Concurrent Planning

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families
Policy: 700.0215
Effective Date: August 20, 2001 Version: 1

The Department of Children, Youth and Families, in accordance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act (PL 105-89) and Rhode Island General Law (RIGL 40-11-12), encourages and promotes permanency for the children in its care. In recognition of a child's need for timely permanency, federal and state legislation allows states to practice concurrent planning. Concurrent planning is a family-centered practice approach requiring intensive work towards reunification with birth parents while identifying a placement option for the child that will be permanent if reunification efforts are not successful. Some of the key principles of federal and state law and good practice related to permanency for children include:

- Safety of the child is the paramount concern.
- Reasonable efforts must be made to maintain children in their own homes.
- Permanency planning efforts should begin immediately upon placement.
- Specific time frames to achieve permanency must be observed.
- Timely and appropriate intensive services for children and families must be available.
- Foster care is a temporary option, except in very limited circumstances.
- Preserving connections between children and their families when involuntary separations occur is essential for the well being of children.

The goals of concurrent planning are to support the safety and well-being of children and families, promote early permanency decisions for children, reduce the number of moves and relationship disruptions children experience in foster care and maintain continuity in children's relationships with parents, siblings, extended family and community. When children enter out of home care, federal (PL 105-89) and state law (RIGL 40-11-12.2, 14-1-27) requires the Department to first explore potential relatives as placement resources. Additionally, the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (PL 95-608) requires the early identification of Indian children and notification to the tribe of a child's removal. A search for absent parents and the establishment of paternity is another critical step that should be initiated as soon as possible after case opening.

A comprehensive case assessment of the birth family identifies a case as appropriate for concurrent planning. The assessment examines the strengths and resources of the child and family as well as areas of need and barriers to timely reunification.

Concurrent planning requires "full disclosure" which includes open, honest, respectful and ongoing discussions with birth families regarding rights, responsibilities, permanency, time frames and access to timely services to meet the safety needs of the children and families. The case planning process is another crucial component of concurrent planning. Birth families should be strongly encouraged to engage in early case planning and decision making around needed changes, identified services and supports to achieve these changes and the manner in which progress will be assessed. During this process the Department, the birth family, the concurrent resource family, the Family Court, the guardian ad litem and service providers must remain mindful of the child's need for safety, security and permanency. Regular supervisory and

~~case reviews within the Department and the Family Court should also focus on the effectiveness of services and the level of progress being made.~~

~~Concurrent planning also requires the Department to prepare and train relative and non-relative concurrent resource families to work cooperatively with birth families in a mutual effort to support and promote reunification. Social work and supervisory staff need to support the concurrent resource family's work with the birth family and recognize the tension that naturally exists in this relationship. Frequent and consistent visitation between parents and children is required and concurrent resource families are key to facilitating this process.~~

~~As a permanency planning practice, concurrent planning is designed to remove barriers to securing permanency for children in out of home care. To be effective, concurrent planning requires a collaborative approach among all stakeholders that focuses on progress towards reunification, managing time frames, and clear decision making about permanency options.~~

~~**Related Procedures...**~~

~~**Concurrent Planning**~~

Concurrent Planning

Procedure from Policy 700.0215: Concurrent Planning

A. Identification of Concurrent Planning Cases
   1. As a part of the initial case assessment, the social worker and supervisor in Family Services completes the Permanency Planning Prognostic Assessment Tool (DCYF #186) within 30 days of assignment to determine if the case is appropriate for concurrent planning.
   2. An Intake social worker may occasionally identify a potential concurrent planning case. This information should be noted in the Intake summary prior to transfer to Family Services. The decision regarding the appropriateness of the case for concurrent planning will be made in Family Services.
   3. Cases considered appropriate for concurrent planning by the worker and supervisor in Family Services must be reviewed and approved by the Administrator/Regional Director.
   4. A thorough search for absent and missing parents should be completed by the social worker as soon as possible after a child comes into placement. The results of the search should be documented and any required legal follow up should be completed, including paternity testing when indicated.
   5. The worker must document in the case record efforts to locate a fit and willing relative to be a placement resource. If a fit and willing relative is identified, the worker may place the child in the relative's home once the necessary criminal and DCYF clearances have been done and the results have been favorable. Provisional approval for the home may be granted for six months while the licensing process is completed. The worker provides the relative with information about concurrent planning and encourages the relative's participation in the concurrent planning process. (Please refer to Policy 900.0025 Kinship Care.)
   6. If a child is already placed with a relative when the case is assigned, the worker should consider the appropriateness of the case as a concurrent planning case. If appropriate, the worker should provide the relative with information about concurrent planning and encourage the relative's participation in the concurrent planning process.
   7. When there is no fit and willing relative to use as a placement resource, the worker/supervisor must seek approval from the Administrator/Regional Director to request a non-relative concurrent resource family.
   8. Once approval is obtained, the worker completes the Placement Unit Request Form (DCYF # 146) and forwards it to the Placement Unit where placement social workers will attempt to match the child with a prepared and approved concurrent resource family.

B. Strategies for Successful Concurrent Planning
   1. Full disclosure of information must be provided to all birth families after a child has come into placement regarding the importance of parents' involvement in case planning towards reunification, their rights and responsibilities, and the legal consequences if they are unable to make the necessary changes to have their child safely returned home.
      a. For each child who enters placement, the social caseworker provides parents at the initial meeting with the Disclosure of Permanency Planning Time Frames (DCYF#188) which outlines parents' responsibilities and the time frames allowed by federal and state law to achieve reunification. The worker should thoroughly

review this document with parents to ensure their understanding. A copy signed by the parents should be placed in the hard copy file in Special Forms/Documents.

b. Throughout the case planning process, the worker and supervisor should consistently keep parents mindful of the time frames necessary to achieve reunification and openly discuss parents' progress or lack of progress towards attaining that goal.

2. The foster family should always be given information concerning the child in their care to assist them with effectively caring for the child and ensuring the child's safety. This is critical in concurrent planning cases where the expectation is for the concurrent resource family to have direct contact with the birth family. The Sharing Information with Caretakers Guide (DCYF#187) provides the social worker with an outline of the types of information that can be shared with the foster family. The social worker obtains this information while completing a family assessment and shares the information with the foster parents (verbally or in writing) as it becomes available.

   a. Social worker documents in a Case Activity Note when and how this information is shared with foster parents.

   b. Foster parents should be provided with a copy of this guide and encouraged to also record additional information about the child as they become more familiar with the child.

3. Family visitation must be clearly defined in the case plan. The safety of the child is paramount in any visitation plan. Regular, frequent and progressive visitation is important to maintain, strengthen, and/or redefine the parent/child relationship. The concurrent resource family's involvement in the visitation process should also be outlined in the visitation plan. (Please refer to Policy 700.0040 Visitation.)

4. Family case conferencing, frequent supervisory reviews and administrative case reviews should be utilized by the social worker to involve the family early in permanency decision making, to maintain the awareness of all parties regarding time frames and to ensure that appropriate services and supports are in place.

C. Role of Concurrent Resource Families

1. All non-relative concurrent resource families are fully licensed foster homes. All relative homes must also obtain a foster care license although placement may occur prior to obtaining the license if appropriate clearances and preliminary forms have been approved. (Please refer to Policy 900.0020 Licensing of Foster Care Homes and Pol.900.0025 Kinship Care.)

2. During the training process, concurrent resource families complete a self-evaluation demonstrating a solid understanding of concurrent planning concepts.

3. To become a concurrent resource family, a written recommendation is required from the DCYF trainer and licensing worker.

4. Case planning for reunification in concurrent planning cases should engage both the birth family and the concurrent resource family in cooperative efforts towards permanency. While maintaining the safety of all parties, case planning may include the following:

   a. Regular meetings/phone calls between the birth and concurrent resource families

   b. Involvement of the concurrent resource family with the birth family in visitation, school meetings and events and medical/mental health appointments

   c. Participation of the concurrent resource family in administrative reviews, court reviews, mediation and family case conferences

d. ~~Continued contact and involvement between the birth and concurrent resource families following permanency goal achievement~~

5. ~~Concurrent resource families make a commitment to:~~
   a. ~~Mentor and support the birth family through reunification by participation with the family in visits, professional appointments, court appearances, case conferences and other interventions as outlined in the case plan;~~
   b. ~~Support the birth family in the transition of children from foster care to home by providing contact and respite (when possible) as well as assistance with the transfer of information including medical and educational records;~~
   c. ~~Continue a meaningful relationship with the child and family after reunification, whenever feasible, through such means as phone contacts, home visits, and respite care;~~
   d. ~~Parent the child permanently, whenever possible, if the planned reunification should not occur or should an accomplished reunification fail; and~~
   e. ~~Maintain a child's significant family and community of origin connections to the greatest extent possible after adoption or another permanency option is achieved.~~