

PERMANENCY PLANNING

Shared Parenting

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Policy

Following a child's entry into care, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) shall support collaboration and promote partnerships between legal parents and the child's caregiver.

Shared parenting is a practice in which licensed caregivers cultivate positive, supportive relationships with legal parents. Shared parenting relationships are based on trust, while keeping the safety and best interests of the child in focus. The social worker will support and facilitate legal parents and licensed caregivers working together as partners to parent a child in care.

Goal of Shared Parenting

The goal of shared parenting is for both the legal parents and caregiver to collaborate and remain actively involved in their child's life.

The DCF social worker shall support these relationships in order to:

- minimize the trauma that children experience when they are removed from home
 - nurture the child's relationship and cultural ties with legal parents, siblings and extended family
 - provide legal parents with support to facilitate reunification
 - respect and honor the families' race, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, and equity needs or preferences and
 - promote supportive and lasting relationships between legal parents and licensed caregivers post permanency.
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Role of Social Worker in Shared Parenting

The development of trust-based relationships between parents, caregivers and other significant adults does not happen naturally. It requires intervention and support by the DCF child protection social worker and the foster care support worker acting as a bridge between the parenting adults and the child as they begin to establish relationships.

In order to promote shared parenting, the social workers shall:

- encourage initial and ongoing communication between the legal parents and child's caregiver
 - arrange and/or facilitate a comfort call between the child's caregiver and legal parents and
 - conduct an icebreaker meeting within seven calendar days of placement
 - actively facilitate conversations between youth/family/caring adults that may not otherwise occur because they are hard, anxiety provoking or difficult
 - address any biases (implicit, explicit, systemic) through conversations that are intentional, respectful, and informed which promotes empathy and trust
 - mediate and resolve differences
 - suggest and facilitate opportunities for the legal parents to remain actively involved in the child's activities while they are separated.
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Comfort Calls

Comfort Calls is the practice of facilitating a phone conversation between the child's parents and the licensed caregivers, immediately following the child's separation and placement.

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Comfort Calls (continued) These calls are generated by the social worker and intended to introduce caregivers to one another, and exchange critical information needed to best meet the immediate needs of the child.

The goal is to reassure the parent their child is safe and to share important details to help everyone navigate the transition of care, while building a positive and trusting co-parenting relationship.

Icebreakers Within seven calendar days of placement, either the child protection social worker and/or the foster care support worker will facilitate an icebreaker meeting between the child's caregiver and legal parents. When appropriate, the child should be included.

Icebreakers are a facilitated, child focused meeting designed to share critical information about the child (routines, needs, culture, etc.). This is the beginning of establishing a relationship between the legal parents and the child's caregiver. The purpose of these meetings is to help reduce trauma, introduce key individuals that are important to the child, help create a sense of teamwork, and promote ongoing communication between the family and the child's caregiver.

This meeting can be conducted virtually or in-person. An in-person meeting is the preferred option. However, accommodations can be made if a virtual meeting is requested by the family.

Ongoing Partnership Opportunities Licensed caregivers and legal parents will continue to partner and work together, with support and guidance from the child protection social worker and foster care support worker, along a continuum that ensures child safety, promotes attachment and healing, and ensures the legal parents are actively involved with their child's life throughout their time in care.

Cross-reference: Permanency Planning Practice Guide, 25-OPG

Outcomes of Shared Parenting Shared Parenting helps achieve the following outcomes:

- the child's relationship with the birth parent is maintained
- both birth and licensed caregivers have current information about the child
- both birth and licensed caregivers have a current understanding of the child's perspective, strengths, and levels of specific need
- there is a smoother transition back into the birth parent's home or permanent home
- ongoing support for the family after the child returns home
- promotes racial equity and eliminates disparate outcomes
- decreases the number of placements a child experiences while in care
- children thrive knowing their legal parents and caregivers are united and supportive of one another
- attachments although disrupted, are not severed when strong relationships are built