Permanency for Children: Concurrent Planning
Practice Bulletin
JULY 2008

Compiled by the Child and Family Services Division, Iowa Department of Human Services

Permanency Needs of Children in Child Welfare:
Concurrent planning is an approach that seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanent family placements for children in foster care. Concurrent Planning is a process of working towards reunification with parents while at the same time establishing an alternative or contingency back-up plan for permanent placement. Concurrent rather than sequential planning efforts are made to more quickly move children from the uncertainty of foster care to the security of a safe and stable permanent family.

Components of Effective Concurrent Planning:
- Individualized and early assessment of the core conditions that led to out-of-home placement, the strengths of the family, and prognosis, the likelihood of reunification within 12-15 months;
- Early paternity determination;
- Early aggressive search for birth family resources for achieving permanency.
- Early identification and consideration of all permanency options.
- Frequent and constructive use of parent-child visitation as part of the reunification efforts.
- Full disclosure to the parents of problems, changes, possible consequences, timelines, and alternative permanency decision making;
- Initial placement with a relative or foster/adopt family who can, if necessary, become the permanent home of the child;
- Effective and timely court hearings with firm timelines for permanency decision making; during which time, documented steps are taken to achieve reunification and an alternative permanency option;
- Involvement of foster/adoptive and kinship caregivers in teaching and skill-building with birth parents;
- Case planning that includes early and targeted strategies for family change to improve parental capacity and move to safe case closure and permanency for the child;
  - Identified things that must change within the family situation in order to keep children safe and the family functioning at a level necessary to achieve and maintain the safety and well-being of the children without the supervision of the child protection worker;
  - Ways the family, the court, and child protection worker will know when the family change process has been adequately completed;
  - Identified combination and sequence of strategies developed with the family to bring about the necessary change. Strategies for family change must match the assessed needs and be of sufficient intensity and duration;
- Ongoing evaluation of progress, tracking and adjusting, to find what works for the family; lack of progress suggests that planned strategies are either wrong or under-powered;
- When reunification is not possible within a reasonable timeframe, taking steps to finalize the alternative permanency option.

Benefits:
- Fewer moves for kids;
- Placement with a permanent family more quickly;
- Fewer problems of attachment and trust;
- Strategies and services matched to the needs of families offers the best opportunity for changing the behavioral patterns that led to the child’s removal.

Research:
Child and Family Service Reviews have linked concurrent planning with positive results in:
- Reducing time to permanency and establishing the appropriate permanency goal;
- Enhancing reunification and adoption efforts by engaging parents;
- Reduced time to adoption finalization
Recent research offers support for the approach, especially with younger children.
Anecdotal evidence within the literature also suggests that openness and direct communication between birth parents and caregivers may lead to more voluntary relinquishments and open adoptions.
Factors found to decrease time to permanency include:

1. Implementing Concurrent Planning,
   http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/concurrent.pdf
2. Concurrent Planning: What the Evidence Shows,

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Expectation: consultation and assist in timely decision-making.

Concurrent planning requires that supervisors have the time, skills necessary to involve themselves closely in clinical service recipients, providers, and others involved in each case.

Institute 2001, found that:

Supervisor play a key role in promoting collaboration among professionals to plan and deliver targeted services and means of conveying permanency goals and back-up plans or necessary, and helps move children more quickly to permanency; but

Concurrent planning is stressful for workers and requires more information to determine various permanency options early in the case;

Caseworkers often have difficulty grappling with the tension inherent in attempting to reunite a child with his or her family while also working on an alternative permanent plan.

To mitigate the inherent conflict, supervisors must help caseworkers:

Understand the dynamics underlying child maltreatment and be skilled in conducting differential assessment;

Accept the philosophy of concurrent planning and believe that it is possible to work in good faith with parents while at the same time planning for an alternative permanency goal.

Develop the skills to work with parents and other professionals to plan and deliver targeted services and assess progress toward goals [Lutz, 200; Westat & Chapin Hall for Children 2001]

Caseworker consistency. One worker change reduced the odds of attaining permanency within the year by 52%.

Fewer Placements. Each additional placement reduced the odds by 32%.

Adequate family financial resources. Extremely poor families were 90% less likely to achieve permanency in 12 months.

More days of parental visitation per week. Each day of visitation tripled the odds of permanent placement within 12 months.

Clear identification of the concurrent plan in the written case plan and family involvement in case planning.

Research impacting supervision:

Westat & Chapin Hall Center for Children 2001, and Urban Institute 2001, found that:

Caseworkers believed concurrent planning is fair, necessary, and helps move children more quickly to permanency; but

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To feel ambivalent about parenting is an indicator that a parent may have serious difficulties in fulfilling the parent role and responsibilities. Many unsuccessful reunifications may be avoided when workers specifically identify and explore parent’s ambivalent feelings about parenting. A study conducted by Peg McCartt Hess and Gail Folaron* defines ambivalence as:

"A pattern of verbal statements that reflect conflicting feelings about parenting, about a particular child, and/or about a child’s return home; or a pattern of behaviors that is

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Supervisor play a key role in promoting collaboration among service recipients, providers, and others involved in each case. Concurrent planning requires that supervisors have the time, and skills necessary to involve themselves closely in clinical consultation and assist in timely decision-making.

Expectation: PERMANENCY: The case plan is the primary means of conveying permanency goals and back-up plans or concurrent goals. Permanency goals are also reviewed and documented by the court. URGENCY is required to assure timely permanence. Concurrent Planning is the primary mechanism to decrease time to permanence by having key permanency decision made and acted on so that the child has a permanent family as soon as it is clear the child cannot return to the parental home. For CFSR, the following items are impacted by concurrent planning practices:

Item 6: Stability of foster care placement.
Item 7: Permanency goal for the child
Item 8: Reunification
Item 9: Timely adoption
Item 14: Preserving connections
Item 15: Placement with relative
Item 16: Relationship of child in care with Parents
Item 17 Needs and service of child, parents, foster parent/caregiver
Item 18: Child and family involvement in case planning.

Concurrent and permanency planning service activities - Examples of expected service activities could include, but are not limited to working with parents to accept and help support movement to other permanency plans for their children, identifying potential relative placements for children and supporting transition of the child to this placement, helping identify potential adoptive or guardianship placements for a child, and providing pre-placement activities designed to achieve placement, working to support the successful transition of children to new school settings when their placements change; and working to support and maintain the placement of children in settings such as foster family, guardianship, or adoptive family settings.

Practice Tips:

Engage Parents in Decision Making: Make the concurrent plan another decision that the parents help make in the normal course of developing a case plan.

Utilize a Concurrent Planning Checksheet: See last page.

Family Team Decision Making: Put on the agenda, for the team meeting, developing a back up plan for permanency. Define the “back up plan” as a parent’s opportunity to participate in an important decision…. what will happen with their children? Tell parents you want them involved in determining who will take care of their children if for some reason they are unable to? Discuss with the parents the results of not establishing permanency for children. Agree with parents that although the back-up plan may not be needed, until they demonstrate the identified behavioral and family change, working on a back up plan is in the best interest of the child.

Parent Ambivalence about Parenting

Deeply felt or consistent ambivalence about parenting is an indicator that a parent may have serious difficulties in fulfilling the parent role and responsibilities. Many unsuccessful reunifications may be avoided when workers specifically identify and explore parent’s ambivalent feelings about parenting. A study conducted by Peg McCartt Hess and Gail Folaron* defines ambivalence as:

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Social workers need to be vigilant in recognizing and identifying parental ambivalence to prevent unsuccessful reunification attempts. Workers must also be willing to explore their own values about parenting and their own ambivalence about parenting options other than reunification. Workers must assure that they are not projecting their own values on the parents or letting their own ambivalence about permanency options interfere with viable options for the child. When ambivalence is identified as an issue with a parent, it must be explored. Hess and Folaron state: "Workers must be willing to identify and explore, initially and ongoing, the parent's feelings about each child, about parenting generally, and about all options for each child's permanent care. When all options are not discussed, the worker and the family act on the possibly erroneous assumption that the parents want to continue to care for each of their children permanently." (pg.15)

**Case Permanency Plan Example**

Parental ambivalence should be addressed in the case plan and is an integral part of concurrent planning. An example** of the concern, the outcome, and strategy language that would be included in the case plan follows:

**Area of Concern:** Mary says it is too hard and unrewarding to be a parent. She also says she may have made a mistake when she did not have an abortion and frequently refers to Ashley as "the mistake." She has not scheduled visits to date. She states she loves Ashley but discusses her own problems rather than making specific plans for visits or for Ashley to return home. It appears Mary can't decide about whether she wants to parent Ashley.

**Outcome:** Mary will decide within 10 weeks whether she can parent Ashley in a safe, nurturing home as evidenced by complying with the permanency plan strategies or Mary will agree to voluntary termination of parental rights. Mary’s decision will be measured by her successful completion of the strategies and a clear statement of her intent.

**Strategies**

- **A.** Within two (2) days, Mary will meet with the caseworker to explore her feelings about Ashley, her feelings about parenting, and options for Ashley's permanent care. A list of parental behavioral indicator and necessary changes will be developed at this meeting, which Mary will need to demonstrate prior to return of her child to her care.

- **B.** Within one (1) week Mary will meet with and provide the caseworker with a schedule of her work and monthly appointments in order to develop two (2) 4 hour visitations per week with her child beginning DATE.

- **C.** Within one (2) weeks Mary will participate in a family team meeting to establish a family plan, including family strengths, identified needs and services to meet those needs, and a concurrent goal for the next three months. Services and demonstrated behavioral change will be monitored and review monthly by the caseworker.

**D.** Mary will attend the Parent Empowerment Series with Ashley beginning DATE and provide copies of completed booklet to the Social Worker within eight (8) weeks. Within two (2) weeks of Mary completing the class, the social worker will review the workbook with Mary and discuss her decision and commitment for reunification.

**Resources and Technical Assistance**


**Case Plan Example developed during the Tools for Permanency: Concurrent Permanency Planning Workshop by Debbie Harbour, Davis County, Eric Erickson, Appanoose County, Georgette Alexander, Appanoose County, Marcia Benjamin, Monroe county, Gisele Chapman, Appanoose County and Melanie Seals, Appanoose County.

**Implementing Concurrent Planning,**

http://muskie.umaine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/concurrent.pdf

**Concurrent Planning: What the Evidence Shows,**


**Parental Ambivalence is presented by Janyce Fenton and Jill Welt as part of the DHS training Tools for Permanency: Concurrent Permanency Planning Workshop.**
## CONCURRENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Iowa Department of Human Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop a visitation plan, if the child is in placement [VISIT EARLY AND OFTEN]:</strong></td>
<td>Immediate and Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Based on the child’s age and developmental level</td>
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<tr>
<td>- That assures frequent, meaningful contact is initiated, sustained, and included in the court ordered service plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identify parental ambivalence and indecision so that it can be targeted as a case plan strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Establish a reasoned hypothesis about the probability of the child remaining or returning home.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Make a comprehensive assessment of the case facts and history including assessment of the need for concurrent planning.</strong></td>
<td>First 30 - 90 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clearly identify:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The service team definition of the central problem, which is the condition that if corrected will allow the child to safely remain home or that will allow reunification.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When prognosis is poor and prior to removal, unless there is an emergency removal, make immediate search for possible non-custodial parents and all potential kin who are able to commit to reunification and/or permanency:</strong></td>
<td>First 30-90 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identify the family resources for the purpose of selecting potential permanent placement options;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Document diligent search in case notes;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Develop a plan for maintaining continuity in the child’s significant relationships with parents, family members, kin, or others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practice full-disclosure.</strong> Share the assessment results with the family, their attorney, the GAL, CASA, and the Court.** Be open and honest, explaining:</td>
<td>Immediate and Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The need for concurrent planning and the importance of involving the family in planning and reviewing the permanency options;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The harmful effects of temporary care on the child and the child’s need for a stable, caring, and permanent family;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clarify birth parents rights and responsibilities, including the court and department’s expectations and effect of parental inaction, disappearance, or lack of progress;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Review the legal requirements for timely permanency and the urgency of reunification.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educate and explore with the parents the various permanency options such as safely remaining home, safe reunification; placement with relatives, adoption (including voluntary relinquishment), guardianship, etc. as the basis for mutually informed decision making regarding the permanency plan.</strong> Encourage and support an alliance between the birth parents and alternative family based on mutual concern for the child. When this is accomplished, the foundation is laid for supportive reunification efforts as well as strengthening the possibilities of openness in adoption if reunification does not occur.</td>
<td>Within 30-90 days and ongoing as necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop or amend the Case Permanency Plan to incorporate the elements of concurrent planning.</strong> The concurrent permanency options shall be selected through a service team meeting or through a team decision-making process. The case plan shall identify goals, indicators and strategies to assist the family and the alternate permanent family that focuses on their unique needs and role.</td>
<td>Within 30 days of the decision that a concurrent plan will be established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document the department’s efforts to effectively assist the family to achieve and demonstrate real change that will assure safety and well being of the child. Document the family progress or lack of progress.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assess the effectiveness of the plan no later than 90 days after the case permanency plan has incorporated concurrent planning.</strong></td>
<td>Within 90 days of plan and ongoing *</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Initiate discussions regarding an early review hearing or permanency hearing at any appropriate point in the case.</strong></td>
<td>As appropriate</td>
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