

# Partnership for Children in Out-of-Home Care

**A**ll of us are responsible for the well-being of children in the custody

of the Department of Children and Families. The children's caregivers along with the Florida Department of Children and Families, the community-based care (CBC) organizations, their subcontractors and the staffs of these agencies undertake this responsibility in partnership, aware that none of us can succeed by ourselves.

Children need normal childhoods as well as loving and skillful parenting which honors their loyalty to their biological family. The purpose of this document is to articulate a common understanding of the values, principles and relationships necessary to fulfill this responsibility. The following commitments are embraced by all of us. This document in no way substitutes for or waives statutes or rule; however we will attempt to apply these laws and regulations in a manner consistent with these commitments.

1. To ensure that the care we give our children supports their healthy development and gives them the best possible opportunity for success, caregivers and DCF, CBC and agency staff will work together in a respectful partnership
2. All members of this partnership will behave professionally, will share all relevant information promptly, and will respect the confidentiality of all information related to the child and his or her family.
3. Caregivers the family and DCF, CBC and agency staff will participate in developing the plan for the child and family, and all members of the team will work together to

implement this plan. This includes caregiver participation in all team meetings or court hearings related to the child's care and future plans. DCF, CBC and agency staff will support and facilitate caregiver participation through timely notification, an inclusive process and providing alternative methods for participation for caregivers who cannot be physically present.

4. Excellent parenting is a reasonable expectation of caregivers. Caregivers will provide and DCF, CBC and agency staff will support excellent parenting. This requires a loving commitment to the child and the child's safety and well-being, appropriate supervision and positive methods of discipline, encouragement of the child's strengths, respect for the child's individuality and likes and dislikes, providing opportunities to develop the child's interests and skill, awareness of the impact of trauma on behavior, equal participation of the child in family life, involvement of the child with the community and a commitment to enable the child to lead a normal life.
5. Children will be placed only with caregivers who have the ability and are willing to accept responsibility for the care of a child in light of the child's culture, religion and ethnicity, special physical or psychological needs, unique situation including sexual orientation and family relationships. DCF, CBC and agency staff will provide caregivers with all available information to assist them in determining whether they are able to appropriately care for a child. Caregivers must be willing and able to learn about and be respectful of the child's religion, culture and ethnicity, and any special circumstances affecting the child's care. DCF, CBC and agency staff will assist them in gaining the support, training and skill necessary for the care of the child.
6. Caregivers will have access to and take advantage of all training they need to improve their skills in parenting children who have experienced trauma due to neglect, abuse or separation from home, to meet these children's special needs and to work effectively with child welfare agencies, the courts, the schools and other community and governmental agencies.
7. DCF, CBC and Agency staff will provide caregivers with the services and support they need to enable them to provide quality care for the child.
8. Once a family accepts the responsibility of caring for the child, the child will be removed from that family only when the family is clearly unable to care for him or her safely or legally, when the child and his or her biological family are reunified, when

the child is being placed in a legally permanent home in accordance with the case plan or court order, or when the removal is demonstrably in the child's best interest.

9. If a child must leave the caregiver's home for one of these reasons and in the absence of an unforeseeable emergency, the transition will be accomplished according to a plan which involves cooperation and sharing of information among all the persons involved, respects the child's developmental stage and psychological needs, ensures they have all their belongings, and allows for a gradual transition from the caregiver's home and, if possible, for continued contact with the caregiver after the child leaves.
10. When the plan for the child includes reunification, caregivers and agency staff will work together to assist the biological parents in improving their ability to care for and protect their children and to provide continuity for child.
11. Caregivers will respect and support the child's ties to his or her biological family (parents, siblings and extended family members) and will assist the child in visitation and other forms of communication. DCF, CBC and Agency staff will provide caregivers with the information, guidance, training and support necessary for fulfilling this responsibility.
12. Caregivers will work in partnership with DCF, CBC and Agency staff to obtain and maintain records that are important to the child's well being including child resource records, medical records, school records, photographs, and records of special events and achievements
13. Caregivers will effectively advocate for children in their care with the child welfare system, the court, and community agencies, including schools, child care, health and mental health providers, and employers. DCF, CBC and Agency staff will support them in doing so and will not retaliate against them as a result of this advocacy.
14. Caregivers will participate fully in the child's medical, psychological and dental care as they would for their biological child. Agency staff will support and facilitate this participation. Caregivers, DCF, CBC and Agency staff will share information with each other about the child's health and well-being.
15. Caregivers will support the child's school success by participating in school activities and meetings, including IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings, assisting with school assignments, supporting tutoring programs, meeting with teachers and working with an educational surrogate if one has been appointed and encouraging the child's participation in extra-curricular activities. Agency staff will facilitate this participation and will be kept informed of the child's progress and needs.