

KINSHIP CARE

Stepping In:

A Guide for Kinship Caregivers in South Carolina



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Thank You



“People say all the time, ‘Oh you’re a saint. You’re so good for what you’re doing.’ I’m not a saint. I’m a person taking care of my family.”

-Sarah Walker, Kinship Foster Parent

Kinship Care is, many times, the very best alternative for children whose parents are unable to care for them. Even though it is a change for everyone, when you provide kinship care, you are giving a child the chance to remain connected with friends, community and family.

Because the child already knows you, you also ease the trauma of this huge change. Their future may be brighter because of the care you give.

As you take on this extra responsibility, you are not alone.

This guide can help you:

- Know what to expect—and what is expected of you
- See how you can meet the child’s needs and the needs of your own family
- Find out where you can go to get answers, support and more

Understanding Kinship Care

When parents can't meet their child's basic needs for safety, food, clothing, shelter, education or health care, relatives or family friends often step in to help care for the child. This is kinship care, and it can be temporary or permanent.

Kinship care may be a private, informal arrangement made between a parent and a relative or family friend. Kinship care can also be a public, formal arrangement ordered by the courts. A South Carolina Department of Social Services case manager may or may not be involved.

Who Can Be a Kinship Caregiver



"I think anyone who can be a Kinship Caregiver should be a Kinship Caregiver."

—Daryl McCulley, Kinship Caregiver

Kin can be related by blood, marriage or adoption, including a grandparent, aunt, uncle, sister or brother. Kinship caregivers can also be people not related to the child but who play an important role in the child's life. You will hear SCDSS refer to these unrelated adults as *fictive kin*.

Should I Become a Licensed Kinship Foster Parent?

When SCDSS becomes involved with a child and identifies a kinship caregiver, that caregiver may be able to become licensed as a kinship foster parent if eligibility requirements are met.

As a licensed kinship foster parent, you have greater support and that can make placement with kin more stable for the child:

- A licensed kinship foster parent will receive the benefits and services that other foster parents receive.
- Those benefits include monthly board payments.
- Licensed kinship foster parents also receive training and case management support to help with meeting the child's needs and working with the child's parents.
- In most cases, the licensing process takes about 90 days. There are also some licensing requirements SCDSS is allowed to waive for kinship foster care.

If you're interested in becoming licensed, contact your case manager or Kinship Care Coordinator, for more information about eligibility for licensing. Ask for the [Kinship Foster Care brochure](#).

If you don't want to become licensed, or if eligibility requirements aren't met, legal custody or adoption may be an option.

Your Role

You are providing daily care, protecting the child's safety and looking out for their overall well-being.

When a child is placed with you through SCDSS, you are also an important member of the decision-making team. What you see and know can help everyone meet the child's needs and keep the child safe.

In your role as the kinship caregiver, you are responsible for:

- Meeting the child’s basic emotional, financial, educational, physical, and medical needs
- Making sure the child keeps positive connections to their friends, family and community
- Attending meetings and court appearances (when applicable)
- Taking the child to medical, school and counseling appointments
- Working with the child’s parents, which may include a parent who does not have custody of the child
- Helping with visitation between the child, parents and siblings

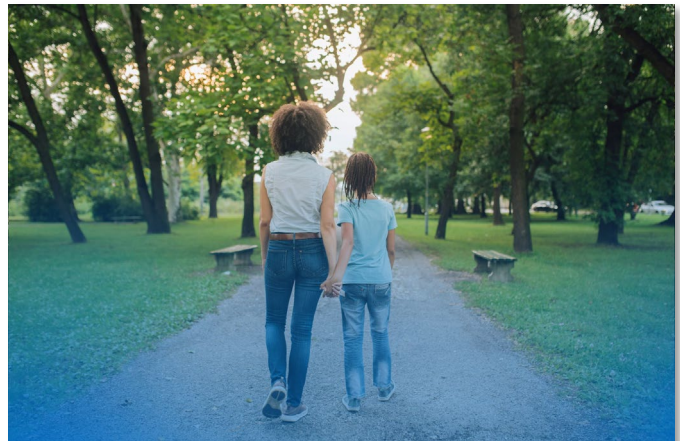
We also encourage you to give emotional support and guidance to the parents. It is beneficial for the child when you have a supportive, open and honest relationship with their parents. You also have an opportunity to model positive parenting.

How Will You Meet All of These Responsibilities?

You may feel challenged by the responsibilities of kinship care. Services, supports and resources are available to help. Some are available to all families and children. Some are only available for children in formal and licensed kinship care.

We provide a list of places to get help in this booklet. You can also go to our website at dss.sc.gov/kinshipcare to search for help.

If you are providing formal or licensed kinship care, please reach out at any time to your case manager, their supervisor or the Kinship Care Coordinator for your region. We are here to help you.



“You’re part of a team. No one person can save a family.”

-Kim Hall, Kinship Caregiver

The Role of SCDSS



“As a Kinship Foster Parent, DSS workers are my new BFFs.”

—Leslie Gore, Kinship Foster Parent

Our role is to promote child safety and well-being and strengthen families.

We provide protection when children aren't safe at home. We also work to find stable, permanent homes for children. Whenever possible, we try to reunite children and parents.

In a formal kinship care arrangement, your case manager will give you information including the

services needed, available or required for the child. He or she will also share visitation plans and your role during parent and sibling visits.

Part of the case manager's job is to make monthly visits to your home to check on the safety and well-being of the child and to discuss services or supports you may need to care for the child:

- Your case manager might schedule these visits ahead of time.
- Some visits may be unannounced.
- These visits are also a good time for you to talk about concerns you have or the help you need.

You don't have to wait for monthly visits to share information, ask questions or ask for help:

- Your case manager and your regional Kinship Care Coordinator are here to help you and give you answers whenever questions come up.

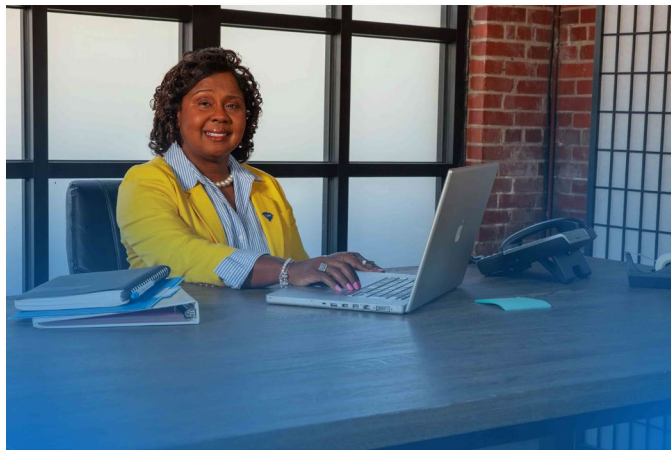
- You should let your case manager know in advance if the child in your care needs any medical procedures or surgery.
- You should contact your case manager if there is an emergency.

Phone numbers for your case manager and Regional Kinship Care Coordinator are in the back of this booklet.

Meeting the Needs of the Child in Your Home

While in kinship care, a child will have many needs. Those can range from the basic care every child should get to the special needs some children will have.

Meeting their needs means making sure they have:



Kinship care is less traumatic for children because they are placed with somebody that they're familiar with. Not a total stranger.

—Mellinda Tyler, DSS Kinship

- A stable place to live
- Healthy meals
- Regular health care from doctors and dentists, plus specialists if needed
- Mental health care or counseling, if needed
- Education that's right for their age, grade in school and their abilities
- Recreation
- Child care if you are at work

For the child, the reliability and consistency you offer is important, even though it may

not seem like a big deal to you. Moving is stressful. Being separated from a parent is traumatic. The fewer times a child is moved, the better their chance to recover and thrive.

For you and your family, meeting some of the child’s needs may be easy. Meeting other needs may put stress on your budget, your time or your other relationships.

Children in kinship care may also go through highs and lows, adding another kind of stress. Their emotions may range from happy to sad, or they may decide to test you. The most important thing to remember during these times is to have patience.

Our goal at SCDSS is to help you get support to meet the child’s needs, so that the child benefits from the stability you offer.

You can find a list of ways to get help in the resources section of this booklet or by going to our website at dss.sc.gov/kinship-care-help.

Parents, Visitation and Keeping Family Connections

SCDSS works to strengthen relationships between children and their parents and to keep siblings together as much as possible, either by placing brothers and sisters in the same home or through regular visitation.

During the child’s time in your care, you should work with parents to keep the family connected, too—unless that’s prohibited by a court order.

In most formal kinship care arrangements that involve a South Carolina Department of Social Services case manager, children have scheduled visitation with their parents and other family members. Each case is different but, as long as it is safe and appropriate, children should visit with their parents as often as possible.

You should talk with your case manager about the visitation plan and if there are other restrictions:

- Please follow the requirements outlined by your case manager for how visits should be supervised and how often visits should happen.

- In certain cases, the Family Court will make visitation plans that must be followed.

Visitation in kinship care may feel awkward because of the change in your relationship with the child and the parents. It is important to establish and maintain healthy boundaries. You must follow the visitation plan even if it feels difficult. Talk with your case manager about what's required and what problems you anticipate or encounter with visits.

Honest, open and frequent communication with the child's parent is encouraged. The children are not placed with you because their parents don't love them. Often, there is a problem or need that parents can work through with the right services, support and encouragement.

Also remember that communication is part of your responsibility as a kinship caregiver. You will need a parent's permission for any medical procedures or surgeries.

Confidentiality

When SCDSS is involved, kinship caregivers must, generally, keep information they learn about the child and the child's family private, only sharing information when it is necessary to meet the child's needs.

You can give information about the needs and behaviors of the child to doctors, counselors, teachers and other providers when the child is getting services to meet medical, educational, mental or social needs.

Your case manager can explain confidentiality and answer your questions. If you're not sure whether you are allowed to share certain information, you can contact your case manager, their supervisor or the Kinship Care Coordinator for your region.

Emergency Situations

Emergencies can happen at any time. In an emergency:

- First, call 9-1-1 or seek out emergency care if the child's health or safety is in danger.
- Next, as soon as possible, let your SCDSS case manager know what's going. Between 8:30am and 5:00pm, Monday through Friday, you can call your local county office.
- For after-hours emergencies (including weekends, holidays or during bad weather) each county has a procedure that should be followed. Please use your emergency contact.
- You must also let parents know about any serious illness, accident or injury.

You should get emergency contact information from your caseworker and write it in the back of this book.

Resources for Caregivers: Getting Help



“There is help out there. You just have to ask and somebody will point you in the right direction.”

—Sarah Walker, Kinship Foster Parent

In formal kinship care arrangements, SCDSS can help you identify the child’s needs and assist you in meeting them. When kinship care is informally arranged by a family, some of these services are still available.

Two brochures—*Kinship Care* (DSS Brochure 37144) and *Kinship Foster Care* (DSS Brochure 37145)—provide detailed information about agencies providing services. You can also get information from your case manager or

Regional Kinship Care Coordinator to help you decide which benefits to apply for.

SC Thrive (www.scthrive.org) can help kinship caregivers in many ways—including caregivers who are not involved with SCDSS and providing private, informal care.

HALOS (www.charlestonhalos.org) specializes in helping kinship caregivers in the Charleston area and is available to those providing both formal and informal care. HALOS provides support groups and one-on-one help to caregivers, as well as school supplies, summer camps, Christmas gifts, cribs and car seats.

SC 211 (www.sc211.org) can connect you to a wide range of services that you can search for by topic or by zip code to find services near you. This website includes services for adults and children and is not limited to kinship caregivers.

Legal Aid Services (www.lawhelp.org/sc) provides information and referrals to lawyers. You can submit your information and find out about legal services using their online form.

Health Care

All children need regular health and dental care. In some cases, children may need specialized care. The child's primary care doctor may suggest a mental health evaluation or that a child should see a specialist.

In these cases, the primary care doctor can help point you in the right direction and set up referrals. If counseling is recommended, you may be asked to attend the sessions.

Help paying for health care

SC Healthy Connections Medicaid offers health insurance for children ages 0-12. Contact your local S.C. Department of Health and Human Services (SCHHS) office or visit www.schhs.gov for more information.

Medicaid is available to children 18 and under who are in SCDSS custody and placed with a kinship caregiver.

If you are using the First Choice Medicaid plan, you also have access to Nurse Call Line, a toll free number you can call any time, 24 hours a day, to talk with a nurse and get advice. That number is 1-800-304-5436.

SC Thrive (www.scthrive.org) may be able to help with:

- Additional Medicaid options for young people
- Access to Welvista, which provides free prescription medication for eligible people without health insurance

Family Connection South Carolina (www.familyconnectsc.org) provides support for children with asthma and help affording care for children with special needs.

Contact your case manager, their supervisor or your regional Kinship Care Coordinator if you:

- Have a problem getting health care for the child
- Think there is a medical, dental or mental health need that is not being taken care of by the child's primary care doctor
- See any changes in the child's mood or behavior

Education

Keeping the child in their same school is our goal. It's better for children, because it cuts down on the changes to their daily routine.

If a child must change schools, you and the case manager will work together to enroll the child in the nearest school that can meet their needs.

Help affording school supplies

HALOS (www.charlestonhalos.org) provides school supplies to kinship care families in the Charleston area.

SC 211 (www.sc211.org) can help you find local sources for free school supplies.

Help working with schools to get special services

Family Connection of South Carolina (www.familyconnections.org) helps kinship caregivers in both informal and formal arrangements work with schools to get services for children who have disabilities or special needs.

You are a valuable resource for information about how the child is doing with classwork, how well they seem to be getting along with others, what

behavior problems they may have and what might help us meet their educational needs.

Contact your case manager, their supervisor or your regional Kinship Care Coordinator for help if the child needs:

- Specific school related items you can't provide
- Special services such as tutoring, counseling or accommodations for physical or learning disabilities

Child Care Assistance

If you work, you may need to find child care for young children or afterschool care for older children.

Find child care

You can search online for child care providers near you at www.abcquality.org or call 1-800-476-0199 to talk to someone who can give you one-on-one help.

Also, many public schools offer afterschool care. Talk with the school the child attends to learn more.

Help paying for child care

SC Voucher (www.scchildcare.org) helps families afford child care. To apply, you must need child care for at least 26 weeks. SC Voucher payments can cover up to 52 weeks for children in kinship care. Eligibility is based on family income and most vouchers require a co-payment. SC Voucher is available to families with an open Child Protective Services (CPS) case.

Head Start is a free program for young children that uses fun activities to develop educational and social skills. Children living with kinship caregivers may be eligible for Head Start (sc-headstart.org).

Financial Support

There are several ways you might be able to add money to your family budget so you can better afford to take care of an extra child.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

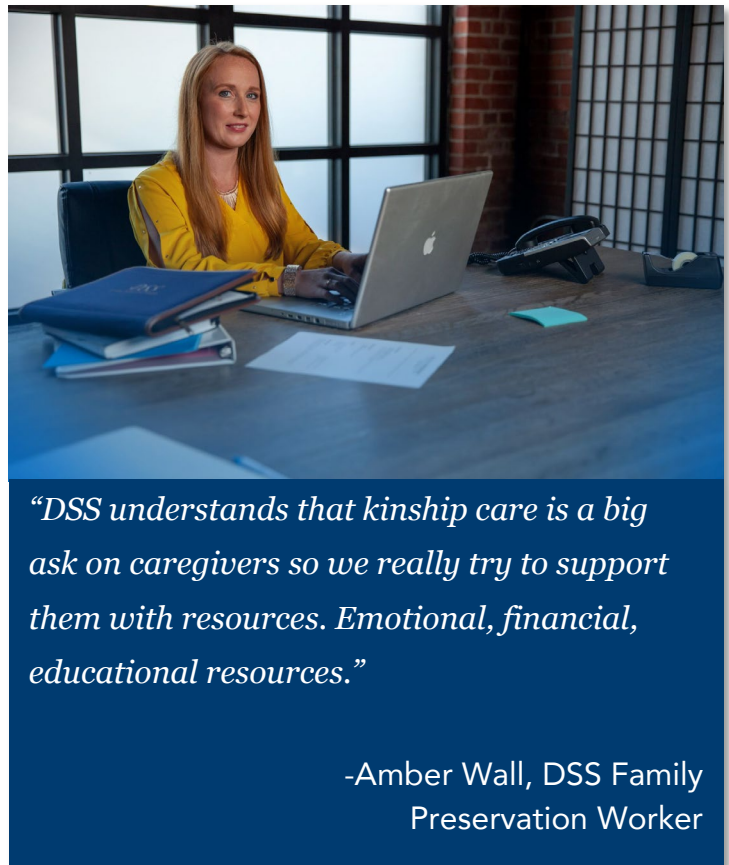
The Child-Only option for TANF can provide money to kinship caregiver households. It works like this:

The child can be considered a family of one within your home.

Since that child has little or no income, they may be eligible for TANF money.

You will have to show how the child is related to you, using verification like a birth certificate, paternity statement, school records, marriage or divorce papers, insurance records, census records or court action that includes relationship information.

You can apply for TANF Child-Only through SCDSS (dss.sc.gov/assistance-programs/tanf/). SC Thrive (www.scthrive.org) can also help you apply for TANF.



“DSS understands that kinship care is a big ask on caregivers so we really try to support them with resources. Emotional, financial, educational resources.”

-Amber Wall, DSS Family Preservation Worker

Child Support

Parents are required to provide financial support for their children, even when children are living with a kinship caregiver. You can ask SCDSS to help you get child support from the child's parents.

If you or the child you are caring for receive TANF, SCDSS will automatically file a child support application.

You can learn more about child support at the SCDSS website:
www.dss.sc.gov/child-support

Foster Care Board Payments

If you are a licensed kinship caregiver and you're providing formal kinship care with SCDSS involvement, you can receive the same monthly board payments that other foster care parents receive.

This money must be used to pay for any of the expenses that come with taking care of the child in kinship care.

Food Assistance

Sometimes, kinship caregivers need financial help to feed the new children in their household. If you are not used to having a baby in the house, you may also need advice on what to feed that child.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

You may know SNAP by its old name, food stamps. SNAP helps families in need buy food. This program is based on income and household size. The child in kinship care can count as one of your household members, even though you don't have legal custody of them.

Apply with your local SCDSS office or online at www.dss.sc.gov. SC Thrive (www.scthrive.org) can also help with SNAP applications.

WIC

WIC specifically helps women, infants and young children. You might be eligible if the relative you are caring for is pregnant, recently gave birth or is a child under 5 years old.

WIC provides healthy foods, health education and other support. It is free to those who qualify. You can learn more about WIC online at wic.fns.usda.gov or call 1-855-472-3432.

SC 211

You can search here for local food banks and other food assistance programs. Go to www.sc211.org.

For Children with Special Needs

Kinship caregivers may need extra help meeting the needs of children with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties or behavioral issues.

Family Connection South Carolina

This organization can help kinship caregivers with every aspect of caring for a child with a disability or special health care need, including affording health care and working with schools. These services are available to families that make kinship care arrangements themselves, as well as families that are working with SCDSS.

Their options also include specialty programs for asthma and autism, plus support groups and one-on-one guidance for caregivers. You can learn more at www.familyconnectionsc.org or by calling 1-800-578-8750.

If the child is involved with SCDSS, children must be referred for BabyNet services (www.scdhhs.gov/resource/babynet). BabyNet is for infants and toddlers under 3 years of age. BabyNet will assess for developmental delays and match you with early intervention services that address the identified need.

Documents Used When a Child Is Placed in Your Home

If you are providing kinship care for a child who is involved with SCDSS, you can expect to see these forms:

The Safety Plan (DSS form 3087)

This is a voluntary written agreement signed by parents, the kinship caregiver and SCDSS. It is not a court order, but it outlines what each person agrees to do to keep the child in your care safe.

A Kinship Care Agreement (DSS Form 3018)

This document explains the roles and responsibilities of the kinship caregiver, parents and SCDSS. While working on this agreement, kinship caregivers should feel free to ask questions. This is an important step toward understanding caregiver roles and responsibilities.

The Child Profile (DSS Form 3017)

This information about the child includes any special needs for education, medical treatment or counseling services, as well as the child's primary care doctor and other doctors the child sees.

A Kinship Caregiver Site Visit Form (DSS Form 30212)

The SCDSS case manager fills out this form while visiting the kinship caregiver's home to check for safety concerns.

Affidavit For Kinship Care Placement Form (DSS Form 3042)

All adults 18 and older in the kinship caregiver's household must have background checks that include criminal, sex offender registry and child protective services records. Every adult household member must complete and sign this form.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long does SC Voucher for child care last?

A: SC Voucher for child care assistance may be provided for up to 52 weeks maximum if funding is available for a family that has SCDSS involvement (open child protective services or foster care). If at the end of 52 weeks, a family may reapply if qualifying circumstances still exist.

Q: If I have legal custody of my relative, can I become their foster parent so I can get additional financial assistance similar to what foster families receive?

A: No. Foster parents provide care when the child is in SCDSS custody. If you have legal custody, you are responsible for the child until they become an adult. However, you may be able to get child support payments from both parents. You may also be eligible for SNAP benefits and Child-Only TANF benefits (dss.sc.gov/assistance-programs/). SC Thrive (www.scthrive.org) may be a good resource for you.

Q: Do I have to report my income or other personal information to a government agency to get services for the child?

A: Probably. You'll have to give basic information including name, social security number, household address and household income so that public assistance programs like SNAP or Medicaid can determine your eligibility.

Q: What if I have trouble getting in touch with my case manager?

A: If you know their phone numbers, the case manager's immediate supervisor or program coordinator for that office can be your next person to call. If not, contact the Kinship Care Coordinator in your region. Phone numbers are at the end of this guide. For emergencies, follow the information for emergency situations on page 10 of this guide.

Q: What if I decide I'm no longer able to care for the child who was placed in my home by SCDSS?

A: Contact your case manager right away so different arrangements can be made. SCDSS staff will try their best to accommodate your situation.

Q: Who can become a Licensed Foster Parent?

A: Licensed Kinship Care is an option when a child is in SCDSS custody. The kinship caregiver will have to meet additional requirements to become a licensed foster parent.

Q: What are the benefits of becoming licensed?

A: When a kinship caregiver meets licensing requirements, they receive additional supports such as training and monthly board payments that help cover the child's living expenses.

If you have additional questions about licensing, contact your case manager or your regional Kinship Care Coordinator to find out more.

Resource Directory

ABC Quality Child Care	800-476-0199	www.abcquality.org
BabyNet	866-512-8881	www.scdhhs.gov/resource/babynet
Child Support	800.768.5858	www.dss.sc.gov/child-support
Family Connection South Carolina	800-578-8750	www.familyconnections.sc.org
HALOS	843-990-9570	www.charlestonhalos.org
Head Start	864-327-4530	sc-headstart.org
Legal Aide Services	888-346-5592	www.lawhelp.org/sc
Nurse Call Line	800-304-5436	
SC 211	2-1-1	www.sc211.org/
SC Healthy Connections Medicaid	877-552-4642	www.scchoices.com
SC Thrive	800.726.8774	www.scthrive.org
SC Voucher	800-476-0199	www.scchildcare.org
SNAP	(800) 616-1309	www.dss.sc.gov
TANF	(800) 616-1309	www.dss.sc.gov
WIC	855-472-3432	wic.fns.usda.gov

Glossary

Here are terms and acronyms you may see and what they mean:

Board Payments	This is the monthly payment that a licensed foster care parent can receive to help cover the expenses of a child in their care. Payment is based on the child's age and the money can be used to cover food, clothing or any other additional expenses related to providing care for the child.
Case Manager	This is the person assigned to work with the kinship caregiver when SCDSS is involved. The case manager is responsible for the child's well-being, including making sure the child is safe and helping the kinship caregiver understand and meet the child's needs.
Confidentiality	In kinship care, this refers to the expectation that you and others involved in the child's case will respect the privacy of the child and parents. For example, you cannot freely discuss the child's problems with everyone you know. But you can provide information to the people who need it. Your case manager can help you understand what is allowed.
CPS	Stands for Child Protective Services. This is the division of the S.C. Department of Social Services that investigates and responds to reports of child abuse and neglect.

Fictive Kin	This term is used specifically to describe a kinship caregiver who is not related to the child by blood or by legal means (like marriage). Someone who is fictive kin is usually a close family friend who knows the child well and feels like family.
Public Kinship Care	This refers to kinship care when SCDSS has become involved. You may also hear this called formal kinship care. SCDSS has legal custody of the child in these cases—and a case manager will be assigned to work with the kinship care provider to protect the child’s safety and provide resources and guidance. SCDSS prefers to license kinship caregivers when a child is in foster care, because the caregiver receives monthly board payments and case management to enhance the child’s stability while living with the kinship caregiver.
Private Kinship Care	This is care worked out between family members or friends and the child’s parents—without SCDSS involvement. You will also hear it called informal kinship care. People providing private kinship care will not have a case manager but may be able to apply on their own for government assistance programs. A good resource for these caregivers is www.scthrive.org .
Kinship Care Provider	This describes a person who is taking responsibility for the care of a child. A kinship care provider may be related to the child or may be a close family friend.

<p>Licensed Foster Parent</p>	<p>This refers to a person who has completed the S.C. requirements to provide foster care. Kinship caregivers who become licensed foster parents for children in SCDSS custody receive the same benefits and services as licensed foster parents who are not kinship caregivers.</p>
<p>SC Thrive</p>	<p>This is a non-profit organization that works with anyone living in S.C. They can provide help to access many services including food, health care, mental health treatment, prescription drugs and financial support. If you are an informal (private) kinship care provider, SC Thrive is especially helpful because you won't have the services of a case manager. Information is at www.scthrive.org.</p>
<p>SC Voucher</p>	<p>This program helps low-income working parents afford child care. To apply, you should need child care for at least 26 weeks. Vouchers may not pay the full cost. Many families are expected to make a co-pay. Information is available at www.scchildcare.org.</p>
<p>SCDSS</p>	<p>Stands for S.C. Department of Social Services. This state agency's mission is to promote the safety, permanency and well-being of children and vulnerable adults, helping individuals achieve stability and strengthening families.</p>
<p>SCDHHS</p>	<p>Stands for S.C. Department of Health and Human Services. This state agency manages Medicaid in South Carolina.</p>

SNAP	Stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a federally funded program to help low-income families afford food. It was formerly known as food stamps. SNAP provides a plastic card to pay for food that works like a debit card.
TANF	Stands for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Can provide eligible families with money to pay bills, job preparation, help finding a job and other support services.
WIC	This is the simple way to refer to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. This federal program promotes and protects the health of low-income mothers, babies and children up to their 5 th birthday. WIC provides nutritious food, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding and referrals to health care.

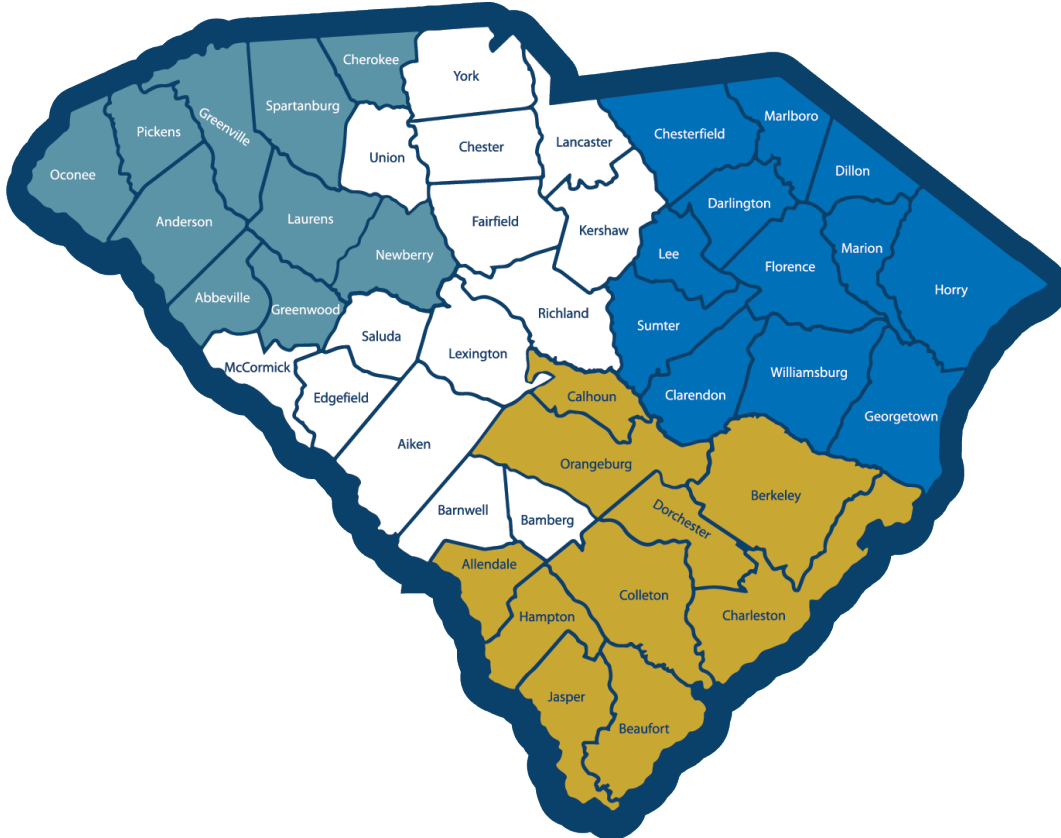
Here's the contact information for your county:

County/Office: _____

Emergency Contact Number: _____

Additional Contact Numbers: _____

SC DSS Kinship Care Coordinator Phone Numbers:



Upstate Region: 888-839-0155

Midlands Region: 888-839-0159 or 888-839-0157

Low Country Region: 888-854-4277

Pee Dee Region: 888-854-4317

