



Technical Assistance Tools

Permanency Planning Instrument

Section 2. Part 1.

Providing Information on Options

Talking about goals

Families have a range of perspectives about their child's future. Some families are comfortable with the child's current living arrangement. Others prefer a change. Part of permanency planning is to "meet the family where they are." The task of permanency planning is *simultaneously* to honor the family's decisions while *also* facilitating changes that further the state's policy expressed in SB 368: "*to ensure that each child receives the benefits of being part of a successful permanent family as soon as possible.*" The key to family's changing their preferences from facility living arrangements to family living arrangements is in changing the *conditions that shape their decisions.*

Deeply understanding a family's perspective can provide clues about how to facilitate goal-directed change in the conditions that affect their decisions. Concurrent planning involves looking at future living arrangements while the child remains in the current living arrangement. Concurrent planning also involves looking at future alternative living arrangements while the family prefers the current living arrangement.

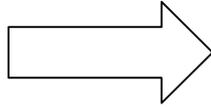
Assumptions

- Birth families/guardians may be skeptical about the idea of family-based alternatives. So, successful family-based alternatives need to be as real and reliable to birth families/guardians as facilities are. They need to be visible and "visitable" and sustainable.
- Birth families/guardians will choose family-based alternatives to facility care when they believe that the benefits of family alternatives outweigh the benefits of the facility living arrangement.
- Winning birth families/guardians to consider the idea of a family-based alternative 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, persistent problem-solving in the face of obstacles, attending to details, and celebrating successes.

Change strategies

Change strategies can come from one two directions.

System changes

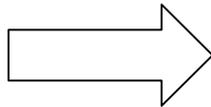


Change the available options
Change the way families have been engaged

Activities that can affect system changes include:

1. Increasing or redirecting funding for family support
2. Recruiting more Support Families
3. Providing training on permanency planning broadly across the system
4. Providing continuity of permanency planners to foster relationship with parents over time

Family changes



Influence the ideas a family holds
Affect a family's experience

Activities that can affect family change include:

1. Building relationships of trust over time
2. Engaging in "what if . . ." discussions
3. Increasing exposure to alternatives
4. Hearing stories from other families
5. Engaging with people who have experience with alternatives

Talking about goals

Whether the family's view is one of total satisfaction with the current facility or less, the strategy is to explore how to improve life for the child. The logic (although not necessarily the language used) goes something like this:

"If you found something better for your child, wouldn't you want it? Wouldn't you hate to learn that there was something out there that was better and nobody told you about it? My job is to help you consider whether there is something better. To be better, I know it has to offer something that you value more than the current arrangement. Let's look together to see if there is anything like that."

While you might not use those words, you can put such an invitation in your own words. One way to get started in talking about future goals with a parent whose initial preference is to maintain the current facility living arrangement is to invite an open-ended response that honors their current preference. An opening might be:

“Tell me about what it is that you’re finding in this living arrangement that works for you and your child.”

You will likely hear answers such as:

- Competent staff
- Security
- Safety
- People who understand my child
- People who understand my child’s disability
- People who accept my child’s disability
- Access to medical support
- A place my child is comfortable

Once you get something approaching a complete list you can confirm:

“Everything you’ve mentioned makes sense . . . These are things I’d want for my child as well. Now let’s begin to look at how it might be possible to deliver those desirable things and whether it’s possible for other desirable things to come into play that aren’t available in the current arrangement.”

Considering return to the family home is essentially about comparing what the facility offers with the kind of support that would make home life possible. Considering an alternate family is essentially about comparing what the facility offers with what family life with another family could offer. Walking through these comparisons can be useful.

Starting with what the family has identified as positive attributes of the current living arrangement can be used to compare similarities and differences between facility life and life with an alternate family.

Similarities might include:

- Caregivers undergo thorough background checks
- Caregivers have specialized training regarding children with disabilities
- Caregivers are paid to provide services
- Living arrangements are subject to periodic inspections to assure health and safety
- Professional services are available

Differences might include:

- The number of caregivers who the child interacts with
- The availability of a consistent caregiver
- The opportunity for the child to spend time with someone with a close attachment

- The predictability of the presence of a preferred caregiver
- The extent to which the preferred caregiver is shared with other children
- The likelihood of a caregiver having a relationship that continues into adulthood

The point is not that a skeptical family will change their view in a single conversation, but that the possibility of thinking differently might be opened which could facilitate future exploration.

By positioning your conversation this way, you can open the door to choosing a goal. A way to open that discussion might be saying something like,

In an ideal world, there would be enough changes to enable you to have your son or daughter at home. Permanency planning is about changing the way the system has provided assistance to families. We need to work on creating a service system that supports family life.

We—in the service system—need to work on goals for increased opportunities for family life. So we want to work on one of these two directions: either (1) creating a system of supports that would increase the possibility that you could choose to have your child return home, or (2) working toward changes that would allow you to choose another family caring for your child. Which of those two directions should we be working toward?

The conversation can then move on to ways to facilitate the family’s involvement while the child remains in the current facility.

The family at this point will either choose one of those directions or not. As representatives of a system whose policy is to encourage family life for children, you can select the goal that the *system* can work toward. You can also note the comfort of the family with that goal. In Section 3 you will identify some activities to move closer to the goal. The activities you identify will be reflect the family’s comfort with the goal.

You can think of families as falling along a continuum. The activities you choose will reflect that continuum.

Activities related to family comfort with a family-based goal

← CONTINUUM →

Family is skeptical about the idea	Family is unfamiliar with the possibilities but willing to learn more	Family prefers the idea
Help family sustain involvement with the child	Help family learn more	Explore funding and services