



Kinship Quarterly

Strengthening Families

January 2017

IN THIS ISSUE: STAR HEALTH

Happy New Year! 2017 promises to bring with it many changes, especially since we are embarking on a new legislative year. Be sure to read each issue this year to stay informed. You can find previous issues here: [DFPS - Kinship Care](#)

STAR Health Assessments

Caring for Children in Foster Care in the First 30 Days

When children and youth go into the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), there may be a lot of issues that need to be addressed. Two of these are the physical and behavioral health-care needs of the child. That's why children and young adults need two important checkups **within the first 30 days of conservatorship**. These are:

- ✓ **A Texas Health Steps Medical Checkup.** Texas Health Steps is a Medicaid service for children and youth in foster care. The Texas Health Steps medical checkup allows a doctor to examine a child from head to toe. This can help make sure the child is growing and developing like other children his or her age. Plus, these checkups can help catch health problems before they get worse. Children and youth must get their first medical checkup within the first 30 days of enrollment into STAR Health.
- ✓ **Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment.**

CANS is a tool that assesses and plans for a child's behavioral health-care needs. It can also help determine what other services the child may need. CANS assessments began on September 1, 2016. All children and youth who enter DFPS will get this assessment within 30 days of entering conservatorship.

Caregivers will receive a call from STAR Health Member Services to schedule these two appointments. For any questions, please call (866) 912-6283.

Other Important Services

Service Management

Some STAR Health members may have a disability, complex condition or other special needs that require finding many types of doctors or specialists. STAR Health members have access to Service Management teams that can:

- ✓ Get answers to any questions or concerns you have.
- ✓ Identify what kinds of services your child may need.
- ✓ Develop a care plan with your child's doctor(s).
- ✓ Get referrals, make appointments and make sure you have access to the care your child needs.
- ✓ Help you request a pre-appeal.

To request this service, call STAR Health Member Services at (866) 912-6283.

Dental Checkups

Children and youth in foster care should get regular dental checkups through Texas Health Steps. During these checkups, the dentist will look at a child's teeth and gums and check for any problems. CPS requires the Texas Health Steps dental checkup to be scheduled within 30 days of coming into the legal custody of DFPS and considers it to be overdue after 90 days. To make sure children receive this important first dental checkup, STAR Health requires all children who are new to STAR Health to have a dental checkup within 60 days of enrollment and then every six months.

Extra Benefits

STAR Health members get extra benefits called value-added services. These include:

- Extra vision benefits. This includes glasses or \$100 toward features or frames not covered by Medicaid.
- Care grants. These small cash grants may be used for items such as art supplies, clothing or personal items.
- CentAccount. This program offers reward dollars for members who complete wellness visits, dental checkups and other health screenings. This program is for members 18 through 20 years old.

Note: Value-added services may have restrictions and limitations.

Caregivers can call STAR Health Member Services at any time to request appointments or services, find a doctor or if they have any questions about their child's benefits. Call (866) 912-6283 or visit www.FosterCareTX.com.

Good to Know



Specialized Skills Training

One of the services provided by an early intervention program (ECI) is specialized skills training (SST). This service is intended to address the "design of learning environments and activities that promote an infant and toddler's acquisition of skills in a variety of developmental areas, including cognitive processes and social interaction. There is no richer learning environment than an infant and toddler's home and no better teachers than parents, extended family, and siblings.

Research demonstrates that the brain is the most malleable or "plastic" during the infant and toddler years. Because of this, every interaction and every environment the child experiences is an opportunity for growth and development. Specialized skills training supports development across domains with an emphasis on strengthening cognitive skills, positive behaviors and social interactions.

There are four components within the cognitive domain that describe how young children develop and demonstrate abilities: exploring the world around them, solving problems, remembering and retaining information, and pretending and using their imagination. Cognitive development is reflected by growth in thinking, reasoning, and understanding.

The four components of the cognitive domain are part of the cognitive process called Executive Function. Executive function "refers to a group of skills that helps us to focus on multiple streams of information at the same time, monitor errors, make

decisions in light of available information, revise plans as necessary, and resist the urge to let frustration lead to hasty actions." (The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, Working Paper 11).

This sounds like an advanced skill, so what does this have to do with infants and toddlers? Cognitive development begins in infancy. For example, an infant kicks a mobile because he naturally kicks out his legs. The mobile moves and perhaps makes sounds. He sees something happen that has captured his interest. He may first observe, but after several repetitions, he understands that this action "causes" something to occur. This early learning of cause and effect is a building block for more complex tasks. In addition, family members share in his excitement about what happens when he kicks the mobile. They praise him and are "delighted" with his new found skill. He enjoys this interaction and attention. As a result, this has been a "positive" experience. Positive early experiences that support cognitive development contribute to traits that support life-long learning, such as curiosity and persistence.

Specialized skills training is an appropriate service to help parents learn how to support their child's development of executive function skills. Three building blocks for executive function are:

1. **Working memory** – which includes following multiple-step instructions and taking turns in group activities.
2. **Inhibitory control** – which makes the following possible: selective, focused, and sustained attention. It also includes joint attention, and the ability to take turns.
3. **Mental flexibility** – which includes the ability to switch gears and adjust to changed demands



The SST service is provided by an Early Intervention Specialist (EIS). The EIS is credentialed by the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). An EIS is a credentialed specialist in:

- Infant and toddler development, both typical and atypical patterns.
- Early childhood cognition, motivation and how infants and toddlers learn
- Typical infant and toddler behavior and challenging behaviors (biting, tantrums, picky eating, sleep issues)
- Infant and toddler social interactions
- How developmental areas are interconnected



Children with delays and disabilities often need assistance to enhance their development. The EIS through SST supports the child's cognitive development by introducing strategies into everyday activities that promote cause and effect, attention and adjusting to changed demands.

What does this look like? For example, when a child is having problems with transitions, the EIS may suggest a timer or song to "cue" the child to anticipate there will be a change from one activity to another. The EIS provides support to the family as they implement this strategy for transition but also asks for feedback about how it is working. Sometimes this means that the EIS and family must try several strategies to find the right fit for the child and family.

There is a strong link between the development of cognitive functions and social and emotional development in young children. One of the key points about brain development is that a positive relationship with primary caregivers is essential. The focus of all early intervention services is to create positive working relationships with families that will support the parent and child relationship and promote development across domains.

RESOURCES

[Love that Max](#) – A blog about kids with special needs

[GrandFamilies Resources](#) – Listing of public and private assistance to help grandparents and other relatives raising children

[Internal Revenue Service – Adoption Credits](#)

[Internal Revenue Service – Free tax return preparation for qualifying taxpayers.](#)

[Parent Companion](#) – A guide for Texas parents and caregivers of children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities from birth through 5 years of age.

[TexasLawHelp.org](#)

[Texas WIC](#)

[The Texas Veterans Portal](#) – connects veterans, their families, and caregivers to benefits and services earned through their military service.

SAFETY TIPS

Top 5 Tips to Protect Your Baby

1. A firm mattress and fitted sheet are all you need for your baby's crib. Remove blankets and toys.
2. Learn to use your child's car seat the right way.
3. Make sure you have both a working smoke alarm and a carbon monoxide alarm on every level of your home, and in all sleeping areas. Test the alarms to make sure they work.
4. Place your baby's crib and other furniture away from windows and blinds. Your baby is safer without any strings or cords within reach.
5. Set your water heater to 120 degrees to avoid scalds.

EVENTS

Texas Parent 2Parent- Regional Conference in Tyler will be February 25, 2017. Thirteenth Annual Statewide Conference in San Marcos is June 16-17, 2017. For more information about these conferences: <http://www.txp2p.org/>

Positive Parenting Class for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities. Free eight-week class. For more information: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/positive-parenting-class-tickets-28866046121>

Free parenting and water safety courses throughout the state. For a location near you: [STAR & CHIP Member Events](#)



Please visit us at [facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers](https://www.facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers) and don't forget to like us!



SPOTLIGHT: Kinship 2016

Here are some photos of our Kinship staff across the state. We want to recognize them for all of their hard work! Thank you for your dedication and commitment to keeping children safe. We can't wait to see what amazing things you will do in 2017!



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We all have the
power
to stop
child abuse.



Report abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children, the elderly, or
people with disabilities at
(800) 252-5400 or www.txabusehotline.org.