



Maryland Center for Excellence in Foster Family Development (CfE)

Birth Family Guide

What is the Center for Excellence?

In September 2019, the federal Children's Bureau awarded the Maryland Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration funding for the National Center for Excellence (CfE) in Foster Family Development ("Foster Family" in Maryland is referred to as "Resource Family"). The CfE aims to improve the wellbeing of children and families impacted by the child welfare system by reducing how long children/youth stay in foster care and non-treatment focused congregate care placements; increasing reunification and exits to permanency and reducing the frequency of children/youth re-entering care after reunification or exits to permanency. The purpose of the CfE is to prepare and support existing resource parents and birth families/families of origin to work together on behalf of children/youth in care to encourage smooth and timely reunification and support youth who may be at risk of or stepping down from congregate care placements.

Who will participate in the CfE?

Birth parents will be invited by the local department of social services to participate in this program. The focus will be on birth parents with children/youth placed with CfE resource parents who are working towards reunification with their child(ren)/youth. Additionally, support groups will be available to any birth parent with a reunification plan in the CfE jurisdiction. Birth parents will participate in a ten-week group for learning and support while their children are in placement. As reunification approaches or occurs, parents are invited to participate in a six-week follow-up program to support the reunification transition. These learning opportunities will facilitate building strong relationships between the child's birth family and resource family working towards reunification. During this phase, the CfE will support resource parents and birth families with children/youth from 4-18 years of age.

Resource parents will participate in the CfE by working with the birth families who have children placed in their homes. They will also participate in weekly groups which will equip them with the same tools and skills as birth families to support co-parenting the children/youth.

Why would I want to participate?

- 1) You become an active participant in the CfE model by **helping to shape the way birth families are trained and supported**. This is an opportunity for your voice and ideas to be heard on what helped you most and how it can help others. As an experienced birth parent, you may provide feedback to child welfare leaders on new skills to improve effectiveness in facilitating relationships with resource families, birth parents and their children/youth and also suggest ways to develop/improve best practice for resource family development.
- 2) You get a chance to **expand and improve your skills** in caring for and supporting your child(ren).
- 3) You will utilize your skills **working with the resource family with whom your child(ren) is placed** to achieve a timelier and more effective reunification.
- 4) You will receive **increased peer support as a birth parent**. As a member of a cohort of CfE birth families, you will not be alone – your cohort of families are there for support and networking.
- 5) You will receive increased **case-management services** to support relationship-building with the resource parents caring for your child to benefit your child while in out of home placement.
- 6) You will have access to **Mobile Response Stabilization Services (MRSS)** 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.
- 7) You will receive a monetary **incentive/stipend for completing all training** requirements.

What will I receive and what will be expected of me?

Activity	Purpose	Expectation	Incentive
Parenting Through Change for Reunification (PTC-R)	<p>Provide ongoing support for families through peer support, hands-on skill development, and weekly coaching through phone calls with the group facilitators.</p> <p>PTC-R has been shown to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build on your strengths ● Increase child cooperation and positive behavior ● Help caregivers observe and manage their emotions ● Teach active communication and problem solving 	<p>Approximately 2 hours per week for 16 weeks total. The first 10 weeks are group sessions with other birth parents.</p> <p>The last 6 weeks are to support you as you prepare for or have your child return home.</p> <p>Group sessions are approximately 90 minutes.</p>	<p>Parents will receive an incentive stipend for attending weekly group sessions.</p> <p>(Once in person, child-care and snacks will also be provided).</p>
Co-parenting with resource families	<p>Co-parenting between families of origin and resource parents has been seen to encourage more timely, smooth and permanent reunification.</p> <p>This relationship will also serve you and your child(ren) by allowing you to maintain your relationship with your child(ren) while they are placed out of home.</p>	<p>Comfort calls are expected between birth families/ families of origin and the resource parents the same day of placement. Your caseworker will initiate this call. Icebreaker conversations should be initiated within 5 days of the youth's placement.</p> <p>When safe and appropriate in cases where supervised visits are ordered, resource parents should supervise and support birth parents during these visits.</p> <p>Birth families and resource families are expected to engage as often and safely as possible, including sharing updates on child's well-being, school progress, etc.</p> <p>Birth families and resource parents are encouraged to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and milestones together.</p>	<p>Your caseworker and the resource parent worker will support the ongoing process</p>



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[Parents and Caregivers: A Community-based Multidisciplinary Approach to Strengthening Families](#)

<https://www.risemagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/One-Step-at-a-Time-1.pdf>

[Birth and Foster Parent Partnership: A Relationship Building Guide](#)

[How can birth and foster parent partnerships help families reunify?](#)

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