

Invest to reduce the number of children entering state custody

Additional resources should be provided to help support relative caregivers. Child abuse prevention stakeholders should utilize community resources to connect relative caregivers with adequate supports.

Relative caregivers are a valuable resource. One way to potentially reduce placements is to provide the necessary financial and child care support to relative caregiver placements.

Sometimes, families are denied services through the relative caregiver program based on their income even though their income may not be enough to adequately care for the child. In determining eligibility for emergency financial or start-up assistance, the state should consider using a different threshold and the specific circumstances. This will **allow relatives to receive the appropriate services that they need in order to care for the child(ren).**

While acknowledging the preference to safely place a child with family, another way to potentially reduce placements is to strategically consider placement with individuals who have a relationship with a child even though they are not related by blood or marriage.



Maintain open communication with relative caregivers about where they may need extra support.

Drug exposed infants and children, who make up a large percentage of children in state custody, often have a variety of health and behavioral issues that complicate their care. Sometimes they are placed with families who underestimate their needs or do not have the resources to address those needs. Ensuring caregivers have appropriate training to create a safe, stable and nurturing environment will help mitigate the trauma children have experienced and support healthy development.

TENNESSEE FOSTER CARE DATA

Number of children in care in August 2021:¹ **9,011**

89% of children in Tennessee's foster care spend **more than one year** in custody waiting for adoption.²

42% of children had **more than two placements** creating instability.³

Long-term impact of foster care

A child who enters foster care has generally had multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences in their home. While foster care provides needed care and safety, it is disruptive and traumatic for children to leave their home and family. Young adults that have been in the child welfare system are almost four times as likely to have suicidal behaviors.⁴

Increase available placements at all levels to ensure that children are placed in an environment appropriate to their needs.

Children have a right to the least restrictive placement that meets their needs and to the services necessary to support their development. Placements should be determined by needs and not by what is available. Having adequate numbers of available placements at all levels ensures children receive the most appropriate care.