

STANDARD: CONCURRENT PLANNING

PURPOSE

The purpose of these standards is to provide direction and guidance to the Children and Family Services (CFS) programs regarding Concurrent Planning services. These standards are intended to achieve statewide consistency in the development and application of CFS core services and shall be implemented in the context of all applicable laws, rules and policies. The standards will also provide a measurement for program accountability.

INTRODUCTION

The Adoption Safe Families Act emphasizes moving children safely and quickly from the uncertainty of foster care to the security of a safe and stable family. In order to achieve timely permanency for children it may be necessary to develop, communicate, and work simultaneously on two types of plans. Concurrent planning is the process of working toward reunification while at the same time establishing an alternative or contingency backup plan. The approach follows logically from family-centered practice, as parents are involved in decision making and are given candid feedback from their social worker throughout the process. Concurrent planning depends on accurate assessment coupled with culturally competent, sensitive interviewing. It supports the safety and well being of children and families, while promoting early permanency decisions for children. Using concurrent planning prepares the family for the child's return to their home, or if necessary, for the identification of another permanent resource for the child.

DEFINITIONS

Aggravated Circumstances - severe situations that have occurred that would put a child in danger if reunification efforts were to be initiated. These circumstances should be brought to the attention of a judge through the county prosecuting attorney or regional deputy attorney general. A judge is the only one who can find that aggravated circumstances exist. According to Idaho Child Protective Act examples of aggravated circumstances include, but are not limited to: abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, sexual abuse, parent committed murder, committed voluntary manslaughter, aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit such a murder or voluntary manslaughter, parent committed a felony assault that resulted in serious bodily injury to any child of the parent, or the parental rights of the parent to a sibling have been terminated involuntarily. A permanency hearing must take place within 30 days of a judge's finding of aggravated circumstances.

Adoption Safe Family Act (ASFA) Timelines – a federal requirement for initiating termination of parental rights if a child is in state custody for 15 of the most recent 22 months, unless a judge determines it is not in the best interests of the child or IDHW has not made reasonable efforts to reunify the child or the child is placed with a permanent relative placement.

Concurrent Planning - planning which addresses a child's need for a permanent family by working toward family reunification while, at the same time, developing an alternate plan that will provide permanency options for the child through adoption, guardianship, placement with a relative or other permanency option.

Permanency Goal for the Child - the overall goal of the case which is intended to provide the child with a lifetime connection to a family. Permanency is associated with a child having the following:

- A family;
- An established legal relationship;
- The expectation of safety, protection, nurturance, stability and continuity;
- A connection to siblings and other family members; and
- A life long commitment.

Permanency Goals include:

- Reunification;
- Placement with a noncustodial parent;
- Legal guardianship with relatives;
- Legal guardianship with non-relatives;
- Adoption by a relative;
- Adoption by a non-relative; or
- Other planned permanent living arrangement (long term foster care).

A social worker should consider and make effective use of out-of-state placements with relatives or with pre-adoptive parents to expedite and achieve permanency for a child(ren).

In cases where the permanency goal for a child is other planned permanent living arrangement, other permanency goals must be considered and appropriately ruled out for the child.

In concurrent planning, each child has a primary permanency goal and a secondary permanency goal (see definitions of primary or secondary permanency goal).

Primary Permanency Goal - the option that is identified as being the most appropriate and preferred permanency option for a child, given the circumstances of the case. A primary permanency goal receives the strongest emphasis of the family and the CFS case manager as they work toward goal obtainment. However, a primary permanency goal may shift at any time to become a secondary permanency goal if it appears likely that the primary permanency goal is not obtainable. For example, initially the primary permanency goal for most children is reunification, recognizing that the child's own family is the best and most preferred permanency option. If however, the parent is not making timely progress in strengthening his/her protective capacities and reducing the safety concerns that necessitated removal of the child from his/her home, the primary permanency goal will shift to become the secondary permanency goal, and the alternate

permanency option will receive the strongest case emphasis and thereby become the primary permanency goal.

Secondary Permanency Goal - the secondary permanency goal in a concurrent plan is the option that is identified as the alternate permanency option for the child. At any time in a case, the secondary permanency goal may become the primary permanency goal and the prior primary permanency goal may shift to the secondary goal. Although both goals are worked simultaneously, the primary permanency goal is the emphasis of the case.

Poor Prognosis Indicators - factors that exist with parents that may prevent them from reducing the safety concerns within 15/22 months. A list of poor prognosis indicators has been gathered by researchers to assist child welfare practitioners in reviewing family history and the behaviors of parents (See attached poor prognosis indicator worksheet).

Life Story Book – is a pictorial and narrative story of the child’s life from birth until placement into a permanent home. The life story book may cover a period of time extending past the permanency placement. The process of developing the Life Story book should be done with the child, depending on the age and circumstances of the child.

Social History – a compilation of all the facts of a child’s life including maternal and paternal history, medical information, education information, developmental history and placement history which should be shared with the permanent resource for the child prior to permanent placement.

Indicators of Strength - factors that exist in a family that may be used to offset or reduce safety concerns for a child. (See attached Indicators of Strengths in Families).

STANDARDS

Beginning a Concurrent Plan:

Concurrent case planning begins at the time of removal of the child from their parents’ custody. The concurrent plan should include steps to make it possible for the child to return home as well as a plan setting forth reasonable efforts to place the child for adoption, with a legal guardian, or in another approved permanent placement. The state must make effective use of inter jurisdictional resources when developing the plan for the family. Included in the plan are steps to locate any absent parents and to establish paternity, if paternity is in question. (See the standard on termination of father’s rights for paternity establishment).

The first alternate care plan should contain concurrent plan information, identifying both the primary and secondary permanency goals. The CFS case manager should staff the primary and secondary goals with their supervisor prior to developing the alternate care plan.

Identifying and Notifying All Adult Relatives:

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires the Department to identify and notify all adult relatives when a child is taken into state

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custody to ensure the relatives have an opportunity to provide support through contact and, in some cases, become a foster parent, guardian, or an adoptive parent for their relative child. Within 30 days after removal of a child from their home, Department social workers must make efforts to identify and provide notice to all the child's adult relatives, notifying them that the child has been removed from their parents' care. Department social workers must also explain relatives' options to provide support through contact, and to participate in the child's care and placement. Some of the efforts to identify relatives to involve them in planning may include letters, phone calls, Family Group Decision Making meetings, and completion of genograms.

Relatives should be instructed that due to the bonds of attachment the child forms with their caregivers, it may not be found in the child's best interest to change placement to a relative who shows interest in being a placement resource later on in a case. Relatives should be made aware that when relatives wait to come forward until it is clear that their relative child cannot return home, and the child is in another stable permanent resource placement, the Department will not consider the relative a possible placement resource.

Family Involvement in Concurrent Planning:

Families should be engaged in all decision making surrounding the permanency goal, including the development of the family's concurrent plan. One way to engage families in the development of the concurrent plan is through Family Group Decision Making (FGDM). FGDM can be used during the initial meeting with the family to develop plan activities as well as other times in the life of the case. For example, FGDM may be helpful when multiple family members want to be a resource for the child or when the family is not showing progress in the completion of their plan. Early identification of relatives, to include in family meetings, is critical. Parents should be encouraged to identify both maternal and paternal family members, as well as fictive kin and individuals close to the family, who might be of help in determining the elements of the service plan.

Informing the Family of ASFA:

Families should be provided with complete information, either at the first family meeting or prior to the case planning hearing, on the requirements of the Adoption Safe Families Act, and the impact ASFA will have on their child and their family. Social workers should explain to families the timeframes contained in ASFA, as well as the definitions of permanency and how that affects their service plan.

Locating Absent Parents:

A diligent search shall be made to locate any absent parent(s) as early as possible following removal of the child. CFS staff will have access to the Locate Services provided by the Self Reliance/Child Support program. Within 30 days of placement, the social worker will complete a "locate form" and forward it to the locate unit.

Changing Primary and Secondary Goals:

If the primary goal is reunification, by 6 months after the placement of the child in alternate care, it should be clear whether reunification is feasible and should continue to be the primary goal or if reunification should be changed to the secondary goal.

Prior to changing permanency goals (shifting the primary goal to the secondary goal and vice versa) the social worker will staff the case with his/her supervisor or the regional permanency committee. With approval from the CFS case manager's supervisor and/or permanency committee, the permanency goal will be changed on the service plan screen in FOCUS. The change will also be documented on the next alternate care plan and reported to the court during the next review.

Recruitment for an Alternate Permanent Home:

When poor prognosis indicators are present or when a primary goal of reunification is changed to the secondary goal, a search should begin for a family who can serve as a permanent resource for the child and who could work with the child's birth family toward reunification, if indicated. In many cases the alternate permanent home will be the initial placement for the child or the child's birth family may identify an individual or family that could fulfill the role of an alternate permanent family.

If an alternate permanent family can not be readily identified, recruitment of a family should begin immediately for an in-state or interstate permanent placement. Prior to termination of parental rights, recruitment should include a review of possible relatives, fictive kin, and resource families. When appropriate, a social worker may list the child on the Idaho Adoption Exchange, the Northwest Adoption Exchange, Wednesday's Child, AdoptUSkids, State, regional and national adoption exchanges and electronic exchange systems, or use another recruitment effort before parental rights have been terminated. In these cases, the court should be notified of the recruitment strategies or permission for recruitment should be obtained from a judge, according to local regional practices. However, prior to termination of parental rights, consideration should be given to the privacy of the family and the readiness of the child in deciding where and how to recruit a permanent home. Recruitment efforts should be staffed with the CFS case manager's supervisor or the permanency committee.

It is preferable to have an alternate permanent family identified prior to termination of a child's parental rights. In those cases where a family has not been identified prior to TPR, an intensive and exhaustive effort should be made immediately after TPR.

Documentation regarding the search for a family should be entered in FOCUS in narrative on the service planning screen.

Timely Completion of a Life Story Book and Social History:

A Life Story Book and a Social History should be initiated for the child when it appears that the child may not return to his/her family. Developing the Life Story Book can be a therapeutic process as the child participates in developing his/her book and begins to deal with issues of grief and loss. The Social History is important in providing valuable life history information including medical background, educational background, etc. to the potential permanent family for the child.

Importance of Supervision:

Continuously staff the concurrent case with your supervisor. Cases that require concurrent planning are extremely difficult and it is helpful to have another perspective regarding the case progress.

CONCURRENT PLANNING TIMEFRAMES

The following actions are associated with timeframes to assist a social worker in accomplishing tasks throughout the life of the case, rather than waiting until ASFA timeframes require action. In all concurrent plan cases, the actions listed under reunification must be completed to ensure the Department has made reasonable efforts to reunify the child with his or her family. Cases that will not have reunification as a permanency goal, either as a primary or secondary goal, include cases where a judge has made a finding of aggravated circumstances or a baby has been relinquished as a “Safe Haven” baby.

If a child is an American Indian child, the tribe must be informed and involved, in all cases and at all points in the case, whether the plan is reunification or another permanency goal.

Tasks between the Shelter Care Hearing and Adjudicatory Hearing

Reunification	Alternate Permanency Goal
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place the child with a family who is willing to work cooperatively with the biological parent(s) towards reunification, but is also willing to become the child's permanent family if needed. This could be a relative or a non-relative resource family. • Develop a genogram (and ecomap) with the family to identify strengths, resources, tensions and stressor in the family. This is a time to begin identification of the child's father, and/or any absent parents or relatives who may serve as a family support or resource; • Determine if the child has American Indian Tribe affiliation(s), notify the respective tribe, and invite the tribe to participate in the permanency planning process. • Meet with the child's family (all interested family members, relatives, or close family support persons) to develop a service plan that addresses reunification as the Primary Goal. Exceptions for reunification plans as a primary goal include a baby that comes under the Safe Haven Act or a judge's finding of aggravated circumstances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate families about the detrimental effects of out-of-home care on children and the urgency of reunification or an alternate permanent plan such as legal guardianship or adoption. • Explain ASFA timeframes for reunification and the consequences of not meeting the timeframes. This knowledge may help motivate parents to make more effective use of services by actively working toward the changes necessary to regain custody. It will allow them to make informed decisions. • Get a copy of the child's birth certificate • If the child is an American Indian child, make sure the tribe has notice of the shelter care and adjudicatory hearings and invite the tribe to participate in the development of the child's permanency plan. • Within 30 days of the child's placement, identify and notify relatives that the child is in care and explain how they can become a resource to the child by becoming a placement option or maintaining other family connections.
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Within Ninety Days after the Child comes into Out-of-Home Care

Reunification	Alternate Permanency Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide immediate accessible focused, intensive services to families while also working on the tasks of an alternate permanent plan. • Make “reasonable efforts” (identified in the plan) to help the family reunify. For children coming under the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act, “active efforts” including access to culturally appropriate services are required. • Identify barriers to the family's progress and work with the family to resolve them. • Maintain frequent social worker/parent contact to support and encourage the parent and monitor their progress. • Ensure the availability of opportunities and supports needed for meaningful visitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider out-of-state placement options with relatives and kin. Submit an ICPC request for home studies of relatives willing to be considered as a permanent placement option. • Begin genetic testing for paternity if needed; • Begin gathering background and social history information; • Begin the child’s “Life Book;” • If the child is an Indian child, involve the child's tribe in the permanency activities and decisions and keep the tribe informed of the case progress.

Prior to 6 Month Review

Reunification	Alternate Permanency Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect information from all service providers regarding the family’s progress toward achieving service plan goals; • Review, with the family, their progress in reducing the safety concerns and enhancing their protective capacities; • Evaluate if services have been appropriate or helpful to the family in achieving their service plan objectives; • Assess the need to modify the service plan. • Prepare a report to the court, stating the family’s progress and any recommendations for a change in case status or service plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In evaluating the family’s progress, consider whether reunification should remain as the primary goal or be shifted to become the secondary goal. • Continue to evaluate out-of-state placement options. If ICPC home study results have not been received, request assistance from the Idaho ICPC Administrator to access home study results and placement recommendations in order to make reasonable efforts to place the child(ren) through an interstate placement in a timely manner. • Continue to maintain contact with possible non-custodial parents and other family members, tribal or community members, friends, or individuals who live in-state or out-of-state to encourage and assist them for preparing to be an alternate permanent placement. • If the primary goal shifts to adoption, and it appears the child’s resource family will be his/her permanent home, update the PRIDE home study to serve as the adoption homestudy. • If the child is not placed in his/her alternate permanent home and the primary goal changes from reunification, begin to transition the child to the alternate caregiver, in-state or out-of-state, through contact and visitation with the potential permanent caregiver. • ICPC placement authorizations remain valid for six months. If appropriate, make sure all ICPC placement authorizations remain current by requesting a renewal or assistance through Idaho’s ICPC administrator.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the child is an American Indian child, involve the tribe in permanency recommendations and make sure they have notice of review hearings.
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Within 9 Months of the Child being in Out-of-Home Care

Reunification	Alternate Permanency Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the family, continue to evaluate and measure changes that have occurred related to safety issues identified during the initial Child and Family Safety Assessment. • Identify any barriers that could prevent the parent(s) from protecting and caring for their child. Work to help the parent(s) resolve those barriers. • If it is safe to do so, increase parent/child visitation giving the child's parents an opportunity to demonstrate newly learned skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the primary goal changes from reunification, complete the child's social history. • If needed, staff the case with the permanency committee to receive a recommendation for TPR or other permanency option (the case should be reviewed by the permanency committee as soon as the likelihood of reunification is questionable or if reunification is no longer an option.) • If a decision has been made to pursue an out-of-state placement, request permission from the courts to place the child out-of-state. • If reunification seems unlikely, use "options counseling" so the family can consider voluntary surrender, kinship care, guardianship or adoption. • If the child is an American Indian child, involve the tribe by keeping them informed, invite them to participate in case staffings, and communicate case progress.

Prior to the Permanency Hearing

Reunification	Alternate Permanency Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare recommendation for Permanency Hearing; • If reunification is likely, identify the services or supports that will be needed by the family to reduce the likelihood of the child reentering foster care. <p>Make appropriate referrals for services or supports pending possible reunification.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Life Book. • At the permanency hearing, if the primary goal is adoption and a home has not yet been identified, the social worker may ask the court for permission to actively recruit for an adoptive home. • Prepare Court Report for Termination of Parental Rights (if appropriate for permanency goal); • If the child is an American Indian child, the tribe must receive notice of the permanency hearing. Continue to work with the tribe around permanency recommendations. • If the child is not already residing in his/her alternate permanent home, all reasonable efforts should be completed to place the child in a timely manner in accordance with his/her permanency plan. This includes in-state and out-of-state permanency placements. • At the permanency hearing, the social worker must report on the status of the in-state and out-of state alternate permanency placement options. If a child is in an out-of-state placement at the time of the hearing, the permanency hearing must determine whether the out-of-state foster care placement continues to be appropriate and in the child's best interests.

Prior to 15/22 Months of a Child being in Out of Home Care

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Reunification	Alternate Permanency Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reunify the child with his/her birth family if safety issues have been reduced and the court finds reunification can occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If adoption is the primary goal and TPR has occurred, complete part 1 of 2 of the Adoption Assistance agreement immediately after TPR. • If the child is an American Indian child, work with the tribe around the permanency goal and concurrent service plan.

**Prior to 24 months
Adoption, Guardianship, Other Planned Living Arrangement**

Identified Permanent Plan
<p>Adoption:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Part 2 of 2 of the adoption assistance agreement. • If adoption is the primary goal, complete report to the court. • Discuss community supports and referrals to services to support the child and adoptive family, post adoption. <p>Guardianship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the case meets the criteria for a subsidized guardianship, negotiate the subsidy with the potential guardians. • Discuss community supports and referrals to services to support the child and the family who is serving as the child's guardian, post guardianship. <p>Other Planned Living Arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide options counseling to the youth to allow him/her to make informed decisions regarding their future permanency plans.

- Provide services and supports to make sure that the long term foster placement is stable;

- If the child is 15 years of age, ensure the child has an Ansel Casey Assessment and independent living plan that will address his/her future safety and well-being.

- Connect the child with individuals who can serve as life-time supports.

- Continually assess whether the child's best interests are thoroughly considered in maintaining the goal of "other planned living arrangement (long term foster care). Regularly evaluate the case to see if additional permanency options are available for the child.

Any variance to these standards shall be documented and approved by the Division Administrator, unless otherwise noted.