

Kinship Care

What is Kinship Care?

Children are in kinship care when they cannot live with their parents, but live full-time with a relative or any non-relative who has a long-standing relationship with the child or family. Kinship care is the most desirable living arrangement for children who cannot live with their parents. It helps children preserve a sense of family and belonging. It can help children identify with their family's culture and traditions.

Types of kinship care:

- An informal agreement between family members or with a non-relative. This arrangement can occur when Hamilton County Children's Services does not have legal custody of the child.
- Kinship caregiver – The caregiver has physical custody, and Hamilton County Children's Services has legal custody.
- Kinship guardian – The caregiver has legal custody and physical custody. Hamilton County Children's Services typically closes the case.
- Kinship foster care – The caregiver is a licensed foster parent and has physical custody of the child. Hamilton County Children's Services has legal custody.
- Kinship adoption – The biological parents' rights are terminated and the relative caregiver becomes the child's legal parent.

If I accept a child into my home as a kinship caregiver, do I have custody of the child?

There are two types of custody:

- Physical Custody - The child lives with you but you have no legal authority to make decisions for the child. You may have input into decisions but Hamilton County Children's Services is the legal guardian and makes all decisions affecting the child. Children's Services will be actively involved with your family and the child.
- Legal Custody or Guardianship – You must go to court, and the court grants legal custody or guardianship. As the legal guardian, you have the authority to make most major decisions regarding the child. The Children's Services case will usually be closed and you and the child will no longer be involved with Children's Services.

As a kinship care provider, what kind of financial support is available?

In most cases, the following financial support is available to kinship caregivers whether they have physical or legal custody:

- Cash Assistance (OWF) – Cash assistance is a federal program that provides a fixed monthly check. Kinship caregivers may apply for cash assistance for the child or sibling group in their care. Your income and assets will not be considered when determining eligibility for child-only cash assistance. However, if you have little or no income you can apply as a family. Currently the child-only OWF payments are:
 - \$259 for a single child.
 - \$355 for two siblings.
 - \$434 for three siblings.
 - \$536 for four siblings.

You must be a blood relative in order to receive child-only OWF. Non-relative kinship caregivers are not eligible unless they take legal custody and become the child's guardian. Call 946-1000 to arrange for an application packet to be sent to you. The completed packet needs to be mailed back to the agency in the postage paid envelope. Please be sure to write: **Attention: Monica Lang** on the outside of the envelope.

- SSI or Social Security – In rare instances, a child is eligible for SSI due to a disability or for social security benefits due to the death or disability of a parent. As a kinship caregiver, you may be eligible to become payee for the child’s benefits. The child’s worker can tell you if the child receives or is eligible to receive either of these benefits.
- Medicaid - Medicaid is state and federally funded health care coverage. Kinship caregivers, both relative and non-relative, may apply for a Medicaid card for the child or sibling group in their care. Your income and assets will not be considered when determining eligibility unless you choose to apply for yourself as well. If you have qualified for cash assistance you will automatically qualify for a Medicaid card. Call 946-1000 to arrange for an application packet to be sent to you.
- Food Assistance - Food assistance is a monthly benefit given to eligible families to help them buy food. Kinship caregivers may apply but the entire household’s income and assets are considered for eligibility. In other words, you cannot receive food assistance for just the child or sibling group in your care. Call 946-1000 to arrange for an application packet to be sent to you.
- Child Care Services - Child Care Services is a state program that partially covers the cost of child care for eligible low and moderate-income families. Kinship caregivers may apply for subsidized child care but the entire family’s income and assets are considered for eligibility. Call 946-1800 for an application packet.
- Kinship Child Care is available to caregivers that still have an open Children’s Services case. Your child care expenses can be paid if your provider is under contract with HCJFS and your income is below 150% of Federal Poverty Level. If you are interested in kinship childcare, notify your children’s services caseworker so he/she can make a referral for you.
- Kinship Permanency Incentive Program (KPI): KPI is a state program designed to promote and support kinship caregivers to become guardians or custodians for children who would otherwise be at risk of harm if they remained in their own homes. KPI provides up to six payments over a three year period, with a maximum benefit amount of \$2025 per child, to assist families in caring for their kin. To be eligible, each of the following must be true:
 - A home study was conducted and the placement was approved. If you have not had a home study one can be completed by HCJFS.
 - The caregiver was awarded legal custody or guardianship on or after July 1, 2005.
 - Your income is below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.
 - The caregiver is a legal resident of Hamilton County, Ohio.

For more information, contact Trina Carlton at 946-1902.

What do I do if I can no longer maintain care of the children in my home?

If you are caring for children in your home as a Kinship Caregiver and a caseworker is still working with your family, you must report your concerns to the caseworker. Your caseworker may be able to assist you in finding ways to stabilize the placement or will find an alternate placement if necessary. If the Children’s Services case has been closed and you no longer have a caseworker, you should call 241-KIDS (or the Children’s Services agency in the county in which you reside) for assistance in finding an alternate placement if needed. **Do not return the child(ren) to the home from which they were removed unless a Children’s Services agency has completed safety and risk assessments.**

Can I become a licensed foster parent for the kinship children in my care?

Yes, you can apply to become a licensed foster parent if Hamilton County Children’s Services has and maintains legal custody of the child. To become a licensed foster parent, you must meet all the licensing requirements. You must:

- Be at least 21 years of age.
- Pass a criminal background check.
- Have sufficient income to meet the basic needs of your household and to make timely payment for your home, utilities and other debts. It does not matter if you own or rent your home.
- Be physically and mentally healthy.
- Complete 36 hours of Orientation and Pre-Service Training in order to obtain your license and at least 40 hours of continuing education every 2 years to maintain your license.

- Successfully complete the home study process, which includes references, medicals, credit check, a fire inspection and interviews of each member of your household.
- Possess basic parenting skills and be able to work closely with a team of professionals who have frequent contact with the child.

What type of financial support does a foster parent receive?

As a foster parent you would receive the following financial support:

- Board Check – Each month, you would receive a check to offset the expense of caring for the child. The daily board rate ranges from \$16.28 to \$32.96 per day depending on the age of the child.
- Medicaid Card – Medicaid is state and federal health care coverage that is available for foster children. You must take your foster child to a physician or pharmacy that takes Medicaid. Medicaid will cover the cost of medical, pharmacy and behavioral health services.
- Child Care Services - Child Care Services is a state program that partially covers the cost of child care. Foster parents who need child care must first apply for state subsidized child care. The entire family's income and assets are considered for eligibility. If you do not meet the eligibility criteria for state subsidized child care, you may be eligible for child care assistance through Children's Services. Call 946-1800 for an application packet.
- Clothing voucher: Receive a voucher for the child at the time of placement, depending on the child's needs.

What is the difference between being a kinship caregiver and a foster parent?

As a kinship caregiver:

- Custody
You have the option to pursue legal custody or guardianship. You also have the option to pursue adopting the child, if the parents agree to terminate their parental rights.
- Children's Services Involvement
 - If you obtain legal custody or guardianship, the agency closes the case and is no longer involved with your family or the child.
 - If you have physical custody, the agency will have an open case and remain involved with you and the child. You will have to meet with a caseworker at least monthly. You will have input into the decisions affecting the child, but the agency will have the legal authority and responsibility to make all major decisions regarding the child.
- Financial Support
Whether you have physical or legal custody, you will be able to apply for the following financial support programs: cash assistance, Medicaid, food stamps, and subsidized child care. If you have custody or guardianship, you may be eligible to apply for the Kinship Permanency Incentive program. (See the detailed explanation above.) Remember that several of these programs are based on income eligibility and are not guaranteed.

As a foster parent:

- Custody
 - Legal custody must remain with Hamilton County Children's Services. Foster parents do not have the option of legal custody. This means that you will have input into the decisions affecting the child, but the agency will have the legal authority and responsibility to make all major decisions regarding the child.
 - Foster parents can apply to adopt if the agency gets permanent custody of the child.
- Children's Services Involvement
 - As a licensed foster parent, you will be held to the same standards as all other foster care providers regardless of the fact that you are related to the child or have a long-standing relationship with the child.

- The agency will have an open case and will be frequently involved with you and the child.
- You will have to adhere to the policies and procedures contained in the Foster Parent Handbook, such as discipline, transportation, medical care, education, babysitting and respite care, etc.
- Because the agency is the legal guardian, you will have to get approval from the agency to do many ordinary things. If you wish to take the child on vacation, it must be approved by the agency. If the child wants to change their appearance such as cutting long hair or getting ears pierced, it must be approved by the agency. If the child needs emergency medical care, the agency must give the authorization to treat.
- The child could be removed from your home if it becomes an unsuitable placement for the child.
- Financial Support
The financial support is guaranteed. You will receive a monthly board check and a medical card.

How do I become a licensed foster parent?

- See the attached document entitled "If you are also interested in becoming a foster parent" or
- Log onto the HCJFS website www.hckids.org
 - Click on "Foster Care & Adoption Information "
 - Click on "If you are interested in fostering"

Once you have chosen an agency, contact the agency's foster care training representative to determine their training requirements and schedule.

If you are also interested in becoming a foster parent

Hamilton County Job and Family Services (JFS) is committed to ensuring that quality local homes are available for children in agency care. To that end, JFS contracts with several private agencies to provide needed foster care services. When a foster home is needed for a child in care, JFS staff will contact these agencies to find a licensed home able to meet the child's needs.

If you are also interested in becoming a foster parent for Hamilton County children, contact any or all of the local agencies listed below and request their information packet. Once you review their information and ask any questions you may have, you can then partner with the agency that best reflects your interests and goals.

Agency	Phone Number
Adriel School	(419) 445-1990
Agape For Youth	(937) 439-4406
Applewood Centers	(216) 696-6815
Bair Foundation	(937) 424-0210
Beech Acres	(513) 233-4830
Beech Brook	(216) 831-2255
Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau	(216) 320-8589 or (800) 205-8535
Buckeye Ranch/Square One for Youth	(513) 772-5800
Child Focus	(513) 685-5044
Choices	(937) 264-0084, ext. 110
Christian Children's Home of Ohio	(330) 345-7949
Diversion Foster Care	(513) 984-2031
Focus on Youth	(513) 644-1030
Lighthouse Youth Services	(513) 772-0848, ext. 147
Necco	(513) 771-9600
National Youth Advocate Program	(513) 772-6166
Oasis Therapeutic Foster Care Network	(740) 698-0340
Oesterlen Services for Youth	(937) 398-0234
Pressley Ridge	(513) 559-1402
Resident Home Corporation	(513) 619-2961
Specialized Alternatives for Youth (SAFY)	(513) 771-7239
St. Aloysius Orphanage	(513) 242-7613, ext. 331
St. Joseph Orphanage	(513) 481-7350
Starr Commonwealth-Columbus	(614) 491-5784
United Methodist Children's Home of Ohio	(614) 559-2800, ext. 413
The Village Network	(614) 751-9068

A note about adopting a child placed in licensed foster homes:

Sometimes children placed in foster care become available for adoption. Ohio law gives preference first to suitable family members of the child, then to a child's foster parents and finally to others who express interest in the child.

If a child placed with you becomes available for adoption and you are interested in adopting that child, you can request an adoption home study if you have not already been approved as an adoptive parent. Your foster care agency may work with JFS to complete the home study and adoption process.