

---

# CHILD WELFARE AT A GLANCE

A GUIDE FOR NEWBIES  
(OR “OLDIES” NEEDING A REFRESHER)

---



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

A publication of the  
Evolution Foundation

[www.facebook.com/Okevolutionfoundation](http://www.facebook.com/Okevolutionfoundation)

[www.evolution-foundation.org](http://www.evolution-foundation.org)

# Introduction

When we first discussed creating this manual, we wanted to develop a document to help families, non-Child Welfare providers, and community members learn about and negotiate the Child Welfare system. We know that families involved in the system can be quickly overwhelmed. We also know mental health providers and other case workers who are tasked with helping families navigate the Child Welfare system often fail for lack of understanding of how the Child Welfare system works in Oklahoma.

Whether you are a family member involved with Child Welfare, a service provider, or a community member who wants to help, this guide will provide you the basics you need to know to be a successful participant in the Child Welfare system.

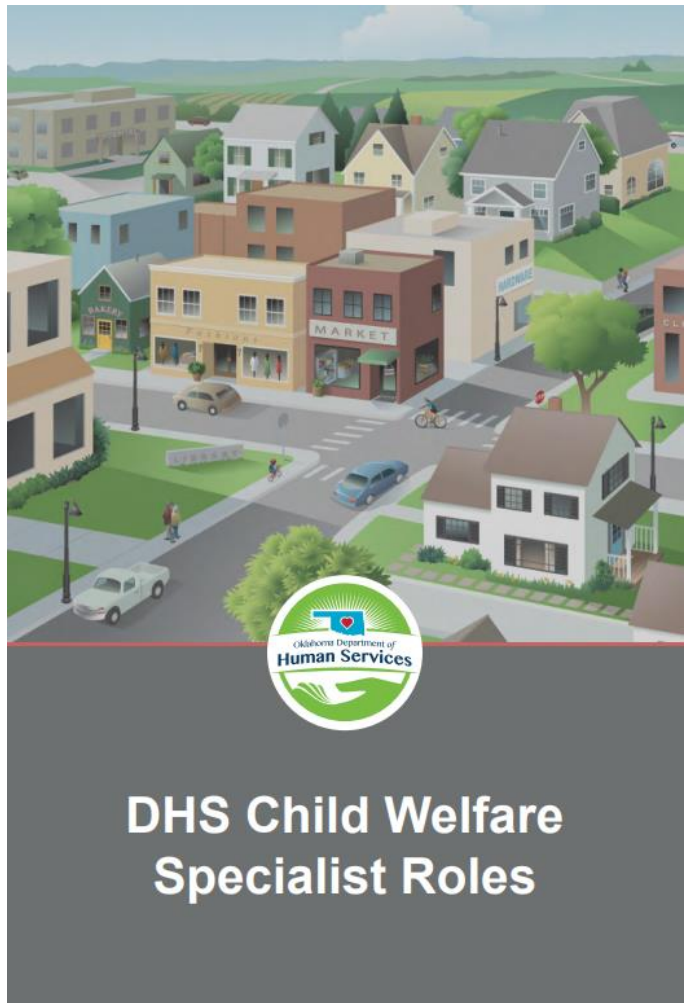
Our first thought was to do the research and create this document from scratch. Luckily, we didn't have to. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) has already done that. So, our goal here is to introduce you to the DHS resources and provide you a link to the appropriate information. If you want, you can go directly to their website, <http://www.okdhs.org/>, and find most of this information. Our hope is that this manual will simplify things by pointing you to some of the most important documents. To access the Child Welfare documents in this manual simply click on the provided picture and it will open. However, you do need to be connected to the internet for it to work.

# Part 1: Who Does What?

Family members and service providers alike often get confused about all the different Child Welfare workers they interact with. There are thirteen different roles! No wonder we're so baffled. At one point we may be talking to someone who knows all about investigations. Later, someone calls who only wants to talk about placement. Then a third person contacts us to discuss services.

It would be nice if family members and service providers could talk to one person to get all the information they needed. Unfortunately, that's just not realistic. It's near impossible for one worker to be proficient in all the separate areas of Child Welfare. Therefore, DHS has divided their complicated work into thirteen roles. If you are ever confused about who you are talking with and what they are trying to accomplish, ask them.

The guide, [DHS Child Welfare Specialist Roles](#), describes all these roles. It will give you a good overview. However, the guide is only a summary. Ask questions of your workers to learn more. It's important for you, your family, or the families you work with that you be as informed as possible. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

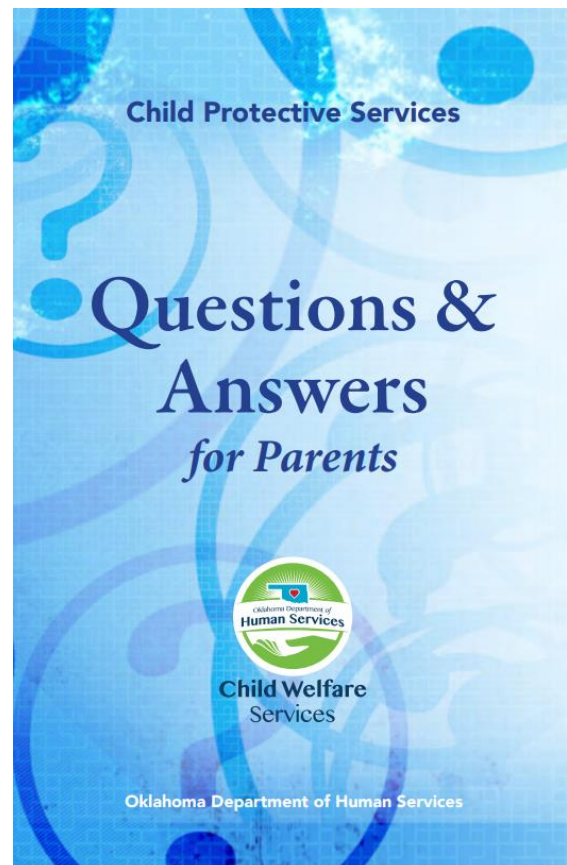


## Part 2: What Families Need to Know

When a Child Protective Services (CPS) worker from Child Welfare shows up at your door, it means someone has reported suspected child abuse or neglect in your home to DHS. To understand why people might make a report see the information in Part 4 under [Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect](#). This can be a stressful time for you, so the more you know, the easier it becomes. The CPS worker should leave you a copy of this first brochure below.

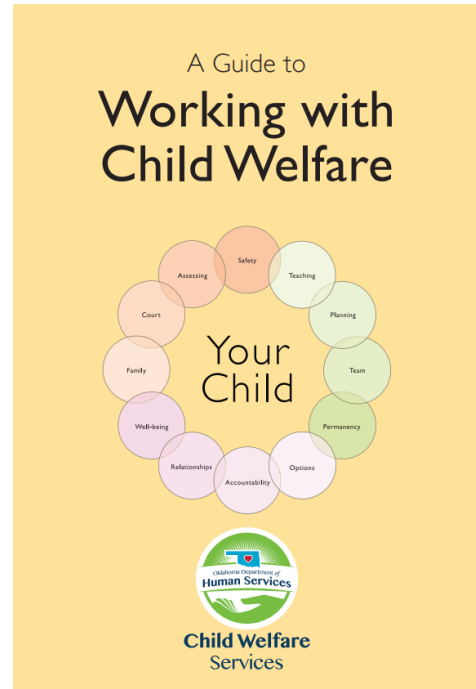
This brochure, [Questions and Answers for Parents](#), explains such things as:

- *What are CPS workers?*
- *How did Child Welfare get my name?*
- *What happens after child welfare services receives a report of suspected child abuse or neglect?*
- *What is the difference between an assessment and an investigation?*
- *How will I know what has been decided after the assessment or investigation has been completed?*
- *What if I disagree with the findings of the investigation? What kind of help can I get from child welfare?*
- *Can my child be taken away from me?*
- *What happens if my child is placed in the legal custody of the Department of Human Services?*
- *When may I see my child?*
- *What happens when the district attorney decides court action is needed to protect my child?*
- *What are the different types of court hearings?*
- *What will I have to do if my child is adjudicated deprived?*
- *What are my rights?*
- *What are my children's rights when a deprived petition is filed?*
- *What if I have Native American history?*
- *What can I expect to happen to my child?*
- *What is termination of parental rights?*
- *What can I do if I feel I have not been treated fairly by child welfare services?*



This next guide, [Working with Child Welfare](#), takes you through the entire walk with Child Welfare. It will guide you through areas like *safety, working as a team, assessing and planning, family meetings, when your child is living somewhere else, visiting your child, court, tips for appearing in court, types of hearings, your protection and responsibilities, permanency options, resolving complaints or problems, and words often used by specialists.*

The information found here is also great information for service providers. The more providers are familiar with these details, the more smoothly they can work with Child Welfare to make positive changes with families. In addition, the more service providers understand about the procedures, the more success they will have in helping families understand what is going on throughout the entire process.



Have you ever wondered if you may leave your child home alone? Find the answers in [Guidelines for Leaving a Child at Home Alone](#).

In Oklahoma, no statutory or public policy requirements exist on the age a child must be to be left at home alone. A parent can determine if his or her child, six years of age and older, is developmentally, physically and cognitively able to care for himself or herself while adults are absent. The following link below gives great guidelines for leaving children at home alone.

With that said, the safety and well-being of children is ultimately the parental responsibility. Adults should take every reasonable precaution to assure the safety of their children when left alone.

This brochure gives parents specific questions to ask themselves before leaving a child at home alone to help determine if it is appropriate. The brochure also offers basic guidelines for children in preschool, elementary, and middle school for you to consider.



## Part 3: Foster Care and Adoption

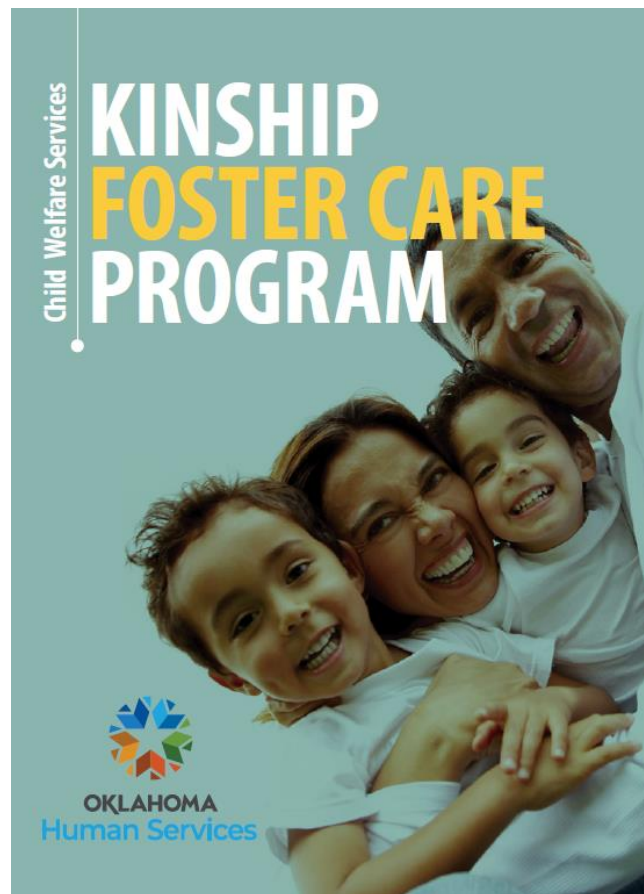
Oklahoma's Child Welfare team understands they need help to improve the lives of our children. They can't do it alone. Simply put, it takes the work of an entire community. We need foster and adoptive parents. We need faith-based groups, advocates, and volunteers from the community to enhance and extend the work of dedicated Child Welfare workers.

In this section, you'll find resources for foster and adoptive parents. Due to the number of children in out-of-home placement, foster homes are always a great need. There are also children in permanent custody that are waiting for their forever home through adoptions.

In the next section, we'll focus on how community members who may not be able to foster or adopt, can volunteer to support Child Welfare efforts.

**When a child can no longer remain safe in his or her own home DHS first seeks to place the child with someone who the child or parents know. [The Bridge Kinship Care Program](#) guide describes this process.**

These placements are with people who are related to the child by blood, marriage, adoption, or by an emotional tie or bond. Caregivers may be grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles, nieces or nephews, cousins, godparents, or neighbors. When you accept placement of a child with whom you have a relationship, you are providing KINSHIP CARE, which makes you a Bridge Kinship Resource Home/Family.

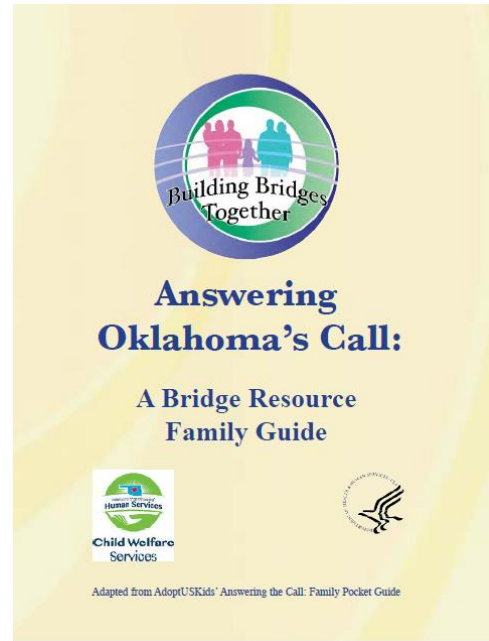


When kinship placement is not possible, DHS looks for Foster Parents to help. Find out what's involved in becoming a Foster Parent in, [Answering Oklahoma's Call: A Bridge Resource Family Guide](#).

The children for whom the Oklahoma DHS is responsible have been removed from their own families due to abuse or neglect. Foster families (also called Bridge Resource Families) provide these children a safe home.

Foster Families work closely with DHS and the child's family to correct the circumstances that led to the child's removal. The goal is to return the child to his or her own home, if possible.

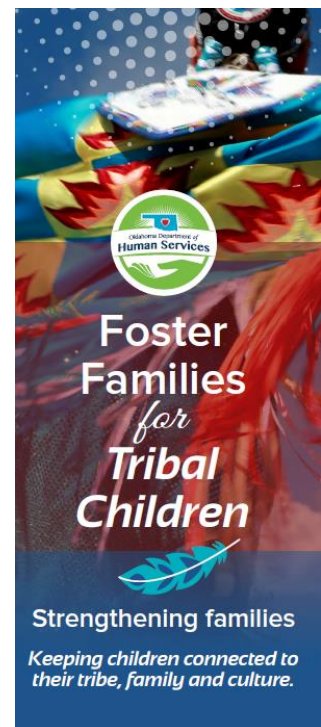
There is no doubt that fostering children who are in our child welfare system is hard work and can be very challenging. However, the reward of positively altering the lives of hurting families is real. This guide discusses the qualifications needed to become a foster parent and walks you through the seven steps to get there.



**Tribal children also need Foster Families. They have a few additional requirements and responsibilities. The [Foster Families for Tribal Children](#) brochure describes what is involved.**

Oklahoma has thirty-eight federally recognized tribes, and approximately 2,500 Native children are in DHS custody at any given time. DHS and Indian child welfare programs actively engage Native American families to become foster families for Native children to help them maintain their connection to their tribe, family, and culture.

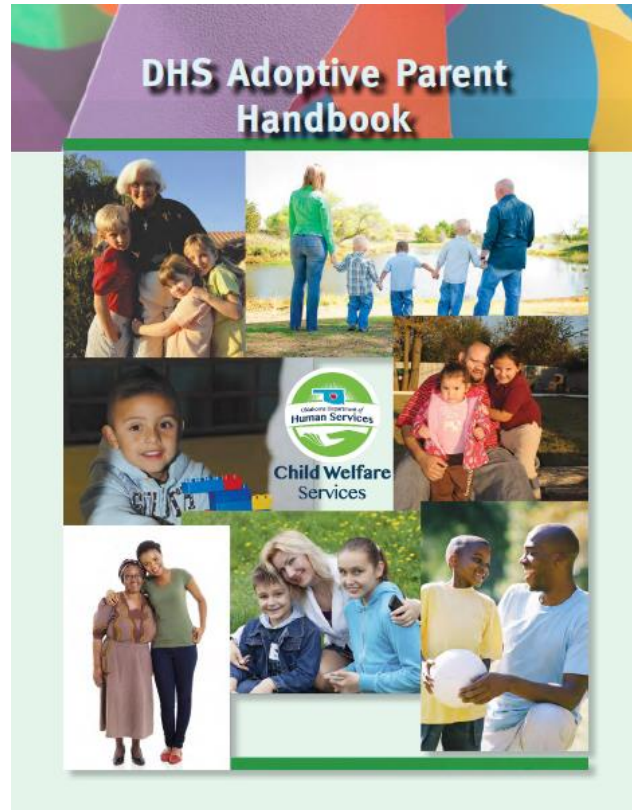
In short, Native American families are needed to help Native children stay connected to their tribe, family, culture, and community. To qualify as a Foster family for Tribal children only one adult caregiver must be a member of a federally recognized tribe.



**The DHS Adoptive Parent Handbook shares all the resources that are available to families that choose to adopt custody children.**

Although the goal is always to return children to their original homes, this is not always possible. As a result, many children are in search of permanent adoptive homes.

DHS recognizes the valuable contribution families make when providing a permanent home to a child through adoption. Therefore, they provide many additional resources through the department, other government agencies and in the community that can help you meet your responsibilities and thrive as an adoptive family.



**For those wanting to adopt, OKDHS Adoption Legal Services are available.**

For foster/adoptive parents ready to adopt a child in OKDHS foster care, there is a quick and efficient way to work with a DHS attorney who can help finalize the adoption. The attorney works one-on-one with the adoptive parents, OKDHS workers, and the courts to complete the adoption process as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Best of all, this legal representation is free of charge. This brochure describes your legal rights as an adoptive family.





## Part 4: How Communities Can Help

Some families cannot foster or adopt, but that doesn't mean they can't help. As you'll see in this section, multiple opportunities exist for you to touch the lives of children and their families. You can volunteer, provide resources, give support, and act as an advocate to name a few. Look through these resources to find your place.

**The first way to help is to care enough to make a Child Welfare referral when you suspect neglect or abuse. The [Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect](#) guide tells you how and why.**

Child abuse is defined by law as **harm** or **threatened harm** to a child's health and safety by a person responsible for the child's health and safety. This includes a parent, a legal guardian, a foster parent, or a person 18 years of age and older with whom the child's parent cohabitates, or any other adult residing in the home of the child.

State law requires every health care professional, teacher, and every **OTHER** person who has **reason to believe** that a child under 18 years of age is being abused or neglected, or is in danger of being abused or neglected, must report the **suspicion** of abuse or neglect.

This guide answers important questions such as:

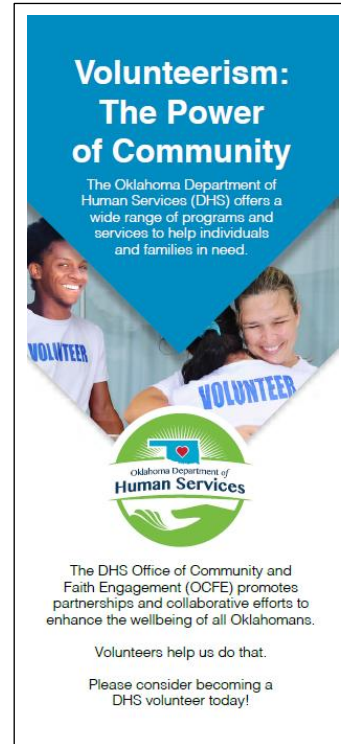
- *What is child abuse?*
- *Who is required to report suspected child abuse?*
- *Is the report I make confidential?*
- *How do I report a suspicion of child abuse?*
- *What information should I be ready to report?*
- *What happens after a report is made?*



A second way you can help is to volunteer. Check out [Volunteerism: The Power of the Community](#) to see your options.

DHS offers a wide range of programs and services to help individuals and families in need. Volunteers can help DHS staff with *shopping, moral support, tutoring, mentoring, transportation, encouragement, office support, community projects, and more.*

This brochure explains why you should volunteer, who can volunteer, how to begin volunteering and what a volunteer can do.



A third way you can help is to become an [Oklahoma Court Appointed Special Advocate \(CASA\)](#) or donate to CASA

Imagine what it feels like to be a child in foster care. They are waiting for a volunteer like you to help them find a permanent, forever home.

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and speak up for abused and neglected children to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service systems or languish in the foster care system. CASA volunteers stay with each child until he or she is placed in a safe, permanent home and the case is closed. For many abused children, their CASA volunteer is the one constant in their lives and often, the one adult who cares only for them.



**A fourth way you can help is to lead your church to become involved in [One Church, One Child](#).**

One Church, One Child is an Oklahoma nonprofit whose nationally recognized recruitment and child-placing service seeks to identify prospective homes for children in the Child Welfare system, particularly African American children. They work through churches and other community organizations to educate about foster care and adoption as well as recruit foster/adoptive families.

Imagine if every church in Oklahoma recruited at least one family to foster and/or adopt. If that happened, every child in the Child Welfare system would have a home to go to. In addition, every child would have a church family committed to supporting, mentoring, and teaching these children.



**A fifth way you can help is to lead your church to be involved in the [CarePortal](#)**

In every community, there are children and families at a point of crisis, who need help. In those same communities, there are churches and people who care and want to take action. CarePortal is a ministry that connects Child Welfare families in need with churches willing to help.

When a need arises, a Child Welfare worker submits the need to the CarePortal's electronic platform that notifies partnering churches of the need. When church members get the notification, they have an opportunity to respond in real-time.

Any church of any denomination can sign up and be a part of this great ministry. Just discuss it with your church family, log on to the [CarePortal website](#) to sign your church up and spread the news to other churches.



# Summary

Caring for Oklahoma’s children is everyone’s responsibility. First, it is the responsibility of families to provide safe and healthy environments for their children. If this doesn’t happen, Oklahoma’s Child Welfare workers step in to help remedy the situation. It is always the goal of Child Welfare to return children to their homes after the necessary changes are accomplished by families.

While Child Welfare children are out of the home the community can help by providing foster care. They can also help by volunteering to mentor, providing transportation, tutoring, providing needed resources, or advocating for children in the courts.

In those situations in which children cannot ever return to their original homes, community members can provide forever homes through adoption.

Everyone has a role to play. Hopefully, this short guide has served three purposes: 1) provided family members with information about what to expect if they are investigated, 2) given service providers an overview of the Child Welfare system so they can help their clients navigate the system, and 3) offered community members an overview of ways they can make a difference. Take the time to dig deeper.

---

**We have more guides for you and your coalition.**

**Check out our other**

**[Newbie Manuals](#)**