



DSCYF

Department of Services for
Children, Youth & Their Families

Kinship Caregiver Resource Guide

Safe & healthy children,
resilient families,
strong communities.

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This guide is a publication of the Delaware Division of Family Services (DFS) to provide information that supports kinship caregivers and promotes child safety and stability. The guide is maintained by the DFS Foster Care Program Team. There is a companion guide for caseworkers that is available upon request.

Perfect

Introduction

Welcome to a new chapter of caregiving. If you are reading this, you are likely navigating the complexities of caring for a child who has experienced abuse, neglect, or separation from their parents. When you opened your heart and your home, you took an act of love and transformed it into a lifeline. You may have expected to be a grandparent, aunt, or uncle, but you found yourself in the role of primary parent, often managing a crisis you didn't cause.

As a kinship caregiver, you have a unique advantage: you already have a connection to the child. The separation and trauma the child has experienced may cause difficult behaviors, fear, anxiety or grief. You may feel overwhelmed at times by the emotional or behavioral challenges they face. Establishing a sense of physical and emotional safety may take time, but it is worth it.

This guide offers practical information and strategies to help you navigate these challenges, understand the impact of trauma on the brain and body, build trust, and take care of yourself too. It will provide some insight into what it means to parent through a 'trauma lens' and look beyond the behavior to understand the hurt child underneath. It also provides resource information and an overview of what to expect when partnering with the Division of Family Services (DFS). You are not alone on this journey. By providing a safe, stable, and nurturing environment, you are not just managing behavior; you are building resilience – in the child and in yourself. Thank you for making a difference.

Understanding Trauma and Child Behavior

Children rely on their primary caregivers, typically parents, to provide a sense of safety and belonging. There are lasting impacts when a child leaves their home due to physical or emotional harm, neglect, or because their parent cannot care for them. The child may feel abandoned, and this feeling can recur throughout their separation. Children living in environments with violence, neglect, housing and/or food insecurity, and parental substance use experience a steady stream of stress (called toxic stress) that changes brain development and impairs their nervous and immune systems. So, in addition to the emotional trauma, there are real impacts on the body and brain. Effects can include mental health issues (depression, anxiety, etc.), behavioral problems, low self-esteem, attachment issues, and long-term physical diseases like diabetes.

Impacts on Children

Childhood abuse, neglect, and abandonment can cause changes in the child's brain and body. These experiences are referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs. You can learn more about ACEs at <https://www.numberstory.org/> and more resources at the end of this guide.

ACEs generally fall into three main areas: abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Other stressors can have similar impacts, including living in adverse community environments. When a child is repeatedly exposed to these stressful events without enough support, their stress response system gets overactivated. This is known as a toxic stress response. Unlike normal brief stress responses (being nervous about a test), toxic stress floods the developing brain with stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) for extended periods.

Consequences of repeated activation of the stress response system can include:

- **Brain Development:** Toxic stress can change how a child's brain grows, affecting areas of the brain responsible for fear, emotion regulation, learning, and memory.

- **Mental and Emotional Health:** It can affect the child's self-esteem and their sense of safety. It increases risk of depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Children may act out with aggression, have trouble controlling impulses, or exhibit self-destructive behavior.
- **Physical Health:** Toxic stress can lead to changes in cell development that increase risk of adult diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.
- **Learning Struggles:** Because the brain is focused on survival, children often have difficulty concentrating, remembering, and performing in school.

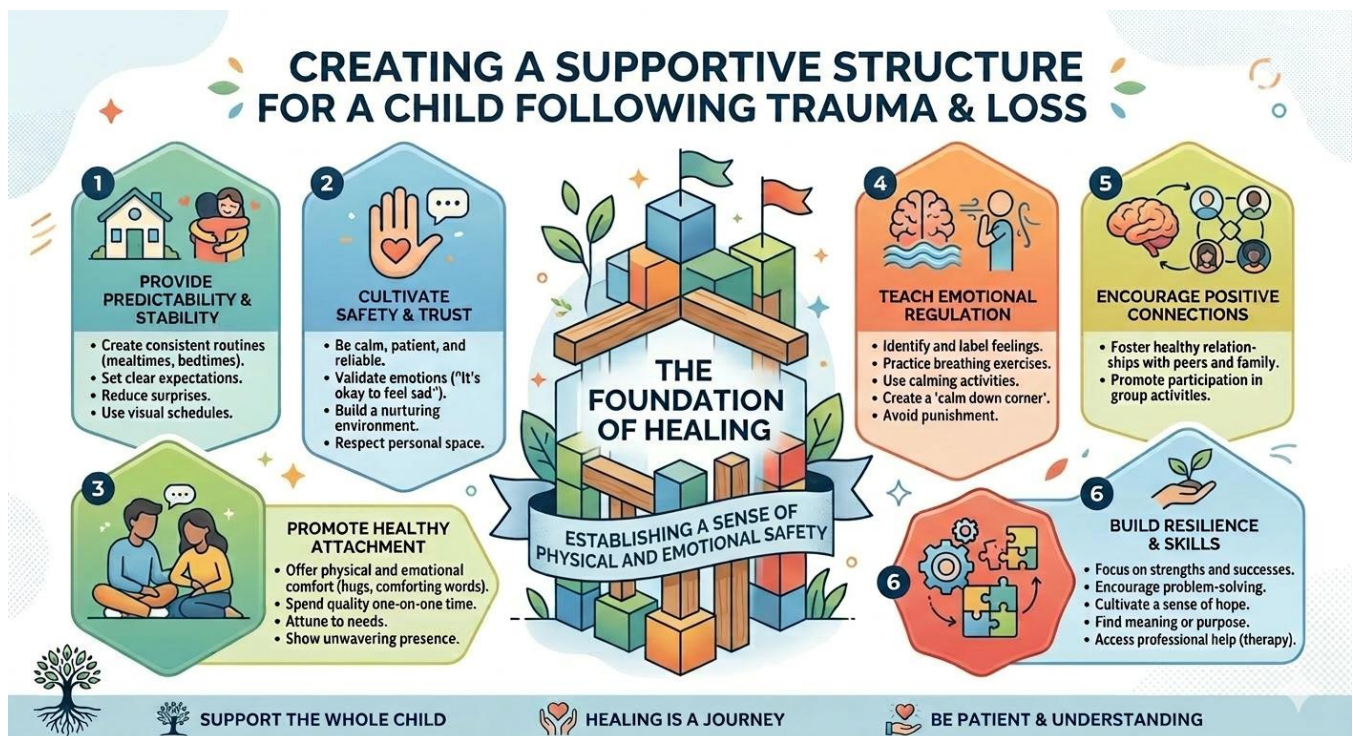
Children who have been exposed to ACEs and toxic stress may engage in self-soothing behaviors, have eating problems, and experience social and behavioral challenges. These signs should not be ignored. There are things that can be done to help children develop healthy coping strategies and promote healing.

Caregivers Can Build Resilience

Caregivers help build child resilience by providing a stable supportive relationship with the child. Here are some tips for creating this trust-based relationship:

- **Foster Positive Connections:** Healing happens when children feel a secure attachment. Spend quality, positive time with the child. Engage in active and non-judgmental listening, validate their emotions, and express love consistently. These actions build trust and safety.
- **Create a Safe and Stable Environment:** Predictable routines and safety (physical and emotional) reduce stress. Establish clear, consistent routines for meals, bedtime, and other activities. Maintain a calm and supportive environment. Knowing what to expect will help reduce anxiety.

- **Model Emotional Regulation:** Children learn how to manage stress and strong emotions by watching the adults around them. Caregivers should practice their own stress management and name emotions out loud. Saying things like, *I feel frustrated right now, so I am going to take a deep breath*, can help children learn effective coping strategies.
- **Teach Coping Skills:** Provide children with tools to handle stress in healthy ways. Deep breathing exercises, mindfulness activities, engaging in creative outlets, and spending time outdoors can all be helpful.
- **Seek Support as Needed:** Caregiving is challenging, especially when dealing with the effects of trauma. Seek professional help from pediatricians, therapists, and support groups for yourself and the child. Early treatment and support can make a big difference.



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Taking Care of You Matters Too!

Your health and wellness are important. We tend to neglect ourselves when we focus on caring for others. Many of the things mentioned above to create a safe, stable environment for children are good for you too. It's okay to consider your feelings and acknowledge how your life has changed. If this is a long-term change, it is normal to grieve the loss of the life you were living. You may have conflicting feelings, such as feeling love for the child and resentment about the situation. These feelings are valid.



STRESS RELIEF FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS: PRACTICAL TIPS AND SUPPORT



1. PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE



Take breaks, get enough sleep, exercise, and maintain a healthy diet.

2. BUILD A SUPPORT SYSTEM



Connect with other kinship caregivers, join support groups, or seek therapy. Share your feelings.

3. CREATE ROUTINES & STRUCTURE



Establish predictable routines for children (meals, bedtime, homework). Reduces chaos and anxiety.

4. COMMUNICATE OPENLY & HONESTLY



Discuss feelings and challenges with the children in age-appropriate ways. Encourage expression.

5. SEEK FINANCIAL & LEGAL AID



Explore available resources, benefits, childcare assistance, and understand legal options.

6. FIND REFRESHING HOBBIES & OUTLETS



Engage in activities you enjoy outside of caregiving. Reduce tension and boost mood.

#KinshipCare #Support #Wellness

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Some ways to take care of yourself:

- **Plan time for a break.** Plan a sleepover with a relative or friend. Do something for you while the child is at school, at an activity, or in an individual counseling session.
- **Recharge throughout the day.** Little things can make a difference. Enjoy a cup of coffee. Connect with a friend. Whatever helps you feel refreshed.

- **Activate your network.** It can be easy to shut people out when we feel overwhelmed by changes but lean on those you trust for support.
- **Create fair expectations for yourself.** Creating a safe space with consistent routines and trust will help you both manage change and stress, even if things are messy at times. You don't have to be perfect.
- **It's okay to get help.** Counseling for the child can help them work through feelings, but what about you? Counseling, or a support group, can help you resolve feelings about the situation and the changes to your life and future.

Finding Calm

Utilizing calming strategies can help both you and the child in your care find ways to reduce stress. Here are some to try together or on your own.

CALMING STRATEGIES FOR STRESSFUL MOMENTS

— STAY CALM —

SIMPLE TECHNIQUES FOR IMMEDIATE RELIEF

1 DEEP BREATHING
Focus on slow, deep breaths. Inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 6.

2 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING
Acknowledge 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.

3 MINDFUL MEDITATION
Observe your thoughts and sensations without judgment. Focus on the present moment.

4 MOVE YOUR BODY
Take a quick walk, stretch, or do some jumping jacks to release physical tension.

5 CATCH A BREATH OF FRESH AIR
Step outside or open a window. Feel the fresh air and natural surroundings.

6 USE POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS
Repeat encouraging and calming statements to yourself.

7 CONNECT & TALK
Share how you feel with a trusted friend, family member, or colleague.

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When the Division of Family Services (DFS) is involved

Keeping Kids Safe and Connected

The Division of Family Services (DFS) knows that it is stressful for children to live in homes where there is abuse, neglect, violence, or drug use. When children must be moved for their own safety, the agency works hard to make the process less scary and upsetting.

One way they do this is through **kinship care**. This means a child stays with a relative or a close family friend instead of someone they don't know. This keeps the child safe and connected to people they already know and trust.

There is a specific process to get approved for kinship care. This happens in two main situations:

- When a **safety plan** is created to keep the child out of foster care by having family or kin provide care.
- When DFS has legal custody of the child.

This section includes information about how a kinship caregiver home is approved and use of safety planning and kinship care in place of foster care.

What is a safety plan?

A caregiver safety agreement, or safety plan, is a written agreement drafted by DFS and signed by the parents and caregivers to ensure the safety of the child. Safety plans are usually short term and should be renewed every 30 days.

Kinship Caregiver Assessment and Approval Process

If you are asked to consider caring for a child as part of a safety agreement or for a child in DFS custody, here are some things you can expect:

- **Relationship determination:** a caseworker will ask both you and the child about your relationship. Safety planning requires an established relationship between the child and kinship caregiver. For children in DFS custody, we can help establish a relationship before the child joins your home if you and child are both interested.

- **Home safety visit:** a caseworker will visit your home to make sure it is a safe place for the child. This includes making sure the utilities work, there are no safety hazards, and there is a physical space for the child to sleep. You will be asked to share information about who lives in your home.
 - If you do not live in Delaware and the child is in DFS custody, a referral will be made to have a home study completed by a caseworker in your state. This is part of a process outlined in the *Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)*.
- **Interviews:** everyone who lives in your home will be interviewed, including children, for the safety assessment process.
- **Background checks:** child welfare and criminal history will be checked for all adult and teen household members. If you live in another state, your local child welfare agency will be contacted. Be honest about your history and keep in mind that not all past charges or agency involvement will prevent you from being a kinship caregiver.

If there are items or services you need to be able to take care of the child, don't let that be a barrier! Ask the worker if they can help you get what you need.

DFS wants to make sure kinship caregivers have what they need to succeed. A caseworker will talk with you about how the child's daily needs will be met.

There is a checklist entitled [Things to Consider Before a Child Joins Your Home](#) on Page 10 and a [Home Readiness Worksheet](#) on page 11 that can help you prepare for the conversation. Here are the main things you will discuss:

- **Money and Support:** Do you have the financial ability to care for the child?
- **Childcare:** If you work, who will watch the child? If you need help paying for childcare, you may be eligible for a Purchase of Care (POC) subsidized childcare referral.

- **Transportation:** How will the child get to school and doctor appointments? Do you have the right car seats, or do you need help getting them?
- **Daily Supplies:** How will you get things like diapers, clothes, toothbrushes, or a safe place for the baby to sleep (like a travel crib)?
- **Overcoming Challenges:** If there is anything making it hard for the child to move in—like a lack of space or supplies—tell the caseworker. The agency or other local groups may be able to help.
- **Setting Up Services:** Does the child need services? Can you handle scheduling appointments, or do you need the caseworker to help?

DFS should give you all the information you need to decide if you can take on the role of a kinship caregiver. If they don't bring these topics up, make sure you ask about them yourself:

- **The Reason for Care:** What safety concerns or risks made it necessary for the child to enter kinship care?
- **The Timeline:** How long will the child likely need to stay in my home?
- **Parental Involvement:** What are the rules about how the child's parents can be involved in their life right now?
- **Family Time Details:** Is the child allowed to spend time with their parents?
 - Do I need to be there during the visits?
 - Where will they visit? What exactly is my responsibility?
- **Safety Protocols:** What should I do if a parent tries to take the child without permission or doesn't follow the agreed-upon rules?

- **Behavioral Expectations:** Does the child have any behaviors that might be difficult to handle? What kind of emotional reactions should I expect as they adjust to this big change?
- **Health and Medical Needs:** Does the child have any mental health or medical needs?

After the child joins your home

The process after the child joins your home is a little different if you are providing kinship care as part of a safety agreement vs. if the child is in DFS custody.

Safety Agreement / no DFS Custody	Child is in DFS Custody
<p>The caseworker will develop a safety agreement (plan) with you and other safety participants, including parents. You will be asked to sign the plan to confirm you agree. Ask for a copy of the agreement if the caseworker doesn't provide it.</p>	<p>The caseworker will provide a placement packet that includes information about the child. It should include a copy of the court order. Ask for a copy of the packet if it isn't provided.</p> <p>DFS will share court hearing details. You are encouraged to participate in these hearings.</p>
<p>The caseworker will provide a letter confirming that the child is in your temporary care through an approved safety agreement. Ask for the letter if you do not get it.</p>	<p>The caseworker will provide a letter confirming that the child is in your care. Ask for the letter if you do not get it.</p>
<p>DFS will ask the parent(s) to sign medical and educational consent affidavits so you can get medical care for the child and support their school participation. The caseworker will give you a copy. You will also be given a copy of the insurance card, if applicable. Ask for a copy if you do not receive them.</p>	<p>There will be a meeting (<i>Best Interests Meeting</i>) to decide whether the child will remain in their home school or transfer. You should be invited to participate. If the child remains in their home school, transportation will be arranged.</p>
<p>The child's parents still have legal authority (and responsibility) to consent for care and should make most decisions.</p>	

Safety Agreement / no DFS Custody	Child is in DFS Custody
<p>The caseworker should check-in within 2 days of the child joining your home to see how things are going. This is a good time to ask questions and let them know if you need anything.</p>	<p>The caseworker will visit you and the child within 5 days of joining your home.</p> <p>During this visit, the first <i>plan for a child in care</i> will be developed. It is important that you share how things are going, ask questions, and talk about what you and the child need to ensure safety and well-being.</p>
<p>The caseworker will make a referral to the Children's Choice Kinship Navigator Program if DFS will continue to be involved. This program can help you navigate the systems, answer questions, provide resources, and more. The service is voluntary, but you are encouraged to take advantage of this helpful opportunity!</p>	
<p>The caseworker will develop a family time plan to ensure the child has meaningful contact with parents and siblings who aren't in your home. If the child is a teen parent, the plan will include family time with their child if they aren't in the home too. The plan includes details about where and how often the family will have time together, if supervision is required and how it will be provided, transportation plans, and more. Ask for a copy if one isn't provided.</p>	
<p>The caseworker should tell you about the child's medical, dental, and mental health needs. This includes medical conditions, allergies, medications, and upcoming appointments. If you know something that the caseworker doesn't, please share it.</p>	
<p>If you need childcare, ask about options, including a possible referral for Purchase of Care subsidized childcare. You can find childcare resource information here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Office of Child Care Licensing: https://education.delaware.gov/families/birth-age-5/child_care_search/ ○ Children and Families First: https://www.cffde.org/accesscare 	
<p>The caseworker will visit you and the child(ren) at least monthly to monitor the safety agreement, assess child safety, and see if there is anything you need.</p>	<p>The caseworker will visit you and the child(ren) at least monthly to monitor how things are going, assess safety, check-in on how services are going, and see if there is anything you or the child(ren) need.</p>
<p>If the safety agreement is still needed, it will be renewed at least every 30 days. Changes may be made based on needs. You will be asked to sign again. The caseworker will give you a copy of the updated agreement.</p>	<p>The child plan will be updated throughout their time in your care and DFS custody. You and the child(ren) should be included in plan development and have a voice in goals and services.</p>

Legal Caregiver Options and Process Information

If the child will live with you for an extended stay, you may want to become their legal guardian or consider adoption. Guardianship/adoption will give you the legal authority to make educational and health decisions and improve your ability to obtain financial support for the child. There are several options for becoming a child's legal caregiver. The option you choose likely depends on how long the child will be in your care and if the parent(s) will be able to resume responsibility in the future.

PERMANENCY OPTIONS

Guardianship may be a good option if the situation is temporary and the parent(s) will likely resume care when able. It can last until the child becomes an adult. Guardianship allows the caregiver to make important decisions about the child's school and medical care. Parents can file a petition in Family Court to ask to have legal responsibility returned to them.

Permanent Guardianship is more secure because the parents cannot petition Family Court to reverse permanent guardianship. To become a child's permanent guardian, you will need to work with an agency to complete an assessment that includes contacting references, completing background checks and a physical examination, and other requirements. A judge must find a specific legal reason why the child cannot be in the care of their parent(s). Permanent guardianship lasts until the child reaches 18 years of age.

Adoption is when the caregiver becomes the child's legal parent. For a child to be adopted, their biological parent's rights must be terminated by Family Court. Adoption approval requires you to work with an agency to complete a Family Profile that includes references, background checks, physical examination, and other requirements.

You will need to file a petition in Family Court if you wish to become the child's legal guardian. If you are working with a kinship navigator or have a caseworker, they can help you work through the process. They cannot give legal advice but can help you complete the paperwork and understand the steps and timeline.

Directions for filing a guardianship petition and the court process can be found on the Delaware Family Court website:

<https://courts.delaware.gov/family/guardianship/>.

- The *Guardianship Instruction Packet* is available in both English and Spanish.
 - English packet:
<https://courts.delaware.gov/forms/download.aspx?id=28458>
 - Spanish packet:
<https://courts.delaware.gov/forms/download.aspx?id=114508>
 - Guardianship petition:
<https://courts.delaware.gov/family/guardianship/forms.aspx>
- The child's caseworker may submit a *Guardianship Checklist* to Family Court to demonstrate agency support for your petition. This checklist summarizes the assessment of your home and your ability to provide care.
- If you cannot afford to pay the filing fee, ask the caseworker or your kinship navigator if financial assistance is available.
- Your kinship navigator or the child's caseworker may be able to help with transportation to Family Court to file the petition and/or to attend hearings.
- After you are awarded guardianship, you are eligible for post-permanency support services. Take advantage of these services! You can choose to work with one of the following providers:
 - <https://abcfoc.org/post-permanency/>
 - <https://www.childrenschoice.org/delaware-programs>
 - <https://www.cffde.org/adoption>
- Learn as much as you can about the ways in which behaviors may change over time. The impact of past trauma and continued feelings of grief and loss for a child living away from their parents can be delayed. Behavioral challenges and mental health needs may emerge later. This can be exacerbated or initiated as they enter adolescence and experience hormonal changes and are exploring and defining their identity in new

ways. Remember, this isn't about you. A child can miss their parents and feel a sense of loss at the same time they love you and appreciate the home and care you provide. This is true even if the parents were abusive and the child is now in a safe environment. Seeking support through groups and treatment can help both of you manage your feelings, enhance skills, and keep the lines of communication open.

- If you would like help finding services and resources for the child, or yourself, discuss options with your kinship navigator, the child's caseworker, or the post-permanency provider. There is also information in the *Resources* section of this guide. This may include things like:
 - medical insurance, benefits, school enrollment, childcare, concrete needs, afterschool activities, counseling, and groups for children.
 - parenting classes, counseling, and support groups for you. You have taken on a lot, and it is okay to lean in to support services for yourself and to work on sharpening your skills!

Note: the process to file a guardianship petition in Family Court is the same if DFS is not involved, but the steps listed above that include DFS will not pertain.

Child Advocates

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Guardian ad Litem (GAL)

You may be contacted by a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or Guardian ad Litem (GAL) to talk about the child and how they are doing in your home. A CASA and GAL have the same basic job – they are appointed by a judge to be the “eyes and ears” of the court and advocate for a child's best interests when the child has experienced abuse, neglect, or dependency or when there is a custody dispute. A CASA is a trained community volunteer who acts as an advocate for the child and a *friend of the court* by providing detailed information on the child's situation and needs. A GAL is typically an attorney who acts as a legal representative to make formal recommendations to the court.

Preparing for your first meeting with a CASA or GAL can help you feel more comfortable and ensure the child gets the best support. They will likely visit your home to see how the child is settling in and will ask to speak with them privately if they are old enough.

They want to understand the child's daily life and how you are managing.

Common topics include:

- **Daily routines:** what is the child's schedule for meals, bedtime, and homework?
- **Health and wellness:** is the child up to date on medical and dental visits? Are they taking any medications?
- **School and activities:** How is the child doing in school? Do they have an IEP or need extra help with tutoring? What activities do they enjoy?
- **Family connections:** How are visits with parents and siblings going? How does the child react to these visits? Have they shared how they feel after visits?
- **Your needs:** Do you have enough space, clothing, or financial support to care for the child?

The CASA or GAL is also a resource for you. You might want to ask them questions about the court process and what you can expect. You can share specific service needs; they may be able to help.

To make the most of your meeting, you may want to have a few things handy such as:

- School documents, such as recent report cards or the child's IEP
- Medical records, including recent/upcoming appointments and current medications
- A list of your questions and/or concerns

Engaging with you matters because the CASA or GAL will provide a report to the judge. By talking to you, they can share your perspective and the child's progress with the court. They are often a good resource for you if you are having trouble getting services for the child.

Resources

**This section includes
checklists, worksheets, and resources
to help support your kinship caregiver journey.**



Things to Consider Before the Child Joins Your Home

Here is a checklist of information that you should consider before the child joins your home. If DFS is involved, discuss this information with the caseworker and ask about any information overlooked to ensure you know what to expect.

1. The Reality of the Child's Trauma

- ❑ **Detailed Needs:** Why does the child need kinship care? How long can I expect the child to be in my care? Has the child experienced violence, abuse, or neglect?
- ❑ **Trauma Expression:** What are signs of trauma? How can I help the child manage their emotions and trauma response?
- ❑ **Diagnoses:** What are the child's current medical needs and diagnoses? What medications are they taking and what do I need to know about them?
- ❑ **Behavioral Needs:** What behaviors has the child been displaying? How might that change as they work through what has happened? Does the child use substances and are they in treatment if so? Are there juvenile delinquency or school behavior concerns?

2. Family Dynamics & Boundary Setting

- ❑ **The "Parent" Role:** What can help me make the shift to being the child's caregiver?
- ❑ **Household Impacts:** How can I help prepare other members of my home, especially my children, for this change? Have I thought about who will be affected and how?
- ❑ **Family Time & Safety:** What do I need to know about visits with parents and other family members? What other contacts are permitted?
- ❑ **Loyalty Conflicts:** How can I balance my relationship with the parent(s) and role as their child's caregiver?

3. Financial & Legal Transparency

- ❑ **Financial Support:** What are possible financial support options? Have I sufficiently thought through my financial means to add another child to my home?
- ❑ **Long-term Options:** What options do I have if the child needs to stay with me for a long time? What other options does the child have? How do I file for guardianship?

4. Logistics & Concrete Supports

- ❑ **Daily Life:** What resources are available if I need help with transportation or childcare?
- ❑ **Material Needs:** What do I do if there are things I need so the child can stay with me?
- ❑ **Support System:** How can my family and friends help me?

Home Readiness Worksheet

This worksheet can help you think through the daily needs of a child before they move into your home. You can use these notes when you talk to the caseworker or other professional supports.

1. Daily Care & Logistics

- **Work & School:** If I am at work, who will watch the child?
 - *Name/Location:* _____
- **Daycare Help:** Do I need a referral for financial help with daycare (Purchase of Care)?
 - Yes No
- **School Travel:** How will the child get to and from school?
 - *Plan:* _____

2. Health & Safety

- **Appointments:** Do I have a way to get the child to the doctor or dentist?
 - Yes No
- **Car Seats:** Does the child have the right size car seat for my vehicle?
 - Yes No
 - *If no, what size is needed?* _____

3. Essential Supplies

Check off the items you already have. Circle the ones you still need.

- **Bedding:** Crib, bed, sheets, etc.
- **Clothing:** Enough outfits for the current season.
- **Hygiene:** Diapers, wipes, toothbrush, soap, and towels.
- **Feeding:** Highchair, bottles, or booster seat.

4. My Support System

- **Barriers:** Is there anything (like a lack of space or a broken appliance) that makes it hard to take the child in right now?
 - *Notes:* _____
- **Help Needed:** Do I want the caseworker to help me set up appointments, or am I comfortable doing it myself?
 - [] I'll do it [] I'd like help

5. Emergency & Important Contacts

- **Caseworker Name:** _____
 - *Phone Number:* _____
 - *Email Address:* _____
- **Caseworker's Supervisor Name:** _____
 - *Phone Number:* _____
 - *Email Address:* _____
- **Emergency Contact (Family/Friend):** _____
 - *Phone Number:* _____
- **Child's School/Daycare:** _____
 - *Phone Number:* _____
- **Child's Pediatrician:** _____
 - *Phone Number:* _____

6. Important Medical Information

- **Allergies (Food or Medicine):** _____
- **Current Medications:** _____
- **Special Medical Needs:** _____

"Welcome Home" Activity Guide

The first few days in a new home can be a lot for a child. These activities are designed to help them feel safe, seen, and part of your home without feeling overwhelmed.

1. Creating Their Space

- **The "Favorite Color" Quest:** Take the child to a store or look at online options together. Let them pick out an item for their room in their favorite color—like a pillowcase, a poster, or a soft blanket. This helps them feel like the space truly belongs to them.
- **The Comfort Kit:** Put together a small box or basket with a few "anytime" items: a flashlight for nighttime, a sketchbook or journal, and a stuffed animal or soft pillow.

2. Getting to Know the House

- **The "Kitchen Tour":** Show them where the snacks and drinks are kept. Tell them, "You don't have to ask if you're thirsty; this is your kitchen too." Let them pick one favorite snack to add to the grocery list for next week.
- **The Scavenger Hunt:** Hide 3 or 4 small treats or stickers around the common areas. It's a fun, low-pressure way for them to explore the layout of the house.

3. Building Connections

- **The "Family Favorites" Dinner:** Ask the child what their favorite meal is and try to make it (or order it) for their first or second night. If they don't have one, share one of your family's favorite meals.
- **A Quiet Activity:** Sometimes kids just need to be near you without having to talk. Set up a "parallel play" station where you can both do something relaxing, like:
 - **Watercolor Painting:** Set out some paper and paints for quiet creative time.
 - **Building Blocks:** Spread out some LEGOs or blocks on the floor.
 - **Movie Night:** Let them pick a movie and share popcorn for a cozy night in.

4. Establishing a Routine

- **The "What Happens Next" Chart:** Use a small whiteboard or piece of paper to show the plan for the next day (Breakfast, School, Park, Dinner, Bed). Knowing what is coming next helps lower a child's anxiety.

Get-To-Know-Me Questionnaire

DFS will provide this if the child is in DFS custody. Otherwise, you can complete this together.

1. My favorite foods at mealtimes are:
2. Things that will make me feel comfortable and less nervous in the home are:
3. I'm allergic to and/or I get sick from:
4. I don't like to eat these foods:
5. If I have religious beliefs, they are:
6. To feel safe, I require/need:
7. My preferred pronouns are:
8. Traditions and cultural practices I'd like to practice are:
9. These things make me angry:
10. These things help you decompress/calm down:
11. I feel positive when my caregiver tells me (for example, I did a good job today today):
12. The best way to check in with you or find out how you're doing is:
13. These are important people in my life that I would like to stay in contact with:
14. I like to use these social media apps:
15. My favorite sports/activities/hobbies I like are:
16. My current needs are:

Information and Services

The following information may be useful in your kinship care journey.

Important Numbers

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Confidential support by calling/texting 988 or <https://988lifeline.org/>
- **Child Crisis Hotline:** 1-800-969-HELP (4357)
- **Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting:** 1-800-292-9582 or <https://kids.delaware.gov/family-services/child-abuse-and-neglect-reporting/>
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or <https://dvcc.delaware.gov/24-hour-hotline-numbers/>

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma Information

- Family Caregiver Alliance: <https://www.caregiver.org/news/at-a-glance-aces/>
- live beyond: <https://livebeyondca.org/parents-caregivers/>
- NumberStory.org: <https://www.numberstory.org/>

Birth to Three (B23) Early Intervention Program: <https://www.b23de.org/>

Early intervention services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities.

Caregiver Information and Support: <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dsaapd/caregive/>

Includes a variety of resources for relative caregivers, including:

- *Delaware's Legal Handbook for Grandparents & Other Relatives Raising Children*
https://dhss.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/dsaapd/pdf/legal_handbook.pdf
- *GRAND – A Resource Guide for Grandparents and Relative Caregivers Raising Children*
<https://dhss.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/dsaapd/pdf/grand.pdf>

Delaware 211: <https://delaware211.org/>

Delaware 211 is a free, confidential service connecting Delaware residents to health and social services, including food, housing, utility, and mental health programs.

Delaware Assist: <https://assist.dhss.delaware.gov/>

Delaware ASSIST is an online portal that allows residents to apply for, renew, and manage state health and social service programs. It can be used to access and apply for benefits, including Medicaid, the food supplement program, financial assistance, and childcare assistance.

Department of Services for Children, Youth, and their Families (DSCYF):

<https://kids.delaware.gov/>

- **Division of Family Services (DFS):** <https://kids.delaware.gov/family-services/>
 - Foster Parent Information: <https://kids.delaware.gov/family-services/foster-care/>
 - Adoption Information: <https://kids.delaware.gov/family-services/adoption/>
- **Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services (DPBHS):**
<https://kids.delaware.gov/prevention-and-behavioral-health-services/>

Information about how to find outpatient providers, crisis services, prevention services, and school-based programs. If you feel the child needs more than outpatient counseling, contact the DBPHS Information and Referral Unit weekdays from 8:00 – 4:30 p.m. at 302-633-2571 or 1-800-722-7710. Email: DSCYF_Intake_General@delaware.gov. Higher level of care referral form:

<https://kidsfiles.delaware.gov/pbhs/pdfs/Higher%20Level%20of%20Care%20Referral.final%20fillable%20doc.pdf>
- **Family Trauma Help:** <https://kids.delaware.gov/information/family-trauma-help/>
- **Suicide Prevention and Warning Signs:** <https://kids.delaware.gov/prevention-and-behavioral-health-services/suicide-prevention/>

Family Court Guardianship Information: <https://courts.delaware.gov/family/guardianship/>

Family Court Guardianship Petition Instruction Packet and Petition:

- English packet: <https://courts.delaware.gov/forms/download.aspx?id=28458>
- Spanish packet: <https://courts.delaware.gov/forms/download.aspx?id=114508>
- Guardianship petition can be found here:
<https://courts.delaware.gov/family/guardianship/forms.aspx>

FIRST Community Directory: <https://kids.delaware.gov/first-community-directory/>

A searchable online directory of programs throughout Delaware.

Generations United: <https://www.gu.org/>

Resource information for grandfamilies and other relative caregivers.

Help is Here DE: <https://www.helpisherede.com/>

This site provides information about mental health and substance use treatment, including crisis resources, phone support, and in-person help for youth and adults.

Kinship Care Program: <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dss/kinshipcr/>

Information about a Division of Social Services program that provides immediate needs for clothing, shelter, health, safety, and educational supplies to kinship caregivers during the 180-day transition period when child first moves into the kinship caregiver home.

Post-Permanency Services flyer:

<https://courts.delaware.gov/forms/download.aspx?id=298228>

Post-Permanency Services Providers:

- <https://abcfoc.org/post-permanency/>
- <https://www.childrenschoice.org/delaware-programs>
- <https://www.cffde.org/adoption>

State Services for Grandparents and Relative Caregivers Raising Others' Children:

https://dhss.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/dsaapd/pdf/services_for_grandparents.pdf