

# KINSHIP PATHWAY

The Kinship Pathway is a guide to help relatives and close family friends better navigate the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and the short-term and long-term implications of caring for a child who is unable to live with their parents. It provides full disclosure of agency terms and definitions, as well as information on legal options, financial supports, and how to access the Kinship Navigator Program.



## Terms and Definitions:

- Kinship Caregiver**- A kinship caregiver can be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or anyone who has established a 'kin-like' bond with the child and/or family. A kinship caregiver serves as a short or long-term caregiver for a child.
- Voluntary Kinship**- A 90-day treatment and services intervention lead in full partnership by DFCS, the Kinship Caregiver and the family to address safety concerns impacting a parent's ability to provide the appropriate safety and well-being for their child. During this time a parent can choose for their child to reside with a kinship caregiver as they partner with the agency to stabilize and improve their current situation. Voluntary Kinship is a short-term intervention and does not extend beyond 90 days.
- Conditions for Return**- DFCS partners with the kinship caregiver and family to create out of home safety plan when a child resides outside the home due to safety concerns. Included in an out of home safety plan are the steps and actions that must occur prior to a child's return home. The child can return home once the conditions for return are safely met.
- CPS Guardianship**- A kinship caregiver assumes long-term legal and financial responsibility of caring a for child. A parent and kinship caregiver may seek the option of permanent guardianship if the caregiver has history of caretaking for a child for an extended period prior to DFCS involvement. Permanent guardianship may also be considered when a parent demonstrates a consistent unwillingness to engage in services and interventions recommended by the agency.
- Kinship Foster Home**- A kinship caregiver receives training and is approved to provide long-term care for a relative child who is in the custody of the state. The agency will continue to work with parents to support reunifying the family while the kinship foster home helps to reduce the trauma a child can experience by keeping them connected to their family and community.

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**Permanency**- The goal of achieving a legally permanent, nurturing family for child in the temporary custody of the state. The permanency goal must be reached within 12 months from the date the child entered foster care. Permanency options include reunification, adoption, and/or a permanent guardian.

**Reunification**- refers to the process of returning a child in state's custody to their families of origin. Reunification is both the most common goal for children in out-of-home care as well as the most common outcome. A kin caregiver approved as kinship foster home partners with parents and the agency to successfully reunify the family.

**Adoption**- A child in the custody of the state is available for adoption once a court has terminated their parent's parental rights. Through adoption the kinship caregiver becomes the child's legal parent.

**Permanent Guardianship**- An option to achieving permanency for a child in the custody of DFCS who is not being returned to their parents or adopted. Approving a permanent guardian may be appropriate if there are circumstances that prevent the termination of parental rights, but it's in the best interest of the child to remain with the kinship caregiver.

## Financial Support:

During short-term arrangements such as voluntary kinship, the biological parents are still responsible for meeting their child's financial needs. In other instances, permanent guardianship, the biological parents can be ordered to pay child support. As a kinship foster home, adoptive parent or a permanent guardian a caregiver may qualify for monthly payments through DFCS.

Each situation is different. DFCS can help determine the types of aid and assistance (TANF, Medicaid, Child Care) for which you might qualify.

## The Kinship Navigator Program:

DFCS has 20 kinship navigators that are located statewide. The kinship navigators assist kinship families in identifying and locating resources within their local community. The program's overarching goal is to close the gaps and/or delays with service delivery to kinship caregivers. Please visit <https://dhs.georgia.gov/kinship-navigator-program> to learn more about the program.

Taking a child into your home is a major step. There are several options for relative caregivers. If you would like to discuss these options and to learn more about your role as a kinship caregiver, you should contact a county DFCS office.

