



Tools For Permanency: Concurrent Permanency Planning

**Stephanie Boyd Serafin,
Associate Director**



**National Resource Center for
Permanency and Family Connections**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work



Definition of Permanency

“... Permanency is defined as a legal, permanent *family* living arrangement, that is, reunification with the birth family, living with relatives, guardianship, or adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005).”



Permanency Planning

- **Is everyone's job!**
- Begins at the time of separation and involves a set of goal directed activities designed to ensure that children exit temporary care as soon as possible and that they do not re-enter the foster care system in the future.
- In order for a child's safety and well-being to be complete, they must have emotional and legal permanency as soon as possible.
- That children need connection with their biological family even if s/he will not be raised by that family.
- Based on the research that shows a child's well-being and safety are compromised when the child's permanency is not obtained in a timely manner.

Concurrent Planning

- A practice model which addresses a child's need for expedient family reunification while, at the same time works toward an alternate permanent placement (adoption, relative care, guardianship)
- The case plan must provide services that are reasonably able to help a family reunify by improving the parental skills and the family's safety net.
- There are not TWO different case plans

Concurrent Planning

- A parent's ability to improve his/her skills in a timely manner is the primary information in determining the child's final permanent plan.
- *Not the completion of services or elimination of all risk.*
- The parents will likely have to participate concurrently in treatment programs or services, i.e. attend addiction treatment and parenting counseling at the same time.

Legal Permanency

1. Reunification with Birth Parents (custodial or non-custodial)
2. Adoption (relative and customary adoptions have priority)
3. Legal Guardianship (relative has priority)

Placement in care does not equal permanency for a child.

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Success Redefined:

- The agency and the court define their primary goal as *timely* permanency, with family reunification as the first, but not the only, option.
- ASFA goals of Safety, Permanency AND Well-Being must ALL be met to achieve success.

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Permanency Planning begins at DAY ONE:

The Journey to Permanency begins the MOMENT a child is removed from his/her birth family.

In order to achieve permanency early an alternative permanent plan must be identified within weeks of placement. Activities such as locating extended family members begin as soon as a decision to place is made.

Nine Core Components: Concurrent Planning

- 1. Differential assessment and prognostic case review**
- 2. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process**
- 3. Family search and engagement**

Nine Core Components: Concurrent Planning

4. Family group conferencing /teaming
5. Visiting between family, child/youth
6. Setting clear time lines for permanency decisions

Nine Core Components: Concurrent Planning

7. Transparent written agreements and documentation
8. Committed collaboration between child welfare, the courts, service providers
9. Specific recruitment, training, and retention of dual licensed resource families

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Visiting:

- Vigorous efforts are made to institute frequent parental visiting, *even with ambivalent or unresponsive parents.*
- Contact of some type within 48 hours (best practice)
- Maintain and enhance connections – resiliency
- Increases reunification
- Decreases behavior problems in foster care
- Contact with siblings if not placed together (ASFA) (see http://www.throughtheeyes.org/files/Yellow_Box_Parenting_Time_Guidelines.pdf).

Permanency Planning and Visits

- No child should be returned home who has not had:
 - **Multiple;**
 - **Overnight;**
 - **Unsupervised visits;**
 - **In the parent's home;**
 - **Testing the parent's stress and relapse plan;**
 - **And with all the adults who will be a part of that household.**

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Timelines:

- The entire case plan is structured by the legal requirements for timely permanency; these timelines are explained to families within the Full Disclosure process.
- Timelines should be designed to meet children's developmental needs.

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Working on Reunification & the alternative permanent plan CONCURRENTLY:

- It is one case plan that meets both goals
- As soon as it is clear that a child will not return home **immediately**, a case plan is developed that works on both possible permanent plans.
- The child is placed with a resource family willing and able to work cooperatively with the biological parents but also prepared to become the children's permanent family if needed.

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Full Disclosure:

- All families are given information about the detrimental effects on children when they do not have permanency and how they can support the child's permanency. It is an open, honest and inclusive practice.
- It allows for Informed Consent by:
 - Birth parents
 - Caregivers
 - Relatives
 - Siblings
 - Resource parents
 - Older children

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Behavior, Not Promises:

- The agency and the court proceed based only on the specific progress (or lack of progress) documented by observation, service provider reports, and expert testimony.
- The agency must define the **Minimum Sufficient Level of Care** and have behaviorally specific expectations based on the substantiated allegations.
- Parents must demonstrate on visits or other settings improved parental skills
- It is NOT based on promises or certification of treatment completion

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Written Agreements:

- Parents are helped to reduce the overall case plan to small steps. This either facilitates observable compliance and improvement or provides documentation for the court on unsatisfactory progress.
- Agency, professionals and birth parent engaged in developing the agreement
- It takes the child out of the middle

Concurrent Planning Philosophy

Teaming with family and community:

- Permanency Planning decisions are made within a case team. Concurrent Planning practice requires that the birth parents, youth, extended family and caregiving families be engaged as an active members of this team.
- Community members, the family's natural helping network and service providers are also a part of the team.
- The agency must develop a structure that enables the child welfare agency and the legal system to work together as a team.

Attachment to Families

- Children have the right to know their family and have life long relationships with them.
- Children can have healthy attachments to more than one family.
- In fact most all children do this every day by attending day care, school and involvement with other adults.
- The key to successful attachment, for children in care, is when all the adults take on the responsibility of ensuring all types of connections are allowed and nurtured.
- The birth and caregiving families must be willing and committed to work together in the best interest of the child. *In order to gain permanency a child should not be told to not love another person.*

The Role of Caregiving Families

- **Foster and Relative Caregivers** should
 - Be willing to actively support reunification,
 - Being involved in case planning including case meetings,
 - Help with family visits,
 - Be invited and attend court proceedings,
 - Willing to adopt/guardianship if reunification cannot occur,
 - Willing to maintain connections post permanency,
 - and able to handle the unknown.
- **Can also**
 - Have a direct co-parenting relationship with the birth parents/family,
 - Teach and model parenting skills,
 - Or other activities agreed upon by the case planning team.

Emotional Permanency

- Emotional permanency is when an adult and child have developed an attachment that provides long lasting love, trust and commitment. This commitment does not require a legal relationship or living together.
- How children define permanency
 - I belong to a family and do not worry that they will ask me to leave.
 - These adults are reliable.
 - I can depend on my family and people whom they entrust to educate and spend time with me.
 - I am rewarded for being competent, for my curiosity, and for my developmental progress.
 - I can get help with psychologically overwhelming events and feelings.

Concurrent Planning Positive Effect on Disproportionality

- Increased involvement of families in decision making and choosing services that will be appropriate for that them
- Building community supports and partnerships
- Targeted recruitment of caregivers
- Confronts biases and acknowledges power and authority dynamics.
- Supportive of relative placements and customary adoptions

Updates in CP

It is not just what we do but focusing on WHEN it is done.

- Front loading of services
- Finding family members (esp. fathers and their families) ASAP and then engaging all of them in case planning
- Thoughtful selection of alternative permanent plan and the caregiving family within weeks of initial placement.
- Providing reasonable/active effort services NOW and assessing early on whether services are working for this family.
- Each case has measurable changed behaviors identified for the parents by the time of *Adjudication Hearing*.

Fully Implementing CP

Systemic reform is essential

All members of the child welfare system need to be involved in this reform:

- Caregivers
- Birth parents and their extended family
- Children
- Legal professionals
- State agency professionals
- Community service providers

Reasonable/Active Efforts

- Service has evidence (research or best practice) that it can help the parent
- Accessible and culturally appropriate
- If substantial progress is not being made - review services
- Offering at least one alternative if services are not helping
- Use tribal and community experts

Reasonable/Active Efforts

- The agency has a responsibility to provide services to birth parents that can help the parent enhance skills.
- Must provide reasonable/active effort services to prevent placement AND to reunify.
- Unique case plans/services that address risk, underlying causes and are reasonably available in the community.
- Planned and purposeful visits are a key service that must be provided.

Aggravated Circumstances:

- Severe situations have occurred that would put a child in danger if reunification efforts were to be initiated.
- A Judge is the only one who can find that aggravated circumstances exist.
- According to Federal Law some examples of aggravated circumstances include, but are not limited to: termination of another, torture, chronic abuse, sexual abuse, parent committed murder, committed voluntary manslaughter, etc.
- Reasonable/Active Effort services must be provided until a Judge signs the order.
- (see also <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=s4302083001>)

Engaging Fathers

- Identification ASAP (non-custodial AND caregiving fathers)
- Father specific engagement approaches: role as a father, family meetings, engaging his family
- Services: male specific programs, concrete services, employment services, coaching approach vs. therapy
- Assume he has something he can and wants to offer his child

Engaging Fathers

- Talk to him about his view of being a man, a father
- Do not “write off” dads: incarcerated, never married mother, has not had previous involvement with child, because mother says he is no good
- Check for system or personal bias that makes it hard for fathers to engage with us and be a part of his child’s life

Resources

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections:

See especially our Concurrent Planning Web Based Toolkit and Visiting Resources WebPages

www.nrcpfc.org

Child Information Gateway

www.childwelfare.gov

**The National Resource Center
For Permanency and Family Connections
Silberman School of Social Work School of Social Work
at Hunter College**

A Service of the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

2180 Third Avenue, Suite 702

New York, New York 10035

Stephanie Boyd Serafin, LCSW

Stephanie.serafin@hunter.cuny.edu

www.nrcpfc.org



**National Resource Center for
Permanency and Family Connections**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

