
What is the Relative Caregiver Program?

The Relative Caregiver Program is an option available for relatives to care for non-custodial children who require out-of-home care. Children and relative caregivers receive supportive services, such as information and referral, support groups, respite, recreation, and family advocacy in order to prevent children from entering and/or re-entering state custody. DCS does not have any oversight with the family, and the family does not receive a monthly stipend through the program. The program first launched in the Shelby, Davidson and Upper Cumberland regions, and was implemented statewide in 2006.

What type of financial assistance can I get?

Financial assistance to help pay for the child's needs is available, but the amount and type depends on the type of arrangement a family decides to make. In some cases, such as legal custody, the biological parents can be ordered to pay child support. In other instances, such as power of attorney or family planned care, if you are the child's sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle or first cousin, you might qualify to receive funds monthly from the Families First Child Only grant through the Department of Human Services. This program takes into consideration only the child's income, not yours, in establishing qualification. With foster parenting and adoption, you may qualify for monthly foster or adoption payments through DCS.

Each situation is different. DCS can help determine the types of aid and assistance for which you might qualify.



Relative Caregiver Program



Contact Information:

Relative Caregiver Program

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Why Can't the Child Stay at Home?

Sometimes children are abandoned, their parents die, or a parent is incarcerated. Sometimes a child is being abused or neglected at home.

What are the Benefits of a Related Child Being Placed with Me?

Placement with a relative can help prevent entry or reentry into the state foster care system. If the Department of Children's Services has to find somewhere else for a child to live, it is often difficult for the child. A welcoming family member can help ease that pain. It is comforting for child to know that family members want to be involved – and to know they care.



What is Family Planned Care?

With family-planned care, the parents informally ask a relative to care for the child. There is no court involvement. There is no formal agreement or ongoing involvement between the relative and DCS. Under this type of agreement, the parents can take the children back whenever they want to. You probably cannot make certain decisions for the child, like signing him or her up for school. You should, however, be able to get basic medical care for the child, but cannot make major medical decisions for the child.

What are some things to consider when having a child placed with me?

Taking a child into your home is a major step. There are several options for relative caregivers. These options include:

- Family-Planned Care
- Power of Attorney for Care of a Child
- Legal Custody
- Kinship Foster Care
- Adoption
- Permanent Guardianship
- Relative Caregiver Program

If you need assistance in deciding which option is best for you, you should consult with an attorney. For free help, you can call the University of Memphis Child Advocacy Clinic at (901) 523-8822, ext. 253, or the Vanderbilt Legal Clinic at (615) 322-4964.

What is Power of Attorney of a Child?

Power of attorney for the care of a child is a legal agreement between you and the parents, making you the official caregiver for the child. This designation enables you to make legal, medical and educational decisions for the child.

To set up power of attorney for a child, you don't need an attorney, nor do you have to go to court. You simply need to fill out a form from DCS, and you and the parents must sign the form in front of a notary.

What is Legal Custody?

With legal custody, a judge in juvenile, chancery or circuit court grants you an order for legal custody. With a custody order, you can make decisions about a child's schooling and medical care. The order also generally outlines explicit guidelines for parental visitation or contact. Frequently, such orders require the parents to pay child support.

If you are the child's sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle or first cousin, you may qualify for the Families First Child Only grant. You may also qualify for the earned income tax credit, which enables you to pay less in taxes. You may also claim the child as a dependent on your taxes.

What is Kinship Foster Care?

With kinship foster care, DCS has legal custody of the child. You then apply to become a foster parent for the child, which involves completing 30 hours of PATH (Parents as Tender Healers) training, a home study and a background check. Once you become a kinship foster parent, the child lives with you, but DCS makes decisions regarding the child's medical care and schooling.

What is Adoption?

When you adopt a child, you become his or her legal parent. A court order terminates the biological parents' rights to the child permanently. Legal representation is necessary to complete this process, regardless of whether a child is in DCS custody at the time the adoption process begins.

What is Permanent Guardianship?

An order from a juvenile court judge is needed to obtain permanent guardianship. This may – or may not – require the services of an attorney. A permanent guardian has the same rights as a parent, but the parents' rights aren't terminated, as they are in an adoption. A permanent guardian may decide when or if the parent can visit or call the child. Often, the order specifies that the parent must pay child support.

To become a permanent guardian, the child must live with you for six months, and you must be able to explain to a judge that guardianship is in the best interests of the child. Permanent guardianship usually lasts until the child is an adult, but it can end sooner if the biological parents have made life changes and can demonstrate that reunification is in the child's best interests.
