



# ROADMAP TO REUNIFICATION

*Bringing Your Child Home*

"For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self.

The journey doesn't end."

-Michelle Obama

"When can my kids come home?"

This is the first question many parents ask when their children are in foster care. When children are placed in foster care, it can be very stressful for everyone in the family. You may feel angry, overwhelmed, or worried about your children's safety and well-being. Your children may be confused and scared.

But foster care is not forever. Children and youth can – and do – return home to their families. In fact, this is the most common outcome. This is called **Reunification**.

**Reunification**—which means getting the family safely back together—is almost always the first goal and in your child's best interest.



***\*\*For all words in this color font within this document, please see the glossary at the end for definitions.\*\****

# Important First Meetings

Below is a list of important meetings in the first 14 days that you should attend.

	DATE	NOTES
<b>Shelter Hearing</b>		
<b>Case Transfer Staffing</b> - where the case is transferred from CPI to your Dependency Case Manager (DCM)		
<b>Comfort Call</b> - occurs within 48 hours of an out of home placement		
<b>Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Staffing</b> - held within 72 hours of your child being placed into out of home care		
<b>Visit with your Children</b> - usually set during the Shelter Hearing to occur during the first 72 hours		
<b>First In-Person Meeting with your DCM</b>		

keep  
going

# Important Contacts

Title	Name	Phone Number	Email	Notes
Dependency Case Manager (DCM)				
Dependency Case Manager Supervisor				
Your Attorney				
Guardian Ad Litem				
Foster Parent				
Family Finder from CCKids				
Peer				

Please make sure everyone has **your** contact information as well. If you have changed your number or do not have access to it, ensure your **attorney & DCM** have a way to reach you.

## CCKids County Service Centers:

### St. Lucie County Service Center

121 N. Second Street  
Fort Pierce, FL 34950  
(772) 672-3560

### Okeechobee County Service Center

208 NE Seventh Ave.  
Okeechobee, FL 34972  
(863) 623-3145

### Martin County Service Center

3465 SE Willoughby Blvd.  
Stuart, FL 34994  
(772) 678-3555

### Indian River County Service Center

1459 20th Street  
Vero Beach, FL 32960  
(772) 617-1677

# Introduction

Being involved with the system can be very scary and stressful, but it can also give your family extra support and a chance to be stronger than before. By participating and helping to design your **case plan** and the services it includes, you can strengthen your skills to become the best parent that you can be for your children.

No one can tell you exactly how long your children will be in **foster care**; this will depend on your case plan and the circumstances that brought you to the foster care system. Reunification does not happen overnight, **but everyone agrees that the first goal is to reunite children and youth with their families as soon as possible.**

Federal law requires States to establish a **“permanency plan”** for each child in care. (this is a plan for where the child will live when they leave foster care— whether they go home to their family [reunification], live permanently with a relative **[kinship care]**, or are placed for adoption). Permanency plans also include services that families must complete in order for children to return home. In most cases where the child remains in foster care for 15 out of 22 months, the law requires the child welfare agency to ask the court to **terminate parental rights** (end the legal parent/child relationship). **During this 15-month period, however, States are required to work to bring parents and children back together.**



# Section 1:

## Your Family's Rights While Involved with the Foster Care System

If you feel as if your rights are being violated, reach out to your attorney as soon as possible!

Fathers who are not married to their children's mother may need to establish paternity before their rights are recognized.

### Your Family's Rights

You have the right to be notified of the specific **allegations** against you and the outcome of the agency's investigation.

When children are removed from their home, every effort is made to place them with relatives. You have the right to identify willing family members and close friends that your children can temporarily stay with. Florida is required to locate and notify relatives (on both sides of the family) within 30 days for placement efforts.

Florida must try to keep siblings in foster care together.

You have the right to be represented by a lawyer.

You have the right to be informed about all court hearings.

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your child's education. This includes talking to their teacher and being involved in 504/IEP meetings.

You have the right to know and be involved in decisions about your child's medical, dental and mental health. This includes speaking to their therapist and doctors.

## Your Family's Rights (continued)

Even if you are undocumented, you can get your children back. You can also get a translator. at any time.

You have the right to bring people who support you to court and meetings, especially (multidisciplinary meetings) MDT's.

You have the right to disability accommodations in all services, including all court hearings, but you must ask for it.

You have the right to attend and be heard at all meetings about your child where you can speak for yourself and be listened to at each step of the process.

If allowed by the Judge, you have the right to have regular visits and contact with your children while they are in foster care.

You have the right to receive fair treatment regardless of race, culture, gender, or religion —including having culturally sensitive services provided in the language you prefer.



**Your children also have rights while they are in foster care, These include:**

## **Your Children's Rights**

Appropriate food, clothing, and shelter

Freedom from harm, danger, and neglect

Access to education

Medical, mental health, and dental care

Someone to represent their interests at hearings (such as an attorney ad litem)

Placement with their siblings when possible; if siblings must be separated, they must have frequent visits.

Placement in a setting where their native language is spoken and where their religious customs can be maintained





# Section 2:

## Your Child's Placement



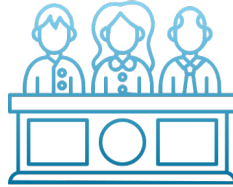
While they are not living with you, your children might live with a family member or close friend (sometimes called **kinship care**), an unrelated foster family, or in an **emergency shelter, group home**, or other treatment facility. Research suggests that if children must be placed out of your home, living with relatives or close friends (kin or **fictive kin**) can help them thrive. The agency will likely ask you if there are family members who can provide a safe place for your child to stay. You may ask the agency to consider placing your child with relatives, even if your relatives live in another State.

Relatives will be screened (have a **background check**, finger prints, or **home study**) to be sure that they can provide a safe temporary home. Give the agency as much contact information for your relatives as you can. If you are worried that your family cannot afford to take care of your children, the agency may be able to help them with financial and other supports.

# Section 3:

## Court Suggestions

First impressions are important. And creating a “positive, first impression” can make a difference. It is important that you show proper courtroom conduct to make a good impression in dependency court. With all the recent changes to virtual (zoom) court, it's important to still act as if you're in-person. It is up to the judge on whether your case will be on zoom or in-person. However you should show up in-person to your shelter hearing.



**Arrive on Time:** It is best to show up at least 15 minutes before your scheduled appearance.

**Setting Up Virtual Court (Zoom):** Most courts today are held by Zoom (only shelter hearings and trials are held in person). It is up to the of the judge. If you are attending court by zoom, make sure you have the app downloaded and ready to go. You can download zoom on your phone, a computer or a tablet and will need a good connection. If you need help with setting it up, please ask someone like your Dependency Case Manager.

**Specific to Zoom:** Find somewhere quiet and calm, with Wi-Fi. Keep your camera on and stay focused. It's important to act as if you are in-person. Do not be in the car, driving, lying in bed, walking around, or multi-tasking. You are still in court. Just like regular court, you must wait to be called on before you speak. The judge or attorney will tell you when it's your turn. If you need to speak to your attorney during a hearing, ask the judge for a moment to speak with your attorney.

**Dress Appropriately:** Dress as if you are going on a job interview. Even on zoom, it's important to dress appropriately. Avoid pajamas and clothing with explicative language.

**Stand when the judge enters the court room:** (If you are in-person) When the bailiff says “all rise” as the judge enters the room, show respect by standing until the judge says to be seated.

**Do your best to remain calm:** You are going through a highly stressful situation involving your children. Take time to process your emotions and do your best to control your emotions while in court. Always ask your attorney or the judge for permission to address the court, and you will be given an opportunity to speak. Avoid making any type of negative facial expression, gesture, or outburst when the court is in session. Always address the judge as “Your Honor” to show respect.

*Always give your full attention during court, even if it's on Zoom. It shows the judge, and others, that you are respectful, professional and serious about your case.*



# COURT



## Types of Court Hearings

<b>Shelter Hearing</b>	This hearing is typically held when a child is initially placed outside of their parent's care. Both the parent(s) and the child welfare agency may present evidence to the court. A judge decides where the child should stay temporarily. Usually parents get a free lawyer.
<b>Adjudicatory Hearing (Fact-Finding)</b>	Evidence is heard specifically about whether the child is abused or neglected as <b>alleged</b> in the petition to determine if the court will continue to be involved in the case. A judge dismisses the case or rules that the child was abused or neglected.
<b>Dispositional Hearing</b>	This type of hearing may take place immediately after the fact-finding hearing. A judge will, among other things, decide the visitation plan, order services, and determine where the child will be placed while the case is ongoing.
<b>Judicial Review Hearing</b>	Courts usually hear evidence and make findings regarding whether the agency has offered and provided services to assist the parents in making progress in safely parenting their child and providing permanency and well-being. It also addresses various well-being issues related to the child.
<b>Permanency Hearing</b>	A judge will determine where the child will live while the case is ongoing; what services will be provided; whether the agency has made reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan; and whether the parent has addressed any safety or risk concerns.

# Section 4:

## Your Case Plan

Your caseworker will work **with** you to develop a case plan to help your family meet these goals. This plan is the road map for reunification with your children –it will spell out exactly what you need to do and learn in order to bring and keep your children home. Your caseworker will meet with you to learn all they can about your family. This is called the **Case Planning Conference**.

**Before your children come home, the child welfare agency and court must be certain that:**

### **You can keep your children safe.**

While your children are in foster care, the agency will regularly assess your family's strengths, needs, and progress toward resolving the issues that caused your children to be placed into care. These might include drug or alcohol use, family violence, neglect, or other unsafe conditions.

### **You can meet your children's needs.**

The agency will work with you to ensure that you can provide a safe place for your children to live, enough food to eat, medical care, and emotional support, among other things.

### **You are prepared to be a parent.**

By learning how to strengthen your parenting skills and getting help and support when you need it, you can keep your family strong. This may include continuing to participate in services offered to you while your children are in foster care and even after they come home.



# Here are some things you can expect from your case plan:

**You have the right to help develop the plan. Your Dependency Case Manager will meet with you to learn all they can about your family. This is called the Case Planning Conference. Tell him or her about:**

- Your family's needs (those that brought your children or youth into care, as well as others that might affect your ability to bring them home safely)
- Your strengths (what you do well)
- Your support system (people who help can help you and your children, such as neighbors, close friends, or family members)
- Your child's special needs (including medical needs, school issues, fears, etc.)
- Your goals and dreams for your family, and what help you might need to achieve them.

**Be sure to speak up about anything that concerns you or that you don't understand. You will be expected to sign and follow this plan.**

Other people also may help to develop this plan. The purpose of this is to involve as many people who love and support your child as possible. These might include:

- Your attorney! Please be sure to review your case plan with your attorney!!
- Other members of your family and your child's family, including your child's other parent and his or her relatives
- Representatives from your child's school or your church
- Close family friends
- An advocate to support you during this process. These are people who have been in a similar situation and are now trained to help other parents.
- Your teenager, if he or she is old enough

**Sometimes planning happens in a group meeting called a family team meeting, family group conference, or family group decision-making meeting.**

Your plan will include supports and services. These services are intended to help your family get stronger. They might include (among other things):

- Counseling (for you and/or your family)
- Drug or alcohol treatment
- Help with housing, transportation, food, and other needs
- Help building job skills and finding employment
- Anger management classes Parenting classes

**You have the right to ask for services you believe can help you and your family, especially any service concerning your children's safety.**

Your needs should be considered. Services and visits with your children will be arranged around your work schedule whenever possible. If you can't afford the services in your case plan, your case management agency may refer you to community agencies that can help or ask that services be paid for through a community services agency.

**Your case plan may include a second goal for your child, in addition to reunification. Other possible goals include:**

- Living permanently with a relative (kinship care or guardianship.) This is called **Permanent Guardianship**.
- **Adoption**
- **Another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)** or independent living for some older teens

Your DCM will pursue this goal while he or she is working with you to bring your children home. This is called concurrent planning. It does not mean that the agency does not want your family to get back together. It simply recognizes that your family's situation is complex and requires additional planning to ensure your child has a safe, permanent home.

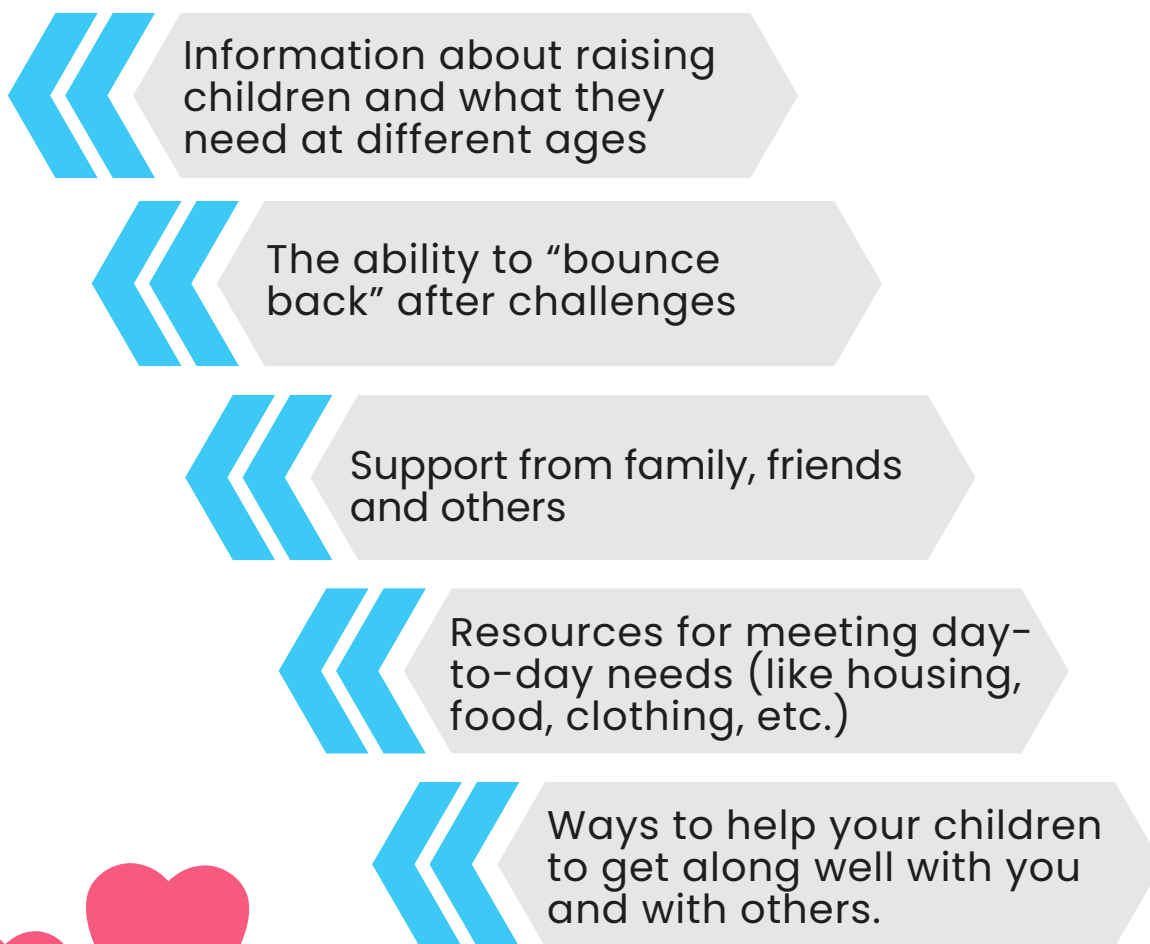
**You have the right to be kept informed.**

You will receive a copy of your case plan. If your first language is not English, you have the right to an interpreter and to receive a copy of the case plan in your native language. You should be informed of any changes to the plan, and the plan should be reviewed regularly.

**YOU'VE  
GOT THIS**

# Section 5: Strengthening Your Family

Your case plan is not just about “checking boxes” to get your children home. The goal is to create a stronger family for your children and yourself. One way you can do this is by building **protective factors**— strengths that help all families get through tough times. Protective factors include:



Ask your support team to help you build protective factors now, so your family is even stronger when your children come home.

# How soon can your kids come home and what are Conditions for Return?

**Conditions for Return** are written statements that must be developed when there is an **out-of-home safety plan** in response to **impending danger**.

**You need to be able to answer YES to all 5 conditions.**

The Conditions for Return describe what must exist or be different with respect to specific family circumstances, home environment, your perceptions, behavior, capacity and/or safety service resources that would allow for reunification to occur with the use of an **in-home safety plan**.

## **1. Are parents willing for an in-home safety plan to be developed and have they demonstrated that they will cooperate with safety service providers?**

What have you done or said since removal that shows that you will demonstrate commitment to a safety plan?

## **2. Is the home environment calm & consistent enough for an in-home safety plan to be implemented and for safety service providers to be in the home?**

### **1. What has changed?**

- a. This is tangible, observable evidence.
- b. If DV was a factor, what has changed?
- c. If substance use was a factor, what has changed?
- d. Has someone moved in or out?

### **2. What behavior has changed and how did the change lead to the environment being more calm and consistent?**

- a. This needs to be significant.

## **3. Are safety services available at a sufficient level and to the degree necessary in order to manage the danger threats in the home?**

### **1. What safety services are available now?**

- a. Were they not available before?
- b. What was done to get the services in place?
- c. How will these services manage the danger threats?

### **2. How are these services going to be monitored?**

- a. What plan will be in place if there is lack of ongoing cooperation from the family once the children are in the home?



**4. If a professional evaluation was needed, what was learned from the evaluation that now allows the development of an in-home safety plan?**

1. What type of evaluation was completed and what was the purpose?
  - a. Psychiatric
  - b. Substance Abuse Evaluation
    - i. Are you engaged in treatment?
  - c. Psychological
    - i. Are you involved in therapy?

**5. Does the parent have a physical location in which to implement an in-home safety plan?**

1. What has happened since removal that would allow an in-home safety plan to be developed?
  - a. Is it your old residence or have you moved?
    - i. Stability of the location must be taken into account.
    - ii. How long have you been there?
    - iii. Do you have the means to continue to reside there?
2. Has the Department done a home study?

If the court finds that the "Conditions for Return" have been met AND an "In-home safety plan" prepared or approved by the Department will allow the child to be safely returned to your home, the court SHALL allow the child to return to the home after making a specific finding of fact that the child's safety, well-being, and physical, mental, and emotional health will not be endangered



# What can I do to make this time apart easier?



**Visit Regularly.** Visiting your children while they are in foster care has many benefits. Most importantly, it helps to preserve and strengthen your bond while you are separated. It also shows the agency that you are committed to your child. Try not to miss any visits. If something is getting in the way of scheduled visits (e.g., transportation, work schedule), talk with your DCM to develop a new plan.

- **Bring things to do.** Toys, games, books, and other activities give you all something to focus on.
- **Use the time to bond.** It is important for you to continue to play an active role in your children's lives. You can rock, sing to, or snuggle an infant. Toddlers might enjoy showing off new skills like walking, jumping, or playing with blocks. With older children, you can talk about their favorite activities and topics. Encourage them to tell you about things that have happened at school, and avoid topics that create tension.
- **Help your children say goodbye or "see you soon."** When it's time for the visit to end, tell your children that you'll see them again as soon as you can.
- **Put your phone away.** Place your phone on silent and keep it away until after the visits.

**Allow your children to express their feelings.** It's normal for children to feel angry or scared. Use your visits to reassure them that you love them and are working to bring them home. Younger children may seem to have "forgotten" their parents or seem more comfortable interacting with foster parents. Give your children the time they need to get comfortable with the situation and interact with you.

**Get to know the foster parents.** Having a relationship with your child's foster parents can make the time apart easier on you and your children. You should have an **"ice-breaker"** to create a co-parenting plan or a **Parent Partnership Working Agreement (PPWA)**. This should happen around 15 days after the Shelter Hearing. If you haven't had one, ask your caseworker so that you can create a plan and co-parent with the foster parents. You can also ask the foster parents for a Google number to reach them on. You can ask how your children are doing at their house, or ask if you can meet them for any upcoming doctor's appointments or parent-teacher conferences.

**Keep in touch between visits.** Ask your caseworker and the foster parents about the best ways to let your children know you're thinking of them while you are apart.

# Section 6:

## Working with Your Team (Who is Who?)

Your experience with the system will include many different people.

Some of these are your Dependency Case Manager, your children's foster parents, your lawyer/attorney, and your children's advocate (Guardian Ad Litem). You also might work with a Peer Advocate. Working well with each of these members of your team will shorten the time to bring your child home.

you  
are  
not  
alone

### Your Dependency Case Manager (DCM):

#### Contact Info:

- Works with your family to develop and monitor your case plan
- Arranges services for you and visits with your child
- Reports to the court on your family's progress

Building a relationship with your DCM will help you understand your case better and make progress toward reunification. Tips for working with your DCM:

- Ask any questions you may have about your case plan, your DCM's expectations, and the services or resources that he or she can provide.
- Stay in touch and tell your DCM about any changes in your life (new home, new job, etc.).
- Keep your appointments and complete services in your case plan.

If you have questions or concerns, always start with your DCM. If you feel the DCM is not listening to you, talk to his or her supervisor, parent engagement specialist, and your lawyer.

## Your lawyer/attorney:

### Contact Info:

- A lawyer may be appointed by the court if you qualify for financial assistance. Alternatively, you may hire your own.
- Represents your interests and speaks up for you in court, including asking for the services you want or need. Should talk to you about your case between court dates and let you know what to expect.
- Make sure they always have the best number to reach you!

Being completely honest with your lawyer helps him or her do the best job possible.

## Your children's foster parents/caregivers:

### Contact Info:

Take care of your children while they are in care

Can make visiting easier and help your children stay in touch with you between visits

Tips for working with your children's foster parents:

- Communicate in a way that is safe and respectful for everyone. (Some parents use a journal to ask questions or exchange short notes with the foster family during the children's visits. In some cases, the foster parents also will use a journal for updates about the children's school progress or other milestones. Other families share important information such as nap schedules, food preferences, and doctor's appointments through their DCM.)
- Tell them as much as you can about your children, including their likes and dislikes, fears, and how they like to be comforted. You know your children best, and this will help the foster parents take the best possible care of your children and help them feel safe and secure.

## Your children's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL):

### Contact Info:

Is a trained volunteer who may be assigned to your children during the court process.

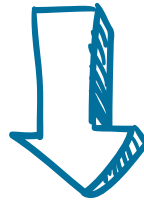
- Monitors your children's case while they are in foster care.
- Makes recommendations to the court about what is best for your children.
- You can work with your children's GAL by providing any information he or she needs to make good decisions for your children.

# Child Welfare System Organizational Chart

## The Department of Children and Families: Office of Child and Family Wellbeing

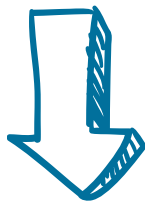
**Child Protection Investigation:** This office handles everything during the investigation (CPI) stage of your case. After the investigation, they transfer it over to the full case management agency.

**Children's Legal Services:** This lawyers who work for The Department of Children and Families and handles all of the cases involving children in the dependency system.



## Communities Connected for Kids (CCKids)

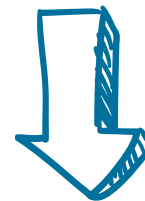
Communities Connected for Kids (CCKids) is the Community Based Care (CBC) Lead Agency for Miami-Dade and Monroe County. They fund and support all full case management agencies, a full service array of prevention programs and other departments to help manage the child welfare system.



St. Lucie County

**CCKids**

Full case management where  
dependency case managers work



Martin, Okeechobee, Indian River Counties

**Children's Home Society (CHS)**

Full case management where  
dependency case managers work

# Let's Talk! **PARENT COUNCIL**



Communities  
Connected  
*for Kids*

Partnering for Success

**Connect with other parents and share your experiences.  
Your perspectives help us help others!**

The Parent Council is a powerful initiative designed to elevate the voices of families impacted by the dependency system, ensuring their lived experiences help shape policies and practices that affect them.

Comprised of parents who have navigated the child welfare system firsthand, the council serves as a bridge between families & the agencies that serve them. It advocates for a more compassionate, equitable approach that provides family-centered solutions and provides feedback to improve system accountability. By sharing insights, participating in decision-making, and mentoring other parents, the council helps foster a more respectful and collaborative environment—one that values family strengths and prioritizes reunification and healing.



Learn more & see  
meeting dates here.

**CONTACT US**

772-873-7800  
<https://cckids.net>







# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**We created this for you because we understand that the language used in child welfare can be complicated and confusing. Please use this guide whenever you hear or read a term that you don't fully understand.**



**Abandonment** – A situation in which the child has been left by the parent(s), the parent's identity or whereabouts are unknown, the child suffers serious harm, as a result of his/her desertion, or the parent has failed to maintain contact with the child or to provide reasonable support for a specified period of time.

**Abuse** – Any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual abuse, injury, or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired.

**Adoption** – The social, emotional, and legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family.

**Allegation** – A report or claim that a child may have been abused, neglected, or harmed, before an investigation determines whether it is true. The claim must be looked into so children and families can receive the right support.

**Assessment** – The ongoing practice of informing decision-making by identifying, considering, and weighing factors that impact children, youth, and their families. Assessment occurs from the time children and families come to the attention of the child welfare system and continues until case closure.

**Attachment** – A child's connection to a parent or other caregiver that endures over time, establishes an interpersonal connection, and aids in the development of a sense of self.  
**Allegations** – a claim or assertion that someone has done something illegal or wrong, typically one made without proof.

**APPLA (another planned permanent living arrangement)** – A permanency option established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to replace the term long-term foster care. Under APPLA, the child welfare agency maintains care and custody of a youth and arranges a stable living situation that is expected to continue until adulthood. APPLA may be used only when all other permanency options—such as reunification, placement with relatives, adoption, or legal guardianship—have been ruled out.

**Background Check** – In child welfare, a background check is an investigation of prospective kinship caregivers, foster and adoptive parents, and all adults residing in prospective foster and adoptive households. In most States, the background investigation includes a fingerprint check of Federal and State criminal records and child abuse and neglect registries. These records checks are also part of the home study process used to assess the suitability of these homes for placement of foster or adoptive children.

**Birth Parent** – The biological parent to children

**Bonding** – The process of forming an emotional attachment. It involves a set of behaviors that will help lead to a close personal bond between the parent/caregiver and their child. It is seen as the first and primary developmental achievement of a human being and central to a person's ability to relate to others throughout life.

**Caregiver** - One who provides for the physical, emotional, and social needs of a dependent person. The term most often applies to parents or parent surrogates, childcare and nursery workers, health-care specialists, and relatives caring for children, elderly, or ill family members.

**Case Closure (termination of services/TOS)** - The process of ending the involvement between the child protective services caseworker and the family, which often involves a mutual assessment of progress and outcome achievement. Optimally, cases are closed when families have achieved their goals and the risk of maltreatment has been sufficiently reduced or mitigated.

**Case Management** - A process that includes the coordination, provision, and monitoring of services tailored to best address clients' strengths and needs. Ongoing case management requires frequent, planned contact with the family to assess progress toward goals.

**Case Plan** - A living document that describes the outcomes, goals, and tasks concerning a child's care while in placement. These goals include ensuring that the child receives safe and proper care while in state custody and that appropriate services are provided to the parents and foster parents, as well as determining goals/objectives families must meet to create a safe, permanent home for the child. Progress is monitored by the case worker and may affect court proceedings.

**Case Planning Conference** - A meeting with dependency case manager and biological parents (and youth if age appropriate) to design and create a parent's case plan document.

**Case Transfer Staffing** - Where the case is transferred from CPI to your Dependency Case Manager (DCM)

**Citizen Review Panel** - A board of private citizen volunteers who review policies, procedures, and specific cases handled by state as well as local child protective services agencies to determine whether these agencies are effectively managing individual cases and/or child welfare systems.

**Child Abuse and Neglect** - Defined by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) as, at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or trafficking, or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm. While CAPTA sets federal minimum standards for states that accept CAPTA funding, each state provides its own definitions of maltreatment within civil and criminal statutes. (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act)

**Comfort Call** - A telephone or video call initiated by the foster parents or trauma therapist to the child's biological family within 24-48 hours after a child is placed in foster care.

**Concurrent Planning** - A case planning approach that involves considering all reasonable options for permanency at the earliest possible point following a child's entry into foster care and simultaneously pursuing those that will best serve the child's needs. Typically, the primary plan is reunification with the child's family of origin. This primary plan and an alternative permanency goal are pursued at the same time, with full knowledge of all case participants. Concurrent planning seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanency for children.

**Conditions for Return** - Describe what must exist or be different with respect to specific family circumstances, home environment, caregiver perception, behavior, capacity and/or safety service resources that would allow for reunification to occur with the use of an in-home safety plan.

**Conditions for Return** are written statements that must be developed when there is an out-of-home safety plan in response to impending danger. They describe what must exist or be different with respect to specific family circumstances, home environment, your perceptions, behavior, capacity and/or safety service resources that would allow for reunification to occur with the use of an in-home safety plan.



**Co-parenting** – A child welfare practice based on the development of a supportive and positive relationship between foster parents and biological parents, with the goal of preserving and/or reunifying families. In shared parenting, foster parents do not necessarily live in the same home as the child, but they serve a pivotal role in promoting the achievement of positive outcomes in the best interests of the child.

**Dependency Case Manager** – Organizes and carries out work to address an individual child's (and their family's) needs in an appropriate, systematic and timely manner, through direct support and/or referrals, and in accordance with chapter 39 and the Florida Practice Model.

**Dependency Case Manager Supervisor** – Direct supervisor for Dependency Case Manager.

**Emergency Shelter** – A short-term, temporary placement for children who need to be removed immediately from their home because their safety is at risk.

**Family Team Meeting** – A generic term that includes a number of approaches in which family members are brought together to make decisions about how to care for their children and develop a plan for services. Families are engaged and empowered by child welfare agencies to make decisions and develop plans that protect their children from experiencing further abuse and neglect. Different terms used for this type of intervention include "family group conferencing," "family team conferencing," "family team decision-making," "family team meetings," "family unity meetings," and "team decision-making." Approaches differ in various aspects, but most consist of several phases and employ a trained facilitator or coordinator.

**Fictive Kin** – means a person unrelated by birth, marriage, or adoption who has an emotionally significant relationship, which possesses the characteristics of a family relationship, to a child.

**Foster Care** – A 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians, and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.

**Foster Parent** – Adults who provide a temporary home and everyday nurturing and support for children who have been removed from their homes. The individual(s) may be relatives or nonrelatives and are required to be licensed in order to provide care for foster children.

**Full Case Management Agency** – the coordination and monitoring of services on behalf of a child client and his or her caretakers. These services include abuse prevention/treatment, mental health counseling, psychiatric consultation and case plan management. A key element of case management in child welfare is the ongoing assessment of the client's needs and progress in services.

**Group Home** – A residence intended to serve as an alternative to a family foster home. Homes normally house 4 to 12 children in a setting that offers the potential for the full use of community resources, including employment, health care, education, and recreational opportunities. Desired outcomes of group home programs include full incorporation of the child into the community, return of the child to his or her family or other permanent family, and/or acquisition by the child of the skills necessary for independent living.

**Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)** – A lawyer or layperson who represents a child in juvenile or family court. Usually this person considers the best interests of the child and may perform a variety of roles, including those of independent investigator, advocate, advisor, and guardian for the child. A layperson who serves in this role is sometimes known as a court-appointed special advocate (CASA).

**Home Study** – The process of gathering information, preparing, and evaluating the fitness of prospective foster, kinship, and adoptive parents. The primary purpose of a home study is to ensure that each child is placed with a family that can best meet his/her needs. Home study requirements vary greatly from agency to agency, State to State, and (in the case of intercountry adoption) by the child's country of origin.

**Ice-breaker** – the practice of scheduling and facilitating a meeting between the birth parent(s) and foster caregiver(s) for the primary purposes of: –sharing information about the child to support quality care for the child; –reinforcing that birth parent is the expert about their child; – initiating and building a relationship between the caregivers with a common focus on the child.

**Impending danger** – a child being in a continuous state of danger due to caregiver behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions and/or situations posing a specific threat of severe harm to a child. Impending danger is often not immediately apparent and may not be active and threatening child safety upon initial contact with a family. Impending danger is often. can be more challenging to detect without sufficient contact with families. Identifying impending danger requires thorough information collection regarding family/ caregiver functioning to sufficiently assess and understand how family conditions occur.

**In-Home Safety Plan** – a temporary plan created with a family to ensure a child's immediate safety while remaining at home, using specific supports and supervision until safety concerns are resolved.

**In-home Services** – Services provided to children and families who have been reported to child protective services for possible child abuse or neglect and who are assessed as being able to benefit from services delivered in the home. Services are generally provided to families who have an "open case" with the child welfare agency and whose children remain at home or have returned home from out-of-home care.

**Kinship Care** – An arrangement that can occur when a public child welfare agency has legal custody and places a child with relatives or kin in a foster care arrangement. This type of arrangement is often referred to as either "formal" or "public" kinship care. Kinship foster homes may be either licensed or unlicensed, depending on State licensing requirements and family preferences.

**MDT (Multidisciplinary team)** – means an integrated group of individuals which meets to collaboratively develop and attempt to reach a consensus decision on the most suitable out-of-home placement, educational placement, or other specified important life decision that is in the best interest of the child. These must take place at all major transitions.

**Neglect** – occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired. The foregoing circumstances shall not be considered neglect if caused primarily by financial inability unless actual services for relief have been offered to and rejected by such person.

**Out of Home Care** – Also called foster care, including family foster care, kinship care, treatment foster care, and residential and group care. Out-of-home care encompasses the placements and services provided to children and families when children must be removed from their homes because of child safety concerns, as a result of serious parent-child conflict, or to treat serious physical or behavioral health conditions that cannot be addressed within the family.

**Out-of-Home Safety Plan** – a temporary plan used when a child cannot safely remain at home and must stay with a relative, non-relative caregiver, or foster family to ensure the child's immediate safety while concerns are addressed.

**Parent Partnership Working Agreement (PPWA)** – To ensure that the care given to children supports their healthy development and gives them the best possible opportunity for success, biological parent/legal guardian, child's current caregiver, DCF, the assigned Full Case Management Agency, and residential child caring agencies, if applicable, will work together in a respectful partnership.

**Peer** (peer support specialist, peer advocate, parent partner) – Peer support workers are people who have been successful in the recovery process who help others experiencing similar situations. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help people become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse.

**Permanency Plan** – A systematic effort to provide long-term continuity in a dependent child's care, as an alternative to temporary foster placements. This might be done by facilitating adoption, establishing clear guidelines for remaining in foster care, or helping the child's family become capable of meeting the child's needs

**Permanency** – The outcome goal in foster care based on the realization of a legal, permanent family relationship for every child and youth. As defined in the Child and Family Services Reviews, a child in foster care is determined to have achieved permanency when any of the following occurs: (1) The child is discharged from foster care to reunification with his or her family, either a parent or other relative; (2) the child is discharged from foster care to a legally finalized adoption; or (3) the child is discharged from foster care to the care of a legal guardian.

**Permanent Guardianship** – A judicially created relationship between a child and caretaker that is intended to be permanent and self-sustaining as evidenced by the transfer to the caretaker of the following parental rights with respect to the child: protection, education, care and control of the person, custody of the person, and decision-making.

**Present Danger** – means a significant and clearly observable family condition that is occurring at the current moment and is already endangering or threatening to endanger the child. Present danger threats are conspicuous and require that an immediate protective action be taken to ensure the child's safety.

**Protective Factors** – Conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that reduce risk and promote healthy development and well-being of children and families and/or appear to mitigate vulnerability to or negative effects from maltreatment.

**Race** – A social and political construction—with no inherent genetic or biological basis—used by social institutions to arbitrarily categorize and divide groups of individuals based on physical appearance (particularly skin color), ancestry, cultural history, and ethnic classification.

**Racial Disparity** – An unequal outcome one racial group experiences as compared to the outcome for another racial group.

**Racial Equity** – A process by which race is no longer a predictor of life trajectories, leading to more just outcomes in policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages.

**Racial Justice** - The proactive process of reinforcing and establishing a set of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes for all individuals and groups impacted by racism. The goal, however, is not only the eradication of racism, but also the presence of deliberate social systems and structures that sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

**Racism** - The systematic discrimination directed against minorities or marginalized groups. Racism differs from prejudice, hatred, or episodic discrimination because it requires one racial group to have systematic power and superiority over other groups in society.

**Reasonable Efforts** - Efforts made by State social services agencies to provide the assistance and services needed to preserve and reunify families.

**Reunification** - Refers to the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin. Reunification is both the primary goal for children in out-of-home care as well as the most common outcome.

**Reunification** - which means getting the family safely back together—is almost always the first goal and in your child's best interest.

**Reunion Registry** - A tool that allows adopted persons and birth parents who do not know each other's identity to register the fact that they are searching for each other. If both parties' names are on the same registry, a "match" is made, and the organization can inform the parties, including helping to arrange a meeting.

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**Shelter Hearing** - Typically held within a day of when a child is first placed outside of their parent's care. During the hearing, both the parent(s) and the child welfare agency may present information to the court. A judge then decides where the child should stay temporarily. Parents are usually appointed an attorney at no cost to them.

**Terminate Parental Rights** - End the legal parent/child relationship.