

When the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is Involved

DCF Involvement

When the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) obtains custody of a child via a Care and Protection (C&P) petition, a grandparent may inquire and apply to be a foster parent for the child. DCF will conduct a criminal background check as well as a DCF history check. Also, DCF will perform a physical standards assessment of the grandparent's home to determine that there is space for the child, and there are no hazards in the house.

Financial Support

Once the grandchild is placed in the grandparent's home, the grandparent will automatically begin to receive foster care payments. The grandchild will automatically receive MassHealth through DCF. The child will also receive quarterly clothing allowances.

Social Worker Involvement

Once a grandparent is approved as the foster parent, a DCF social worker (Family Resource Social Worker) will be assigned to work with the family to complete a home study. Another social worker (On-Going Social Worker) will be assigned to work with the child and the biological parents, as well as involved community services providers, to create a service plan with the family. The On-Going Social Worker will conduct monthly home visits at the grandparents' home to monitor the children in their placement setting. When DCF has custody of a child, it is expected that the DCF social worker will supervise visits between the child and the biological parent(s). The visits typically take place at the DCF office.

Legal Issues

During court proceedings, all parties (except grandparents) have attorneys. DCF has an attorney, each biological parent has an attorney, and the child has an attorney. The court will assign a court investigator at the beginning of the case to conduct an independent investigation. A Probation Officer is also assigned to monitor the case for the court. The DCF social worker prepares a court report for the Judge to review the progress of the case at each court date.

Decision Making

DCF will make all major decisions on documents; except Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and specific medical procedures and medication issues. DCF must approve anyone else over 14 years old, other than the approved grandparent, who plans on being a caretaker for the child. This approval process requires a criminal background check and a DCF history check of the anticipated caregiver. If the child is going to go to this caretaker's home, DCF must conduct a physical standards check of the house.

Permanency Planning

The Juvenile Court expects that DCF will identify an appropriate permanent goal for each child in DCF custody. Typically, the initial goal for a child in DCF custody is to reunify the child with the biological parent(s). At some point, if that goal seems uncertain, DCF may change the goal to guardianship or adoption and may discuss both options with the grandparent who is caring for the child. The grandparent must be included in permanency planning for all children.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE: Kinship Navigator is a program of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that assists all kinship caregivers (grandparents and other relatives) with accessing services for themselves and the children they are raising. For more information, please contact Jennifer.s.kitchenham@state.ma.us or 844-924-4546, or visit www.mass.gov/kinship-navigator

Communication

When working with DCF, it may not be easy to reach the social worker assigned. Families are encouraged to contact the supervisor or the manager if immediate assistance is required. In an emergency after hours, the kinship foster parent should contact the DCF Hotline at 1-800-792-5200.

The Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren was established in 2008 to serve as a resource to the Commonwealth on issues affecting grandparents raising grandchildren and other relative grandchildren. The Commission works to provide information, resources, and support to the thousands of Massachusetts grandparents and relative caregivers by hosting community workshops, trainings, an annual conference, and maintaining an up to date website full of resources for caregivers. To receive newsletters from the Commission, or for more information, contact the Commission at www.massgrg.com. You can also contact the Director of the Commission at 617-748-2454 or e-mail colleen.pritoni@state.ma.us.