



Top 10 Tips for Relative Caregivers to Implement Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

1. Thank You!

The passage of this law is a historic achievement for children and their relative caregivers. The bi-partisan law passed unanimously in both the US House of Representatives and the Senate. Take the time to thank your Representative and Senators for passing the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. Write a short letter to your representatives thanking them for their support and explain how important this legislation is to the children you are caring for, or your organization. You can find the address for your Representative and Senators by visiting www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

2. Get Informed

Familiarize yourself with the new legislation by reading the new materials available on the organizations' websites listed below. On these websites you'll find several helpful documents including: several summaries of the new law, a document outlining the implications for relative caregivers, and a Q&A on implementation of the kinship related provisions of the new law. The websites will be regularly updated with additional resources.

- Alliance for Children and Families (www.alliance1.org)
- Children's Defense Fund (www.childrensdefense.org)
- Center for Law & Social Policy (www.clasp.org)
- Child Welfare League of America (www.cwla.org)
- Foster Club (www.fosterclub.com)
- Generations United (www.gu.org)
- National Foster Care Coalition (www.nationalfostercare.org)
- Voices for America's Children (www.voices.org)

3. Share What You Have Learned

Talk to others in a grandparent support group, youth advisory boards, your networks, and other child advocates and let them know about the changes coming. Share with others what you have learned from the materials and direct them to the websites listed above. You may also consider partnering with other advocates in your state to prepare a document detailing what the new law means for your state. For example, the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Texas created a paper entitled, New Federal Foster Care Legislation: What It Means for Texas (<http://www.cppp.org/research.php?aid=790>) that could serve as a helpful example.

4. Communicate with Child Welfare Agencies

Contact your state, tribal, county, and/or private child welfare agencies and ask them what they are doing to implement the law. Most provisions of bill went into effect on the day the bill was signed (October 7, 2008), while a few of the provisions are phased in over time. Two provisions of the new law, subsidized guardianship and extending foster care to youth beyond 18, are options for states if they wish to accept them; otherwise states are required to implement all other provisions of the new law. Your contact will serve as a reminder that the implementation of this law is a priority. You can visit your state government website to find contact information on your child welfare agency. For instance, by visiting the Illinois state government website www.IL.gov and clicking on a listing of state agencies, you can find the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, which administers foster care. Every state has a different name for the agency that administers foster care, so you may need to search for, "foster care" in the website's search box.

5. Contact Your Governor's Office

Contact your governor's office and ask them what they are doing to help implement the law. State governments will be responsible for the bulk of the work of implementation. Subsidized guardianship is only available to states if they choose to accept the option, so it is very important that they hear from caregivers and advocates. In some states the governor's office can decide to accept the option. You can visit one of the organization's websites listed above to find out what your governor can do to implement the law. The governor's office can also help encourage state agencies to move more quickly on implementation. The more governors hear from their constituents the greater the likelihood that they will make thoughtful implementation of the new law a priority. The governor's office has its own website and should have an area on the website for you to send in a comment, or concern. Perform an internet search for the, "Office of Governor (your state)" to find the website.

6. Contact Your State Legislators

Contact your state representatives and ask them to help with implementation. Some states will need to pass additional state laws to fully implement provisions of the Act. If additional state legislation is required it also may be helpful to contact the leaders in the state legislatures, including the chair of the committee that has jurisdiction over child welfare. You can also share with state legislators several documents including *New Help for Children by Grandparents and Other Relatives: Questions and Answers About the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*. Check the organizations listed in question two to find the Q&A and other helpful documents as they become available. Additionally, check www.grandfamilies.org for information on current relevant legislation in your state and visit the National Conference of State Legislatures' website (<http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>) for a link to your state legislature's website.

7. Check Back for More Helpful Materials

Regularly check the websites in question two for updates on legislation and other action steps. Organizations will regularly include updated information about implementation. The Q&A contains a timeline that details which parts of the law go into effect at what times. Many helpful resources are in the process of being developed, so please stay tuned to the websites listed in question two.

8. Prepare to Apply for a Family Connection Grant

Begin preparing with groups in your state to pursue one of the Family Connection Grants. A Request for Proposal (RFP) is tentatively scheduled to be released by Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sometime in early 2009. Unfortunately, there is no set date when the RFP might become available and there may be a short window to apply. You can sign up to receive email alerts from the HHS on their Grants Forecast Page (<https://extranet.acf.hhs.gov/hhsgrantsforecast/>) by searching for, "[Family Connection Discretionary Grants](#)."

9. Keep up the Momentum to Create Positive Policy Changes for Grandfamilies

This legislation is only the beginning of the effort to provide needed support for relative caregivers. It's important for the media, elected officials and others to realize there is still significant work left to be done. By following up with child welfare agencies, the governor's office, and the state legislature you will keep them engaged on issues related to grandfamilies. They need to hear how the implementation is going so they can begin to push for additional reforms. Additionally, reach out to your local paper, television or radio station to talk about why implementation will help children in your state.

10. Continue to Provide the Much Needed Support to Children

Give yourself a well-earned pat on the back for the direct service and advocacy that you provide for children and their caregivers. Your work to provide children with a strong permanent family, as either a relative caregiver or child welfare advocate, is the greatest gift we can give our country.