



Technical Assistance Tools Permanency Planning Instrument

Stages in the Permanency Planning process

Desired Outcomes

- 1) Families and guardians will come to prefer family life over institutional care for their children.
- 2) The first priority is for children to return home to their families with support.
- 3) When return home is not possible, children will live with quality Support Families committed to caring for them long-term in a shared-parenting arrangement with their family.

Assumptions

- Families may be skeptical about the idea of their child returning home, especially if the “system” has not been able to support the child or the family in the past. They may also be skeptical about another family caring for their child. Successful family living arrangements need to be as real and reliable to families/guardians as they believe facilities are. Support for returning home needs to be realistic and sustainable. An alternate family needs to be visibly good and “visitable.”
- Families will choose family life instead of facility care when they are assured access to good, reliable supports, including well-qualified alternate families from which to choose when return home isn’t possible.
- Winning families to consider the idea of resuming care or having another family care for their child requires building a trusting relationship – trust comes from engaging in active listening and respectful interaction, honoring families’ experiences, providing useful information, being approachable and friendly, remaining engaged over time, working hard on behalf of the child and family, persisting in problem-solving in the face of obstacles, attending to details, and celebrating successes.
- Permanency is *not done by a single person* at a point in time. Rather it involves multiple parts of the service system and *evolves over time*. The process described below is not the work of a single “permanency planner” but is rather the combined work of multiple people representing multiple elements of the system.

Methodology: Stages of Process

Stage 1 Gathering information

- **Gather initial information** on a child from facility records and discussions with facility staff or other service professionals. Information should include (at a minimum) date of birth, how long the child has lived in the current facility, family or guardian contact information, diagnoses, reason for placement (if known), and the previous permanency plan (if available).
- **Visit the child** in the facility and/or in other places the child spends time such as school to learn more about the child and his or her needs.
- **Identify expected level of family's interest** in a family living arrangement. For example, anticipating the family's probable interest may be determined through the previous permanency plan or from information provided by facility staff or other sources who have knowledge of family's wishes.
- **Identify the likelihood of available funding** for a family living arrangement.

Stage 2 Establishing contact

- **Establish contact with the family or guardian** (in writing, by phone, or in person) to introduce self and offer information about permanency planning and family-based alternatives.
- **Attempt to meet in person** if possible.
- **Be prepared for multiple contacts** or multiple means of contact to be able to have a meaningful dialogue.

Stage 3 Engaging the family

- **Engage the family in discussions** about options and wishes.
- **Identify family's level of comfort** and any sources of reluctance. Identify areas where information may be lacking or mistaken, or where ideas about imaginable alternatives are limited.
- **Develop a strategy to address sources of reluctance.** This may involve additional discussion after providing written information, videos, putting them in touch with others including other families who could share their experience.
- **Identify follow up steps** attuned to the family's pace for processing further exploration.

Stage 4 Readiness for change

- **Identify services which would be needed** when the family is interested in their child returning home or exploring another family caring for their child.
- **Explore waiting lists and program eligibility** and assure the family's knowledge about programs and access.
- **Consider making contact with EveryChild** or relevant others.
- **Provide contact details for the family** to connect with relevant agencies and/or contact potential resources on the family's behalf.

Stage 5 Resource activation

- **Link family with identifiable resources** when 1) a birth family decides to bring their child home, and 2) when child has access to resources that enable returning home or seeking a Support Family.
- **Help family to think about how to choose a provider.**
- **Help family to think about how to choose a Support Family** where they want to explore that alternative. For example, go over How to Choose a Support Family booklet with family.
- **Assist in gathering more in-depth information.** Such information can include written documentation such as professional assessments (physician/nursing, psychological, behavioral, PT, OT speech, etc.) medical records, service plans, levels of care, school records, etc. It can also come from conversations with parents, guardians, facility staff or others who know the child.

Stage 6 Transitioning

- **Provide information and/or assistance** as needed to facilitate the transition process when 1) birth family is ready to begin the process of bringing their child home, or 2) the family and the Support Family they have chosen have mutually committed to a match and are ready to engaged in the planning process to move the child to the Support Family's home.
- **Assist in the development of a transition plan** that includes pre-placement visits, securing ongoing supports, arranging training, and setting a move date.