

Partnership Plan between Caregivers for Children and Teens in Out-of-Home Care and the Department of Children and Family Services and Staff

The purpose of this partnership plan is to confirm our mutual commitment to children and teens through a common understanding of the values, principles and practices we will uphold in fulfilling our responsibilities to children and teens in the care and custody of the State of Louisiana.

We agree that:

Every child deserves quality parenting every day; regardless of where the child is living or who is providing for their care

Caregivers provide high quality parenting

Providing quality parenting is the expectation for all caregivers. This involves a commitment to the physical and psychological safety and well-being of the child or teen. Quality parenting for children in DCFS custody includes:

- Having an awareness of the physical and emotional impact of trauma on a child;
- Having respect for the child/teen's individuality, and fully integrating the child/teen into your family;
- Providing appropriate supervision and discipline in accordance with DCFS policy
- Recognizing and encouraging the child's talents, gifts, and strengths;
- Providing opportunities for the child to develop interests and skills through normal, developmentally appropriate activities
- Sharing responsibility for preparing teens for transition to adulthood through hands-on activities and opportunities to learn and practice skills.
- Participating fully in the child's medical, dental, and psychological care, including providing transportation and consulting with the providers to ensure that the needs of the child/teen are met
- Actively supporting educational success of the child by participating in school activities, meetings, etc., and encouraging the child's participation in extracurricular activities
- Developing a "co-parenting" partnership to the extent possible with the child's birth family

DCFS staff support caregivers in providing high quality parenting

Support to caregivers includes:

- Providing contact information for the worker, supervisor, and other resources so that support is available 24/7 as needed
- Responding timely to phone calls, emails, requests for services and other resources so caregivers can meet the needs of the child.
- Regularly discussing the strengths and needs of the caregivers to competently provide care for the specific and unique needs of each child placed in their home.
- Offering training and educational opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills

DCFS staff and caregivers support the well-being of the child/teen

Supporting a child's well-being includes:

Caregivers, with the support of DCFS staff, advocate for children and teens in their care within the child welfare system, the court system, schools, mental health, health and other community agencies.

Caregivers and DCFS staff demonstrate respect for the identity of the child/teen including their religion, culture, race, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, language, sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, physical ability and other characteristics.

Once a caregiver accepts responsibility for the care and placement of a child/teen, the child/teen will be removed only when: 1) the caregiver is clearly unable to meet the child/teen's needs; 2) when the child and their birth family are reunited; 3) when the child/teen is being placed in a legally permanent home in accordance with the case plan or court order; 4) or when the removal is demonstrably in the child's best interest.

If a child/teen must leave the caregiver's home for one of the above reasons, and in the absence of an unforeseeable emergency, the transition will be accomplished according to the transition plan created via cooperation and information sharing among all parties and takes into consideration the child/teen's developmental stage, psychological needs, ensures that the child/teen has all of their belongings and allows for a gradual transition from the caregiver's home. If possible, continued contact with the child/teen after the move may be arranged.

DCFS staff and caregivers support connections between the child and the child's birth (or previous family)

Supporting connections includes:

Respecting and supporting the child's ties to their birth family and other important connections/relationships. Caregivers, with the guidance of DCFS staff, support the child in maintaining these relationships by assisting with appropriate visitation, phone calls, emails, text messages, Facetime, Skype etc.

DCFS staff will support and prepare the caregiver and birth parent to build a co-parenting relationship. This includes engaging the birth parent in school activities/meetings, medical/mental health appointments, etc.

When the permanency plan for the child/teen includes reunification, caregivers and DCFS staff work together with the birth parent to develop and support the transition plan, to prepare the child for transition and to provide continuity for the child's birth parents in improving their ability to care for and protect the child.

Caregivers and DCFS staff share information and respect confidentiality

Sharing information includes:

Staff providing caregivers all relevant information known about the child and their family situation prior to placement, and providing updates on an ongoing basis as soon as reasonably possible in order to assist the caregiver in parenting the child

Caregivers and DCFS staff share information with each other and the birth parent about the child's progress and needs, health/mental health services, visitation,

recreational/social activities, academic performance, behavioral functioning and issues regarding school placement. All partners treat information confidentially.

Caregivers work in partnership with DCFS staff to maintain school records, medical and mental health records, photographs of the child and records of special events and achievements.

Caregivers and DCFS staff respect each other as true partners

Respect is shown by:

Caregivers and DCFS staff working together in a manner that nurtures and supports an open, honest, positive, working relationship.

Caregivers and DCFS staff collaborate in developing a plan for the child/teen in care. Caregivers are invited to attend and encouraged to participate in all Family Team Meetings and court review hearings.

Caregivers respecting that DCFS staff must visit privately each month with the child to ensure their safety and well-being

DCFS staff respecting that children sometimes have a perspective that does not accurately or fully represent a situation; therefore, staff always provide the opportunity to hear the caregiver’s perspective

Above all, treating each other in a professional manner, acknowledging the challenges we each face in fulfilling our role and starting with the assumption that each is doing the best they can for the children and families being served.

By their respective signatures below, both the DCFS Staff and Caregiver(s) understand and are committed to practicing the outlined partnership expectations that ensure quality care for the children/teens in the home.

Caregiver Name (PRINT)

Caregiver Signature

Date

DCFS Name (PRINT)

DCFS Signature

Date