Welcome to the Kinship Care Program! Thank you for opening your heart and home to a child you know and care about who has come into Oklahoma’s care due to abuse or neglect. Your willingness to take a child into your home shows a great deal of commitment and love.
We understand that an additional child in your home brings new challenges and changes that impact your family. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services is here to help by offering the support you may need in adjusting to an additional family member living in your home.
What is Bridge Kinship Care?

When a child can no longer remain safe in his or her own home due to abuse or neglect, OKDHS seeks to place the child with someone who the child or parents know. These placements are with people who are related to the child by blood, marriage, adoption, or by an emotional tie or bond. Caregivers may be grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles, nieces or nephews, cousins, godparents, or neighbors. When you accept placement of a child with whom you have a relationship, you are providing KINSHIP CARE, which makes you a Bridge Kinship Resource Home/Family.

How Does a Child Come into Bridge Kinship Care?

When a child has been abused or neglected and OKDHS determines that a parent is unable to safely protect the child or provide adequate care, OKDHS intervenes to ensure that are the child is protected and cared for.

When determining placement of a child, preference shall be given to relatives and individuals who have a kinship relationship with the child. OKDHS will make diligent efforts to place the child with a kinship caregiver, provided the child’s needs are met and safety is ensured.
What are the Benefits of Bridge Kinship Care?

- Allows the child to live with people they know and trust.
- Provides parents with a sense of hope that their child will remain connected to the family.
- Lessens the impact of loss, grief and uncertainty for both the child and the parents.
- Preserves the child’s history, culture and identity.
- Creates a sense of stability in the child’s life.

Initial Placement

Bridge kinship care is a unique program because the child can be placed with a family member or kin before all of the regular foster home requirements for approval have been met so the child can be placed with family members or kin quickly and with the least amount of disruption in his or her life as possible.

How does this happen, and why? The purposes of placing a child with a bridge kinship caregiver are to ease the transition because the caregivers are known to the child, maintain connections to the community and family of origin, preserve culture, language and family traditions, and improve the likelihood of siblings remaining together.
Initial Kinship Approval Process

A child may be placed in a bridge kinship home prior to completion of the bridge resource family assessment and pre-service training.

The child welfare or resource specialist completes the following initial kinship approval process before a child is placed:

- The specialist or another CW worker makes a home visit to talk with you about your willingness and ability to meet the child’s needs, even if it is for a short time, and completes an Initial Kinship Placement Agreement.
- The specialist or another CW worker completes a records check for each adult household member to determine if there is CW history or if other services have been provided. A juvenile services search is completed on all children older than 13 years of age and who are not in OKDHS custody.
- The specialist or another CW worker completes a house assessment, which is a walk-through of your home to assess its physical safety and outside surroundings.
- The specialist or another CW worker completes a Request for Background Check. This request is submitted to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation for each person in the household who is 18 years of age and older. The check provides information about the criminal history, driving record and sex offender registry. If you have lived in Oklahoma for less than five years, you will
have to obtain an equivalent background check from the previous state(s) in which you lived.
• You will complete a Bridge Resource Family Assessment Application.
• The specialist or another CW worker will ask you to provide the names of three personal references.

Who’s Who?

Who are these “workers” coming to my home? Do they all do the same thing? OKDHS has several different types of workers whose roles within OKDHS are very different. Here is a general list of the different types of workers and their responsibilities. We hope this list helps you understand what each one does.

Child Protective Services Specialist

• Responds to calls when a person suspects a child is being abused or neglected.
• Evaluates reports of abuse and/or neglect, assesses child safety, assesses the risk of future maltreatment and the need for protective services and then assists in coordinating services.
• Makes a recommendation to the District Attorney’s office whether or not a child is safe in the home.

Permanency Planning Specialist

• Is the worker for the family and child.
• Works with the child’s parents to identify services to help correct the conditions that resulted in the child being
placed in OKDHS custody.
- Visits you and the child on a monthly basis and informs you of family visits, court hearings and other information important to the child’s case.
- Talks with you when you have questions about the child, including arranging medical, visual and dental appointments.
- Reports to the court and explains the progress the child’s parent(s) has made on the Individualized Service Plan and makes recommendations to the court about the child’s status while in out–of–home care.

Foster Care Resource Specialist

- Is your worker.
- Explains the requirements to become an approved Bridge Kinship Resource Home, and makes a home visit to assess your home for an Initial Kinship Placement. If approved, this allows the child to be placed in your home before you have met all the requirements to be a fully approved kinship foster home.
- Completes your family assessment/home study, helps you complete the contract for payment purposes and explains what forms are needed.
- Provides you with Federal Bureau of Investigation finger print cards and vouchers, helps determine if you are eligible to receive child care assistance, answer questions about your stipends and maintenance payments, and other questions you may have.
Contract Resource Family Assessment Specialist

- Contracts with a private agency to complete the Bridge Resource Family Assessments.
- Is a subcontractor, not an OKDHS employee.
- Assists OKDHS in getting your assessment completed as quickly as possible. It is important for you to meet with the subcontractor and provide the requested documents and information.

An approved assessment/home study, along with fingerprints and training, must be completed before you receive monthly foster care maintenance payments.

Adoption Resource Specialist

- Is a Child Welfare specialist who works with families who want to adopt a child.

Child Welfare Supervisors

Each of the above mentioned workers, with the exception of the Contract Resource Family Assessment Specialist, has an immediate supervisor who is available to answer questions.
Financial Assistance

We understand the financial strain placed on your budget by taking in additional children on such short notice. To assist you with the initial placement, OKDHS can offer financial up-front support to assist you. Here are some questions that you may have thought about.

Q. I was told that payment began the day the child was placed in my home. Is that correct?
A. No, that is not correct.

Q. The child is already in my home and I have already spent a lot of money. When will I start getting paid?
A. OKDHS makes maintenance payments when your home is fully approved as the Bridge Kinship Resource Home. If you are related to the child, you may apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for the child at your local OKDHS office. Please apply immediately.

Q. What is a training stipend?
A. You may be eligible for a one-time training stipend, paid in two parts. The initial stipend of $375 is paid when you are enrolled in the 27 hours of pre-service training. Enrollment in training is the responsibility of your worker. The final stipend of $375 is paid when you have completed the pre-service training. This money is to help you with gas, babysitting or other expenses so you can attend training. The child must be in your home to receive the training stipends.
Q. Am I eligible for a Kinship Start-Up Stipend?
A. Kinship families who have not been approved for payment and have not been an approved resource in the last five years may be eligible for the one-time KSUS. This money helps meet the additional financial needs that result from having a child placed in your home.

Q. How much is the KSUS?
A. The KSUS is equivalent to the monthly foster care maintenance payment according to the age of the child. The child must be in your home on the 15th day of placement to receive the stipend.

Q. Do the stipends come to me automatically?
A. You must have a signed contract and a number assigned before payment can be made.

Q. Will I get my check in the mail?
A. You will receive your payment on a MasterCard debit card or through direct deposit to your bank.

Q. Can I receive foster care maintenance payments and TANF payments at the same time?
A. No. Notify your TANF worker immediately when you have been approved for foster care maintenance payments. The amount of your last TANF payment is automatically deducted from your foster care maintenance payment so an overpayment will not be created. You cannot receive the
full amount of the maintenance payment or the full amount of any other type payment through the Social Security Administration for a death benefit of the child’s parent, Supplemental Security Income, or child support. Notify your foster care specialist immediately about any monies you receive on behalf of the child so you will not have an overpayment.

*Before you receive any money, you must have:*

- Signed a Fixed Rate Kinship Foster Care Contract. The contract will be sent to Child Welfare Services Foster Care Section for a contract number to be assigned.
- Provided copies of your Social Security card and driver’s license.
- A debit card that has been pinned. This card comes to you by mail in a plain white envelope. Please do not mistake it for junk mail. You may also request direct deposit instead.
Approval Process

Your home is approved for the monthly foster care maintenance payment when the following are completed.

- A contract has been signed by the kinship bridge resource parents.
- Completion of Guiding Principles for Oklahoma Bridge Resource Families Pre-Service Training (27 hours).
- FBI fingerprint background check results have been received and reviewed for all adults in the home.
- The Resource Family Assessment is completed and the OKDHS supervisor has approved it. You will receive a signed copy of the assessment.

Your resource specialist will assist you in the following:

- Completing the application packet.
- Enrolling you in training.
- Obtaining a contract number.
- Obtaining your fingerprint cards and vouchers.
- Completing your day care request, when applicable.

This is a list of documents that you will need before your home is approved. Having these documents ready when the foster care specialist or contractor meets with you to complete the assessment will speed up the process toward approval.

- Copy of your current marriage license, if applicable.
- Copy of all divorce decrees, if applicable.
• Copy of legal separation document, if applicable.
• Immunization records for each child in your family who is not in OKDHS custody.
• Copy of vehicle insurance verification.
• Copy of driver’s license for each applicant.
• Copy of current pet vaccination record.
• Copy of Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Military Duty, DD Form 214.
• Employment verification.

Initial Meeting
You may be invited to an initial meeting within seven days of the child being placed in your home. This is the first meeting between the child’s parent(s) and the Bridge kinship resource parent(s) and provides an opportunity to share information about the child’s needs.

Visitation and Supervision
The CW specialist for the child’s case will meet with you and discuss the visitation schedule and supervision responsibilities. Your foster care resource specialist will be able to assist in answering questions related to visitation and supervision.
Visitation is a right
The child and parent or parents have a right to regular visitation.

Visitation is available to the children and families involved with CW, unless visitation is not in the child’s best interests, taking into consideration:

- Protection of the physical safety of the child; protection of the life of the child; or
- Protection of the child from being traumatized by contact with the parent; and
- The child’s expressed wishes.

Frequency of parent-child visitation
Family visitation begins no later than one week after the child’s removal and a visitation schedule that considers the needs of the child is developed.

Frequent, purposeful visitation contributes to successful placement and reunification and reduces the time to reunification. Visitation is the single most predictive factor in whether a child is successfully reunified. Parent-child visitation is a high priority of the child welfare specialist.
The Child’s Team

You, as a kinship parent, along with the child welfare specialist, the child’s parents, and other professionals involved with the family, work together in planning for the child (see the diagram below). Many people are involved in a team effort to reunite the child with his or her own family or when this is determined not to be in the child’s best interest, to establish another permanent home for the child. You are a vital member of the child’s team, and the information you have regarding the children placed in your home is very important to a successful outcome.
Services

OKDHS is the guardian of the child while in your care and responsible for providing services. OKDHS provides you with assistance in accessing supportive services for a child in your care.

Medical Care, Medical Information and Educational Information

OKDHS custody children receive medical care through SoonerCare, Oklahoma’s Medicaid program. All children in OKDHS custody and residing in out-of-home care are assigned to and receive their medical benefits through SoonerCare. When the SoonerCare case is certified, two medical cards are sent to the local OKDHS office. The child welfare specialist retains one and the other is given to the kinship caregiver. If you have additional questions, please contact your foster care resource specialist.

The Child’s Passport is a web application available on the OKDHS website. Medical and educational information for children in OKDHS or tribal custody may be accessed through the Child’s Passport. The Child’s Passport link is found on the OKDHS home page (okdhs.org) under the “Quick Links” section and can also be accessed via eportal.okdhs.org.
Child Care

Q. My husband and I both work every day and I can’t afford to pay for child care. What can I do?
A. When both kinship resource parents work 20 hours or more per week each, OKDHS can pay child care expenses. Verification of employment must be provided, including the days of the week and hours of the day that are worked, when the application for child care is made. Child care is paid for employment purposes only, not for educational or training reasons. If you need child care, talk to your foster care specialist immediately.

Q. I don’t work but sometimes I have appointments and errands to run and I don’t want to take the child with me. Will OKDHS pay for child care or who can I leave them with?
A. OKDHS cannot pay for child care in the situation that you mentioned. It is important that you identify an “alternate caregiver” who can watch the children when they cannot go with you. That person must be approved by your foster care specialist before you may leave them with that person. This is very important. Contact your foster care specialist as soon as you have someone identified.

Policies
You will learn more about some of the important OKDHS policies about being a kinship foster family for a child in OKDHS custody. The following are policies that you need to know now.
**Discipline**
This is an important subject. There is no difference in regards to the discipline techniques, be it a kinship or traditional resource. Physical discipline such as spanking, swatting and slapping on the hands are neither appropriate nor approved forms of discipline. OKDHS prohibits the use of any form of physical discipline on a child in OKDHS custody, even when a kin relationship exists.

**Confidentiality**
Case-specific information about a child in OKDHS custody or the child’s family is confidential and is not shared except when obtaining services for the child.

**Religion**
The religious preference of the child in OKDHS custody and the child’s parents, when appropriate, is considered when integrating the child into your family.

**Smoking**
Kinship foster parents or anyone else will not smoke in the home when a child is placed in the home. Nor will they smoke in the automobile when transporting a child.

**Legal**
When a child is placed in OKDHS custody, the family’s case will be reviewed through the Juvenile Court system from the initial removal of the child until a decision has been made to return the child to his or her own home or to make another permanent placement and custody determination. Your assigned case workers, permanency planning and foster care resource specialist answer question and provide you additional information on the case status.

**If you have a problem or any questions, contact the child’s CW worker or your foster care resource specialist.**
**TRAINING INFORMATION**

Beginning Date: ______________ Ending Date: ______________

LOCATION: ______________________________________________________

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Specialist</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource Specialist Supervisor</td>
<td>Phone Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child’s Permanency Worker</td>
<td>Phone Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permanency Supervisor</td>
<td>Phone Number</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCE INFORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foster Parent Help Line</th>
<th>1-800-376-9729</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Resource Parent Support Center</td>
<td>1-800-376-9729 or <a href="http://www.okbridgefamilies.com">www.okbridgefamilies.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Resource Information</td>
<td>211 or <a href="http://www.211oklahoma.org">www.211oklahoma.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Resource Family Handbook</td>
<td>Request a copy from your foster care resource specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sooner Care Helpline (contact to find a medical provider who accepts Medicaid.)</td>
<td>1-800-987-7767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC (Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program</td>
<td>Contact your local Health Department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other

Other