

# Kin-First Culture

This guide summarizes seven strategies to create a **Kin-First Culture**— that promotes kinship placements, helps children maintain connections with their families, and tailor services and supports to the needs of kinship families. **Kinship Care** means the full-time care, nurturing and protection by relatives. Virginia has included fictive kin in their statutory definition of “relative” for purpose of child welfare policies.

## IDENTIFICATION, NOTIFICATION, AND ENGAGEMENT OF KIN

- Discover maternal and paternal kin for placement and support. The networks of the paternal family should be examined as thoroughly, even if the father is currently absent from the child’s life.
- Utilize the Father Engagement Toolkit at <https://fusion.dss.virginia.gov/dfs/DFS-Home/Family-Engagement/Fatherhood-Engagement-Toolkit>
- Search the Birth Father Registry to determine if any man has registered as a putative father.
- Initiate diligent search as soon as the agency is made aware of the existence of such parent and continues until court excuses further search and the child has achieved permanency.
- Document diligent search efforts in OASIS using the diligent search screen so the results are retained for all parties.
- In foster care, federal law requires written notice to any identified relatives within 30 days; it should be done within 5 days when feasible.
- Utilize ICPC for kin identified who reside out of state.
- Engage tribes early in efforts to locate family placements and supports for American Indian and Alaska Native children.
- When engaging kin, focus on the role they can play to help children preserve healthy family connections, even when the children are not placed with them.
- Give kin the opportunity to be heard and considering their input in critical decisions that affect their lives. Their ability to participate in all aspects of child welfare decision making can increase engagement and empower families and youth.
- Utilize Family Partnership Meetings to explore and discuss the family’s needs, strengths, and challenges. These meetings often begin before a child is removed from their parents.

### PRACTICE TIPS

#### Diligent search

- the efforts to locate adult relatives and other individuals who have significant relationships with the child.
- initiated at first contact
- search progress reported at each court hearing
- continues until permanency

## PLACEMENT WITH KIN

- Create a sense of urgency for placement with kin.
- Complete thorough Exception Reports when unable to place with kin.
- Kin-First Culture seeks to remove all barriers to approving kin who can provide a safe and stable placement for the child.
- Educate kin on the differences between caring for a child as an approved foster parent vs an alternative to foster care so they can make an informed decision about which is best for their family.
- Utilize written materials about kinship placement options and their various benefits and supports; including the VDSS Kinship Care Brochure and the Voluntary Parental Child Safety Placement Program brochures for parents and caregivers.
- Consider all the roles kin can provide; ensure connections and supports for youth remain strong.
- Utilize the Permanency Assessment Tool (PAT) to assess relatives/fictive kin for Parent Child Safety Placement Program or kinship foster care.

## IMMEDIATE SAFE PLACEMENT WITH KIN AS A RESOURCE FAMILY

- Support that the child’s first and only placement should be with kin.
- State Police criminal name checks and Central Registry Searches through OASIS can be done immediately.
- Children can be placed immediately with kin after background checks are received, a PAT assessment, and home environment checklist is completed.
- Submit a kinship waiver within 72 hours of placement.

Kinship Care research repeatedly shows that, compared to placement in non-kin settings, placement with kin:



reduces a child’s trauma due to removal from their parents, and

reduces their chance of being moved to other homes.

### **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR KIN**

- Kin caregivers may receive financial assistance and there are preventative services funding categories to assist with needs.
- Generally, kin caregivers caring for children outside of the child welfare system may qualify for public assistance such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or child-only TANF.
- Relative Maintenance Support Payment Program - which provides an additional \$200 per child per month in for kin caregivers who have been certified by the child welfare agency as having kept the child out of foster care.
- Kin caregivers caring for children inside the child welfare system and approved as a foster parent should be receiving the same foster care maintenance payments and other financial assistance as non-kin foster parents.
- If the child has achieved permanency with kin and has exited the child welfare system under adoption assistance or the KinGAP assistance program, the child may qualify for an ongoing monthly subsidy.

### **KIN-SPECIFIC FOSTER PARENT APPROVAL PRACTICES**

- Utilize the Resource Family Tip Sheet “Kinship/Fictive Kin Approval”.
- Resource Family staff may request waivers for non-safety criteria related to foster parent approval.
- Provide kinship-specific training. Trainings should be culturally appropriate, and trauma informed, recognize the unique family dynamics associated with kin care, and include examples that reflect the life circumstances of the kin participating. CRAFFT Coordinators can assist to make a plan for training and support.
- Utilize Mutual Family Assessment (MFA) Program to refer to contract workers who may have an increased capacity to work closely with kin to help them maintain full approval when waivers are utilized.
- Label Kinship placements in OASIS as a relative or fictive kin placement.

### **PERMANENCY WITH KIN**

- Kin can support visitation and reunification with parents.
- Kin can be part of all the options for legal permanence for the child, including reunification with the parents, legal custody of kin, and subsidized adoption.
- Written materials, specifically about permanency options for kin, can assist with informed decision making and ensure families are choosing the best option for their individual circumstances.
- Utilize the brochure Kinship Care: Exploring options for relatives and close family friends of children in foster care.

- Use family-centered team meetings to help families make the best decision about a permanent family for the child, including team decision-making meetings, permanency roundtables, multidisciplinary team meetings, etc.
- Increase use of kinship guardianship assistance-Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP), as an option for kin caregivers if reunification and adoption are not in the best interests of the child.
- Post-permanency services and supports should be provided to assist kin caregivers. If properly supported as soon as an issue arises, stability can be maintained for the child and the family.



### **KIN SUPPORT FOR PLACEMENT STABILITY**

- Utilize Virginia's six Kinship Navigator Programs throughout the state.
- Utilize the Virginia Kinship Resource Guide at <https://www.kinshipvirginia.com>
- Support kin caregivers who are caring for children with increased needs by using a needs assessment tool (VEMAT) to provide families with additional financial support.
- Engage other public systems, such as schools, early care and education, economic security, and aging services to support children, parents and kin.
- Involve legal stakeholders, including the judiciary, attorneys, and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) in supporting the agency's priority for kinship placement and connections.
- Provide opportunities for kinship families to network with each other through mentoring, support groups and leadership development opportunities.
- Develop strong relationships and referral processes with community-based organizations that can provide tailored, culturally appropriate and relevant services to children, parents and kin.

## References

American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, Children's Defense Fund, And Generations United, with support from Casey Family Programs. (2021, December). *Kinship Caregiving Options: Considerations for Caregivers*. <http://www.grandfamilies.org>

American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and Generations United, with support from Casey Family Programs. (2023) *Kinship Assessment Tool*. <http://www.grandfamilies.org>

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Virginia Department of Social Services. (2024, December 31). *Fatherhood Engagement Toolkit* <https://fusion.dss.virginia.gov/dfs/DFS-Home/Family-Engagement/Fatherhood-Engagement-Toolkit>

Virginia Department of Social Services. (2024, December 23). *Kinship Care: Exploring options for relatives and close family friends of children in foster care*. [https://www.dss.virginia.gov/nam/downloads/kinship\\_care\\_brochure\\_web.pdf](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/nam/downloads/kinship_care_brochure_web.pdf)

Virginia Department of Social Services. (2024, December 31). *Family Resource Tip Sheet: Kinship/Fictive Kin Approval*. <https://fusion.dss.virginia.gov/dfs/DFS-Home/Resource-Family/Resource-Family-Resources-and-Job-Aids>