several possible reasons include:

The primary reason for out-of-home placement is that the court has determined that a child is not safe remaining in the home, due to the actions of the parent, guardian or someone else living in the home who poses a risk of abuse and/or neglect to the child.

A parent or guardian may decide to place a child in out-of-home care voluntarily in order to keep a child safe. For example, if a parent or guardian is entering into an inpatient substance abuse treatment facility, or will be hospitalized due to an illness or operation, the parent or guardian can agree to a Voluntary Placement Agreement. Usually the placement is with a family member or close family friend. There are certain restrictions on Voluntary Placement Agreements.

Voluntary Placement Agreements shall not:

- Exceed 90 days;
- Be consecutive ("back to back") placement agreements;
- Be utilized more than twice within 24 consecutive months;
- Be accepted for a child without the written, informed consent of the parent, legal guardian, or legal custodian; and
- Be accepted for a child who is age 12 or older and not developmentally disabled without the written informed consent of the child, unless the Department of Child Safety determines that the voluntary placement is clearly necessary to prevent abuse.

If a child has a very serious emotional condition, disability, or behavioral issue (such as substance abuse or uncontrollable impulsive behavior), and a parent or guardian is incapable of keeping the child, or the child's siblings safe, the Department of Child Safety may place the child in out-of-home care.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES

- If you have, a voluntary agreement with the Department of Child Safety be sure to get the agreement in writing. It should clearly explain your parental rights and agency timeframes.
- Be as open as possible with the Department of Child Safety Specialist regarding your child's needs. This will help ensure that your child is placed in the most appropriate and least restrictive placement to meet their unique needs.

WHAT DO THE TERMS SAFETY, PERMANENCY, AND WELL-BEING MEAN IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY?

It is important to know that federal and state laws set three main goals for children involved in the Department of Child Safety:

SAFETY

Safety means that your child must be protected from abuse or neglect. Ensuring your child's safety is the most important goal, and will be the focus of your involvement with the Department of Child Safety.

Federal law requires child welfare agencies (DCS) and courts to think about child safety when they make decisions about where your child will live (for example in your home or with a relative). They also think about your child's safety when they decide what services to provide your family.

The safety of a child is most important to the Department of Child Safety, including when a child is in out-of-home care. Federal and state law requires that child welfare agencies conduct a criminal background check on anyone who applies to be a foster or adoptive parent, or to work in a group home or residential treatment setting. In addition, the Department of Child Safety requires an intensive home study of anyone who applies to become a foster parent, adoptive parent or kinship or relative placement for a child in the State of Arizona.

PERMANENCY

Permanency means that your child will have a safe, stable, and permanent home. It further means that it is very important to continue family relationships and connections with your child while they are living outside of your home.

To achieve permanency, the Department of Child Safety wants your child to return home as soon as it is safe to do so. The majority of children in out of home care return to their own families.

If, after a certain amount of time in out of home care, the Department of Child Safety and the court determine that you are unable to safely care for your child, DCS must look for a safe and permanent home for your child. It is in the best interest of your child to be placed with a relative, or someone who knows your family and/or your child well. This person(s) could be appointed by the court to be your child's legal guardian. The need for permanency may necessitate that your child be adopted by the guardian or another family member. If there is no family member, or person who knows your family and/or child well, who would be willing and able to adopt your child, the foster parents, who the child has been living with may adopt the child. The Department of Child Safety will always seek to permanently place a child in the least restrictive environment, with a family member or friends of the family in order to retain familial relationships and contact.

Your participation in services for your child while they are in out of home care is an important aspect of reunification. Speak to your assigned DCS Specialist about regularly attending medical or behavioral health appointments for your child.

WELL-BEING

Your child's needs are taken care of while in out of home care. This includes physical health, mental health, and developmental/educational needs. If your child is receiving services in their out of home placement, these services will likely continue upon their return home. Your family should be given an opportunity to engage in additional services that can assist you in meeting your child's well-being needs.

HOW IS IT DECIDED WHERE MY CHILD WILL BE PLACED?

The Department of Child Safety will determine where your child will be placed when he/she enters out of home care. The Department of Child Safety seeks to provide every child who requires out of home care with a placement that addresses the unique needs of the child. The major factor in the selection process is that the Department of Child Safety shall place a child in the least restrictive type of placement available, consistent with the best interest of the child. Federal child welfare law requires state agencies to find out first if your child can live safely with a relative such as a parent, grandparent, adult sibling, aunt, uncle or someone they know and have a close relationship with. You can suggest a relative or close friend who might be able to care for your child. Kinship care is the term used when your child is placed with a relative or another person who you or your child knows.

If placement with a relative is not possible, your child will likely be placed in a licensed family foster home. The Department of Child Safety makes every effort to place the child in a home-like setting, and strives to keep children close to their own homes and communities.

If your child has very intensive needs, a family foster home or kinship home might not be able to care for him/her. If this is the case, your child could be placed immediately in a place where his/her needs will be met. This could be a therapeutic foster home, a group home, or a residential treatment home.

WILL ALL OF MY CHILDREN BE PLACED TOGETHER?

If more than one of your children is removed from the home and placed out of home, the Department of Child Safety will make every effort to place the children together. Sometimes this is not always possible for a variety of reasons. For example, there might not be a foster home large enough for all of your children, or one of the children may need more specialized care, and thus the children may need to be placed separately.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE THAT WILL TAKE CARE OF MY CHILD?

Your child might be placed with a **relative (kinship care)** or a close friend. This can happen if you have suggested it, and the relative and the Department of Child Safety agree that it is a safe placement for your child.

Your child might be placed with a **licensed foster family** that you may not know. All foster parents must meet certain standards set by the state to ensure that children placed in their care will be safe and cared for properly. Foster parents have been trained to understand the special needs of children who live away from their families.

Your child may be placed in a **licensed group home** with other children. The staff who work in a group home or residential setting will care for your child. Group home facilities must be licensed, and the staff must meet standards set by the State of Arizona.

WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO GIVE THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY ABOUT MY CHILD?

You know your child better than anyone else. When your child is being placed in out of home care, it is very helpful for you to share important information with the Department of Child Safety and the out of home caregiver. It is important to share information about the following:

- Your child's routine and special needs
- School placement and progress
- Your child and family's medical history
- Special care your child has received or needs
- Upcoming medical appointments
- Names of your child's health care providers
- Allergies/sensitivities your child has
- Medications your child is taking or medical equipment your child needs
- Special treatment for development or behavior problems
- Information about your child's close friends
- Name of family members or close friends that can help
- Anything else that might help your child's needs to make the adjustment to a new home easier

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES

- When your child moves into an out of home placement, be sure that they take some things from home to help them feel comfortable in the placement, for example, some special toys, pictures or other treasured items.
- For many children it is important to keep ties with friends and neighbors. You can ask your assigned DCS Specialist to place your child near your home and neighborhood if it is possible.
- Let the DCS Specialist and caregiver know what works to help calm and reassure your child, especially during this difficult time.

- Make sure you give the DCS Specialist and caregiver as much information as possible about your child to ensure that all needs will be met.

WILL I BE ABLE TO VISIT MY CHILD IN OUT OF HOME CARE?

Yes. Unless the court orders you not to visit, rarely does this happen, the Department of Child Safety is responsible for developing a plan with you that allows you to visit your child regularly. This visitation schedule will be part of your case plan. The visitation plan is intended to help you stay in touch with your child and to help your child return home to a safe environment as soon as possible. Visitation shall take place in the most natural, family-like setting possible and with as little supervision as possible while still ensuring the safety and well-being of the child. How often you visit your child depends on many factors, often the only limitation is the availability of people to transport children to visits, and your and your child's schedule. If you have any family or friends who would be willing to assist with visits, you should share that information with your DCS Specialist.

Each family's plan for visiting will be different. Your plan will be based on your and your child's needs and desires. It will also consider the needs and desires of the foster family or the staff in a group home where your child might be placed. Most likely, the agency workers schedule and resources will be considered, as well. If your child is placed in a group home or residential treatment center, you may be encouraged to visit there.

If the placement of siblings together is not possible for all or any of the siblings in your family, the Department of Child Safety shall make efforts to maintain frequent visitation or other ongoing contact between all siblings in your family.

Most families have *supervised* visitation. This means that a representative from the Department of Child Safety or service provider will stay with you while you visit with your child. This is done with children to ensure that they are safe at all times. After a family has progressed through their case plan goals, they can visit together without supervision.

WHERE CAN I VISIT WITH MY CHILD?

Where you and your child visit depends in part on where you live. Visits can happen in a number of different places. This could be at the DCS office, a visitation center, a treatment center, a public location, or a recreation center. As you progress through your case plan, visits may be able to occur at your home. Deciding where you will visit with your child is part of the case planning process.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Work closely with your DCS Specialist to develop a visitation schedule that will work for you and your family. If your children have been placed in different homes, make sure that the plan also explains how the children will be able to visit with each other.
- Visit consistently, try not to miss any visits. This will be very important to your child.
- Ask your DCS Specialist to arrange phone contact with your child between visits.
- By following the visitation plan you let the Department of Child Safety and your children know that you care.
- Ask your DCS Specialist what you are to do and who you are to call if you cannot make a scheduled visit.
- If you need help with transportation for the visits, talk to your DCS Specialist for assistance with transportation.
- Try to develop a positive connection and relationship with the caregiver or the group home staff where your child lives.
- You may feel strange or find it difficult to be visiting with your own child, therefore you might want to talk with someone (therapist or close friend) who can help you cope with those feelings.
- When you visit with your child, try to understand how difficult it is for them to have more than one caregiver right now. Your child might think that they must choose between you and the foster parent. Let your child know they do not have to choose.