



**State of Florida  
Department of Children and Families**

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## **Fostering Definitions**

- **Adoption:** If the parents' rights are terminated, a child will be available for adoption. Foster parents can adopt foster children in some circumstances. Relatives are also able to adopt the children whose parents' rights are permanently terminated.
- **Case management organization (CMO):** A CMO contracts with the community-based care agency (CBC) to provide front-line services to children and families under state supervision.
- **Case management:** The ongoing follow-up and review of the safety and well-being of a child who has been removed from parents or caregivers. A child who is in out-of-home care will see a case manager at least once a month, and the case manager will work with the parents, the child and the child's current caregivers to determine the best interests of the child.
- **Case plan:** The court document that all parents or caregivers of dependent children must follow. Case plans have goals for the parents and the child so that the parents can reunify with the child and safely care for the child.
- **Child Protection Team:** Conducts forensic interviews and medical exams of children to determine if they have been abused or neglected.
- **Child protective investigation:** These investigations are handled by DCF child protective investigators whenever an allegation of abuse, neglect or abandonment is made to the Florida Abuse Hotline. The investigations typically last up to 60 days.
- **Child Welfare Professional:** An individual who is primarily responsible for case activities that has met the criteria for Florida Certification as a Child Protective Investigator, Case Manager or a Licensing Counselor.
- **Child protective investigator (CPI):** A child protective investigator checks into allegations of abuse, neglect and abandonment of children by their caregiver. The investigator will interview the child, caregivers, and other contacts to determine if a child is safe or not. If a child is not safe, the CPI can remove the child from the home.
- **Community-based care lead agency (CBC):** These agencies contract with DCF to manage prevention, intervention, foster care and adoption services. There are 20 CBCs across the state.
- **Dependency court:** The court system in Florida that makes decisions regarding the best interests and welfare of children who must be removed from their home.

- **Dependent child:** A child who has been removed from their home and needs to be under state supervision. This child could live with a relative, non-relative or in foster care.
- **Fictive Kin:** An individual who is unrelated to the child by either birth or marriage but has such a close, emotional relationship with the child that he or she may be considered part of the family (e.g. godparents, close family friends).
- **Florida Abuse Hotline:** Any person in Florida who suspects a child is being abused, neglected or abandoned by a caregiver, or who suspects a child has been a victim of any crime, must report that information to the Florida Abuse Hotline. The Hotline number is 1-800-962-2873.
- **Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF):** The state agency that manages services to families, including investigating child abuse, managing child welfare cases, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and providing federal benefits like Medicaid and food assistance
- **Foster care:** Licensed foster care is made up of individuals or families who have requested to be able to take dependent children into their home. Foster homes are licensed and inspected regularly, and foster parents go through a rigorous interview process before being approved.
- **Foster child:** A foster child is a dependent child who is has been removed from their parent or guardian and is living in a licensed foster home.
- **Foster parent:** A foster parent has been through a rigorous interview process to determine if they can safely care for abused and neglected children in their home. Foster parents are paid a monthly stipend to help cover the costs of the needs of the child, but this funding will generally not pay for everything a foster child needs.
- **Group home:** A group home is a home for several foster children that is licensed by the state. Group homes are run either by house parents, who live with the children, or by shift staff, who transfer in and out during every 24 hours.
- **Guardian ad Litem:** A volunteer advocate for a dependent child in court. This advocate is represented by an attorney and speaks to the judge on behalf of the child they represent.
- **Home study:** All prospective foster parents must undergo a home study, which determines if the home has enough space and is safe for a foster child to live.
- **Independent Living:** Program for teens in foster care that prepares them for adult life.
- **In-home care:** Some children are under state supervision but can safely remain in their own homes with regular case management.
- **Licensing:** The licensing process includes interviews with prospective foster parents, a home study and a review of financial records, among other things.
- **Medicaid:** The federal program that funds health insurance for low-income families. Medicaid provides the health and dental care that is needed for children in foster care.

- **Non-relative placement:** A child who has been removed from their parent or guardian and placed with a family friend. Non-relatives are not eligible for additional funding.
- **Out-of-home care:** This term includes all children who have been removed from their home and are living with a relative, non-relative or in foster care.
- **Permanent guardianship:** Many children will be placed in permanent guardianship, usually with appropriate relatives, if the parents' rights have not been terminated but the child cannot safely return home.
- **Pre-service training:** Between 20 and 30 hours of training is required to become a licensed foster parent. This training helps the foster parent understand the background of children who have been abused and neglected and learn ways to deal with their behaviors.
- **Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI):** A new training program whose goal is that each foster child in Florida have an engaged, involved, well-trained and qualified foster parent who will help the foster child on the path to success.
- **Relative placement:** A child who has been removed from their parent or guardian and placed with a relative. Relatives can get some funding to help with the child's expenses through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
- **Reunification:** The process of returning a child who has been removed from the home to the parents or guardians and ensuring that the child will remain safe. Most children who are removed from their home have reunification as their case plan goal.
- **Road to Independence scholarship:** Stipend for those up to age 23 who have aged out of foster care and are going to college or other post-high school studies. The stipend covers school expenses and some of their living expenses.
- **Shelter hearing:** A hearing held within 24 hours of a child's removal for the judge to approve the removal and the placement.
- **Social worker:** In Florida means that an individual has earned a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) after successfully completing four years of college. An individual with a master's degree in social work (MSW) has completed a graduate program and is eligible to pursue licensure. There are two levels of licensing in Florida, both of which require an MSW degree: Certified Master Social Worker (CMSW) and Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW).
- **Termination of parental rights:** This is a court decision made if the parents have committed an egregious act against a child or refuse to complete the case plan to show they will be able to safely care for their child.