



## ***Overview of Foster Care***

Kids Central Inc. is the lead agency in Circuit 5, which includes Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion and Sumter counties. We develop and manage the delivery of a comprehensive, community-based and coordinated system of care for abused, neglected and abandoned children and their families. This includes contracting with service providers in each county for case management, adoption and other services needed to round out the full spectrum of care in order to meet the needs of the children and families in each county.

### ***WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?***

A licensed foster parent provides temporary care to children whose families are unable to care for them. Becoming a licensed foster parent and holding a position of public trust is a privilege, not a right or entitlement. Foster parents provide temporary care for children 0-17 years of age until they can return to their family, non-relative, find an adoptive home, or achieve independence. Families are licensed through Kids Central, Inc., by the Department of Children and Families to provide safe, stable homes for children in both shelter and foster care status. It takes approximately 2-3 months to become licensed upon completion of MAPP.

Children are in shelter care status until they are adjudicated dependent. Children in Shelter Care status are still in the legal custody of their biological parents. Children can remain in shelter care status for a few days or as long as several months. Weekly visits are required by the Family Care Manager (FCM) for as long as children remain in shelter status. Upon being adjudicated dependent, foster children are placed in the custody of Kids Central. Children can remain in foster care status for up to one to two years or longer; however, the goal is to achieve permanency within 12 months.

Foster Parents may not take actions, such as cutting hair or piercing ears, without the written permission of the biological parents or the court. Foster Parents should coordinate these things with the FCM so the biological parents can participate in the decision. Neither foster children nor shelter children can be taken out of the state of Florida without either permission from the biological parents or the permission of the Court. When planning a trip out of state, the Foster Parents should provide the child's Family Care Manager with a minimum of two (2) weeks' notice to allow time for noticing the court and obtaining the proper paperwork. Additionally, Foster Parents may not give authorization for any type of medical procedure, such as surgery or the use of anesthesia.

## ***BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSURE***

- Must be at least 21 years of age.
- Must have legal, stable and verifiable income that is sufficient to support themselves and their family without the assistance of the board rate. As a general rule, an applicant should be able to cover four to six weeks of the board rate with their discretionary income.
- Must take 30 hours of pre-service training (MAPP- Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting). For both married and unmarried couples who reside together, both people must attend MAPP. Any back-up who will be providing primary care (i.e. watching children during day in lieu of a daycare facility) to foster children, must also complete the required 30 hours of pre-service training.
- Background screening must be conducted on all adults in the home, including frequent visitors and back-ups. This includes FBI (National), FDLE (State), local law enforcement checks, child abuse registry checks, Civil checks through the Clerk of County and Department of Motor Vehicle checks. If an applicant has lived in the state of Florida for less than 5 years, abuse history checks and local checks will be completed in the state of previous residence. An applicant is obligated to report any possible disqualifying offenses that have occurred which may prevent them from being licensed.
- All children in the home 12 years of age and older must have FDLE check and local law enforcement checks. Checks with the child abuse registry will be completed for all children in the home.
- At least 2 home visits conducted with all family members.
- References: 3 personal references known for at least 2 years (cannot be relatives), all adult children, 2 neighbors or 2 community references, employment references for the past 2 years, school and daycare references for all the children living in the home. Other references as needed.
- Copies of all marriage certificates and divorce decrees.
- Verification/copy of driver's license, auto insurance (to include full coverage), social security cards, child support verification, citizenship papers/visa if **not** born in the United States and proof of vaccinations for pets.
- Review of and signature on various forms to confirm understanding of and agreement with policies specific to Kids Central, Inc. and the Department of Children and Families.

## ***HOME SAFETY ISSUES***

- A health inspection must be completed on an annual basis by the Health Department in the county of residence. Satisfactory water results must be received for all homes with wells.
- A first aid kit must be available.
- All medication (prescription, over the counter and medication that needs to be refrigerated), poisonous and hazardous materials/chemicals must be secured in a closet, container or cabinet with a rotating lock, which is inaccessible to children. The locked area must not be a laundry room or bathroom. If needles are required to administer medication to anyone in the home, these must also be locked. Combustible items must be stored away from any heat source and it

is highly recommended that they are locked up. The key must be kept separately.

- In-ground pools, spas and above-ground pools must have a barrier of at least 4 feet in height on all sides. The barrier can consist of a fence, screen enclosure, child safety fence, exterior walls of the home or the sides of an above ground pool.
- All access points to the pool must be controlled with an alarm, a key lock or a bolt lock and access points must be locked when the pool is not in use.
- One of the following life saving devices must be stored in the pool area: Shepherd's Hook, ring buoy or floatation device with a rope attached.
- All alcoholic beverages must be inaccessible to children. It is recommended that alcohol be locked up if there are older children in the home.
- A fire extinguisher (size 2A10BC) must be kept in or adjacent to the kitchen and there must be a fire extinguisher on each floor of the home. All fire extinguishers must be inspected and tagged annually.
- A working smoke detector must be present in every sleeping area of the home.

## ***CAPACITY***

Each family will be licensed for a capacity based on available space and the Foster Parent's strengths and needs. This number should be a mutual decision between the Foster Parent and the Licensing Specialist. The capacity can be increased or decreased when appropriate after the first year of licensure. Foster Parents must be aware of their limitations and be prepared to say no to new placements when they have reached their limitations. As a general rule, the number of children in the home should not exceed: two children under the age of 2 years old or 5 children between the ages of 0 to 17. This number includes your biological and adoptive children and children who may be placed with the Foster Parent as a relative or non-relative.

## ***SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS***

- Infants under 12 months of age may share a bedroom with an adult.
- Children over 12 months may not sleep in a bedroom with an adult unless there is a documented medical need.
- Children over 3 years of age may not share a room with a child of the opposite sex. This rule also applies to siblings.
- Children may not share a bed.
- Children may not sleep on a couch, futon, trundle or rollaway bed on a long-term basis and these arrangements must be approved beforehand by the Licensing Specialist.
- Each child must have at least 40 sq. feet of living space in the bedroom and adequate storage space for their belongings.

## ***FIREARMS SAFETY***

According to Florida Law, Kids Central is not able to keep any record regarding possession of firearms or how/where firearms are stored. It is the Foster Parent's responsibility to keep the firearm in a securely locked box, or container, or in a location which a reasonable person would believe to be secure or shall secure it with a trigger lock, except when the person is carrying the firearm on his or her body, or within such close proximity thereto, that he or she can retrieve and use it as easily and quickly as if he or she carried it on his or her body.

## ***EARLY PERIODIC SCREENING, DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT (EPSDT)***

The following medical tasks and examinations are provided free of charge through Medicaid: health and developmental history, physical assessment to include height and weight, growth assessment, developmental assessment, vision assessment, hearing assessment, immunizations and laboratory tests. EPSDT screening also includes treatment for problems detected during the screening, such as provision of eyeglasses and dental services.

The initial screening should be completed within 72 hours of a child coming into care (this does not apply to children moving between foster homes) and then children must be scheduled for examination according to the following periodicity schedule: 2 months of age, 4 months of age, 6 months of age, 1 year of age, 15 months of age, 18 months of age, once every year from ages 2 to 5, and once every 3 years from age 6 through the month the young adult reaches age 21. If the specific needs of a child require more frequent assessment, appointments may be scheduled more frequently or at different intervals.

## ***GENERAL HEALTH***

In order to effectively carry out all of the many and complex responsibilities of providing care to foster children, Foster Parents must remain in good general health and be free from communicable diseases, chronic reoccurring health problems and chronic debilitating health problems. If any of these conditions exist or if the Foster Parent is prescribed any psychotropic medications, he/she will be asked to provide a health certificate completed by the treating physician to confirm that they are emotionally stable and physically capable of providing care to children.

## ***PAYMENT OF THE BOARD RATE***

Foster Parents are reimbursed for the money spent caring for foster children on a monthly basis through issuance of a check around the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month for the previous month. Direct deposit is available. As a general rule, the board rate is meant to cover food, clothing, transportation, utilities, telephone, linens, recreation, the child's allowance and personal incidentals. Foster Parents are required to provide the foster children with an allowance on a weekly or monthly basis. Foster Parents are encouraged to find ways for the children to earn their allowance, as age appropriate, in order to allow them the

opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility. Foster Parents are also encouraged to set allowance amounts based on the needs of the child (i.e. a teenage child should be afforded the opportunity to earn enough money to participate in activities with his/her friends). A child should not be expected to purchase their own clothes, toiletries or personal items with their allowance.

The current board rate for foster children is as follows:

	<b>Daily rate</b>	<b>Monthly rate</b>
Ages 0-12 years	\$17.00	\$517.44
Ages 13 to 17 years	\$19.00	\$578.32

### ***MILEAGE***

Transportation on behalf of a child may be reimbursed for the following:

- Court appointments
- Family visitation
- Medical appointments (dentists, M.D.'s, therapies, EPSDT, counseling, etc.)
- Hospital admission, discharge and visits for lab work, tests, etc.
- Appointments with probation office
- WIC appointments
- Enrollment in school, school appointments, and staffings
- Appointments/visits to DCF for Medicaid related issues
- Transporting to and from respite

Mileage will also be reimbursed for activities the Foster Parent participates in to maintain their licensed home status to include attending in-service training.

The Foster Parent should submit a Travel Form to receive reimbursement. The Form should include the date of travel, time of departure and time of return, destination to include the purpose of the trip and the name of the child the trip was for, along with the number of miles each way. Mileage forms must be separate by month (i.e. mileage for January and February must be submitted on two separate forms, rather than one form). Mileage will be reimbursed at the rate of 44 cents/mile. Completed travel forms should be faxed to Brittany Martin. Forms received and approved by noon on Wednesday will be paid the following Friday. Incomplete or inaccurate forms will be returned to the Foster Parent for revision.

### ***CLOTHING VOUCHERS***

When a child enters the dependency system for the first time, they are eligible for a clothing voucher in the amount of \$50 for children ages 0-11 and \$70 for children ages 12-17. The caretaker should purchase what the child needs and submit the receipts to the Placement Department for reimbursement in the amounts noted above.

On an annual basis, usually during the summer months, all children in care receive a clothing allowance in the amount of \$300.

## ***AGENCY EXPECTATIONS OF CAREGIVERS***

Foster parents are expected to communicate with their Licensing Specialist regarding all changes in household composition (i.e. a new member moving into the home or an existing member moving out of the home regardless of whether the moves are on a temporary or permanent basis or a marriage or divorce), plans to relocate, any involvement with law enforcement or contact from a Protective Investigator regarding an abuse report. Whenever possible, the Licensing Specialist should be made aware of these changes PRIOR to occurrence. When this isn't possible, communication with the Licensing Specialist should occur immediately afterwards.

Foster parents are expected to transport children to and from all activities and appointments whenever possible. If a foster parent is unable to transport for any reason, the responsibility for transportation should be negotiated with the Family Care Manager.

Foster Parents are expected to provide recreational activities for the foster children placed in their home and to encourage their involvement in extra-curricular activities as they would with their own children and to include them in all family activities.

Children age 4 and under must be in an approved car seat.

- A rear-facing infant carrier should be used for children ages 0-9 months (20 lbs.).
- A toddler carseat should be used for children ages 9 months to 4 years (20-50 lbs.). The carseat should remain rear facing until the child is at least 1 year old.
- A booster seat is recommended for children ages 4 years & older until the seatbelt fits the child appropriately.

Foster Parents are expected to maintain open lines of communication with all professionals involved with the children and with the Licensing and Placement Departments. All staff members are required to return phone calls within 24 hours and this same courtesy should be extended from the Foster Parents to the staff. Communication is vital in order to build and sustain a successful working relationship.

All personal items acquired by the child while living in the foster home, must be sent with the child when he/she leaves.

## ***HOME VISITS***

- While children are in shelter care, either the Protective Investigator or the Family Care Manager will visit the children once per week.
- Once children are adjudicated dependent, the Family Care Manager will visit the children at least once per month and more often as needed.
- Licensing Specialists will visit the home quarterly for a total of 4 visits per year with the 4<sup>th</sup> visit being for the purpose of relicensure. Home visits will be conducted more often as needed. Monthly phone contacts will also be completed.

## ***RESPITE***

The purpose of respite is to allow Foster Parents time to take care of themselves, to recharge when necessary and to tend to the needs of their own family. Foster Parents are allotted twelve (12) respite days per year. For these twelve days, an alternate caregiver will be paid the respite rate and the primary caretaker will continue to receive the board rate. If a Foster Parent uses more than 12 days of respite in a given year, the alternate caregiver will be paid the board rate and the primary Foster Parent will not receive any payment for the child. Placement should be notified of the need for respite arrangements at least two (2) weeks prior to the respite date except in the event of an emergency. All Foster Parents are strongly encouraged to identify a friend, family member or neighbor who is willing to serve in the capacity of a back-up provider. All back-ups must be cleared through the background screening process. A back-up can assist with respite to include overnights and general babysitting services. Respite that is provided by a back-up, rather than another Foster Parent, must take place in the licensed Foster Parent's home.

## ***EMERGENCY PROCEDURES***

- Foster Parents should maintain a file with phone numbers of each child's Family Care Manager, the emergency (non-working hours) numbers and emergency medical numbers.
- If a child runs away, Foster Parents should give the child a reasonable amount of time to return on their own accord based on the age of the child. The Foster Parent should then call the local sheriff or police authority to make a report. The Family Care Manager should also be contacted immediately. Unless the child is threatening the caregiver or other children in the home, the expectation is that the child will be returned to the home when picked up by law enforcement.
- Foster Parents must ensure that routine medical care is sought for every child. Family Care Managers should be routinely updated regarding the child's medical status. In the event of an emergency, the child's health and well being are first priority. The Foster Parent should not stop to call the Family Care Manager until the necessary care is obtained.
- On an annual basis, all licensed Foster Parents will be required to complete a Disaster Plan that outlines where they will go in the event they have to evacuate to include names and phone numbers for emergency contacts.

## ***IN-SERVICE TRAINING***

Foster Parents are required to complete twelve (12) hours of in-service training for the first two years of licensure and 8 hours per year each year thereafter. A maximum of 4 hours can be completed through books, videos and online training. The remaining hours must be completed in a face to face setting. The caregiver must document the date of training, topic, trainer and length of the training.

Ongoing training opportunities consist of the following:

- NAPPI (Non-Abusive Psychological and Physical Intervention- 4 hours) – Required Annually
- Psychotropic medication training - Required within 120 days of initial licensure

- Water Safety Training – Required once within the first year if not taken prior to licensure
- Car Seat Training- optional
- First Aid/CPR Training- optional, but highly encouraged
- 30 hours of additional training if a Foster Parent is interested in becoming a medical foster care provider
- 30 hours of additional training if a foster parent is interested in becoming a therapeutic foster care provider

## ***RADON***

Radon is an invisible, odorless gas that is present in some homes. A radon test must be completed if a Foster Parent resides in Sumter, Citrus, Hernando or Marion Counties and must be updated every 5 years. The radon level must be 4.0pCi/L or lower.

## ***FIRE SAFETY***

Fire drills must be conducted at least every 6 months and every time a new foster child is placed in the home regardless of the age of the children in the home. The dates of fire drills, amount of time it took to complete the drill and the number of people who participated in the drill should be documented.

An evacuation plan must be posted in a prominent location in the home and should be discussed with all children in the home, as age appropriate. The plan should highlight fire escape route, location of smoke detectors, location of a fire extinguisher on each floor of the home, all exits and a meeting place outside the home.

Fire Inspections are required for all homes in Citrus County. These inspections must be completed by the Citrus County Fire Inspector. For all other counties, the Licensing Specialist will complete a Verification of Fire Safety.





## **Overview of Foster Care Signature Page**

**My/our signature(s) below indicates that I/we have read this Overview of Foster Care document in its entirety, I/we understand the information presented within the document and have been given the opportunity to discuss any information I/we didn't understand with my/our Licensing Specialist prior to signature.**

**I/we understand the importance of following these guidelines as they relate to the care of the foster children placed in my home and to the maintenance of my license in good standing and that failure to abide by these guidelines may affect the status of my license.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Foster Mother**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Foster Father**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Licensing Specialist**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**