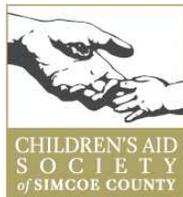


## FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING

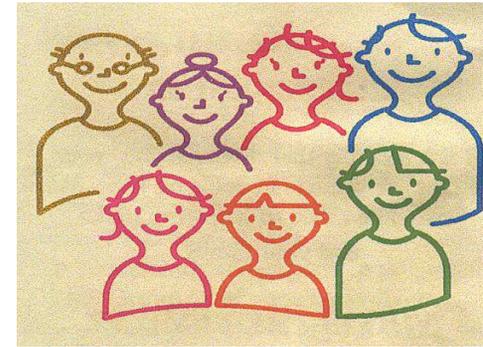
Coordinator: Darlene Sykes, MSW RSW  
Mailing Address: 60 Bell Farm Road, Unit 7  
Barrie, ON L4M 5G6  
705-726-3745 Ext. 2410 (Voice Mail Only)  
705-326-6757 (Office)  
1-800-461-4236 Ext. 2401 (Voice Mail Only)  
705-326-6079 (Fax)



If you think that FGDM is a good choice for your family, contact the child's worker or the FGDM coordinator.

*Supported by the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County*

*Thanks to the Toronto FGC Project for the use of some of their materials to make this booklet.*



## CAREGIVERS' HANDBOOK

If you are reading this handbook, you may be considering caring for a child in your extended family or community.

### OPTIONS / CHOICES

There are a number of options available to you when considering care giving:

1. *An informal agreement* with the biological parent(s)
2. *Supervision Order* or *kinship out of care* provider
3. *Kinship in care* (used to be Provisional Foster Care)
4. *Custody*
5. *Adoption.*

Keep in mind that the CAS has to meet with you to complete a home study of some kind to make sure the child will be safe and that the placement is in the child's best interests. The home study also gives you a chance to learn more about the child, including any special considerations. The home study is discussed in more detail later in this handbook.

## Informal Agreement

This is the least “intrusive” of all the care giving arrangements. In such an agreement:

- You and the parent(s) may want to agree that you will care for a child for a period of time
- The CAS would have to agree that this plan meets the child’s needs and keeps the child safe
- There is often a written agreement that is signed by the parent(s) and you so it is clear who is doing what, for how long and any special conditions (e.g., visits, school, medical appointments)
- While there is NO financial assistance available through CAS, you can apply to Ontario Works for foster care benefits (approximately \$200.00 per month). The parent(s) may also agree to turn over the monthly Child Tax Credit (Baby Bonus) to you
- You and the parent(s) negotiate access
- CAS may provide recommendations about access depending on the situation or circumstances
- You have NO legal rights and the parent(s) still needs to make all the decisions for the child, such as medical care and schooling
- The parent(s) could remove the child from your care at any point. If this happens, however, and the CAS feels the child is not safe, they would become involved
- It is important to understand that you cannot enforce this agreement if the parent(s) does not follow through

## Temporary Care Agreement (TCA):

A TCA is made between the parent(s) and the CAS and places the child in CAS care for a number of days or months, but cannot go over one year. The parent(s) still has the main responsibility for the child but day to day care is the responsibility of CAS. The parent(s) has to take back care of the child before the end of a year or, if this is not possible, the CAS must involve the court.

## Society Wardship:

Society Wardship is when the CAS has temporary custody of a child. While the CAS has main responsibility for the child’s care, the CAS is still required to keep the parent(s) informed about the child’s health and well-being and must also involve the parent(s) in decision making about the child.

## Crown Wardship:

Crown Wardship means the CAS has been given custody of the child by the court. With a child under 6, the Crown Wardship order often says there is no access to the parent(s) so the child can be placed for adoption. With older children, the order can allow access to the parent(s).

## Extended Care Agreement (ECA):

If a youth has been in CAS care as a Crown Ward and wishes to remain beyond his/her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, s/he can sign an Extended Care Agreement. This would allow the young person continued support (e.g., educational) and could continue until his/her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

### Kinship Care Worker (KCW):

The Kinship Care Worker helps families that are caring for a child who is kin. S/he provides support and guidance about resources that are available for the kin care giver. The Kinship Care Worker is probably the person who will complete your home study.

### Foster Resource Worker (FRW):

The Foster Resource Worker supports the foster parent in his/her care of a child. The FRW is usually employed by the CAS but may work for another agency if the home is not a CAS foster home (called an Outside Paid Resource, like a special group home).

### Supervisor:

The supervisor oversees the work of the above workers. All of them work as a team to make sure children are safe and families are supported.

### Time Frames:

Since the law changed in 2000, a child can only be in care for a certain period of time before a permanent plan must be made. For a child under the age of 6, this time is one year and adds up even if the child returns home and comes back into care. For a child over 6, the time is two years. These times were put into place to provide children with stability and permanency.

### Supervision Order - Kinship out of Care

Sometimes you might start out care giving with an informal agreement, and then CAS feels the need to protect the child. The CAS would then go to court and ask for a Supervision Order. This option is somewhat more “intrusive” because it involves court and conditions. In such a situation:

- A child can be placed with you for a period of three to 12 months at a time
- Certain “conditions” would be in place and all parties (e.g., parent and you) would be expected to follow them
- Supervision Orders are temporary but can be renewed in court if required
- The CAS worker would be in touch with you and offer assistance as needed
- While there is NO financial assistance available to you through the CAS, you can apply to Ontario Works for foster care benefits (approximately \$200.00 per month). The parent(s) may also agree to turn over the monthly Child Tax Credit (Baby Bonus) to you
- You could negotiate some special needs for the child with the CAS (e.g., bed, clothes), so think about this for the meeting with the worker doing the home study or for the family meeting
- You stand in place of the parent(s) regarding rights and responsibilities
- Access / visitation arrangements are recommended by the CAS but decided by the court and included in the order

## **Kinship in Care (Used to be called Provisional Foster Care):**

The next care giving option is more “intrusive” and means the situation is before the court and the child is in the care of the CAS. This type of care giving used to be called “Provisional Foster Care”.

This type of care giving is now called “Kinship in Care” because the care giver is a member of the child’s kin group but the child is in the care of the CAS by order of the court. In such an arrangement, you:

- Are providing a service to CAS like a foster parent
- Have the same rights and responsibilities as a regular foster home
- Will have to take part in some foster parent training and some other meetings
- Will have visits with the worker because decisions about the child’s care are made in partnership with CAS
- Receive financial assistance on a “per day” basis from CAS and they can assist with other support services as needed
- Allow access / visitation as recommended by the worker, but ordered by the court

## **LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF CAS**

There are many official “terms” used by CAS workers, which can be confusing and challenging. Here are some:  
**Intake Worker:** An intake worker is usually a social worker who follows up on referrals or calls to CAS and completes and assessment or investigation about a child’s safety.

**Family Service Worker (FSW):** If further CAS service is required, a family is transferred to a FSW, who is usually also a social worker. The FSW continues the assessment of the child’s safety and also acts as a case manager when other services are required to help the child or family. The FSW may provide counselling to the family, depending on the family’s needs and the worker’s area of expertise. If necessary, the FSW will take matters to court.

**Long Term Care Worker (LTC):** If the child is in the care and custody of the CAS, s/he will have a Long Term Care worker. The LTC Worker acts as the child’s guardian on behalf of CAS. The worker is responsible for the child’s physical, emotional, psychological, educational, behavioural and spiritual needs while in CAS care.

**Family Resource Worker:** The Family Support Worker provides additional support to a family when extra parenting assistance is required.

**Child and Youth Worker (CYW) or 1:1 Worker:**

The CYW or 1:1 worker may come into a family’s home to provide extra support when the child has special or high behavioural or emotional needs.

*Participation in Treatment Programs:* If a treatment program like anger management or counselling is needed for the child, are you willing to make sure the child attends?

*School:* Can you make sure that the child attends school? If you are working outside the home, who will be there to take care of the child after school?

*Child's Behaviour and Needs:* Are you familiar with the child's behaviours and any special needs? Can you manage his/her behaviour and/or special needs? How do you feel about having the child in your home?

*Other People in the Home:* How will other people in the home feel if you take on this care giving job? How will they relate to this child? How do they feel about having the child in your home?

*Safety and Hygiene:* Would the child be safe and healthy in your home? Is there anything you would have to do to make your home safer for the child?

*Addictive Behaviours:* Do you (or anyone in your home) have any current addiction (e.g., alcohol, drugs, gambling) that might make your home not safe for the child?

*Parenting Skills:* Are you someone who deals easily and well with children? Can you provide structure and routine?

## Custody

This is one of the most permanent options for a family to consider. The plan with the new law that governs the children's aid societies is that they will be able to assist you with gaining custody of a child, if the parent(s) agrees.

If the parent(s) agrees to sign the custody papers and the CAS agrees that this is a good plan, CAS will usually end their involvement after you are granted custody. If the parent(s) does not agree to you looking after the child, the CAS will let the judge know of your plan and the judge will decide.

In such a situation:

- You will act as the child's parent
- The parent(s) can come back to court to challenge your custody, at any time, but they would have to prove to the judge that they could care for the child again and that it is in the child's best interest to face another change
- There is NO financial assistance available from CAS, however, you can apply to Ontario Works for the foster care benefit and can apply for the Child Tax Credit
- Access arrangements will be part of the custody order

If needed, you can get custody forms at the nearest Superior Court of Justice, Family Court. If you need help you can make an appointment with the Advice Counsel at the Family Law Information Office at the court house.

## Adoption

Adoption is the most permanent and final type of care giving arrangement.

Once an adoption order has been granted by a judge, you are the child's parent with full rights and responsibilities.

When the new law comes into effect, "birth relatives" will be defined as any relative of the child, meaning grandparents, aunts, uncles, great aunts and uncles, siblings, or someone in the child's family circle.

In the past, access was not usually a part of an adoption order. However, with the new law, "openness" (i.e., some type of contact or connection with parent(s) / family) can be included in the order.

## Home Study

Some type of home study is required before you can take care of a child where CAS is involved. Making sure a child will be safe and well-cared for is the responsibility of the CAS. There are different kinds of questions that you will be asked or that you should ask the person doing your home study / assessment.

This section is intended to give you general information about becoming a care giver. For specific questions or information, please contact the child's Family Service Worker or the Kinship Care Worker.

*Access:* How will access with the child's parent(s) / siblings / grandparents and/or other important people in his/her life be arranged? How will this affect you as the care giver?

*Finances:* Do you have the finances available to provide for the child? Remember that Ontario Works provides a foster care allowance. Also, under special circumstances, CAS could approve you to be a kinship in care provider and would then assist financially. Be clear about what you think the child needs in order to live with you (e.g., bed, clothes).

*Space:* Does your home have enough room for the child?

*Respite/Relief:* Do you have supports that will assist with child care when necessary or needed?

*Health:* Does your present health allow you to adequately care for the child?

*Other Responsibilities:* Do you have other people who depend on you for their care, and if so, how will this affect the child?

*Age:* Does your age allow you to adequately care for the child, especially if the plan proposed is a long term one?

*Criminal Record / Violence:* Do you (or anyone who lives in the home) have a criminal record which would suggest that you might be a danger to the child? Has there ever been any domestic violence in your home?