

PERMANENCY PLANNING

Kinship Care

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Policy

Kinship caregivers are the preferred placement option for children, if the child's safety can be assured, and the child's individualized needs (both immediate and ongoing) can be met.

Kinship care refers to the care of children by relatives or close family friends (often referred to as fictive kin) either temporarily (alternate caregiver arrangement) or through formal licensing. A kinship caregiver provides full time care, nurturing and protection of children when a child cannot remain safely at home.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 21-21, Alternate Caregiver Arrangement

Licensing Kin and Fictive Kin Homes

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has the legal authority and responsibility to provide safeguards for those children who must be separated from their parents/primary caregiver and placed in out-of-home care. Although no child in the custody of DCF shall be placed in an unlicensed home, there are exceptions for placing a child with a kin caregiver on an emergency basis.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 24-1, Foster Care Services

Importance of Familial Connections

Children have inherent attachments and connections with their families of origin that should be protected and preserved whenever safely possible. Efforts to achieve permanency for children and youth must include safe and deliberate preservation of familial connections in order to successfully ensure positive child well-being outcomes.

Family connection provides one of the most important contributions to the development and identity of children. A child's family connections help them grow and thrive, provides them identity and security and are a critical link to culture and traditions.

Family Search and Engagement

From the onset of DCF's involvement with the family, it is critical to identify extended family members (maternal and paternal) and other significant adults connected to the child and family, that can offer support in times of crisis, or if necessary, provide placement and/or support when out-of-home placement is necessary. Identifying these resources early on may prevent the need for a child's separation from the home and can assist with safety planning efforts.

The search for kin must begin without delay when taking protective or legal action to manage child safety, whether that protective action is in-home or out-of-home. Involving family members can assist with safety planning efforts, help prevent children from entering foster care, mitigate the trauma for children who are removed by increasing the likelihood that they will live with someone they know, or by supporting them while they are in state custody.

Ongoing efforts to identify, search and include kin in case planning activities shall be made throughout DCF's involvement with the family until permanency for child/family is achieved.

Cross Reference: Permanency Planning Policy 25-3, Permanency Teaming

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Practice Expectations

The ability of kin to offer a safe, secure and stable environment for the child and provide appropriate care and protection must be assessed. If the home does not meet licensing standards but is believed to be in the best interest of the child, a placement waiver may be requested for DCF Commissioner approval.

Cross Reference: DCF Policy 22-5-1, Elimination of Barriers to Licensure, Placement, Alternate Caregiver Arrangements and Limitations of Access

When a child is unable to be placed with kin at the time of initial placement, DCF shall seek to identify persons with an established relationship with the child or individuals who have a familial relationship and are willing to develop a relationship with the child for consideration before placing the child in a licensed out-of-home care placement.

Should the initial search result in a child entering a core licensed home, DCF will continue to facilitate and bridge connections with kin.

Efforts to identify kin at time of the initial placement should be documented and barriers clearly articulated prior to requesting a non-related caregiver for placement.

When making placement decisions, if there are several viable options that offer safe care, consideration should be given to the extent the placement provides the optimal balance of the following factors:

- attachment: children experience the loss of primary attachment relationships with parents, siblings and family when they enter care; and caregivers upon placement disruptions
- permanence: children need to have a sense of belonging and being connected to a family helps them feel psychologically safe and secure. Permanence has a relational, cultural and legal dimension
- kinship: reinforces "the social status" that comes from belonging to a family of one's own and the sense of identity and self-esteem that is inherent in knowing one's family history and culture

Permanency placement decisions must be based on careful individualized assessment and consideration as to how the caregiver can meet the child's immediate and long-term needs (physical, emotional, developmental, medical and cultural).

These decisions must be made in full transparency with the input of parents, child (age appropriate), caregivers, team members and community providers as part of the teaming process.

Documentation All efforts to identify, locate and include relatives/kin in case planning activities shall be documented in the electronic case record.

Cross reference: DCF Documentation Policy 8-2, Case Narratives

Supporting Kinship Caregivers

A child's placement with kin is typically unplanned and often precipitated by an emergent or crisis situation. Placement of a child with kin changes the relationship,
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**Supporting
Kinship
Caregivers
(continued)**

roles and responsibility of care between the child, caregiver and parents which can present challenges for all parties involved. Given these family dynamics, the need for support and facilitation to bridge these relationships is critical. Social workers and the foster care support workers are expected to play an active role, paying attention to the relationships between the parenting adults.

It is important these unique dynamics be openly discussed and proactively addressed before issues arise. It is also important for kinship caregivers to be supported and access available services to help navigate this new role and responsibility. Conducting permanency team meetings can address emerging issues, promote frequent and timely communication and assist with case planning activities.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 24-1, Foster Care Services

Cross reference: DCF Policy 25-3, Permanency Teaming
