

Family Matters

**Information for relatives considering
becoming foster parents**



Attention. If you want free help translating this information, ask your worker or call the number below for your language.

ملاحظة: إذا أردت مساعدة مجانية في ترجمة هذه المعلومات، فاسأل مساعدك في مكتب الخدمة الاجتماعية أو اتصل على الرقم 1-800-358-0377.

កំណត់សំគាល់ បើអ្នកចង់បានជំនួយកម្រិតឥតគិតថ្លៃ ដោយមិនគិតថ្លៃ សូមសួរអ្នកកាន់សំណុំរឿងរបស់អ្នក ឬ ទូរស័ព្ទទៅលេខ 1-888-468-3787 ។

Pažnja. Ako vam je potrebna besplatna pomoć za prevod ove informacije, pitajte vašeg radnika ili nazovite 1-888-234-3785.

Ceeb toom. Yog koj xav tau kev pab txhais cov xov no rau koj dawb, nug koj tus neeg lis dej num (worker) lossis hu 1-888-486-8377.

ໂປຼດຊາບ. ຖ້າຫາກທ່ານຕ້ອງການການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອໃນການແປຂໍ້ຄວາມດັ່ງກ່າວນີ້ພໍລີ, ຈົ່ງຖາມນຳພັນກຽມຊ່ວຍວຽກຂອງທ່ານຫຼືໂທໂທຕາມເລກໂທ 1-888-487-8251.

Hubaddhu. Yoo akka odeeffannoon kun sii hiikamu gargaarsa tolaa feeta ta'e, hojjataa kee gaafaddhu ykn lakkoofsa kana bilbili 1-888-234-3798.

Внимание: если вам нужна бесплатная помощь в переводе этой информации, обратитесь к своему социальному работнику или позвоните по следующему телефону: 1-888-562-5877.

Ogow. Haddii aad dooneyso in laga kaalmeeyo tarjamadda macluumaadkani oo lacag la'aan ah, weydii hawl-wadeenkaaga ama wac lambarkan 1-888-547-8829.

Atención. Si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para traducir esta información, consulte a su trabajador o llame al 1-888-428-3438.

Chú Ý. Nếu quý vị cần dịch thông tin này miễn phí, xin gọi nhân-viên xã-hội của quý vị hoặc gọi số 1-888-554-8759.

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This information is available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities by calling (651) 431-4199. TTY users can call through Minnesota Relay at (800) 627-3529. For Speech-to-Speech, call (877) 627-3848. For additional assistance with legal rights and protections for equal access to human services programs, contact your agency's ADA coordinator.

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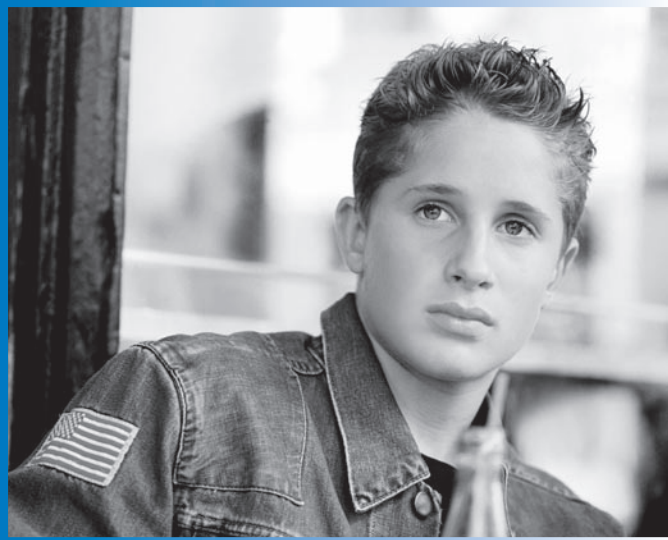
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Permanency outcomes for children:

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.



When children need foster care, the county or tribal social service agency must first consider children's relatives and kin as foster parents.



Foster care is temporary

When county or tribal social service agencies place children in foster care, the goal is to help their parent(s) and safely reunify the family as soon as possible. If children cannot return safely home, county or tribal social service staff will seek families, including relatives and kin, to permanently care for the children.

In Minnesota, the local county social service agency is responsible for providing child welfare services; the court system has oversight responsibilities. Minnesota's American Indian Child Welfare Initiative tribes have the same responsibilities and services as part of their social service agencies and court system.

When children need foster care, without delay, the county or tribal social service agency must first consider a child's maternal and paternal relatives and kin as a foster home. Relatives include persons related by blood, marriage and adoption; kin includes persons with whom a child has previously lived or had a significant relationship. For an Indian child, a relative includes members of their extended family as defined by the tribe.

Children need families; it is their enduring source of relationships. The preservation of safe connections and attachments are vital to a child's development. The purpose of this booklet is to provide relatives and kin with information about Minnesota's foster care program requirements, support services, and the responsibilities of foster parents.

Caring for children

When the county or tribal social service agency determines that a child cannot live safely with their parents and requires foster care, the agency must place them with:

- Relatives or kin who agree to provide immediate care. In addition, they agree to complete a foster care application within 10 days, and qualify to be licensed foster parents.
- Licensed foster families who may or may not be related to children.

All children in foster care must be in licensed foster homes. The home must be licensed by either a county, child placing agency or a tribe.



When county or tribal social service agencies place children in foster care, the goal is to help their parent(s) and safely reunify the family as soon as possible. If children cannot return safely home, county or tribal social service staff will seek families, including relatives and kin, to permanently care for the children.

Children need their families, even if they cannot be placed with them.



County and tribal social service agencies must search and find relative and non-relative foster families who will:

- Offer a safe home that meets a child's daily needs
- Provide stability and consistency
- Preserve a child's relationships and connections to their birth parents and extended family
- Enable a child to live with their siblings, or have frequent contact with them
- Participate in plans to reunify a child with their birth parents, unless a court decides otherwise
- Accept a child as a unique individual
- Preserve a child's connections to friends, school, their culture and community
- Ensure children receive medical care, other necessary services and attend school.

In Minnesota, child welfare and other social services are provided by the county or tribal agency where a child resides. In some cases, relatives or kin live in a different county or state than the child and their parent(s). In these cases, the relative's county or tribal social service agency would be different than the agency providing services to a child and parents. It will be necessary for the relative/kin to request consideration for foster care placement from the county or tribal social service agency that is working with the child and their parents. The relatives/kin will need to follow this request with a completed application for a foster care license to the county or tribal agency where they reside, or with a private foster care agency.

County agency must search for relatives

The county or tribal agency must ask parents for information about relatives/kin who may be able to care for children when removing a child from their parents' care. Prior to placement, or within 30 days after removal, the county agency must notify maternal and paternal relatives and kin about a child's need for a foster home. The county agency must send relatives a letter and document their efforts to find and contact relatives. The letter to relatives must include the following:

- The need for a foster home for a child, the option to become a placement resource, and the possibility of the need for a permanent placement
- Their responsibility to keep the county agency informed of their current address to receive notices in the event that a permanent placement is needed for a child
- The opportunity to participate in the care and planning for a child
- Family foster care licensing requirements, including how to complete an application, how to request a variance from licensing standards that do not present a safety or health risk to a child, and supports available for foster parents and children.

A relative's decision not to be an initial placement resource shall not affect whether they are considered for placement later. The opportunity to participate in the care and planning for a child may be lost by failing to notify the agency of an address change or failing to respond to notices.

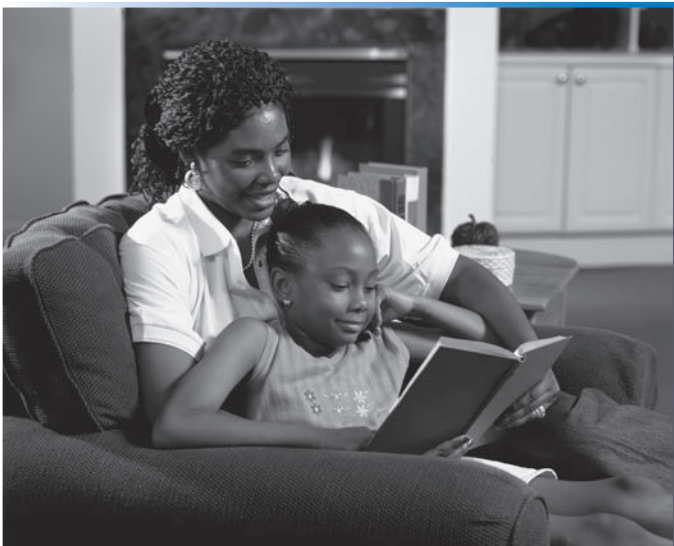
Relatives or kin may be aware that a child is in need of placement in foster care and ask the county agency or tribe providing services to that child and their parent(s) to be considered to care for the child. Relatives are encouraged to follow-up a verbal request with a request in writing. When relatives ask to be considered, they can apply for a foster care license through their local county or tribal social service agency. See Seeking a license in this booklet.

Children need their families, even if they cannot be placed with them. When relatives and kin cannot provide daily care for a child, they can talk with the county or tribal social service agency about other ways they can help a child in foster care and their parent(s). The agency would need to determine that a relative's involvement would be in a child's best interest, and may require background studies or training.

Ways relatives may be able to help include:

- Provide respite care or babysitting for a child
- Drive the parent(s) and/or child to an appointment
- Help with parent-child visitation
- Request visitation with a child
- Attend court hearings
- Go to a child's activities, such as a baseball game or school play
- Invite a child to family celebrations and make sure they have a way to get to the event
- Offer cultural or family social/medical history information
- Help a youth with tasks associated with their independent living plan, such as helping them visit a college, helping to find an affordable car, or letting them use a computer to search for a job.

Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.152, provides that any relative may request and be granted notice, and the opportunity to be heard in a review or hearing to be held with respect to a child.



When relatives and kin cannot provide daily care for a child, they can talk with the county or tribal social service agency about other ways they can help a child in foster care and their parent(s). The agency would need to determine that a relative's involvement would be in a child's best interest, and may require background studies or training.



Emergency relative foster care placement

When foster care placement is needed, county social service agencies may place a child immediately with a relative or kin who is not yet a licensed foster parent. To immediately place children with relatives and kin, the agency will need to ensure that the home is safe for a child. The agency may request release of information to access records to determine if anyone who resides in the home has a criminal history or history of maltreatment of children or adults. Agency staff must visit the relative's home before an emergency placement, or within three days of placement, to ensure a child's health and safety. This assessment is not the same as a complete background study. Page 12 of this booklet provides sample questions the agency may ask a prospective relative to ensure a child's health and safety. It will also be necessary to provide fingerprints, as explained on page 7, to complete the foster care application.

Tribal social service agencies also have a process for placing a child immediately with an unlicensed relative or kin. Contact the tribal social service agency making the placement for information about their process.

When a county or tribal social service agency places a child with an unlicensed relative or kin, the relative must become a licensed foster parent. Unlicensed relatives or kin must complete the child foster care application within 10 calendar days of a child's placement in their home. The relative must submit the following to a licensing agency to complete the application:

- Application for Child Placement (DHS 4258a)
- Home Safety Checklist (DHS 0644)
- Initial background study information
- Classifiable fingerprint cards (persons 18 years and older)
- Notice of privacy practices (licensing agency form).

The application for Child Placement and Home Safety Checklist are on the DHS website, www.dhs.state.mn.us. Use the toolbar at the top of the page to select "Forms (eDocs)" and use the eDocs search to find forms DHS 4258a and DHS 0644.

Relatives need to complete the application and submit it to their local county or tribal social service agency, or private foster care agency. Tribal social service agencies may require a different application; contact the tribe for the correct forms.

Relatives accepting a child for emergency placement are required to complete the foster care licensing process. If the process is not completed, the agency cannot verify that a child is safe, and is required to remove them from the relative's home.

Foster care placement with relatives is an agency's first consideration

County and tribal social service agencies must make a decision about where to place a child that is based on a child's individual needs and in their best interest. Relatives and kin must be given first consideration for placement, and considered every time a child is moved during their time in foster care. If a child cannot be safely returned to their parents' care, relatives could be considered at the point the agency is determining a permanent home for a child. Page 12 provides sample questions the county or tribal agency may ask relatives when making placement decisions.

Social service agencies may offer families an opportunity to participate in a planning meeting, often called Family Group Decision Making. These meetings bring parents, extended family, kin and others together to talk about a child and parents' needs, and to make placement and permanency decisions for children. The meeting may include planning for placement, services, permanency resources, safety planning, or other supports for the parent(s) and child to encourage reunification.

The court reviews efforts of the agency to search for relatives, and if there is a relative who is qualified to be licensed to provide family foster care, the court may order a child placed with the relative consistent with their best interest.

Relatives or kin who are not a child's foster parents may continue to help them and their parent(s) by partnering with the agency. Consider the suggestions on page 2 about how relatives can work with the county or tribal social service agency and professionals to support children and their parent(s) during placement, preserving connections and relationships.



Only the Minnesota Department of Human Services' Licensing Division can make a determination of a licensing disqualification for county and private foster care agencies.

Anytime there is a change in household membership (for example, someone moves into the home), foster parents are required to notify the county or private foster care licensing agency.



Seeking a license

Relatives and kin not selected for emergency placement may request to be considered as foster parents for a child, and apply for a foster care license through their county or tribal social service agency, or a private foster care agency. Contact a tribal social service agency for information about their licensing process.

The application for licensure for county and private foster care agencies is on the DHS website, www.dhs.state.mn.us. Use the toolbar at the top of the web page to select “Forms” (eDocs); use eDocs search to find forms DHS 4258a and DHS 4258b.

To become licensed, prospective foster parents:

- Must be at least 21 years old
- May be single or married
- May rent or own a home
- Must be able to physically care for child(ren) and obtain all necessary medical care
- Must offer a safe home or apartment that has bedroom space for children
- Cannot spank or use any other form of physical punishment
- Must be free of chemical health problems
- Must provide information for a background study for everyone age 13 or older in the home, including fingerprints for everyone 18 years and older, and an approved background study
- Must complete six hours of initial foster parent training and 12 hours of annual training
- Must participate in additional training if children use car seats or have medical needs or challenging behaviors that require specific knowledge, skills or supports.

To complete the licensing process, social workers will visit with relatives and kin to:

- Learn about their family’s history, parenting skills, and ability to meet a child’s daily and special needs
- Tour their home, ensure it meets local and state safety requirements, fire code, and if needed, request additional safety inspections
- Ensure that background studies for everyone age 13 and older in the home have been approved by the Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Request and follow up with three personal references about the family
- Write a home study to document the family assessment that includes information about the relative/kin’s family history, relationship history, information about their own children, health history, coping and support, parenting practices, family schedule and cultural information
- Provide training to help families understand the agencies’ role, the goals of permanency planning, and the shared responsibility to care for children’s well-being.

The county or private agency licensing the home must provide applicants with a summary of the Minnesota foster care standards. The standards are Minn. Rules, parts 2960.3000 to 2960.3100. The standards are also available at www.dhs.state.mn.us, on the Foster Care page.

Variance Request

A variance from Minnesota foster care standards may be requested in circumstances that do not jeopardize the health or safety of a child. An applicant must request a variance in writing to the county or private agency licensing the home. A licensing agency has the legal authority to issue most variances, however, variances requesting a dual license for foster care and child care, or adult foster care, child foster care for youth over age 18, and variances regarding background study disqualifications, must be approved by the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Completing background studies

Background studies are reviews of individuals' criminal, abuse and neglect history. Minnesota requires background studies when individuals have direct contact with persons served by licensed programs. Background studies related to foster care have an additional requirement; fingerprints are necessary for persons 18 years of age or older to access national crime information databases to complete the background study. The study includes reviewing juvenile records for anyone under age 23. The Minnesota Department of Human Services' Licensing Division completes all background studies for child foster care. Some tribal social service agencies may have other arrangements to complete background studies.

When an individual's records reveal a criminal history or previous maltreatment finding, they may be disqualified from becoming licensed foster parents for a county or private foster care agency. A maltreatment finding must be determined serious or recurring to be considered a disqualification. If relative applicants or household members are disqualified, the Minnesota Department of Human Services will provide written notice to the individual, as well as to the county or private agency licensing the home. The notice will include information about how to request reconsideration of the disqualification. Family members have a right to know the information used to make the background study determinations.

Tribal social service agencies have a process for background studies. Contact the tribal social service agency making the placement for information about their process.

Only the Minnesota Department of Human Services' Licensing Division can make a determination of a licensing disqualification for county and private foster care agencies.

In limited cases, the Minnesota Department of Human Services may be able to set aside or grant a variance to a disqualification if relatives show that they are not a risk to children's safety or well-being.

If a licensing disqualification is discovered after children are placed in a relative or kin home, county or tribal social service agency staff may need to remove children from the home, and may return them only after a disqualification is set aside, or a variance is granted by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

It is extremely important that all household members complete the background study. Failure to report a new household member is a serious situation and may result in a corrective licensing action.



Anytime there is a change in household membership, for example, someone moves into the home, foster parents are required to notify the county or private foster care licensing agency. It is extremely important that all household members complete the background study. Failure to report a new household member is a serious situation and may result in a corrective licensing action.

Additional information about the background study process is on the Minnesota Department of Human Services' website, www.dhs.state.mn.us/licensing. Questions about background studies can be sent to dhs.awbackgroundstudy@state.mn.us.

Licensing Process

When a county or private foster care agency receives an application, it is required to act on the application. The agency can engage the family in their home study process and/or request additional information or assessments. The agency uses the application, background study, home visits, and other information gathered, to make a determination and sends their recommendation to approve or deny the application to the Minnesota Department of Human Services' Licensing Division.

An applicant may ask the county, tribe or private agency licensing the home for an update on the progress and status of their application.

Tribal social service agencies license, approve, and certify child foster homes on or near reservations. Prospective foster parents must contact their tribal social service agency for information about this process.

An approved foster care license does not guarantee placement of a child in the home of a particular relative or kin. Placement decisions are made based on a child's individual needs and best interests.

Foster care placement: Knowing what to expect

County and tribal social workers must develop written plans that describe what needs to happen for children to safely return to their birth parents, and describes the care children need while they are living with foster parents. This plan is referred to as the Out-of-home Placement Plan. As part of the process, county social workers prepare, and courts approve, all visitation schedules for foster children with birth parents, siblings or other relatives and kin. Foster parent(s) are consulted in development of the plan and provided a copy.

All relative (and non-relative) foster parents must:

- Participate in foster parent training
- Work with county or tribal social service agencies and other professionals to meet children's needs, including school, dental, medical, therapy appointments, visitation and transportation
- Keep records about children in their care
- Make every effort to understand and be patient in addressing challenging or unexpected behaviors of children due to their life experiences
- Share information with social workers about children's adjustment and needs

- Report, as mandated reporters, any suspected abuse or neglect of children
- Participate in services to meet children's needs
- Keep information about a child and parent(s) private
- Provide agency staff, and other professional staff, access to the foster home to visit with a child and provide services (the county social worker is required to visit a foster child monthly, and most of these visits need to be in the foster family's home)
- Support visitation between a child and their parents, siblings and other relatives.

Foster parents must be notified of court hearings concerning a child in their care, and have the right to attend the hearings and be heard.

All relative (and non-relative) foster parents must partner with the county or tribal agency to support the Out-of-home Placement Plan, follow visitation plans, and provide the agency with information about the progress of the plan. Research shows that family dynamics and communication within the extended family are likely to change. Relative foster parents need to consider that this experience may significantly change the immediate and extended family composition and relationships. The county or tribal social service agency's primary focus is going to be a child and their parent(s). The agency will offer the relative foster parents supports to ensure a child's needs are met.

Visitation

As part of the Out-of-home Placement Plan, it is the responsibility of the county or tribal social service agency to develop a visitation plan with parents, siblings, and other relatives that is consistent with a child's best interest. Relatives may request visitation, but it is the agency's responsibility to develop a plan that is consistent with a child's best interest.

Taking advantage of available help

County social service agencies must offer relatives and kin supports to care for foster children. Relative and kin licensed foster parents receive the same supports from county social service agencies as provided to other foster families who are not relatives. These include:

- Monthly payments to cover the expenses of children's room, board, clothing, personal needs, and a child's difficulty of care
- Medical Assistance or other medical insurance to cover children's medical and dental costs while in foster care (extended family members, relatives, and foster parents are not responsible for these expenses for a foster child)
- Monthly home visits from the county social workers responsible for placement and permanency planning
- Services to help care for children's medical and mental health needs
- Training or support groups for foster, relative and kinship caregivers
- Help from county social services staff to resolve problems and provide resources to meet children's needs.

When relatives or kin foster parents become the permanent legal parents of children who are in their care, they may be eligible for assistance to meet children's special needs.





Relatives requesting foster care services and supports

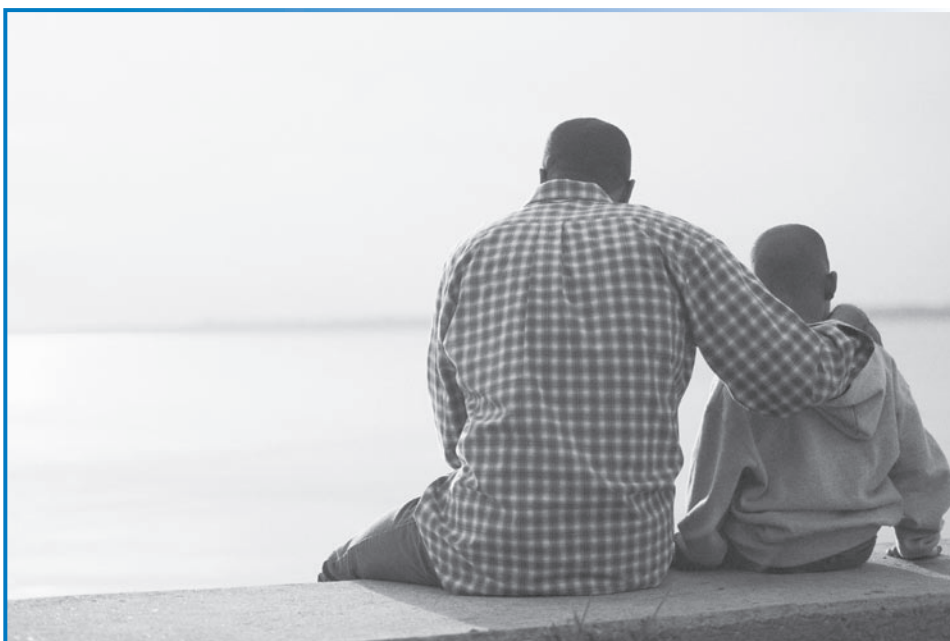
Relatives or kin who are informally caring for a child may request foster care services from the local county social service agency. When services are requested, the county must give the relative or kin written notice explaining:

- If a child in the relative's care needs child protective services, the relative may make a child protection report. The county will provide information about how to make the report.
- If a relative or kin believes that a county agency has placed a child in the relative's home pursuant to a court order or a Voluntary Placement Agreement, and they are not receiving foster care payments for the child, the relative may request payments. The county must approve or deny their request within 30 days. The denial notice includes appeal information.

Permanency options for a child in foster care

Foster care is temporary; when it is determined that a child cannot return safely to their parental home, county and tribal social service staff will seek families, including relatives and kin, to permanently care for children. The county social service agency may send a notice to relatives about the need for a permanent placement; it may ask the court to modify the notice requirement; or may ask the court to relieve the agency of the notice requirement. The relative notice requirements do not apply when a child is placed with an appropriate relative, or a foster home that has committed to being the permanent legal placement of a child, and the agency approves of the permanent placement.

If families are asked to consider adoption or accept transfer of permanent custody of a child, the booklet "Paths to Permanency" (DHS 4907 and 4907a) offers relative foster parents information about permanency options when reunification of a child with their parents is not possible.



Seeking other resources

Help is available through other resources, including:

- **Minnesota Kinship Caregivers Association**
A Minnesota organization that offers regional support groups, sponsors training events, and provides a handbook for relatives that includes information about financial and legal issues.
(651) 917-4640
www.mkca.org
- **MN ADOPT** is a program contracted by and funded through the Minnesota Department of Human Services. It is dedicated to finding permanence for Minnesota children who need families, and to sustaining families who adopt them. MN ADOPT provides support services offered by private agencies, counties, tribes and individuals for families who have adopted Minnesota waiting children; provides information on parenting children with special needs and adoption assistance; referrals to statewide services and resources; training (online and in person) for adoptive parents and professionals; and plans events celebrating diversity and designed for recruitment.
(612) 861-7115
(866) 303-6276
www.mnadopt.org





Assessing a relative's capacity to care for a child

When county and tribal social service agencies consider placement with a relative or kin, they must ensure that the placement is in a child's best interest, and the relative can care for a child's individual needs. Some questions that may be asked include:

- Can you tell me about the child?
- When have you cared for the child in the past?
- Where would the child sleep in your home?
- How do you picture protecting the child while at the same time ensuring that they maintain contact with their parents and siblings?
- Can you describe other times when you protected a child or other children from harm or potential harm?
- What do you think the child will need most from you during the first 30 days in your home?
- What will you expect from the child during the first 30 days in your home?
- What do you know about the struggles the child has been through? How might you help the child cope?
- What will you do if the child is angry and does not appreciate you and how you are trying to help?
- What do you think contributes to the stability in your life?
- Can you describe a typical day in your life?
- How do you imagine your life will change if the child comes into your home?
- How do you think you will adapt to the changes in your daily life?
- How do you think other family members will adapt to the changes?
- What do you think about having regular contact and visiting with social workers in your home, who are going to be ensuring the child is safe, cared for, and planning for their permanency?

By asking relatives who are potential caregivers the previous questions, the social worker is trying to discover if the caregiver:

- Has protected the child in the past under similar circumstances or family conditions
- Has made appropriate arrangements to assure the child is not left alone with the maltreating person
- Believes the child's report of maltreatment and is supportive of them
- Is physically able to intervene to protect the child
- Does not have significant individual needs, which might affect the safety of the child
- Has sufficient resources to meet the child's basic needs
- Has adequate knowledge and skills to care for the child. This may involve considering the caregiver's ability to meet the child's special needs, or participating in training to learn how to meet their needs
- Is willing to work with the caseworker, and supports efforts to assess the specific needs of the child's family and provided services
- Expresses appropriate concern and intolerance about what occurred
- Is emotionally able to carry out a plan and is able to intervene, if necessary, to protect the child
- Displays concern for the child, their experiences, and is intent on emotionally protecting them
- Has a strong bond with the child or is willing to develop a relationship
- Is clear that the first priority is the well-being needs of the child.
- Expresses a belief that the maltreating person is in need of help, and supports that person getting help
- May have a difficult time believing the parent would maltreat their child, but describes the child as believable and trustworthy
- Does not place responsibility on the child for the family's problems.





Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

Child Safety and Permanency Division
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St. Paul, MN 55164-0943