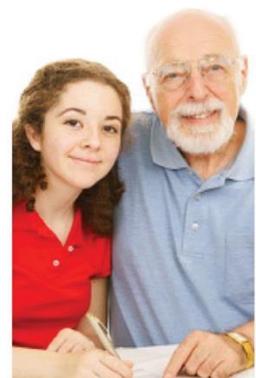
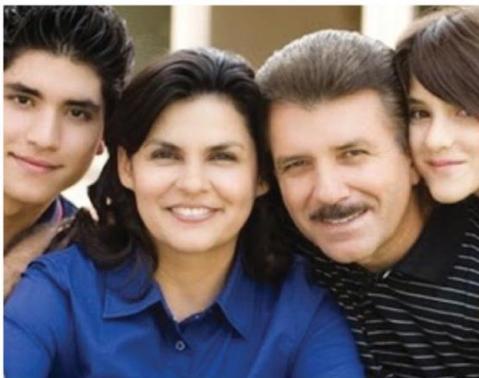


Know Your Options

Understanding Foster Care, Adoption and Legal Guardianship in North Carolina

A Resource Guide for Relatives Caring for Children in Foster Care



Developed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services in partnership with the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES



SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL WORK

Contents

Introduction	5
Purpose of this Resource	5
What is kinship care?	6
What is Permanence?	6
Temporary Care	7
Initial Safety Placement	7
Am I Ready to be a Foster Parent?	8
Foster Care	9
Foster Home Licensing Overview.....	9
Becoming a Licensed Foster Parent	9
Foster Home Licensing Steps	9
Financial Support for Children and Youth in Foster Care	9
Foster Home Licensing Waivers.....	10
Timeframe for the Approval Process	10
Options for Permanence: Reunification, Adoption, and Guardianship	10
Reunification	10
Adoption	10
Legal responsibilities of adoptive parents	11
Adoption Assistance.....	11
Post Adoption Support.....	11
Legal Guardianship	12
Legal Responsibilities	12
Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)	12
Eligibility for KinGAP	12
Resources for Youth in Foster Care	13
LINKS Program	13
Foster Care 18-21 Program.....	14
Education and Training Vouchers (ETV).....	14
NC REACH program	16
Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo)	16
Additional Resources for Youth	17

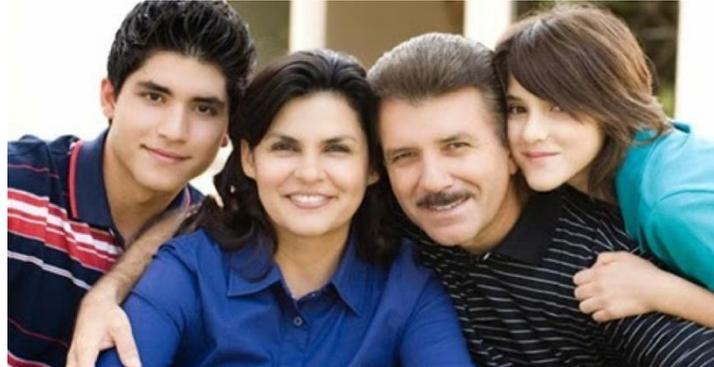
US Department Of Education Youth Transition Toolkit	17
Youth Voices for Permanency – Courtroom Guide on How Courts and Judges Can Make a Difference	17
Youth Are Never Too Old to Be Adopted.....	18
Involving Youth in Decision Making	18
Creating a Family: Talking with Tweens and Teens about Adoption	18
Successful Older Child Adoption: Lessons from the Field - NACAC North American Council on Adoptable Children	18
Positive Outcomes: What Workers Can Learn from Successful Teen Adoptions - NACAC North American Council on Adoptable Children.....	18
What Helps and Hinders Me from Being Adopted	18
Going Beyond Recruitment for Older Youth – NRC-DR	19
Talking with Older Youth about Adoption	19
Youth Engagement Blueprint Series	19
Resources for Relative Caregivers	20
Financial Support.....	20
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	20
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).....	20
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	20
Health Insurance	20
Navigating birth parent/primary caregiver relationships.....	21
Resources to Help Navigate the School System	22
Great!Schools.....	22
Changing Schools	22
North Carolina Public Schools.....	22
Educational Benefits for Youth in Foster Care	22
FosterFocus Magazine: School & Parents Pt. 1.....	23
School Enrollment Support	23
The Role of Schools in Supporting Foster Youth.....	23
LEA Requirements.....	23
What is a 504?.....	23
What is an IEP?.....	23
Homeless Youth and Schools	23
Special Legal Considerations – Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)	24

Understanding the Courts	25
NC Courts Help Topics – Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency	25
Factsheet for Families: Understanding Child Welfare and the Courts	25
The Court Process: Basic Information on Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Cases	25
The Courtroom: A Resource Parents Guide to Preparing for Court	26
Appendix A. Comparing Types of Kinship Placements Chart	27
Appendix B. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and Additional Resources	28
FAQ Voluntary Placement.....	28
FAQ Foster Care	28
FAQ Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP).....	28
FAQ Schools	29
FAQ: Post-Adoption Services and Supports.....	30

Introduction

Purpose of this Resource

When a child or youth is living in an unsafe environment, it is common practice for them to temporarily stay with family or “kin.” Sometimes families can work out these arrangements on their own, before the child is at risk. Other times, the formal child welfare system gets involved.



This *Know Your Options* guide is just one step the State of North Carolina is taking to increase kinship caregivers’ knowledge about resources, supports, and benefits they may be able to access. Specifically, the goal is to improve foster home licensing rates for kin, helping qualify more eligible youth for the KinGAP program (an alternative to adoption which can be a good fit for kinship caregivers and youth).

Appendix A: Comparing Types of Kinship Placement is a chart to help you compare the different types of kinship placements and understand which options are right for the children and youth for whom you are responsible.

By educating kin, youth, child welfare professionals and judges about kinship foster home licensing and the KinGAP program, we hope to increase support for eligible youth who will benefit from placement with kin.

This guide is designed to help **YOU** understand the system and the foster care, adoption, and legal guardianship processes, especially if you are:

KIN WANT TO KNOW: What if I’m caring for a child or youth who is NOT in DSS custody?

This guide is for kin who are caring for children who are in the custody of the department of social services, also known as foster care. If you are caring for a child in your family who is not in social services custody/ foster care, the options in this guide may not apply to you. You should call your local county Department of Social Services and ask to speak to someone in Economic Services to determine if you are eligible for public assistance.

NC County Departments of Social Services Directory:

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory>

- A kinship caregiver (related biologically to the child, or “fictive kin” someone with a “family like” relationship with the child);
- A youth in foster care placed with a kinship caregiver; or
- A birth parent/primary caregiver of a child who is currently in foster care

In this guide you will find helpful information about the child welfare system, specifically the options for permanence children in foster care have: 1) reunification; 2) adoption, and 3) guardianship. These different options are each described in detail with the goal of providing you with the information you need to make an informed decision about what is right for your family.

Why do children come into foster care?

Children come into foster care because of abuse, neglect or dependency. Abuse, neglect, and dependency are caused by a variety of factors ranging from a parent's illness to drug addiction, domestic violence or mental health concerns. Some children come from stressful situations where they have been abused physically, emotionally and or sexually. When the county Department of Social Services ("social services" or "DSS") finds that a child cannot be cared for safely by their birth family they obtain permission from the court to take the child into custody and place them in foster care.

When a department of social services receives a report of child abuse or neglect, social service workers meet with the family to determine if conditions are present that pose a major threat to the child's safety. During this assessment, if social services determines the child is not safe in their home, social services often takes temporary custody of the child/youth and provides evidence to the courts about the reasons for removing the child from their birth parents. However, in some cases, DSS and a parent may agree to place a child with a relative without a formal change of custody. If this occurred in your case, see the "KIN WANT TO KNOW" box above.

What is kinship care?

Knowing that removal from home is stressful for the child, the first choice for temporary placement is often with a grandparent or other relative. This placement arrangement is called **kinship care**. In North Carolina, **kin** can be related to the child by birth, or can be "**fictive kin**," those who have a "family-like" relationship with the child. Examples of fictive kin can include: a friend of the family, a teacher, or a close member of the child's community.

Children and youth remain in temporary care until the court system determines the best place for the child to live permanently. Ideally, the child will be reunified with their birth parents (returned permanently to the birth parent's home). In order for this reunification to happen, birth parents are given expectations they have to meet in order to have their child returned home. It is common for the court and child welfare system to begin to plan for other permanent home options for the child, where a legal caregiver role is established through adoption or guardianship.

What is Permanence?

Permanence occurs when the custody of the child/youth in foster care is given to caregiver(s) who agree to provide care for the child forever. There are three paths to permanence. The first path, **reunification**, is usually the number one goal for a child: returning to their birth parents' home. Reunification occurs when the birth parent is able to address the safety concerns, the child returns to their birth home, and DSS "closes the case."

The second and third paths are **adoption or legal guardianship**. These paths are only taken when a judge determines the birth parents cannot provide a safe, stable home for the child. The differences between adoption and guardianship are described in detail in this guide.

Temporary Care

Initial Safety Placement

When a local county Department of Social Services (DSS) gets a report from someone who suspects a child is being abused or neglected, DSS workers conduct an assessment to determine if the child is safe at home. If the child is not safe, DSS removes the child from the birth parents' home and places them somewhere safe.

- Placements can be **voluntary** when DSS **can work with birth parents** to identify a person or family the child can safely stay with temporarily. When voluntary placement occurs, only the physical custody of the child is granted to the temporary placement provider(s) and the birth parents are able to maintain legal custody of the child(ren).
 - The formal process DSS uses for this type of arrangement is called a **Temporary Placement Service Agreement (TPSA)**. DSS will stay involved in the TPSA and work with the caregivers to resolve safety issues while providing support to the relatives who are temporarily caring for the child. If the caregiver cannot fulfill the terms of the TPSA, then DSS will take custody of the child.
- Placements can also be **involuntary** when DSS is **unable to work with the birth parents** to identify a safe alternative living arrangement for the child. When an involuntary placement occurs, the physical custody of the child is granted to the temporary placement provider(s) and the county DSS takes legal custody of the child(ren). The formal process DSS uses for this type of arrangement is called **foster care**. Foster homes have been licensed, meaning the foster parent(s) have met the following requirements:
 - Be at least 21 years old
 - Have a stable home and income
 - Maintain a drug-free environment
 - Be willing to be fingerprinted and pass* a criminal records check
 - Complete all required training and be licensed by the state of North Carolina (see "Foster Home Licensing" below)

*Note: in North Carolina, some non-violent criminal offenses can be waived on a case by case basis

If a kinship placement is not available when a child is first removed from the home, the child is typically placed with a licensed foster parent. Licensed foster parents are have successfully completed the licensing process, which includes training, a comprehensive home safety assessment, and other child safety assurances. Once they are licensed, foster parents are approved by the State to provide temporary care of a child/youth until a permanent placement is achieved. If a kinship placement becomes available shortly after a child has been placed with foster parents, social services has to obtain approval from the court system and conduct a home safety assessment before the child's placement can change from a non-related foster parent to a kinship placement.

Am I Ready to be a Foster Parent?

If you're considering fostering or adopting a child, stop for a moment and ask yourself these important questions:

- Do I have time to care for a child and provide physical, emotional, educational and spiritual needs?
- Do I have support from my family, community, church and friends who will be there for me through challenging times?
- Am I willing to advocate for my child? The child I foster will have special needs and possible unforeseen educational or mental health challenges.
- Am I ready to commit to a child short or long term, even if times get tough? I know a child deserves stability and continuity and will be counting on me.
- Am I able to support and encourage continued contact with important people in a child's life including the birth family?

If you want to discuss your ability to foster please call our hotline at 888-625-4375 or email us at nc.kids@dhhs.nc.gov.

Retrieved on June 28, 2019 from

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/nc-kids-adoption-and-foster-care-network/who-can-foster-andor-adopt>

Both types of placement (voluntary and involuntary) are designed to keep the child/youth safe on a short-term basis while the birth parent(s) or primary caregiver work to address the safety concerns identified by the social service agency. The child will stay in temporary care until they can return home (reunification) or until the courts decide that a different caregiver needs to take legal custody of the child and provide a permanent home through adoption or guardianship.



Foster Care

For many reasons, including the hope the child will be reunified with their birth parents quickly, many kinship caregivers do not start or complete the foster home licensing process, limiting their options for support.

Foster Home Licensing Overview

North Carolina law requires that foster parents are licensed by the NC Division of Social Services with families working through their local county DSS or a licensed private agency. In North Carolina families who desire to become licensed foster parents are required to complete TIPS-MAPP (Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting) and assessment process. Below are the specific steps in the process:

Becoming a Licensed Foster Parent

The licensing process takes time and there are some expenses connected with it (examples include the cost of fire inspection, fingerprint cards, criminal checks, and physicals). Sometimes to meet home licensing standards, home repairs or improvements may be required. The required 30-hour training is offered at times that are friendly for working parents, but free childcare is not always available while attending training.

Foster Home Licensing Steps

1. Watch a [Foster Parent Orientation video](https://www.ncswlearn.org/presenter/Foster_Parent_Orientation/story_html5.html):
https://www.ncswlearn.org/presenter/Foster_Parent_Orientation/story_html5.html
2. Choose an agency, local DSS or private foster care placing agency. Links are provided at this website: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/nc-kids-adoption-and-foster-care-network/how-foster-and-or-adopt>
3. Attend an orientation with your chosen agency.
4. Complete TIPS-MAPP course or an equivalent training such as Caring for Our Own (CFOO) which is designed specifically for kinship caregivers.
5. Completion of Mutual Home Assessment for foster home licensing. This is not the same as an adoption home study.
6. Your agency will complete your Foster Home Application and submit it to the NC Division of Social Services for review and licensure.
7. Once licensed by the NC Division of Social Services, consider and accept foster care placements based on the needs of the children and your family's parenting abilities and preferences.
8. Relicensure of foster parents is required every 2 years.

Financial Support for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Licensed foster homes are eligible to receive financial assistance provided by social services to help foster parents care for the child temporarily. This is called a **monthly board payment**. Licensed foster

parents are eligible to receive the monthly board payment as soon as a foster child is placed in their home because they completed the foster parent training and other licensing requirements beforehand.

Kinship caregivers who are not licensed foster parents before gaining physical custody of their relative child can decide to pursue their foster parent licensure through the same process and will become eligible for the monthly board payment once they complete the foster parent training and fulfill the other licensing requirements to receive their foster home license.

Relatives who have not completed the licensing process may still be given placement of a child, but may only be eligible to receive a monthly “child-only” stipend, which is significantly less than the monthly board payment.

Foster Home Licensing Waivers

If some of the licensing requirements are too difficult for the kinship caregiver to achieve and are not necessary to maintain the safety of the child (for example, having a certain number of bedrooms, or not being able to fence all bodies of water on the property), the licensing agency may request a waiver, which are exceptions to the rule. Waivers are granted on a case by case basis. Safety of the child will always be the top priority, and not all licensing requirements are eligible for a waiver, but whenever possible, social services will work with relative caregivers to help them become licensed, including assistance with a Waiver application. Talk to your social worker to learn more about licensing waivers.

Timeframe for the Approval Process

The licensing process can take up to a year to complete, depending on how quickly the potential caregivers can move through the process. Most relatives enter into kinship care arrangements on an emergency basis, with the hope the child will soon return home. Sometimes that happens, and other times birth parents/primary caregivers struggle to meet the requirements for reunification within the timeframe set by the courts, and sometimes it does not. Regardless, it is important for kinship caregivers to prepare for either option.

Options for Permanence: Reunification, Adoption, and Guardianship

Reunification

Whenever possible, a child will return to their birth parents’ home permanently, which is called **reunification**. If this happens, the courts will return legal custody of the child to the parents.

In cases where the child/youth cannot return home to their birth parents, the first choice for a permanent home is with a relative. If the child is already placed with kin, the kinship caregiver will be approached about becoming the child’s permanent caregiver through adoption or legal guardianship.

Adoption

Before a child can be adopted, they must be “legally free.” This can happen when both parents voluntarily give up their parental rights or when social services submits a request to the judge to Terminate Parental Rights in court, which is commonly called “TPR.” Termination of a parent’s rights means that the parent permanently loses their right to make decisions for the child as well as their ability to change or regain custody. One of the strengths of adoption is that, once a parent’s rights are taken away, the parent cannot ask the court to reconsider.

Legal responsibilities of adoptive parents

An adoptive parent has all the same legal rights and responsibilities that any birth parent/primary caregiver has.

Adoption Assistance

Children who have been in foster care and have “special needs” or may be considered more difficult to place, may be eligible for financial support called “adoption assistance.” One or more of the following conditions must exist and be documented in order for the child to be eligible for adoption assistance:

- 1) The child is six years of age or older;
- 2) The child is two years of age or older and a member of a minority race or ethnic group;
- 3) The child is a member of a sibling group of three or more children to be placed in the same adoptive home;
- 4) The child is a member of a sibling group of two children to be placed in the same adoptive home, in which one or more of the siblings meet at least one of the other criteria for special needs;
- 5) The child has a medically diagnosed disability which substantially limits one or more major life activity, requires professional treatment, assistance in self-care, or the purchase of special equipment;
- 6) The child is diagnosed by a qualified professional to have a psychiatric condition which impairs the child’s mental, intellectual, or social functioning, and for which the child requires professional services;
- 7) The child is diagnosed by a qualified professional to have a behavioral or emotional disorder characterized by inappropriate behavior which deviates substantially from behavior appropriate to the child’s age or significantly interferes with child’s intellectual, social and personal functioning;
- 8) The child is diagnosed to be mentally retarded by a qualified professional;
- 9) The child is at risk for a diagnosis described above in items e through h, due to prenatal exposure to toxins, a history of abuse or serious neglect, or genetic history.
- 10) The child meets all of the medical and disability requirements for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

THE NC CHILD WELFARE MANUAL SAYS

Adoption is the method provided by law to establish the legal relationship of parent and child between persons who are not so related by birth, with the same mutual rights and obligations that exist between children and their birth parent. The primary purpose of adoption is to help children whose parents are incapable of assuming or continuing parental responsibilities to legally become part of a new permanent family.

Child Welfare Manual

<https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/manuals/dss/csm-50/man/>

Post Adoption Support

Adoption is a lifelong journey that doesn’t end when the official paperwork (decree) is issued. Families formed through adoption can face unique challenges. Post Adoption Support Services are designed to offer families an ongoing network of peer support, links to appropriate resources, parenting programs, counseling services, and crisis intervention. For more information, see the “KIN WANT TO KNOW” box below.

Legal Guardianship

When reunification with birth parent/primary caregivers or adoption is not a good fit, legal guardianship is another way for a child to find a forever home. Unlike adoption, guardianship does not require a child to be legally free. A child becomes legally free when the courts terminate parental rights (TPR), a legal process that means birth parent/primary caregivers no longer have the right to make decisions for their child. TPR is required for adoption, but not legal guardianship, making guardianship a good option when it is in the child's best interests to stay connected to their birth parent/primary caregivers.



Legal Responsibilities

Legal guardians are responsible for the day-to-day care and supervision of the children placed with them. They make all the necessary decisions related to the children's health, education, discipline, and upbringing. Once a relative becomes the permanent legal guardian, social services no longer has legal custody of the child, and will not be involved in the family's life, unless the family has struggles related to the guardianship and reaches out to social services to apply for financial assistance and learn about other supports that are available to eligible children and families.

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)

The purpose of the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) is to make funds available for the financial support of youth who are determined to:

- Be in a stable family setting;
- Have a court-ordered permanent plan other than reunification or adoption; and
- Are eligible for legal guardianship (see below).

Eligibility for KinGAP

- The court has determined that Reunification and Adoption are not appropriate permanency options for the youth.
- The youth must be placed in the licensed home for a minimum of 6 months prior to guardianship being awarded.
- The youth is the placement responsibility of a NC county department of social services at the time of entry into the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program.
- The youth is at least 14 years of age but not older than age 18, or is a sibling of the qualified youth who is also placed in the guardianship arrangement.
- The youth demonstrates a strong attachment to the prospective guardian and has been consulted regarding the guardianship arrangement.

KIN WANT TO KNOW

Are there **post-guardianship** services available to me?

At this time, there are no formal post-guardianship services available to kinship caregivers. However, families may qualify for public assistance. Contact your county department of social services to learn more about available services and supports.

How do I access **post-adoption** services in my area?

The Department of Social Services in the county where the family resides is the agency responsible for providing post-adoption services, such as providing information and referrals to appropriate services. DSS agencies can also refer the family to the appropriate Post Adoption Support Service provider in their county. This is true even if the agency neither placed the child nor supervised the placement. The North Carolina Division of Social Services contracts with community agencies to provide Post Adoption Support Services (PASS) to any adoptive family. PASS providers offer a wide array of supportive, educational and therapeutic services. To locate the PASS provider in your county, click on this link: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/nc-kids-adoption-and-foster-care-network/post-adoption-support-and> , or contact your local county Department of Social Services for assistance.

The Center for Adoption Support and Education website provides additional information, resources, and training opportunities relating to adoptive parenting: <https://adoptionssupport.org/>

- The prospective legal guardian shall have entered into a guardianship assistance agreement with the county department of social services who holds custody of the youth prior to the order granting legal guardianship.

Children and youth who qualify for guardianship assistance can receive the same amount of monthly financial support as foster and adopted children who qualify for adoption assistance.

Resources for Youth in Foster Care

LINKS Program

The purpose of LINKS is to build a network of relevant services with youth so that they will have ongoing connections to family, friends, mentors, the community, employers, education, financial assistance, skills training, and other resources to help them transition into adulthood.

All youth who are now 13 or older and are not yet 21 and who are or were in county child welfare agency foster care after the age of 13 are eligible for LINKS services, with two exceptions: 1) if they have more than \$10,000 in a personal bank account or 2) if they are an undocumented immigrant.

County child welfare agencies use LINKS funding every year to support youth transitioning to adulthood. The funds can be used to purchase supplies and materials, provide incentives for youth participation in programming, provide goods or services to individual youth and young adults, and for other costs of operating the LINKS program.

In addition, there are LINKS funds available to assist individual youth and young adults with Transitional and Housing costs. Eligible youth may receive up to \$3,000 in Transitional Funds every year to assist with transitional costs, such as educational or vocational achievement, transportation, or finding a job. Housing funds up to \$1,500 a year can be provided to young adults who are at least 18 years old, but not yet 21 who aged out of foster care. These funds are first-come, first-served and they are not an entitlement, meaning that once the fund runs out each year, no additional funds are available.

Foster Care 18-21 Program

Foster Care 18 to 21 is a program that offers young adults aging out of foster care the opportunity to continue foster care placement and transition to independence with county child welfare agency supervision. This occurs when foster youth agree to remain in foster care after their 18th birthday. Young adults who exit foster care at age 18 are also able to return to the Foster Care 18 to 21 program at a later date as long as they have not reached their 21st birthday.

Young adults who were in foster care on their 18th birthday may continue to receive foster care benefits and services until their 21st birthday as long as they meet one of the following requirements:

- Completing high school or program leading to an equivalent credential such as a GED;
- Enrolled in college, a vocational program, or other post-high school educational program;
- Participating in a program to reduce barriers to employment or help the young adult gain employment;
- Employed at least 80 hours a month (or approximately 20 hours a week);
- Incapable of completing the educational or employment requirements due to a medical condition or disability.

Young adults must also:

- Have been in foster care upon his/her 18th birthday; and,
- Be 18 years of age, but not yet 21 years of age;
- Enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county child welfare agency and agree to abide by the provisions of the agreement; and,
- Agree to reside in an approved placement.

Young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services remain eligible for foster care maintenance payments.

Young adults who enter into Foster Care 18 to 21 may reside in a licensed foster care home or facility, a college or university dormitory, or in a semi-supervised independent living setting such as an apartment or host home.

Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

The Education and Training Voucher Program provides federally-funded aid to former foster youth for college and vocational training.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Youth must fall into one of these categories:
 - Youth was in foster care on or after their 17th birthday; or,
 - Youth were adopted from foster care with the adoption finalization on or after their 16th birthday; or,
 - Youth entered a kinship guardianship placement from foster care on or after their 16th birthday.
- Youth is a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen
- Youth's personal assets (bank account, car, home, etc.) are not worth more than \$10,000
- Youth must be age 18, 19, or 20 when you first apply to the ETV program unless given specific exception due to completing secondary school and entering post-secondary prior to age 18. Participants who are participating in the program on their 21st birthday remain eligible until their 23rd birthday.
- Youth must have been accepted into or be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical or vocational school. To remain eligible for ETV funding, youth must show progress toward a degree or certificate.

ETV Funds can be used for:

- Tuition
- Books
- Computers
- School Supplies
- Living Expenses
- Housing
- Childcare
- Health Insurance
- Groceries
- Transportation

To apply, visit www.statevoucher.org and click on North Carolina. Foster Care to Success administers the ETV program and can be reached at 1-800-585-6118 and online at www.fc2success.org.

NC REACH program

NC Reach provides state-funded grants for former foster youth to attend public community colleges and universities in North Carolina. These grants can be used to pay tuition, fees, books, and room and board.

To be eligible youth must be:

- An NC-DSS foster youth who “aged out” at 18, was adopted after age 12, or exited foster care to guardianship through the KinGAP program
- A legal resident of North Carolina
- Younger than 26 years of age
- Enrolled in a public community college or university in North Carolina



More than money, NC Reach provides students with a wide array of supports and services to help them stay on track and graduate including program coordinators that work with students to help them navigate and connect with local resources, seminars and workshops to help students strengthen academic abilities, care packages, and career readiness learning opportunities.

NC Reach recipients must maintain a 2.0 GPA to remain eligible for funding. If a student’s grades drop below that threshold during the semester, NC Reach automatically enrolls the student in the Academic Success Program, which provides study guides and personal academic coaching.

To apply, visit www.ncreach.org. Foster Care to Success administers the NC Reach program and can be reached at 1-800-585-6112 and online at www.fc2success.org.

Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo)

SaySo, a program of Children’s Home Society of North Carolina, is a statewide association of youth aged 14-24 who are or have been in the out-of-home care system in North Carolina. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements. Founded in 1998 by a stakeholder of older youths in care, adult caregivers, and adult professionals, SaySo has been recognized with respect in North Carolina and nationally as a youth-driven advocacy organization. The mission of SaySo is to work to improve the substitute care system by educating the community, speaking out about needed changes, and providing support to youth who are or have been in substitute care. Through a series of yearly conferences, events, and opportunities for youth in foster care, SaySo helps youth with their life within the system of care, as well as to transition out of care. This is accomplished by informing young people of services and resources available to them, as well as teaching them essential life skills.

- [Speaking Out Today While Making Changes For Tomorrow](https://www.saysoinc.org/)
<https://www.saysoinc.org/>

YOUTH WANT TO KNOW - How do I access the different programs that can help me?

Youth who are or were in foster care may request services from their county Department of Social Services.

Local County DSS Directory

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory>

This link provides information about SaySo, an organization of youth ages 14-24 in North Carolina who have all experienced foster care, and empowers them to educate others on the foster care experience as well as advocate for change with policymakers.

- [“For You” Guide Book by SAYSO](#)

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/106e4b_24c2f04f318542f19443c6aa3dc94caf.pdf

This resource was created by foster youth for foster youth. It provides resources for independent living (e.g., learning how to manage money, moving out into your first apartment, preparing for your first job or a doctor appointment) and navigating the foster care system.

To learn more about SaySO, visit www.saysoinc.org, contact 1-800-632-1400, or email sayso@chsnc.org.

Additional Resources for Youth

US Department Of Education Youth Transition Toolkit

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf>

The U.S. Department of Education (ED), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and youth and practitioners involved in the child welfare system, developed this toolkit to help youth access the resources needed to successfully transition into adulthood, continue on to postsecondary education, and meaningful careers. This toolkit serves to inspire and support youth currently in foster care and young adults who have aged out of care to pursue college and career opportunities. Recognizing that these systems may be challenging and that the transition from foster care can be confusing, this toolkit includes tips and resources to help youth and young adults tackle social, emotional, educational, skills and resource barriers.

Youth Voices for Permanency – Courtroom Guide on How Courts and Judges Can Make a Difference

[https://voice-for-](https://voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/Youth%20Voices%20for%20Permanency%20full%20paper%20v2.compressed.pdf)

[adoption.org/sites/default/files/Youth%20Voices%20for%20Permanency%20full%20paper%20v2.compressed.pdf](https://voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/Youth%20Voices%20for%20Permanency%20full%20paper%20v2.compressed.pdf)

The perspectives of youth currently or formerly in foster care offer important insights into what it takes to achieve lasting permanency. This guide for court professionals reflects input of youth and judicial

leaders, explains the importance of permanency in adolescent lives, and offers ideas for how judges can help more children and youth achieve permanency.

Youth Are Never Too Old to Be Adopted

<https://www.nacac.org/resource/adoption-teen-permanency/>

This resource shares perspectives from older youth who have experienced the adoption process. This resource can be helpful to teens as it normalizes the range of feelings they could have prior to adoption and it also shares the experiences of youth after adoption to help demystify some of the concerns foster teens may have about adoption.

Involving Youth in Decision Making

Creating a Family: Talking with Tweens and Teens about Adoption

<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-category/talking-tweens-teens-adoption/>

This 60-minute video provides insight into the feelings and reservations teens may have about adoption. It also explains how developmental needs may impact how youth process adoption and provides tips for navigating this transition with youth.

Successful Older Child Adoption: Lessons from the Field - NACAC North American Council on Adoptable Children

<https://www.nacac.org/resource/adoption-teens-family-recruiting/>

This brief provides tips on exhausting all options to increase the likelihood of achieving adoption for older youth in foster care, including how to actively engage youth throughout the adoption process.

Positive Outcomes: What Workers Can Learn from Successful Teen Adoptions - NACAC North American Council on Adoptable Children

<https://www.nacac.org/resource/teen-permanency-adoption/>

The brief provides concrete tips for how to involve youth in the adoption process.

1201 Child Placement Services – NC Department of Health and Human Services

<https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/divisional/social-services/child-welfare/policy-manuals/modified-manual-1/modified-manual>

This manual guides social work practice in NC and highlights the importance of keeping youth involved in the decision-making process regarding their permanence.

What Helps and Hinders Me from Being Adopted

<https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/wwk-research-what-helps-and-hinders-me-from-being-adopted-youth-brief.pdf>

This brief reports findings from interviews with foster youth about barriers to adoption. It describes commonly held beliefs among foster youth about what helps some get adopted and what hinders others. It also provides statistical information to assess the validity of the beliefs held by future adoptees and discusses what experiences may have contributed to the development of those perspectives.

Going Beyond Recruitment for Older Youth – NRC-DR

<http://www.nrcdr.org/assets/files/NRC-DR-org/going-beyond-recruitment-for-older-youth.pdf>

This resource provides tips on how to be more intentional in recruiting for older youth in foster care and provides tips for discussing the adoption process with foster youth to get them more involved.

Talking with Older Youth about Adoption

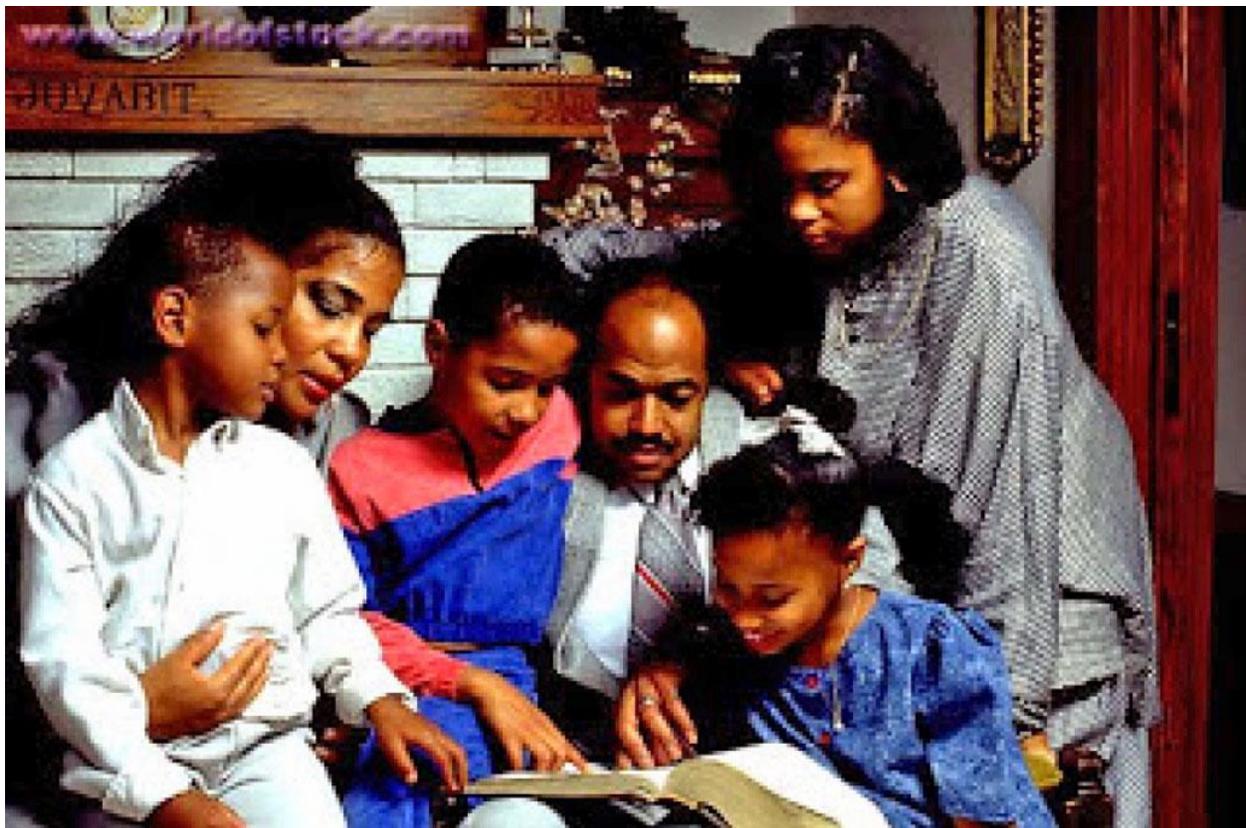
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/talking.pdf>

This provides tips for how to discuss adoption with youth such as acknowledging what feelings they may have and checking for their understanding of adoption. This resource also emphasizes that communication about adoption is an on-going process rather than a one-time conversation.

Youth Engagement Blueprint Series

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/youth-development/blueprint-series/>

This resource provides guidelines for improving an organization’s capacity to engage older youth in foster care before and after permanence is achieved.



Resources for Relative Caregivers¹

Financial Support

Many caregivers need financial support to help provide for foster children and youth in their care. Kinship caregivers who would benefit from financial support should speak with their social services worker about what services and supports are available to them. These may include:

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program is designed to provide financial assistance while helping low-income families become self-sufficient. Caregivers do not need to have legal custody in order to apply for TANF benefits, but they do need to meet their State's TANF definition of a kin caregiver. A caseworker can provide information or refer a caregiver to the correct place to find information on eligibility for TANF, how to apply for benefits, documents and other information needed, and whether to apply just for the children or for the entire family. Even if a relative caregiver or the caregiver's family does not qualify for TANF benefits, it is possible to apply for and receive benefits for the relative children being cared for in the home. In these situations, only the children's income is considered for eligibility. If the children have little or no income, they will likely be eligible to receive TANF benefits. Depending on their State of residence, these benefits may be available until children's 18th birthdays.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) refers to the Federal Food Stamps program. SNAP is available to families with incomes below a certain level. In this case, the entire household's income is considered, and the relative children can be included in family size for determining the benefit amount. A caregiver cannot apply for SNAP for the children only. Application is generally made at the same office where TANF applications are made. Find out more at <http://www/fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may be available to children or caregivers who are disabled. This is also available to anyone over age 65. Information about SSI benefits is available from the local Social Security office or online at <http://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-eligibility-issi.htm>.

Health Insurance

Many children being raised by relatives are eligible for medical insurance through either Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Medicaid provides coverage for many health-care expenses for low-income children and adults, including visits to the doctor, checkups, screenings, prescriptions, and hospitalization. Every State permits grandparents or other kinship caregivers to apply for Medicaid or CHIP on behalf of the children for whom they are caring. Most States do not require the caregiver to have legal custody in order for the children to be eligible. Find out more at <https://www.healthcare.gov/medicaid-chip/getting-medicaid-chip>.

¹ Information provided in this section has been made readily available by the Child Welfare Information Gateway at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/>.

Navigating birth parent/primary caregiver relationships

Foster care creates complex relationships between caregivers. Birth parents and temporary caregivers meet in the best interests of the child. Ideally, the caregivers work together, helping the child maintain or strengthen healthy connections with their birth parents while they are in temporary care. The pre-



existing relationship between the birth parent(s) and the kinship caregiver can make the child's time in care easier for the relative caregiver, or more difficult depending on how the birth parent reacts to the situation.

Relative caregivers who decided to have their foster home licensed may have access to a foster home licensing training designed just for kinship caregivers. This training, Caring for Our Own (CFOO), includes content on:

- **Characteristics of the Family System**

- Boundaries
- Rules
- Roles
- Decision-making and Power Distribution
- Communication Styles

- **Planning for Successful Visits and Contacts**

A self-guided questionnaire designed to help identify strategies more making visits and contacts between the children and their birth parent/primary caregiver(s) more successful

- **Transitional Reactions for Birth Parents**

A guide that describes common reactions of birth parents/primary caregivers, gives examples of related behaviors and feelings, and provides strategies to manage different reactions from birth parents/primary caregivers. Transitional Reactions include:

Transitional Reactions for Kinship Caregivers	Transitional Reactions for Children	Transitional Reactions for Birth Parents
Hopes and Dreams	Hopes and Dreams	Hopes and Dreams
Grief and Adjustment	Loss/Separation	Grief and Remorse
Shifting Parental Roles and Responsibilities	Feeling Unloved and Thrown Away	Accepting a New Relationship
Guilt	Guilt	Guilt
Embarrassment	Anger	Carrying Over Past Issues
Carrying Over Past Issues	Embarrassment	Feeling Under the Kinship Caregiver's and Agency's Authority
Loyalty	Carrying Over Past Issues	Anger and Disappointment
Adjusting to Child Rearing Demands	Trying to Get Put Out or Acting Out	Feeling Betrayed
Anger	Accepting Kinship Caregiver in Parental Role	Planning for Illness or Death
Planning for Illness or Death	Divided Loyalties	
Sabotage	Worry About Caregiver Becoming Ill or Dying	

Ask your social services worker if Caring for Our Own is available in your county.

Resources to Help Navigate the School System

This section includes links to a variety of online resources relatives can use to help address questions they have about schools.

Great!Schools

This website allows you to use your address to find the school your child is supposed to attend. It also provides ratings based on academics, equity, and environment.

<https://www.greatschools.org/school-district-boundaries-map/>

Changing Schools

This Virginia-based tool is not required for North Carolinians, but includes helpful questions caregivers may want to consider when deciding what school enrollment options are in the best interest of the child or youth in their care. A similar tool is available for South Carolina ([click here](#)).

VA: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2010/306-10b.doc

SC: <https://ed.sc.gov/scdoe/assets/File/policy/federal-education-programs/title-i/Foster%20Care/BestInterestSchoolOriginDecisions.pdf>

North Carolina Public Schools

The following resources are about or for caregivers with children or youth attending public school in North Carolina.

- [NC Public School Enrollment FAQ](#)
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/questions/>
- [Is your child ready for kindergarten?](#)
<https://www.dpsnc.net/Page/341>
- [Sample Registration Form from Buncombe County](#)
<https://www.buncombeschools.org/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=3727398>
- [Standard NC Curriculum](#)
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/>

Educational Benefits for Youth in Foster Care

This website details the educational benefits available to a child in foster care is entitled to by federal law: [US Title IV-E Requirements \(Section E\)](#)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/pi1011.pdf>

- The plan must include: 1) an assurance that the child's placement in foster care takes into account the appropriateness of the current educational setting and the proximity to the school the child was enrolled in at the time of placement; and, 2) an assurance that the title IV-E agency has coordinated with the local education agency or agencies to ensure the child can remain in that school, or if remaining in that school is not in the best interests of the child, an assurance to enroll the child immediately in a new school with all of his or her educational records."
- Educational Stability Requirements (Effective October 7, 2008) - adds travel to and from school in the foster care maintenance payment definition, adds a case plan requirement to ensure

educational stability for children in foster care, and requires that the title IV-E agency ensure that each child receiving a payment under the title IV-E plan is attending school full time or has completed secondary school.

FosterFocus Magazine: School & Parents Pt. 1

<https://www.fosterfocusmag.com/articles/school-parents-part-one>

This article was written by a foster parent with a doctorate in education who provides details about what a caregiver need to consider about the educational needs of a foster child in their care.

School Enrollment Support

[LegalAid Guide to Enrolling in NC Public Schools](#)

<http://www.legalaidnc.org/about-us/projects/advocates-for-childrens-services>

The Role of Schools in Supporting Foster Youth

<http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/The%20Role%20of%20Schools.docx.pdf>

A school-focused publication that could be useful in helping caregivers understand what school supports may be available. Includes an overview of the child welfare system

LEA Requirements

http://sss.usf.edu/resources/format/memos/2016/dps_2016_166a.pdf

Describes Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

What is a 504?

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/504-plans.html>

An overview of what a 504 can do, who is eligible, and how to get the process started. Includes a comparison of 504 plans and IEPs

What is an IEP?

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/ieps/what-is-an-iep>

An overview of an IEP can do, who is eligible, and how to get the process started. Includes links to services based on the age of the child and other information for caregivers about navigating the IEP process.

Homeless Youth and Schools

- [NCHE School Help for Homeless Children with Disabilities: Information for Parents](#)
https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/idea_parents.pdf
- [NCHE Enrolling Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School](#)
<https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/enrollment.pdf>

- The [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#), reauthorized in January 2002, ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness.
<https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/summary.pdf>

Special Legal Considerations – Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 established nationwide procedures for the handling of Indian child placements and authorized the establishment of Indian child and family service programs. The act requires specific actions on behalf of a child who is a member of a federally recognized Indian Tribe, Aleuts, or members of certain native Alaskan villagers. Nothing in ICWA is to be construed as preventing the emergency removal of an Indian child to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child(ren). If a county child welfare worker believes that a child(ren) is in imminent danger, the same procedures are followed as in any other emergency removal.

ICWA specifies that tribal courts have exclusive jurisdiction of child(ren) who reside on the reservation. If the child(ren) is a ward of a tribal court, but does not reside on a reservation, the jurisdiction of the case must be transferred to the tribal court. In any action leading to the foster care placement or in any termination of parental rights action affecting an American Indian child who does not reside on the reservation, the parents, guardian or custodian of the child(ren) may petition for transfer of jurisdiction to a tribal court.

At any time during proceedings of a foster care placement, the American Indian custodian and American Indian tribe have the right to intervene in the proceedings at any time. Tribal courts have the same authority as any state court and any decisions made by them that follow the ICWA guidelines have the effect of any other court decision.

The act applies to Indian child custody proceedings and includes:

- County child welfare custody, when the parent or custodian cannot have the child returned on demand (as in Voluntary Placement Agreements), but where parental rights have not been terminated;
- In termination of parental rights proceedings;
- In pre-adoptive and adoptive placements; and
- Proceedings regarding juvenile court-assigned custody or guardianship of the person of the juvenile.

The [Bureau of Indian Affairs \(BIA\)](#) has a listing updated each year of the appropriate tribal person to receive questions about membership and ICWA proceedings. The [North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs](#) can also help regarding local tribes.

Understanding the Courts

NC Courts Help Topics – Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency

This link provides information from the North Carolina Judicial System about child abuse, neglect, and dependency.

<https://www.nccourts.gov/help-topics/family-and-children/abuse-neglect-and-dependency#child-protective-services-7641>

NC Juvenile Court - A Handbook for Parents

This handbook tries to explain the court process and the people involved in your case, but it is only a general explanation. You should always discuss your case with your lawyer.

<https://www.nccourts.gov/assets/documents/publications/English-Handbook-for-Parents-in-Abuse-Neglect-and-Dependency-Hearings.pdf?Patd3dXqil9dO8lFtHHqZN.afF0FxFAN>

KIN WANT TO KNOW - What is a “short order?”

A “short order” or “memorandum of order” is a one-page document that may be helpful when the guardian needs to provide proof of guardianship, for example when enrolling a child or youth in school or seeing a new doctor. Private information is largely left out of a short order.

Legal guardians can request a short order from the Court (some courts provide them, others may not).

Factsheet for Families: Understanding Child Welfare and the Courts

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/cwandcourts.pdf>

This factsheet is designed to answer parent and caregiver concerns about the court process and provide resources regarding legal action and parental rights.

The Court Process: Basic Information on Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Cases

- In North Carolina, each county has a Department of Social Services (DSS). Reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency are received by DSS. If DSS finds evidence of abuse, neglect, or dependence, DSS must decide whether to file a petition, the paperwork that starts the court’s involvement with the family.
- When DSS files a petition, it may ask the court for an order to remove the child from the home if DSS has determined that removal is needed to keep the child safe.
- When a petition is filed, birth parents or caregivers included in the petition will receive a copy. The petition names the parent or caregiver as “respondent.”
- In the petition, DSS describes what information is used to decide that the child needs protection or assistance. These are called allegations.

- A summons is attached to the petition and tells the date, time and place of the first court hearings. The summons tells the respondent that they have the right to have a lawyer present and will give the name and number of the lawyer appointed.
- If DSS asked that the child be removed from the home and the judge agreed to do so, there will be an order stating who has custody of the child. Usually, this will be DSS. Having custody makes DSS legally responsible for the child and DSS can decide, with at the approval of the court, where the child will live (this is where an approved kinship placement would be needed so that the child does not have to enter or remain in foster care).



The Courtroom: A Resource Parents Guide to Preparing for Court

- **Arrive on time.** Ask your caseworker or others involved in the case what time the hearing is scheduled to begin. You should plan to arrive at the courthouse at least 30 minutes before each scheduled hearing. Be sure to ask court officials or law enforcement officers where the appropriate waiting area is, and listen closely to make sure you hear when a case is called. It may be appropriate to find individuals from DSS that are involved in your case, so that they know you are present. Ultimately, the judge gets to decide who is allowed in the courtroom at different portions of each hearing.
- **Dress appropriately.** Do not wear halter tops, torn jeans, short skirts, hats, or t-shirts with printing and/or logos to the hearing.
- **Turn off all electronic devices.** Before you go into the courtroom, be sure to turn off cell phones and other devices.
- **Do not bring food or drink into the courtroom.**
- **Take it seriously.** Show the judge respect. Address the judge as “judge,” or “your honor.” Don’t curse or show an inappropriate level of emotion. Refrain from having side conversations with others in the courtroom, particularly if the conversations do not involve the hearing.
- **Listen carefully.** Don’t interrupt others when they are speaking, and wait for the judge to address you before speaking. If you wish to be addressed, consider discussing this with one of the hearing participants (e.g., the lawyer for DSS or the caseworker) in advance. Don’t guess at an answer. Don’t lie. If you don’t understand a question, ask the judge or your attorney to explain it to you. Do not answer the question until you understand.
- **Children in court.** If you have children with you, arrange for someone to care for them during the hearing unless the court has requested to speak with one or more of the children involved in the case, the child wishes to speak to the court, or the child has been subpoenaed as a witness.
- **Do not leave without understanding what the judge has ordered.** If you do not understand an order or have questions about your rights and responsibilities in the court process, consider seeking the assistance of a licensed attorney.

For More Information Manual Juvenile Court and Child Welfare:

<https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/manuals/dss/csm-67/man/Chapter%20X.pdf>

Manual: [Review of Court Ordered Placements](#)

Appendix A. Comparing Types of Kinship Placements Chart

CAREGIVERS	TEMPORARY CARE		PERMANENT CARE			EXTENDED FOSTER CARE
	Unlicensed Kinship Foster Care	Licensed Foster Care (kin or foster parent)	Legal Custody	Guardianship	Adoption	Foster Care 18-21
Is financial assistance available from social services?	Ask your social services worker	Yes, monthly foster care payments	Ask your social services worker	Yes, monthly KinGAP payments for those who qualify	Yes, monthly Adoption Assistance payments for those who qualify	Yes, monthly Foster Care Board Payments for those who meet program eligibility requirements. Youth may be living in a foster home, a relative's home, or living independently.
How long will I receive financial assistance?	Ask your social services worker	Until the child turns 18 or permanently leaves the home	Ask your social services worker	Until the child is 18 or 21, depending on the youth's age when guardianship is achieved	Until the child is 18 or 21, depending on the youth's age when adoption is achieved	Until the young adult's Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) is terminated. The VPA can be terminated if the youth chooses to terminate, or if the youth no longer meets eligibility criteria. Youth are eligible until age 21.
Who receives the financial assistance?			Legal custodian, if applicable	Legal guardian, if eligible for KinGAP	Adoptive parent, if eligible for Adoption Assistance	It varies from youth to youth, based on unique circumstances. (examples: payments could go to placement provider or the youth themselves)
What expenses are there for me (out of pocket)?	All expenses related to care of the child	All expenses related to care of the child; however a monthly foster care payment is available	All expenses related to care of the child	All expenses related to care of the child; however a monthly guardianship assistance payment is available for those who qualify	All expenses related to care of the child; however a monthly adoption assistance payment is available for those who qualify	The youth is responsible for their own living expenses. Foster Care 18-21 benefits support independent living expenses for young adults.
Will a social worker visit me?	Yes	Yes	No	Court determines if visits continue	No	Yes, monthly contact with the social work is required.
How do I learn about services if I need them?	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact your local county department of social services
What additional supports are available?						
Health Care/Insurance	Medicaid	Medicaid	Medicaid	Medicaid	Medicaid	Medicaid
Independent Living Resources (LINKS program)	Yes; for children 13 and older the LINKS program is available through social services	Yes; for children 13 and older the LINKS program is available through social services	Yes; for children 13 and older the LINKS program is available through social services	Yes; for children 13 and older the LINKS program is available through social services	Yes; for children 13 and older the LINKS program is available through social services	Yes; for children 13 and older the LINKS program is available through social services
Post-Secondary Education Financial Aid (NC REACH: financial aid for undergraduates in NC public universities or community colleges) available to youth who have aged out of foster care at age 18; those who were adopted from foster care on or after their 12th birthday; or those who exited foster care to guardianship through the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP).	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/nc-reach/	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/nc-reach/	No	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/nc-reach/	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/nc-reach/	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/nc-reach/
Post Secondary Education Financial Aid (Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) provides funding for school related expenses for youth who were in foster care on or after their 17th birthday or were adopted from foster care after their 16th birthday or entered into a guardianship placement from foster care on or after their 16th birthday)	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/	No	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/	Visit website for more information: https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/
Eligibility for Free School Meals	Yes	Yes	Need-based; apply through the child's school	Need-based; apply through the child's school	Need-based; apply through the child's school	Need-based; available to youth enrolled in public school
Food Stamps	Need-based; apply through social services	Need-based; apply through social services	Need-based; apply through social services	Need-based; apply through social services	Need-based; apply through social services	Need-based; apply through social services
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency
Home Energy Assistance	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency	Contact the social services agency
Tax Credits	Contact an accountant	Contact an accountant	Contact an accountant	Contact an accountant	for more information about adoption tax credits visit: www.nacac.org/help/adoption-tax-credit/	Contact an accountant

Appendix B. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and Additional Resources

FAQ Voluntary Placement

- Will the kids get daycare, payment, food stamps (how do financials work – what resources are available in the moment?) CPS, daycare, Work First?

FAQ Foster Care

- **How long does it take to get to get licensed?**
It varies depending on how long it takes to get the requirements achieved.
- **How much financial support would we receive each month if we became licensed foster parents?** To learn more about financial and other benefits, talk with your county DSS worker.



- **Is this the child's money or the foster parent's money?** Foster care payments (board rate) are tied directly to the child, but are intended to be used by the foster parent(s) to provide for the child's day to day needs. Assistance is not intended to create a savings account for the child, but to support the family's care of the child, including food, shelter, clothing, and other needs. Children and youth may have feelings about the foster parent "being paid" to take care of them, and/or may wonder if the money should be "theirs" to spend as they like. Foster parents may need to explore the child's feelings about the money, and use the conversation to teach about money management, budgeting, and real world expenses.
- **Are there any limits on how foster parents can spend payment dollars, or can they use it however they would like?** Foster parents decide how family resources are spent. Foster care payments are child-specific, but given to the foster parent(s) to decide how to spend.
- **NC Department of Health and Human Services Foster Care website:**
<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/state-guardianship/foster-care>
- **Child Welfare Manual: Assuming Temporary Placement of a Child**
<http://reports.oah.state.nc.us/ncac/title%2010a%20-%20health%20and%20human%20services/chapter%2070%20-%20children's%20services/subchapter%20a/10a%20ncac%2070a%20.0110.pdf>

FAQ Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)

- **Funding Manual Kinship Guardianship Assistance:**
<https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/manuals/dss/csm-78/man/Section%201700.pdf>
- **Is this the child's money or the legal guardian's money?** Kinship guardianship assistance (KinGAP) is tied directly to the child, but is intended to be used by the guardian(s) to provide for the child's day to day needs. Assistance is not intended to create a savings account for the child, but to support the family's care of the child, including food, shelter, clothing, and other needs. Children and youth may have feelings about the guardian "being paid" to take

care of them, and/or may wonder if the assistance money should be “theirs” to spend as they like. Guardians may need to explore the child’s feelings about the assistance, and use the conversation to teach about money management, budgeting, and real-world expenses.

- **Are there any limits on how guardians can spend guardianship assistance dollars, or can they use it however they would like?** Legal guardians have the same rights as birth parent/primary caregivers to decide how family resources are spent. Guardianship assistance is child-specific, but given to the guardian(s) to decide how to spend. There are no restrictions on how money should be spent.
- **If the child I am caring for was never in foster care, is there still support available?** North Carolina is working toward a full kinship navigator system, which will provide supports for all relatives and other caregivers providing for children, regardless of whether the child is in DSS custody or not. Comprehensive kinship navigator services are in development, but not yet available.
- **Are there post Guardianship services and supports?** No. At this time Guardians are not eligible for post permanency services and supports, although local county social service agencies may have services available. Contact your local county department of social services to find out what services and supports exist in your area.

FAQ Schools

- **Where can I get information about schools?**
 - North Carolina Department of Public Instruction:
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/languagearts/parents/>
 - *Every Student Succeeds Act*:
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/succeeds/>
 - Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care:
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>
- **Where can I get information about school placement, and other school related activities – extracurricular activities, LINKS activities, and transportation issues?**
 - Website: *Every Student Succeeds Act* <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/succeeds/>
 - Document: Ensuring Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>
- **What is the adoption process like?** If you choose to adopt the child or youth in your care, your adoption worker will help you through the process. You can learn more by reviewing the child welfare policy manual section on adoption:
<https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/manuals/dss/csm-50/man/CSs1302.pdf>
- **How much adoption assistance do families receive each month?** The amount of adoption assistance varies depending on the child’s needs and the number of children in the home. Talk with your county DSS worker to determine your family’s eligibility for support.

- **Is this the child’s money or the adoptive parent’s money?** It’s a good idea for the guardian to have a conversation with the worker and with the whole family about assistance. Adoption assistance is tied directly to the child, but is intended to be used by the adoptive parent(s) to provide for the child’s day to day needs. Assistance is intended to support the family’s care of the child, including food, shelter, clothing, and other needs. Children and youth may have feelings about the caregiver “being paid” to take care of them, and/or may wonder if the adoption assistance money should be “theirs” to spend as they like. Caregivers may need to explore the child’s feelings about the assistance, and use the conversation to teach about money management, budgeting, and real world expenses.
- **Are there any limits on how adoptive parents can spend adoption assistance dollars, or can they use it however they would like?** Adoptive parents do not have restrictions on how the assistance is used. Adoptive parents have the same rights as birth parent/primary caregivers to decide how family resources are spent without monitoring or approval from DSS. Adoption assistance is child-specific, but given to the adoptive parents to decide how to spend. There are no restrictions on how money should be spent.

FAQ: Post-Adoption Services and Supports

- **How do I find out about post-adoption services and supports in my county?** Talk to your local Department of Social Services to find out which services you are eligible to receive. For children adopted out of the foster care system in NC, the local DSS where the family resides is responsible for providing the post-adoption services and supports even if the county was not involved with the initial removal of the child or the placement of the child with the adoptive family.

Post-adoption supports for eligible families can include: information or referrals to supportive services such as mental health or adoptive parent support groups, case management, advocacy, respite care, short-term or long-term family services or return to foster care if the placement is no longer an option for keeping the child safe.

Local County DSS Directory

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory>