

Answers to the Resource Family Approval (RFA)

As you may or may not have heard, foster care in the state of California is entering a new chapter with the **Resource Family Approval (RFA)** program. RFA is changing the way foster and relative families are approved, trained and supported to care for children in the child welfare system.

What is the RFA?

The Resource Family Approval (RFA) Program was authorized through Senate Bill 1013 (Chapter 35, Statutes of 2012). The statute requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), in consultation with county child welfare agencies, foster parent associations, and other interested community parties, to implement a unified, family friendly, and child-centered resource family approval process.

RFA is a new foster caregiver approval process that improves the way caregivers (related and non-related) are approved by preparing families to better meet the needs of vulnerable children, youth and non-minor dependents in the county child welfare and/or probation systems. This new process replaces the existing multiple processes for licensing foster family homes, certifying homes of licensed foster family agencies, approving relatives and non-related extended family members (NREFMs) as caregivers, and approving legal guardians and adoptive families by combining the best elements of all the processes into a single approval standard. The process is streamlined and unifies approval standards for all caregivers regardless of the child's case plan, thereby eliminating the duplication of existing processes such as background checks.

What is a Resource Family?

The terms **Resource Family/Resource Parent**, replace terms such as foster parent, adoptive family, guardianship family, and relative/NREFM. A Resource Family is considered to be an approved home regardless of whether or not an individual or couple is related to a child in foster care. This shift in terminology represents a move towards a more inclusive, holistic and family centered approach to reunification. With RFA, there is a greater emphasis on resource parents teaming with birth parents in support of family reunification and serving as one of many *resources* working to bring families back together while promoting permanency for children.

How is the process different from the existing one?

The RFA process involves completion of a comprehensive assessment that includes assessing the applicant's ability to honor a child or non-minor dependent's natural connections, be a care-provider to a child/non-minor dependent in a family setting, provide a safe, nurturing and stable home, and provide permanency or prepare a child/non-minor dependent for permanency. A written assessment includes the following information:

- Home inspection

- Background check (DMV records, criminal records check, child abuse central index check, Meghan's law check)
- First Aid/CPR certification
- Training assessment (see Training section below)
- Permanency assessment (similar to an adoptive home study)

What is a permanency assessment and why do I need one?

The permanency assessment creates a comprehensive picture of your family by exploring your family's dynamics and characteristics, including your mental, physical, and emotional health history. This assessment helps to identify your family's strengths, as well as needed supports or additional training your family may need to meet the needs of children, youth, and non-minor dependents in your care. This assessment assists the placement social workers in making informed matching decisions for children in care with approved resource family homes. Additionally, this process allows for permanency for children to occur in a more streamlined process as the Permanency Assessment is used for guardianship and/or adoption, if reunification does not occur.

Training:

All current foster families, relative, and non-related extended family homes (NREFM) are strongly encouraged to attend the Resource Family Preapproval Training in order to be able to fulfill the requirements of a Resource Family.