

What if I become a Kinship Carer?

An information sheet for the public.

Kinship care

Thank you for offering to care for a child from your extended family. Kinship care placements are often needed in an emergency when Child Protection Services have been notified about a care and protection concern and it is decided that a child or young person is not safe to stay at home. It is much better if they are placed with people they know and trust and remaining within the family is always considered as the first option.

This information sheet answers some frequently asked questions about being a kinship carer and it is intended to provide you with some essential information that will help you in the first few days of the placement. More information will be provided by staff of Child Protection Services who are involved in the case.

What is meant by formal kinship care?

Formal kinship care is the placement of a child or young person who is the subject of a care and protection order under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 with a member of their extended family or other adult with whom they have a significant relationship.

This means that Child Protection Services has been involved in all cases where a formal kinship care placement is made, and a judgement has been made that the child is at risk and needs to be placed away from home in a safe environment.

In these circumstances, all carers must be assessed and approved by the Department as able and suitable to provide care for the child or young person.

If I am a member of the family and the parents are happy for me to look after their child, why does the Department have to approve me?

All carers of children who are under the custody or guardianship of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services must be approved as suitable carers. The Secretary is required by law to make suitable arrangements for the care of a child who is the subject of a care and protection order. It is also important that children who have to be placed away from home are not exposed to additional harm or distress.

If Child Protection Services considers that a placement with a kinship carer is in the best interests of the child, they have a duty to ensure that the carer, like all other carers, is suitable to care for the child or young person.

How is a kinship carer approved?

The following checks need to be carried out before a child is placed with a member of their family, even in an emergency:

- a satisfactory police history check of all adults in the household;
- a satisfactory child protection check of all adults in the household; and
- a satisfactory home safety check.

In some circumstances, a child may be placed prior to the home safety check being completed. In these cases the check will be completed the next working day. Kinship carers are also assessed to ensure that they have the capacity to support and promote the child's developmental needs and can care and protection them from harm.

What support will I receive?

Child Protection Services supports family members who care for children on legal orders in a number of different ways. You can attend training for example, and as a formal kinship carer you will also receive support from the child's primary worker as well as an out of home care support worker. They will help you if you need advice about the child's behaviour, want some training or have any issues or concerns about the placement. You will receive fortnightly payments to reimburse you for the costs of caring for the child.

Who has custody and guardianship of a child in formal kinship care?

The Magistrates Court (Children's Division) makes decisions about custody and guardianship of children based on what is in their best interests. In most cases, the Court will transfer custody and guardianship to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

What information will I receive and will I be involved in future planning?

Planning for the needs of children in care is based on Looking After Children. It includes the documents Essential Information Record 1 and Placement Plan Part 1. You will receive these documents when the child is placed with you as well as information about the rights of children, parents and carers. If you have not received these documents you should ask your worker for copies, Through Looking After Children you can express your views on how the child is progressing and what is needed to keep him or her safe and happy. Always ask if you need help.