

Important Information for Relatives

Opportunities for Involvement



STATE OF CALIFORNIA

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES



Q1: *I am the relative of a child who is being removed from his or her home. What should I do?*

A1: If you want to be involved in helping the child or the family, please contact the child's social worker, probation officer or their supervisor.

Q2: *What can I do to help?*

A2: Connections with relatives and family friends are important for all children, but especially for a child whose family is in crisis. You can give the family support and encouragement as the parents try to resolve the problems that led to the child being removed from them. You can also help by calling and visiting the child, inviting the child and the family to your home for holidays and other occasions, remembering birthdays, etc. You can assist the child's social worker or probation officer in locating other relatives and family friends who might be able to help the child and the family, including those who live out of state. You may also want to consider having the child live with you until the child can safely return home.

Q3: *What about the child's brothers and sisters?*

A3: In most cases, the goal is to keep brothers and sisters together, but this is not always possible. Even if brothers and sisters have

to live in separate homes, you may be able to help them keep in touch through visits and family events.

Q4: *If I want the child to live with me, what do I need to do?*

A4: You may request to be approved as a relative caregiver. Consider if you can provide for the child on a long-term basis if the child is not able to return to the home of his or her parents. By law, preferential consideration for placement of the child is given to grandparents and adult aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. Certain requirements must be met:

- Criminal record clearances are to be obtained for all adults living in the home;
- All adults are to be screened for prior child-abuse histories;
- The home has to meet health and safety standards;
- The relative has to have the ability to care for and supervise the child; and
- The relative has to agree to ensure that the child's personal rights are protected.

Q5: *There is someone in my household who has a criminal background. Does that mean the child can't live with me?*

A5: No, you can still be considered. Some crimes may be exempted, allowing for placement in your home. Each case is

reviewed carefully. The social worker or probation officer will give you detailed options based on the findings of the case.

Q6: *What kind of financial and social support will I receive if I choose to be a caregiver?*

A6: Once a child is placed in your home, you are eligible to apply for financial support, which may be available either through foster care funding or the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Act (CalWORKs) program. The child's social worker or probation officer will do the following things:

- Assist you in obtaining financial and medical assistance for the child;
- Work with you to access health and dental care for the child;
- Give you information on what to do and who to call if problems occur;
- Have contact with you and the child at least once a month;
- If eligible, help you access a yearly clothing allowance for the child;
- Provide assistance with emergencies; and
- Help arrange parent-child visits, and counseling and other services the child may need.

Q7: *If my home is approved, will the child get to live with me?*

A7: Not necessarily. The homes of other relatives may also be assessed and approved. This allows the county to have a group of interested relatives to choose from. Where the child will live will be carefully considered, based on many factors. The approved home should meet the child's best interests without further disrupting the child's life and activities.

Things that must be considered are the child's proximity to the following:

- His or her current school;
- His or her brothers and sisters, parents, or other relatives; and
- The programs and activities the child currently participates in.

The caregiver's willingness to work with the social worker and the parents, with the goal of reuniting the child with his or her family, is another important factor to consider when deciding who will care for the child.

Q8: *What about visits between the child and the parents? How does that work?*

A8: The social worker or probation officer and the court will determine how often the child and the parents can visit. Relatives and other caring adults may help in many ways to ensure that visits are safe and productive. They may be able to provide a safe space for visits, to transport the child and the

parents to and from visits, and to be a supportive, familiar presence for the child and the parents.

Q9: *What happens if the child cannot return home?*

A9: Living with a family permanently is the primary goal. When a child isn't able to return to his or her parents, the family the child is living with is usually considered first as a permanent family. You may be asked about becoming the child's legal guardian or adopting the child. Ongoing financial and medical assistance may be available through the Adoption Assistance Program, the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program or CalWORKs. Information about these programs is available in the pamphlet *Giving a Child a Permanent Home: Choices for Relatives*, PUB 344 (7/09), which is online at <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/pub344.pdf> (English) and <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/Spanish/pub344SP.pdf> (Spanish). You can also check with the child's social worker or probation officer about these programs.

Q10: *I live out of state. How can I get involved?*

A10: In some circumstances, a child may be placed with a

relative out of state. The social worker or probation officer can discuss this option with you. You can also be supportive by maintaining contacts and visits.

Q11: *If the child has American Indian heritage, how can I help the child maintain connections with his or her cultural heritage?*

A11: The social worker or probation officer is required to ask all relatives about the child's connections with American Indian tribes so that the child can benefit from any services available to American Indian children. If you can help answer questions about yourself and other relatives who may be enrolled members of American Indian tribes, please let the social worker or probation officer know.

Q12: *If I want to give information to the court about the child, how do I do that?*

A12: The Relative Information Form (JV-285) is available for you to use to provide information to the court about the child. You can ask the social worker or probation officer to give you this form, or you can ask for it at the court clerk's office. The form is also available online at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/forms/>.