



# Kinship Quarterly Strengthening Families

April 2019

In this Issue:

Independent Living Skills  
Assessment

Water Safety

**April is Child Abuse Prevention Month!** In this quarter's issue, we discuss the Independent Living Skills Assessment for your youth. We also explore in depth the importance of Water Safety. Don't forget to check out other safety tips and resources included in every issue.

### **Kinship caregivers of youth age 14 or older**

DFPS provides programs and services for youth through the Transitional Living Services Program. This program within CPS, works to prepare youth for their successful transition to adulthood. Transitional Living Services includes the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program. The PAL program provides services such as an independent living skills assessment, life skills training, case management, and other services, resources, and supports to help youth become healthy, productive adults. CPS PAL staff work closely with your caseworker to coordinate PAL services for the youth in your care.

Recent state law changed the timeframes for completion of an independent living skills assessment for youth in DFPS conservatorship. The assessment is required for youth at:

- Age 14 in the Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) of DFPS; or
- Age 16 or older in the Conservatorship of DFPS.

DFPS needs your help to make sure youth get a life skills assessment completed. The assessment may be required if you have a youth 14 or older placed with you. Caregivers play a vital role in helping to assess the youth's strengths and challenges. When it is

required, the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Contractor or CPS PAL staff will give you instructions to complete the assessment and caregiver portion.

### **What is an Independent Living Skills Assessment?**

DFPS uses the assessment to evaluate a youth's general readiness to transition to a successful adulthood. It is generally done before a youth participates in PAL life skills training.

DFPS uses the Casey Life Skills Assessment (CLSA) to perform the independent living skills assessment. The CLSA allows youth and their caregivers to determine the youth's strengths and needs. Areas covered in the CLSA include:

- Daily living
- Self-care
- Work and study
- Relationships and communication
- Housing and money management
- Career and education planning
- Looking forward and permanency

### **What do you need to do?**

- Ensure the youth in your care take the assessment and you complete the caregiver portion once the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Contractor or a DFPS PAL staff contact you.
- Attend a meeting when invited by the PAL contract staff to discuss the:
  - a. Youth's developmental needs.

- b. Comparison of the youth and caregiver scores, strengths, and areas for improvement.
- Use assessment results to plan activities for real life learning experience so the youth can learn from practicing these skills. Examples include, but not limited to grocery shopping, cooking, etc.
- Participate in an annual review of life skills learned through the youth's plan of service. The original assessment will be reviewed along with youth's progress and continued needs.
- Ensure youth participate in PAL life skills training and other services.

**If you have questions, please contact:**

- 1) CPS PAL Program Specialist Alma Aranda at (512) 438-2350 or by email at [alma.aranda2@dfps.state.tx.us](mailto:alma.aranda2@dfps.state.tx.us) or
- 2) Regional PAL staff [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Protection/Youth\\_and\\_Young\\_Adults/Preparation\\_For\\_Adult\\_Living/PAL\\_coordinators.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/PAL_coordinators.asp)

## EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

### Specialized Skills Training



Specialized Skills Training (SST) is a service offered exclusively by Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) programs. SST is designed to help parents and other caregivers identify strategies to promote their child's development, especially cognitive and social skills, through common daily activities in settings where the child and family typically spend time. This is because 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. SST helps parents identify opportunities for enriching interactions to enhance learning.

Cognitive development begins in infancy. For example, an infant kicks a mobile because he/she naturally kicks out the legs. The mobile moves and perhaps makes sounds. He/she sees something happen that has captured his/her interest. The infant may first observe, but after several repetitions, he/she understands that the action causes the mobile to move. 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 the infant kicks the mobile. The baby enjoys this interaction and attention, and wants to repeat it. Positive early experiences that support cognitive development contribute to traits that support life-long learning, such as curiosity and persistence.

The SST service is provided by an Early Intervention Specialist (EIS). The EIS is credentialed by the Health and Human Services Commission ECI program. An EIS is a credentialed specialist in:

- Infant and toddler development, both typical and atypical patterns
- Early childhood cognition, motivation and learning
- 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. Through SST, the EIS teaches parents to support 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 supports the family as they implement this strategy for transition and 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.

For more information, please visit the HHS, [ECI website](#).

## Water Safety Tips



Summer is on its way and children will soon be clamoring to cool off while splashing in a kiddie pool or heading to a swimming pool or the beach, but playing in and around water comes with risks. Drowning is a major worldwide cause of death and injury in children; every year in the United States approximately 4,000 people do not survive drownings and of those one fifth, or about 800, are children under the age of fourteen.

We often assume drowning occurs like we've seen on TV, with the victim involved in a long period of splashing, frantically waving their arms and calling for help, but children often drown quickly and silently. Colin Holst is one such youngster, a four year old boy in Texas who drowned in just such a way, at a swimming pool on a beautiful summer day surrounded by people who loved him, but who briefly and tragically lost sight of him while he played with other children in a pool; drowning can occur in less than one minute. After his death, Colin's family established the water safety education organization, Colin's Hope: <http://www.colinshope.org/>.

Following are a few simple water safety tips which could have prevented the majority of these tragedies, avoiding the heartbreaking grief shared by thousands of Texas families following the loss of a child due to drowning.

- Children have drowned in as little as two inches of water. NEVER leave young children unsupervised in or around any container or body of water, including bathtubs, buckets, toilets, aquariums, pools and ponds. Drain buckets, kiddie pools, and baths when finished. Drownings can happen in even tiny amounts of water.
- Ensure small children cannot let themselves out of the house and don't have access to any container or body of water. Childhood drownings often occur when a child is left alone, even for a few seconds. Many children who drown in pools were last seen inside the home, had been out of sight less than five minutes, and were in the care of one or both parents, with or without other adults present at the time.
- Children often drown with adults or other swimmers nearby who either aren't closely supervising them, or don't understand what to look for. Many caregivers expect children to splash and show obvious signs of distress when they are having trouble in the water. However, drowning victims, especially children, are rarely able to call for help or wave their arms, and usually drown silently.
- Water wings, inner tube like floatation devices worn by many toddlers to help them stay afloat are NOT approved water safety devices; they can easily deflate or be slipped off, and children should NEVER be left alone with these or other floatation devices to keep them safe.
- Find age-appropriate swim lessons for your child, and make sure children can swim and float; many classes are offered at local municipal swimming pools or the YMCA for relatively low cost. Learning to swim can be potentially life-saving for children and adults. Keep in mind that lessons do not make your child "drown-proof" and it's still extremely important for an adult to have eyes on every child during water play and swimming.
- Avoid using any alcohol while supervising children or prior to taking children swimming, splashing, boating, or water skiing. Alcohol influences balance, coordination, and judgment, and its effects are increased by exposure to sun and heat.
- Lifeguards aren't babysitters; always keep your eyes on your children, even when lifeguards are present.
- Learn to swim yourself; it's easier to save a drowning child if you are able to reach them in deep water.
- Don't let children play around drains and suction fittings.
- Don't underestimate the power of water; rivers and lakes as well as the ocean can have an undertow.
- Learn CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). In the time it takes for paramedics to arrive, CPR skills performed by a bystander could save your child's life.

- Ensure any accessible bodies of water, including ponds and swimming pools, have self-closing gate and four-sided fencing surrounding them, and ensure an alarm is installed on all doors leading outside the home.

## Home Safety Tips

- Coin lithium batteries, or "button batteries" can be fatal if swallowed; keep these and any devices that contain them, out of reach of children.
- Ensure all electrical outlets covered.
- Use safety latches and locks for cabinets and drawers to help prevent poisonings and other injuries.
- Use wall anchors to prevent furniture, TVs and ranges from tipping over and falling on children.
- Keep medications, cleaners and all other hazardous materials out of children's reach.

## Resources

- DFPS Kinship Care Facebook  
[www.facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers](http://www.facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers)
- STAR Health  
[https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Protection/Medical\\_Services/guide-star.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Medical_Services/guide-star.asp)
- DFPS Kinship Care Information  
[www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption\\_and\\_Foster\\_Care/Kinship\\_Care/](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/Kinship_Care/)
- Texas Financial Assistance  
<https://www.financialhelpresources.com/state/texas.html>
- Texas Assistance and Financial Aid Programs  
[https://www.needhelp-payingbills.com/html/texas\\_assistance\\_programs.html](https://www.needhelp-payingbills.com/html/texas_assistance_programs.html)
- Texas Assistance and Financial Aid Programs  
[https://www.needhelp-payingbills.com/html/texas\\_assistance\\_programs.html](https://www.needhelp-payingbills.com/html/texas_assistance_programs.html)
- <http://www.colinshope.org/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainment/tips/drowning.html>
- Child Abuse Prevention Month Events  
[http://www.helpandhope.org/how\\_you\\_can\\_help/events.asp](http://www.helpandhope.org/how_you_can_help/events.asp)



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