

Resource Family Handbook

Division of Youth and Family Services



Resource Family Handbook Index

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Introduction

What is the Division of Youth and Family Services?

The Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) is New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Its mission is to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children and to support families. DYFS is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranging for the child's protection and the family's treatment. DYFS also responds to requests for family services. DYFS contracts with many community-based agencies throughout the state to provide services to children and families. Such services include counseling, parenting skills classes, substance abuse treatment, in-home services, foster/adoptive care and residential placement. DCF also includes the Division of Child Behavioral Health Services (DCBHS), and the Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships (DPCP).

Throughout the state there is a network of 47 Local Offices providing DYFS services. In addition to the DYFS Local Offices (LO), there are Institutional Abuse Investigation Units (IAIU), that respond to allegations of abuse and neglect in resource homes or institutions.

DYFS operates a 24-hour State Central Registry (SCR) hotline that receives all reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. After regular DYFS business hours, the hotline is linked with a statewide network of Special Response Units (SPRU) that investigate referrals made after work hours and on weekends and holidays. The SCR hotline number is: 1-877-NJ ABUSE (652-2873).

What is Resource Family Care?

The three types of Resource Family Care Providers are foster, adoption, and kinship. Foster caregivers are individuals and families who volunteer to open their hearts and homes to become temporary substitute parents to children in need of placement due to protective or other social service reasons. Adoptive caregivers provide permanent care for children whose parents have had their parental rights terminated. Kinship caregivers are related to a child in placement through blood, marriage, civil union, domestic partnership, or adoption; or are connected to the child by an established positive psychological or emotional relationship. While children are in placement, the resource family offers them loving experiences that promote healthy growth and development. The family provides for the vital physical and emotional care of children when they are separated from their biological parents. When children are placed in a resource family home, the caregivers must be licensed, or be eligible and in the process of being licensed when they are potential kinship providers.

Who Comprises the Resource Family DYFS Team?

As a resource parent, you will interact with various staff and aspects of DYFS. The DYFS Resource Family Team includes:

Office of Licensing (OOL): The Office of Licensing has the responsibility for inspecting and licensing your home and ensuring that all regulatory mandates are met for the safety, protection, comfort, and well-being of children.

Resource Family Inspector: The Resource Family Inspector is the representative from OOL who will visit and assess your home for compliance with the Manual of Requirements for Resource Family Parents (Chapter 122C).

Resource Family Support Unit:

- **Resource Family Support Worker (RFSW):** Prior to licensure, this staff person will conduct your home study, visit your home several times, meet and interview all household members, and ensure that all aspects of the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) have been completed satisfactorily. Resource Parents can contact their RFSW when they have questions about agency policy or particular concerns. The RFSW should be notified *immediately* whenever the following occurs:
 - Change in household composition
 - Change in address and/or telephone number
 - Change in employment status or hours of employment
 - Any event that may impact on your ability to care for a child in care (e.g., fire, flood, construction, burglary damage, etc.)
 - Arrest, death, disability or serious illness of a household member
- **Resource Family Facilitator:** This is the staff person in the Resource Family Support Unit who contacts you when there are children in need of placement. The Facilitator provides you with critical information about the children being placed and will answer questions you may have regarding the placement process.

Caseworker (Family Service Specialist): Your first contact with a caseworker will probably occur when a child is placed in your home. The caseworker will visit regularly to provide support. The caseworker, the child's family and you are part of the team working toward reuniting the child with the biological family.

Caseworker's Immediate Supervisor: Besides the caseworker, their immediate supervisor is the other person in the Local Office who knows the most about the child placed in your care. If you need to discuss an urgent matter when the caseworker is not available, ask to speak with their supervisor.

Casework Supervisor: The casework supervisor provides guidance and supervision to the caseworkers and to the supervisors in a DYFS Local Office. If you need to discuss an urgent matter when neither the caseworker nor supervisor is available, ask to speak with the casework supervisor.

Local Office Manager (LOM): The LOM is responsible for the over-all operation of the local office. The Manager becomes involved in any special case situation and has the authority to approve special requests.

Birth/Legal Parents: No matter what the circumstances are that resulted in children being in resource family care, they typically are strongly attached to their biological families. Because of this, and because the law requires it, the goal for most children in out-of-home placement is reunification with their families if this is in the children's best interest and does not jeopardize their safety.

Children in Care

How and when does visitation occur between children and their families?

Since parent/child visits are a critical component in working toward a child's return home, frequent visits are encouraged and court ordered for most families. The caseworker establishes a plan and location for visits after consulting with the child's parents, the child (when appropriate) and you. Most visitation occurs in the Division's Local Offices. Although you cannot refuse to allow the child in your care to participate in visits, you should have a role in planning the visit so that you can make appropriate scheduling preparations regarding child care, employment, school, and family activities. In some instances, the family court judge will be very specific about the circumstances regarding visits and all parties will have less flexibility in these court-ordered situations.

If you have any problem with a parent/child visit, you should discuss it with your caseworker. In case of an emergency, contact your DYFS Local Office, or after hours, the 24 hour SCR Hotline at 1-877-NJ ABUSE.

Do visits occur with siblings and extended family members?

Just as a child's separation from the biological parents is traumatic, separation from brothers and sisters and other significant relatives and friends also can be extremely difficult for children in care. Every effort should be made to place siblings together but when this is not possible, it is crucial to a child's well-being to maintain contact with siblings on a regular basis. Contact with extended family members and family friends should also be maintained through visits, phone calls, letters, and e-mails whenever possible and appropriate.

For some children in resource family care, the goal will be placing them with a relative, rather than returning to their biological parents. In other situations, the relative will not assume full-time care responsibilities, but may be available to have a significant role in the children's lives. For instance, a relative may be able to provide transportation to

therapy or medical appointments; or the relative may wish to attend the children's school plays, conferences, birthday parties or other social activities.

Any activity that positively integrates the birth family, including siblings and relatives, into the child's daily life serves to strengthen the placement, and contributes to the child's well-being and future success of the child's return to the birth family.

How does confidentiality apply to the children in my care?

DYFS is responsible for ensuring the confidentiality (or privacy) of all information concerning the children and families it serves. As a resource parent, you share in this serious responsibility.

The DYFS caseworker will inform you of all necessary information about the children in your care and their families to enable you to adequately care for the children. New Jersey Law mandates that you only discuss or share child abuse/neglect information about a child when it is needed in connection with providing care, treatment, or supervision to that child. Individuals with whom you may share pertinent information about children in your care may include doctors, teachers, and counselors. You must not share background or child abuse/neglect information about the child or the child's family with relatives, friends, neighbors, or the media. Children in care can not be photographed for newspaper articles, Facebook, or any publication where their identities would become known to the public.

What consents am I authorized to give for a child in my care?

One of the most difficult aspects of being a foster or kinship parent is that you act as a child's parent, but do not have all the "rights" that may be taken for granted when you are a biological or adoptive parent.

For most children in resource family care, birth parents remain their legal parents. What this means is you cannot give permission or consent for a child in placement to do certain things that can be considered a "major" event. For instance, you cannot consent to:

- ❖ Surgery or other exceptional medical treatment
- ❖ Enlisting in the Military
- ❖ Getting married
- ❖ Changing a religious affiliation
- ❖ Getting a job
- ❖ Quitting school
- ❖ Changing a child's name or nickname
- ❖ Having a child baptized in your religion
- ❖ Cutting a young child's hair if this is against the parents' wishes based on their culture and tradition
- ❖ Having ears or other body parts pierced
- ❖ Tattoos

Usually, the birth parent or DYFS representative will give consent or permission when significant decisions are warranted. This is one of those areas where partnership and communication between the resource parent, the caseworker, and the birth parent(s) is very important, because everyone, working as a team, wants to do what is best for the child.

What is the Resource Parent Identification Letter?

DYFS issues a Resource Parent Identification Letter when a child is placed in your home. This letter is intended to help with registering the child in school, obtaining routine medical care, and receiving other necessary services for the child.

The letter provides the name, date of birth, DYFS case number, and Medicaid number for the child, as well as the resource parent's name, address, and telephone number. It is signed by the appropriate Local Office Manager or designee, notarized, and labeled "confidential." Neither the letter nor the contents of the letter should be shared, except on an as-needed basis with appropriate parties, as indicated above.

What can I expect regarding board and clothing payments?

As a Resource Parent, you are reimbursed by receiving a monthly board check for each child placed in your home. This financial reimbursement covers the child's living expenses, i.e., food, shelter, personal allowance, general recreation, and cultural activities.

In order to determine the appropriate board rate, the resource parent, caseworker, and DYFS nurse utilize a tool called the Resource Family Care Rate Assessment to review the circumstances of every child who is placed with a family. The initial review takes place at the time of placement or within the first 30 days of placement.

Based on the guidelines, you and the caseworker identify the appropriate rate for the child. The caseworker then takes the necessary steps to obtain approval for the rate. At a minimum, you and the caseworker review the guidelines and assess the board rate every three months.

Authorized Absences and Board Payments: There may be times when a child is absent from your home for a period of time (e.g., vacationing with parents, hospitalization, attendance at camp, etc.). When this absence has been approved by DYFS, you will receive your usual board payment for a maximum of four weeks.

Clothing Allowance: In addition to board payments, DYFS issues a monthly clothing allowance that is to be used specifically for clothing for the child. The amount of the clothing allowance is slightly higher for teenagers. When a child leaves your resource home, the clothing accompanies the child.

Initial Clothing Allowance: When a child is placed in your home, if it is the child's first

placement, DYFS will issue a check for an initial clothing allowance. It is to be used to purchase a basic wardrobe for the child. Additionally, when an infant is placed in your home from the hospital, a check is usually issued to purchase a car seat in the event that you don't have one.

Payment Procedures

Automatic Payment System: Whenever a child is placed in a resource family home, the caseworker ensures that updated information about the placement is entered into the DYFS information system called NJ SPIRIT. If this update is completed by the last working day of the month, an automatic payment process will be initiated. Approximately 10 working days after the first day of the next month, you can expect the board payment for the previous month. Partial payment, a per diem rate, will be paid if the child spends less than one full month in your home.

Manual Payment System: If a placement line can not be entered prior to the end of the month the child stayed with you, or in the case of a vacation placement, the caseworker will complete a Claim for Payment System Invoice (Form K-100). This is a "manual" payment process. After the caseworker completes the K-100, you will receive two copies of the invoice. Return the signed original invoice to DYFS. Keep a copy for your records. You can expect payment within one month of signing and returning the invoice.

Are there tax benefits to being a Resource Parent?

As resource and adoptive parents, you **may** qualify to claim deductions and credit on your federal income tax returns for your foster and adoptive children. The National Foster Parent Association has a 26 page resource guide entitled "Federal Tax Benefits - Foster, Adoptive Parents and Kinship Caregivers" that provides general information regarding basic tax rules and tips regarding eligibility. The guide can be accessed at www.NFPAonline.org.

What is Educational Stability?

In accordance with the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Federal Legislation), the N.J. Educational Stability Act became effective September 9, 2010. The Act mandates that DYFS coordinates with local school districts to continue children in their current educational setting at the time of placement. If remaining in the pre-placement school is not in a child's best interest, DYFS coordinates immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school.

What is my educational responsibility for a child in placement?

As a resource parent, you have the responsibility of overseeing a child's daily school activities and consenting to routine educational matters. It's important to note that a child in care can not be home schooled. All children in out-of-home placement must be

immediately enrolled and/or attending school within 72 hours of the school placement decision.

As a resource parent, you are authorized to:

- ❖ Register a child in school
- ❖ Consent to a child's participation in elective courses of study, school activities, trips, and organized sports
- ❖ Sign report cards and permission slips for routine educational activities
- ❖ Consent to a child's participation in a voluntary fingerprint program (e.g., kidnapping prevention program), provided the police or another law enforcement agency do not retain the prints or copies
- ❖ Consent to a request from the school district for referral to the Child Study Team
- ❖ Serve as the parent for a handicapped child during the classification or individualized education program (IEP) process, when the parents are unavailable

As a resource parent, you are also responsible for the following school related activities:

- ❖ Ensuring that a child attends school regularly
- ❖ Encouraging good study habits
- ❖ Being involved with a child's academic progress
- ❖ Participating in routine conferences with a child's teacher and meeting with school personnel when problems arise or for periodic reviews

If you identify problems the child may be having that require special help, be sure to tell your caseworker so you both can advocate with the school on the child's behalf.

Private School: A child may be enrolled in a private or parochial school only when all the following conditions are met:

- ❖ The child's parents and the child, when age appropriate, agree to private/parochial schooling
- ❖ The school meets the standards of the New Jersey Department of Education
- ❖ The schooling is consistent with the child's religion, or the parent does not object to the school placement if a parochial school is being considered
- ❖ No cost to DYFS is incurred

College: Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS) administers several scholarship programs for foster and adoptive youth. Information about these scholarship programs can be obtained by contacting FAFS at 1-800-222-0047.

Students also are encouraged to apply for federal financial aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, which is available from their high school guidance office. Most youth in resource care are eligible for maximum federal

and state financial aid. More information can be obtained by contacting the New Jersey Department of Higher Education Financial Aid Hotline at 1-800-792-8670.

What are expectations regarding babysitting?

It is the responsibility of the resource parent to ensure that children in placement receive appropriate care and supervision. The resource parent should use the same good judgment in choosing a babysitter for children in care as they would utilize for their own children.

Can a minor be utilized as a babysitter?

An adolescent who is the resource parent's child, a relative's child, or neighbor's child who is of sufficient reliability and maturity can care for children in care. The length of time depends on the maturity of the babysitter and needs of the child. This care should be short term and occur infrequently.

Can a child in care babysit?

Since children in care should have the most normalized experience possible, they can be permitted to babysit for other children in care and/or the resource parents' own children, or children of friends and neighbors, as long as they possess the appropriate skills and maturity. However, the child in care should not be used inappropriately on a consistent basis to watch other children in the home, to the detriment of the child's own needs and freedom.

More in-depth information regarding babysitting issues for children in care can be found through the FAFS Fact Sheet #4 (April, 2009) entitled: Babysitting for Children in Foster Care Placement: What You Need to Know.

What is expected of me regarding transportation?

Transportation needs are identified as part of the Resource Family Care Rate Assessment for each child in care. Routine transportation is the responsibility of the resource parent and is therefore included in the base level of care rate. This includes transportation to medical appointments, school events, social and sports activities, church, shopping, etc.

If you are willing to provide transportation for a child with special ongoing needs, such as psychological or physical therapy appointments, or parent/child visits, this may result in a higher level board rate depending on the number of hours spent transporting the child.

New Jersey Law requires that:

- Children from infancy to age eight or 80 pounds must ride in a safety or booster seat in the back seat of a vehicle.

Note: A rear-facing infant seat should never be placed in a front seat with a passenger-side airbag unless the vehicle is equipped with an air bag on/off switch. Infant seats should be secured properly and face the rear of the vehicle.

- Children under age eight who weigh more than 80 pounds must wear a seat belt wherever they are transported
- All children over the age of eight must be secured with a seatbelt while in a moving vehicle
- No child should ride in the back or bed of a truck

Reminder: Never leave children unattended in a car.

Reimbursement from DYFS is available for purchasing an infant car seat for a child 2 years and under. If you need a car seat for a child in your care, contact your child's caseworker. Once purchased, the car seat is the property of the child for whom it was purchased. If the child leaves your home for placement in another resource home, the seat should go with the child. If the child returns to his birth/legal family, the seat should be returned to DYFS

What do I need to know regarding bicycle helmets?

New Jersey Law requires that children under the age of 14, who are operating or riding as a passenger on a two-wheeled bicycle, must wear a properly fitted and fastened bicycle helmet. If you purchase the helmet for a child in your care, you will be reimbursed for the helmet by submitting the receipt to your caseworker.

Can a child in my care participate in family vacations and trips?

Taking children on family vacation and trips is strongly encouraged as it helps the children know that they are truly a part of your family, and enhances the bonding process.

A vacation or trip of more than three days requires notification and approval by DYFS. You should consult with your caseworker at least one month prior to the anticipated date of departure for any planned vacation. In the case of emergency trips, contact DYFS about your plans as soon as possible. You should always advise the caseworker of the vacation/trip dates and the location(s) where you can be reached.

If a child's planned vacation/trip with your family interferes with court-ordered parental visits, it is necessary for DYFS to secure prior written consent of the birth parents and/or the court, in order for the child to accompany you. If it is determined that the child in

your care cannot accompany your family, the caseworker will consult with you and make appropriate alternative arrangements for the child during your absence.

What Is a Life Book?

Ideally, children in placement should have records containing everything of importance in their lives. Similar to a scrapbook, a life book can capture many and varied facets of a child's life. It should be unique and personal to each child in your care. You may wish to involve older children in this activity to identify the important events in their lives that reflect their history.

Examples of information that may be included are:

- Photos of themselves and siblings
- Birthday cards and descriptions of favorite gifts and moments
- Special trips and vacations
- Names of teachers, schools, and school pictures
- Report cards
- Special accomplishments and awards

What are appropriate methods of discipline?

Discipline is part of parenting and should be a means of helping children to be safe and to learn appropriate behavior. It should always be utilized with the child's best interest at heart, and should help them to understand boundaries, and the need to respect others and themselves.

Guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behavior should be established with the children when they are placed in your home. Clear and consistent communication is critically important since households have different expectations, and a child needs to know what your specific expectations are. Sometimes, particularly for older children, it is helpful to establish these guidelines in the presence of the caseworker. It's important to give encouragement and praise for good behavior. An explanation of consequences as a result of unacceptable behavior also should be discussed.

Never threaten to have a child removed from your home in an attempt to make a child behave differently. The child also should never be deprived of meals, mail, or family contact as a method of discipline.

Corporal Punishment, including *HITTING, STRIKING, WHIPPING, SLAPPING, BERATING*, or any other form of punishment causing physical or emotional harm or pain should **never** be used.

Acceptable forms of discipline include taking privileges away, such as a special activity or a favorite television program, or time outs, where the child is separated from others for a short period of time.

Never hesitate in asking for advice and assistance, or expressing frustration to your caseworker or RFSW when discipline methods aren't successful.

Remember from your pre-service training that *“Asking for help is a strength.”*

What happens if I move?

Moving to another County: If your family is planning to move to another county within New Jersey, you may continue to provide resource family care without going through the home study and approval process again. However, your new residence needs to be inspected to ensure that it meets the licensing standards for resource care. Be sure to notify your RFSW and your licensing inspector prior to moving so a home visit/inspection can be scheduled as soon as possible.

If you currently have children in care, you will need prior approval for the children to move with you. Maintaining stability is crucial for children in care, so strong consideration is given to the children remaining in your home.

Moving to another State: If your family is planning to move to another state and you wish for the child in your care to move with you, DYFS is responsible for determining if it is appropriate for this to occur. If this is recommended, necessary parental, administrative, and judicial approval is needed.

If you have obtained all of the necessary approvals to move out of state with the child in your care, you will continue to receive board and clothing payments from DYFS. You will be given information about obtaining medical and/or services from the other state. Additionally, DYFS must arrange for supervision of your home and the child in care from the appropriate agency in the receiving state. The new state will provide periodic visits to your home and prepare summary reports for DYFS. Some states may require that the appropriate authority in that state license your home.

What occurs if a child returns to resource family care?

The law requires that the Division files specific plans for children who re-enter placement after having been reunified with their parents. Due to the importance of consistent care in a child's life, DYFS should make every effort to place a child with their former resource family, unless there are specific reasons for this not to happen. The Division believes that the child's relationship with the former resource family can make the placement process somewhat less traumatic. In the event that a child can be placed with a sibling when re-entry into resource care is necessary, maintaining siblings together will generally

be given priority over returning a child to the former resource family, unless the family also is willing and able to care for sibling(s).

Health Care

What is Medicaid?

Medicaid in New Jersey is provided in two ways:

- **Fee-for-Service (FSS), or “regular Medicaid:”** Participants are seen by an approved Medicaid provider who bills Medicaid directly for payment.
- **Medicaid Managed Care (MMC):** Participants are enrolled in a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) that manages their healthcare and provides services. With MMC, a primary care physician (PCP) is selected or assigned. All routine care must be received through the PCP, and referrals from the PCP are required for all specialists.

Medicaid currently contracts with four HMO programs that provide care for children in placement. Benefits are the same for all four HMO. Every child in placement who is enrolled in a HMO will have a care manager from the HMO, who will work with the DYFS Child Health Unit nurse to assist resource parents/ caregivers in coordinating services to best meet the medical needs of each child.

For information about enrolling in a MMO, contact the Health Benefits Coordinator at **1-800-701-0710**.

Can I consent to routine and emergency medical care?

Upon entering resource family care, each child’s health needs are evaluated by obtaining a medical examination at the time of placement. Your caseworker may take the child for the exam, or you may be asked to do so.

As the child’s resource parent, you are responsible for:

- Arranging and consenting to routine medical and dental care for your child, including an annual comprehensive evaluation and examination
- Contacting DYFS immediately whenever emergency care is required, using the 24-hour SCR hotline at 1-877-652-2873 on weekends and after regular office hours
- Consenting to emergency care, including hospital admission, only when immediate consent is critical to the child’s well-being and when DYFS cannot be contacted within the time required. You must notify DYFS as soon as possible after consenting to such treatment.

- Notifying DYFS of any health needs that the child may develop while in your care

What are the Child Health Units?

The Child Health Units (CHU) are located in each DYFS Local Office. The role of the CHU nurse is to partner with DYFS staff and resource families to ensure each child receives optimal health care while in out-of-home placement. Each CHU is staffed with a clinical nurse coordinator, health care case managers (nurses), and staff assistants. Every child in DYFS custody is assigned a CHU nurse who will visit the child in the resource family home within three weeks of placement. The CHU assists resource families in achieving DCF health care priorities for each child that include:

- A Comprehensive Medical Exam (CME) within 30 days of placement
- Appropriate well child and preventative care services, including immunizations
- Semi-annual dental exams for children aged 3 and above
- Creating a Health Passport which includes health history and current health care needs
- Ensuring children with a suspected mental health issue receive appropriate assessments and follow up care

Can I administer psychotropic medication to a child in my care?

For those children who may require psychotropic medication as part of a treatment plan, the DYFS caseworker is responsible for obtaining *informed consent* from the child's parent or legal guardian. In the absence of a parent or guardian, the Local Office Manager may sign the consent. Informed consent for the prescription of psychotropic medication should be documented in the child's case record.

Resource parents may not provide consent for psychotropic medications.

DYFS Administrative Code 10:122C-7.4 mandates the following before any psychotropic medication is administered to a child in placement:

- The resource family parent, in conjunction with the DYFS or contract agency caseworker, should ensure the child is assessed by a psychiatrist, mental health clinical nurse specialist, or mental health nurse practitioner, to determine the need for and possible risks/side effects of the psychotropic medication; and that the resource family parent is knowledgeable about the indications for the use of the medication, as well as the therapeutic benefits and side effects of such medication.
- The resource family parent should not administer psychotropic medication as a punishment or for the convenience of the resource family parent
- The resource family parent should ensure that psychotropic medication is stored in an area inaccessible to children

Additionally, the resource family parent should ensure that the child in placement receiving psychotropic medication is monitored as follows:

- Immediately report any observed side effects from the medication to the DYFS or contract agency caseworker and the prescribing psychiatrist, mental health clinical nurse specialist, or mental health nurse practitioner
- In conjunction with the DYFS or contract agency caseworker, the resource family should ensure that the psychiatrist, mental health clinical nurse specialist, or mental health nurse practitioner reviews the child's status, behavior, well-being, progress, side effects and reason for continuing the medication every 30 days, or as the psychotropic medication team deems necessary
- Maintain a medication log indicating the child's name, type of psychotropic medication, and the date and time the medication is administered.

Resource Parents are encouraged to contact the Local Office CHU with any questions or concerns regarding a child's physical and/or mental health needs.

How do I obtain mental health services for a child in my care?

PerformCare is the state-wide Contracted System Administrator (CSA) for the Division of Child Behavioral Health Services (DCBHS). PerformCare assists resource families in obtaining appropriate mental health services.

Their website is: www.performcarenj.org and their toll free access number is: 1-877-652-7624.

Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) can be provided to youth who exhibit emotional or behavioral challenges that may jeopardize their current living arrangement. The MRSS provides face-to-face crisis response within one hour of notification. The goal is to stabilize behavior and maintain placement in the home.

Families of youth discharged from a psychiatric screening center are automatically eligible for MRSS, if desired. MRSS is available 24 hours/7 days a week and can offer up to eight weeks of stabilization services. Services can be accessed by calling: 1-877-652-7624.

When should children be immunized?

It is a licensing requirement that all children in resource family care receive prescribed immunizations. By the time children in your care are two years of age, they should have received four doses of Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus (DPT) vaccine; four doses of Hemophilus Influenza Type B (Hib) vaccine; three doses of polio vaccine; and one dose of Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine. It is also recommended that children should receive the vaccine against Hepatitis B infection. Consult with your pediatrician for the schedule of all other recommended children's vaccines.

Children who are infected with the HIV virus should have immunizations as recommended by their HIV managing physician because of their potentially compromised immune systems.

Who is eligible for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program?

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services administers the Women, Infants, and Children's (WIC) program which provides specified nutritious supplemental foods to infants and children up to their fifth birthday. These children have been determined to be at "nutritional risk" primarily because of inadequate nutrition and inadequate income. Some of the foods available to WIC clients include: iron fortified formula, cereal high in iron, fruit or vegetable juice high in Vitamin C, fortified whole milk, fortified evaporated milk, cheese, and eggs.

Children in placement are considered income-eligible for WIC benefits. However, because of limited funds, eligible children may occasionally be placed on a waiting list.

DYFS Policy and Practice

What are External and Internal Case Reviews?

Child Placement Review (CPR) Board - Enhanced 45 Day Review

The history of the New Jersey Child Placement Review (CPR) System dates back to 1978 when the Child Placement Review Act (S-3246) was passed. The Act created Review Boards to operate in all counties. The Boards consist of court appointed citizen volunteers who are charged with monitoring the cases of all children placed outside their homes by DYFS. The goal of the Boards is to ensure that children return to their birth parents or are placed in alternative permanent homes in a timely way.

As per a directive issued by the Administrative Office of the Courts on March 9, 2010, the Boards now only review a case once, 45 days after DYFS places a child, rather than conducting ongoing reviews as previously was done. It was felt that multiple reviews were no longer necessary due to the direct oversight role of Family Court Judges in placement cases. Since there is now only one CPR review, it is more comprehensive than in the past. It is a structured and informative session for parents, resource parents, DYFS caseworkers and other child welfare stakeholders.

If for any reason you are unable to attend, you should consider sending a written update about how the child is doing and any concerns/issues that exist.

After the CPR Board completes its review, it makes a recommendation to the court about the placement. The court considers this recommendation and then makes a final decision about whether the placement should continue and/or whether the case plan and services are appropriate. More in-depth information regarding this process can be found at: http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/directive/2010/Dir_04_10.pdf .

Regional Reviews

An objective third-party DYFS staff person conducts periodic reviews, known as Regional Placement Conferences for all children in out-of-home placements. The first formal review occurs 5 months after placement. A second review occurs at the 10th month of placement. The child's parents also are included in the review, as well as the child (if appropriate), the resource parents and other interested parties. As a member of the DYFS team, you will receive notification of this review and are encouraged to participate either by providing information about the child to the caseworker in preparation for the review, and/or by attending the review.

Permanency Hearings

The court holds a permanency hearing no later than 12 months after the child has been in placement. It provides review and approval of the child's placement plan by the court. Any hearing held before the Family Part of the Court may serve as a permanency hearing if it provides the review and approval of the child's permanency plan.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) states that resource parents are to be notified of all hearings and given an opportunity to be heard.

What is the Case Practice Model?

The Case Practice Model (CPM) provides guidelines as to how DYFS expects children and families to be treated, and how they and their natural support networks will be engaged in the decisions affecting their safety and well-being. It is a strengths-based and family-centered model of practice which helps achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for children. Some crucial aspects of CPM include: quality investigation and assessment; engaging youth and families; working with family teams; individualized planning and provision of relevant services; continuous review and adaptation; and safe and sustained transition from DCF involvement. More extensive information regarding CPM can be found on the DCF website at www.nj.gov/dcf.

What are Family Team Meetings and who attends them?

DYFS attempts to convene a Family Team Meeting prior to or within 72 hours of a child's out-of-home placement. The purpose of the meeting is to continue family engagement and to strategize regarding such important issues as: a review of efforts and services to prevent the need for placement; a review of areas of concern; identifying the family's strengths and needs; identifying relative (maternal and paternal) and family friend resources for placement and other types of support; developing a visitation plan; and ensuring that everyone understands that permanency within 12 months is the goal.

Everyone important in the life of a child, as well as the child in care (if age and otherwise appropriate) should be asked to attend the Family Team Meeting. Invited participants should include: interested family members, friends, resource parents, and representatives from the child's support system such as teachers and therapists. Parents, children and youth (when appropriate), and all team members should engage in the decision making

process involving what services and supports are needed, how and who should provide them, and deadlines for delivery and completion.

How can I resolve a problem with DYFS?

Resource Parents are given an opportunity to dispute or appeal DYFS actions or decisions. Depending upon the nature of the dispute, different mechanisms are available to seek objective resolutions.

You can initiate any dispute resolution by contacting:

- Your caseworker
- The DYFS Information Number at 1-800-331-3937
- Office of Advocacy 1-877-543-7864
- The Administrative Hearings Coordinator at 609-292-8715
- Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS) at 1-800-222-0047 also provides information and assists in resolving disagreements with DYFS

Disruption Conference:

The decision to permanently remove a child from a resource home is made in an informed and planned manner. The resource parent is invited to participate in a meeting, called a disruption conference, to discuss the reasons for the proposed removal. If the resource parent does not agree with the decision reached at the disruption conference, the resource parent may be eligible for a dispositional conference.

Whenever possible, a disruption conference is conducted prior to removal of children to ensure that moving the child is the most appropriate way to respond to an emergency situation in a resource home. If there is no opportunity to conduct the conference prior to an emergency removal, the conference is held within 72 hours of the child's removal.

A disruption conference is not required, but is encouraged, when the disruption is at the request of the resource parent.

Dispositional Conference:

This is conducted by an objective, third party DYFS representative who may choose either a document and record review or a hearing. If a hearing is conducted, you have an opportunity to present testimony, provide and examine witnesses, and review DYFS records. DYFS records that contain confidential information, however, may not be reviewed.

You may also be represented by a person of your choosing to present your case. Such representation is not limited to attorneys, and can be provided by a friend, relative or any other individual you choose.

Court Orders:

Any dispute regarding a DYFS action which is the subject of an existing court order specifically addressing the disputed action, must be resolved in the trial court that has jurisdiction over the disputed matter. Cases for which a guardian ad litem must be appointed also are resolved in the appropriate trial court.

Dispute Time Frames for DYFS Decisions or Actions:

If you are notified by DYFS of a formal decision or action, as for example, you receive a letter indicating that your resource home is being closed, you may dispute that decision within 10 calendar days of the date of the letter. The Division is then required to acknowledge in writing your request for appeal within 10 business days. The written notification will inform you of the right to a dispositional conference, an administrative hearing, or both, as appropriate, and the relevant procedures to follow.

You are able to request a dispositional resolution of any formal action taken by DYFS with which you do not agree. Most importantly, you should do so within the required 10 day time frame.

The Division's Action Line and Office of Advocacy:

Other avenues for resolving issues with DYFS are the Division's Action Line and the DCF Office of Advocacy. If you have made attempts but were unable to resolve a problem through your caseworker and the Local Office Chain of Command (Supervisor/Casework Supervisor/Local Office Manager), you may choose to call the Division's Action Line at 1-800-331-DYFS (3937), Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m., or the Office of Advocacy, Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. at 1-877-543-7864 or by email at askDCF@dcf.state.nj.us.

What occurs if someone makes a complaint about a resource parent?

DYFS may have a concern or receive a complaint about the care that resource parents are providing to a child placed in their home. These complaints are categorized as either an abuse/neglect allegation or a child welfare concern.

Investigations of Abuse or Neglect in Resource Family Homes

The responsibility for investigating allegations of child abuse and/or neglect in resource homes is charged to the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU). When the IAIU receives an allegation, the placement of any additional children in the home is suspended. Investigations conducted by the IAIU conform to the standards of investigation used in other out-of-home settings, for example, residential facilities and schools. At the conclusion of the investigative process, the IAIU will make a determination regarding the allegation. The two conclusions are:

Substantiated: a preponderance of evidence supports the allegation that the child has been harmed or placed at risk of harm and the Resource Parent was responsible.

Unfounded: there is not a preponderance of evidence to confirm that the child was harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm; or there is not a preponderance of evidence indicating that a parent, caregiver, institutional caregiver, or a child was involved.

The final determination is sent to the Resource Parent in the form of a letter that indicates the rights of the Resource Parent and the process to appeal the findings if you disagree. At the same time, a report will be submitted to the Resource Family Unit and the Office of Licensing with recommendations from IAIU for remedial and/or corrective action, if needed.

The Resource Family Unit is responsible for taking action regarding the status of your home, based upon the recommendations in the IAIU report. If an abuse allegation is substantiated, the children in care must be removed from the home. The Office of Licensing is responsible for actually closing a home through licensure revocation, which can be appealed.

If you have been accused of child abuse or neglect, you may want to talk with someone who is able to understand or to offer emotional support during this very trying time. The Foster and Adoptive Family Services Resource Family Advocates are available to assist. The FAFS Resource Family Advocates are trained in DYFS policies, procedures, and regulations regarding confidentiality and the investigative process, as well as child abuse/neglect laws and regulations. Their goal is to facilitate communication, clarify the process, provide current information on resources, and offer support to the resource parent who is under investigation. Resource Family Advocates do not offer legal advice and resource parents are not obligated to share any information with them. All rules and regulations regarding confidentiality are strictly enforced.

Any Resource Parent interested in receiving assistance from a Resource Family Advocate can contact Foster and Adoptive Family Services at: 1-800-222-0047.

Is there an insurance liability program for resource parents?

DYFS provides a Resource Parent Liability Program consisting of two distinct components: (1) property damage/loss, and (2) legal representation.

The program is intended to provide protection for:

- Damages or loss to your property caused by a child in placement
- Claims made by third parties against you because of the acts of a child in placement
- Claims made against you by third parties, including children in placement or persons acting on their behalf, alleging negligence on your part in the course of your resource parenting responsibilities

For specific information or to file a claim, contact your Resource Family Support Worker.

Adoption

Are Resource Parents able to adopt?

Whenever adoption becomes a consideration, the child's current resource parents, if interested, are assessed as possible adoptive candidates.

New Jersey law (N.J.S.A. 30:4C-26.7) mandates that resource parents who have had the child continuously in placement for two or more years shall be given "first consideration". However, DYFS also has the legal authority to select adoptive parents for the child regardless of the length of the placement if another placement is in the best interest of the child. If a resource parent disagrees with this decision, a Dispositional Conference can be requested.

Special Project

What is a Resource Parent Adjunct Recruiter?

Because Resource Parents are our best recruiters, an effective partnership has been initiated with DYFS Recruiters. Recruitment events co-sponsored by DYFS and Resource Parents are held where the positive and poignant experiences of caring for our children are presented. Knowing community resources well, the Resource Parents also are able to collaborate, utilize, and network with organizations intrinsic to local communities.

A statewide Speaker's Bureau Profile Book has been compiled which identifies Resource Families who are willing to serve as Adjunct Recruiters. In addition to the events described above, they are available for media interviews, focus and panel groups, and mentoring new and potential resource families. A small stipend is available for Adjunct Recruiters. If you would like more information, please contact the Recruiter in your area.

Many Thanks to New Jersey's Resource Parents

Thank you for partnering with DYFS to help care for New Jersey's most vulnerable children. By welcoming these children into your homes, you provide safety, stability and love that helps them heal and grow.

We express our sincere gratitude for making a daily difference in the lives of children!