



# Partnership Plan for Children in Out-of-Home Care

**All** of us are responsible for the well-being of children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The children's licensed caregivers, along with the Florida Department of Children and Families, community-based care (CBC) organizations, their subcontractors, residential child caring agencies and staffs of these agencies undertake this responsibility in partnership, aware that none of us can succeed by ourselves.

Children need normal childhoods as well as loving and skillful parenting which honors their loyalty to their biological family. The purpose of this document is to articulate a common understanding of the values, principles and relationships necessary to fulfill this responsibility. The following commitments are embraced by all of us.

1. To ensure that the care we give our children supports their healthy development and gives them the best possible opportunity for success, licensed caregivers, DCF, CBC, and residential child caring agencies will work together in a respectful partnership.
2. All members of this partnership will behave professionally, will share all relevant information promptly, and will respect the confidentiality of all information related to the child and his or her family.
3. Licensed caregivers or designated persons, the family, DCF, CBC, residential child caring agencies will participate in developing the plan for the child and family, and all members of the team will work together to implement this plan. This includes caregiver participation in all team meetings or court hearings related to the child's care and future plans. DCF, CBC and agency staff will support and facilitate caregiver participation through timely notification, an inclusive process and providing alternative methods for participation for caregivers who cannot be physically present.
4. Excellent parenting is a reasonable expectation of caregivers for youth in care. Licensed caregivers will provide and DCF, CBC, and the residential child caring agencies will support excellent parenting. This requires a loving commitment to the child and the child's safety and well-being, appropriate supervision and positive methods of discipline, encouragement of the child's strengths, respect for the child's individuality and likes and dislikes, providing opportunities to develop the child's interests and skills, awareness of the impact of trauma on behavior, equal participation of the child in family life, involvement of the child with the community and a commitment to enable the child to lead a normal life.
5. Children will be placed only with licensed caregivers who have the ability and are willing to accept responsibility for the care of a child in light of the child's culture, religion and ethnicity, special physical or psychological needs, unique situation including sexual orientation and family relationships. DCF, CBC, and the residential child caring agencies will provide licensed caregivers with all available information to assist them in determining whether they are able to appropriately care for a child. Licensed caregivers must be willing and able to learn about and be respectful of the child's religion, culture and ethnicity, and any special circumstances affecting the child's care. DCF, CBC, the residential child caring agencies will assist them in gaining the support, training and skills necessary for the care of the child.
6. Licensed caregivers will have access to and take advantage of all training they need to improve their skills in parenting children who have experienced trauma due to neglect, abuse or separation from home, to meet these children's special needs and to work effectively with child welfare agencies, the courts, the schools and other community and governmental agencies.
7. DCF, CBC, and residential child caring agencies will provide licensed caregivers with the support they need to enable them to provide quality care for the child.

8. Once a licensed foster parent or residential child caring agency accepts the responsibility of caring for the child, the child will be removed from that placement when the foster parent(s) or residential child caring agency is clearly unable to care for him or her safely or legally, when the child and his or her biological family are reunified, when the child is being placed in a legally permanent home in accordance with the case plan or court order, or when the removal is demonstrably in the child's best interest.
9. If a child must leave the placement in a licensed setting for one of these reasons and in the absence of an unforeseeable emergency, the transition will be accomplished according to a plan which involves cooperation and sharing of information among all persons involved, respects the child's developmental stage and psychological needs, ensures they have all their belongings, and allows for a gradual transition from the child's placement and, if possible, for continued contact with the foster parent or residential child caring agency after the child leaves.
10. When the plan for the child includes reunification, licensed caregivers or their designees and agency staff will work together to assist the biological parents in improving their ability to care for and protect their children and to provide continuity for the child.
11. Licensed caregivers will respect and support the child's ties to his or her biological family (parents, siblings and extended family members) and will assist the child in visitation and other forms of communication. DCF, CBC, and the residential child caring agencies will provide licensed caregivers or their designee with the information, guidance, training and support necessary for fulfilling this responsibility.
12. Licensed caregivers or their designees will work in partnership with DCF, CBC, the residential child caring agency to obtain and maintain records that are important to the child's well-being including child resource records, medical records, school records, photographs, and records of special events and achievements.
13. Licensed caregivers or their designees will effectively advocate for children in their care with the child welfare system, the court, and community agencies, including schools, child care, health and mental health providers, and employers. DCF, CBC, and residential child caring agencies will support them in doing so and will not retaliate against them as a result of this advocacy.
14. Licensed caregivers or their designees will participate fully in the child's medical, psychological and dental care as they would for their biological child. Agency staff will support and facilitate this participation. Caregivers, DCF, CBC, and residential child caring agencies will share information with each other about the child's health and well-being.
15. DCF, CBC, residential child caring agencies and staff of these agencies will ensure that children are enrolled in school or in the best educational setting that meets their needs. Caregivers will support that the child continues to be enrolled at the school of origin when, if possible it is in the best interest of the child, with the goal of minimal disruption of the child's education.
16. Licensed caregivers or their designees will support the child's school success by participating in school activities and meetings, including IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings, assisting with school assignments, supporting tutoring programs, meeting with teachers and working with an educational surrogate if one has been appointed and encouraging the child's participation in extra-curricular activities.
17. DCF, CBC, residential child caring agencies and staff of these agencies will show no prejudice against a caregiver who desires to educate at home a child placed in their home through the child welfare system and will facilitate this participation and will be kept informed of the child's progress and needs.

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Signature of Foster Parent or Direct Care Staff

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Signature of Agency Representative