

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

Approved By: Operations Team

Date: 07/12/2018

Overview

Description: **Kinship care** refers to the **care** of children by relatives or, in some jurisdictions, close family friends (often referred to as fictive **kin**). Relatives are the preferred resource for children who must be removed from their birth parents because it maintains the children's connections with their families.

Research has shown that children living with relatives in kinship care placements generally have a greater likelihood of being successful and experiencing positive outcomes.

Policy and procedures for ensuring children's placement in kinship and fictive kin homes are assessed accurately and timely so children's connections are honored first and foremost. This is in alignment with Mecklenburg's value and belief that children and youth fare better in kinship placements.

Purpose/Rationale: This policy is to guide Youth and Family Services social workers in assessing kinship caregivers for the placement of children. Mecklenburg County Youth and Family Services is committed to partnering with family and the community to keep children safe. The assessment of kinship placements must begin during the intake and investigation process and continue at every level of service and decision point throughout the course of the agency's involvement with the family.

Applicability: Youth and Family Services social workers, social work supervisors and resource development staff.

Definition(s):

Kinship is the self-defined relationship between two or more people and is based on biological, legal, and/or strong family-like ties.

Kinship Caregiver: A kinship caregiver is a person who is either related by blood, legal and/or has strong family like ties providing full time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives who have been placed formally or informally into their care by a due to parental difficulties. A Kinship Caregiver may also be identified as a Temporary Safety Provider during

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

the pre-custody phase of a case.

Informal Kinship Care: Informal Kinship care allows parents to make temporary arrangements with a family member when they are unable to care for their child during a serious family hardship and/or absence, but do not want to relinquish their parental rights. With informal kinship care, there is minimal child welfare involvement by a local departments of social services and caregivers do not go through the custody process.

Formal Kinship Care: Formal kinship care occurs when a child welfare agency determines that it is no longer safe for a child to remain in the home of their biological parent and/or guardian. The child is placed in the home of relatives or kin and the agency assumes legal custody of the child through the court.

Failure to Comply: **Policy:**

Procedure(s) that apply: Placement with Relatives and Kin (Kinship Care)

Mecklenburg County Department of Youth and Family Services values and supports the importance of family in meeting the needs of its members. When children cannot be assured safety in their own homes, the best alternative resource can often be found within the extended family and other "kin." Most people have loosely structured kinship networks that are available in times of difficulty. Parents and guardians facing the risk of child placement should be given a reasonable opportunity to identify and come together with their kinship network to plan for and provide safety, care, nurture, and supervision for the child. The agency has the responsibility of assessing the suggested resource to assure that the child will receive appropriate care.

Informal kinship care arrangements are commonplace in times of shared crisis for many families. Such arrangements are most effective when other members of the family and community resources provide emotional and tangible support to the care provider. When DSS becomes involved in a family, informal kinship supports may not exist and the family may be too embarrassed or angry to seek such support. For instance, during a child protective services investigative assessment, DSS may require the parent to choose and arrange for a temporary placement for their child in order to protect the child from further harm. Agency staff should help the temporary care provider locate and develop support and resources needed in caring for the child. In addition, **the agency shall remain involved with the family providing placement and the birth family until the child's ongoing safety is assured and the**

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

placement is legally secure or until the DSS files petition for custody. These informal arrangements are NOT legally secure for the child or for the kin caregiver.

In any of these situations, these distinctions are not readily apparent. At the first conversations with relatives or kin about having the child placed with them, either by the parent with DSS involvement, or by the DSS through court order, **it is critical that County Department of Social Services thoroughly consider and have a thorough discussion with the kin caregiver explaining all options available to them. Full disclosure should include, but not be limited to:**

- Involvement and participation in CFT's and other meetings
- Licensing options
- Permanency considerations
- Financial support
- YFS supports provided

This should occur during the kinship care assessment, as well as ongoing when changes in the planning occur. In this manner, the relative or kinship caregiver can make informed decisions.

Involvement in Planning

The agency should help to mobilize the family's kinship network in the process of:

- assessing the risk of harm to the child;
- assessing the resources of the kinship network to eliminate that risk;
- developing a plan for the protection, permanence, and well-being of the child;
- tailoring that plan to the needs, resources, support and desires of the family;
- implementing the plan; and
- evaluating and monitoring the implementation of the plan.

Best Practice for Placement with Relatives

County Departments of Social Services shall strive to strengthen and preserve the family. In keeping with Federal law, North Carolina law and policy require that, when a juvenile must be removed from his home, the County DSS Director shall give preference to an adult relative or other kin when determining placement, provided that (1) the placement is assessed by the agency to be in the best interests of the child in terms of both safety and nurture; and (2) the prospective caregiver and the living situation are assessed and determined to meet relevant standards. The Juvenile Court is required to ask at each hearing, including non-secure custody, adjudication, disposition, review, and permanency planning, whether or not a relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision for the child and, if so, to order placement with

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

that relative if the home is assessed to be appropriate. If placement with the relative is less than 30 days an Initial Provider Assessment form should be completed. ([DSS-5203ins](#)). A - Comprehensive Assessment form is required thereafter ([DSS-5204ins](#)).

When relatives and/or other kin are identified as potential caregivers for children at risk, the agency shall assess the suitability of those resources. Kinship care may be considered as the primary plan and/or as an alternative permanent plan if the primary plan is found to be inappropriate.

The social worker should, therefore, address the issue of available and appropriate relatives in each court report, including the results of assessments of those relatives.

When necessary and appropriate to the needs of the child, the agency shall make efforts to provide or procure reasonable assistance to help families and kin meet assessment and/or licensing standards so that they can provide care for the child.

When possible, child support should be paid directly to the caregiver. Potential caregivers shall be informed of available agency resources, such as child-only Work First grants, subsidized guardianship assistance², medical coverage, day care, and food stamps. When needed, families shall also be informed of any available community resources for free or low-cost clothing or furniture, minor home repairs, or other such incidental needs that may unnecessarily prohibit their being approved to provide care for children. If the kinship caregiver wishes to be licensed as a foster parent, the agency is required to determine whether or not the family meets state licensing requirements, thus enabling them to receive foster care assistance payments, Medicaid, and other benefits. Since foster care placement, even with licensed relatives, is not a permanent plan, the kinship care providers should be assessed for their interest and ability to adopt the child or to assume guardianship or legal custody.

Utilizing the Family's Own Resources

Often agencies emphasize the importance of publicly supported helping systems (e.g. mental health, schools, social services, juvenile justice) over that of informal systems such as the extended family, kin, the spiritual community and other community resources. By doing so, they frequently overburden the formal systems while missing an opportunity to involve people who can better address many family needs.

Whether licensed as a foster home or not, kinship care providers should be valued and treated as partners with the birth family and the agency.

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

This includes notifying relatives providing care for a child of any court review or hearing to be held about the child and of their opportunity to be heard in court. Social workers should receive additional training regarding the development of collaborative working relationships with kin.

Social workers will convene **Child and Family Team meetings** which focus on a mutual sharing of information among agency staff, other professionals, the family, and their kinship network. Families, along with their kinship network, should be fully involved in the decision-making process from the point of initiation of services so that the resources and wisdom of the family and its culture can be tapped. The family's understanding incorporates an historical perspective of the problems faced by the family, as well as their efforts to remedy those problems. They are in a position to confront the problems and to help provide realistic supports needed to help the child and his/her family of origin move toward healing.

Children who have been abused or neglected do not respond appropriately to corporal punishment, since often they have already experienced and survived extreme discipline from their parents. Kinship care providers may not be aware of the impact of abuse, and may be reluctant to agree to a non-corporal punishment policy. The agency shall discuss and formalize a child-specific alternative discipline plan for children in agency custody.

Kinship Care Assessment: Licensure and Approval

In order to maximize the possibility of a positive kinship placement, a thorough assessment shall be conducted to evaluate the suitability of the placement (please refer to the Instructions Comprehensive Assessment [DSS-5204ins.](#)) It is critical that the agency develop and nurture staff sensitivity to the unique issues that are present when relatives and other kin are assessed for their suitability to parent children. Assessment should be based on an understanding of the kinship family's culture and community, child rearing approaches, and family dynamics, and should focus on the ability of the family to meet the immediate and ongoing needs of the child.

Any relative or other kinship caregiver should be licensed as a foster parent if they want to be licensed and meet licensing requirements. Additionally, if a placement is determined to be suitable for the care and nurturing of the child, but the home cannot meet all foster care licensing requirements, the agency may submit justification for a waiver to the County Division Director

In North Carolina, many licensure requirements may be considered for waiver if approval is in the best interest of the child (ren); if the health, safety and protection of the child is assured, and if the local agency recommends that the waiver(s) be granted.

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

If the agency has custody or CPS involvement with the child and has sanctioned placement with a non-licensed relative, services should be provided to assure that the kin caregiver has the best chance of meeting the child's needs for physical and emotional security. Whether or not the agency has custody, kinship caregivers may need agency supportive services. Some services that are frequently requested by caregivers are:

- "grandparent" support groups open to all kinship caregivers regardless of age;
- legal assistance in obtaining permission to enroll the child in school, to obtain medical attention or to obtain legal custody or guardianship;
- assistance negotiating the social services system to get approved for food stamps, Work First grants, Medicaid or state supported insurance coverage for the child, child support, or day care services; and
- information and referral services to connect with informal and formal service providers in the local community.

For more information regarding kinship care licensure and approval requirements, please refer to [North Carolina Foster Home Licensing Manual](#).

Non-Relative/Fictive Kin Placement Resources

If a relative cannot be identified as an appropriate placement resource for the child, a Non-Relative/Fictive Kin placement resource shall be chosen for the child that ensures that the child is placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting available and in close proximity to the parent's home consistent with the best interests and special needs of the child.

Non-Relative/Fictive Kin placement resources shall be carefully evaluated and prepared prior to placement to help assure that the child will remain in that placement until reunification or other permanent home is achieved. Every child deserves one single, stable placement within his/her own community.

Form(s) that apply: DSS 5203 Initial Provider Assessment, DSS 5204 The Comprehensive Assessment, DSS 5204ins Comprehensive Assessment Instructions, DSS 5231 NC Safety

Category:

	Policy Title:	Kinship Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 004	Version:	1	Effective Date:

Assessment, TPSA (part E of the Safety Assessment

Reference(s): NCDHHS Foster Home Licensing Manual

Policies:

Contact(s):

Policy & Practice Model Supervisor

Policy History:

Developed November 2017.