

Participant Handbook



For Parents

Rooted in Community
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Rooted in Community's Mission Statement: ✨

Building strong, connected communities that prioritize safety, wellness, and health to improve the lives of individuals and families.

Rooted in Community's Vision Statement: 🌱

To foster a future where every individual, regardless of background, is empowered to heal, thrive, and contribute to a community rooted in safety, wellness, and respect for all.

Rooted in Community's Core Values: 🌊

1. **Community Strength:** We recognize that communities possess the inherent power to create safety, wellness, and health, and we work to amplify their voices and capacity for healing.
2. **Holistic Well-Being:** We focus on the whole person—mental, emotional, physical, and social health—believing that all aspects of well-being are interconnected.
3. **Collaboration:** We believe in the power of partnership and community collaboration to create sustainable change and provide comprehensive support.
4. **Healing and Resilience:** We support individuals in overcoming harm, recognizing the strength and resilience within each person, and promoting long-term healing.
5. **Justice and Equity:** We advocate for equal opportunities and access to resources, addressing the needs of individuals and families. We actively identify and counter inequities within our organization and externally in our communities. We recognize inaction perpetuates racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination.

Introduction: ❤️

Dear Parent,

I want to begin by simply saying this: I see you. I see how heavy this season may feel and how complicated the path ahead can seem. If you are reading this, it means you are walking through an incredibly hard and deeply personal journey—one filled with both hope and uncertainty as you work towards reunifying with your child. I want you to know that you are not alone.

At Rooted in Community, we believe in the power of family. We know that children thrive best when they can be safely connected to the people who know and love them most. We also recognize that life can take unexpected turns. Sometimes those turns create separation, healing work to be done, and a plan to help bring families back together stronger than before. This is where your agency treatment plan comes in—not as punishment or judgment—but as a roadmap for healing, restoration, and ultimately, reunification.

We understand the pressures and emotions you may be carrying. It is normal to feel frustration, sadness, shame, or even fear. Change is hard, and growth rarely happens in a straight line. But every step you take—big or small—toward completing your plan matters. You are doing brave work that will have lifelong impact for your child and your family.

Throughout this process, you will be working with a team of people who are here to support you and your child. Our foster caregivers are temporary partners, walking alongside your child with care and compassion while you do what you need to do. They are not here to take your place. Your role as parent is irreplaceable and central to your child's story. We are all rooting for your success.

Please know that our doors are always open to you. Our team is here to answer your questions, celebrate your progress, and encourage you through setbacks. Reunification is not just about "checking boxes"—it's about healing relationships, rebuilding trust, and creating safe, loving environments for your child to return home to. You have already taken the first step by showing up. We believe in you. We believe in the possibility of restoration. And we are honored to be part of your journey as you work to bring your family back together.

With respect and encouragement,
Sara Gilbert
Director
Rooted in Community

Agency Hours: 🌱

Monday-Friday 9:00am-5:00pm

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00am-3:00pm "Drop-in hours"

A time when team members are available, and you don't need an appointment or to call ahead. Just stop by, one of us will be available! (We know it can be difficult to track us down when we work on the road and have remote office hours!)

Understanding Foster Care in Michigan

Overview of the Foster Care System and Its Goals

In Michigan, foster care provides temporary, safe, and nurturing environments for children who cannot remain in their homes due to concerns about their safety or well-being. The primary goal is to ensure children's safety while working towards returning children back to their parents whenever possible. This involves addressing the issues that led to the child's removal and supporting families in creating a stable and healthy home environment.

Reasons for Child Placement into Foster Care

Child Protective Services (CPS) team members are employed through the Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). They are assigned to an investigation of child abuse or neglect through Centralized Intake (a program within DHHS that accepts calls from anyone who can report allegations of abuse or neglect of children in Michigan) and supervision.

CPS will investigate allegations. They use structured decision-making tools such as the Safety Assessment and Risk Assessment. If findings of abuse and/or neglect are present within the tools and investigation, they are able to either, open an "ongoing" case of CPS to help eliminate low and some moderate risk factors while the family unit remains intake (children are not removed) or they can submit a petition to the local court to request removal of youth from the home in high risk situations where the children's immediate safety and life are in jeopardy of significant harm.

If a petition is granted, a removal order is provided to CPS and the removal of the child/ren occurs from the parents or guardians and they are brought into foster care. Foster care placements are not only in licensed foster homes but can also occur, and are preferred to occur, with relatives or people who are close with the child and can provide a safe and stable environment for the child. Placement with a relative or safe person (kinship care) still means the child is in foster care and is not a guardianship or power of attorney arrangement.

Once a child is placed in foster care, the management of the case quickly (within 5 days) transfers to a foster care worker either through MDHHS or a private agency (like Rooted in Community), and the CPS worker removes themselves from the case.

Common reasons for removal include:

- **Abuse or Neglect:** Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or neglect of the child's basic needs.
 - **Substance Abuse:** Parental substance use impairs the ability to care for the child.
 - **Mental Health Issues:** Untreated mental health conditions that pose a risk to the child.
 - **Domestic Violence:** Exposure to ongoing domestic violence in the home.
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Key People in the Foster Care Process

Navigating the foster care system involves working with many professionals and agencies, each playing a vital role in supporting the child and family:

- **Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS):** Oversees child welfare services, including investigations, case management, and coordination of services.
- **Courts:** Family courts make legal decisions regarding the child's placement, parental rights, and permanency plans.
 - **Judge:** Oversees the court proceedings and makes final decisions regarding the child's placement and parental rights.
 - **Parent's Attorney:** Represents your interests and provides legal advice.

- **Guardian ad Litem (GAL):** An attorney appointed to represent the best interests of the child.
- **Prosecutor:** Represents MDHHS and/or Private Agency to provide an overview of efforts made during the review period and next steps recommended by the agency.
- **Caregiving Families:** Provide temporary care and support for children in foster care, ensuring their daily needs are met in a safe environment. Can be a licensed foster home, relative or kinship family.
- **Service Providers:** Offer specialized services such as counseling, substance abuse treatment, parenting classes, and other supports to address the family's needs.
- **Attorneys:** Represent the legal interests of the parents and the child during court proceedings.
- **Rooted in Community Staff:**
 - **Licensing Worker:** Ensures caregiving families and their homes meet state requirements and provide ongoing support to caregiving families to support stable and safe placements with no or limited moves of the child during their time in foster care.
 - **Foster Care Worker:** Coordinates services for the child and family, facilitates communication among stakeholders, and supports the reunification process.

Typical Court Hearings in the Foster Care Process

The court system plays a crucial role in overseeing the foster care process and making decisions in the best interest of the child.

Foster care workers and service providers report to the court on the parents' progress towards removing barriers in providing a safe and stable home for their child to return to. They provide a recommendation to the presiding judge each court hearing regarding services, visitation and placement or return home of the children.

The judge hears each recommendation and makes a determination and will present a written order. Only judges can make final decisions in the case.

Key hearings include:

- **Preliminary Hearing:** Held shortly after a child's removal to determine if temporary placement is necessary.
- **Adjudication Hearing:** The court reviews evidence to decide if the allegations of abuse or neglect are substantiated and if parents are in violation of the Michigan Child Protection Law.
- **Dispositional Hearing:** Determines the services and supports required for the family and sets the initial case plan.
- **Review Hearings:** Regularly scheduled to assess the family's progress, review the child's placement, and make necessary adjustments to the case plan.
- **Permanency Planning Hearing:** Occurs within 12 months of the child's removal to establish a long-term plan, which may include reunification, adoption, or guardianship.
- **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Hearing:** If reunification is not possible, the court may consider terminating parental rights to allow for adoption or permanent placement.
- **Post-Termination Review Hearings:** Conducted to ensure the child's needs continue to be met if and after parental rights have been terminated.

Understanding these components can empower parents to actively engage in the process and work collaboratively towards reunification.

If you need further assistance or have specific questions about any part of this process, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Legal Framework and Parental Rights 🏛️

Navigating the child welfare system can be overwhelming. This section aims to clarify the legal processes, your rights as a parent, and the roles of various people who are involved in foster care proceedings in Michigan.

Relevant Michigan Laws and Statutes 📖

Michigan's child welfare system is governed by several key laws and policies designed to protect children and support families:

- **Child Protection Law (MCL 722.601 et seq.):** Outlines the responsibilities of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in investigating child abuse and neglect reports.
 - **Juvenile Code (MCL 712A.1 et seq.):** The legal framework for court proceedings involving child protection, including the authority to remove children from their homes when necessary.
 - **Foster Care and Adoption Services Act (MCL 722.951 et seq.):** Regulates foster care and adoption services, ensuring the safety and well-being of children placed outside their homes.
 - **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA):** A federal law that establishes standards for the placement of Native American children in foster and adoptive homes, recognizing the importance of maintaining their cultural heritage.
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Parental Rights and Responsibilities During Foster Care Placement 👨‍👩‍👧

Your Rights:

- **Participation in Case Planning:** You have the right to be involved in developing and updating the case service plan, which outlines the steps needed for reunification.
- **Visitation:** You are entitled to regular visitation with your child unless restricted by the court for safety reasons. Times for visits are set according to your child's schedule, your schedule and then caseworker/case aid and caregiver schedule. (See Family Time Contract)
- **Legal Representation:** You have the right to an attorney during all court proceedings. If you cannot afford one, the court will appoint an attorney for you.
- **Notification of Hearings:** You must be informed of all court hearings involving your case of child abuse/neglect and have the opportunity to attend and participate.

Your Responsibilities:

- **Compliance with the Case Service Plan:** You are expected to complete the tasks outlined in the plan, and show benefit from the tasks, such as attending counseling or parenting classes.
- **Maintaining Contact:** Regular communication with your caseworker and participation in scheduled visits with your child are crucial in working towards reunification.
- **Providing Information:** Keep your caseworker informed about any changes in your circumstances, such as employment or housing.

Understanding your rights and the legal process is essential in working towards reunification with your child. Stay engaged, communicate openly with your attorney and the foster care caseworker, and utilize the resources available to support your family's journey.

Ongoing Safety of Michigan Children:

If you ever have concerns about the safety or well-being of a child, whether your own or someone else's, you can make a report at any time.

Call Centralized Intake at 855-444-3911 📞

(Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, toll-free)

Your Legal Responsibility

Protecting children is a shared responsibility. Michigan law requires certain individuals to report suspected abuse or neglect, but any person who is concerned for a child's safety can and should make a report.

- **Your report is confidential.** When you make a report in good faith, your identity is protected and will not be shared with the family involved.
- **False reporting is a crime.** Michigan Child Protection Law (MCL 722.633(5)) makes it a criminal offense to intentionally file a false report of child abuse or neglect. This ensures that the system focuses on true concerns about children's safety.

Reporting should never be used to retaliate or cause harm to others. Instead, it is one of the many ways our community works together to keep children safe when serious concerns arise.

Respecting Boundaries and Ensuring Safety

At Rooted in Community, we are committed to fostering a safe and respectful environment for everyone involved—children, families, caregivers, and our dedicated team members. We understand that the child welfare process can be emotionally challenging. However, it's essential to maintain professionalism and mutual respect throughout our interactions.

Zero Tolerance for Harassment

Harassment, threats, or stalking of any Rooted in Community staff member, caregiver, or affiliated professional is strictly prohibited. Such behaviors not only hinder the collaborative process but also violate Michigan law.

Understanding Michigan Law

Under Michigan Compiled Laws:

- **Stalking (MCL 750.411h):** Defined as a willful course of conduct involving repeated or continuing harassment that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed, or molested. Penalties can include up to one year of imprisonment or fines up to \$1,000, or both.
- **Aggravated Stalking (MCL 750.411i):** Involves stalking that includes credible threats, violations of court orders, or targeting individuals under 18 by someone five or more years older. This is a felony offense, punishable by up to five years of imprisonment or fines up to \$10,000, or both.
- **Lisa's Law (MCL 750.81c):** Safeguards child welfare staff and protects them both during work hours and outside of them. Communicating (verbally, on social media, through text, etc.) a threat to harm a team member is a misdemeanor punishable by up to 1 year in jail and/or a \$1000 fine. Assaulting a team member causing injury is a felony punishable by up to two years in prison and/or a fine up to \$1000. Assaulting a team member causing serious impairment is a felony punishable by up to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to \$5000.

Additionally, Michigan law provides for Personal Protection Orders (PPOs) to protect individuals from stalking or harassment.

Our Commitment to Safety

In situations where team members or caregivers face threats or harassment, Rooted in Community will take legal action. We will collaborate with law enforcement to address any threats, including assisting in obtaining PPOs and pursuing legal charges when appropriate.

The Parent-Agency Treatment Plan (PATP) 🤝

What Is the PATP?

The Parent-Agency Treatment Plan (PATP) is a personalized roadmap developed collaboratively between you and your caseworker. Its primary goal is to outline the steps needed to safely reunite your family. This plan identifies your family's strengths, areas needing support, and the services that will assist you in creating a stable and nurturing environment for your child.

Participating in meetings with the caseworker and the support team during meetings and then reviewing the PATP frequently for tasks that you can actively accomplish will assist you greatly in working towards reunification.

Key Components of the PATP ✨

The PATP is structured to provide clear guidance and support:

- **Strengths:** Recognizes the positive attributes and resources within your family that can aid in reunification.
- **Needs and Goals:** Identifies specific areas where support is needed and sets achievable goals to address them.
- **Action Steps:** Outlines the tasks required to meet each goal, specifying who is responsible and setting target dates for completion.
- **Services:** Details of the support services provided, such as counseling, parenting classes, or substance abuse treatment, to help you achieve your goals.
- **Progress Reviews:** Regularly assesses your advancement toward goals, allowing for adjustments to the plan as needed.

Timelines and Updates 📅

The PATP is a dynamic document that evolves with your progress:

- **Initial Plan:** Created within 30 days of your child's placement into foster care.
- **Updates:** Reviewed and revised at least every 90 days to reflect progress and make necessary adjustments.

Your Role in the PATP 🙌

Active participation in the PATP is crucial:

- **Collaboration:** Work closely with your caseworker to develop and refine the plan.
- **Engagement:** Attend all scheduled meetings and services outlined in the plan.
- **Communication:** Maintain open and honest communication with your caseworker about challenges and successes.

Your involvement ensures the plan is tailored to your family's unique needs and circumstances.

Working Toward Reunification 🏠

The PATP serves as a structured guide to help you address the factors that led to your child's placement in foster care. By following the plan and utilizing the provided resources, you are taking significant steps toward creating a safe and supportive home environment for your child's return.

Developing and Using Case Service Plans

What Is a Case Service Plan?

A Case Service Plan is a detailed report developed by your caseworker each reporting period. It holds information on contacts throughout the reporting period and on updates on progress and concerns within the case. It is submitted to you and all court participants.

Components of the Plan

The Case Service Plan includes:

- **Family Information:** Details about each parent or caregiver, including contact information and relationship to the child.
- **Child's Information:** Comprehensive data on your child's physical description, health, education, and emotional needs.
- **Permanency Planning:** The long-term goal for your child's living situation, such as reunification, adoption, or guardianship.
- **Services and Support:** Specific services provided to address identified needs, like counseling, parenting classes, or substance abuse treatment.
- **Visitation Plan:** Arrangements for maintaining contact with your child, including frequency and supervision details.
- **Progress Evaluation:** Regular assessments of your progress toward the goals outlined in the plan.

Regular Reviews and Updates

Case Service Plans are not static; they are reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes and progress.

- **Initial Plan (ISP):** Developed within 30 days of your child's placement into foster care.
- **Ongoing Reviews (USP):** Conducted at least every 90 days to assess progress, update goals, and make necessary adjustments.
- **Court Involvement:** The court reviews the plan during scheduled hearings to ensure compliance, efforts being made by the agency to support you and your family, and progress toward permanency goals.

Role of Family Team Meetings (FTMs)

Family Team Meetings along with Team Decision Meetings (TDMs) are collaborative gatherings that include you, your caseworker, your attorney, your child's attorney, service providers, and other support persons. These meetings are crucial for:

- **Developing the Plan:** Ensuring your input and perspective shape the Case Service Plan and Parent Agency Treatment Plan.
- **Assessing Progress:** Reviewing achievements and identifying areas needing additional support.
- **Problem-Solving:** Addressing challenges and modifying the plan to better meet your family's needs.

Your active participation in developing and following the Case Service Plan is vital. Engaging in services, attending meetings, and maintaining open communication with your caseworker can significantly impact the outcome of your case and support the goal of reunifying your family.

Getting to Reunification 🏠

Reunification is the process of the court returning your child from foster care to your care. Michigan's child welfare system prioritizes reunification when it's safe and in the best interest of the child. This process involves meeting specific criteria, accessing benefit from support services, and participating in ongoing monitoring to ensure a stable and nurturing environment for your child's return.

Criteria and Steps for Reunification ✅

1. Addressing Barriers:

Work collaboratively with your caseworker to identify and address the risk level and environment that led to your child's placement in foster care.

This may include:

- Completing parenting classes
- Engaging in substance abuse treatment
- Securing stable housing
- Participating in mental health services

2. Compliance with the Case Service Plan:

Actively participate in the development and execution of your Case Service Plan, which outlines the goals and services necessary for reunification. Regularly attend scheduled meetings and follow through with recommended services.

3. Family Time (Parenting Time):

Be consistent and meaningful during contact with your child through scheduled visitations. Demonstrating a strong, positive relationship supports the case for reunification. See family time agreement for further information.

4. Reunification Assessment:

Your caseworker will conduct regular assessments to evaluate:

- Progress in addressing the initial concerns
- Engagement in services
- Quality of parent-child interactions
- Overall readiness for reunification

5. Court Approval:

The court will review the case and, upon determining that reunification is in the child's best interest, will authorize the return of your child to your care.

Overall Readiness:

As your child returns home, case managers role is to ensure that your home environment supports safety, stability, and healing. During visits, they will be looking for a space that is clean and free from immediate hazards, with working utilities and enough room to meet your child's basic needs.

Compliance will be needed from every individual who resides in the home or is frequently at the home. A review the background of household members will be completed to ensure there are no safety concerns that could put your child at risk.

If there are firearms in the home, they must be legally obtained, legally stored—locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition—to prevent any accidental harm.

Similarly, any substances such as alcohol, prescription medications, or other chemicals should be securely stored out of reach.

Beyond physical safety, case workers will look for signs of emotional readiness, meaning that the home feels welcoming and that you are prepared to help your child through the life change of coming back home. This includes open conversations, routines that promote stability, and patience as your child adjusts.

Our goal together is to make the transition home not only safe, but supportive and filled with care.

Support Services Available

To facilitate reunification, various support services are available:

- **In-Home Services:** Assistance with parenting skills, household management, and creating a safe home environment.
 - **Therapeutic Services:** Access to counseling and mental health services for both parents and children.
 - **Substance Abuse Programs:** Support for overcoming addiction and maintaining sobriety.
 - **Housing Assistance:** Resources and referrals to help you secure stable and appropriate housing.
 - **Financial Support:** Guidance on budgeting and accessing financial assistance programs.
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Monitoring and Follow-Up After Reunification

After your child returns home, ongoing monitoring ensures the stability and safety of the reunification:

- **Regular Home Visits:** Your caseworker will conduct scheduled and unscheduled visits to assess the home environment and provide continued support.
- **Continued Services:** Access to support services remains available to address any emerging needs or challenges.
- **Progress Reviews:** Periodic evaluations will monitor the family's adjustment and the child's well-being.
- **Court Oversight:** The court may schedule follow-up hearings to review the family's progress and determine if ongoing supervision is necessary.

This phase typically lasts for several months, during which the focus is on ensuring a successful and lasting reunification.

Voluntary Post-Reunification Support:

At Rooted in Community, we believe that support shouldn't end the moment a court case closes. After reunification, families have the option to continue receiving care and connection through our voluntary post-reunification support services (VPR). Parents can choose to stay connected through regular check-ins, supportive home visits, and invitations to community gatherings and events. We also offer help navigating life's ongoing challenges, including educational advocacy for you and your child, guidance with housing and employment, and connection to local resources. Our goal is to walk alongside you as you continue building stability, joy, and confidence in your family's next chapter.

Remember: Your active participation, openness to support, and commitment to the process are vital to achieving reunification. Don't hesitate to reach out to your caseworker or support team with questions or for assistance—they're there to help you every step of the way.

Placement of Your Child: 🏠

When your child enters foster care, whether placed with a relative, close supportive person (kinship care), a licensed foster family, or child caring institution, it marks a significant transition for both of you. This period can bring about a mix of emotions, including relief, anxiety, and uncertainty. Understanding the process and your role within it can help maintain and strengthen your bond with your child during this time.

Understanding the Placement 🤝

Michigan law prioritizes placing children with relatives or kinship families when possible. This approach aims to provide continuity and comfort for the child. However, even familiar placements can introduce new dynamics and potential tensions as roles and boundaries adjust.

Regardless of the placement type, caregivers are expected to provide a safe, nurturing environment that supports your child's well-being. They work in partnership with you and the child welfare team to support your child's needs. There are many safety standards and assessments completed on the family your child is living with and that need to be continued to be followed.

Everyday Caregiving Decisions ✂️

Caregivers may make routine decisions about your child's daily activities under the "Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard." This includes allowing participation in extracurricular activities, cultural events, and social outings.

However, certain activities require additional permissions:

- **Out-of-State Travel:** Requires consent from you (the child's parent) before anyone is able to take a foster youth- who is a temporary court ward, out of state.
 - If the parent's whereabouts are unknown or they refuse to consent, the agency must petition the court to obtain permission for the out-of-state travel.
- **Medical Decisions:** Routine medical care can be authorized by caregivers, but significant medical procedures require parental consent or court approval.
- **Driver's License Application:** Only a legal parent may sign a driver's license application for a teen in foster care whose parents still have rights.
- **Religion:** A religion that is shown to have been practiced in the family home before removal will be continued while your child is in foster care. If there was no religion followed in the home prior to removal, the child has the option to attend religious services with the caregivers.
 - Consent from a child's parent before the child participates in significant religious rituals, such as baptism or confirmation is required.
- **Appearance:** Parental consent is needed before making significant changes to a child's appearance, including haircuts that change the style of the child's hair.
 - An infant or toddler's first hair cut must be consented to by parents.
- **Psychotropic Medication:** Parents must consent before their child is administered psychotropic medications.
 - If the parent's whereabouts are unknown or they refuse to consent, the agency must petition the court to obtain authorization to give psychotropic medications.

It's important to maintain open communication with your child's caregiver and caseworker regarding these activities to ensure your child's safety and well-being.

Schooling and Educational Involvement 🎓

Your child's education is a critical aspect of their development. While in foster care, decisions about school enrollment and participation in school activities are typically made by the caregiver in consultation with the caseworker. You retain the right to be informed about your child's educational progress and can participate in school meetings and conferences, but direct access to school records may be limited.

If your child remains in their current school, caregivers and the school are responsible for transportation. If a school change is necessary, efforts are made to minimize disruption to your child's education.

Note that home-schooling of children in foster care is prohibited. Private schooling requires parental permission but the caregiver opting for private schooling attendance will need to cover the cost.

📄 Reasonable and Prudent Parenting: What Caregivers Can Decide

Under Michigan's guidelines, caregivers can make decisions that support a child's normalcy and development:

- **Activities Caregivers Can Approve Without Additional Permission:**
 - Participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, clubs)
 - Social outings with peers
 - Cultural and religious events
 - Routine health and dental check-ups

These standards aim to allow children in foster care to experience a sense of normalcy while ensuring their safety and respecting parental rights.

Navigating Changing Relationships 💬

It's natural for relationships to evolve during your child's time in foster care. You may experience feelings of loss, frustration, or concern about your child's attachment to their caregiver. Maintaining regular, positive contact through scheduled visitations, phone calls, or video chats can help preserve your bond.

Engaging in family team meetings and staying informed about your child's progress also reinforces your commitment to reunification.

Remember, the goal of foster care is to provide temporary support while working towards a safe and stable reunification. Your active participation and collaboration with caregivers and case workers are vital to achieving this outcome.

Caregiver Responsibilities at a Glance 📖

Caregivers at **Rooted in Community** are held to high standards to ensure your child's safety, dignity, and well-being while in care. These guidelines help provide consistency, protection, and support during a difficult time.

Personal Possessions 🧳

Caregivers must safeguard your child's personal belongings. Everything they arrive with, receive, or buy stays theirs and moves with them when they leave. Belongings must be stored safely and respectfully in the caregivers home.

Allowance and Money 💰

Children receive a daily allowance and may keep money they earn or receive as gifts. Caregivers monitor allowance but cannot take or misuse the child's personal money. Bank accounts may be set up with team agreement.

Clothing 👕

Children are provided with seasonally appropriate clothing. All clothing, whether brought from home or purchased during care, remains the child's property unless it is returned to parents.

Nutrition 🍏

Children are given nutritious meals daily that honor their culture and preferences. Allergies must be documented and respected, and caregivers coordinate allergy awareness with schools and service providers.

Social Media 📱

Caregivers must protect children's privacy online. No names, faces, case details, or identifying information should be shared publicly. Private photos for memory books are allowed.

Water Safety 💧

Supervision is required around all water sources (pools, lakes, bathtubs). Pools and hot tubs must be locked or fenced. Life jackets, alarms, and rescue equipment are required where applicable.

Safe Sleep ✅

Infants must sleep safely on their backs in approved cribs without soft bedding. Bedsharing is prohibited. Caregivers must complete safe sleep training and follow strict guidelines.

Surveillance in Bedrooms 📹

To preserve the privacy of the youth in care, the use of video or audio surveillance equipment is strictly prohibited in:

- Any bedroom occupied by a child over the age of 2 years old
- Any bathroom or personal hygiene area, regardless of the child's age
- This policy applies to all surveillance, including nanny cams, baby monitors, and home security systems.
- Exceptions may only be granted under exceptional circumstances with written approval from the supervising agency and the child's legal guardian or court.

Important Reminder About Benefits

If your child enters foster care, it's important, if you have benefits, to notify your benefits worker right away about the change in your household. This applies to programs such as food assistance, WIC, cash assistance, childcare subsidy, and Section 8 housing. Keeping your information up to date helps ensure that your benefits remain accurate and avoids any issues with your assistance moving forward.

Other Outcomes

When Termination Occurs: Understanding What It Means and How to Move Forward

Facing the possibility of termination of parental rights (TPR) is one of the most difficult and painful potential aspects of the child welfare process. While every effort is made to support reunification, there are times when the court may determine that returning a child home is no longer in their best interest. This decision is never made lightly and carries both legal and emotional impacts for parents and children.

What Termination Means Legally and Personally 📄

Legally

Termination of parental rights means that you are no longer recognized as your child's legal parent. This ends your right to make decisions for your child, including those regarding medical care, education, and daily life. Legally, it also severs inheritance rights and typically removes obligations related to child support or care.

Personally and Emotionally

While the legal bond may end, the emotional bond between a parent and child often does not. These relationships are complex and deeply human.

Termination does not erase history, love, or connection—it changes how those connections can be expressed going forward. Some families may maintain informal or semi-formal contact through open adoptions or through agreements with guardians, while others may experience distance or disconnection. Processing this loss is deeply personal and often requires time and support.

What Happens for the Child After Termination 🏠

Once parental rights are terminated, the agency and court work to establish a new permanency plan that provides stability and belonging for the child. There are several paths this may take:

Adoption

The most common outcome after termination is adoption. The child may be adopted by a relative, their foster family, or another adoptive family. Adoption provides legal permanency and often creates lifelong connections, but it also may come with grief as the child adjusts to their new legal identity and family dynamic.

Guardianship

In some cases, especially with relatives or close connections, guardianship may be established. Guardianship provides a stable and legal caregiving arrangement but does not completely sever parental rights unless already terminated.

APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement)

For older youth, especially teens who do not wish to be adopted or do not have a guardian identified, APPLA may be used. This plan focuses on preparing the young person for adulthood and independence. It includes support for education, employment, housing, and connection to trusted adults as they transition out of foster care. This is often referred to as “aging out” of the system.

Rooted in Community: Still Here for You 🤝

Even if termination occurs, Rooted in Community believes in lifelong support and healing. We

offer voluntary post-termination support services to parents and families who wish to process their experience, maintain community connections, and explore healthy ways of honoring their role in their child's story.

Our support includes:

- Grief and loss support groups and counseling referrals
- Community gatherings and connection opportunities
- Assistance navigating post-termination contact (when permitted)
- Support with housing, employment, and wellness resources to move forward in your life with dignity and strength

Termination does not mean you are forgotten or alone. We recognize the love you carry and will continue to offer compassion and connection as you navigate what comes next.

After-Hours Support:

At Rooted in Community, we recognize life can bring unexpected challenges at any time, including outside of traditional business hours. While we are deeply committed to supporting those in our programming, our team members also have personal responsibilities and may not be immediately available by phone or in person after hours.

Because safety is our top priority, we have developed the following guidance to ensure our participants have resources available when urgent needs arise:

- If there is an immediate threat to safety, please contact 911 for police assistance. First responders are trained to manage and stabilize unsafe environments.
- If there is a mental health crisis and need for further evaluation or stabilization, the nearest emergency room can complete a mental health assessment. Based on the evaluation, the hospital may place a 72-hour mental health hold if deemed necessary.
 - For support for suicidal ideation and virtual assessment, 988 can be called for support at any time.
- For urgent mental health support at home, Muskegon County's Health West Mobile Crisis Team is available after hours. They offer in-home crisis intervention for youth and families and can be contacted at:
 - Health West Crisis Line: 231-722-4357
- For urgent health-related concerns, Hackley Community Care provides an after-hours emergency line. Caregivers can call for medical advice or guidance on next steps related to physical health needs:
 - Hackley After-Hours Line: 231-737-1335
- For concerns of abuse or neglect, calling the DHHS centralized intake number can offer assistance and, if standards are met, have an on-call CPS worker come to the home.
 - Centralized Intake Line: 855-444-3911

Proactive Safety Planning:

If a parent is aware of heightened risk factors or potential crises that may arise during times when the agency is closed:

- A personalized safety plan can be developed in advance to plan ahead with action steps.
- The safety plan will outline specific instructions, emergency contacts, and steps to help ensure the safety of all involved.
- Planning ahead is essential to help manage risks and ensure that you feel supported even when immediate Rooted in Community staff support is not available.
- We highly recommend that you save each of the phone numbers above in your phone for quick access in case of an emergency.

By partnering together, creating safety plans, and utilizing available community resources, we can work toward safe and supportive outcomes for everyone involved.

*Calling 211 connects people to a **free, confidential information and referral service** that helps individuals and families find support in their community including emergency housing, food assistance, mental health, substance use services, employment services, childcare and more!

Common Acronyms:

3130: Initial Home Study (general foster home licensing) Initial licensing recommendation report submitted by the agency.	DCWL: Division of Child Welfare Licensing. Team of state employees who provide a range of services to agencies and foster homes, including reviewing licensed foster home reports.	The Act/Act 116: Act Number 116 of the public Acts of 1973 Amended, pertains to the regulation of Child Care Organizations. Pink and Green book rules were developed from this area of law.
4004: Foster Home Reevaluation (general foster homes) occurs at 6 month mark after original license is issued, and each year after. Every 3 years a new application is submitted with this report as well.	CCWIS: Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System. State system currently transitioning all information from the MiSacwis System. Soon all areas of child welfare case information will be kept within CCWIS.	DHHS: Department and Health and Human Services. Each county has a DHHS office that provides public assistance to community members, investigates fraud, and manages the child welfare of their county.
4005/SE: Special Evaluation Report (general foster homes) occurs whenever there is suspected green book violation after licensure.	CWLM: Child Welfare Licensing Module. State system that all general foster home reports and information is stored. This module is a part of the larger CCWIS system.	CPS: Child Protective Services. Team members employed through DHHS that seek to verify the safety and wellbeing of children.
3130A: Relative Placement Home Study (relative and fictive kin initial and renewal home study) Occurs within 30 days of placement and each year after.	MiSacwis: Michigan Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System. The state is replacing MiSacwis in incremental, modulars to CCWIS.	MIC: Maltreatment in Care. CPS team members specifically hired to investigated suspected abuse or neglect of children who are in foster care.
5770: Relative Placement Safety Screen (relative and fictive kin) Occurs before placement, during a household member change or address change.	Green Book: Licensing Rules for Foster Family Homes and Foster Family Group Homes for Children. Contains all state rules that each licensed foster home must follow (even when children are not placed in the home).	CPL: Child Protection Law Act 238 of 1975 which defines abuse/neglect. Describes that legal ramifications of CPS and requires certain citizens to be mandated reporters, such as child welfare workers and foster parents.
HV: Home Visit. A visit where a team member comes to your home.	TC/LM: Telephone Call/Left Message. Frequently seen in team member reports.	FC: Foster Care or Foster Child. Either in reference to a worker or youth in care.
3130A Addendum: (relative and fictive kin) Occurs whenever a CPS-MIC investigation occurs for the home.	Pink Book: Licensing Rules for Child Placing Agencies. Contains all state rules that each child placing agency (like Rooted and DHHS).	GMC: Good Moral Character. Publication that lists several potential convictions that require further review if found for an applicant.

CHRI: Criminal History Record Information. This is obtained through fingerprinting process and is kept secure within state systems. Each caregiver of a foster youth will have fingerprinting completed.	Fictive Kin or Kinship: Individuals who have a strong relationship with children in foster care or, if a young child, a strong relationship with the biological parent of child in foster care. Not related by blood or marriage. Do not have to be licensed to provide care for children.	ART: Administrative Review Team. This team resides within DCWL and reviews GMC convictions based on the agency's review of rehabilitation and how this is related to caring for children in foster care.
CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocate. A community volunteer that serves to preserve the wellbeing of children in foster care. Not every child will have a CASA court appointed. These volunteers go through extensive training through the family court system.	DOC: Determination of Care. This is a supplement reimbursement stipend in addition to the daily foster care stipend. This is provided to caregivers who have youth with higher need or specialized care needs and exists to help eliminate the costs of the level of care needed.	ICPC: Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. An agreement among states that ensures children placed in foster care have the ability to be placed across state lines when it is in their best interest and determines the state responsible for supervising care.
MYOI: Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative. A program that helps older youth in foster care learn and achieve successful outcomes in their transition to adulthood.	FTM/TDM: Family Team Meeting/ Team Decision Meeting. Meetings that are held before court hearings and during points of change in the case. All team members are encouraged to attend to assist in planning for the well-being of the youth and family.	ICWA: Indian Child Welfare Act. Federal law that establishes minimum standards for child welfare youth who are Native American. Created in response to the historical disproportionate removal of Native youths from their families and communities.
GAL: Guardian ad Litem. Court appointed attorney assigned to youth in care.	LE/LEO: Law Enforcement/Officer.	DV: Domestic Violence.
FOM: Michigan's Foster Care Online Manual (policy)	APPLA: Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement	Subsidy: financial assistance provided to caregivers in a reimbursement (non-taxed).
Semi-Annual: Transition Plan. A meeting held with youth 14 and older with their supports plan independence.	90 day: 90 Day Discharge planning meeting for youth and their supports before exiting the foster care program.	TBRI: Trust Based Relational Intervention, a type of parenting style and therapeutic approach.
PO: Protection Order	SOP: Standard of Promptness.	SA: Sexual Abuse
SED: Severely Emotionally Disturbed, SED waivers provide high level of support and funds to secure placements for youth.	ISP/USP: Initial and Updated Service Plans created to provide an update and guide to services for youth and their parents.	RTC: Residential Treatment Center- a group home setting for youth who require extra supervision and guidance to be safe within the community.
Sib/Sib Split: Siblings who are separated while in foster care.	Psych Eval: Psychological Evaluation.	TPR: Termination of Parental Rights.

Looking Ahead:

In addition to this handbook, please review the following attached Rooted and Community Policies:

- Program Statement Policy & Procedure #12302
- Behavior Support Policy #12313
- Communication Policy #12315
- File Management and Privacy of Records Policy and Procedure #12213
- Grievance Handling and Compliance #12210
- Medical and Dental Care Policy #12413
- Religion and Spirituality Policy #12314
- Unusual Incidents and Emergencies Policy #12322

Moving Forward Together

We know that this journey may be filled with challenges, uncertainties, and moments of deep emotion — but please remember, you are not walking this path alone. Every step you take matters. Your commitment to your child, your willingness to engage, and your love are powerful forces in this process.

At Rooted in Community, we believe in second chances, growth, and the strength of families. Our team is here to walk alongside you with compassion, respect, and unwavering support. No matter how difficult the road may feel at times, reunification and healing remain our shared hope and goal whenever it is safe and possible.

This handbook is just one of the many tools available to help you stay informed, empowered, and connected. As you move forward, please continue to reach out, ask questions, and take advantage of the services and people ready to support you.

Your story — and your family's story — is still being written. Together, we will work toward brighter days ahead.

