U.S. Army Family Care Plans
Requirements for Single Soldiers and Dual-Military Couples

Governing Regulation: Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, Army Command Policy, paragraph 5-3

Purpose: This information paper provides a comprehensive overview of Family Care Plan (FCP) requirements, required forms, and detailed instructions for completion. It is intended to assist Soldiers, commanders, and legal assistance personnel.

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1. What Is a Family Care Plan?

A Family Care Plan (FCP) is the documented plan by which a Soldier ensures that dependent Family members are properly and adequately cared for when the Soldier is unavailable due to military duties (deployment, temporary duty (TDY), field exercises, permanent change of station (PCS), or other military requirements). The FCP designates guardians (temporary/short-term and long-term/principal) who will assume responsibility for the Family members' health, safety, welfare, education, and daily needs.

Important: The FCP is **not** a legal document that can change a court-ordered custody arrangement or interfere with a natural parent's legal rights. Its sole purpose is to document, for Army readiness and command purposes, the Soldier's plan for care during periods of military absence.

2. Who Must Have a Family Care Plan?

The Army strongly encourages all Soldiers and emergency-essential civilians with Family members to maintain an FCP. However, an FCP is mandatory for the following categories (AR 600-20, para 5-3):

- Pregnant Soldiers who: (a) have no spouse, are divorced, widowed, or separated, or are residing without their spouse; or (b) are married to another Servicemember of the Regular Army (RA), U.S. Army Reserve (USAR), or any other Service (Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Space Force, or Coast Guard).
- Single or geographically single Soldiers (no spouse, divorced, widowed, separated, or residing apart from spouse) who have joint or full legal and physical custody of one or more Family members under age 18 (or under age 19 in some references), or who have adult Family members incapable of self-care regardless of age.
- Soldiers with liberal/extended visitation rights (by court decree) that place Family members solely in the Soldier's care for more than 30 consecutive days.
- Soldiers whose spouse is incapable of self-care or is otherwise physically, mentally, or emotionally disabled and requires special care or assistance.
- Dual-military couples (one or both members of the RA or USAR of any Service) who have joint

or full legal custody of one or more Family members under age 19, or who have adult Family members incapable of self-care regardless of age.

Definition of "Family Member" for FCP purposes: A child under the age of 19 (or 18 in some older references; use current regulation) or any other family member who is incapable of self-care and dependent on the sponsor for total support and/or care.

Definition of "Guardian": A person appointed by the Soldier to take care of the Family Member's health, safety, and welfare when the Soldier is unable to do so. Guardians should be thoroughly briefed on responsibilities, military/civilian**Dual-military couples** (one or both members of the RA or USAR of any Service) who have joint or full legal custody of one or more Family members under age 19, or who have adult Family members incapable of self-care regardless of age.

Definition of "Family Member" for FCP purposes: A child under the age of 19 (or 18 in some older references; use current regulation) or any other family member who is incapable of self-care and dependent on the sponsor for total support and/or care.

Definition of "Guardian": A person appointed by the Soldier to take care of the Family Member's health, safety, and welfare when the Soldier is unable to do so. Guardians should be thoroughly briefed on responsibilities, military/civilian benefits access procedures, and should not themselves be deployable Soldiers if possible.

3. Counseling, Completion, and Recertification Timelines

- **Counseling:** Soldiers required to have an FCP will be counseled using DA Form 5304 (Family Care Plan Counseling Checklist) as soon as possible upon arrival at the unit or identification of the requirement (e.g., pregnancy, change in marital/custody status).

- **Completion deadline (Active Duty / RA):** Completed and commander-approved DA Form 5305 with all required attachments within 30 days of counseling.

- **Completion deadline (USAR / ARNG):** Within 60 days of counseling.

- **Pregnant Soldiers**: Counseling (DA 5304) as soon as pregnancy is identified and NLT 90 days prior to expected birth. Complete DA 5305 showing intentions NLT 60 days prior to expected birth. Recertify the full plan (including guardianship documents) NLT 45 days after the child's birth.

- **Annual recertification**: The FCP must be reviewed and recertified by the commander at least annually (commonly during the Soldier's birth month), and whenever there is a change in family status, guardians, legal custody, duty station, or other material circumstances. Also required 30 days prior to deployment or OCONUS assignment out-processing.

- **New unit arrival:** Soldiers generally have 30 days upon arrival at a new unit to have an approved FCP on file**.**

4. Consequences of Failure to Maintain an Adequate FCP

Failure to develop, maintain, or implement an adequate FCP can result in:

- Mandatory counseling regarding voluntary and involuntary separation procedures (AR 600-20).

- Possible involuntary separation under AR 635-200 (enlisted) or corresponding fficer regulations for parenthood/failure to maintain Family care plan.

- Bar to reenlistment (AR 601-280). Commanders **will** initiate a bar against Soldiers

who have been counseled and do not have an approved plan on file within two months after counseling.

- Non-deployable status until the plan is validated and approved.
- Administrative or, in extreme cases, disciplinary action under the UCMJ.

5. Required Forms and Supporting Documents

A complete FCP packet typically includes the following (exact requirements may vary slightly by command or individual circumstances; always verify with the unit and local Legal Assistance Office):

Form	Title / Purpose	Key Notes
DA Form 7667	Family Care Plan Preliminary Screening	Initial screening; often required early in the process.
DA Form 5304	Family Care Plan Counseling Checklist	Documents counseling; Soldier and commander (or designated representative) initial/sign. Not annually recertified like the 5305.
DA Form 5305	Family Care Plan (primary document)	Main plan form. Commander is sole approval authority (not delegable).
DA Form 5841	Power of Attorney (for Guardianship)	Or equivalent legal delegation of control. Prepare in advance; often left unsigned until deployment/activation.
DA Form 5840	Certificate of Acceptance as Guardian or Escort	Completed and **notarized** by each temporary and long-term guardian. One for short-term and one for long-term typically required.
DD Form 1172-2	Application for Identification Card / DEERS Enrollment	One for each Family member. Ensures continued access to benefits/ID cards. AR 600-8-14 requires ID cards for children under 10 residing with single/dual-military parents.
DD Form 2558	Authorization to Start, Stop, or Change an Allotment	Or other proof of financial support arrangements. Prepare in advance; leave unsigned until deployment.
Letter of Instruction	Detailed instructions to the guardian/escort	Required. Covers special needs, medical info, school, routines, contact info, location of documents, access to benefits, etc.
DA Form 7666	Parental Consent	Required when the designated guardian is **not** the other natural/legal parent (or when consent from all parties with legal interest is needed). Must be signed and typically notarized by both parents.
Supporting Docs	Court orders, separation agreements, custody decrees, marriage certificates, etc.	Include any documents that affect custody or the plan's validity.

Note for Dual-Military Couples: One common plan may be used by both members. Neither military member should be identified as the temporary or long-term guardian. Once both commanders approve and sign, the commander of the Soldier least likely to deploy retains the original; a complete copy is forwarded to the other commander. If equally likely to deploy, either may hold the original so long as both have copies.

6. Detailed Instructions for Completing Key Forms

6.1 DA Form 5304 – Family Care Plan Counseling Checklist

This form documents that the Soldier has been counseled on FCP requirements and understands the policy. It is completed during the initial counseling session.

How to complete:

- Soldier and commander (or authorized representative) initial each applicable statement in the checklist.
- Key topics covered include: understanding that the Soldier remains available for worldwide assignment/deployment; no special duty consideration based solely on Family responsibilities (except EFMP); requirement to designate qualified, reliable guardians; need for powers of attorney, acceptance certificates, financial arrangements, letters of instruction; dual-military rules; timelines for submission (30/60 days); annual update requirement; and consequences of non-compliance.
- Soldier signs acknowledging understanding and receipt of forms/guidance.
- Commander or designated representative signs the counseling.
- The 5304 itself is not typically “recertified” annually like the 5305; it records the counseling event.

6.2 DA Form 5305 – Family Care Plan

This is the primary planning document. The Soldier initials statements affirming understanding and arrangements, designates temporary (short-term) and principal (long-term) guardians/escorts, and lists Family members requiring care.

How to complete (key sections):

- **Part I – Soldier’s Family Care: Initial each statement.** Confirm counseling date, understanding of responsibilities during duty/exercises/TDY/PCS/deployment/etc., that arrangements have been made, that guardians have been briefed, that required documents are attached, and that the plan will be kept current.
- **Part II – Designation of Guardians/Escorts:** Provide typed or printed name, address, phone numbers, and relationship for: (1) Temporary/short-term guardian (available immediately for short absences or until long-term guardian assumes responsibility); (2) Principal/long-term guardian (for extended absences/deployments). Include escort if noncombatant evacuation or similar movement is contemplated (especially OCONUS).
- List all Family members covered by the plan (names, ages, relationship, any special needs).
- Attach all supporting documents listed in Section 5.
- Soldier signs. Commander reviews for adequacy and workability, then signs as approving authority. Approval cannot be delegated.

Tip: Choose guardians carefully. They should be immediately available, able to assume long-term responsibility if needed, and preferably not another deployable Servicemember. Discuss all medical, educational, financial, religious, and routine care details in advance.

6.3 DA Form 5841 – Power of Attorney (Guardianship)

This special power of attorney authorizes the designated guardian to act in loco parentis — to assume and maintain guardianship, provide for health/education/welfare, authorize medical/surgical/dental care (including major procedures), register children in school, grant permissions, and perform other acts the Soldier could perform if present. It is intended to be durable (continues if the Soldier becomes incapacitated).

How to complete and execute:

• Fill in the Soldier's full name, state of residence/legal domicile, current military residence, and the full name and address of the appointed attorney-in-fact (guardian).

• List the child(ren) or Family member(s) by full name.

• The form grants broad authority for care, medical consent, schooling, and customary living standards.

• **Recommended practice:** Prepare the form in advance and keep it with the FCP packet, but do not sign or notarize it until deployment, extended TDY, or other activation of the plan. This keeps the authority from taking effect prematurely while ensuring it is ready when needed. Some commands may require signed versions earlier — confirm local practice.

• When executed: Soldier signs in the presence of a notary public (or other authorized official). The original should go to the guardian; copies remain in the unit file and with the Soldier.

• **Alternative:** Soldiers may use a special power of attorney or other legally sufficient document prepared by Legal Assistance instead of (or in addition to) DA Form 5841. Legal Assistance can advise on state-specific effectiveness, especially if the child will reside in a jurisdiction that may not fully honor a simple POA for custody-like authority.

Critical note: A power of attorney does not permanently transfer legal custody. Only a court can do that. The POA facilitates day-to-day care and decision-making during the Soldier's absence. Always consult Legal Assistance if there are existing court orders, contested custody, or interstate issues.

6.4 DA Form 5840 – Certificate of Acceptance as Guardian or Escort

This form is the guardian's formal, notarized acceptance of responsibility. It attests that the guardian has received the necessary documents (including the POA), understands the duties, and has been briefed on how to access military and civilian facilities, services, entitlements, and benefits on behalf of the Family members.

How to complete:

• Guardian completes the form stating they were provided an original (or copy of) DA Form 5841 or equivalent naming them as guardian/escort for the named Family member(s).

• Guardian affirms acceptance of full responsibility and that they have been provided all necessary legal authority and means to perform the duties.

• **Must be signed by the guardian in the presence of a notary public.** Signing before notarization can invalidate the form.

• Typically prepare separate certificates for the short-term (temporary) guardian and the long-term (principal) guardian.

• Return the notarized original(s) to the Soldier for inclusion in the FCP packet.

6.5 DA Form 7666 – Parental Consent

This form is required when the FCP designates someone other than the child's other natural or legal parent (or another person already having legal interest in custody) as the temporary or long-term guardian. It records the agreement of both parents (or all parties with legal interest) to the custodial arrangements set out in the attached DA Form 5305.

How to complete:

• Identify the Soldier, the other parent, the child (full name, date and place of birth), and current primary residence of the child.

• State that the parties have reviewed the attached Family Care Plan (DA 5305) and agree to the

temporary physical custody arrangements with the named guardian during the Soldier's military absence (deployment, TDY, etc.).

• Both the Soldier and the other parent sign. Signatures are typically notarized.

• The form also includes language that the parties will cooperate with any additional documentation needed to effectuate the consent.

If consent cannot be obtained: Document reasonable efforts to obtain consent. The commander should seek legal guidance from Trial Counsel or the servicing Legal Assistance/Staff Judge Advocate office before approving a plan that lacks required consent. Existing court orders take precedence; the FCP cannot override them.

6.6 DD Form 1172-2 – Application for Identification Card / DEERS Enrollment

Complete one form for each Family member covered by the plan (even if they already have a current ID card). This ensures the guardian can obtain or renew ID cards and that Family members retain access to TRICARE, commissary, exchange, and other benefits during the Soldier's absence. Sign the form as the sponsor. Children under age 10 residing with single parents or dual-military couples are specifically directed to receive ID cards under AR 600-8-14.

6.7 DD Form 2558 – Authorization to Start, Stop, or Change an Allotment (or Equivalent Financial Proof)

Prepare this form (or provide other clear proof of financial support arrangements) to ensure the guardian has access to funds needed for the Family members' care. Common practice is to prepare the allotment authorization in advance but leave it unsigned until the plan is activated (deployment). Alternatives include bank account access authorizations, joint accounts, or other written financial arrangements. The commander must be satisfied that adequate financial support is in place.

6.8 Letter of Instruction to the Guardian/Escort

This is a required narrative document (often referenced on DA Form 5304). It should be tailored and thorough. Recommended contents include:

• Full identifying information for each Family member (full name, DOB, SSN if appropriate, medical/allergy info, medications, physicians, insurance/TRICARE details).

• Daily/weekly routines, school information, extracurricular activities, religious preferences, dietary needs, and special instructions.

• Location of important documents (birth certificates, immunization records, passports, court orders, insurance cards, POAs, wills, etc.).

• Contact information for the Soldier's chain of command, rear detachment, Family Readiness Group, Legal Assistance, TRICARE, school, doctors, and emergency contacts.

• Procedures for accessing military facilities, DEERS, medical care, and benefits as the agent for the Family members (guardians do not gain personal entitlement to benefits solely by virtue of the FCP).

• Financial arrangements and how to access funds.

• Contingency plans if the primary guardian becomes unavailable.

• Any OCONUS-specific instructions (evacuation, escort to CONUS guardian, etc.).

7. Special Situations and Best Practices

Dual-Military Couples: Submit the same basic plan to both commands. Neither Servicemember may be listed as guardian. Coordinate approval so both commanders sign. Original retained by the commander of the member least likely to deploy.

Existing Court Orders / Custody Disputes: The FCP must be consistent with existing court orders. If the plan names a third-party guardian, obtain DA Form 7666 consent or document efforts. Contact Legal Assistance early if there is any conflict or contested custody.

OCONUS Assignments: Single parents and dual-military couples with Family members must recertify the FCP NLT 30 days before out-processing the CONUS station. Plans should address noncombatant evacuation and escort arrangements if applicable.

Testing the Plan: Commanders may test implementation of the FCP at any time. Soldiers should ensure guardians are prepared and contact information remains current.

Legal Assistance: Strongly recommended for drafting or reviewing powers of attorney, reviewing custody documents, preparing special POAs tailored to state law, and resolving consent issues. On Okinawa, contact the Torii Station Legal Assistance Office (Bldg 218, Room 217; DSN 652-4332 / 4742).

8. Where to Obtain Forms and Additional Help

Official DA and DD forms are available at the Army Publishing Directorate website: https://armypubs.army.mil/(search by form number). Unit S-1, legal assistance offices, and Family Readiness personnel can also provide current versions and assistance. Always use the most recent edition of each form.

For personalized advice, contact your unit commander, First Sergeant, or the local Legal Assistance Office. Commanders remain the approval authority for the completed plan.

Disclaimer: This information paper is for general informational and training purposes only. It summarizes key requirements of AR 600-20 and related forms as of the date of preparation. Regulations and form versions are subject to change. This document does not constitute legal advice and does not create any attorney-client relationship. Soldiers should consult their chain of command and Legal Assistance Office for advice specific to their situation and for the most current regulatory guidance and form editions. Local command policies may impose additional requirements.

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