

Information Sharing with Caregivers

Safe Children, Healthy Families, Caring Communities

All of us are responsible for the well-being of children in the custody of the Washoe County Department of Social Services (WCDSS) and we undertake this responsibility in partnership with full awareness that none of us can succeed by ourselves. Children need normal childhoods as well as loving, skillful, quality parenting which recognizes the attachment to their biological family. In order to achieve these goals, respected partners must share information.

Sharing information with caregivers in child welfare cases is critical to making the caregiver a partner in the child's case. **Information sharing is not only permitted under state and federal law, it is required.** Giving caregivers such information better enables them to meet the needs of children and youth in their homes and sharing information regarding the child with the caregiver or potential caregiver is a critical component of effective service delivery. A well-informed caregiver or potential caregiver is better able to meet the needs of a child in care and is better prepared to handle challenges particular to the child.

As we began the shift in practice to adopt both TIPS (Trauma Informed Preservice) and QPI (Quality Parenting Initiative), it has become apparent that there is confusion about what information can and cannot be shared with caregivers. Because of the confidential nature of child welfare cases, the QPI Child Welfare Workgroup worked collaboratively statewide and with the District's Office to clarify what information may be shared with caregivers or potential caregivers.

The purpose of this document is to provide simple and concise guidance where the law appears to create barriers. Reference: Federal Law, 42 USC 675 (5)(D), 42 USC 675 (5)(G), Nevada Revised Statute, NRS 424.038 and Nevada Administrative Code, NAC 424.810

Legal and Policy Requirements:

- Full disclosure or comprehensive sharing of information with the foster parent is required by Federal law, NRS, NAC
- The general rule is that caregivers **must** receive records and information, that relate to or assist in appropriately parenting their foster child except when expressly prohibited by law
- Caregivers routinely should be made part of the CFT and be invited to all CFT meetings, as this partnership is a critical component of effective service delivery. Creating a team of people who support the child and family within the child welfare case is becoming increasingly common nationwide. The current caregiver is a valuable member of the team as he or she is familiar with the immediate, day to day needs of the child.

Benefits of Sharing Information/Records with Caregivers:

- Being fully informed helps caregiver families provide quality care for children
- Sharing of information helps to build and /sustain meaningful partnerships between caseworkers, biological parents and caregivers
- Provides the foundation for supporting healthy relationships between caregiver families and biological families

Information Sharing with Caregivers

- Helps to counter misconceptions and set realistic expectations about children and their biological families
- Supports stability for the children in the caregiver's home and reduces disruptions
- Provides critical content for the child's Lifebook

Records/Information that **MUST BE** shared with Caregivers that relate specifically to the children (this is not an all-inclusive list):

- Notification of all court hearings regarding the child the Caregiver is currently providing care for
- Caregivers **MUST** be invited to attend all court hearings
- The reason for removal if it impacts the care of the child.
- Medical, dental, psychological, psychiatric and behavioral history and on-going treatment and/or evaluation
- Visitation and case plans that identify expectations of caregivers.
- Copy of child's case plan
- Behavioral assessments and other social assessments (may require redacting of biological parent's information)
- All school reports
- Copies of Birth Certificate and immigrant status documents
- CFT staffing forms (everyone who attends CFT should get the final document with objectives and next steps they sign off on)
- Copy of the Present Danger Plan and/or the safety plan (including description of safety threats)

Records/Information that **CANNOT** be shared with Caregiver Families:

- Identities of reporters of abuse or neglect
- Financial records of the Biological parents or any other party of participant
- Law enforcement records, including CJIS and NCIC records and police reports.
- Records of Domestic Violence centers
- Court reports and parental case plan

Sharing information about the child's Parents with the Caregiver:

- The case worker should share information regarding the conditions affecting the parent's ability to care for the child or to safely interact with the child or the caregiver when; 1) The caregiver is part of the treatment team working to achieve the goals of the case plan and the parent consents (use the written release identifying the foster parent as a member of the team) or 2) when the safety of the child indicates the foster parent's need to know. (Information obtained directly from substance abuse treatment or health care providers may not be shared except with the written consent of the parent.)
- If the caregiver is not part of the treatment team or the safety of the child does not indicate the need for the caregiver to know, then the caseworker must obtain the parental consent to share information (a copy of the consent must be maintained in the file and a copy provided to the

Information Sharing with Caregivers

foster parent) or a court order prior to disclosing sensitive information, such as any medical or mental health condition of the parent.

Sharing information about the child or the family with former caregivers:

- A child or youth in foster care often forms a meaningful and significant bond with his or her caregiver. When that child moves from the caregiver's home, either to reunify with a parent or to be placed in another foster care placement, the child may desire and benefit from a continued relationship with the former caregiver.
- Case workers can share general updates regarding a child who has left a placement with former caregivers so long as the information sharing would not be contrary to the child's best interest.
- Adults in the child's life should make appropriate efforts to recognize both the importance of the child's relationship with the former caregiver and the role the former caregiver could continue to play in the life of a child.
- Nothing prohibits the caregiver from continuing a relationship with the child and/or the family after placement ends, if such a relationship is consistent with the desires of the child, family and the needs of the child.

Sharing information about the child with others:

- A caregiver is permitted to share otherwise confidential information about a child when sharing such information is necessary to obtain services for the child, including but not limited to educational services, mental health treatment, respite care, or other services necessary to care properly for the child

Caseworkers: If you and your supervisor/coordinator are unsure about whether or not a specific document or piece of information can be shared with a caregiver, the supervisor/coordinator should contact the DDA's for assistance

Foster Parents: If you feel as though information about a child is not being shared with you, or you are not being provided necessary documents, please contact your caseworker and the caseworker's supervisor.