



Technical Assistance Tools

Permanency Planning Instrument

Section 1. Part 3.

History Prior to Placement

Talking about family circumstances that prompted the family to consider placement

In order to facilitate a permanent living arrangement in a family setting, whether it is the child's home or another family's home, it may be instructive to look at what was happening when the child was living at home that prompted the family to look for another placement for their child. We must address the unmet needs of the child and family while living at home. Even if the goal is not to return the child to their birth family, a support family may have the same support needs. The family may be able to express those needs with some detail if the discussion begins with the daily routine. Families need help in articulating what these needs are or were at the time their child lived at home. Simply stating that the family could not care for the child anymore tells us nothing about what supports were not available and therefore need to be addressed in the plan.

Assumptions

- Families want us to know that their decision to place their child was based on a difficult situation and that it was the best decision under the circumstances.
- Families may not initially describe their circumstances in detail, either because they don't know how much detail we want or because they have told their story so many times before.
- Families can be helped to describe their circumstances and needs if adequately facilitated by concrete questions for which they "know" the answer.
- Permanency planners may be uncomfortable asking families to describe their situation prior to the placement of their child. While it may be difficult to revisit a difficult time in the family's history, the discussion can fill-in much needed detail and may also serve as an opportunity for the family to feel heard and understood.
- Permanency planners need to assure they have captured the family's perspective, do not have to ask families to repeat their "story" at permanency planning reviews..

Getting started

The starting point of this discussion needs to be an open invitation to discuss the situation that led the family to consider placement outside the home without judgment. You will have to facilitate this discussion, so that the family members understand the kinds of information that you want. The information can be most easily prompted by using a process called a “routine’s based interview”. You can use the family’s daily routine to help them articulate specific information about the support needs that you will use later in Section 2 when developing the list of supports that will be needed in order for the child to live in a family – whether it be the birth family or an alternate family.

To use a routines-based interview to talk to a family about the circumstances that led to their decision to seek placement, here is how you might start off.

“This may be a very difficult discussion for you, and I want to be sensitive to how hard this is. It would help us to understand what kinds of supports Sarah would need in the future if we could talk a little bit about what she needed in the past. We have found that the best way to do that is to talk about what a typical day is/was like with Sarah at home (or when Sarah was at home).”

Then, follow with a progression of questions like those below:

- *Tell me what a typical day is (was) like with Sarah?*
- *What time does Sarah wake up in the morning? What is she like in the morning? Does she wake up happy, hungry?*
- *Tell me about breakfast time? How is breakfast time for you? How long does it take for Sarah to eat breakfast? What kinds of foods does Sarah eat? Does Sarah feed herself?*
- *How does Sarah get dressed for the day? Does she need help dressing? Are you able to manage dressing Sarah by yourself?*
- *What does Sarah do after she eats breakfast and gets dressed for the day? What does Sarah like to do? Does she play with toys? What kind of toys does she like? Does she watch TV? Does she play well with other kids?*
- *How long does Sarah stay occupied with an activity?*
- *How much supervision does Sarah need during this time?*
- *Tell me about lunchtime. What’s that like for Sarah and you?*
- *What does Sarah do during the afternoon? What is her typical routine?*
- *Do you have time for yourself during the day or time to get chores done?*
- *Tell me about when you take Sarah to the doctor’s office. How does Sarah do in the car?*
- *Do you go on family outings? Does Sarah go also? How does that go?*
- *Tell me about dinnertime. How does that go? What does Sarah do while you are preparing dinner?*
- *What does Sarah do in the evening?*
- *Are you able to get things done that you want or need to do during the day?*

- *What is bedtime like?*
- *What is bath time like?*
- *What time does Sarah go to bed at night? Does she go right to sleep? Does she sleep through the night?*

From a typical day you might ask similar questions about a typical week or month.

- *Are some days better than others?*
- *Are there patterns when things go better?*
- *How did things change over time?*

Note that the questions are focused around Sarah and the needs of the caregiver(s) as it relates to caring for Sarah. This discussion is not meant to probe into private unrelated aspects of a parent's life, but rather to get a clear picture of the day-to-day care needs that a family faces.

Using the Information

You must use your best listening techniques as the family responds to your questions. Some families need more probing than others do. If the family tells you about a particular part of the day that is/was problematic for them, you may have to probe a little deeper to get at what is needed. For example, if Sarah's mother tells us that bath time is difficult for her. You would want to probe deeper into what exactly makes it difficult? Is it that Sarah needs help getting into the bathtub and is too heavy for her mother to lift? Is it that Sarah does not like to take a bath and becomes resistant during her bath? These questions may help us identify that Sarah may need some personal assistance support in order to return home or live with another family.

The information gathered during this discussion should give us lots of information from which to have the discussion about supports that would be needed for a child to return home and provides suggestions for what another family might need to care for this child. There should be some parallel between what is identified during this discussion and what is determined as needed in Section 2, Part 2, Supports Needed to Accomplish Goals.

The purpose of this section is to understand the past in order to develop appropriate supports for the future possibility of living with a family.