

CONCURRENT PLANNING STANDARD

PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard is to provide direction and guidance to the Child and Family Services (CFS) programs regarding Concurrent Planning. This standard is intended to achieve statewide consistency in the development and application of CFS core services and shall be implemented in the context of all applicable laws, rules and policies. The standard will also provide a measurement for program accountability.

INTRODUCTION

The Adoption Safe Families Act emphasizes moving children safely and quickly from the uncertainty of foster care to the security of a safe and stable family. In order to achieve timely permanency for children it is necessary to develop, communicate, and work simultaneously on two types of plans in the event reunification is not possible. Concurrent planning is the process of working toward reunification, while at the same time, establishing and working toward an alternative or contingency permanent plan. Using a family-centered practice approach, parents are involved in decision making and are given candid feedback from their social worker throughout the process. Concurrent planning supports the safety and well being of children and families, while promoting early permanency decisions for children.

TERMS

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) is a federal law requiring that when a child has been in foster care for at least 15 out of the last 22 months, a Petition for Termination of the Parent and Child Relationship be filed, or a finding by the court that termination of parental rights is not in the best interests of the child, or that IDHW has not made reasonable efforts to reunify, or that child is placed with a permanent relative placement. The rationale for this determination should be documented in the Alternate Care Plan and approved by the court.

Aggravated Circumstances

Aggravated circumstances are severe situations which would put a child in danger if reunification efforts were to be initiated. According to the Idaho Child Protective Act, examples of aggravated circumstances include, but are not limited to: abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, sexual abuse, parent committed murder, committed voluntary manslaughter, aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit such a murder or voluntary manslaughter, parent committed a felony assault that resulted in serious bodily injury to any child of the parent, or the parental rights of the parent to a sibling have been terminated involuntarily.

Compelling Reasons

Compelling reasons are case specific justification for either not filing a termination petition within the “15 of 22” month time period, or case specific justification that reunification,

adoption, guardianship, and relative placement are not in the child's best interests. This may apply in the following circumstances:

- the child will be imminently reunited with his/her parent(s);
- the parent and child have a significant bond but the parent is unable to care for the child because of an emotional or physical disability and the child's foster parents have committed to raise the child to the age of majority and facilitate visitation with the disabled parent;
- an older child refuses to be adopted despite counseling and efforts to prepare the child for permanency;
- no grounds to file a petition to terminate parental rights exist;
- the child's tribe, acting in the child's best interests, chooses to define compelling reasons for not terminating parental rights; or,
- adoption is not the appropriate permanency goal for the child.

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent planning addresses a child's need for permanency by working with a family towards reunification while simultaneously working towards an alternative permanency goal of adoption, guardianship, or another planned permanent living arrangement.

Concurrent Planning Family

A concurrent planning family is a family who is willing and able to provide on-going care for a child on a permanent basis if reunification is unable to be achieved. A concurrent planning family may be a relative, fictive kin or non-relative.

Dual Assessment

Dual assessment is another name for the Resource Family Foster/Adoptive Home Study used to evaluate a prospective family who has applied to become licensed to provide foster care and/or adoption.

Fictive Kin or Kin

Fictive kin or kin are non-relatives who have a significant, family-like relationship with a child which existed prior to the child entering foster care. Fictive kin or kin may include godparents, close family friends, clergy, teachers or members of a child's Indian tribe.

Life Story Book

A Life Story book is a pictorial and narrative story of the child's life beginning at birth. The Life Story Book may cover a period of time extending past the permanency placement. The process of developing the Life Story Book should be done with the child, depending on the age and circumstances of the child.

Permanency

Permanency is a relationship between a child and adult in which the following characteristics are present: parenting; life-long intent; a sense of belonging; legal and social status; and unconditional commitment by the adult.

Permanency Goal

The permanency goal for the child is the overall goal of the case intended to provide the child with a lifetime connection to a family.

Permanency Hearings

Permanency hearings can occur at any time, but must occur within 12 months of the date the child was placed into foster care, and every year thereafter. The purpose of the 12 month permanency hearing is to approve, modify, or reject the permanency plan and review the child's current placement. The Court must make a determination that IDHW has made reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan through a retrospective review of agency efforts.

Primary Permanency Goal

The primary permanency goal is identified as the most appropriate and preferred permanency option for a child given the circumstances of the case. A primary permanency goal receives the strongest emphasis of the family and the CFS social worker as they work toward goal attainment. However, both the primary and secondary goals are worked simultaneously. A primary permanency goal may shift at any time to become a secondary permanency goal if it appears likely the primary permanency goal is not attainable.

Protective Capacities

Protective capacities are personal and caregiving, behavioral, cognitive and emotional characteristics that specifically and directly can be associated with being protective to one's young. Protective capacities are personal qualities or characteristics that contribute to vigilant child protection.

Relative

A relative is a person related to a child by blood, marriage, or adoption (i.e. grandparent, great-grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, first cousin, sibling and half-sibling).

Secondary Permanency Goal

The secondary permanency goal in a concurrent plan is the option that is identified as another permanency option for the child. At any time in a case, the secondary permanency goal may become the primary permanency goal and the prior primary permanency goal may shift to the secondary goal. Although the primary permanency goal is the emphasis of the case, both goals are worked simultaneously.

Sibling

A sibling is a person who shares the same biological or adoptive mother and/or father of the child. Siblings may be full-siblings or half-siblings. Siblings include those children who would be considered a sibling if not for a disruption in parental rights, such as a termination of parental rights (TPR) or death of a parent.

Social History

A social history is a compilation of all the facts of a child's life including maternal and paternal history, medical information, education information, developmental history and placement

history, which should be shared with prospective permanent resource families for the child prior to permanent placement selection.

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARD

Establishing a Concurrent Plan

Concurrent planning begins at the time of a child's placement in foster care. It requires the identification of primary and secondary permanency goals. CFS social workers should staff primary and secondary goals with their supervisors prior to the development of the Alternate Care Plan and the family's service/case plan.

A concurrent plan includes steps to reduce the identified safety threats so the child can return home as well as steps to place the child for adoption, with a legal guardian, or in another planned permanent living arrangement. Included in the plan should be efforts to locate any absent parents and establish paternity, if paternity is in question (see the Standard for Paternity and Termination of Parental Rights).

Families should be engaged in all decision making surrounding the permanency goal, including the development of the family's concurrent plan. All permanency goals, including concurrent goals, must be developed in consultation with the child when the child is 14 years of age or older. The child must also be given the option to identify up to two individuals to act as permanency planning partners who will participate in permanency goal development. These individuals cannot be the child's foster parent or social worker. In the event there is good cause to believe an individual identified by the child as a permanency planning partner would not act in the best interest of the child, the individual's involvement can be denied.

One way to engage families, youth and their permanency planning partners in the development of the concurrent plan is through Family Group Decision Making meetings (FGDM). A FGDM can be used with the family early on to develop plan activities as well as other times in the life of the case. For example, a FGDM may be helpful when multiple family members want to be a resource for the child or when the family is not showing progress in the completion of their plan. Early identification of relatives to include in family meetings is critical. Parents should be encouraged to identify both maternal and paternal family members, as well as fictive kin and individuals close to the family who might be of help in determining elements of the service plan.

Permanency Goal Options

When making permanency planning decisions, it is important to understand the preferred options for permanency. These options are described in order of those which provide the most to least level of permanency. Permanency with relatives is generally preferred over non-relative placement.

Permanency Goals in order of preference include:

- **Reunification:** Reunification occurs when child is placed back with the caregiver from whom he/she was removed. It also includes placement with a noncustodial parent where the child is placed with a parent who did not have custody of the child at the time of removal. Cases which will not have reunification as a primary or secondary permanency

goal include cases where a judge has made a finding of aggravated circumstances or a baby has been relinquished under the Safe Haven Act;

- Adoption: Parental rights are terminated and the child is legally adopted. A child may be adopted by a relative or a non-relative. For a child who falls under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a permanency goal of adoption may include Customary Adoption. Customary Adoption is a process of legal adoption which does not require termination of parental rights. Customary adoptions require the involvement of the child's tribe and are finalized through tribal courts;
- Legal Guardianship: Legal guardianship is established by the court and does not require parental rights to be terminated. Legal guardians may be relatives or non-relatives;
- Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA): APPLA does not meet the definition of permanency and is an option only for youth aged 16 or older. APPLA indicates the plan is for the youth to remain in foster care until age 18. All other permanency goals must first be considered and appropriately ruled out and the appropriateness of APPLA must be re-evaluated on an on-going basis. Intensive and ongoing efforts to place a child permanently through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or with a fit and willing relative must continue to be made, and these efforts must be documented in the case file.

There are differences in legal status, parent/caregiver rights and responsibilities and the availability of ongoing post-permanency support for each permanency goal option. The Permanency Options Matrix outlines these differences and can be helpful in determining the most suitable permanency goal for a child.

Documentation of Initial Concurrent Permanency Goals

Each child's initial primary and secondary concurrent permanency goals should be documented in iCARE and on the child's Alternate Care Plan within 30 days of the date of the child's removal. They must also be included in the family's service/case plan within 45 days of the child's removal. Once permanency goals are documented in iCARE, they will automatically populate onto the child's Alternate Care Plan. Although the permanency goal options do not specify if the goal is intended to be with a relative or a non-relative, this distinction will need to be made when adding the goals to iCARE. If the focus changes between relative and non-relative, this specification will need to be changed in iCARE at that time. It is important to remember the goal itself does not include the relative specification and should be presented to the family, service/case plan participants and the court accordingly (i.e. as reunification/adoption instead of reunification/adoption by a relative). For information on how to add concurrent permanency goals in iCARE, see "iCARE How-To's" on the iCARE SharePoint page.

The decision-making process used to develop the child's concurrent plan must also be documented in iCARE (Service Plan > Child's Name > Perm Plan Goal > Narrative). At minimum, this should include who was involved in plan development, when development occurred, plan preferences of the parents, child and relatives, a description of factors which were considered (i.e. relative interest, child's needs, child's age, parent/child relationship) and the appropriateness of the primary and secondary goals. If permanency goal development occurred

at a Family Group Decision or other meeting, meeting notes should be uploaded onto the family's service/case plan (Service Plan > Document).

Changing Permanency Goals

Concurrent goals should be re-assessed prior to the six month periodic review hearing. Re-assessment of concurrent goals occurs in conjunction with re-assessment of safety. If the safety re-assessment determines there has been little to no progress in alleviating the identified safety threats and the child continues to be unsafe to return home, consideration should be made to shifting the primary goal of reunification to the secondary goal and the secondary goal to the primary goal. Consideration should be given to the parents' protective capacities and presence of reasonable efforts including services provided to the family, as well as follow-up services if those initially provided were unsuccessful. Additional areas to consider include: any paternity issues; the Indian Child Welfare Act; relative engagement; efforts to identify a concurrent planning permanent placement; the child's trauma history, mental/emotional health, educational and physical health needs; and child, parent, relative and foster parent perspectives. The appropriateness of the secondary goal and progress made towards achieving that goal should also be assessed. Efforts to identify a relative and concurrent planning permanent placement for the child should be reviewed.

Most often, reunification continues as the child's primary goal. If it has not yet been achieved, additional re-assessment of primary and secondary permanency goals should occur in preparation for the 12 month permanency hearing. Once a child has been in alternate care for 12 months, a single permanency goal should be selected as it is highly unlikely reunification will occur. There are some situations in which it may be appropriate to extend a concurrent plan including reunification and a secondary permanency goal for no more than three months, after the 12 month period. As an example, situations where a parent is waiting to secure housing, but has otherwise been able to reduce the identified safety threats in the home. If the child has been in foster care at least 15 out of the last 22 months, the Department must seek termination of parental rights unless the court finds compelling reasons that termination is not in the best interests of the child.

Re-assessment of concurrent plans occurs through regional permanency staffings. These meetings provide an opportunity to assist the social worker in preparing for any discussion about permanency planning which may occur at court. Permanency staffings must include the child's social worker, the social worker's supervisor and a child welfare representative from outside the social worker and supervisor's team. The role of the "outside party" is to provide an objective view of the case and ask critical questions. When adoption is included as one of the child's permanency goals at the time of the pre-six month periodic review staffing, it may be helpful to have a representative from the permanency or adoption team participate either in addition to or as the "outside party". Re-assessments occurring prior to 12 month permanency hearings should include a chief as well as a representative from the permanency or adoption team. When making decisions to change any permanency goal, the input of youth aged 14 years or older and their permanency planning partners must be considered. Prior to proceeding with any primary permanency plan which includes termination of parental rights, approval of the permanency plan must be given by the Hub Program Manager. Termination of parental rights is a tool used to free a child for adoption. Therefore, it should not be pursued unless the plan is for the child to be placed for adoption.

Once reunification is no longer the primary goal, practice focuses on achieving the alternate permanent goal; however, reunification efforts must continue until termination of parental rights occurs.

Documentation of Permanency Goal Changes

As with the initial permanency goal development process, the decision-making process used to identify changes to the child's permanency goals should be documented. Documentation should include factors considered in the decision-making process including existing safety threats and protective capacities; the appropriateness of the permanency goal; reasonable efforts including services provided to the family as well as follow-up services if those initially provided were unsuccessful; the child's trauma history, mental/emotional health, educational and physical health needs; the relationship between the child and parents; perspectives of the child, parents, relatives, foster parents and tribe (when applicable); relative search and engagement; and efforts to identify a concurrent permanent placement for the child. Follow-up on any concerns identified at the previous permanency staffing should also occur. Permanency staffing meeting notes and should be uploaded onto the family's service/case plan in iCARE (Service Plan > Document). If a Family Group Decision Meeting is held to address permanency goal changes, meeting notes should be uploaded to the family's services/case plan as well. Any additional documentation should be added to the child's permanency goal narrative (Service Plan > Child's Name > Perm Plan Goal > Narrative).

When a regional permanency staffing results in the recommendation to shift a child's primary and secondary permanency goals, move to a singular permanency goal, or otherwise change a child's permanency goal, the goal should immediately be changed in iCARE on the service plan screen. The change must also be documented on the next Alternate Care Plan and brought before the court for approval during the next review. If the court makes a permanency goal determination different from that recommended by CFS, the permanency goal should be changed in iCARE to reflect the court order.

Concurrent Planning and Permanent Placements

At the beginning of each case, a search should be initiated for a concurrent planning family who can work with the child's birth family toward reunification while committing to be the child's permanent family if reunification does not occur. Therefore, it is critical to engage the birth family to identify a relative who could fulfill the role of concurrent planning family. Recruitment should include use of the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) process to aid in the assessment of out-of-state relatives. Sometimes the best permanency placement option for a child is not local. In that situation, the child may be unable to be placed in a concurrent planning placement while reunification efforts are in place. However, permanent placement selection can still occur and the child and identified family can visit with one another. Non-relative foster parents should be asked about their interest in providing a permanent placement should reunification not occur and a fit and willing relative not be identified. It is essential for foster parents who are interested to have a current approved dual assessment.

A concurrent planning or legal risk adoptive placement may be selected at any time; however it is essential diligent search and notification of relatives has occurred and prospective relative placements identified prior to placement selection. The early selection of a concurrent planning placement can be helpful to everyone involved in a family's case as it provides a greater level of

certainty as to where, with whom and under what circumstances a child will live should reunification not occur. Ideally the selection should occur once the child has been in foster care for six months. Identification prior to six months should be considered in those situations where reunification is highly unlikely to occur. See the Placement Selection Committee Standard for information about the selection process.

In situations where no relatives or current care providers have been identified as permanent placement options for a child by the time adoption becomes their primary permanency goal, use of media-based recruitment strategies such as Idaho Wednesday's Child and/or AdoptUsKids should be considered. If termination of parental rights has not occurred, consideration should also be given to the privacy of the family and readiness of the child in deciding where and how to recruit a permanent home. In addition, the birth family, foster parents and CASA should be notified of the intent to utilize media-based recruitment and permission for such recruitment efforts obtained from the court, depending upon regional practices. In those cases where a family has not been identified prior to termination of parental rights, intensive and exhaustive efforts, including media-based recruitment, should continue to be made to locate a permanent family. Children who have been in foster care for more than 12 months without an identified permanent placement may also benefit from a Permanency Roundtable. Referral for child-specific recruitment through the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program is another option. Recruitment efforts should be staffed with the CFS social worker's supervisor or regional permanency committee. They must also be reported to the court as part of ongoing periodic review and permanency hearings.

Documentation regarding recruitment efforts should be entered in iCARE monthly contact narratives.

Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning

Successful concurrent planning includes the use of promising practices which contribute to the accomplishment of timely permanency. Ignoring any one of these practices can delay permanency for a child in foster care. Supervisors should continuously staff the concurrent case with their social workers. Concurrent planning can be extremely challenging and it is helpful to have another perspective regarding the case progress. The Concurrent Planning Review Form is available to support the supervision of concurrent planning. It outlines specific tasks related to promising practices by relevant timeframes.

- **Early Collection of Parent, Relative and ICWA Information:**

Identification of a child's birth and legal parents is central to the provision of reunification efforts. A diligent search must be made to locate any absent parent(s) as early as possible following removal of the child using all available information from the case record, as well as information provided by individuals connected to the family. The service plan should include steps to locate any absent parents.

Determination of the child's paternity should be made as soon as possible. The Standard for Paternity and Termination of Parental Rights provides guidance regarding this process. Failure to determine paternity early in the case can result in significant case delays caused by inadequate assessment of the father and provision of related services, greater length of stay in foster care for the child, late identification and involvement of

paternal relatives (i.e. “pop-up relatives”) and legal issues related to the termination of parental rights if adoption becomes the child’s primary goal.

CFS has access to the statewide Locate Services through the Central Office Child Welfare Funding Team. Within 30 days of placement, the CFS social worker must complete a "locate form" regarding any absent parent and forward it to the locate unit. Locate Services can also assist in locating a child’s relatives. Relatives should be identified as early as possible to aid in the continuation of a child’s relationships and reduce the likelihood of placement changes late in the case.

A Child and Family Social and Medical Information (CFSMI) Form for each child must be initiated within 30 days of that child’s foster care entry. The CFSMI Form documents valuable information about the child and parents, including identification of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles; American Indian ancestry; and medical history. Copies of the non-identifying portions of the CFSMI form are given to the child’s current caregiver, prospective pre-adoptive parents and prospective legal guardians. The CFSMI form and guide to its completion are available on the Child Welfare SharePoint.

Significant delays in permanency occur when American Indian ancestry is not identified early in a case. If a parent or relative notes on the CFSMI form the child or parent has “American Indian Ancestry”, the American Indian Ancestry form must be completed. A child’s parents and relatives should be asked about any tribal connections. If a child is an American Indian child, the tribe must be informed and involved, in all cases and at all points in the case, whether the plan is reunification or another permanency goal.

A Social History should be written for every child placed in foster care, and must be completed for those who are not reunified. This document contains information as to a child’s strengths, personality, trauma history and special needs to aid prospective permanent families in determining their ability to care for the child. A Life Story Book is another tool for documenting information about a child and the child’s family. Developing the Life Story Book can be a therapeutic process as the child participates in developing his/her book and begins to deal with issues of grief and loss.

- **Engaging Relatives**

Relative involvement in child welfare can be supportive to birth parents, children and resource families. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires IDHW to identify and notify all adult relatives when a child is taken into state custody. The Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 clarified relatives requiring notification include the parents of a child’s sibling(s) when that parent has custody of the sibling. This includes the adoptive parent(s) of any siblings. Notification is necessary to ensure the relatives have an opportunity to provide support through contact and, in some cases, become a foster parent, adoptive parent or legal guardian for their relative child. Within 30 days after removal of a child from their home, CFS social workers must make efforts to identify and provide notice that the child has been removed from their parents’ care to all of the child’s adult grandparents, all parents of a sibling of the child when such parent has custody of such child, and other adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents). CFS

social workers must also explain relatives' options to provide support through contact, and to participate in the child's care and placement. Some of the efforts to identify and involve relatives in planning may include letters, phone calls, Family Group Decision Making meetings, and completion of genograms.

Relatives should be instructed that due to the bonds of attachment the child forms with their caregivers, it may not be found in the child's best interest to change placement to a relative who shows interest in being a placement resource later on in a case. They should be made aware that when relatives wait to come forward until it is clear that their relative child cannot return home, and the child is in another stable permanent resource placement, IDHW might not consider the relative a possible placement resource as it may not be in the best interest of the child to place with his/her relative at that time.

Relatives must be provided information about the potential availability of Idaho's IV-E relative guardianship assistance and adoption assistance programs. Each relative notification needs to be documented in the child's case record and should include the relative's name, contact information, relationship to the child and any response. A Relative Letter template is available to assist with the notification process (Attachment A).

Relatives often know a significant amount about the family's functioning. Their level of engagement within the case can vary widely. Children are less likely to experience a disruption from a relative placement. Relatives unable or unwilling to be a placement option may still be able to visit with the child, supervise parent visitation, provide respite, assist the birth parents or foster parents with transportation or provide support in other ways.

- **Visitation**

Visitation is the primary child welfare intervention in maintaining the parent-child relationship necessary for reunification. It provides social workers an opportunity to assess parent-child interaction and relationship while providing hands-on parent coaching and education. Ideally, the first visit should occur within 48 hours of the child's placement in foster care. Children who experience frequent and purposeful visitation tend to have fewer behavioral problems, fewer placement changes, are more likely to be reunified and reunify earlier than those who do not. The frequency, location and need for supervision of visits are dependent upon case-specific circumstances. The Visitation Standard provides further guidance on how to make the most of visitation.

- **Early Intensive Reunification Efforts**

Reunification efforts should begin immediately and be based upon a thorough assessment of the unique strengths and needs of family members. Targeted services should be provided to each parent and child based upon individualized assessments. Developed family service/case plans should prioritize identified safety concerns and require parental demonstration of skills. Plan achievement should not be based on certificates of completion.

Documentation of reunification efforts and parental participation is essential to demonstrating progress or lack of progress in any case. Written agreements including case/service plans, visitation plans and alternate care plans are helpful in demonstrating shared understanding of expectations and goals.

- **Prognostic Case Reviews**

Prognostic case reviews are informed by the initial safety assessment and reasons for child welfare involvement and foster care placement. They include a review of any child or parent assessments, family history, current strengths, presenting problems and underlying needs to identify factors which make timely reunification more or less difficult and more or less likely. Case reviews should be collaborative, incorporating information from services providers, resource families and all case plan participants.

Timely six month periodic review and annual permanency hearings are important to achieving permanency. In preparation for these court hearings, case staffings are held to re-assess safety, case progress and concurrent planning goals. Case staffings involving the establishment or change of concurrent and permanency goals should be prognostic case reviews. Use of the Idaho Case Consultation Staffing Form in conjunction with permanency-related factors such as the child's needs, placement history, relative involvement and birth parent input can help with this process.

Unplanned changes in social workers assigned to a case can result in a six month delay in case progress. Even planned changes in social workers may result in a delay. Frequent formal and informal communication about case planning progress between social workers assigned to different tasks in the case is essential to reducing case transfer-related delays. When a case will be transferred as part of Hub processes, early teaming between the involved CFS social workers is beneficial. Participation of all assigned CFS social workers and supervisors in prognostic case reviews can assist in minimizing any delays resulting from case transfer.

- **Fostering Relationships**

Fostering relationships between birth parents, relatives, resource parents and community members helps to establish a support network for the family which can be in place once CFS is no longer involved. This is true regardless of which permanency outcome is achieved.

Collaboration between birth parents and resource parents can have a significant impact on the overall course of the child's placement in foster care. Icebreaker meetings are one way to introduce birth parents to resource parents. Children whose parents and resource parents have a respectful, supportive relationship have been shown to have more stable foster care placements, better emotional development and more success in school.

The relationship between a child's resource parents and relatives should also be encouraged. Building this connection can result in added support to the foster parents and feelings of security for the child. In situations where a child cannot immediately be placed with a relative, perhaps due to geographical distance and the need for reunification

efforts, but later moves to the home of the relative, a pre-existing positive relationship between the resource parents and relatives can help the transition go more smoothly.

School events, extra-curricular activities and cultural events offer natural opportunities for birth parents, relatives and resource parents to interact and build relationships with one another.

- **Full Disclosure**

All CFS social workers are responsible for teaching birth parents, the child, relatives, resource parents and other case planning team members how the child welfare system works through the use of full disclosure. Confidentiality guidelines as outlined in the Confidentiality Standard apply. Individuals need to be provided with information necessary for them to make any decisions they are being asked to make. The Full Disclosure Checklist (Attachment B) identifies items which may be covered with each case participant. Full disclosure should be an on-going process reiterated frequently throughout the life of the case.

Families should be provided with complete information on the requirements of the Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA) and the impact ASFA will have on their child and family. CFS social workers should explain to families the timeframes contained in ASFA, as well as the definitions of permanency and how that affects their service plan.

Families being considered for placement of the child need to be provided with information necessary to determine if they would be able to meet the child's needs. Relative and non-relative resource parents need the information necessary to provide adequate care and support the permanency plan for the child. Children in foster care need information delivered according to the child's age and ability to understand. This allows the child to be effectively involved in case planning decisions including permanency.

Full disclosure also includes the process of keeping CASA, deputy attorneys general and/or prosecuting attorneys informed of case plan progress and decisions. The timely sharing of information helps reduce any possibility of courtroom surprises or battles.

Special Situations

There are two situations when concurrent planning does not occur. If an infant is abandoned and enters foster care under the Safe Haven Act, CFS moves to seek termination of parental rights as soon as 30 days after the child enters foster care. The identities of the child's parents are unknown, and the child should be immediately placed in a home intended to be an adoptive placement for the child.

In some cases, severe situations are present which would put a child in danger if reunification efforts were initiated. These situations should be brought to the attention of a judge through the county prosecuting attorney or deputy attorney general to ask for a ruling that aggravated circumstances are present. If aggravated circumstances are found by the judge to be present, a permanency hearing must take place within 30 days of that ruling.

Attachment A: Relative Letter

(Insert Regional Letterhead)

Date

Dear (relative's name),

I am writing to let you know that you have been identified as a relative of (child's name(s)) who was placed in the custody of the State of Idaho on (date of removal) and is currently living in (a/two) (relative/non-relative) foster home(s).

Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act in 2008 and the Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in 2014 which require state agencies to notify a child's adult relatives and custodial parents of a child's siblings when the child is taken into state custody. Notification ensures relatives have an opportunity to provide support through contact and, in some cases, become a foster parent, guardian or an adoptive parent for their relative child.

It would be most helpful if you could contact me immediately, but at least within the next 30 days, as critical decisions and planning occur during this time. We are in the process of developing a plan with (child's name(s)) family. It is very early in the case and while most children in our custody are able to return to their own home, sometimes circumstances make that impossible. As members of (child's name(s)) family, your participation in his/her/their future is very important. Please call us with your input and let us know if you can help (child's name(s)) and his/her/their family in any way.

When relatives wait to come forward until it is clear that their relative child cannot return home, and the child is in another stable permanent placement, we may not consider the relative as a possible placement resource. We ask you not to wait so we can include you in planning for (child's name(s)) future.

If you already know that you are interested in becoming a foster parent, legal guardian or adoptive parent for (child's name(s)), please let me know that so I can help you get started on the approval process. In the event that you become the legal guardian for or adopt (child's name(s)), you may be eligible for an ongoing subsidy (cash payment and/or medical coverage) based on the child's needs until (child's name(s)) reaches age 18.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me at (phone number). If I am not available, please leave a message. You can also write to me if you prefer at Child and Family Services, (street or PO Box, city, state, zip)

Sincerely,
(social worker's name)

Full Disclosure Checklist

What should be discussed?

➤ **ITEMS TO COVER with Birth Parents**

- Why the child needs permanency
- Expectations (of agency and parents)
- Changed behaviors that will ensure the child's safety
- Reasonable Efforts (How services will improve their protective capacities)
- Gain information from the birth family on their strengths, resources, extended family, and other information that will help develop a case plan
- Roles and responsibilities of all parties
- Timelines
- Consequences if the parent(s) do not make progress towards reunification.
- Feedback that is concrete, specific, and behaviorally based
- Balance negative statements with positive ones
- Relationship between worker, birth parents, and resource parents.
- Laws and legal processes
- Choosing, participating in and evaluating progress of services/treatment
- Visitation plan
- Questions and concerns
- Answering "what if" questions (what if the birth parent does not complete his/her treatment)
- Give feedback, praise and support for the work they are already doing

➤ **ITEMS TO COVER with Resource Family**

- Provide adequate information in order for a family to determine if they can meet the expectations of being a Resource Family for this child
 - Information regarding the child and any special needs
 - Give feedback, praise and support for the work they are doing
 - Information on the case progress
 - Visitation plan
- Current legal situation

- Why children need to have permanency
- Roles and responsibilities of all parties
- Timelines
- The services the child is attending
- Handling of boundary issues and conflict resolution
- Allow for questions and concerns
- Answer “what if” questions (What happens if the parents do not complete services and improve their protective capacities? What if the child is returned home?)

➤ **Additional items to cover with Resource Families who are RELATIVES:**

- Gain information on the quality of the relationship between the resource family and the birth parents
- Gain a commitment to protect the child even if it means a conflict with the birth parent
- If the relative Resource Family is unsure whether they want to be the adoptive parent or guardian; discuss their concerns and the pros and cons of the impact their decision may have on the child

➤ **ITEMS TO COVER with Children and their Siblings** (developmentally appropriate language)

- That the adults will make the decisions (It is not for the child to do and his/her behavior does not influence the decision)
- Child will have contact with ALL important people in his/her life now and in the future (Do I have to choose one parent/family over another?)
- Praise for his/her behavior and ability to handle a difficult situation that is not his/her fault
- Expectations and responsibilities of the adults (What do my parents need to do for me to go home?)
- Answer his/her “what if” questions
- Visitation plan (When can I see my birth parents and siblings)
- When and how decisions will be made
- Placement decisions (Where will I live?)
- Older children: His/her desires about different permanency options
- Older siblings: Willingness to care for, visit or support siblings
- Emotions related to the situation
- Personal safety plan (How will I know I will be safe)

Timelines

How to get started sharing information

Verbally acknowledge the person's strengths

Connect their strengths to the topic(s) to be discussed

Use open ended questions instead of declarative statements

Strength-Fact-Strength technique

Demonstrate your belief in his/her abilities to meet the child's needs

Check for understanding – let them ask questions

Make it safe to disagree