

Maine Kinship Family Resource Guide

For more information, or to discuss issues related to your situation contact:

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program

Phone: 207-827-2331
E-mail: info@affm.net



**Adoptive & Foster
Families of Maine, Inc.
& The Kinship Program**

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THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF RAISING GRANDCHILDREN, NIECES, NEPHEWS, OR OTHER RELATIVES



Raising children can be a wonderful, satisfying and enjoyable experience. Children can help us see the world in a different light and bring an easy smile to our hearts. However, raising children is not an easy experience under any circumstances. Usually when a child comes to live with a relative, it is because there has been some hardship within the family. Everyone involved will feel the stress of the immediate changes and on-going demands.

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Some things you should know:

- You are not alone. In Maine, over 16,500 children live with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, or another relative and not their parents.
- There have always been relatives helping raise children.
- There are others in your community who share many of your experiences and feelings.

Relative caregivers sometimes express the following:

- I'm relieved that the child is safe and in a healthy place.
- I wonder where I might have gone wrong with my child.
- I am so glad to be with this child. He's the light of my life!
- I've never had to ask for help before and now I have to ask for help.
- I'm proud that we have pulled together for this child.
- I am so angry at my brother for not loving his daughter enough, now I have to step in and raise her.
- It's all worthwhile when this child says, "I love you".
- My old friends aren't interested in taking a baby along!

- I miss getting out to play golf or read a book or take a bath.
- I know I am making things better.
- I am worried that the mother might just come and take the children.
- I know I'm doing what needs to be done and that's good.
- I am so tired.

Some things you can do:

- Call or e-mail Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program to get information or find out about meeting other grandparents, aunts, and uncles in your part of the state.
 - You can speak with a Kinship Specialist at AFFM by calling 207-827-2331.
 - You can email AFFM at info@affm.net
- Gather your support people. This may be an organized group or a best friend. Talking does help.
- Gather the family. You may be taking on the most responsibility, but others may be willing to take the child to a movie or to their home for the weekend. Respite can be a positive experience for both the child and caregiver.
- If you have a two parent family, be sure you are in agreement and that both of you take care of the child. Avoid letting the child make one of you the “good guy” and one the “bad guy”.
- There will be times your child will suddenly act worse and it is not because you did something wrong. Stay calm, be understanding and stick to the rules. Your child needs you to be strong and stable.
- Know your limits. You cannot make everything right for this child. You can be there to love the child.
- Break the stress. You know what works for you, but you may need to be creative to find a way to do it. Here are some ideas:
 - Try taking a 20 minute walk a few times a week, without the child. You will find this time alone allows you to refocus your attention on your needs.
 - Find an activity for the child out of the house. Check your town's recreation program or local YMCA for some options.
 - While the child is at their practice or meetings, do something just for you.
 - Take the child somewhere that is fun for the child and restful for you, like the library or a place outdoors.
 - Many libraries offer story times and activities for a variety of ages.

- Make a house quiet time, when everyone does activities that do not bother anyone else. Electronics could still be an option (with headphones).

THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN FROM DISRUPTED FAMILIES

Children who come from disrupted families may demonstrate only the usual challenges of growing up. More often, the children who come to live with relatives carry emotional wounds and struggles related to their parents' problems. Children who have lost family are often angry and afraid. Children who did not receive proper care struggle to understand other people's expectations. Children whose mothers took drugs or alcohol during pregnancy can experience limitations. Children who have led very unstable lives are often slow to trust that people will care for them. Children often need to test out the "new parents". The child may wonder, "will they love me no matter what I do? Do they still love my mother and father?"

To overcome challenges, children need loving and consistent care. Most children need more help than any one person can give. Some children need professional help (see the counseling section on page 9). It is important to help the child understand that the family disruption is not the child's fault. The child's parents are not able to parent because of the parents' adult problems. Most children who are separated from their parents blame themselves for the separation. They often worry about their parents. You can help by:

- Talking with the child to help him/her understand the parents' struggles
- Setting limits for the parents to ensure the child's safety and reduce family stress
- Supporting positive contact with the parents
- Making sure the child hears you speak kindly of the parents

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program (AFFM) provides information, resources and educational materials to help families enhance their ability to care for their youth.

We provide groups so relatives can share their experiences and solutions to challenging situations as well as training programs for relatives and an extensive library.

Call AFFM to talk to one of our specialists, 207-827-2331.

HEALTH



YOUR HEALTH

One of the challenges for a caregiver is to maintain your own health while you take care of others. Not only do you need to maintain necessary medical appointments, but you also need to eat right, get enough sleep, exercise and find time to relax. It is difficult to make time for these things if you have a two-year-old in the house or if you are working full time and trying to get to the kids' evening basketball game. Remember, your family is depending on you to take care of yourself so you can continue to take care of them. As the motivational speaker, Eleanor Brown said, "Self-care is not selfish. You cannot serve from an empty vessel."

Look after your mental health as well. You and the child have experienced enormous change. Sometimes it is hard to deal with all that is expected of you. You may need a break from the whole family. Taking time to reestablish boundaries can be a healthy healing process.

Counseling may be very helpful. Some people think counseling suggests a weakness. Actually, it is a strength to recognize the limits of what you know how to do. You are facing a new and difficult situation. A counselor may help you to find the best way to deal with your new challenges. It may take time to find the right counselor. Ask lots of questions and choose someone with whom you feel comfortable. AFFM has volunteer clinicians available to help brainstorm and access mental health providers.

What if I need time off from work?

If you work, it may be a challenge to get time off to attend to all the family responsibilities. Find out your company's policies regarding use of sick days, vacation time, and personal days. If you run out of paid leave, unpaid leave may be an option. Talk to your employer and try to problem-solve together.

Maine's Family Medical Leave law requires employers with 15 or more employees to allow up to 10 weeks unpaid leave. This is available when the employee has a child placed in connection with an adoption by the employee. The federal Family and Medical Leave Act requires employers with 50+ employees to allow up to 12 weeks unpaid leave when the employee begins parenting a foster or adopted child. Both the state and federal laws allow time off to care for a seriously ill member of the employee's immediate family, which is defined as a child, parent, or spouse. You can read more about the Maine Family Care Act at Maine.gov or by clicking on this URL or copying it into your search browser <https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/26/title26sec636.html>

THE CHILD'S HEALTH

How do I get medical care?

When a child comes to live with you, take him or her to the doctor as soon as possible. You will want to have the doctor look for possible past injuries to the child or medical conditions. You will also want to make sure the child is up-to-date on immunizations.

Find out where the child got medical care in the past. It may be very helpful if you can take the child to the same provider. If not, ask the new doctor's office to request the medical records from the past provider(s).

In order to provide medical care, the medical provider may require documents to prove you are the child's legal guardian or that you have Power of Attorney. If this is not the case, you will need a letter from the legal guardian or parent giving you permission to sign for medical care. The letter must state the time frame for this permission. For example, it might give permission for Mary or Tom Smith to consent to Jane Brown's medical care from January 2015 to July 2015. If the child is in state custody, talk to the child's caseworker about getting routine medical care. If the kinship placement was made through DHHS, you can request this letter from your caseworker.

How do I know if the child is growing in an age appropriate manner?

Each child grows in his or her own unique way. It is important to keep an eye on your child's development. There are ways you can encourage healthy development in your child. If your child is struggling in some areas it may be that your child has special needs. Early intervention can make a big

difference. It may be a short-term problem or a long-term problem as the child adjusts to the changes in his or her life.

Your child's pediatrician is the best place to start if you have concerns. They can refer families to a specialist, establish testing, or inquire about additional supports. In addition to the child's pediatrician there are many great resources to learn about child development. Check out your local library, websites, and pamphlets at social service agencies. Contact the Child Development Services Program in your area, <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/cds>.

The UMaine Cooperative Extension: Parenting & Family Caregiving has extensive resources and services.

- You can call 1-800-287-0274
- Visit their website at <https://extension.umaine.edu/parenting>.

Does the child need counseling?

Like you, the child has experienced enormous change and will probably be struggling. Here are some signs that additional support may be needed:

- Sudden mood changes
- Feeling unhappy for long periods of time
- Often losing his or her temper over small things
- Physical pain with no physical cause
- Dropping grades or poor work performance
- Often angry
- Difficulty getting along with peers
- Very easily distracted

Talk to your pediatrician as a first step to considering counseling. You need to find a counselor who will work with you as well as the child. Try to find someone with whom you are both comfortable. Your child's pediatrician can offer a list of counselors best suited for your child's needs.

Is my child eligible for in-home behavior services?

Sometimes families need a mental health specialist to come to the home and help them learn to manage a child with behavioral challenges. To qualify for this assistance a child needs to have a mental health diagnosis or a medical diagnosis.

If you feel your child would benefit from having in-home assistance, you will need to call 207-624-7900 for the Maine State Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services in the region where you live.

Referral forms and information on how to complete them is available online at www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cbhs/family/forms.html.

How do I pay for the child's health care?

Medical benefits may be the single most important benefit you can get for a child who is living with you. The child may be covered by a parent's insurance or by your insurance. Most children living with relatives are eligible for MaineCare.

MaineCare provides comprehensive coverage to low-income and disabled people. As of January 1, 2014, Maine now uses a new national IRS-based method for determining income eligibility called MAGI (modified adjusted gross income) for children, parents or caretakers, pregnant women and newly eligible. A monthly gross income chart for eligibility is available at <https://maineequaljustice.org/policy/health-care/>. Your child may be eligible for MaineCare even if you are not. If you are not the child's parent, you can choose to apply for MaineCare for the child only. DHHS may ask about your income and assets, but if you're not applying for yourself, your assets and income will not be counted, and don't need to be shared with DHHS.

SCHIP is low-cost MaineCare for some children who are a little over the income guidelines for free MaineCare. They are able to get MaineCare by paying a small monthly premium. If you are the child's parent and your child has severe health conditions, your child may be eligible for MaineCare services under the Katie Beckett option. This provides MaineCare coverage to children who are not in a medical facility but need the level of care of a facility. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1603>

In addition to medical services, MaineCare may provide for some non-medical therapeutic services. For example, MaineCare pays for dental work, other therapies, counseling, therapeutic day care or therapeutic horseback riding. If you think your child needs other kinds of therapeutic services, talk to your child's doctor or counselor.

MaineCare will pay relative caregivers to transport their children to and from medical appointments. Reimbursement is available through local transportation providers. A transportation provider in your area may also be able to provide transportation for your child to his/her medical appointments. For the contact information for your local transportation provider, visit www.maine.gov/dhhs/oms/nemt/nemt_index.html

How do I apply for MaineCare?

Call 1-877-543-7669 or go to the nearest Department of Health and Human Services office. You may need:

- Social Security Number
- Proof of relationship to child (for example, a birth certificate)
- Proof of income (if applying for an adult)
- Proof of citizenship of person(s) to be covered by MaineCare (birth certificate, passport, certificate of citizenship or military record).*
- Proof of identity of person(s) to be covered by MaineCare (driver's license; tribal document; school ID with photo; military card; or one of the following for children 15 and younger: school records; daycare records; or an affidavit form completed by the parent or legal guardian).*

*There are also other ways to prove citizenship or identity and there is assistance obtaining birth certificates. For help, call the Office of Vital Records at 1-888-664-9491. This hotline is only for new MaineCare applications or renewals.

CHILD PROTECTION AND FOSTER CARE



Everyone is responsible to see that children are not abused, neglected or abandoned. Are you worried that a child might be harmed? Are you worried about a child who is in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)? Many relatives find they can work closely with the DHHS to provide care and safety for a child. If you can help, it is important that you get actively involved as early as possible. Let people involved with the child know that you are there to help.

What do I do if I think the child has been abused or neglected by someone in the family?

If you cannot keep the child safe, contact the Department of Health and Human Services at the statewide child abuse report number: 1-800-452-1999, or ask for a child protective worker at one of the offices listed on page 13. Talk with the child protective worker about developing a safe situation for the child. You can also visit their website for more information: www.maine.gov/dhhs.

If you think you can intervene and keep the child safe, share your concerns with the child's parents. Consider ways that you can help. You may be able to care for the child while the parents get a break or resolve some problems. You may be able to assist the parents in accessing other resources. Sometimes a family is able to protect a child within the family.

If you do call the DHHS and your call meets the criteria for response, the DHHS will investigate. Usually, the DHHS does not take the child out of the family. If the investigation results in concerns that the child is in danger, the Courts may award custody of the child to DHHS to ensure safety.

What can I do if I am worried that the DHHS may take the child into custody and I want to care for the child?

You can work with the child's parents to develop a way to keep the child safe from harm. You may talk with the child's parents about giving you guardianship of the child. If the parents are willing, have them contact the DHHS to see if this will meet the safety concerns (see page 14). You can have specific safety agreements written into the guardianship agreement.

You can request that the DHHS place the child with you should the child go into the DHHS custody. Call the caseworker and let him or her know you are available. Find out as much as you can from the caseworker about what will need to be done to keep the child safe. The caseworker will want assurance that you can keep the child safe and that you will work within the DHHS plans for the child. DHHS is required to consider relatives for placement and recognizes the importance of keeping children with family.

Can I become the child's foster parent?

Yes, if you and your home meet the qualifications and the DHHS staff decide it is in the child's best interest to be placed with you. If you are the foster parent, the DHHS is still the legal guardian. This means the DHHS will make major decisions for the child. The DHHS continues the role of monitoring parental contact, and helps the child and family get other services as well. These services may include counseling, respite, clothing and diaper allowance, camp, and other therapeutic services. The child's situation will be reviewed in court.

Can DHHS place children in your home if you do not have a foster care license?

Yes, if DHHS determines that you and your home meet DHHS safety standards and that it is in the child's best interest to be placed with you. DHHS may require a safety plan for the child. They will check your home prior to placing the child with you.

Can DHHS provide a reimbursement to an unlicensed home?

Yes, DHHS can provide a minimal reimbursement for the child called a board rate. A clothing and/or diaper allowance for the child can also be provided. Contact the child's DHHS caseworker for more information.

Should I try to get a foster home license?

A foster home license will make you eligible for an increased daily board rate and certify that you meet health and safety regulations. The application process involves a home study (see page 16) and may require home improvements. If the child is not able to return to the parents and you want

to adopt or become a permanent guardian for the child, a foster home license may help the process.

Who else can help me find my way through the DHHS system?

If you want to become a licensed foster parent or adopt a child through DHHS, there are two good resources. Contact DHHS directly (see phone directory on page 13) or contact Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program. They will tell you what to expect and how the process works. You can reach them at (207) 827-2331, 1-800-833-9786 or at www.affm.net.

If the child is already in custody of the state, how do I get to see the child?

Call your local DHHS office and ask for Child and Family Services. Ask to speak to the child's caseworker. It may be that the child's caseworker is with a different office, but the local office should be able to give you that information. Ask the caseworker for the opportunity to see the child.

What if the child is in state custody and I want custody instead?

Custody decisions are made by the court. At the court proceeding, there are parties to the child's case. These parties have legal standing regarding decisions for the child. Typically, the parties to a case include the parents (represented by their lawyers), the DHHS (represented by an Assistant Attorney General) and the guardian-ad-litem whose job is to represent the child's best interest.

If you want first-hand information on what is taking place in court or if you want your opinion to be heard in court, you may want to petition (ask) the court for status. There are three types of court status.

1. An interested person may only attend court proceedings.
2. A participant has the right to attend court and be heard in court.
3. An intervenor has the rights of a party to the case including the rights to present evidence and witnesses, cross-examine witnesses and have access to records.

You petition for status by petitioning the judge. The petition is a letter that must contain specific information about the case. It is possible to petition for status without a lawyer. Most people who want intervenor status will want to be represented by an attorney.

Where can I get more information about the child protective and court system?

Contact Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program (AFFM) and/or talk to the child's caseworker.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Phone Directory:

DHHS Location	Contact Number
Augusta	1-800-452-1926 or 624-8000
Bangor	1-800-432-7825 or 561-4100
Biddeford	1-800-322-1919 or 286-2400
Caribou	1-800-432-7366 or 493-4000
Ellsworth	1-800-432-7823 or 664-1400
Farmington	1-800-442-6382 or 778-8400
Fort Kent	1-800-432-7340 or 834-1000
Houlton	1-800-432-7338 or 532-5000
Lewiston	1-800-482-7517 or 795-4300
Machias	1-800-432-7846 or 255-2000
Portland	1-800-482-7520 or 822-2000
Rockland	1-800-432-7802 or 596-4217
Sanford	1-800-482-0790 or 490-5400
Skowhegan	1-800-452-4602 or 474-4800

LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS



This is a brief summary of your options for a legal relationship with the child. For more detailed information, see the Adoptive and foster Families of Maine Legal Guide For Maine Grandfamilies. This legal guide includes information on formal and informal placements, court processes, educational issues and other legal resources. If you would like a copy of the legal guide, please call us at 1-800-833-9786 or visit our website at www.affm.net.

If you are taking care of your relative's child, what rights do you have? What if the parent of the child decides that he or she wants to take the child back? While you are taking care of the child, what decisions can you make about schooling or about medical care? Your rights to have the child and your rights to make decisions for the child depend on the legal relationship that you establish.

The basic starting point under Maine law is that parents are the natural guardians of their minor children. This means that, unless there is a change in the legal relationship, only parents can get medical and educational services for the child and only parents decide where the child can live. This section describes possible changes in the legal relationship.

POWER OF ATTORNEY

Power of Attorney is a short-term arrangement you can do without going to court. Maine law allows a parent to give you Power of Attorney for a child. Power of Attorney will give you practically all of the power regarding care and custody of the child. Power of Attorney alone may not allow you to register the child in a school district different from where the parent resides. The Power of Attorney is a written statement from the parents' that lets you act as the parent for things such as medical care. Sample forms are available online at www.ptla.org. Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program can also help you obtain the sample forms or mail you a

copy if you do not have access to the internet. They also Power of Attorney only lasts six months, though, so if you want it to last longer, the parent will need to sign a new statement at the end of that time. The Power of Attorney needs to be signed before a notary public or attorney. Power of Attorney statements can be revoked at any time by the parent(s), regardless of the amount of time left in a previously signed statement.

GUARDIANSHIP

Guardianship can give your relationship with your child more stability. Guardianship gives you basically all of the legal rights and responsibilities of a parent of a minor child. To get guardianship, you petition (ask) the Probate Court of the county in Maine where the child currently lives. Typically, the Probate Court judge grants guardianship with the consent of the parents. If the parents do not consent to guardianship, the judge can still grant guardianship if the judge finds that the situation meets specific standards and it is in the child's best interest to do so. In order to change guardianship back to the parents, the parents would need to petition the Probate Court again.

- To learn more about guardianship, please visit:
https://www.courts.maine.gov/maine_courts/family/adoption-guardianship.html

Here are some other issues to consider when petitioning for guardianship:

- The Probate Court has the flexibility to grant a limited guardianship. This allows you to write into the guardianship specific rules so that, for example, the child lives with you, but the parent keeps the right to make decisions about schooling, or keeps visitation rights.
- You may want the court to order child support payments at the same time that guardianship is granted.
- If you have been caring for the child as a parent before going to court, you may be eligible for de facto guardianship which may assist you in a successful petition even if a parent is not in agreement with the guardianship.
- You may wish to have more than one person appointed guardian so that if anything happens to you that you are not able to parent the child, someone else already has the legal authority to do so. This is called co-guardianship.
- Children fourteen years old and older are asked to sign their agreement with the guardianship.

You can also become a guardian if you were appointed in the parent's will.

If you have guardianship, you will need to provide the court with an annual update regarding the child.

What is permanency guardianship?

Permanency guardianship may be an alternative to adoption for children in DHHS custody. This alternative can provide much needed permanency when a caregiver meets all of the requirements, and adoption is not the best option. Permanency guardianship may provide the child with assistance including MaineCare, a monthly subsidy, college tuition assistance, and/or financial assistance for one-time permanency guardianship expenses. If you want more information about permanency guardianship, contact the child's DHHS caseworker and ask for the *Permanency Guardianship Option: A Handbook for Relatives and Others Considering Permanency Guardianship for a Child in Foster Care.*

ADOPTION

Adoption is a permanent decision whereby you become the child's legal parent with all the same rights and responsibilities as any parent.

When can I adopt?

There is a step before adoption when the court terminates the birth parents' rights. The parents may voluntarily give up their rights in court, or the judge may terminate parental rights. Once the court has terminated the parents' rights, you may petition for adoption.

What is a home study?

The adoption will probably require a home study. This means a caseworker will conduct background checks and extensively interview you, other family members, and references that you provide to the caseworker. The caseworker will tour your home. After the caseworker has gathered all the information, she or he will recommend whether the adoption is appropriate for the child.

I want to adopt, but I am worried that I cannot afford it.

If the child is in DHHS custody at the time of the adoption, the child may be eligible for adoption assistance. Adoption assistance may include medical health insurance for the child, a monthly subsidy, and/or financial assistance for adoption expenses. The amount of monthly subsidy depends on the special needs of the child. To find out more, call the child's caseworker.

If the child is not in DHHS custody at the time of the adoption, then there will be expenses related to the termination of parental rights and the adoption. Eligibility for other resources may also change when the child is

adopted. Feel free to call Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program for more information.

For general information about adoption, call Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program at 1-800-833-9786.

OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

You may gain some stability in the context of a divorce, a protection from abuse order, or other court case in which the District or Superior Court decides who gets custody of a child. If the court decides that placing the child with either parent will put the child in jeopardy, the court can award custody to another person.

There is also a special part of Maine law that allows grandparents to petition the District or Superior Court where the child lives for visitation rights. If the grandparents have established a relationship with the child (or have tried to establish one), or if one of the child's parents has died, the court can grant visitation rights to grandparents if that is in the best interest of the child.

Taking care of children may change your interest in or eligibility for government assistance. You can visit the Pine Tree Legal Assistance website, www.ptla.org, for more information about eligibility. Click on Legal Help from the menu at the top of the page. You will also find substantial information about legal issues on www.helpmelaw.org.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

You can petition the court or seek Power of Attorney without a lawyer, but the assistance of a lawyer could be a great help. A lawyer should help you understand the range of possible agreements under guardianship or Power of Attorney. He or she can tell you the possible results of taking legal action or not taking action. If you are going to court, the attorney can guide you through the court system and tell you what the judge will be looking for in order to make a decision in your case.

There is legal assistance for some low-income children and adults. The Kinship Program can recommend lawyers who may work on a sliding scale or services at a reduced rate. Low-income caregivers seeking to get guardianship or maintain guardianship may also request the Probate court appoint an attorney and the court will decide if this is an option.

If you are looking for a lawyer, be sure to ask the following questions:

- Has the attorney had experience in these types of cases?

- What is the hourly rate?
- Is a retainer required?
- What are the things you can do on your own to reduce the fee?

Through the Maine Bar Association, www.mainebar.org, or 1-800-860-1460, you can obtain a low-cost referral and initial half-hour appointment. Even if approached directly, many lawyers offer a free or low-cost initial consultation.

KIDS LEGAL is a statewide project within Pine Tree Legal Assistance. KIDS LEGAL specializes in providing legal services addressing the needs of low-income Maine children. With offices in Portland and Bangor, they provide direct representation, consultations, and group trainings in areas such as education, housing, public benefits and family law matters. Contact your local KIDS LEGAL or Pine Tree Legal office directly by phone or at www.kidslegal.org.

- Aroostook County: 207-764-4349
- Penobscot, Piscataquis, Waldo Counties: 207-942-8241
- Kennebec, Somerset, Knox, Lincoln Counties: 207-622-4731
- Cumberland, York and Sagadahoc Counties: 207-774-8211
- Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford Counties: 207-784-1558
- Washington and Hancock Counties: 207-255-8656

CHILDCARE



Sometimes childcare is needed so you can work; other times it is needed so you can get time for yourself or others.

What types of childcare are available?

People choose the type of childcare based on availability, need, and cost. Here is a list of possibilities:

- An adult hired to care for the child in your home.
- Daycare center (usually an all-day or after school program)
- Family daycare (an individual takes care of the child in her/his home)
- Respite (funded by an agency for children with special needs)
- Extracurricular or recreational activities
- Preschool
- Baby-sitting co-op (a group of people who take turns helping each other out)
- Grandmother's helper (a younger person who plays with the child while you do other things)
- Family (family members to take the child occasionally or regularly)
- Summer day camp or overnight camp

Visit <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/> for a list of additional types of resources and links for parents.

How do I choose the right childcare provider?

Make a list of questions to help you remember to get all the information you need. Here are some suggestions of things to consider:

- Staff experience and ratio of staff to children
- Warm, friendly, clean and safe environment
- Good discipline style

- Good supplies (including age-appropriate toys)
- Opportunity for active play and quiet play
- Staff enjoy the children and talk to them in an understanding way
- Comfort talking to the person or people who will care for the child
- Ask the person or program for references and check them out

CAMP

The Maine Youth Camping Foundation puts out a booklet of Maine summer camps. Contact them at 518-9557 or www.mainecamps.org. They also have information on camps accepting special needs children. The YMCA, YWCA, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H Club, Maine Conservation Corps, colleges, town recreation departments and many church and private organizations run summer camps. Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program assists families in finding camps that offer scholarships and financial assistance. (See respite information on page 17)

CHILDCARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM

Are there funds to help me pay for daycare?

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) runs a voucher program to help working parents pay for the childcare they need to work outside the home. This program also helps parents who are going to school, job training, seeking employment, or going to a substance abuse treatment program. You use the voucher to pay the daycare provider you choose. To use the voucher, the provider must meet certain state standards. The program serves children between 6 weeks and 12 years old. Children who are placed in your home through DHHS custody, may be eligible for free child care while you work or attend school. Please ask your caseworker if this is an option in your case.

Are there income limits?

Yes. Contact the Childcare Subsidy Program for income guidelines at 1-877-680-5866 or 207-624-7999. Be sure to let them know you are a relative caregiver and inform them if you have guardianship or not, and if the child receives public benefits (eg. Child Only TANF, SSI, MaineCare, etc.)

How do I find out if I am eligible?

Contact the Childcare Subsidy Program at 1-877-680-5866 or 624-7999 or visit their website at www.state.me.us/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/step.htm. In the lower section of the page, you will see applications to download under, “how do I apply?”

RESPIRE



What is Respite?

Respite is a term for childcare designed to give you a break from the child. If you are looking at summer camps as respite, contact Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program (AFFM) at 1-800-833-9786 in the early spring about camp scholarships.

RESPIRE FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

Am I eligible for Respite for Special Needs Children?

To be eligible for respite the child(ren) must be no older than 17 and have a documented emotional or behavioral diagnosis or two or more developmental delays. The child's therapist or doctor will need to provide an assessment or evaluation signed and dated within the past year or an older assessment or evaluation with an update letter providing current diagnoses that are signed and dated within the past year. For an application to request respite services go to www.namimaine.org or call 207-622-5767.

RESPIRE CARE PROVIDERS

NAMI Maine Family Respite Program

This program is funded by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and is designed to give planned breaks to families of children with special needs. Upon completion of the application process, your family may be allotted up to 24 hours per month for planned respite service, as long as funding remains available.

To be approved for respite services, child(ren) must be in the custody of and live in the same

household as the adult applicant. This program is not open to children in foster care. If you are in the process of adopting a child, the adoption needs to be finalized prior to applying for respite services.

For an application to request respite services go to www.namimaine.org or call 207-622-5757.

Safe Families for Children

Safe Families for Children provides respite services to families who have guardianship through the Probate Court. If there is no legal relationship (guardianship), the parents can sign the necessary forms to receive respite services for the person requesting them.

To request respite services through Safe Families for Children:

- Call 207-713-0523
- Email: maine@safefamilies.net

RESPITE FOR OLDER RELATIVES

Am I eligible for Respite for Older Caregivers?

If you are raising a child of a relative and you are 55 years old or over, the statewide agencies on aging may be able to assist you with some childcare/respite services. It is also available to caregivers of any age who are caring for a relative who is over 60 years old. The program is called the Family Caregiver Program. In addition to respite, it offers help getting other kinds of services.

Below are the agencies on aging that provide these services statewide:

- **Aroostook Area Agency on Aging**
 - For more information, please visit: <https://aroostookaging.org/> or call 1-800-439-1789 or 764-3396.
- **Eastern Agency on Aging** serves families in Penobscot, Piscataquis, Hancock and Washington Counties.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://www.eaaa.org/> or call 1-800-432-7812 or 941-2865.
- **Seniors Plus** serves families in Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://www.seniorsplus.org/> or call 1-800-427-1241 or 795-4010.
- **Spectrum Generations** serves families in the Central Maine Area.

- For more information, please visit:
<https://www.spectrumgenerations.org/> or call 1-800-639-1553 or 622-9212.
- **Southern Maine Agency on Aging** serves families in Cumberland and York Counties.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://www.smaaa.org/> or call 1-800-427-7411 or 396-6500.

EDUCATION



What do I need in order to register a child in a new school system?

- Birth Certificate
- Proof of legal guardianship
- Immunization record
- Past school records

The school will probably help you by requesting the past records from the child's last school. The school records may include the immunization records. You may also request immunization records from the child's parent or doctor's office.

What if I do not have legal guardianship?

The general rule is that a child attends school in the same school district where the parent or legal guardian lives. Exceptions may be made by the superintendent of schools if the superintendent determines it is in the child's best interest because:

- A. It is undesirable and impractical to reside with the child's parent or there are other extenuating circumstances and
- B. The child is living in the school district for reasons other than educational purposes.

For more information contact Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program at 207-827-2331 or toll free at 1-800-833-9786.

How does it work when the child is in DHHS custody and is living with me?

Children in DHHS custody are considered residents of the school district in which they are placed by DHHS. This means that the children can enroll in the school district where they reside with a foster family, an adult relative or any other adult or treatment center where DHHS placed them. DHHS may

need to be involved with enrolling the child in school. Contact your child's school and your caseworker if there are questions related to enrollment.

Each year DHHS signs a blanket form that authorizes all permission slips for the school year. The caregiver or foster parent then signs each individual slip for the specific activities.

DHHS has the right to be notified if the student is going to be suspended or expelled. DHHS will then notify the foster parent or caregiver. If the child is a special education student, then the surrogate parent has the right to be notified of any disciplinary issues.

DHHS has full access to educational records, however it does not have any decision-making authority as a parent would.

Should I tell the teacher about the child's situation?

Yes. Partner with the teacher to help the child's transition to be as smooth as possible. Help the teacher to be sensitive to the child's situation. Let the teacher know that you want to be kept informed of the child's progress.

What if I think my child needs special education services because he is struggling at school?

You can request an Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) meeting. This means you will meet with school staff to discuss how to determine whether your child needs special services. If your child had special education services at a previous school, the I.E.P. will set up services at the new school.

What is Section 504 and does my child qualify?

The purpose of Section 504 is to protect children with disabilities from discrimination in schools. To be eligible for Section 504, your child must be a "qualified disabled person". This means he or she must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

Where can I get more information and help regarding special education and Section 504?

Contact Maine Parent Federation at 1-800-870-7746 or visit their website at www.mpf.org

To learn more about IEPs and 504s, you may reach out to the Maine Department of Education Special Education Office at 624-6600 or visit their website at www.state.me.us/education/speced/index.htm.

What if I need legal assistance for special education, residency, or truancy?

There are a few options. You can contact Kids Legal or the Maine Bar Association (see page 17). If it is related to a disability, you may contact the Disability Rights Center at 1-800-452-1948 or go to www.drcme.org.

What if my child is having behavior problems at school?

Behavioral problems may be temporary due to adjustment, long term due to a serious problem, or just a normal part of the child's development. If the behavior problem is long term, the child may need special education services. The school is responsible to help your child to learn even though the child's behavior is a challenge. Talk with the teacher and school guidance counselor to develop a plan to help the child manage better.

What if my child has homework and I am not able to help him?

This is not unusual. School has changed a lot and is different than when you went to school. Talk to the teacher. The school may have a homework program or may offer other suggestions about how you can help the child.

The American Library Association at www.ala.org/alsc recommends hundreds of educational websites. Check out the list of additional educational resources found on page 37.

OBTAINING A BIRTH CERTIFICATE OR SOCIAL SECURITY CARD



When you request services for your child or open a bank account, someone may ask you for a copy of the child's birth certificate or social security number.

Can anyone request a copy of the birth certificate?

Generally, if a child's birth parents were married to each other, the birth certificate is available to anyone with a direct and legitimate interest. In Maine, if the parents of the child were not married to each other, the birth certificate is not public information. Only the child's legal guardian or people whose names are listed on the certificate (such as a parent or child) may obtain a copy of a birth certificate.

How do I get a copy of the birth certificate?

You can request a birth certificate from the town or the state where the child was born. To order from the State of Maine, contact the Maine Vital Records Office:

- Cost of certified copy: \$15.00; and \$6.00 for each additional copy of the same record.
- By Phone: (207) 287-1919
- In person: Vital Records Office
- Web:
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/vital-records/index.shtml>

If you need a birth certificate for proof of citizenship or MaineCare, call 1-800-701-1887 for more information.

To purchase a birth certificate by using a credit card you may call: Vital Check Network at 1-877-523-2659. There is an additional fee when using a credit card.

To request a birth certificate from another state other than Maine, check that state's vital records website.

How do I get the child's social security number?

All children should have a social security number. To get a first-time social security card or to replace a lost one, you will need a birth certificate. There are three ways you can apply for the card:

- Go to the website www.ssa.gov, and go to form SS-5
- Call 1-800-772-1213
- Go to the nearest Social Security Administration Office.

To get a replacement social security card

Citizenship

If you have not already established the child's U.S. citizenship, proof of U.S. citizenship is required. Only certain documents are accepted as proof of U.S. citizenship. These include a U.S. birth certificate or U.S. passport. Note, this documentation is only required if your child has NOT already established citizenship.

Identity

While you can use a birth certificate to prove age or citizenship, you cannot use it as proof of identity.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) needs evidence that shows the child continues to exist beyond the date of birth. Only certain documents are accepted as proof of your child's identity. An acceptable document must show your child's name, identifying information (i.e., age, date of birth, or parents' names) and preferably a recent photograph. SSA generally can accept a non-photo identity document if it has enough information to identify the child (such as the child's name and age, date of birth or parents' names). It is preferred to see the child's U.S. passport. If that document is not available, SSA may accept the child's: State Issued non-drivers identification card; Adoption decree; Doctor, clinic or hospital record; Religious record; School daycare center record; or School identification card.

SSA also must see proof of your identity. An acceptable document must be current and show your name, identifying information (date of birth or age) and preferably a recent photograph. For example, as proof of identity Social Security must see your: U.S. driver's license; State-issued non-driver identification card; or U.S. passport.

If you do not have one of these specific documents or you cannot get a replacement for one of them within 10 days, SSA will ask to see other documents.

Please visit <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/ss5doc.htm> to see more details about how to obtain a replacement social security card.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



Taking care of a child can certainly challenge a family's finances. There is government assistance available.

TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)

TANF provides monthly income to low-income families with children. Any "relative caretaker" of a child can apply. TANF provides a one-time plastic card (similar to a debit card), which will allow you to access your TANF benefits at banks, ATM machines and stores.

What if my income is too high to qualify, but I could still use the help?

If you are related to the child, and you are not the child's parent, you can apply for a "child only" grant. Your income and resources are not counted in determining the child's eligibility. DHHS may ask if you have income, but you don't have to claim your wages if you are applying for "child only" TANF. DHHS may also ask you to sign a tax waiver form. If you are claiming the child on your income taxes, the amount of TANF you will receive will be less. DHHS only needs to know if you have income and assets but not necessarily what and how much they are. However, if the child has a source of income, it may be counted when determining the child's eligibility. The monthly check is much lower. It is pro-rated for additional children you have living with you.

Will they make me do workfare?

DHHS requires adults who get TANF to participate in ASPIRE. This can involve work activity or job training. If you are sanctioned for not doing ASPIRE, the children continue getting their TANF benefit. If you have a "good cause" exception you will not be asked to do ASPIRE.

Can I claim the child as a dependent on my income taxes if I get "child only" TANF assistance?

You can, but the TANF amount will be reduced. This will not affect MaineCare eligibility.

SNAP

This is assistance to buy food. If you qualify, DHHS will mail you a plastic card (like a debit card) to use at the grocery store, and most convenience stores, to buy food.

How do I qualify?

Unlike TANF, where you can apply for a “child only grant”, most members of the household must be included in a food stamp application. Therefore, in most cases, your income will be counted. However, where minor children are living with a parent or “caretaker relative”, assets (like cars and bank accounts) are not counted. Also, the maximum income limits and allowable deductions in the food stamp program are higher. So, even if you cannot get TANF or MaineCare for the adults in your household, you may be able to qualify for food stamps.

Am I required to work?

Some adults in the household who are not working may be required to register for work. You may be exempt from this requirement. For example, you do not have to register if:

- You are 60 or older, or
- You are caring for a child under age 6, or
- You are caring for an incapacitated person, or
- You are physically or mentally unable to work

If you are not exempt, you can lose food stamps if you quit a full-time job or reduce your hours to less than 30 hours per week, without good cause. Even if you are disqualified, others in your household can still get food stamps.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Emergency Assistance (EA) is a TANF-related program run by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. It helps children and their families with some emergencies. You have to have children in the home, but you do not have to be on TANF, to get EA. Your income must be below the poverty level. The emergency must not have been caused by someone in the household.

What kinds of emergencies qualify?

- Disasters caused by fires, floods or storms

- Repairing or replacing such essential items as wells, chimneys, septic systems, furnaces or heating stoves
- Emergency housing
- Utilities (electricity, gas, bottled gas, water or sewer), if you have received a turn-off notice
- Special medical equipment or clothing

ALTERNATIVE AID

Alternative Aid is a program for low-income working families with children who are not on TANF. This program helps resolve problems that prevent family members from getting or keeping a job. Families are eligible if they meet the income, asset and other eligibility requirements for TANF, (such as deprivation) and the parent or caretaker relative has a job or is looking for one. Alternative Aid is not a cash benefit. It provides vouchers for services or items that the family needs. For example, the program may provide a voucher for car repairs, childcare, uniforms or even housing related emergencies. Families can apply for this benefit once every 12 months. The income eligibility limit for this program is 133% of the poverty level. Apply at your local DHHS office.

How do I apply for TANF, SNAP, Emergency Assistance or Alternative Aid?

Call your nearest Department of Health and Human Services Office to find out how to apply. When you apply, you may need:

- Social Security numbers
- Proof of your relationship to the child (for example, birth certificate that shows your relationship)
- Proof of income (this is not necessary for a “child only” TANF or MaineCare application)

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program designed to make sure that anyone who is age 65 or over, blind, or disabled, has a minimum level of income.

Can a child qualify for SSI?

Yes. A child is considered disabled if the child has a medically recognized physical or mental impairment (or combination of impairments) that cause “marked and severe functional limitations”. Also, the impairments must be expected either to last at least 12 months or to result in death.

I have a disabled child in my household who is related to me, but I am not the parent. Will my income be used to decide how much SSI this child is entitled to?

The answer is a little complicated. Generally, the only people whose income can be counted when calculating a child's SSI benefit are the child's parents. But if the parents are not living with the child, their income is not counted. And because you are not the child's parent, your income is not counted. However, the child's benefit will be reduced by a fixed amount because you are providing food, clothing and shelter (or "in-kind income") to the child. Finally, if you adopt the child, you become the legal parent: then your income will be considered in determining the child's eligibility.

How do I apply for the child?

You can apply at any Social Security Administration Office. Use their website, www.socialsecurity.gov to find out more about social security programs.

SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY (SSDI)

SSDI is a program for wage earners and their dependents. You must have worked in order to qualify. Children's benefits, spousal benefits and possible benefits for other family members are available. There are two situations when a dependent grandchild or step grandchild of a worker may qualify for benefits.

1. The child lived with the grandparent and received at least one half support from him or her for the year before the grandparent became disabled, entitled to retirement or disability benefits, or died and the child was under age 18 when he or she began living with the grandparent and the child's natural or adoptive parents were disabled or dead when the grandparents became disabled, entitled to retirement or disability benefits, or died.

Or

2. A dependent grandchild or step-grandchildren may qualify for child's benefits if he or she was legally adopted by the grandparent's surviving husband or wife. The grandchild's parents or stepparent must not have been living in the same household and making contributions to the child's support when the grandparent died.

Child's benefits are paid because the child lost a source of income when the worker retired, became disabled, or died. You can apply for SSDI at any Social Security Administration Office.

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

All Maine's towns and cities have general assistance programs. The program is designed to provide a "safety net" for Maine residents, when a household's income does not cover basic needs - food, shelter, clothing, and other personal items.

Each town has local rules setting the income guidelines. Compared to other programs, this is the hardest one to qualify for. Your income for the month of application must be very low. Most Maine towns and cities have adopted "workfare" rules, or work search requirements.

To apply, go to your city hall or town office. They must act on your application within 24 hours.

TELEPHONE ASSISTANCE

Some Mainer's are eligible to receive telephone service (wireline or wireless) at reduced rates. This is called the Lifeline Service Program. If you qualify, you may receive a \$9.25 credit on your phone bill. In addition, if you do not have a phone, you may be able to have one installed at a low cost. The Telephone Association of Maine (TAM) joins the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Maine Community Action Association (MCAA) in urging you to take advantage of the Telephone Assistance Program. TAM is made up of all 24 telephone companies in the State of Maine. Residential customers or a member of a customer's household receiving support from any of the following programs are eligible for Lifeline Service Program:

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- SNAP
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LiHEAP)
- Medicaid
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)

This is a program for low-income families and foster children. WIC provides some basic healthy foods for pregnant and nursing women and children under five years of age. They also give nutrition information and referrals to other community resources. All children in foster care who are

under the age of 5 years old qualify for WIC and the family income is not counted. To find the WIC program nearest you, Call 1-800-437-9300 or visit their website at www.maine.gov/dhhs/wic.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Low-income households can get help once a year, during the winter, with their fuel bills (LiHEAP). Related programs include: weatherization, appliance replacement, and home rehab. For more information, visit their website at <https://mainehousing.org/programs-services/energy/liheap>

How can I qualify?

Different income limits are set each year, depending on the total amount Maine gets from Congress in that year. You can use medical expenses, including insurance premiums and transportation costs, as deductions from income. There is no asset test.

Contact your county Community Action Program in the fall or visit their website at <https://mainehousing.org/programs-services/energy/liheap>

MaineHousing General Contact Info

Phone: (207) 626-4600

Toll Free: 1-800-452-4668

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

Affordable rental housing is supported by subsidies from several agencies, like HUD (Federal Housing and Urban Development), USDA/RD (Rural Development; formerly FMHA), and the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA). These programs all serve households below a certain income level, and monthly rent is capped at a percentage of income (typically about 30%).

If you know the programs that serve your area, apply for as many as you like. The demand outweighs the supply so there are waiting lists; the more waiting lists you are on, the better chance you have of receiving a housing subsidy.

If you do not know your options, contact MSHA in Augusta at 626-4600 or 1-800-452-4668 or visit their website at www.mainehousing.org.

The Maine State Housing Authority keeps track of all the programs in the state and can tell you about the programs in your area.

ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER FAMILIES OF MAINE & THE KINSHIP PROGRAM DISCOUNTS AND RESOURCES

AFFM provides discount cards and activities for adoptive, foster and kinship families. They offer discounts to stores, amusements, vacation activities and more.

AFFM has new and gently used clothing, toys, and household and baby items for free.

AFFM usually has a small cash fund that is accessible to families who meet the fund rules. The rules include the following:

- The family must have an immediate need for something essential to the stability of their family or the family has a need for respite.
- The Fund is only available to kinship caregivers who have the relative's children in their care or for whom there is a court plan to move the children into their care.
- AFFM must find that the need cannot be met through other supportive resources.
- The need must be one that can be met by limited cash from the Fund.
- The relative must discuss with AFFM staff other financial resources that may be available to them.
- The Fund will not be available to a family on an on-going basis; therefore, the money must be a one-time need or there must be other plans to meet the need on an on-going or repetitive basis.
- The money is given with an expectation that the relative will participate in a survey to help AFFM evaluate their program.
- Funds are only available one per year.

AFFM reserves the right to change the rules at any time. Families may contact AFFM to inquire whether money is available to them. There are times when there is no money available in the Fund. However, AFFM will help connect families to additional resources.

AFFM accepts donations to the Fund or donation of new and almost new clothing, dressers, bed frames, new mattresses, new toys, and new school supplies. Checks should be made payable to Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine.

For more information about AFFM resources call 1-800-833-9786 or visit their website at www.affm.net.

TAX CREDITS



EARNED INCOME CREDIT

If you worked at any time during the tax year, you may be eligible for the Earned Income Credit (EIC). If so, you will owe less in taxes, and you could get cash back. You can get the EIC even if you do not owe income tax. Although you do not have to be raising children to get the credit, the amount of the credit is much larger for taxpayers with children. The amount of the EIC depends on your income, marital status and the number of children.

To get the larger child related EIC, you must meet these basic requirements:

- Your earnings for the year were below a certain amount
- You were raising a child in your home for at least half of the tax year
- The child is your son, daughter, adopted child, grandchild, stepchild, sibling or step siblings or the descendant of such relative (e.g. your niece or grandnephew), or a foster child placed in your home by an authorized placement agency
- The child is under 19, or under 24 and a full-time student; a child with a total and permanent disability can qualify at any age
- Your investment income was below a certain amount

How do I claim the credit?

If you were raising children in the tax year, file federal tax return forms 1040 or 1040A, not Form 1040EZ. Be sure to attach Schedule EIC.

How much credit can I get?

This depends on the number of children and your income and filing status. Get forms and printed information from the IRS at www.irs.gov or by

calling 1-800-829-3676 (1-800-TAX-FORM). For answers to tax-related questions, call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040.

CHILD TAX CREDIT

The Child Tax Credit offers up to \$2,000 per qualifying dependent child 16 or younger at the end of the calendar year.

There is a \$500 nonrefundable credit for qualifying dependents other than children.

Here are the basic requirements:

- The child is under 16 years old;
- The child lived with you in the US for more than half the year;
- You must be related to the child (same as relationship criteria for EIC)

You do not have to claim the child as a dependent in order to claim this credit. However, if a court order (e.g. a divorce decree) gives this credit to one of the child's parents, only that parent can claim this credit.

CHILD AND DEPENDENT CARE CREDIT

The child and Dependent Care Credit is a tax benefit that helps you pay for childcare you need in order to work or look for work. You can also claim this credit if you pay for the care of a spouse or an adult dependent who cannot care for him or herself. Generally, you must claim the child as your dependent in order to get this credit; however, there are special rules for children of divorced or separated parents.

The maximum amount of credit for Tax Year 2020 is: \$6,660 with three or more qualifying children. \$5,920 with two qualifying children. \$3,584 with one qualifying child.

You can claim this credit if:

- You paid for care for a “qualifying child” under age 13, or for a dependent disabled adult, who lived with your family for more than half the tax year, *and*
- You needed the child or dependent care in order to work or look for work (and your spouse was also unavailable to provide care) *and*
- You paid less for your dependent care than you earned. (If you are married and filing jointly, the income of the spouse with the lowest

income will be used. There are special rules for figuring the income of a spouse who was a full-time student or disabled.)

You can claim this credit in addition to the EIC and the Child Tax Credit. However, this credit is not “refundable;” if you earn too little to pay federal income tax, you cannot get this credit.

How do I claim the credit?

File form 1040, along with Form 2441, or Form 1040A, along with a Schedule 2. Specific instructions on the credit are included with the forms.

The State of Maine also provides a Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. This credit is “refundable”, so, unlike the federal credit, you can claim it even if you didn’t earn enough to pay income tax. If the child is enrolled in a childcare center or home with a Quality Certificate, you will be eligible for a double credit (50% of the federal credit). Ask your childcare provider if they have a Quality Certificate. If they do, ask them for the 3-digit number on the Quality Certificate and be sure to write this number on your Maine Income Tax Return.

For more information:

- On the federal credit, go to the Internal Revenue Service website at www.irs.gov/publications/p503/index.html
- For the State credit, go to the website of the DHHS Office of Child Care and Head Start at www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/taxcredits.htm

FREE TAX FILING AND MORE INFORMATION

For more information about tax credits, free filing options, and other tax tips, go to Pine Tree Legal Assistance website at www.ptla.org/low-income-taxpayer-clinic#.

The Pine Tree Legal Assistance Low Income Tax Clinic provides information and education to taxpayers. It also provides assistance to people in tax “controversies” such as denials and audits.

Call your local Pine Tree Legal Assistance office for more information.

- Aroostook County: 207-764-4349
- Penobscot, Piscataquis, Waldo Counties: 207-942-8241
- Kennebec, Somerset, Knox, Lincoln Counties: 207-622-4731
- Cumberland, York and Sagadahoc Counties: 207-774-8211
- Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford Counties: 207-784-1558
- Washington and Hancock Counties: 207-255-8656

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax help to people who generally make \$54,000 or less, persons with disabilities, the elderly and limited English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns.

In addition to VITA, the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 years of age or older, specializing in questions about pensions and retirement-related issues unique to seniors.

To locate a VITA or TCE site near you, call 1-800-906-9887.

PROPERTY TAX FAIRNESS CREDIT (PTFC)

This program is for qualified Maine homeowners and renters. Eligibility and the refund amount are based on your income and the percent of income you spent on property tax or rent. If you paid property tax on your home in Maine that was more than 6% of your adjusted gross income, OR you paid rent that was more than 40% of your adjusted gross income, you may be eligible for this credit. There are special eligibility rules if you are elderly and have a low income.

You will need to file Maine Income Tax Form 1040ME and the Property Tax Fairness Credit form (schedule PTFC) to claim your credit. You can download the forms you need from the Maine Revenue Service website at www.maine.gov/revenue or request forms be mailed to you by calling 207-624-7894

You can apply each year between January 1 – April 15.

OTHER RESOURCES

Autism Society of Maine

- The Autism Society of Maine provides education and resources to support the valued lives of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families.

G.E.A.R. Parent Network

- G.E.A.R. Parent Network empowers parents of children with behavioral health needs to build on their family's strengths and to advocate for their family's needs. For more information call 1-800-264-9224, or visit their website at www.gearparentnetwork.com.

N.A.M.I. Maine

- Through support, education, and advocacy NAMI Maine is dedicated to building better lives for the 1 in 4 Mainers who are affected by mental illness. NAMI offers compassion and provides social/emotional support for all persons affected by mental illness. For more information call (800) 464-5767 or visit their website: <https://www.namimaine.org/>

Southern Maine Parent Awareness

- Southern Maine Parent Awareness is dedicated to providing information, referral support and education to families who have children and youth with special needs throughout Maine. For more information call 1-800-564-9696 or visit their website at <https://waban.org/southern-maine-parent-awareness/>

The Maine Parent Federation

- The Maine Parent Federation is a private non-profit organization. MPF provides information, referral, one on one telephone support, and training to parents of children with disabilities or special health care needs and the professionals who work with these families through numerous grant-funded projects. Their services are offered at no cost to parents and are available statewide. For more information call 1-800-870-7746 or visit their website at <http://mpf.org/>

Wings For Children and Families Inc.

- Wings is a non-profit corporation partnering with parents and providers to deliver quality case management services utilizing the wraparound planning process as well as provide training to other

system providers to improve quality of care. For more information call 1-800-823-2988 or visit their website at <https://www.wingsinc.org/>

KidsPeace

- KidsPeace is a private charity dedicated to serving the behavioral and mental health needs of children, families and communities. KidsPeace provides a unique psychiatric hospital; a comprehensive range of residential treatment programs; accredited educational services; and a variety of foster care and community-based treatment programs to help people in need overcome challenges and transform their lives. KidsPeace provides emotional and physical health care and educational services in an atmosphere of teamwork, compassion and creativity. For more information visit their website at <https://www.kidspeace.org/>

CHCS

- CHCS is both a Medicaid/MaineCare certified home health agency and a comprehensive community mental health center, one of the few combined institutions anywhere in the country. Our services are provided 24-7.. For more information visit their website at <https://www.chcs-me.org/>

Community Care

- Community Care is a private non-profit (501 (3) c) agency that serves youth, families and adults in the state of Maine who are affected by, or who are living with mental health/behavioral, trauma/abuse/neglect, and/or poverty issues. We believe that all individuals can realize their fullest potential and life satisfaction. Further, we believe that we can support them to achieve their goals by joining with them in a respectful and positive manner as we provide the treatment, interventions, guidance, and supports.
<http://www.comcareme.org/AboutUs/OurMission.aspx>

Additional Educational Resources:

- www.yourdictionary.com – helps children find the meaning of any word.
- www.factmonster.com – gives children facts about science, math, history, language arts and helps children do homework.
- www.Kidshealth.org – Gives parents and kids tips on how to help with homework.

- <https://www.storylineonline.net/> - Picture books read by celebrities. Storyline Online is available 24 hours a day for children, parents, caregivers and educators worldwide. Each book includes supplemental curriculum developed by a credentialed elementary educator, aiming to strengthen comprehension and verbal and written skills for English-language learners.
- <https://www.readaloud.org/> - Read Aloud 15 MINUTES is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is working to make reading aloud every day for at least 15 minutes the new standard in childcare.
- <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/25-activities-reading-and-writing-fun> - These activities from Reading Rockets have been developed by national reading experts for you to use with children, ages birth to Grade 6. The activities are meant to be used in addition to reading with children every day.
- <https://www.rif.org/literacy-central/collections/reading-activities-parents-and-caregivers> - Explore some of Reading is Fundamental's collections of best practices to encourage and motivate young readers. Hands-on activities, recommended book lists, strategies for parents and caregivers, alphabet coloring pages, and tips for reading aloud.

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program LIBRARY SAMPLING



Below is a sampling of books families have found useful. For an up to date and complete listing of the AFFM library, call us at 1-800-833-9786 or visit our website at www.affm.net

- Raising Our Children's Children
- Grandparents as Parents
- 1-2-3, Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2 – 12
- Raising Your Spirited Child; A Guide for Parents Whose Child is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, Energetic
- Put Yourself In Their Shoes; Understanding Teen with ADHD
- Siblings Without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too
- Straight Talk About Psychiatric Medications for Kids
- Driven to Distraction: Recognizing & Coping with ADD from Childhood through Adulthood
- Treating Explosive Kids: The Collaborative Problem-Solving Approach
- FASD and Your Child
- Grandparenting With Love and Logic
- From Chaos to Calm
- Inside Kinship Care
- Help! I'm Raising My Grandkids
- How To Handle A Hard-To-Handle Kid

