

CONCURRENT PLANNING STANDARD

PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard is to provide direction and guidance to the Child and Family Services (CFS) programs regarding Concurrent Planning. This standard is 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 standard 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 is necessary to develop, communicate, and work simultaneously on two types of plans in the event reunification is not possible. Concurrent planning is the process of working toward reunification, while at the same time, establishing and working toward an alternative or contingency permanent plan. Using a family-centered practice approach, parents are involved in decision making and are given candid feedback from their social worker throughout the process. Concurrent planning supports the safety and well being of children and families, while promoting early permanency decisions for children.

TERMS

Aggravated Circumstances - severe situations which would put a child in danger if reunification efforts were to be initiated. According to the 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.

Alternate Permanent Placement – broadly refers to a family who has been formally recommended through the Permanent Placement Committee process to be the pre-adoptive or pre-guardianship family for a child.

Compelling Reasons - case specific justification for either not filing a termination petition within the “15 of 22” month time period, or case specific justification that reunification, adoption, guardianship, and relative placement are not in the child’s best interests. This may apply in the following circumstances:

- the child will be imminently reunited with his/her parent(s);
- the parent and child have a significant bond, but the parent is unable to care for the child because of an emotional or physical disability and the child’s foster parents have committed to raise the child to the age of majority and facilitate visitation with the disabled parent;

- an older child refuses to be adopted despite counseling and efforts to prepare the child for permanency;
- no grounds to file a petition to terminate parental rights exist;
- the child's tribe, acting in the child's best interests, chooses to define compelling reasons for not terminating parental rights; or,
- adoption is not the appropriate permanency goal for the child.

Concurrent Planning - planning which addresses a child's need for permanency by working with a family towards reunification while simultaneously working towards an alternative permanency goal of adoption, guardianship, or another planned permanent living arrangement.

Concurrent Planning Family – a family who is licensed or approved to provide both foster care and adoption services. A concurrent planning family is willing and able to support reunification efforts while also being interested in providing permanency for a child through adoption or guardianship if reunification is not achieved. The family can be a relative, fictive kin/kin, or non-relative.

Customary Adoption - an adoption which occurs under the customs, laws, or traditions of a child's tribe. Termination of parental rights (TPR) is not required to affect the tribal customary adoption. Through customary adoption, tribes are allowed to meet the permanency needs of their children while honoring their own tribal values and beliefs.

Dual Assessment - another name for the Resource Family Foster/Adoptive Home Study used to evaluate a prospective family who has applied to become licensed to provide foster care and/or adoption. This dual home study process incorporates the components of the PRIDE mutual assessment process.

Fit and Willing Relative – individuals who meet Idaho's definition of relative (Idaho Statute 16-1602(38)) and qualify as a licensed foster home and/or receive a positive adoption home study. The relative must also possess the protective capacities; be able and willing to recognize and provide for a child's special needs; provide a safe and nurturing home for the sibling group when the child is being placed with his or her siblings; ensure the child's safety; and follow-through with visitation, contact, or relationship-building activities with the child prior to placement in their home.

Fictive Kin or Kin - non-relatives who have a significant, family-like relationship with a child. Fictive kin or kin may include godparents, close family friends, clergy, teachers or members of a child's Indian tribe.

Life Story Book - a pictorial and narrative story of the child's life beginning at birth. 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.

Permanency - a relationship between a child and adult in which the following characteristics are present: parenting; life-long intent; a sense of belonging; legal and social status; and unconditional commitment by the adult.

Permanency Goal - the overall goal of the case intended to provide the child with a lifetime connection to a family.

Permanency Hearings - permanency hearings can occur at any time but must occur within 12 months of the date the child was placed into foster care, and every year thereafter. The purpose of the 12-month permanency hearing is to approve, modify, or reject the permanency plan and review the child's current placement. The court must make a determination that the Department has made reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan through a retrospective review of agency efforts.

Pre-Adoptive Placement – a relative, fictive kin/kin, or non-relative placement which has been identified as a child's adoptive placement through the Permanent Placement Committee process. Pre-Adoptive placements are formalized with the completion of an Adoptive Placement Agreement or Legal Risk Adoptive Placement Agreement.

Pre-Guardianship Placement – a relative, fictive kin/kin, or non-relative placement which has been identified as a child's guardianship placement through the Permanent Placement Committee process.

Primary Permanency Goal - the primary permanency goal is identified as 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 social worker as they work toward goal attainment. However, both the primary and secondary goals are worked simultaneously. A primary permanency goal may shift at any time to become a secondary permanency goal if it appears likely the primary permanency goal is not attainable.

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard – the standard of care characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while simultaneously encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child that a caregiver must use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the state to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, or social activities.

Resource Family – may include foster families, adoptive families, relatives, or fictive kin/kin. The term broadly refers to anyone who provides a safe, stable, loving home for a child when the child's parents or guardians are unable to provide one.

Protective Capacities - personal and caregiving, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that specifically and directly can be associated with being protective to one's young. Protective capacities are personal qualities or characteristics that contribute to vigilant child protection.

Relative - a person related to a child by blood, marriage, or adoption. This includes a child's grandparent, great-grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, first cousin, sibling and half-sibling (Idaho Statute 16-1602(38)).

Secondary Permanency Goal - the secondary permanency goal in a concurrent plan is the option that is identified as another 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 the primary permanency goal is the emphasis of the case, both goals are worked simultaneously.

Sibling - a person who shares the same biological or adoptive mother and/or father of the child. Siblings may be full-siblings or half-siblings. Siblings include those children who would be considered a sibling if not for a disruption in parental rights, such as a termination of parental rights (TPR) or death of a parent.

Special Circumstances – a term which refers to situations which, when present, indicate concurrent planning is not required. These situations include an infant entering foster care through the Safe Haven Act and cases where the court finds aggravated circumstances to be present.

CFS STAFF REQUIREMENTS

This standard provides information regarding CFS staff requirements, guidance, and direction on implementation. Below are the requirements for CFS staff for this standard:

- All children entering foster care must have a concurrent plan consisting of different primary and secondary permanency goals with the exception of those cases where special circumstances or compelling reasons are present.
- All permanency goals, including primary and secondary concurrent goals, must be documented within 30 days of a child's entry into foster care and updated whenever any changes are made.
- Permanency goals, including primary and secondary concurrent planning goals, are to be developed using multi-person staffing and based on the presence of current safety threats, the child's needs, reunification efforts, and family input.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) –a federal law which requires that when a child has been in foster care for at least 15 of the last 22 months, a Petition for Termination of the Parent and Child Relationship be filed, or a finding be made by the court that termination of parental rights is not in the best interest of the child, or that the Department has not made reasonable efforts to reunify, or that child is placed with a permanent relative placement. The rationale for this determination should be documented in the Case Plan Part 2 (the Child's Plan) and approved by the court.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act – a federal law which requires the Department to identify and notify all adult relatives when a child is taken into state

custody to ensure relatives have an opportunity to provide support through contact and/or becoming a foster parent, guardian, or adoptive parent for their relative child. Within 30 days after removal of a child from their home, CFS social workers must make efforts to identify and notice all the child's adult relatives.

Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act – a federal law which requires CFS to notify parents of a child's sibling(s) when that child is placed in foster care. Notification must occur within 30 days of the child's removal and follow the same guidelines as relative notification required under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARD

Establishing a Concurrent Plan

Concurrent planning begins at the time of a child's placement in foster care. It requires the identification of primary and secondary permanency goals. CFS social workers should staff primary and secondary goals with their supervisors prior to the development of the Case Plan Part 1 (the Family Case Plan) and Case Plan Part 2 (the Child's Plan).

A concurrent plan includes steps to reduce the identified safety threats so the child can return home as well as steps to place the child for adoption, with a legal guardian, or in another planned permanent living arrangement.

Families should be engaged in all decision making surrounding the permanency goal, including the development of the concurrent plan. All permanency goals, including concurrent goals, must be developed in consultation with the child when the child is 14 years of age or older. The child must also be given the option to identify up to two individuals to act as permanency planning partners who will participate in permanency goal development. These individuals cannot be the child's foster parent or social worker. One of the individuals may also be designated as the child's advisor, able to advocate for the child with respect to the application of the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard. In the event there is good cause to believe an individual identified by the child as a permanency planning partner would not act in the best interest of the child, the individual's involvement can be denied.

Permanency Goal Options

When making permanency planning decisions, it is important to understand the preferred options for permanency. These options are described in order of those which provide the most to least level of permanency. Before considering any permanency goal for a child, each more preferred option must be considered and ruled-out. Reasons the goals are not appropriate must be clearly documented. Permanency with relatives is generally preferred over non-relative placement.

There are differences in legal status, parent/caregiver rights and responsibilities, and the availability of ongoing post-permanency support for each permanency goal option. The Permanency Options Matrix outlines these differences and can be helpful in determining the most suitable permanency goal for a child.

Permanency goals in order of preference include:

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- Reunification: Reunification occurs when child is placed back with the caregiver from whom he/she was removed. It also includes placement with a noncustodial parent where the child is placed with a parent who did not have custody of the child at the time of removal. Cases which will not have reunification as a primary or secondary permanency goal include cases where a judge has made a finding of aggravated circumstances or an infant has been relinquished under the Safe Haven Act;
- Adoption: Parental rights are terminated and the child is legally adopted. A child may be adopted by a relative or a non-relative. For a child who falls under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a permanency goal of adoption may include Customary Adoption. Customary Adoption is a process of legal adoption which does not require termination of parental rights. Customary adoptions require the involvement of the child's tribe and are finalized through tribal courts;
- Legal Guardianship: Legal guardianship is established by the court and does not require parental rights to be terminated. Legal guardians may be relatives or non-relatives. When a young person is living with a relative or there are other compelling reasons not to terminate parental rights, legal guardianship can be a good permanent solution. Guardianship is often a preferred permanency option for American Indian/Alaska Native youth. A number of tribes do not recognize termination of parental rights (TPR) and adoption.
- Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA): APPLA does not meet the definition of permanency and is an option only for youth aged 16 or older. APPLA indicates the plan is for the youth to remain in foster care until age 18. All other permanency goals must first be considered and appropriately ruled out and the appropriateness of APPLA must be re-evaluated on an on-going basis. Intensive and ongoing efforts to place a child permanently through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or with a fit and willing relative must continue to be made, and these efforts must be documented in the case file. At each permanency and periodic review hearing, the youth must be asked about his/her desired permanency outcome and documentation must be made of the steps CFS is making to ensure the foster family follows the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard and the youth has the opportunity to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities. In addition, the court must make a determination of compelling reasons that it is not in the best interest of the child to be placed permanently with a parent, in an adoptive placement, in a guardianship, or in the legal custody of the Department in a placement with a fit and willing relative, including an adult sibling.

Documentation of Initial Concurrent Permanency Goals

Each child's initial primary and secondary concurrent permanency goals should be documented in ESPI and on the Case Plan Part 2 (the Child's Plan) within 30 days of the date of the child's removal. It is important to remember the goal itself does not include the relative specification and should be presented to the family, case plan participants, and the court accordingly (i.e. as reunification/adoption instead of reunification/adoption by a relative). For information on how to add permanency goals in ESPI, see "Case Plan Part 2 Process ESPI" on the CWWiki.

The decision-making process used to develop the child's concurrent plan must also be

documented in ESPI. At minimum, this should include who was involved in plan development; when development occurred; plan preferences of the parents, child and relatives; a description of factors which were considered (i.e. relative interest, child's needs, child's age, parent/child relationship); and the appropriateness of the primary and secondary goals. It should be noted if permanency goal development was discussed at parent and/or family meeting(s). For information on how to document permanency-goal staffings, see "Conducting Ongoing Case Consultation" and "ESPI Procedures-Permanency Staffing Consultation/Creating a Permanency Case" on the CWWiki.

Changing Permanency Goals

Ongoing Case Consultations are held throughout the lifetime of a case (see "Using Ongoing Consultation" on the CWWiki for process information). Concurrent goals should be re-assessed at every ongoing case consultation no less frequently than every 90 days. Re-assessment of concurrent goals occurs in conjunction with re-assessment of safety. If the safety re-assessment determines there has been little to no progress in alleviating the identified safety threats and it continues to be unsafe for the child to return home, consideration should be made to shifting the primary goal of reunification to the secondary goal and the secondary goal to the primary goal. Consideration should be given to the parents' protective capacities and presence of reasonable efforts including services provided to the family, as well as follow-up services if those initially provided were unsuccessful. Additional areas to consider include: any paternity issues; the Indian Child Welfare Act; relative engagement including efforts to identify relatives, fictive kin, and a concurrent planning permanent placement; the child's trauma history, mental/emotional health, educational and physical health needs; and child, parent, relative and foster parent perspectives. For children birth to three years of age, consideration should be given to the length of time the child has been in out of home placement comparative to the child's age and progress made in alleviating identified safety concerns. The appropriateness of the secondary goal and progress made towards achieving that goal should also be assessed.

Once a child has been in alternate care for 12 months, a single permanency goal should be selected as it is highly unlikely reunification will occur. There are some situations in which it may be appropriate to extend a concurrent plan including reunification and a secondary permanency goal for no more than three months, after the 12-month period. As an example, situations where a parent is waiting to secure housing, but has otherwise been able to reduce the identified safety threats in the home. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires the Department to seek termination of parental rights (TPR) once a child has been in foster care at least 15 out of the last 22 months. An exception can occur if the court finds compelling reasons that termination is not in the best interests of the child, the Department has not made reasonable efforts to reunify, or the child is placed in a permanent relative placement.

An Ongoing Case Consultation where a child's primary and/or secondary concurrent goal is likely to be changed is held as a Permanency Staffing Consultation and must include the child's social worker, a permanency social worker or representative, the social worker's supervisor, and a child welfare representative from outside the social worker and supervisor's team. CASA must also be invited. In ICWA cases, the child's tribe must also be invited. The role of the "outside party" is to provide an objective view of the case and ask critical questions. When making decisions to change any permanency goal, the input of youth aged 14 years or older and their permanency planning partners must be considered. Prior to proceeding with any primary permanency plan which includes termination of parental rights, approval must be given by the

field program manager. Termination of parental rights is a tool used to free a child for adoption. Therefore, it should not be pursued unless the plan is for the child to be placed for adoption.

Once reunification is no longer the primary goal, practice focuses on achieving the alternate permanent goal; however, reunification efforts must continue until termination of parental rights occurs.

Documentation of Permanency Goal Changes

As with the initial permanency goal development process, the decision-making process used to identify changes to the child's permanency goals must be documented. Documentation should include factors considered in the decision-making process including existing safety threats and protective capacities; the appropriateness of the permanency goal; reasonable efforts including services provided to the family as well as follow-up services if those initially provided were unsuccessful; the child's trauma history, mental/emotional health, educational and physical health needs; the relationship between the child and parents; perspectives of the child, parents, relatives, foster parents and tribe (when applicable); relative search and engagement; and efforts to identify a concurrent permanent placement for the child. Follow-up on any concerns identified at previous case consultations should also occur. See "ESPI Procedures -Permanency Staffing Consultation/Creating a Permanency Case" on the CWWiki for guidance on entering documentation in ESPI.

When a Permanency Staffing Consultation results in the recommendation to shift a child's primary and secondary permanency goals, move to a singular permanency goal, or otherwise change a child's permanency goal, the goal should immediately be changed in ESPI. The change must also be documented on the Case Plan Part 2 and brought before the court for approval. If the court makes a permanency goal determination different from that recommended by CFS, the permanency goal should be changed in ESPI to reflect the court order and the reason for the change documented.

Concurrent Planning and Permanent Placements

At the beginning of each case, a search must be initiated for a concurrent planning family who can work with the child's birth family toward reunification while committing to be the child's permanent family if reunification does not occur. Therefore, it is critical to engage the birth family to identify a relative who could fulfill the role of concurrent planning family. Recruitment should include the use of the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) process to aid in the assessment of out-of-state relatives. Sometimes the best permanency placement option for a child is not local. In that situation, the child may be unable to be placed in a concurrent planning placement while reunification efforts are in place. However, the Permanent Placement Committee process should still occur and the child and identified family can visit with one another. Non-relative foster parents must be asked about their interest in providing a permanent placement should reunification not occur and a fit and willing relative not be identified. It is essential for foster parents who are interested to have a current approved dual assessment.

A Permanent Placement Committee may be held at any time; however, should be held no later than six months after a child entered foster care. It is essential diligent search and notification of relatives has occurred and prospective relative placements assessed prior to the meeting. See the Permanent Placement Committee Standard for more information about this process. Early selection of an alternate permanent placement can be helpful to everyone involved in a family's

case as it provides a greater level of certainty as to where, with whom and under what circumstances a child will live should reunification not occur. Identification prior to six months must be considered in those situations where reunification is highly unlikely to occur. Once the Permanent Placement Committee process has been completed, information about the family recommended by CFS as the child's permanent placement must be shared with the court. Parties to the child protection case can request a judicial review of the recommended placement. In these situations, the judge may either approve or deny the placement recommended by CFS.

When no relatives or current care providers have been identified as permanent placement options for a child by the time adoption becomes their primary permanency goal, use of media-based recruitment strategies such as Idaho Wednesday's Child and/or AdoptUsKids should be considered. If termination of parental rights has not occurred, consideration should also be given to the privacy of the family and readiness of the child in deciding where and how to recruit a permanent home. In addition, the birth family, foster parents, and CASA must be notified of the intent to use media-based recruitment and permission for such recruitment efforts obtained from the court. In cases where an alternate permanent family has not been identified prior to termination of parental rights, intensive and exhaustive efforts, including media-based recruitment, must continue to be made to locate a permanent family. Recruitment efforts should be reviewed during Ongoing Case Consultations. They must also be reported to the court as part of ongoing periodic review and permanency hearings.

Documentation regarding recruitment efforts should be entered in ESPI as part of the monthly contact narratives (see "Monthly Contact Narratives" on the CWWiki for documentation guidance).

Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning

Successful concurrent planning includes the use of promising practices which contribute to the accomplishment of timely permanency. Ignoring any one of these practices can delay permanency for a child in foster care. Supervisors should continuously include discussion of concurrent case planning and progress during Supervisor Staffings with their social workers. Concurrent planning can be extremely challenging, and it is helpful to have another perspective regarding the case progress.

- **Early Collection of Parent, Relative and ICWA Information:**
Identification of a child's birth and legal parents is central to the provision of reunification efforts. A diligent search must be made to locate any absent parent(s) as early as possible following removal of the child using all available information from the case record, as well as information provided by individuals connected to the family.

Determination of the child's paternity needs to be made as soon as possible. Failure to determine paternity early can result in significant case delays caused by inadequate assessment of the father and provision of related services; greater length of stay in foster care for the child; late identification and involvement of paternal relatives (i.e. "pop-up relatives"); and legal issues related to the termination of parental rights if adoption becomes the child's primary goal.

CFS has access to the statewide Locate Services through the Central Office Child Welfare Funding Team. Within 30 days of placement, the CFS social worker completes a

"locate form" regarding any absent parent and forward it to the locate unit. Locate Services can also assist in locating a child's relatives. Relatives should be identified as early as possible to aid in the continuation of a child's relationships and reduce the likelihood of placement changes late in the case.

An initial Social and Medical History (SMH) for each child and parent must be completed within 60 days of that child's foster care entry. The SMH documents valuable information about the child and parents, including identification of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles; American Indian/Alaskan Native ancestry; and medical history. Copies of the non-identifying portions of the SMH are given to the child's current resource family, prospective pre-adoptive parents, and prospective legal guardians. The SMH and Social and Medical History Guide are available on the CWWiki.

Significant delays in permanency occur when American Indian/Alaskan Native ancestry is not identified early in a case. If a parent or relative notes on the SMH the child or parent has "American Indian Ancestry," the American Indian Ancestry form must be completed. A child's parents and relatives must be asked about any tribal connections. 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.

A Life Story Book is another tool for documenting information about a child and the child's 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.

- **Engaging Relatives**

Relative involvement in child welfare can be supportive to birth parents, children and resource families. Federal law requires CFS to notify a child's relatives of the child's placement in foster care. Notification is necessary to ensure the relatives have an opportunity to provide support through contact and, in some cases, become a foster parent, adoptive parent or legal guardian for their relative child. Within 30 days after removal of a child from their home, CFS must make efforts to identify and provide notice that the child has been removed from their parents' care to all of the child's adult grandparents, all parents (including adoptive parents) of a sibling of the child when such parent has custody of such child, and other adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents). CFS must also explain relatives' options to provide support through contact, and to participate in the child's care and placement. Relatives should also be informed of the Department's intent to identify an alternate permanent placement for the child no later than six months after the child was placed in foster care. Some of the efforts to identify and involve relatives in planning may include letters, phone calls, parent meetings, family meetings, and completion of genograms.

Relatives should be instructed that due to the bonds of attachment the child forms with their resource families, 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 in a case. They must be made aware that when relatives wait to come forward, and the child is in another stable permanent resource placement, CFS might not consider the relative a

possible placement resource as it may not be in the best interest of the child to place with his/her relative at that time.

Relatives must be provided information about the potential availability of Idaho's IV-E relative guardianship assistance and adoption assistance programs. Each relative notification needs to be documented in ESPI and should include the relative's name, contact information, relationship to the child and any response. A Relative Letter template is available to assist with the notification process (Attachment A). The Standard for Placement of Children in Foster Care has additional information regarding relative engagement.

Relatives often know a significant amount about the family's functioning. Their level of engagement within the case can vary widely. Children are less likely to experience a disruption from a relative placement. Relatives unable or unwilling to be a placement option may still be able to visit with the child, supervise parent visitation, provide respite, assist the birth parents or foster parents with transportation or provide support in other ways.

Relatives and/or fictive kin residing out-of-state must demonstrate their ability to establish and maintain healthy attachments with the child and support the child's safety, well-being, and permanency. The CFS social worker must encourage the relative and /or fictive kin to maintain their relationship between the child through face to face visits, phone calls, and other methods. The CFS social worker must also support the child's current foster parent in maintaining this relationship with the relative and/or fictive kin. The assigned social worker, in collaboration with the relative and/or fictive kin and resource family, shall develop a visitation/contact schedule to support the relationship between the relative and/or fictive kin and child. Please consult with your supervisor regarding financial support for visitation.

- **Visitation**

Visitation is the primary child welfare intervention in maintaining the parent-child relationship necessary for reunification. It provides social workers an opportunity to assess parent-child interaction and relationship while providing hands-on parent coaching and education. Ideally, the first visit occurs within 48 hours of the child's placement in foster care. Children who experience frequent and purposeful visitation tend to have fewer behavioral problems, fewer placement changes, are more likely to be reunified, and reunify earlier than those who do not. The frequency, location and need for supervision of visits are dependent upon case-specific circumstances. The Visitation Standard provides further guidance on how to make the most of visitation.

- **Early Intensive Reunification Efforts**

Reunification efforts begin immediately and are based upon a thorough assessment of the unique strengths and needs of family members. Targeted services should be provided to each parent and child based upon individualized assessments. Developed family case plans should prioritize identified safety concerns and require parental demonstration of skills. Plan achievement is not to be based on certificates of completion.

Documentation of reunification efforts and parental participation is essential to demonstrating progress or lack of progress in any case. Written agreements including case plans and visitation plans are helpful in demonstrating shared understanding of expectations and goals.

- **Prognostic Case Reviews**

Prognostic case reviews are informed by the initial safety assessment and reasons for child welfare involvement and foster care placement. They include a review of any child or parent assessments, family history, current strengths, presenting problems and underlying needs, to identify factors which make timely reunification more or less difficult and more or less likely. Case reviews should be collaborative, incorporating information from services providers, resource families, and all case plan participants.

Timely six-month periodic review and annual permanency hearings are important to achieving permanency. In preparation for these court hearings, Ongoing Consultation and Supervisor Staffings are held to re-assess safety, case progress, and concurrent planning goals. Case Consultations involving the establishment or change of concurrent and permanency goals should be prognostic case reviews.

Unplanned changes in social workers assigned to a case can result in a six-month delay in case progress. Even planned changes in social workers may result in a delay. Frequent formal and informal communication about case planning progress between social workers assigned to different tasks in the case is essential to reducing case transfer-related delays. When a case will be transferred as part of hub processes, early teaming between the involved CFS social workers is beneficial. Participation of all assigned CFS social workers and supervisors in prognostic case reviews can assist in minimizing any delays resulting from case transfer.

- **Fostering Relationships**

Fostering relationships between birth parents, relatives, resource parents, and community members helps to establish a support network for the family which can be in place once CFS is no longer involved. This is true regardless of which permanency outcome is achieved.

Collaboration between birth parents and resource parents can have a significant impact on the overall course of the child's placement in foster care. Icebreaker meetings are one way to introduce birth parents to resource parents. Children whose parents and resource parents have a respectful, supportive relationship have been shown to have more stable foster care placements, better emotional development and more success in school.

The relationship between a child's resource parents and relatives should also be encouraged. Building this connection can result in added support to the foster parents and feelings of security for the child. In situations where a child cannot immediately be placed with a relative, perhaps due to geographical distance and the need for reunification efforts, but later moves to the home of the relative, a pre-existing positive relationship between the resource parents and relatives can help the transition go more smoothly.

School events, extra-curricular activities, and cultural events offer natural opportunities for birth parents, relatives, and resource parents to interact and build relationships with one another.

- **Full Disclosure**

All CFS social workers are responsible for teaching birth parents, the child, relatives, resource parents, and other case planning team members how the child welfare system works using full disclosure. Confidentiality guidelines as outlined in the Confidentiality Standard apply. Individuals need to be provided with information necessary for them to make any decisions they are being asked to make. The Full Disclosure Checklist (Attachment B) identifies items which may be covered with each case participant. Full disclosure is an on-going process to be reiterated frequently throughout the life of the case.

Families should be provided with complete information on the requirements of the Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA) and the impact ASFA will have on their child and family. CFS 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.

Families being considered for placement of the child need to be provided with information necessary to determine if they would be able to meet the child's needs. Relative and non-relative resource parents need the information necessary to provide adequate care and support the permanency plan for the child. Children in foster care need information delivered according to their age and ability to understand. This allows the child to be effectively involved in case planning decisions including permanency.

Full disclosure also includes the process of keeping CASA, deputy attorneys general and/or prosecuting attorneys informed of case plan progress and decisions. The timely sharing of information helps reduce any possibility of courtroom surprises or battles.

Special Situations

There are two situations when concurrent planning does not occur. If an infant is abandoned and enters foster care under the Safe Haven Act, CFS moves to seek termination of parental rights as soon as 30 days after the child enters foster care. The identities of the child's parents are unknown, and the child should be immediately placed in a home intended to be an adoptive placement for the child.

In some cases, severe situations are present which would put a child in danger if reunification efforts were initiated. These situations should be brought to the attention of a judge through the county prosecuting attorney or deputy attorney general to ask for a ruling that aggravated circumstances are present. If aggravated circumstances are found by the judge to be present, a permanency hearing must take place within 30 days of that ruling.

Any action taken not consistent with this standard must be pre-approved by the FACS Division Administrator or designee. The action, rationale, and approval must be documented in the file.

Attachment A: Relative Letter

(Insert Regional Letterhead)

Date

Dear (relative's name),

I am writing to let you know that you have been identified as a relative of (child's name(s)) who was placed in the custody of the State of Idaho on (date of removal) and is currently living in (a/two) (relative/non-relative) foster home(s).

Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act in 2008 and the Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in 2014 which require state agencies to notify a child's adult relatives and custodial parents of a child's siblings when the child is taken into state custody. Notification ensures 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.

It would be most helpful if you could contact me immediately, but at least within the next 30 days, as critical decisions and planning occur during this time. We are in the process of developing a plan with (child's name(s)) family. It is very early in the case and while most children in our custody are able to return to their own home, sometimes circumstances make that impossible. As members of (child's name(s)) family, your participation in his/her/their future is very important. Please call us with your input and let us know if you can help (child's name(s)) and his/her/their family in any way. Information about any American Indian/Alaskan Native heritage the child/children has/have is also very important.

When relatives wait to come forward, and the child is in another stable permanent placement, we may not consider the relative as a possible placement resource. We ask you not to wait so we can include you in planning for (child's name(s)) future.

If you already know that you are interested in becoming a foster parent, legal guardian or adoptive parent for (child's name(s)), please let me know that so I can help you get started on the approval process. In the event that you become the legal guardian for or adopt (child's name(s)), you may be eligible for an ongoing subsidy (cash payment and/or medical coverage) based on the child's needs until (child's name(s)) reaches age 18.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me at (phone number). If I am not available, please leave a message. You can also write to me if you prefer at Child and Family Services, (street or PO Box, city, state, zip)

Sincerely,
(social worker's name)

Full Disclosure Checklist

What should be discussed?

➤ **ITEMS TO COVER with Birth Parents**

- Why the child needs permanency
- Expectations (of agency and parents)
- Changed behaviors that will ensure the child's safety
- Reasonable Efforts (How services will improve their protective capacities)
- Gain information from the birth family on their strengths, resources, extended family, and other information that will help develop a case plan
- Roles and responsibilities of all parties
- Timelines
- Consequences if the parent(s) do not make progress towards reunification.
- Feedback that is concrete, specific, and behaviorally based
- Balance negative statements with positive ones
- Relationship between worker, birth parents, and resource parents.
- Laws and legal processes
- Choosing, participating in and evaluating progress of services/treatment
- Visitation plan
- Questions and concerns
- Answering "what if" questions (what if the birth parent does not complete his/her treatment)
- Give feedback, praise and support for the work they are already doing

➤ **ITEMS TO COVER with Resource Family**

- Provide adequate information in order for a family to determine if they can meet the expectations of being a Resource Family for this child
- Information regarding the child and any special needs
- Give feedback, praise and support for the work they are doing
- Information on the case progress
- Visitation plan
- Current legal situation

- Why children need to have permanency
- Roles and responsibilities of all parties
- Timelines
- The services the child is attending
- Handling of boundary issues and conflict resolution
- Allow for questions and concerns
- Answer “what if” questions (What happens if the parents do not complete services and improve their protective capacities? What if the child is returned home?)

➤ **Additional items to cover with Resource Families who are RELATIVES:**

- Gain information on the quality of the relationship between the resource family and the birth parents
- Gain a commitment to protect the child even if it means a conflict with the birth parent
- If the relative Resource Family is unsure whether they want to be the adoptive parent or guardian; discuss their concerns and the pros and cons of the impact their decision may have on the child

➤ **ITEMS TO COVER with Children and their Siblings** (developmentally appropriate language)

- That the adults will make the decisions (It is not for the child to do and his/her behavior does not influence the decision)
- Child will have contact with ALL important people in his/her life now and in the future (Do I have to choose one parent/family over another?)
- Praise for his/her behavior and ability to handle a difficult situation that is not his/her fault
- Expectations and responsibilities of the adults (What do my parents need to do for me to go home?)
- Answer his/her “what if” questions
- Visitation plan (When can I see my birth parents and siblings)
- When and how decisions will be made
- Placement decisions (Where will I live?)
- Older children: His/her desires about different permanency options
- Older siblings: Willingness to care for, visit or support siblings
- Emotions related to the situation
- Personal safety plan (How will I know I will be safe)
- Timelines

How to get started sharing information

- Verbally acknowledge the person's strengths
- Connect their strengths to the topic(s) to be discussed
- Use open ended questions instead of declarative statements
- Strength-Fact-Strength technique
- Demonstrate your belief in his/her abilities to meet the child's needs
- Check for understanding – let them ask questions
- Make it safe to disagree