




# Supporting Kinship Caregivers

What Child Advocates Can Do to Support Relatives Raising  
Children in the Child Welfare System



“Kinship caregivers play a critical role in helping traumatized children to heal. By maintaining ties to family, community, and culture, children are spared additional losses. Being sheltered in the loving arms of a familiar adult is an invaluable first step on the road to healing.”

-Dr. Sarah Springer, Chair, American Academy of Pediatrics, Council on Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship Care

# Training Goals and Objectives

Goal: Learn how to help reduce the barriers to kinship families receiving monthly financial support so that children can thrive in their care.

- Understand strengths and benefits of kinship care
- Understand the unique needs and challenges facing relative caregivers
- Lift the veil on the approval and licensing process and discuss barriers for relatives to becoming licensed
- Examine non-safety exemptions and licensing waivers to increase licensing eligibility for kin
- Build empathy for relatives navigating the child welfare system

# CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVES

## Grandma Jean

- Previously raised grandkids without state involvement
- Feels insulted to have to jump through hoops to care for her grandbaby
- Has a household member who may pose a barrier the home study

## Great-Uncle Jared

- Poor communication from DCYF on length of time-commitment
- Delay in learning about resources
- DCYF perceives hesitancy from caregivers
- Housing setup is considered inadequate by the state



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Research shows that children removed from their parents fare better when placed with extended family over nonrelated foster parents.

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## Corrosive Myths About Families

**Myth: “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”**

Reality: Kin provide unique protective factors to children.

**Myth: “It’s their moral responsibility.”**

Reality: Love and morals don’t pay the bills.

**Myth: “Kinship care is not as stable.”**

Reality: Children experience fewer placement changes and are less likely to re-enter foster care.

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# Children Thrive in Kinship Care

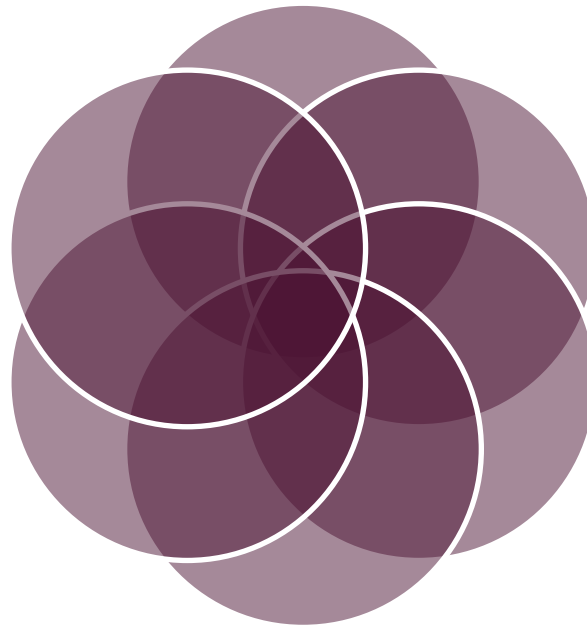
Cultural Identity &  
Community Connections

Permanency

Placement  
Stability

Safety

Connection  
to Siblings



Well-Being

## Kinship Care is More Prevalent Than You Think

Nationally, 1 in 11 children live in kinship care at some point in their life



43,000 Washington children lived in kinship care in 2018.

For every child in kinship foster care, there are 20 being raised outside the child welfare system





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## Who are Kinship Families?

- More likely to be lower income, single, older, and less employed than families in which at least one parent is present.
- 60% of children in kinship care live below 200% of federal poverty line.

### **2021 Federal Poverty Level**

\$12,880-one person

\$26,500-family of four

*Poor ≠ Unsafe*

## It's Hard for Grandfamilies to Get Help

- Circumstances of child's removal creates greater challenges
- System is complicated & time consuming
- Lack of support to navigate the systems (there is not currently a Kinship Navigator Program)

## Supporting them Helps Children Thrive More

- Research shows when kinship families are offered support for learning about available financial and health services, the social and mental health outcomes for children are even better.
- Greater likelihood of parental connection to a child in a relative home, but relatives need help with boundaries, understanding trauma, and managing their own emotional and physical health.

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Percentage of Washington children in kinship placements  
under the supervision of DCYF

45%

Percentage of kinship families that are licensed?

12%

# Comparison of Monthly Stipends

## Non-Needy TANF

\$363/ month + roughly \$90 per additional child

Household of 3 children =  
**\$543/ month**

## Foster Care Reimbursement

\$672-\$810/ month per child at a minimum

Household of 3 children =  
**\$2,106/month**

# Lorraine's Story





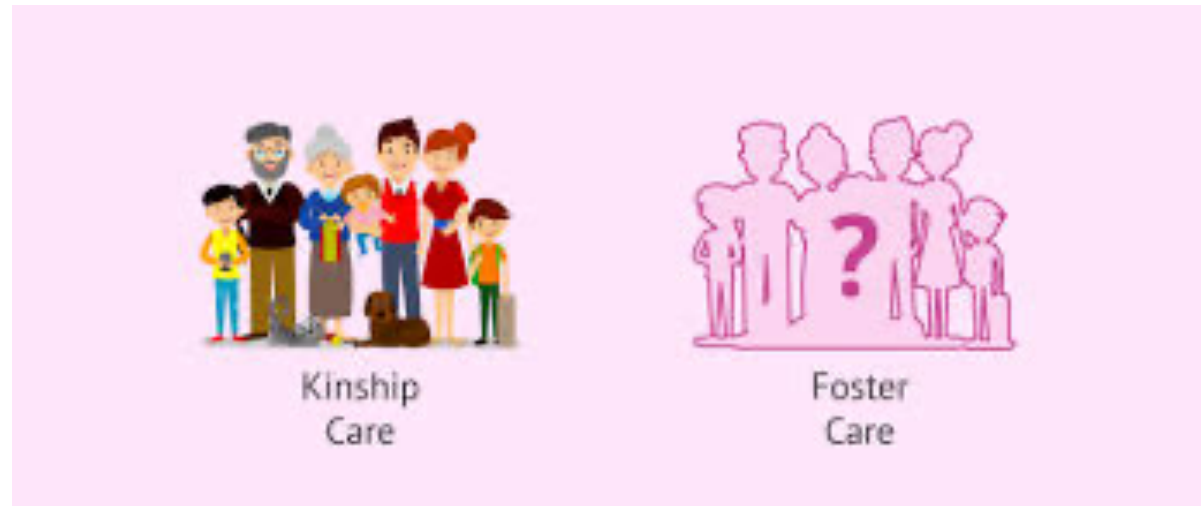
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“Children are best cared for by a person they have a relationship with, when the caregiver is assessed as safe and suitable.”

DCYF Policy 45274

# Why Prioritize Kinship Families for Placement?

- Unique benefits to children and families
- Reflects our current values
- Federal law
- State policy





# HISTORICAL PRACTICE OF SEPARATING FAMILIES UNDER THE GUISE OF CHILD WELFARE

Orphan Trains  
1854-1929

Native American  
Boarding Schools  
1860-1960

Indian Adoption  
Project  
1958-1967

By 1926, 83% of  
school-aged Indian  
children were in  
boarding schools

Between 1941-1967,  
one-third of Indian  
children were  
separated from their  
families

# Overrepresentation of American Indian/Native Alaskan Children in Foster Care

## American Indian and Native Alaskan Children

- AI/NA children make up 0.9% of children in the United States but are 2.1% of all children placed into foster care
- Overrepresentation 2.7x greater than their proportion to the population

## Caucasian/White Children

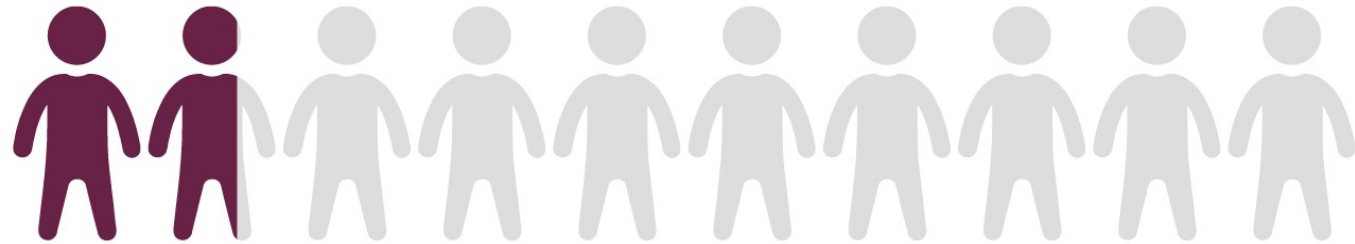
- Caucasian/White Children make up 52% of children in the United States and are only 42% of all children placed into foster care.
- Underrepresentation 0.8x lower than their proportion to the population

# Placement Priorities for American Indian/Native Alaskan children

Only

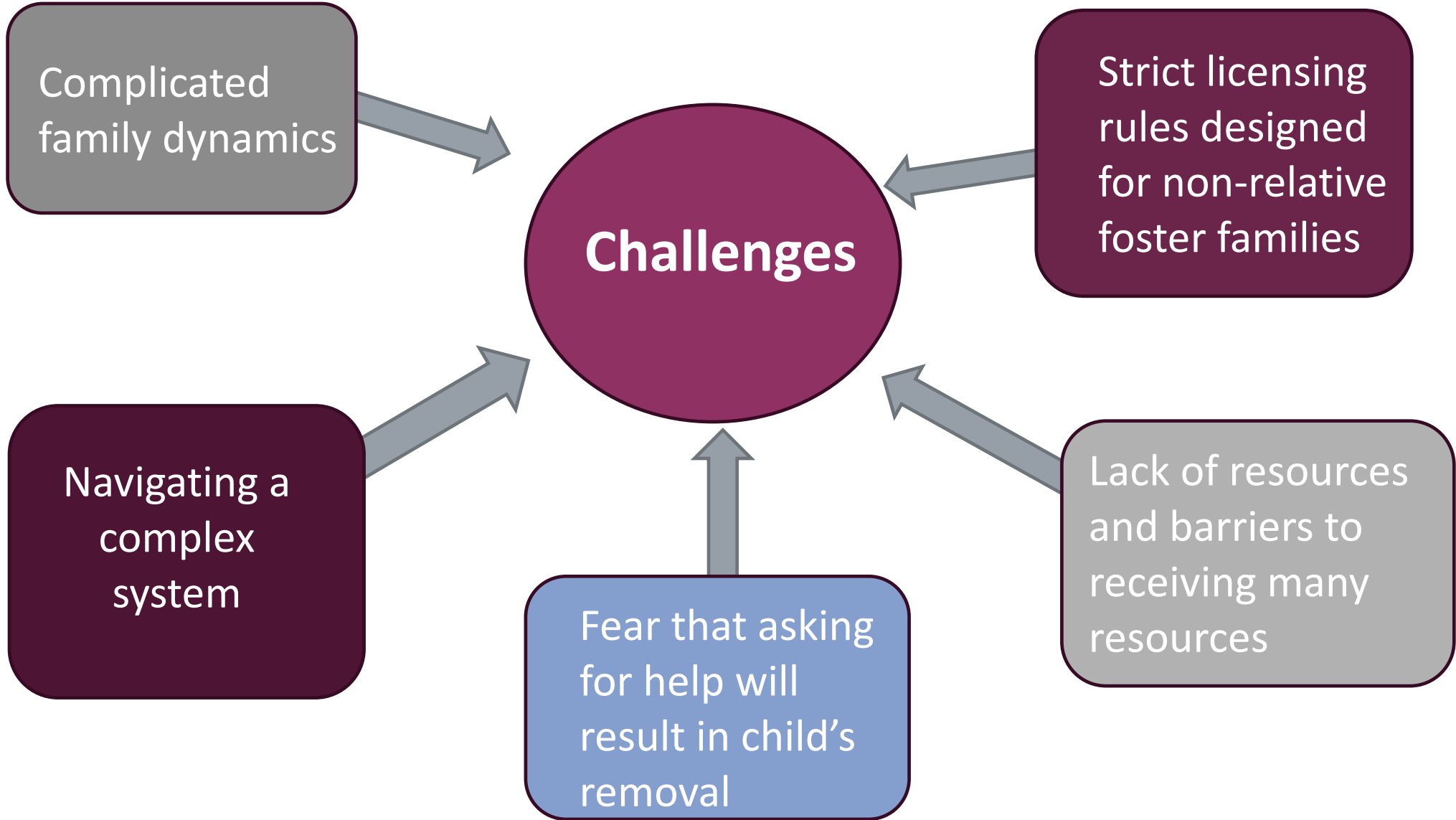
**17%** OF AMERICAN INDIAN CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE LIVE WITH AMERICAN INDIAN CAREGIVERS

Time frame: approximately 18 months after a CPS investigation





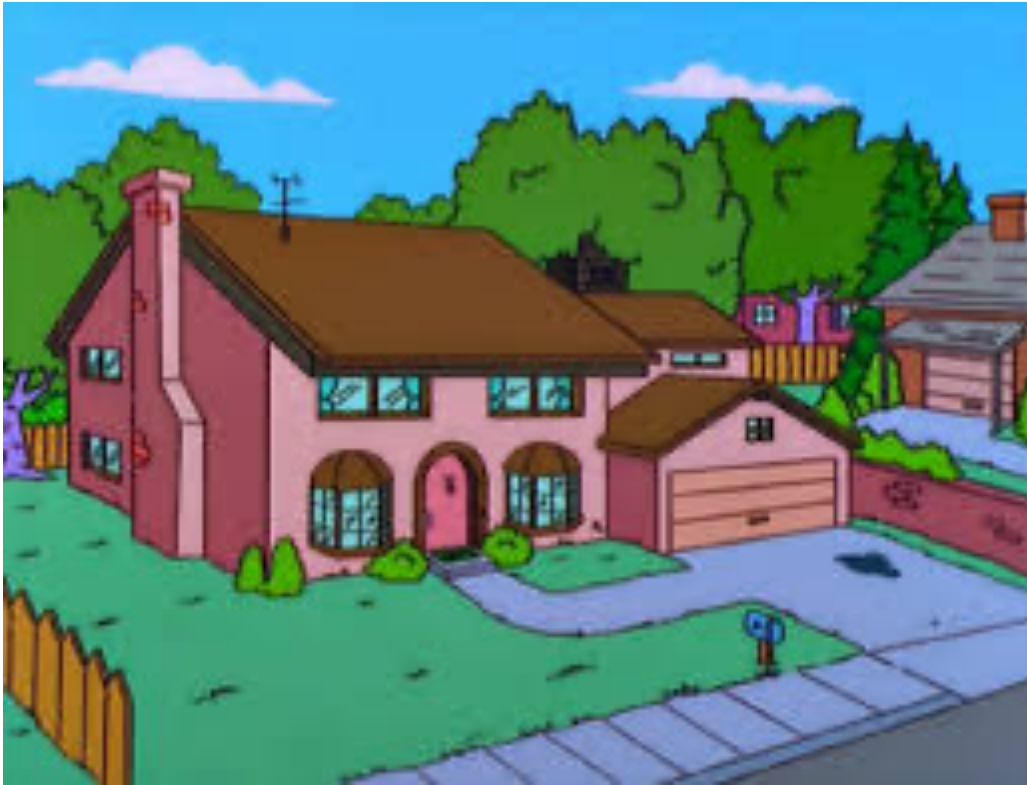
## Special Considerations for Kinship Caregivers



Traditional Foster Families	Kinship Families
Decision to become caregiver is planned	Decision is unplanned and in crisis
Preparation for caregiving occurs in advance	Limited preparation for caregiving
Requirements for approval are anticipated	Unanticipated requirements to become licensed or adopt
Limited knowledge of family dynamics	Knowledge of family dynamics
Celebration of a new family	Mixed feelings about loss of parent to child
Strengthens new family relationships	Redefines existing family relationships
No guilt over birth parent problems	Guilt over birth parent problems
Feelings that they are saving the child	Ambivalence about taking over parental role of child
Feelings of loyalty and commitment by assuming legal relationship	Perception that they are betraying birth parent by assuming legal relationship



## Background on Licensing

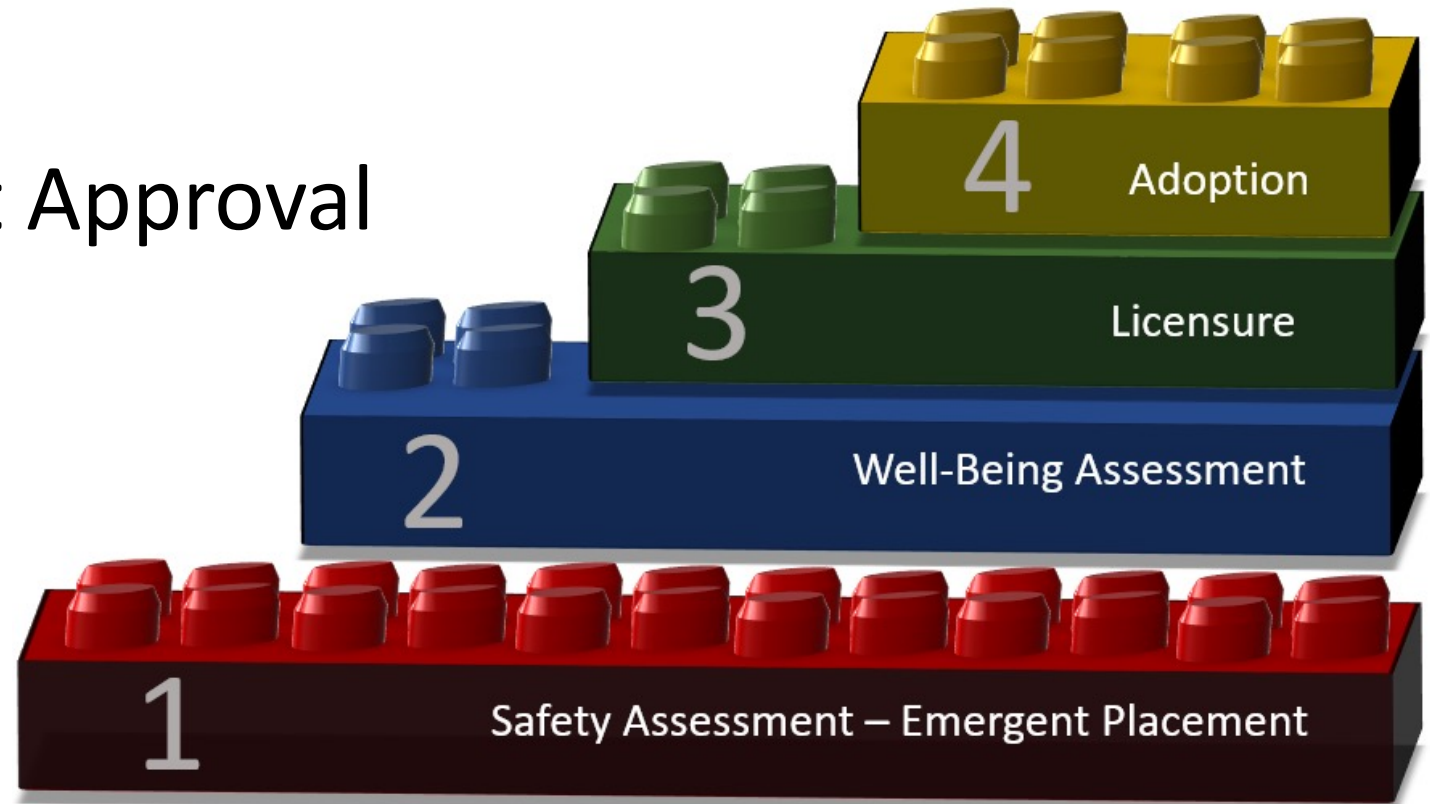


## Basic Federal Licensing Requirements

- Adult caregiver 18+ years old
- Background check
- Basic home assessment
- Certification of “appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child”



# 4 Tiers of Placement Approval and Licensing



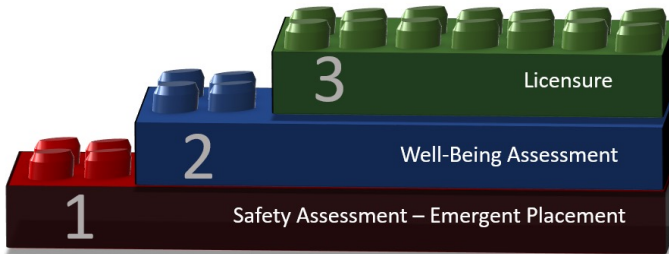
# Multiple Pathways for Relatives



Relative who does not get a license and doesn't want to adopt



Relative who wants to adopt, but does not get licensed




Relative who wants to be licensed




Relative who wants a license and to adopt

If Grandma Jean is safe  
enough to raise her  
grandkids....



Initial Home Study  
and Placement

Approved




Adoptive Home  
Study and Adoption

Approved



why isn't she safe  
enough to pay?



Foster Care License

Denied

# LICENSING BARRIERS

## Personal Barriers

- Training and paperwork is too time consuming
- Don't understand the paperwork or the value of benefits from licensing
- Intrusive application– don't want to be judged and worried about rejection
- Health and medical form
- Home doesn't meet standards/requirements
- Can be expensive
- Believe this is short-term/temporary placement

## Bureaucratic Barriers

- Criminal history of someone in the home
- Previous child abuse/neglect findings
- “Character and suitability”
- Social workers don't pursue waivers
- Stranger foster care is easier
- Having a license means you will be called to take in other children

## Non-Safety Exemptions and Licensing Waivers for Kinship Families

Federal law explicitly permits child welfare agencies to waive on a case-by-case basis nonsafety licensing standards for relative foster family homes.

42 U.S.C. § 671 (a)(10) (2018)



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## Relative Non-Safety Exemptions for Kinship Licensing allowed under the Washington Administrative Code

- Dual license capacity (childcare and foster care)
- Applicants must be 18 years of age and income requirement may be exempted
- May be eligible for DCYF to pay for recommended evaluations
- Bedroom requirements
- Bedroom sharing
- Using bottled water while waiting on approval of well water
- Education home schooling (this is rarely approved)



## Non-Safety Licensing Requirements – Possible future automatic exemptions for relatives

- Orientation and Caregiver Core Training
- First aid, CPR, HIV/AIDS, & Blood Borne Pathogen Training
- Vehicle registration, and insurance and driver's license
- Category 4 – Background Check
- Household Immunizations & Pet Vaccinations

# Resources and Financial Support for Unlicensed Relatives

- Non-Needy TANF
- Free & Reduced Lunch
- Relative Support Service Funds
- Concrete Goods
- Child Care
- SNAP
- WIC, Medical/Dental Coverage
- Mileage Reimbursement
- Clothing and Grocery Vouchers
- Federal Tax Credits
- Limited Respite Care



# Does licensing matter?

- ❖ Increases the financial resources, education, and supports which leads to greater stability and outcomes for the kids
- ❖ Can help identify any future barriers to legal permanency with the relative
- ❖ **To be eligible for the Relative-Guardianship Assistance Program fund (R-GAP) the relative must be licensed for a period of at least six consecutive months prior to executing the guardianship**

# Suggestions for Supporting Relatives

- Offer resources and supports up front
- Recognize that kinship caregivers may have multiple adverse experiences of their own, such as:
  - Grief and loss regarding the child's parents
  - Isolation from their own peers
  - Role change and more experiences
- Lend them an ear
- Be willing to share service information and support multiple times and in multiple formats
- Keep asking kinship caregivers what support they need – this will change over time

# Other Ways to Support Kinship Caregivers

- Remind them about court hearings and the opportunity to submit a caregiver's report
- Help create childcare backup plans for relatives who work or if they become ill
- Support relatives in developing a new parenting toolbox
  - Kinship 101: Online Class
  - Alliance for Child Welfare Website: Free online trainings designed for relatives
  - Connect with local support group

## CHANGES ON THE HORIZON

### -CHILD ONLY LICENSE – SENATE BILL 5151

- DCYF is authorized to develop and issue a child-specific license to a kinship caregiver.
- DCYF is currently seeking input in the development of this license.

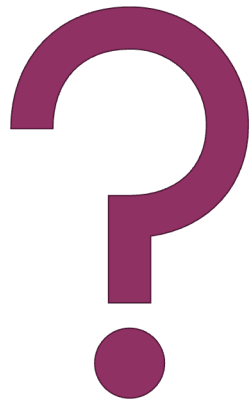
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“The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will recover from trauma and thrive.

Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love.”

Dr. Bruce Perry





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