



Guidance for Local Department of Social Services: Center for Excellence in Resource Family Development (CfE) Engagement and Preparation

This document provides *guidance to LDSS staff in the five CfE sites* on identifying and engaging resource parents and families of origin for the Center for Excellence in Resource Family Development (CfE) model. It provides guidance on eligibility requirements and assessing if CfE is a good fit, including whether there is mutual benefit to the CfE and the resource parent. It also describes the steps that should be taken to support resource parents in developing their home into a CfE home, as well as the steps necessary to support families in actively participating in and receiving benefits from the core components of the CfE.

Table of Contents

CfE Resource Parent Engagement and Preparation	2
Resource Parent Eligibility	2
Assessing Fit with Resource Parent	2
Resource Parent Investment & Commitments	2
Resource Parent Benefits	4
LDSS Staff Steps to Engage and Prepare Resource Parents	5
CfE Family of Origin Engagement and Preparation	7
Family Eligibility	7
Assessing Fit with Family	7
Family Investment	8
Family Benefits	8
LDSS Staff Steps to Engage and Prepare Families	8

CfE Resource Parent Engagement and Preparation

Resource Parent Eligibility

To participate in the CfE and receive the Differential Board Rate and/or Bed Hold Rate, a resource parent must be licensed in one of the five selected jurisdictions (Baltimore County, Carroll County, Frederick County, Montgomery County, or Prince George's County) and commit to the expectations outlined under the *Commitments* section below. They must be *licensed* to provide care for children/youth between 4-18 years of age. (The initial phase of implementation will focus on the families of origin and resource parents of children 4-12 years old. Formal kin placements who are not fully licensed are eligible to participate in the CfE and receive stipends for training and/or group sessions but will not receive the Differential Board Rate or Bed Hold Rate.

Assessing Fit with Resource Parent

Before approaching a resource parent to explore their interest in becoming a CfE resource parent, assess whether a resource parent is a good match for CfE. Consider whether the resource parent is committed to and demonstrates the following when applicable:

- Collaborating with families of origin to support timely and lasting reunification;
- Active family team participation;
- Empathy and cultural sensitivity;
- Understanding and addressing personal bias;
- Understanding a child/youth's trauma in order to meet the child/youth's needs;
- Understanding a child/youth's behavioral health needs.

It is recommended that the LDSS considers exploring resource parent interest when a child's or youth's family of origin has agreed to participate in the parenting program for families of origin, Parenting Through Change for Reunification (PTC-R).

Resource Parent Investment & Commitments

If the resource parent meets the eligibility criteria and is assessed to be a good match, they must commit to:

- 1) Maintain all standard resource parent requirements as outlined by Maryland Department of Human Services and the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS), including licensure renewal requirements.
- 2) Accept placements of children and/or youth who meet CfE child/youth eligibility characteristics: Are age 4+ and have a permanency goal other than adoption (i.e. reunification, guardianship, APPLA).

- 3) Accept at least one placement of a child whose characteristics align with CfE child eligibility characteristics described above. If the resource home is approved for additional placements and has a vacancy, priority should be held for other CfE placements. The jurisdiction should consider non-CfE homes first for children/youth, who do not fit child eligibility characteristics described above. Note the following:
- No child should be moved in order to create a CfE bed or home. Existing placements of children/youth in the home that do not possess CfE characteristics described above should be maintained. Additionally, jurisdictions are not prevented from placing a child/youth in a CfE home if it prevents a child/youth from being placed in congregate care or outside the jurisdiction.
 - Jurisdictions are not prevented from placing sibling group(s) if at least one child/youth fits CfE characteristics. The resource parent(s) will be compensated at the standard rate for placement and care of children/youth who don't fit CfE child characteristics.

4) Complete the following preparation/training:

- Parent Partnership training modules
- 16-week KEEP or KEEP SAFE Group (KEEP SAFE will not be available until September 2022)
 - Minimum of 80% group attendance rate
 - Weekly completion of Parent Daily Report (PDR) with the group facilitator
 - Daily effort to develop skills to use evidence-based, trauma-informed parenting practices

Note: All licensed resource parents are required to complete all standard required in-service trainings.

5) Consistently support a child/youth's reunification and prevent placement disruption by:

- Building collaborative relationships with the family of origin of children/youth placed in their home to support successful, permanent reunification.
- Maintaining ongoing communication with the family of origin including providing updates to family of origin on child's well-being, school progress, etc., and including the family in celebrations or activities.
- Proactively communicating with the family team, including attending any family team meetings if invited.
- Planning with and supporting families of origin to maximize benefits of visitation and family time.
- Working with DSS social workers/case managers to support reunification strategies.

- Co-parenting using the evidence-based, trauma-informed parenting practices outlined in the KEEP model.
- Using skills learned in the KEEP model to support the children/youth in your home to encourage placement stability and reunification.
- Using provided crisis prevention supports, such as planned respite and Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS).
- Implementing all practices outlined in the [Parent Partnership Guidance](#) issued by Maryland Department of Human Services, including Comfort Calls, Ice Breaker meetings, and other continuum of contact activities.

Resource Parent Benefits

Your role is to communicate both the expectations and benefits of becoming a CfE resource parent. The *Becoming a CfE Resource Parent* document serves as a resource to you. Some of the key benefits of being a CfE resource parent include the following:

Resource parents...

- 1) Become an active participant in the CfE model by helping to shape the way resource families are recruited, trained, and supported. This is an opportunity for resource parents' voices and ideas to be heard on what helped you most and how it can help others.
- 2) Improve and expand skills in working with children and youth in out of home placement, particularly those demonstrating challenging behaviors.
- 3) Improve and utilize skills working with the family of origin of the child(ren) placed in your home to achieve a timelier and more successful reunification.
- 4) Receive increased peer support in your role as a resource parent. As a member of a cohort of CfE resource families, resource parents will be a part of a cohort of families for support and networking.
- 5) Receive increased case-management services to support relationship-building with birth parents while the child is placed in their home.
- 6) Gain access to Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS)*¹ when a child is placed in your home. MRSS is a child, youth and resource family specific crisis intervention model designed to meet the resource parent's sense of urgency when children and youth begin to demonstrate behavioral changes associated with the early phase of a crisis. This support is available when a child is first placed in your home and when experiencing a behavioral or mental health crisis. A trained therapist will come to a resource parent's home to help them navigate challenging times.

¹ Services available upon completion of procurement.

- 7) Gain access to consistent, planned and emergency respite as part of the planning process. The goal is to have dedicated CfE respite providers to support resource parents and the child placed in their home.
- 8) Receive a monetary incentive/stipend for completion of all training requirements. This will be a stipend of \$25 for each KEEP group session and Parent Partnership training modules. (Formal kin caregivers who participate will also receive these participation stipends.)
- 9) Receive an increased board rate for the child(ren)/youth placed in their care upon completion of training. Resource parents without an immediate placement will receive a holding rate to ensure their home remains available for CfE placements. (Formal kin caregivers who participate are *not* eligible for the increased board rate or bed hold rate.)

LDSS Staff Steps to Engage and Prepare Resource Parents

To engage resource parents in becoming CfE resource parents, it is recommended that LDSS staff conduct the following activities (typically be done by the Resource Parent Worker, unless noted otherwise):

- 1) Provide information about the CfE expectations and benefits. See Communicating Resource Parent Benefits and Required Commitments sections for information.
- 2) To support you in communicating this, share the following materials:
 - i) *Becoming a CfE Resource Parent Guide*
 - ii) *KEEP Overview Handout*
 - iii) *KEEP Overview Video for Staff*
 - iv) *KEEP Overview Video for Resource Parents*
 - v) *CfE Orientation for Resource Parents recorded webinar*
 - vi) *Other materials as they become available*
- 3) Assess the match between the resource parent's interest and the CfE. See *the Assessing Fit section* of this document for more information.
- 4) If there is a good fit, invite the resource parent to become a CfE resource parent. Provide written documentation by reviewing and obtaining their signature on the *CfE Resource Parent Agreement Form*. Provide the resource parent with a copy for future reference and retain and file the signed *CfE Resource Parent Agreement* form. Upload the signed Agreement to CJAMS.

- 5) Connect the resource parent to the Maryland Child Welfare Academy (CWA) using The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, University of Maryland, School of Social Work [website portal](#). CWA will follow up with the resource parent to further discuss enrolling in the next KEEP group and Parent Partnership Training.
- 6) Complete CJAMS prompts to provide resource parents the Bed Hold payment when there is no child currently placed in home, or the Differential Board Rate if there is a current CfE placement.
- 7) CWA will obtain resource parent consent for evaluation participation during the virtual meet and greet. Communicate with resource parents about any potential barriers to participation in KEEP group (16 weeks/90 minutes/virtual) and Parent Partnership Training.
- 8) Confirm with CWA that the resource parent has been enrolled in KEEP group and/or Parent Partnership Training. Confirm the “focus child/youth” with CWA.
- 9) Confirm first KEEP group session participation.
- 10) Ensure LDSS Family Worker(s) for children/youth placed in the home are informed of the CfE resource parent participation in the CfE, so that the Family Worker can support the family of origin in parent partnership and consider inviting them to participate in Parenting Through Change-Reunification, if eligible.
- 11) Family Worker reviews KEEP Group and training attendance information provided by CWA, seeking to understand resource parent attendance and then following up with resource parents when necessary to address barriers or celebrate progress.
- 12) Support resource parents to continue to practice KEEP skills and strategies.
- 13) Celebrate CfE resource parent graduation from KEEP group.
- 14) Confirm resource parent participation in follow-up evaluation activities by The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, University of Maryland, School of Social Work; Support resource parents to participate in evaluation activities, if needed.

CfE Family of Origin Engagement and Preparation

This document provides guidance to LDSS staff in order to engage families of origin in the Center for Excellence in Resource Family Development (CfE) in a core component, Parenting Through Change for Reunification (PTC-R).

Family Eligibility

Families of origin with whom the children/youth will be reunified (based on permanency plan) are eligible for the CfE. They should experience the benefits of the LDSS and CfE resource parent's focused effort on parent partnership. These partnership opportunities are intended to facilitate building strong relationships between families of origin who are working toward reunification and the resource families caring for their children. This should result in parents' empowerment as change agents for their family's future stability.

The initial phase of CfE implementation will focus on families of origin who have a child ages 4 - 12 years old.

Exclusionary criteria:

- There is a current open case of sexual abuse of youth or children against the potential participant.
- Parent is actively psychotic
- The child exhibits *severe to extreme* impairment in mood, emotion, self-harm or substance-use.

Assessing Fit with Family

Any plan of reunification should prompt the consideration of whether PTC-R is a service that would benefit and support the family's goal. It also should be considered when developing a service plan, or at any point in working with a family whose child is placed out of home.

A family will most likely benefit from PTC-R if:

- The goal is to build parenting skills, strengthen relationships, and achieve stable reunification
- The child is exhibiting ongoing mild or moderate behavior problems that disrupt family functioning or outcomes in school/community
- Re-establishing the parent-child relationship will foster growth, success, and safety
- Goals include strengthening skills in emotion regulation, communication, and problem solving across many settings (e.g., parent-child visits, with other family members, with case workers, and in the legal system)
- When completing the MD-CANS, relevant indicators are present for challenges with family, school, peers, or other relationships are present (e.g., arguing, fighting, bullying, not connecting)

Family Investment

Families of origin who participate in Parenting Through Change for Reunification commit to a ten-week group for learning and support while their children are in placement. As reunification approaches or occurs, families of origin are invited to participate in a six-week follow-up program to support the reunification transition. (Families must complete the ten-week program to be eligible for the six-week follow-up program.)

Family Benefits

Partnership between families of origin and resource parents, particularly when centered on the unique strengths and needs of the child/youth, has been seen to encourage more timely, smooth and permanent reunification. This relationship will also serve families of origin and their child(ren) by allowing them to best maintain relationships when child(ren) are placed out of home.

Benefits to parents...

- Receive increased peer support as a parent. As a member of a cohort of CfE families of origin, you will not be alone – your cohort of families are there for support and networking.
- Expand and improve skills in caring for and supporting your child(ren) and working with the resource family with whom child(ren) is placed in order to achieve a timelier and more effective reunification.
- This is an opportunity for parents' voices and ideas to be heard on what helped you most and how it can help others. Become an active participant in the CfE model by helping to shape the way families interact with resource families and the child welfare system.
- Benefit your child while in out of home placement with increased case-management services to support relationship-building with the resource parents caring for your child.
- Access to Mobile Response and Stabilization Support (MRSS)^{*2} when your child returns home. The goal of MRSS is to promote stability and the well-being of the family and the child/youth. These services are available while your child is in your care and also when experiencing a behavioral or mental health crisis. A trained therapist will come to your home to help you navigate challenging times.
- Stipend for participation in each PTC-R session.

LDSS Staff Steps to Engage and Prepare Families

To engage family of origin in the CfE, it is recommended that LDSS staff conduct the following activities. These activities will typically be done by the Child & Family Worker, unless noted otherwise.

- 1) Provide information about the CfE support and preparation. To support you in communicating this, share the following materials:

² Services available upon completion of procurement.

- i) *Guide for Birth Parents*
- ii) *PTC-R Overview*

2) Conduct a meeting with the family to discuss their active participation in the CfE and how PTC-R could support their reunification efforts.

3) Include any decision to participate in PTC-R in the family service plan.

4) Connect parents to the Maryland Child Welfare Academy (CWA) using The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, University of Maryland, School of Social Work [website portal](#). CWA will follow up with the parent to discuss enrolling in the next PTC-R group available. CWA will also obtain consent for evaluation participation.

5) Confirm with CWA that the parent has been enrolled and obtain dates for the PTC-R group.

6) Communicate with parents about any potential barriers to participation in PTC-R and provide support to resolve barriers.

7) Ensure the LDSS worker(s) for the associated resource parent are informed of the family's participation in the CfE, so that the worker can support the resource parent in parent partnership and consider inviting them to participate in KEEP, if eligible.

8) Family Worker reviews PTC-R group attendance information provided by CWA, seeking to understand attendance and then following up with families when necessary to address barriers to participation or celebrate progress.

9) Conduct family meetings to support family's continued use of PTC-R skills and strategies, in collaboration with resource parents, when appropriate.

10) Celebrate CfE PTC-R graduation.

11) Confirm parent participation in follow-up evaluation activities by The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, University of Maryland, School of Social Work; Support parents to participate in evaluation activities, if needed.

12) After PTC-R, continue to inquire about and support family in practicing PTC-R skills.

13) As the family approaches reunification, encourage parents to participate in the 6 sessions of Parenting Through Change - Return Home (PTC-RH) to support the transition.

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