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RESOURCE FAMILY SUPPORT

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RESOURCE FAMILY SUPPORT

5.1. Basic Principles for Support

- Resource families provide a service that LDSS cannot; therefore, they should be treated with respect and valued as members of the child's permanency team (see Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Dispute Process- Resource Family Guidance Sections 2.5.1.1.3. and 4.5.2.4.10.3).

- Because children in foster care have lived experiences that result in behavioral, educational, medical, mental health or social needs, the resource families caring for them must have the services and supports that will enable them to provide the best possible care for children while maintaining connections to their families.

- Support and retention of currently approved resource families is the single most effective recruitment strategy.

- Data regarding the utilization of resource families, their expressed needs for training and support, and their overall level of satisfaction should be collected and regularly used to inform both recruitment and retention activities.

5.2. Valuing Resource Families

As the providers of the child's daily care, resource parents possess a unique perspective and should be regarded as persons with expertise about the child. They should be treated as valued members of the child's permanency team as reflected in the Foster Parent Bill of Rights.

- Communication is a fundamental component of teamwork with resource families, requiring prompt efforts and a high level of overall customer service.

- Providing timely notification of court hearings, team meetings, visits, etc. allows families to plan schedules and prepare accordingly, and displays a fundamental level of respect for the family.

- Supporting and responding to the needs of resource families in a timely manner, including providing ongoing training and linking them to community resources demonstrates the resource family's value. It also contributes to placement stability because the resource families are better able to meet the needs of the children placed with them.

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- Ensuring that training and support activities are driven by resource family stated and unstated needs and incorporates a variety of topics values them. Utilizing CRAFFT to bolster support and retention of existing families increases LDSS capacity.

- Collaborating with neighboring LDSS to offer a variety of supports and in-service trainings, including resource family support groups, increases LDSS capacity and the effectiveness of resource family support.

- Utilizing an ongoing process to gather information about the needs of resource families and their overall satisfaction level regarding their relationship with the LDSS ensures that resource families know that they are valued and have a voice.

- Recognizing and acknowledging resource families for their expertise and service throughout the year and in a variety of ways demonstrates their value.

5.3. Supporting New Placements

Providing a high level of information and support at both the early and ongoing stages of placement is critical for both the resource family and the LDSS to meet a child's needs.

The very first placement a resource family experiences after approval should be given extra time and responsiveness to assist the family in putting their training into practice. The resource family needs support in making the needed adjustments to their home and schedule to meet the child's needs, preparing for, responding to their own children's needs during this transition, and beginning the early work of maintaining the connection between the child and their family.

Individuals who are approved as kinship resource parents must be provided with the following information by the time of placement:

- LDSS contact information, including but not limited to, Family Services Specialist name and phone number and after-hours contact information.

- Contact information including who the child may or may not have contact with and what type of contact is allowed (e.g., supervised visitation; phone contact; email; etc.).

- Information regarding the child's medical history and needs including allergies, immunizations, current medical treatment, the child's doctors' names, health insurance, and contact information and, when applicable, the child's medication.

- Educational information including provisions for getting the child to school and, if applicable, the plan for enrolling the child in a new school or childcare, if needed.

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- The LDSS's plan for immediate follow-up regarding the child, including but not limited to, next Family Services Specialist visit to the home; school enrollment; medical follow-up; visitation between the child and family members including siblings.

A review of and signing the Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics/Mutual Responsibility Agreement and for kinship resource parents, the Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Dispute Process.

- A review and signing of the confidentiality agreement, including a discussion of the meaning of confidentiality.

- A discussion of the prohibition against the use of corporal punishment under any circumstances. Corporal punishment must be defined, and resource parents must agree to refrain from all such methods of discipline. The Discipline Agreement must also be signed.

- The expectation and process for obtaining full approval as a kinship resource parent and the next steps the LDSS will take to support their decision to pursue full approval.

5.4. Supporting connection with child's family and reunification

The LDSS should create opportunities for resource families and the child's family to develop ongoing relationships in service of safety, permanency, and well-being for children in care. This relationship should be regarded as a priority, facilitated by the LDSS, and valued by the child's permanency team.

All relevant information about the child (and where appropriate, the parents) should be shared with resource parents caring for that child; without it, they are unable to meet the child's needs, and this inability undermines placement stability.

5.4.1. Lifebooks

A lifebook is a scrapbook-like creation that records a child's life, how they entered foster care, their experiences with different families, and their feelings along the way. This book records the love shared by their families, their resource families, and other natural supports who pass through their lives. Lifebooks are especially important for children who are unable to remain connected to their families. For more information about how lifebooks support a sense of identification, belonging, and connection see Foster Care Guidance Sections 4.14 and 9.5.3)

5.5. Respite

Respite care is a placement resource designed to provide relief to families caring for children by providing short-term substitute care for children.

5.5.1 Purpose of Respite

The purpose of respite care for resource parents is to reduce foster home disruption and provide a stable foster care placement for the child. See Foster Care Guidance Section 10.5. When appropriate, planned, or emergency respite should be used to provide resource families with opportunities to take care of themselves and nurture marital and family relationships. Respite is used to preserve the placement stability. LDSS should support resource parents in exercising the reasonable and prudent standard in decisions regarding respite and placement stability.. Respite placements may be used when a resource family emergency arises, in the event of an illness, to provide the resource parent with time to spend with immediate family members and friends, or for resource parents to have some time to themselves. It may also be used to provide respite to support the needs of a child who is transitioning to an adoptive placement or stepping down from a more restrictive placement (i.e., congregate care setting) to a resource family or to the home of a relative through regularly scheduled visits. Such visits may help evaluate appropriate matching of the child with the prospective family and ultimately reduce the number of placement disruptions. Relative respite care is a viable tool to help maintain vital family connections that are important in establishing and maintaining permanency. Relative respite care also may increase the possibility of relative adoption or custody of the child by relatives.

Individuals with whom a child may spend time socially (e.g., overnight stays with a friend, church camp, etc.) are not subject to approval as respite resource parents.

Respite Care Services information is available on FUSION.

5.6. Contingency fund

In cases where a child in foster care's behavioral needs result in extensive damage to the property of the resource family, the LDSS should explore the use of the Contingency Fund to reimburse the resource parent for associated expenses.

5.7. Post placement review

LDSS should provide ongoing support and training to resource families to support the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to meet the needs of children in foster care. At the conclusion of placements, LDSS should engage resource families in self-assessment to review the strengths and areas of skill development and should use this to create a family development plan. Family development plans should outline the responsibilities of both the resource parent(s) and LDSS to address mutually agreed upon areas of need, to include resources and in-service training, and any follow up needed. These reviews and development plans may be incorporated into the next re-approval process. See Resource Family Guidance Section 4.6.

5.8. VEMAT

For children in foster care, the purpose of the Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is to assess the child's behavioral, emotional, and physical/personal care needs to determine if an enhanced maintenance payment is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. Regular and frequent contact with the resource parent is an opportunity to discuss children's needs, concerns the resource parent may have related to the child, and ways to identify and use the child's strengths to improve behavior. These visits should serve as opportunities to provide support, training and for the FSS to proactively consider what the child and resource parent may need to ensure the child's safety, maintain the placement, and improve the child's overall wellbeing. For more information about the VEMAT, see Foster Care Guidance Section 18.2.

5.9. In-service Training

The LDSS should engage with the resource parent on the challenges of fostering and connect them to training which will support their development and help them to better meet the needs of children placed with them. Understanding the impact of trauma on development and behavior is an important topic for in-service training for resource parents.

The LDSS must provide opportunities for training on an annual basis.

- Resource families should be surveyed no less than annually to determine training needs.
- Bolster LDSS offerings of in-service training by utilizing CRAFFT (See Resource Family Guidance Section 1.7) and collaborating with neighboring LDSS to conduct trainings.
- When resource families wish to receive credit for training conducted outside of social services (i.e., through a local school, at a state conference), the LDSS should request information about the content (through an outline, handouts, etc.) as well as verification of attendance (certificate, training roster, etc.). Those LDSS that use Title IV-E funds to support the costs of such trainings must submit the training information in advance of the training to the State office for approval. To access Title IV-E submission and funding information go to Instructions for Title IV-E Funding and Title IV-E Training Pass through Grant.

5.9.1. Training needs

Training must be relevant to the needs of children and families and may be structured to include multiple types of training modalities and resources (for example, online resource parent training courses such as the use of Foster Parent College, seminars, and conferences). LDSS should support resource families by

setting up Foster Parent College accounts at initial approval and direct them to in-service training courses to support their development, as needed.

While the number of hours is not specified, areas of need should be identified through the creation of individualized family development plans through post-placement reviews. No more than half of the in-service training hours should be obtained utilizing self-paced training methodologies (e.g., online courses, self-study books, etc.). In-service training recommended as a result of post-placement reviews and family development plans should be reflected in re-approval addendums (See Resource Family Guidance, Section 4.6)

If a child's foster care goal changes to adoption, the resource parent is required to receive adoption training within six months of the goal change and finalization.

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