

A PARENT'S GUIDEBOOK ABOUT  
LOUISIANA'S  
FOSTER CARE PROGRAM



Department of  
Children & Family Services  
*Building a Stronger Louisiana*



“  
Alone we can do so little,  
together we can do so much.  
”

**-HELEN KELLER**



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LOUISIANA'S  
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PARENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

CHILD(REN) NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

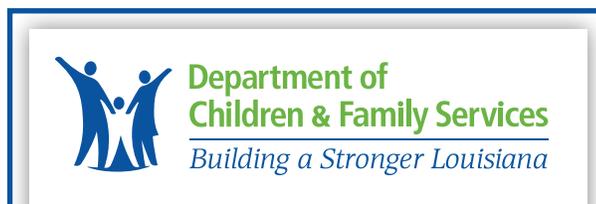
\_\_\_\_\_  
CASE WORKER OFFICE & CELL PHONE NUMBERS

\_\_\_\_\_  
CASE SUPERVISOR OFFICE & CELL PHONE NUMBERS

\_\_\_\_\_  
CHILD WELFARE MANAGER OFFICE & CELL PHONE NUMBERS

COURT OF JURISDICTION NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER

\_\_\_\_\_  
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# A PARENT'S GUIDEBOOK ABOUT LOUISIANA'S FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

*Treating all people with dignity, compassion and respect, while providing services with integrity*

## **DCFS Principles of Practice focus on the physical safety and emotional well-being of children.**

- ♥ Families are strengthened to care for their children, in their homes whenever possible.
- ♥ A permanent family is vital to a child's well-being.
- ♥ Decision-making is guided by the voice of children, young adults, and their families.
- ♥ Everyone who supports children and families is treated as an important partner.
- ♥ The knowledge and well-being of our staff and partners are valued.

This guidebook will explain how the child welfare system works, the services and the programs that are available to you. We want to partner with you to facilitate your child's safe return home. During your time with the child welfare system, we encourage you to focus on doing whatever is necessary to provide your child with a safe and stable home.

Everyone involved wants to help you and your child achieve safety, stability, and well-being. Our goal is to help you reunify with your child and have them safely remain with you. We know that being involved with the child welfare system can be very stressful, complicated, and confusing. This may seem overwhelming, but you are not in this alone.

We have helped many families in your situation reunite with their children, and in fact, about 65% of all children who come into foster care are either returned to their parent's custody or are permanently placed in the custody of a relative. This guidebook has been prepared to help you through the process, and was created with the help of parents that have gone through this experience. Please remember you are not alone! You are encouraged to ask questions or request a meeting with your case worker, the supervisor and/or manager whenever needed, and remember, if at any time things change for you such as your phone number or address, please make sure to tell your case worker immediately.

DCFS will help you and your family if needed with translation or interpreter services and other tools to make communication easy (for example, sign language, bilingual staff, and technology for the visually and hearing impaired). Clients are encouraged to ask for any needed help to ensure understanding of the Foster Care System.

Our goal is to help you reunify with your child and have them safely remain with you.



# WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

## YOUR RIGHTS:

### ✓ TO VISIT YOUR CHILD

You have the right to visit your child. A supervised visit will be held between you and your child within five days of entering foster care. You and your case worker will develop a schedule for visits and work through all of the details.

### ✓ TO HAVE AN ATTORNEY REPRESENT YOU

You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to represent you at the first court hearing, which is the 72-hour (continued custody) hearing.

### ✓ TO HAVE AN INTERPRETER

You have the right to have an interpreter to help you communicate if you have difficulties hearing or English is not your first language.

### ✓ TO REQUEST SERVICES

You have the right to request services that you feel will help you and your family achieve reunification.

### ✓ TO REQUEST A FAMILY TEAM MEETING (FTM)

You have the right to request a meeting to discuss any questions or concerns with your team at any time. Your first FTM will be scheduled within 30-45 days of your child entering custody, and at least every six months thereafter.

### ✓ TO ASK QUESTIONS

You have the right to ask questions about your case plan, decisions made, and why certain things are done.

### ✓ TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR YOUR CHILD

You have the right to make medical and educational decisions for your child. You have the right to be informed about anything that may affect your child.

### ✓ TO INCLUDE YOUR NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBE

If you or your child is American Indian or Alaskan Native, you have the right to include your tribe in case planning and communication. The agency will also contact your tribe, if it is federally recognized, to assist in supporting you and your family.



## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- ✔ Communicate with your assigned case worker and/or agency staff.
- ✔ If your child was removed from your care, provide the names of relatives and other important individuals in your child's life as possible support and placement resources for your child.
- ✔ Participate in the development of your case plan.
- ✔ Actively work to successfully complete the items in your case plan.
- ✔ Maintain consistent and quality visits with your child according to the visitation schedule.
- ✔ Participate in medical appointments.

## YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS:

- ✔ Your child has the right to be safe and supervised.
- ✔ Your child has the right to food, clothing, and shelter.
- ✔ Your child has the right to be protected from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect.
- ✔ Your child has the right to obtain treatment for medical and emotional conditions.
- ✔ Your child has the right to visit you, siblings, and other family members/kin, if it is in the child's best interest.
- ✔ Your child has the right to have a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), which is a person appointed by the courts to look after your child's best interest.
- ✔ Your child has the right to an attorney and will be appointed one by the court so that your child will be able to express their interests.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ❖ WHY WAS MY CHILD REMOVED?

An investigation of child abuse or neglect was conducted by DCFS. Through this investigation, it was determined that your child could not be protected from danger if the child remained in their home. This information was provided to a Juvenile Court judge, and the judge has placed the child in the care and custody of the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. A court hearing will be held within 72 hours or 3 business days to determine if your child should remain in foster care or return to your home. It is very important that you attend this hearing.

### ❖ WHAT HAPPENS AFTER COURT?

If the Court decides your child should stay in foster care, your case worker will work with you to help you develop a plan to get your child back. Your child will remain in foster care as you continue to work with your team (which will consist of your case worker, foster care supervisor, individuals caring for your child, and other people that you determine are important in helping you). In working with your team, remember to ask questions and keep in contact with your team for support and encouragement.

### ❖ WHEN CAN I CONTACT/SEE MY CHILD?

You have the right to visit your child. If your child is removed from your care, soon after removal you will receive a call from the case worker and/or the caregiver who has committed to partnering with you to care for your child temporarily. This will be an opportunity for you to share and discuss any important information you would like to tell the person caring for your child. An additional meeting, called the Ice Breaker meeting, will be held between you, the caregiver of your child, and your case worker as well. In the Ice Breaker meeting, you should be ready to share important information such as daily routine,

hobbies, likes/dislikes, etc., in order for the foster parent to best care for your child. If you have not already had a visit with your child by the time of the Ice Breaker meeting, you will be able to visit your child after the Ice Breaker meeting. You will work with your case worker to develop a plan to visit your child regularly.

### ❖ **WHERE IS MY CHILD LIVING?**

We want to do everything possible to place your child with a relative or someone known to your child so this experience is least traumatic. It is very important, and legally required, that you provide the name and contact information of the child's relatives. The judge will also ask you to provide this information. We are obligated to contact them when a child comes into foster care to determine if any are willing and able to temporarily or permanently care for your child. We can also consider other adults who would be willing to provide a safe, stable home while your child is in foster care. If your child is not living with a relative or friend, then your child will live in a DCFS licensed foster home, unless your child needs a more structured setting to meet their needs. Attempts will be made to place the child close to your area.

### ❖ **DO I GET A PREFERENCE ON WHO MY CHILD CAN LIVE WITH?**

It is important to keep children connected with family, so sharing family/kin options for placement is strongly encouraged.

### ❖ **WHAT DOES REUNIFICATION MEAN?**

Reunification means to "reunite." DCFS will work with you so you can have your child returned to your custody as soon as safety concerns no longer exist.

## **WORKING WITH YOUR DCFS CASE WORKERS**

### **THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CASE WORKERS, AND THEY ARE ALL IMPORTANT TO YOU:**

- Intake Worker is the worker who receives reports and sends the report to the office where you and your family reside.
- Child Protective Services (CPS) Worker is the worker who completes child abuse/neglect investigations.
- Family Services (FS) Worker is the worker who works with families when their children remain in their home.
- Foster Care (FC) Workers are workers who are assigned to every child/family that enters foster care and works with the family to reunite your family.
- Parent Worker (in some areas) is a worker who is assigned to each parent to help support the parent in getting services.
- Parent Partner is a worker within the community who works with the parent and collaborates with case workers and providers to meet the needs of families.



### ❖ **WILL I HAVE THE SAME WORKER THE WHOLE TIME?**

No, initially a Child Protective Services Worker would have been assigned to complete the investigation. You will then be assigned a Foster Care Worker, and in some areas of the state, you and your child may not have the same worker.

### ❖ **WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM MY DCFS FOSTER CARE WORKER?**

- To support you in making your home safe and to connect you with services
- To ask for your personal information regarding your child and family to help with case planning
- To include you in the decision-making process with regards to your child's permanent plan and care
- To visit you in your home
- To report progress to the court regularly
- To develop a co-created case plan within 45 days of foster care entry that shows the steps needed to have your child return to your custody

### ❖ **WHAT CAN I DO IF I HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT MY CASE?**

If you have a concern, try to discuss the issue with your Foster Care Worker first. If you feel uncomfortable doing this alone, ask someone you trust to be with you as you meet with your case worker.

If this doesn't work for you and you remain concerned, call or request a meeting with their supervisor, manager, or Area Director. If you are still not satisfied, you may contact DCFS Field Operations at (225) 342-9141.

### ❖ **KEEP A WRITTEN RECORD**

It is helpful to have proof about your progress in your case plan. Keeping track of the day and time of phone calls, meetings, letters, etc. in writing is a good method of having a clear picture of what is happening. It will help you remember what was said and done.

## **WORKING WITH YOUR CHILD'S CAREGIVER**

When a child enters DCFS custody, it is the expectation that the caregiver who will be caring for your child will provide quality parenting to your child. The caregiver will also be encouraged to maintain regular communication with you by sharing important information about your child and at times may supervise visits between you and your child. The caregiver will also be able to better meet your child's needs if you are able to provide and share important information about your child. While it may be difficult at first, establishing and supporting a relationship in which you and the caregiver can work together is critical. Through regular, open, and honest communication, the information exchanged and the joint parenting relationship observed by your child will demonstrate and reinforce your role as parent. This relationship will also demonstrate that your child is the priority, and that you and the caregiver are both committed to the best care possible for your child.

While it may be difficult at first, establishing and supporting a relationship in which you and the caregiver can work together is critical.



## COURT

A series of court hearings will take place during your involvement with the child welfare system called Child in Need of Care (CINC) hearings. The Court will advise you of your rights and appoint an attorney if you do not have one. **You have the right to have an attorney represent you and the right to be heard. Your attendance is required at all hearings. There will be several court hearings that take place in the Juvenile Dependency Court.**

- **Continued Custody/72-hour Hearing** is a hearing held within 72 hours or three business days (not including weekends and holidays) of the child being taken into custody. The reason(s) your child is in foster care are discussed during this hearing, and if continued custody is necessary for the child's safety and protection, it will be decided then.
- **Appearance/Answer Hearing** is a hearing where the parent will appear and answer the petition. At this hearing the Court shall advise the parent of his rights and responsibilities.
- **Adjudication Hearing** is a hearing to determine if your child is "In Need of Care" and if DCFS must provide more evidence if the child was confirmed to be abused or neglected.
- **Disposition Hearing** is a hearing held for the Court to make decisions about plans for the child who has been adjudicated to be In Need of Care.
- **Case Review Hearings** are conducted at least every 6 months to determine if the child should remain in custody, assessment of the child's placement, extent of the compliance with previous case plan, progress made towards alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating placement in foster care, and the likely date the child's permanent plan will be completed.
- **Permanency Hearings** are conducted within 9 months after the Disposition Hearing if the child was removed prior to the Disposition or within twelve months if the child was removed at the Disposition, but in no case more than twelve months after the removal and at least once every twelve months thereafter.

## FAMILY TEAM MEETING

- ❖ **WHAT IS A FAMILY TEAM MEETING?** An FTM is a partnering of the case worker and other team members with the parents, caregivers, youth, CASA, and Attorneys, to come together in understanding the family's situation or the youth's needs for independence, recognizing the family and youth's strengths, identifying the family and/or youth's challenges, making decisions, setting goals and achieving desired outcomes. At the conclusion of the FTM, a case plan will be created based on the information discussed in the meeting. The reason for this meeting is to set goals and explore options for the family in order for your child to be returned home.
- ❖ **WHO SHOULD YOU INVITE TO YOUR FAMILY TEAM MEETING?** Your positive support system, caregivers (relative and foster parents), CASA, both the parents, your attorney and child's attorneys.
- ❖ **WHEN WILL YOU HAVE A FTM?** An FTM will be held within 30 days of the child entering foster care and every 6 months thereafter. However, an FTM can be called at any time by any party involved.

## GLOSSARY

- ❖ **STATE CUSTODY** ■ Specific parental responsibilities that the judge shifts from you and gives to DCFS. Some of the responsibilities are: where the child lives and goes to school, selection of the child's doctor and minor medical treatment. This is a temporary arrangement, and you have a right to make recommendations.
- ❖ **JUDGE** ■ The person who determines whether your child should return to your care based on safety risks and caregiver protective capacities.
- ❖ **FOSTER PARENT** ■ Adults that complete training to help take care of your child until you can ensure the safety for your child. Every caregiver is certified and licensed by DCFS. A relative can also become a certified foster parent to assist in caring for your child.
- ❖ **KIN/FICTIVE KIN** ■ Adults who serve as supports for the family who may also be caring for a child who has been removed.
- ❖ **CASE PLAN** ■ A document indicating goals and action steps needed to determine if your child can remain safe. Your case plan is time-limited and must be confirmed by the judge. Your case plan includes goals that you and your team decide will help you, and is discussed during the FTM.
- ❖ **PERMANENCY PLAN** ■ The decision of who will be legally responsible for your child until your child is 18 years old. Possible goals are reunification, guardianship, and adoption. Permanency Plans are most often worked concurrently – meaning, working two plans at the same time in order to achieve the best outcome for the entire family. The judge reviews the plans and determines if the plans are in the best interest of your child.
- ❖ **VISITATION PLAN** ■ The opportunity to visit your child, spend time with them, and share things that may have happened while you are apart.
- ❖ **TRANSITION PLAN** ■ A plan that outlines a series of dates, times, and location to help guide the parent, caregiver, and child as the family is reunited. Your child could experience placement moves from one foster home to another.
- ❖ **CONFIDENTIALITY** ■ Legal responsibility to keep certain information private.
- ❖ **ASSESSMENT** ■ The process to determine what services a parent may need to help complete their case plan.
- ❖ **STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING (SDM)** ■ A tool that is used to measure the level of risk to the child and help decide how often your DCFS case worker will be visiting your home.
- ❖ **CASE RECORD** ■ Place where information about you and your family's case is maintained.
- ❖ **DCFS RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COURT** ■ Suggestions to the judge about what the agency believes is best for your child's safety and health.
- ❖ **CHILD SAFETY** ■ The things about you and your family situation that help or threaten your child's safety and health.
- ❖ **PROTECTIVE CAPACITIES** ■ Your ability to care for and keep your child safe.
- ❖ **STRENGTHS** ■ The things about you and your family situation that will help you to make the changes to reduce the risks to your child. What do you think your strengths are? What does your case worker think they are?
- ❖ **SAFETY PLAN** - A plan that can help you avoid dangerous situations and understand how to react when you are in danger.





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