

# SIX STEPS TO FIND A FAMILY:



## A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement (FSE)

**DEVELOPED BY**  
**THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR FAMILY  
CENTERED PRACTICE AND PERMANENCY PLANNING**  
at the Hunter College School of Social Work  
A Service of the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

and **THE CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY  
FOR YOUTH PROJECT**

**WRITTEN BY**  
**Mardith J. Louisell**

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Acknowledgements: This guide has relied on others who have written practice guides on youth permanency. We are grateful to Cheryl Jacobson, CPYP Youth Permanence Consultant; California CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), particularly Kara Hunter; Linda Librizzi, Hollygrove-EMQ Family Finding Specialist; Mary Stone Smith, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, Kevin Campbell, and Veronica Salmeron, Fresno County Permanency Specialist. We are also grateful to all of those professionals who allowed us to borrow liberally from their work.

We are grateful to our colleagues at the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS for their insight into the need for such a guide. Patsy Buida, National Foster Care Program Specialist at the Children's Bureau and our Federal project officer for the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning provided guidance and support in making this guide a reality.

We would also like to thank Susan Dougherty, Information Specialist at the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, for her keen editing eye.

## SIX STEPS TO FIND A FAMILY: A Practice Guide to *Family Search and Engagement (FSE)*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. WHY PERMANENCY NOW?

Until recently, the issue of permanence for youth has lacked sufficient attention by the child welfare community and misconceptions about the issue abound, including:

- A) People don't want to adopt teens
- B) Teens do not want to be adopted
- C) Placements of teens are unsuccessful.

Research on homelessness and poverty found that 49% of youth who aged out of care in 2002 and 2003 were homeless at some point over the next three years. 43% of youth were high school dropouts with a median income of \$598.33 per month. 37% percent had children of their own.<sup>2</sup> These findings dovetail with Courtney's<sup>3</sup> findings that youth who "age out" of the child welfare system often struggle to stay in school, find stable housing, support themselves financially, and secure medical services.

Between 1998 and 2004, the number of children nine or older waiting for adoption rose from 39% to 49%. African American children remain in care longer and are less likely to receive mental health services; they are more likely to be freed for adoption but less likely to be adopted.<sup>4</sup> What social workers believe about youth is also important: Avery<sup>5</sup> found that worker perception of the adoptability of children influenced recruitment efforts negatively.

It is essential to hold the same high hopes for youth in foster care as we do for our own children in terms of connections, living situation, and hopes for their future. Teens need not age out of the system. Recent technological improvements have made it easier to locate missing family and important adults presumed lost. Such connections may, in fact, be available to the youth, which means that many youth living in long term group or foster care with no family support may have persons who want to, and are able to, raise and/or support them throughout their lives.

Through work at the National Youth Permanency Convening in 2002, the following definition of youth permanence was developed:

Permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult who provides:

- A safe, stable, and secure parenting relationship
- Love
- Unconditional commitment
- Lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, or guardianship, where possible, offering the legal rights and social status of full family membership, in which the youth has the opportunity to maintain contacts with important persons including brothers and sisters.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP). Hunter College, and California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)

<sup>2</sup> *Adoptalk*, North American Council on Adoptable Children, Summer 2006, from Detroit Free Press, 4/12/06, cited from Wayne State University.

<sup>3</sup> Mark. E. Courtney, et al, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth*, 2005

<sup>4</sup> McRoy, Ruth, 2006, McRoy and Hill, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Avery, R.J. (2000). Perceptions and practice: Agency efforts for the hardest-to-place children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 22(6): 399-420 and (1999). Identifying obstacles to adoption in the New York State out-of-home care system. *Child Welfare* LXXVII(5): 653-671

A broad array of individualized permanency options exist; reunification and adoption are an important two among many that may be appropriate.

In “A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood” (Casey Family Services), achieving “permanency” was defined as having an enduring family relationship that is:

- Safe and meant to last a lifetime
- Offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership
- Provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well-being
- Assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, other significant adults, family history, and traditions, race and ethnic heritage, culture, religion and language.

## II. HISTORY OF FAMILY RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

Family-Finding and Engagement is a structured model to build permanent, caring relationships for the youth, who otherwise would not have a permanent family, by helping adults make realistic decisions on how to be involved in a youth’s life.

Family search and engagement processes have been used successfully in New York, Louisiana, California and Colorado, among other states and counties. One finding family process was developed in Catholic Community Services of Western Washington in Tacoma. Staff noticed that when a youth gained a connection with family, critical incidents reports tended to decrease. This led to the understanding that having a family connection was as urgent as the need for safety. Since then various models have been used across the United States. The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, as well as the California Youth Permanency Project, have provided leadership and technical assistance in this critical best practice.

## III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FINDING A FAMILY

- Finding a family is a youth-driven process.
- Every youth deserves, and can have, a permanent family.
- Youth have the right to know about their family members; family members have the right to know about their youth.
- Youth should have connections with the biological family, regardless of whether they will live with them, unless there is a compelling reason not to.
- With support, most youth can live in a home rather than in foster care or institutions.
- Family and fictive kin<sup>6</sup> help develop, plan and achieve the youth’s permanence.
- The goal of Family Search and Engagement (FSE) is permanency, through reunification, guardianship, adoption or another form of permanent commitment - long term placement in foster care is not a permanent plan.

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<sup>6</sup> Fictive Kin refers to individuals, unrelated by either birth or marriage, who have an emotionally significant relationship with another individual that would take on the characteristics of a family relationship.

## IV. AGENCY PREPARATION FOR STARTING YOUTH PERMANENCE WORK

Before an agency begins the Family Search and Engagement (FSE) work, the following steps should be taken.

### • ASSESSMENT

Perform an “Agency Self-Assessment”<sup>7</sup> to determine where gaps in youth permanence practice and policy exist. Use the self-assessment as a resource to determine how to implement Family Search and Engagement in the agency.

### • BUY IN

Obtain visible and tangible buy-in from administrators. Administrators help staff buy-in by introducing the kick-off presentation, which is designed to build enthusiasm, assigning social work and support staff, allocating resources, and designating a process for reviewing data and progress. When administrators remain present through the subsequent FSE activities - training policy and practice implementation - the agency moves forward more quickly.

Buy-in at all staff levels is key. Establish a committee on youth permanence and have members engage in activities to achieve youth permanence. As they do the work, they will become champions and believers in the viability of youth permanence. Focus on the role of supervision in youth permanence.

### • DATA

Determine which youth do not have a permanent connection. How large a group is it? What are the characteristics of the agency’s youth in foster care? Are most in group homes? Foster homes? Where do the youth with the greatest need live? Who has been waiting the longest? The answers to these questions determine which youth the agency will initially focus on.

Decide what outcome measures you want to track and how. Examples:

- A) Number of connections before and after the search for relatives
- B) Measurement on a youth permanency scale
- C) Cost of new practice in resources and time.
- D) Youth improvement in behavioral functioning.

For example, Orange County (CA) measured youth improvement on “The Brief Impairment Scale (BIS): A Multidimensional Scale of Functional Impairment for Children and Adolescents.”

The agency may want to ask staff to determine individual outcomes to assess the program and bolster future funding efforts.

### • LOCATION OF FAMILY SEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT:

Examine your agency’s structure for where the process will work more effectively. In what area should you implement first? Where are the potential supports and champions? Can a natural partnership be formed, for instance, by pairing social workers with Independent Living staff or with a permanency-minded group home?

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<sup>7</sup> Developed by the California Permanency for Youth project, [www.cpyy.org](http://www.cpyy.org)

## • PARTNERS:

Educate involved professionals about permanency on a regular basis. Determine how to involve partners, including the youths' attorneys, youth advocates, juvenile court, mental health, probation, group homes, foster family and adoption agencies. Finding permanence requires a team approach with staff, collaterals, and family sharing the work. Select the professional partner most likely to work well on youth permanence and gradually include others.

Inform service providers of the agency's expectations regarding youth permanence and include permanency expectations in the providers' contracts. For instance, the agency might insist that a group home does not cancel family visits as punishment for a youth's misbehavior. Help partners examine language used to describe youth and eliminate negative words, such as "unadoptable."

## • STAFF:

Provide training for supervisors and staff on the philosophy of finding a family, including training on how youth experience grief and loss and what challenges that experience presents in terms of permanence.<sup>8</sup>

Assign supervisors who understand the practice and philosophy of youth permanence and possess youth permanence skills.

Consider assigning support staff to schedule family meetings and complete Internet searches.

Consider using family group meeting experts to facilitate the meetings.

## • RESOURCES

Contract with an internet search provider for family finding.

## • DOCUMENTATION OF POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

Select a form on which the youth's permanence team will enter all contacts. Documenting and tracking potential connections is critical - information is frequently mislaid, then lost. Staff must know how to pass on information to new social workers, collaterals, etc

## • MONITORING OF PROGRESS

See attached form that supervisors can use to track the progress of a case in the permanency arena.

## • POLICY

At every move the youth makes, ensure that the social worker makes a serious effort to see if the biological family can now care for the youth - for each move, the potential of future moves gets higher. Review policy and practice to make sure the bar for reunification with the youth's family is not set higher than necessary.

Develop a procedure and policy for involved professionals who want to adopt or become a permanent family to a youth with whom they work.

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<sup>8</sup> Henry, Darla L., *The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for Permanency*

# INTRODUCTION

## • HIGHLIGHT EARLY SUCCESSES

Publicizing success stories and recognizing staff at agency meetings and in newsletters generates enthusiasm for the work and creates the impetus for more success.

To demonstrate progress, create a visual symbol, such as a tree, that shows the increase in a youth's connections since permanency work started. Place it in a public place where it will generate questions. Besides giving the social workers a sense of progress, it shows that the agency is committed to youth permanence practice.

## RESOURCES

[County, Agency or State Self-Assessment](#)

[Declaration of Commitment to Youth Permanency](#)

[Sample Policy for Adoption by Involved Professional](#)

[Form for Documenting Potential Connections](#)

[The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency.](#)

[CPYP County Data Collections Forms and Permanency Scale.](#)

[Alameda County Group Home StepUp Project Final Report](#)



## SIX STEPS TO FIND A FAMILY: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement (FSE)<sup>9</sup>

*"They're always talking about this permanency stuff. You know social workers. . . always using these big social work terms to talk about simple things. One day, one of them finally described what she meant by permanency. After I listened to her description, which was the first time anyone ever told me what the term meant, I said, "Oh, that's what you mean? Yeah, I want permanency in my life. I don't think I ever had that! When can I get it?"*  
-- Youth in foster care.

### SIX STEPS

Setting the Stage  
Discovery  
Engagement  
Exploration and Planning  
Decision Making and Evaluation  
Sustaining the Relationship(s)

### STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

#### GOAL :

The youth, social worker, supervisor, caregivers and professionals gain a clear understanding of the Family Search and Engagement (FSE) process and how to safely and successfully support these activities.

#### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. Social worker and supervisor discuss the definition of permanency and philosophical and clinical issues regarding permanency.
- B. Social worker and supervisor determine the timing of the youth's initial participation. Only in rare cases of mental health concerns will the youth be unable to participate in the process from the beginning.
- C. Social worker and supervisor decide who is the best person to work with the youth on family search and engagement.
- D. Person designated to work with the youth introduces FSE to the youth and explores what the youth may want from connections.
- E. Youth and person designated explore youth's known family network (including fictive kin, siblings and half siblings in care).
- F. Youth and social worker identify and involve professional and non-professional partners. Social worker orients partners to the FSE process.

<sup>9</sup> Developed by The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP), Hunter College, and California permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)



## EXPLANATION:

The supervisor and social worker assess any questions or fears they themselves have about beginning the process. Supervisor and social worker prepare the youth and the initial professional and non-professional persons involved with the youth for the family search and engagement process (FSE) and address clinical and logistical considerations.

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## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

### GOAL:

Knowledge of a large pool of family members and significant adults, some of whom will establish connections and join the team to assist and support the youth's quest for permanency.

### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. If you haven't already talked with the youth about whom the youth knows, talk to the youth.
- B. Review the case for persons currently in the youth's network. Include known fictive kin, siblings and half siblings in care, step siblings and adopted siblings.
- C. Contact mother, father, and professional and non-professional persons who are part of the youth's life to obtain information on potential connections. Take special care to look for paternal relatives, who have sometimes been ignored in the past.
- D. Follow the agency's guidelines for due diligence, permissions and confidentiality.
- E. Mine the file and other important records.
- F. Use Internet search engines to find lost contacts.
- G. Document your findings.
- H. Start engaging connections immediately. You will continue to search for more connections but don't wait to contact those whom you've found. FSE isn't a linear process.
- I. Keep the youth, the team and contacts informed about progress.
- J. Talk with the youth again. The youth will remember more each time.

## EXPLANATION:

Success is achieved when the family is extensively known. We look for a large number of relatives because:

1. Most families have dozens of relatives, even if they don't keep in touch.
2. With a large number of relatives, you're likely to find relatives who are currently raising children well, thus countering the attitude that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."
3. "Reasonable efforts": You want to assure enough of the family was contacted to give the youth a chance for permanency with his family.
4. Because a youth may have serious difficulties, you need several persons to provide support.

## STEP 3: ENGAGEMENT

### GOAL:

Those who have an inherent, or historic, connection to the youth share information about the youth, are cleared on safety as needed, begin to establish a connection with the youth, and, if they are not already on the team, join the team.

### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. Develop an individual engagement strategy for how each person will connect with the youth and support permanency efforts.
- B. Prepare for the first in-person visit between youth and important adults.
- C. Keep the youth informed of the process.

### EXPLANATION:

Persons who have been found are contacted, as appropriate, to begin the process of engaging with the youth and join the youth's permanency team. Because FSE is not a linear process, a social worker may have begun Step 3 as soon as a particularly suitable person was discovered, but will simultaneously be working on Step 2, Discovery.

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## STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

### GOAL :

A functioning team composed of the youth, family, professionals, and important others explores options and takes responsibility for finding permanency for the youth.

### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. Merge the newly identified family members and others with the existing youth permanence team.
- B. Prepare self, youth (if not done already) and others for participation.
- C. Clarify the team's goal and what you expect of participants.
- D. Help the team explore options and assign tasks.
- E. Set timelines and monitor progress to assure that tasks are completed.
- F. In rare cases the youth may not meet with the team. Even so, keep the youth updated every step of the way.

### EXPLANATION:

We may have begun the team in Step 1, 2 or 3. In Step 4, we begin active decision-making. Now the social worker is not the only person responsible for decision-making, but joins the team in exploring options and making decisions as a group.

## STEP 5: Decision Making and Evaluation

### GOAL:

The team, including the youth and social worker, develops an individualized plan for legal and emotional permanency, a timeline for completion, a process for ongoing monitoring of progress, and a contingency plan.

### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. Team evaluates the permanent possibilities for the youth.
- B. Team devises a primary plan and backup plans.
- C. Legal issues are explored specific to reunification, adoption, guardianship, kinship foster care and non-legal formal commitments.

### EXPLANATION:

By the end of Step 5, the youth and the team will have a realistic plan for the youth's future and long-term support. Team members will have committed to doing their part to support permanence.

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## STEP 6: SUSTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP(S)

### GOAL:

The youth, family and team has a plan to support the young person and her family, has achieved legal or non-legal commitments, and has organized the necessary resources to maintain permanency.

### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. Review contingency plans.
- B. Review legal status and less formal commitments.
- C. Review formal and informal resources for family members and others to help support permanency.
- D. Prepare the team to be self-sustaining.

### EXPLANATION:

The youth is now either living with family or on the verge of living with family who will support the youth throughout life. Without supports for the family and youth, the normal challenges of life and adolescence can disrupt the permanency. The long-term plan is reviewed to ensure that the contingency plan is sufficient. At this point, the social worker serves as a resource for the team.

## *Social worker:*

*"I had a case where a teenage girl was on the run. The police picked her up and called me at 7am on a day I could not cancel scheduled appointments. I needed help. I had used the time when she was on run to work with her two aunts, so, when this call came, I called her aunt at 7 am. "Eunice," I said, "I need your help." And she helped - she came, she took the girl! Before, I never would have done that but I had gotten to know Eunice as we worked on the case, so I felt that maybe I could call her and ask for help, even at 7am.*

*You do need a family to be involved as much as you are. I'm less stressed and anxious about having to do everything myself, less fearful that I'm making a mistake. I think maybe I'm more comfortable with my judgement because I have more tools and i'm not doing it all alone."*



# DEFINITION OF PERMANENCY

Permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult who provides:

- A safe, stable and secure parenting relationship,
- Love,
- Unconditional commitment, and
- Lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, or guardianship, where possible, offering the legal rights and social status of full family membership, in which the youth has the opportunity to maintain contacts with important persons including brothers and sisters.

A broad array of individualized permanency options exist; reunification and adoption are an important two among many that may be appropriate.



# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

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### GOAL

The youth, social worker, supervisor, caregivers and professionals gain a clear understanding of the Family Search and Engagement (FSE) process and how to safely and successfully support these activities.

### PRACTICE STEPS:

- A. Social worker and supervisor discuss the definition of permanency and philosophical and clinical issues regarding permanency.
- B. Social worker and supervisor determine the timing of the youth's initial participation. Only in rare cases of mental health concerns will the youth be unable to participate in the process from the beginning.
- C. Social worker and supervisor decide who is the best person to work with the youth on family search and engagement.
- D. Person designated to work with the youth introduces FSE to the youth and explores what the youth may want from connections.
- E. Youth and person designated explore youth's known family network (including fictive kin, siblings and half siblings in care).
- F. Youth and social worker identify and involve professional and non-professional partners. Social worker orients partners to the FSE process and explains the youth's permanency team.

### EXPLANATION:

The supervisor and social worker assess any questions or fears they themselves have about beginning the process. Supervisor and social worker prepare the youth and the initial professional and non-professional persons involved with the youth for the family search and engagement process (FSE) and address clinical and logistical considerations.

The youth permanence team is composed of the youth, family, professionals, and important others, that explores options and takes responsibility for finding permanency for the youth. The team assigns tasks, sets timelines and monitors progress. Because of the team, the social worker is not the only person responsible for decision-making about the youth's permanence. Once a permanent family has been found and a support network created, the team becomes self-sustaining.

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

## PRACTICE STEPS:

### A. SOCIAL WORKER AND SUPERVISOR DISCUSS THE DEFINITION OF PERMANENCY AND CLINICAL ISSUES REGARDING PERMANENCY.

To prepare for doing permanency work, it's helpful to review how many years the young person has been in placement and how many moves were made, what is known of siblings, half-siblings, and family, and what the future holds if permanency isn't achieved. The supervisor and social worker confirm that they share a definition of permanence, review whether any of the following attitudes could influence the work and, if so, make a plan for resolving them. It can be helpful to review the Youth Permanence Scale to see at which point the youth's permanency situation would fall today. It's also helpful to review the Youth Permanence Consult Sheet to see what you have done, what you know and what questions you will answer in the process of achieving permanence.

### ATTITUDES TO YOUTH

#### 1) "THE YOUTH IS STABLE. WHY UPSET THINGS?"

Placement stability in foster care is a myth. People die, relatives get sick, the room in which the youth lives is needed for Grandma. Stability in placement or in counseling is not a reason to ignore permanency. The outcomes for youth who emancipate from the foster care system in terms of homelessness, jobs, education and early pregnancy are extremely disheartening.

#### 2) "THE YOUTH IS TOO UNSTABLE - IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE."

Sometimes, such youth feel hopeless and that they're an impossible burden on the social worker. "Would it be easier if I just walked away?" one teenage girl said to her social worker when no placement was available, but often when a youth finds connections, hope for the future increases, the number of critical incident reports decreases, and the youth's behavior becomes more stable.

Many youth in Project UPLIFT (Colorado) weren't making any progress on treatment plans. But when family members were found and began coming to the residential center to participate in planning, the youth began to work on their treatment plans. One youth had hope that he wasn't always going to be identified as perpetrator, for instance, and be confined to a residential center for what felt like forever to him.

## UNADOPTABLE!

*Two teenage sisters had spent their early childhood with their homeless mother and entered care after she died. Diagnosed with borderline intellectual functioning (50-70 IQ range), they had little interest in adoption or guardianship in 2003. The permanency worker was told the girls were incapable of forming any attachments and were not socialized. With counseling over time, the girls realized that a permanent home was something they wanted and became their own best advocates, identifying several potential connections, none of whom were able to offer the sisters permanence. A few months later, they approached a faculty member at their school and asked her and her husband to be their guardians. The couple agreed to explore the idea and "once the frequency of the visits increased, the girls made dramatic progress." The social worker now describes them as "talented, outgoing, and even gregarious." They graduated from middle school on the honor roll and are getting straight "A's in high school. The adoption was scheduled for finalization in 2006.*

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

## 3) "SOME YOUTH ARE TOO DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED, MENTALLY ILL OR SPECIAL IN OTHER WAYS TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY."

It's as important that youth with developmental, physical or mental challenges obtain permanency as it is for any other youth. We tend to see them as "special," but others may see them simply as a person and not consider their specialness a deterrent to parenting them. Parents already familiar with an illness such as spina bifida aren't frightened about its care requirements.

Even youth with severe issues can be placed. Project UPLIFT (Colorado) found an adoptive home with an aunt for a youth who was a sexual predator. The aunt traveled to the treatment facility to work on the relationship and, upon finishing the program, the youth moved in with her.

## 4) "GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH DON'T WANT PERMANENCE."

Reunification for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/questioning (GLBTQ) youth is often ruled out too quickly. These youths' needs are no different than anyone else's. If reunification is tried and fails for a GLBTQ youth, all other options for permanence should be explored.

## 5) "THE YOUTH WILL BE DISAPPOINTED YET AGAIN."

It important to remember that our job is not to prevent the youth from feeling bad (nor is that possible), but to do what we can to find permanency. A youth has a right to honest information, good or bad, about her family - the information is core to the youth's identity. In talking with youth, they have said that they realize what their situation is regarding permanence and appreciate when someone tries to do something for them, regardless of how it works out: "It's way better than someone not even trying." Even if a relative is dying, although it is painful, it's important to tell the youth, unless there is a mental health reason not do.

## 6) "HE SAID HE DOESN'T WANT TO BE ADOPTED."

Consider why he might say this. What has his past experience been? What misconceptions does he have about adoption? He has probably heard confusing, inaccurate and intimidating statements about adoption. It's best never to ask a youth, "Do you want to be adopted?" Instead, help the youth consider lifetime connections. Review past connections and experiences to help put his feelings into context. It's the social worker's job to help him change "No" to "I'll think about it."

*A social worker found Joe, a food worker at the youth's school, who wanted to be a permanent connection for 16 year old Anthony, but Anthony didn't want to be adopted.*

*"Well," the social worker said, "what about not being adopted, just visiting with Joe?"*

*"I guess that would be okay," Anthony said.*

*The social worker explained to Joe that Anthony was probably scared but wanted to visit anyway.*

*"What about living with Joe?" the social worker asked a few months later, after several visits had occurred.*

*"Yeah, that might be okay, but I don't want to be adopted." And the youth moved in.*

*The social worker told Joe, "Anthony doesn't want to be adopted, but he needs you to be his permanent connection. Is there anything that Anthony could do to get himself kicked out of your house?"*

*"Nothing," Joe said.*

*Two years later, Joe brought up adoption with Anthony and finally, at 18, Anthony consented to his own adoption.*



# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

## ATTITUDES TO FAMILY

### 1) "THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE."

Particularly if the family has a long history with the agency, staff often believe there are no competent adults in the family. Keep open the possibility there may be family who are competent and willing, but may not, for a variety of reasons, be known to social services.

### 2) "IF THEY CARED, THEY WOULD HAVE COME FORWARD."

Families move, grandparents lose phone numbers, staff lose phone numbers, parents rebuff their families, families grow tired, family circumstances change, a parent doesn't provide names or the social worker doesn't ask or an aunt's call isn't returned or a grandparent thinks the youth is adopted or an uncle wants to be involved but doesn't know how to find the youth or parents of a youth's friend don't know the youth needs permanence - these are some of the many reasons someone might not have come forward.

## ATTITUDES TO PERMANENCE

Are there misgivings and hesitations that make the social worker pull back? If the social worker is hesitant about permanency when talking to the youth, the youth will realize that and take cues accordingly.

## WORRY ABOUT CONFLICT

In calling meetings, social workers often feel uncomfortable about tension, for instance, between separated parents and want to help them mend fences, but the parents need not get along - just participate. Explore the worst that could happen and, with your supervisor, make a plan for dealing with it.

## LETTING GO

Sometimes a social worker can get help from the supervisor in relinquishing her role as the only person responsible for the youth. Planning for the youth is the responsibility of everyone, the family, professionals, fictive kin, and social worker.

*Sometimes a social worker wants to become the permanent connection for the youth. If so, follow your agency's procedures regarding adopting a youth with whom you have been involved professionally.*

Sometimes an involved professional sees herself as the only person who loves the youth and doesn't encourage permanency efforts. Educate the professional on permanence and help her reframe the relationship as one of many important to the youth. If she is extremely involved, perhaps she wants to be the youth's permanent connection, but hasn't known how to explore this with the agency.

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

B. SOCIAL WORKER AND SUPERVISOR DETERMINE THE TIMING OF THE YOUTH'S INITIAL PARTICIPATION. ONLY IN RARE CASES OF MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS WILL THE YOUTH BE UNABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS FROM THE BEGINNING.

The youth is central to the entire process. In rare cases, the youth won't be able to participate at the initial stages, but as the youth is prepared for permanency, the youth will be increasingly involved. Part of the preparation for permanency is helping the youth to grieve the losses of persons known, to formulate self-identity, to establish trust and security through attachments, and to build relationships and develop the openness to join families on a permanent basis. Even in the rare cases when the youth is not involved at the beginning, keep the youth informed about what's going on. (See [The 3-5-7 Model: Preparing Children for Permanency by Darla Henry](#).)

- Review who is the most appropriate to talk with the youth about permanence and the FSE process.
- Mental health concerns for the youth should be considered. Discuss these with your supervisor and the youth's therapist; be sure the therapist understands permanency and its critical importance for the youth.
- If mental health concerns prevent the youth from joining the youth permanence team, explore how the team can involve the youth in other ways. The social worker can speak with the therapist about how the youth might be involved. Possibilities might include the youth sending a letter to the team or giving the social worker a list of the youth's wishes to communicate to the team.
- If the youth doesn't want to be involved in team meetings, keep the youth informed every step of the way. Often youth appear to be uninterested because they fear that things will not work out. However, they often follow the process intently from the sidelines.

C. SOCIAL WORKER AND SUPERVISOR DECIDE WHO IS THE BEST PERSON TO WORK WITH THE YOUTH ON FAMILY SEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT.

- Determine who has the best relationship with the youth for working on permanence issues. Possibilities include the social worker, Independent Living Program social worker, foster parent, therapist, group home staff, etc.
  - If the designated person is not the social worker, the social worker orients that person to the FSE process.
1. What permanency means - the process: The youth permanence team will search for family members and fictive kin, help them establish connections with the youth as appropriate, and gradually increase their activities with the youth through letters, phone calls, visits to support the youth and participation on the team. Eventually the youth moves to less restrictive placements and, finally, to permanence with a family that makes a commitment to the youth through adoption, guardianship, or another form of formal (though not necessarily legal) commitment.

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

2. Social worker explains that Family Search and Engagement is not a linear process. Essentially, the process of finding a family is not sequential where one family is considered at a time. Nor does each step follow neatly after the other. The social worker has to be flexible in identifying which of the many activities should be done, and when. Sometimes the activities will not follow the specific order described here. In working with possible resources for the youth, the social worker must be sensitive to how relationships are developing.
3. Youth Involvement: Social worker explains that during each step, the youth is consulted and involved. For instance, in the “Discovery” step, the youth is asked to help make a family tree and talk about what family and fictive kin the youth knows. This also helps the youth see where the youth fits in the family.
4. Social worker might draw an Ecomap (see “Resources” for website and instructions) for the designated person to show what family connections this youth has compared to those of a youth who lives with his family. Compare social, family, educational and vocational assets. Review how family, friends, neighbors, church and community play naturally supportive roles with a youth living with his family in helping him grow and learn social skills.
  - Explore any questions and hesitations the designated youth permanence person may have about the process.

## D. PERSON DESIGNATED TO WORK WITH THE YOUTH INTRODUCES FSE TO THE YOUTH AND EXPLORES WHAT THE YOUTH MAY WANT FROM CONNECTIONS.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR INVOLVING YOUTH:

Developmentally, adolescents are trying to determine their own identities and values and how to make their own decisions. Start with a discussion with the youth about family to learn how she sees herself connected. The youth may have information about family of which professionals are unaware and know how to contact family even if the youth doesn't have a phone number or address.

Explain what permanency means - youth rarely know the term. They have often been told they are not adoptable and therefore may react poorly to being asked if they want to be adopted. They may have misconceptions about what adoption means, believing it means giving up one's name and losing contact with siblings and biological and foster family. If appropriate, arrange for the youth to meet with a teen who has been adopted. Introduce the concept of connections to the youth. Mention that one looks for safety, commitment, and follow-through when looking for connections. The Connectedness Map is a useful way to help the youth think about connections.

If the youth seems to be against permanence, gradually work with the youth on “Unpacking the No of Adoption.” What is behind the youth's fear or anxiety? Again, talk about the importance of connections and what that means for the youth's future.

Explain what you, the social worker, hope for, and that you can't guarantee the outcome but hope to find people with whom the youth might connect and who may want to help in the youth's life. If the youth is angry or apprehensive about finding family and others, be sensitive to this. Find ways to be curious and ask non-threatening questions about his family. Develop timelines for what you will do and when. Don't stop searching. It is child welfare's responsibility to find permanent connections for the youth.

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

## Preparation for the Youth's Response:

- Youth often become excited once they understand what you're doing.
- Alert the caregiver, school, etc., that the youth might act out in response to stress or anxiety as you pursue permanency.
- Prepare for daily questions from the youth about how the search is going.
- Take action now! If social workers start the process but don't follow through, the youth sometimes thinks social workers lied about what they said they would do. Many times a youth, tired of waiting, takes matters in his own hands and finds a prospective parent on his own.
- Sometimes a youth will say, "My best friend is my permanence," or "My boyfriend is." Reiterate that you want the youth to have a long term and safe connection, for instance, "I know your relationship feels permanent to you now and I hope it will be, but we want to connect you to someone with adult resources so they can help you if you get in a pinch with money or safety."

## E. YOUTH AND DESIGNATED PERSON EXPLORE THE YOUTH'S KNOWN FAMILY NETWORK (INCLUDING FICTIVE KIN, SIBLINGS AND HALF SIBLINGS, SOME OF WHOM MAY BE IN CARE).

The youth can tell you whom they care about, they may know people not in the file, and, with the designated person, can review people to whom they have felt connected in the past. Many youth want to know about their siblings, some of whom have been adopted. Also, a youth may know about a sibling for whom there is no information in the case file. The youth can identify those resources they are not interested in and problems they may have had with people in the past. This conversation also gives the designated person a chance to understand the youth's needs and wishes more fully.

## Techniques to help youth identify important adults:

- Find out if the youth has any tribal affiliation or ICWA status. If they do belong to a Tribe, find out how to follow up with their Tribe(s).
- Find out whether any relatives or fictive kin are currently involved in decision-making with the youth. Orient them to the Family Search and Engagement Process and invite them to join the youth's permanency team.
- Paint a realistic picture for the youth - finding a permanent family is not fast and there is no guarantee of success. Be prepared for the youth to become impatient or discouraged.
- The youth may ask, "Why are you doing this now?" Plan for the question and answer honestly. For instance, "We failed to do this before, but we should have. But we're going to start right now and make the future better than the past."
- Ask, "If you could leave foster care right now, is there one or two persons you'd like to see? If the youth says there isn't anyone, say, "We want you to have someone and that's why we're doing this." Then begin the Ecomap.
- Complete an Ecomap, genogram, or similar tool. (See "Resources" for websites.)
- Draw an informal picture of whom the youth feels connected to. Ask about:
  - Biological relatives
  - Siblings and half-siblings
  - Fictive kin or others to whom the youth feels close or wants to feel close. Teachers, the bus driver, a friend's mother, etc.

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

- Consider drawing a time line with the youth. Start with grade school and draw a map of the neighborhood. Ask, “Who were your playmates in kindergarten? Where were you living? Who was your teacher?” Continue through to the present. It’s helpful for the social worker to draw her own timeline to show the youth. If the youth identifies someone important to him or her, ask if the youth felt safe.
  - As you keep asking about connections, over time the youth will remember more.
  - Note how many connections are known at this point in the process. Later compare it with how many have been found.
- Check the files for siblings who may have been adopted. Familiarize yourself with agency policies and state and federal laws on confidentiality.

## PRACTICE NOTE:

Don’t forget the simple - a youth was in a therapy session, talking about wanting to find someone. The therapist picked up the phone, called them and got them into the session

### F. YOUTH AND SOCIAL WORKER IDENTIFY AND INVOLVE PROFESSIONAL AND NON-PROFESSIONAL PARTNERS. SOCIAL WORKER ORIENTS PARTNERS TO THE FSE PROCESS AND EXPLAINS THE YOUTH’S PERMANENCY TEAM.

- Potential team members include the probation officer, school counselor, therapist, ICWA or tribal contact, current and former foster parents, social workers, including the siblings, social workers, pastor, teacher, relatives, sports coach, etc.
- Orient partners to the Family Search and Engagement process.
- Set protocols about contacting family members. One team member, usually the social worker or permanency specialist, will take the lead. However, more than one person may work on finding family members and in small counties, people run into family. Plan ahead for this eventuality. Decide at what point family members can be contacted, what a team member can say to a family member or fictive kin about the process, and whom the potential connection should call to get involved in the process.
- Remind the team members that newly located family members cannot be given information prematurely as to the youth’s residence.
- Decide who will convene monthly team meetings to review progress and keep the momentum going.

As the youth, social worker, supervisor and team begin the permanency work, a team member may be unclear about what permanence is or may object to finding the youth permanency. A person may be pro-permanence but insist it won’t work for this youth. If a youth might have to leave the area to achieve permanence, a therapist may feel it’s more important that the youth remain in therapy in the area than find permanence. Continue educating individuals and the team about permanency and its importance.

# STEP 1: SETTING THE STAGE

## QUESTIONS

- *What if the therapist thinks the youth is not adoptable?*

Educate the therapist about permanency. Explore what the therapist thinks would make the youth ready and how, together, you can make that happen.

- *What if the youth and family have experienced extreme grief, a murder or death?*

Help put any issues on the table that might interfere with achieving permanence. Begin to raise these difficult areas as topics that can be talked about: "What did it mean for you to lose your grandmother and sibling in such a short period of time? How can we keep the family safer?"

## SUMMARY

*Setting the Stage* lays the foundation by examining and recognizing the need for permanency. The social worker and supervisor consider clinical issues that may arise for them. They determine who will be the youth's contact on the process. With the youth, they analyze the youth's desires for connection, network and safety considerations, and begin to create the youth's permanence team.

## RESOURCES

[Finding Forever Families](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/materials_list.asp) (Video) available through Dave Thomas Foundation, [www.davethomasfoundation.org/materials\\_list.asp](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/materials_list.asp)

[The Connectedness Map](#)

[Ecomap](#)

[Genograms](#)

[ToolBox No. 3, Facilitating Permanency for Youth](#), Gerald P. Mallon

[The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency](#). Henry, Darla L

[Youth Digital Stories on Permanence](#) California Permanency For Youth Project, [www.cpyy.org](http://www.cpyy.org)

[Youth Permanence Consult Sheet](#). This sheet is useful to help you decide your next actions and to assess where you are in the process at each step and at team meetings.

[Unpacking the No.](#)

## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

*Searching for relatives of Rebecca and Darren, who lived in northern California, the social worker found several adult siblings in Texas and Southern California. Neither the youth nor the siblings had known of the others' existence, but one of the adult sisters, already a licensed foster parent, said she wanted Rebecca and Darren to live with her. Rebecca has now moved in with her sister. Darren, 18, decided not to move, but he now knows he has a home available to him should he want it in the future.*

### GOAL

Knowledge of a large pool of family members and significant adults, some of whom will establish connections and join the team to assist support the youth's quest for permanency.

### PRACTICE STEPS

- A. If you haven't already talked with the youth about whom the youth knows, talk to the youth.
- B. Review the case for persons currently in the youth's network. Include known fictive kin, siblings and half siblings in care, step siblings and adopted siblings
- C. Contact mother, father, and professional and non-professional persons who are part of the youth's life to obtain information on potential connections. Take special care to look for paternal relatives, who have sometimes been ignored in the past.
- D. Follow the agency's guidelines for due diligence, permissions and confidentiality
- E. Mine the file and other important records.
- F. Use Internet search engines to find lost contacts.
- G. Document your findings.
- H. Start engaging connections immediately. You will continue to search for more connections but don't wait to contact those whom you've found. FSE isn't a linear process.
- I. Keep the youth, the team and contacts informed about progress.
- J. Talk with the youth again. The youth will remember more each time.

### EXPLANATION

Success is achieved when the family is extensively known. We look for a large number of relatives because:

1. Most families have dozens of relatives, even if they don't keep in touch - only those with genetic issues or victims of genocide don't.
2. With a large number of relatives, you're likely to find relatives who are currently raising children well, thus countering the attitude that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."
3. "Reasonable efforts": You want to assure enough of the family was contacted to give the youth a chance for permanency with his family.
4. Because a youth may have serious difficulties, you need several persons to provide support.

## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

*Data from Project UPLIFT in Colorado showed the most successful social worker spent her time talking to the youth and connections, rather than combing the file. Most of your information will come from person-to-person contacts.*

### PRACTICE STEPS:

**A. If you haven't already talked with the youth about whom the youth knows, begin with talking to the youth.**

**B. Review the case for persons currently in the youth's network. Include known fictive kin, siblings in care, step siblings and adopted siblings.**

**Assess** the urgency for connections: is the youth running, sexually abused or acting out sexually, using drugs or alcohol, suicidal? Is the youth approaching age 18 and faced with aging out of care? How long have these behaviors been going on? Are they getting better or worse? What is the youth's biggest unmet need? The answer to these questions will determine how quickly the team must move. The more challenges a youth faces the more important it is to achieve permanent connection for that youth.

### Siblings:

How many and where are they? Are there siblings whom the youth doesn't know about? How can siblings benefit from the permanency work? Two-thirds of the children in care have siblings in care, but only one-third of them are placed with siblings. Permanency work isn't finished until the siblings are connected.

**C. Contact mother, father, and professional and non-professional persons who are part of the youth's life to obtain information on potential connections. Take special care to look for paternal relatives, who have sometimes been ignored in the past.**

### Where to look:

- Talk to siblings, half siblings, former and current foster parents, previous social workers, siblings' or cousins' social workers, teachers,

residential staff, family doctors, etc. Ask about family members who may not be listed in the file.

- Ask yourself where you will obtain the most information; call or visit that person first. Generally, people over age fifty have more interest in family trees and people over sixty tend to be home during the day.

- If a person works, try calling at night. Being willing to work around other people's schedules shows them you're invested in the work.

- Use funerals and reunions as an opportunity to find people. Funeral homes can tell you who claimed the deceased's possessions. In one situation, a thirty year old went to her father's gravesite and met a cemetery staff who said that someone else had been visiting that site. It turned out to be the youth's lost sibling.

- Be tenacious.

**D. Follow the agency's guidelines for due diligence, permissions and confidentiality**

### Due diligence and permissions

- Determine which family members, if any, may not be contacted. However, because you are calling for information, not placement, almost all family are appropriate to call.

- If necessary, obtain appropriate permissions from the agency, court and family to contact family members.

- If the parental rights were terminated, determine the guidelines about contacting the biological family. Will it be hurtful to the parents? Can you get the information elsewhere?

- If the youth was adopted, determine the guidelines about contacting birth parents.





### Confidentiality Issues to Consider

- Protection of children almost always supersedes other laws, such as those on confidentiality.
- When there hasn't been a Termination of Parental Rights, before you make any contacts, determine if your agency requires that you obtain approval from the youth's and parents' attorney.
- If your agency has a family group meeting protocol, follow those guidelines on confidentiality in family meetings.
- Consider what information you will share and how you will share it when you talk to a relative.
  - Information about youth: As you contact people, keep the information general (i.e., youth's interests, favorite subject in school, why family is important to them). You may use first and last name for purposes of identification.
  - Don't discuss issues regarding the youth's biological parents.
  - Don't begin the discussion with a contact by providing information on the youth's health, mental health or developmental diagnoses. That kind of information can and should be shared once a contact becomes involved in a youth's life. Casual contacts who may only provide locating information on other individuals don't need the youth's private history.
- Find the answer to the following questions in your jurisdiction:
  - In your agency, can minors sign releases of information pertaining to them?
  - Can a parent forbid child welfare from searching for another parent's family?
  - Can a father (or mother) decide that child welfare cannot contact his (or her) mother (the youth's grandmother)?
  - Familiarize yourself with state or federal laws that give youth the right to inquire about siblings.
  - Familiarize yourself with your agency confidentiality requirements related to HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act).

*In care for five years, a sixteen-year-old boy spent the past three years in group homes. His mother, whom he had not seen for two years, was not considered a viable placement and his father had passed away 10 years ago. But the social worker contacted the funeral home listed on the father's death certificate and located the ex-daughter-in-law of the youth's father's companion, who led to the father's companion. It turned out that the father's companion lived only an hour away and that the youth had a half brother and half sister he never knew about and whom he now visits regularly. The worker also reconnected the youth to his maternal cousins who had moved out of state. "Eric has come out of his depression," the social worker said, "and is now reaching out to friends and the community." As of April 2007, the youth was scheduled to move to the maternal relatives at the conclusion of this school year*

## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

*In checking internal child support files, one county discovered that José's dad was paying child support for another child (e.g., José's half-sibling). When they called dad, the agency found he didn't realize that he had this child. "I want DNA testing," he said, "but if José's mine, I want to be involved in his life." He was tested, confirmed as father, made contact, and has begun forming a relationship with José.*

### E. MINE THE FILE AND OTHER IMPORTANT AGENCY RECORDS.

To begin, skim the file. You want to find information quickly, rather than spending weeks in the file.

***As you do the following, record all addresses and phone numbers:***

- Look at the first entry and subsequent referrals to the agency.
- Look at the most recent entry.
- Look for names that repeat themselves throughout the file.
- Pay attention to who attended court hearings.
- Look at court documents and juvenile justice files.
- Make a list of all social workers, even if they no longer work at the agency.
- Note all relatives, including siblings and half-siblings.
- Note teachers, therapists, residential treatment and group home staff, etc.
- Look for legal documents, e.g., birth and death certificates.
- Make a chronological list of all placements to review with the youth. This can spur memories and is important for youth as part of the youth's history
- Review the file on a regular basis. Names that formerly seemed irrelevant may become important.
- When you come to a roadblock, re-mine the case. You will often find contacts that were overlooked the first time.

### F. USE INTERNET SEARCH ENGINES TO FIND LOST CONTACTS.

- Be sure of the correct spelling – the internet search operates on the basis of exact spelling.
- Details of gender, city, last name and approximate age are useful.
- Try the parents' birth certificates to find grandparents.
- If a parent is dead, try the death certificate, sometimes available online. Look for who is listed as the respondent on the death certificate. This is the person who releases the body to the mortician and it may be a girlfriend, for instance, not a relative. If a parent is dead, you can still obtain information from the birth certificate.
- See "Resources" for a list of useful web sites.

## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

*In one case in which a search had yielded no relatives, a social worker finally found an old "Contact-in-case-of-an-earthquake" form with a name listed. After searching for a phone number and address, a paternal great-uncle was found 1000 miles away, whom the youth will join after high school.*

*In another county, when the files were mined, the social worker discovered dozens of letters to the youth from his mother. Because the mother had been accused of welfare fraud, the agency didn't give the youth the letters because it didn't want to forge a relationship between the boy and a criminal. In fact, the fraud case turned out to be a county mistake of welfare overpayment, which the mother hadn't repaid. The details of the case were forgotten but the label of criminal stuck for years and the letters were never given to the youth, who thought his mother didn't care*

### **G. DOCUMENT YOUR FINDINGS:**

Use your agency's tracking form to document what you found from conversations, case mining, and search engines. If the agency doesn't have a form, discuss how to record the information with your supervisor so the information won't be lost. Document information you receive from a group or foster home about a potential connection. See samples.

- Don't eliminate people because of health, transportation limits, or past behavior. They may contribute information or make a connection with the youth.

### **H. START ENGAGING CONNECTIONS IMMEDIATELY. YOU WILL CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR MORE CONNECTIONS BUT DON'T WAIT TO CONTACT THOSE WHOM YOU'VE FOUND. FSE ISN'T A LINEAR PROCESS.**

### **I. KEEP THE YOUTH, TEAM AND CONTACTS INFORMED ABOUT PROGRESS.**

This is critical. When there is no follow-up after a potential connection has been engaged, people don't know what to do and the agency loses potential information and connections for the youth. Regular team meetings are important for sharing progress, planning next steps and sustaining the momentum for permanency.

### **J. TALK WITH THE YOUTH AGAIN. THE YOUTH WILL REMEMBER MORE EACH TIME.**

*Complete a family tree that you can give to the youth and the family, if appropriate. Once you begin getting photos from family, you can add them to the tree*

### PRACTICE NOTE: PREPARATION FOR FIRST CALLS OR VISITS WITH NEW CONTACTS

It helps to clarify what we are asking of the family. What we are asking is this:

1. To share information about family and their stories of strength to help the youth create a family identity
2. To make a meaningful connection with the youth
3. To join the youth permanence team to develop strategies and make decisions about the youth's future.

#### Preparation for first call or visit with new contacts:

- Decide which member of the team will make the contact? The CASA? Social worker? The child's attorney, therapist.
- It is almost always better to make a phone call or visit in person than to send a letter. When a letter is necessary due to distance, see [sample letter](#).
- If the visit is in person, decide where it will occur and who will be present.
- Stop and assess how the initial contact might unfold.

To alleviate anxiety, ask yourself:

- What is this person's relationship to the youth?
- What information do I want from the conversation?
- Imagine what the contact might feel - guilt, excitement, shame, fear?
- Plan a response. To a mother who had lost touch, you might say, "I'm so sorry, I can't imagine what you've been going through. Despite what happened, this is a chance for you to do something for Keisha today."
- Make notes about what you will say, so you can keep the conversation focused.
- When the initial contact is by phone, plan to follow-up with a visit to the family member at home if the youth lives in the immediate area. Decide in advance how much information should be shared about the youth and what that information is. Consider how to word the information in non, technical terms.

#### First call or visit to family or fictive kin:

- Don't necessarily mention your title (for example, Sonoma County Social Worker) when you call potential relatives; instead say, "I'm a lifelong connection specialist," or "I'm working with Tanya," etc.
- Use your own worry about the youth to engage the contact: "I'm worried about Robert and his future. I need help to make sure he . . . , etc." Convey the importance of the youth connecting to their family.
- Help the contact feel that the contact can make a contribution: "The information you give me today about relatives could make a huge difference in your grandson's life. We're worried about what will happen if Johnny leaves foster care with no connection."
- Tell the family in the first contact, "We're looking for information about family members and whether any of the family would want to explore forming a connection with Frederick."
- Give the contact an overview of the information you want: general details on family, such as talents, religion, etc., specifics on where the family is located and details about the family tree.
- Ask details the youth might want to know for the future.

## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

What does his family look like physically? Whom does the youth look like? What was Mom good at? Dad? Singing? Carpentry? Stories? Are there medical issues the youth should know? How does the family celebrate holidays? What is the family's religion and ethnicity? What area did they come from? What kind of work did the adults do?

- When in doubt about what to say, refocus on the youth's needs: "I (the social worker) am not always going to be around, but I want this information for Johnny."
- Ask for the names and phone numbers of other family members. Obtain contact information for three other family members before you end a call, including information on the person who keeps track of reunions and holidays. If the family had difficulties with child welfare, you may not get another chance.
  - Alternatively, it may take more than one call for the family to decide to give you information - you may have to establish trust. Keep calling.
  - Use information from an internet search when you call: "I noticed that when I looked for relations, I found these names. Can you tell me about them? Is Mary a relative? Is she alive?"
  - If grandmother mentions an aunt, ask if you can call her right now, using 3-way calling. What you need from them doesn't seem urgent when it's followed up by phone tag.
  - From the first, let relatives know that, before visiting the youth, family members must be approved by the child welfare agency. Be aware that a family member may contact other family members after you have called.
  - Sometimes a relative who had a close connection with the youth feels the youth behaved poorly and is angry at the youth. Emphasize how much the youth needs them to reconnect, find a way to bring them back to the table and help them devise ways to help the youth.
  - Find out about your agency's procedure on confidentiality and follow it. For instance, if the father has a new wife, do you tell her why you're calling?
  - Cultural Competency: If you are seeking a connection in a religion or culture in which you are not an expert, locate someone who can tell you how to show respect. To visit a tribe, for example, perhaps you should bring a gift or food. If relatives are religious, consider enlisting a minister to help you approach the family.
  - Explore the ways a contact can provide support to the youth.
  - End the conversation by helping the contact feel they made a contribution: "The information you gave me today about relatives may make a huge difference in your grandson's life."
  - If you make an in-person visit, bring a camera and take pictures to show the youth. If appropriate, bring a gift, for example, a video of the youth singing. If appropriate, ask the contact to send a picture of the youth's parents or other relatives to the youth and ask the contact to phone the youth or send cards.

### After Visit:

- Update the youth, team and contacts on the results of your calls or visits.
- Create an address book and/or photo album for the youth.
- Let each person who provided pictures or cards for the youth know when they are given to the youth.

# STEP 2: DISCOVERY

## Examples:

### Introduction:

- “Is Robin available? My name is Rita and I work with a teenager named Alicia Adams and I think there is a possibility that she may be a part of your family. Is now a good time to talk?”
- “Is José available? My name is Anthony and I am working to help kids in the foster care system reconnect with their family. Right now I am working with a young man named Trevor Jones and we think there is a possibility you might know him.”
- Ask, “Who is in your family?” Not “Who can take care of Shevonne?” Relatives often think we’re hunting for a caretaker for the youth and, even if the youth never lives with the family, you need information.
- “I don’t know if you remember Anna but she remembers you as someone important in her life.”
- Don’t get caught up in the details of who did what to whom; simply obtain a list of relatives.

### If a contact is upset about your call:

- When a contact asks “Why are you calling now?” admit at once that we as an agency could have done better:

“We should have been doing this years ago, but luckily we are now. I’m so sorry that we weren’t doing this before. We should have been.”

“Because we’re concerned about the plan for your grandson. If you can help us figure that out, it would be great.”

“He’s graduating - can one of you come? Unless you do, he will have no one there.”

“I’m worried about Tanika and I wonder if you are. I know what happens to kids who age out and you have a chance to do something about it today.”

*Two teenage girls were hanging out in the Independent Living Services office. While Brenda, the social worker, was on the phone, she heard one girl say to the other, “There’s one foster family I really wish had adopted me. They spoiled me rotten and treated me like a princess.” Brenda had spoken with the girl about connections but she had never mentioned this foster home. Figuring out who the family was, Brenda contacted them and told them that the girl remembered them and needed connections now. “We’ve always loved the girl,” the family said. “We wanted to adopt her, but circumstances interfered. She was the one who always wanted her own way - a princess. We want to see her. We can’t this weekend because we’ve scheduled a trip to Disneyland. Wait - she could come with us. We’ll take her if she wants to go!”*

# STEP 2: DISCOVERY

## QUESTIONS:

- *What if the youth doesn't want you to contact some people?*

If a youth says she doesn't want you to contact a peer, relative or other adult, explore this with the youth and explain what you're hoping to do. If the youth says no because the youth wants to stay in the current living situation, work on how that situation can become permanent. Regardless, continue to find persons who can support the youth's future, either through providing information or encouragement.

- *What if the relative/near-kin did not know the youth was in foster care?*

Before the call, imagine what the relative might be feeling and plan some phrases to help: "I know this must be very difficult for you, not having known," or "I'm so sorry you didn't know this. I wish we had been able to tell you sooner."

- *What if the relative/near-kin person wants to know where the youth is?*

Tell the relative you can't tell say anything at this point because of confidentiality, but you will find out if and when you can tell him. Sometimes, you can guess certain questions contacts will ask. Find out beforehand what you can say and consider how to word the information.

- *Why call a family that abused or neglected the youth? What if an interested family member has a criminal history?*

The family's assets and abilities may have changed since the last agency contact; now they may be able to participate or even serve as a resource. Even if they cannot, the youth may want, or benefit from, a connection with them. For example, parents who are incarcerated can contribute family history and memories, provide information on the family's talents, religions, etc., and tell you who might be able to support the youth. They often appreciate the opportunity to help their child. Don't rule out information sources.

- *What if the youth asks you (the social worker) to adopt him?*

Be prepared for this question, especially if you have a close relationship. With your supervisor, develop an answer that is honest. Decide what, if anything, you

will commit to.

- *What if the youth has severe challenges and will never live at home?*

Permanency is a relationship and family, not a place. Even if the youth will live in an adult care center after he turns eighteen or remain in a high level group home during the teen years, the youth needs a permanent family who will send cards, make phone calls, and spend time with him on holidays. Such a family will advocate for him wherever he is, assure his needs are met and monitor his progress -just what parents would do if their own child were in an adult care center.

- *What if the family feels guilty and ashamed of not being involved with the youth sooner?*

Anticipate this and plan your response. First, take time before the call to analyze your own feelings. Then assure the family you are calling because you realize that the youth is in danger of not having anyone in her life and you need their help in figuring out how to proceed, e.g., "I know this is hard for you. I think we've all made mistakes with Carla, but this is our chance to figure out how to help her through life."

- *What if the family doesn't want us to search for family?*

Social services is obligated to find a family for the youth. Revisit the issue with the family occasionally and stress the role that natural connections play in the youth's future success. Often a mother will not want us to look for the father's side of the family and vice versa or won't want us to contact her own relatives, but that doesn't mean that we don't. If the family won't cooperate, continue searching, keeping them up to date on your work.

- *What if you can't make any contacts?*

There are very few cases in which a search has found no one, but it can sometimes take a year. In the meantime, do concurrent planning - work on alternate permanent plans and begin child specific recruitment.

## STEP 2: DISCOVERY

*In one situation, none of the family members could accept a transgender youth. When the father was located in prison, visits between father and youth began, and as the relationship developed, it was clear that the youth's transgender identity was no problem for the father. "It's the first time I've ever been embraced by a man appropriately," the youth reported.*

*"James had been close to a cousin who had moved to Texas. Once he moved, the agency lost touch. We scraped and scraped looking for other relatives - it took a year. Finally we found half siblings James had never met, right in Bakersfield where he lived. When the half siblings came for the meeting, they brought family with them - two vans piled with people! James was thrilled, 'I thought people were never going to stop getting out of the vans.' The relatives accepted him as theirs and James now sees them weekly. The half-siblings had a phone number for the cousin, who has since had a successful ICPC study. James will move to Texas and the agency is working on a plan to preserve his relationships with his half siblings."*

### SUMMARY

In Discovery the social worker uses all available means to find as many relatives and important adults and as much information as possible; completes a family tree to show the youth and family; and prepares for the initial call or visit. After the visit, the social worker keeps the youth and others informed of the results and begins engagement with family within one week of discovery.

### RESOURCES

Antwoine Fisher, movie

[Letters, samples](#)

[Free internet search engines and other search websites](#)

[Life Books Phone Scripts for First Telephone Calls with Relatives or Fictive Kin](#)

[Steps on a Failed Adoption](#)

[Tips on Searching](#)

[Forms for Tracking Potential Connections Found](#)

[Youth Permanence Consult Sheet](#)

This sheet is useful to help you decide your next actions and to assess where you are in the process at each step and at team meetings.



# STEP 3: ENGAGEMENT

## STEP 3: ENGAGEMENT

### GOAL

Those who have an inherent, or historic, connection to the youth share information about the youth, are cleared on safety as needed, begin to establish a connection with the youth, and, if they are not already on the team, join the team.

### PRACTICE STEPS

- A. Develop an individual engagement strategy for how each person will connect with the youth and support permanency efforts.
- B. Prepare for the first in-person visit between youth and important adults.
- C. Keep the youth informed of the process.

### EXPLANATION

Persons who have been found are contacted, as appropriate, to begin the process of engaging with the youth. Because FSE is not a linear process, a social worker may have begun Step 3 as soon as a particularly suitable person was discovered, but will simultaneously be working on Step 2, Discovery.

*As a social worker, show compassion to parents who have resurfaced, ambivalent foster parents, and struggling or failing adoptive parents. Put yourself in their shoes, but don't skirt the issue of moving forward on finding permanency. For example, if the parents haven't told the grandparents about a grandson, the social worker might say, "Where is your mom and dad, brothers and sisters? How can I help you tell them about your son?"*

*Initiate procedures for fingerprinting, home studies and screening in required databases. In most cases, these must be finished before a family member can visit the youth in an unsupervised capacity. Find out what rights, if any, a family has to see a youth without a search.*

### A. DEVELOP AN INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR HOW EACH PERSON WILL CONNECT WITH THE YOUTH AND SUPPORT PERMANENCY EFFORTS.

#### Assess the adult:

- If the adult wants to participate in the youth's life, discuss the various possible kinds of involvement, such as a letters, phone calls or visits.
- Explore the adult's motivation and commitment.
- Educate the family on the therapeutic and social issues that youth in foster care face - grief, loss, PTSD, attachment disorders. Explain that institutional care may have affected how the youth functions socially. A support group for relatives or parents who assumed guardianship, or who adopted former foster youths, is an excellent resource. Find the family a therapist who understands foster youth and permanency.
- Explain how adversely the youth is impacted if family doesn't follow through with a promised visit, phonecall, etc.
- Follow the agency guidelines regarding screening and safety issues.
- Obtain releases of information, court permissions, and assure that HIPPA compliance and confidentiality are upheld.
- Explain what a permanence team is and invite the adult to join the youth's permanence team.

## PRACTICE NOTE: CONNECTIONS and PLACEMENT

*Why aren't we asking about placement from the beginning? Isn't that what we want?*

In fact, our first goal is to get information and find connections for a youth rather than placement. Because social worker practice has had to focus on placement (after all, it's an emergency when a youth doesn't have a place), it's hard for social workers not to think of placement first. But if we don't think "connections," it's too easy to dismiss people who may be connections, reconnections, or sources of information. Thinking "information" and "connections" requires a different thought process, which takes time to develop.

At the beginning we are looking for information on the youth's history and for connections. We're looking for information because the youth needs a sense of identity: Who am I? What was my family like? Am I like them? What's my medical history? What were my parents good at? We're looking for connections because, at the minimum, the youth needs people who call regularly, provide a place for holidays, and help with education and security deposits for apartments. What we're looking for are multiple relationships - if a placement happens to occur, that's great - but we don't find just one person and stop. The youth still needs these other connections for support. One person is not enough to provide everything a young person needs.

Ultimately we do want permanency for the youth, which usually includes a home, but not always - for instance, a youth might need to remain in an RTC. In that situation, a youth would still need emotional permanence and, in fact, could be adopted even while remaining in an RTC, just as one of our own children might need to be in an RTC. If so, we would still consider ourselves parents and function as such. We want the youth to have supportive relationships so they can be successful wherever they're living. Whether we achieve a placement or not, we have achieved a great deal if we find a youth's history and create connections.

However, we have not completed our work if a fifteen year old in group or foster care has found one connection willing to call the youth twice a week but unwilling or unable to act as a permanent parent. In that case, we continue looking for permanence, while helping that connection flourish.

**Practice issues:** Don't bring up placement in the initial phone call. Sometimes, when a permanency specialist calls a potential connection whom has been found in the file or through an internet search, the person will say, "Oh, but I couldn't provide a place - my house is too small," or "I'm too old to take care of a teenager." At that point, the permanency specialist clarifies all of the above, e.g., "No, we're not looking for placement, even though I know that's the usual role the agency has taken in the past. We've discovered that while a good placement is important, it's equally important for the youth to know about the lineage and history of the family. We're looking for many things, but from you right now, we're looking for information on John and to explore whether you want to have a connection with him." We want to let the person get to know the youth before we say, "Here, do you want this teenager?"

# STEP 3: ENGAGEMENT

## B. PREPARE FOR THE FIRST IN-PERSON VISIT BETWEEN YOUTH AND ADULTS.

### Preparing self:

With your supervisor's counsel:

- Determine the structure of the meeting for the best chance of success.
- Decide what the boundaries of the initial meeting will be - how long it will last, where it will take place and how it will end.
- Make a plan to assure safety.
- Let involved professionals know that a meeting will occur that will affect the youth and do contingency planning with the other professionals based on possible reactions the youth may have to the contact.
- Imagine the youth's feelings: Will the youth be worried about rejection? About loyalties to family? if appropriate, discuss them with the youth.

### Preparing the youth:

- With most youth, share information about family as it is uncovered and verified (with prior permission). With some, it's better to share little until family members have been engaged, background information is complete, and the team has made a clinical judgment to approve initial contact with the youth. Plan ahead with those who know the youth best about how this information should be handled.
- Arranging phone calls, letters, pictures or email between the youth and new family members before the initial meeting may help break the ice.
- Tell the youth what the boundaries of the initial meeting will be and how the meeting will be structured - that is, how long it will last, where it will take place, who will be in charge, how the youth might participate, and how it will end. Discuss with the youth if that seems comfortable and if there are changes the youth would like to make.
- To make the visit successful and comfortable for the youth, discuss the youth's expectations and concerns, including safety, and develop a plan for how to address them.
- Introduce the youth to the family member or other adult in a supervised setting.
- Talk with youth about their expectations and help them sort these through, e.g., a youth may expect to go home with the family member or may be apprehensive about meeting the family.
- Ask the youth if they would like to bring anything to share with the family, such as art work, crafts or a video.
- If a connection doesn't show, develop a contingency plan for what the youth will do and spend time with the youth.

*Take your cue from the youth for the visit. One youth wanted the visit arranged around his football game - no family had ever attended his ball games.*

# STEP 3: ENGAGEMENT

## Preparing family and important others:

- Exchange home and cell phone numbers with the family member so you can call if someone doesn't appear and make an alternate plan immediately.
- Talk with family members about their expectations. Review the developmental stage of the youth, her needs and strengths, etc., but don't use a diagnostic label or social work jargon. Help the family to understand and be sensitive to the youth's expectations and fears about the visit.
- Consider the challenges family members face in connecting for the first time with a youth. If a connection knew the youth, will anything be difficult about reconnecting?
- To reduce awkwardness, plan with the family to end the visit with a plan for a follow-up visit or next steps.
- Invite the connection to join the youth's ongoing permanence team.
- Begin to develop a schedule for how and when ongoing contact will occur, e.g., a scheduled Sunday afternoon 20 minute phone call or an email every Wednesday and Friday. That way the youth can expect predictable contact and see follow-through, and the family has a defined task. The regularity helps relationship open in an organic way.

### *Practice Note: Managing Expectations*

*It's critical to have a good relationship with the connection so you can let them know about the youth's potential reactions and help them avoid making inappropriate comments or promises. Help the family develop a predictable structure to these meetings/reunifications. If the youth and family both have an accurate picture of a meeting's nature, anxiety and awkwardness decrease. The youth is less likely to have an emotional or behavioral crisis and more likely to be comfortable and confident in future meetings.*

## Preparing caregivers:

- Encourage the caregiver to participate in planning for visits with connections.
- Prepare foster parents or residential staff for the youth's anxiety before a visit.
- After the visit, care providers should anticipate an emotional reaction. This is normal: the youth might act out, withdraw or run. If you know where the youth has run, ask the contact to encourage the youth to return. Sometimes, scheduling additional visits and encouragement from the family persuades the youth to return. If not, follow standard runaway protocol. Later, explore the youth's reaction with the youth.
- A caregiver's ability to evenhandedly cope with the youth's feelings after the visit can support the youth to continue family visits. Conversely, misunderstanding the complexity of a youth's post-visit feelings can have a detrimental effect on the connection.

# STEP 3: ENGAGEMENT

## Logistics:

- Make initial visits brief, supported and fun. Schedule them in a natural setting, such as a home-like room or park. Serve food.
- Bring a camera and address book so the youth can have pictures and ways to contact connections.
- Use real life frames, rather than scheduled breaks. For instance, rather than waiting for a school vacation three months away, set up a visit as soon as possible. Without intending to delay, if one wants for just the right time, one can add another year to a youth's life in foster care.
- When relatives visit from out of town, assist them with motel locations, rides and planning activities, donated tickets to local attractions, etc. This may be an activity for volunteers.

## After the visit:

- Provide an activity or opportunity for the youth to process feelings. Some youth want to talk, others want to write their feelings in a journal or write a letter to the family. If you anticipate a difficult reaction, have a therapist ready to work with the youth.
- Organize separate debriefings with the family and other stakeholders.
- Update your documentation regularly with new information.

## C. KEEP THE YOUTH INFORMED OF THE PROCESS.

Due to the strain of this process on the youth, it's important to update the youth each step of the way on what has happened and is planned. This requires intense collaboration with professionals so they are prepared for the youth's possible reactions.

## **Questions:**

- *I don't know what to say!*

For scripts on phone conversations, see "Resources."

- *What if the youth or family member gets angry or aggressive?*

Often the social worker can anticipate this and prepare both the youth and the family. If the social worker and team think the visit isn't going well, they can recommend another time to discuss intense therapeutic issues or they can shorten or end the visit.

- *How long should an initial visit in a distant city be?*

Visits with found kin should be no more than 4 days for the first visit, perhaps less depending on the developmental age of the youth. Assess how the youth is coping and, if necessary, shorten visits to minimize stress and anxiety. The youth must be supported during the visit, so a social worker or designated adult must accompany the youth, or professional support must be arranged in the distant city.

## Questions (cont'd):

- *How do I help parent(s) and relatives resolve past differences and troubled relationships within the family and with friends?*

Conflict in relationships with family members and friends is normal. In most situations, the initial fears of conflict will be greater than the reality. Concentrate on what the youth needs and continue to redirect the conversation to the purpose of the meeting. Make notes with useful phrases that you can consult to redirect the conversation, for example: "I'd like to get back to the work we need to do here, that is, figuring out what Bobby needs. We were in the process of working on his health care." "We only have until 4 o'clock, so in the time remaining, let's concentrate on how we can help Bobby. We're trying to figure out if any one of you can call him every week."

- Sometimes a family member will say, "Oh, yes, I have contact with Tanika every so often. I definitely stay in touch." A social worker might respond by saying, "Yes, you have contact, that's great, but Tanika hasn't had the chance to celebrate birthdays and holidays like Thanksgiving with family as a teen raised in a family would. That's what I mean by permanency."

- *What if long distances keep family from being involved?*

Secure funds to send the youth to visit the family - sometimes airlines donate tickets. Provide phone cards to the youth and the family to facilitate the connections.

## Summary:

**Engagement** requires sensitivity to each family member's needs, as well as to everyone's safety, feelings, and expectations. Stakeholders should be prepared for the youth's concerns and reactions and helped to recognize these as a normal and expected part of the process. Debriefing after the meeting should occur with the youth, family members, team members, caregivers, and other professionals. Assure that permissions and background checks have not been overlooked.

## Example:

In Fresno County's experience, it's preferable for staff to go along with the youth. On Day 1, the staff and youth get to know the area. On Day 2, they meet with the family and the youth is left with the family, but the caseworker and youth talk every hour by phone. A schedule is made ahead of time with the family and money is given to the youth for activities and food. The youth does not stay for the evening. It's important that a staff person be available by phone at all times so that the family can reach someone. In one situation when the youth was not prepared and was extremely anxious, the family did not know what to expect. Consequently, they did not "hang in there" with the youth. However, in a situation where the family was well prepared, when the youth acted out behaviorally, the grandmother said, "I lost my grandson for ten years and a few of his behaviors aren't going to stop our relationship now."

## Resources:

[Forms for Tracking Potential Connections Found](#)

[Phone Scripts for First Telephone Calls with Relatives or Fictive Kin](#)

[The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency.](#) Henry, Darla L.

[Youth Permanence Consult Sheet](#)

# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

## STEP 3: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

### Goal

A functioning team composed of the youth, family, professionals, and important others explores options and takes responsibility for finding permanency for the youth.

### Practice Steps

- A. Merge the newly identified family members and others with the existing youth permanence team.
- B. Prepare self, youth (if not done already) and others for participation.
- C. Clarify the team's goal and what you expect of participants.
- D. Help the team explore options and assign tasks
- E. Set timelines and monitor progress to assure that tasks are completed.
- F. In rare cases the youth may not meet with the team. Even so, keep the youth updated every step of the way.

### Explanation:

We may have begun the team in Step 1, 2 or 3. In Step 4, we begin active decision-making. Now the social worker is not the only person responsible for decision-making, but joins the team in exploring options and making decisions as a group.

**Note:** Family Search and Engagement is not necessarily a linear process. Sometimes, if a family is coming from out of town, visiting the youth for the first time and joining the team might happen at the same time. Teams develop in different ways and the social worker must be flexible about each team's development.

*I always thought that I was adoptable even though I was 16 years old, but my social worker kept saying I was too old every time I asked him about it. I worked after school at this hardware store and the guy who owned it was kind to me. He was such a good guy and I always talked to him. I never really told him I was in foster care, but one day when we got to talking, he started to ask me a lot of questions about my family and then about life in foster care. I invited him to my case conference because my social worker said I could invite anyone who I wanted to, and at that point he asked about adoption. I was shocked at first, but it made sense. We finalized my adoption three months ago. That day was the happiest day of my life.*

# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

## Practice Steps:

### A. MERGE THE NEWLY-IDENTIFIED FAMILY MEMBERS AND OTHERS WITH THE EXISTING YOUTH PERMANENCE TEAM.

The social worker has been working with an initial team consisting of the youth and persons already involved with the youth, such as the foster parent, teacher, or mentor, and professionals (Court Appointed Special Guardian, therapist, etc.). In Step 3, Engagement, the social worker has talked with family members about the existence of the team and the possibility of joining. Now the newly identified family and fictive kin will join the team and participate in active planning for a successful future for the youth.

### B. PREPARE SELF, YOUTH (IF NOT DONE ALREADY) AND OTHERS FOR PARTICIPATION.

#### *Preparation for first team meeting:*

##### Preparation of Self:

- In consultation with your supervisor, clarify for yourself what you see as the purpose of the meeting. You may have two purposes at the first meeting. Separate the purposes in time: for instance, use the first hour to get to know each other and the second to plan for the youth's future.
- Keep the need for placement and the need for a permanent plan separate.
- Consider your guidelines for handling conflict at the meeting.
  - Stay focused on the goal of permanence.
  - Allow team members to struggle with the issues.
  - Include persons who aren't in conflict to mitigate tension.
  - Have a set of rules to refer to if the discussion becomes tense.
  - If necessary, cut the meeting short.

*After searching, a social worker found an uncle in Wisconsin for a youth in Colorado. In the first phone call, the uncle said, "We're having a family reunion in two weeks and we want him to come." The social worker planned the visit quickly - she wasn't thinking about placement, she was thinking of how important the reunion was. The relatives paid for the ticket, and the youth went and met cousins and aunts and uncles he didn't even know he had. Eventually, after home studies, etc., were completed, the youth moved to Wisconsin.*

##### Preparation of Youth:

- Before the meeting, meet with the youth to explain the purpose of the meeting and find out what the youth wants.
- Let the youth know how long the meeting will be, where, etc.
- Explain your expectations - that the team will meet about the youth and permanency regularly. If the youth chooses not to attend, the team will still meet and a designated team member will update the youth.
- If the youth can't attend or chooses not to, find a way that the youth can give input (a video, audiotape, or letter) or a way that the youth can communicate his or her wishes to someone present at the meeting.
- Discuss how to help the youth if an important connection doesn't show.



# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

## Preparation of Others:

- Talk to each participant to discover each of their perspectives.
- Find out if there is anyone who often precipitates a conflict, and if any team member has been skilled in guiding that person to participate productively.
- Help the team create a welcoming environment for newly found family, particularly those who may be fearful of the child welfare system.
- If a professional chooses to join the team on his own time as a commitment to youth, ask him to clarify his nonprofessional role to the team.
- Clarify the team's goal and what you hope for in member participation and achievement of youth permanency. Clarify that long-term placement is not an option - in fact, it's too soon to discuss placement.
- Provide a structure for roles and behavior at the meeting.
  1. Explain that you as the social worker will be actively involved.
  2. Explain that even if a team member can't provide a home or visits for the youth, the team member can help find this youth a family and meet his needs for connection.
- Before the meeting, a social worker may want to help some team members identify why they are attending the meeting and assist them in voicing their concerns.
- Help the team members understand the youth's strengths.
- Discuss the necessity for beginning the legal issues of placement - background checks, home inspections, and court processes - so that any suitable connection has been cleared to support the youth and family in emergency situations.

*A teenage boy in care for seven years, now in a group home, had almost no contact with family. When the social worker interviewed him, he said he wanted comic books and a job. The social worker found family from information in the file. Because the family lived locally, a meeting was scheduled. When the boy said he wanted a job, the uncle stepped up and said, "I can offer him a job." And he did. But the youth began missing work because the group home wasn't getting him to work. The uncle was upset, so they called a family meeting. The social worker said that she didn't think the group home would improve. "Well, if he lived with me," the uncle said, "then he'd get to work on time." "Is that an option?" the caseworker asked. "It certainly is!" The uncle immediately filled out the home study form and was approved. However, his wife was expecting a baby and worried about time to transport him to counseling. Another family member stepped up and said they could transport him to activities until after the baby was born. The youth moved in with the uncle and aunt three months ago and continues to do well in the home.*

## Logistics:

- If the agency has a family group meeting process, such as Team Decision Making (TDM) or Family Group Conferencing, use that process for the meeting.
- The team can meet in person or on the phone; the social worker can meet with one person or with many; it should include the youth unless the youth declines or mental health issues prevent participation.

# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

## Venue:

- If possible, hold the meeting in the family's space. It symbolizes the family's responsibility for the youth. The social worker might offer to bring food.
- If the meeting is held in the family's home, the social worker should prepare the youth that the family's social economic status, condition of the home and neighborhood may differ from what the youth is used to.

## Family Reunions:

- If there is a family reunion, ask if the young person, along with an adult the young person knows, can participate. If it seems appropriate, ask if there is a time that family members can meet specifically to talk with the youth.

## Time:

- Set a time limit on each meeting, no more than 90 minutes total.

## Scheduling:

- If possible, consider having the family, rather than child welfare, gather participants. It gives them responsibility and helps you see how the family functions.

## Fun:

- Have fun- serve food or play a game to start.

## **C. CLARIFY THE TEAM'S GOAL AND WHAT YOU EXPECT OF PARTICIPANTS.**

## **D. HELP THE TEAM EXPLORE OPTIONS AND ASSIGN TASKS**

## **E. SET TIMELINES AND MONITOR PROGRESS TO ASSURE THAT TASKS ARE COMPLETED.**

## **F. IN RARE CASES THE YOUTH MAY NOT MEET WITH THE TEAM. EVEN SO, KEEP THE YOUTH UPDATED EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.**



# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

## Practice Note: Meeting Tips

### During Meeting:

During each of the following steps, remember to move at the speed of the team. If members have never been involved with the youth, the first steps will be to get to know the youth, not to find permanency.

### Introduction:

1. Each person explains their connection to the youth.
2. Social worker clarifies, honestly and straight forwardly, what the goal of the team is and what the social worker hopes for in team participation and achievement of permanency. "These are the issues. We want to find and make a decision about legal permanence." State that long-term placement in foster care is not an option. Be clear that the team will come up with more than one option because none of us can predict what might happen.
3. Let the family know it's not a choice of either parenting the youth or doing nothing. Show them what they can do and that there's an agency framework for helping them do it. If they can't parent the youth, they can help to find someone who can or they can provide support to the youth. Tell them, "Your family has some responsibility for your son and here are some ways to help."
4. Review the youth's strengths.
5. Time:
  - As you address the following steps, you must weigh the urgent need for permanence against the family's readiness to participate in the process.
  - Don't try to rush the development of the relationship with the youth.
  - However, let family know that time is important. The process will not continue indefinitely. While you do not want to rush the development of the relationship, you will continue to search for more connections and for permanency while the relationship is developing.
  - Set timelines for youth, self, and family: "Hi, we're here to talk with you about Melissa and her future and it should take about 45 days for us to develop a permanency plan." At 45 days, take time to review where the team is regarding a plan and what the next steps are. Having a timeline will ground your work if team members don't return phone calls, etc.
6. Develop a vision for the youth: What does the youth want for his future? What do we want for him? If he were doing really well at 20 years old, what would that look like? Who would come to his graduation? What is the youth's big need and how can we address it?
7. Questions to ask during the meeting:
  - How can each team member give the youth hope and provide concrete support now? Can they phone, visit, write letters? Provide transportation? What can team members, including the professionals, do to help find a permanent family for the youth?
  - Determine who will take responsibility to do certain tasks.
  - Look at team members to see if there is anyone particularly suited to forming a connection with the youth. Has anyone had the same experience as the youth? Do they have advice? If a youth comes from a family where people didn't have chances to succeed, and the youth does, is there an adult on the team who went through the same experience?
8. Identify how the team will monitor the progress of its plan and the responsibilities of individual team members.

# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

## Social Worker Follow-up After the Meeting:

1. Assess the team's functioning. Evaluate the team's progress regularly to assure the momentum continues.
2. Recognize success.
3. Maintain regular contact with the youth so that the youth knows on almost a daily basis what is happening. The suspense of not knowing what will happen is stressful. Help the youth understand the process and that the youth can't plan on living with an uncle or grandmother until all the steps have been taken.

## **Questions:**

- *"What if the youth has run away? I can't do anything then."*
  - Even when the youth is absent, you can work on the case.
  - Convene the team to make a plan so it's ready when the youth returns.
  - Engage the family and work in tandem. When the youth does appear, you'll have a relationship in which the family will help and take responsibility.
  - Use the time as an opportunity to review with the relatives and team the difficulties in permanence or adoption and devise strategies for dealing with them.
  - When the youth returns, let her know the team has been working on her permanency while she was on run.
- *"What if I can't find any non-professional team members to come?"*
  - If you are short on non-paid team members, start with just one person each on the maternal and paternal side. Ask each to bring another non-paid person. For instance, a grandmother may have a friend who is attached to the youth. A teacher may know an interested school employee. Enlisting them to help find people also generates a feeling that it's the family's team, not the social worker's.
- *"What if team members are struggling with keeping each other informed of progress?"*
  - Ask team members to take responsibility for updating everyone each month (or week) on a rotating basis or to be the person whom others can call for an update.
- *"What if the youth is in jail?"*
  - Get the team to visit and advocate for services for him.
- *"What if the youth doesn't want a specific person included in the team?"*
  - Work with the youth on how the person might be included. In some cases, the person might be included in the team but not attend the meeting. In others, the youth might not attend when that person is there. Include anyone who is willing to help in whatever form is suitable and find a way to include them even if it can't be in person at first. Keep the possibility open and work on achieving it.
- *"What if the family is out of state?"*
  - Prepare by initiating the ICPC work when you have a potential person in mind - don't wait until the youth is ready to move.

# STEP 4: EXPLORATION AND PLANNING

- *“After the first conversation, what if there has been no contact in several months?”*
  - Set time limits as you talk with each contact, “I have 45 days to explore a permanency connection with you.” Let them know what the next steps are for you if it doesn’t work. Tell them you’re developing several plans. If they don’t respond, talk with them about how they can support finding a family, even if it’s not theirs. Tell them that you will be discussing adoption with other adults and need their help to support this.
- *“What if the family have mental health concerns about the youth?”*
  - Help the family think about such issues in terms of behavior, which is much less frightening than labels. Discuss with the family how they would cope with a car accident, a broken arm, or a disease such as leukemia. (Mom would call her mother, neighbor, go to hospital, plan for treatment, etc.) Find out if a family member has cared for someone who showed behaviors related to mental illness and ask how they did it. The family may already know exactly how to deal with this situation.

*In one family, a woman who had been suicidal since her twenties was still alive at forty years old because, as the aunt said, “We (the family) all become mental health workers.”*

## **Summary:**

Exploration and Planning is where the team begins the process of developing a permanent plan for the youth.

## **Resources:**

[Ecomap  
Forms for Tracking Potential Connections Found  
Youth Permanence Consult Sheet, CPYP](#)

# STEP 5: DECISION MAKING AND EVALUATION

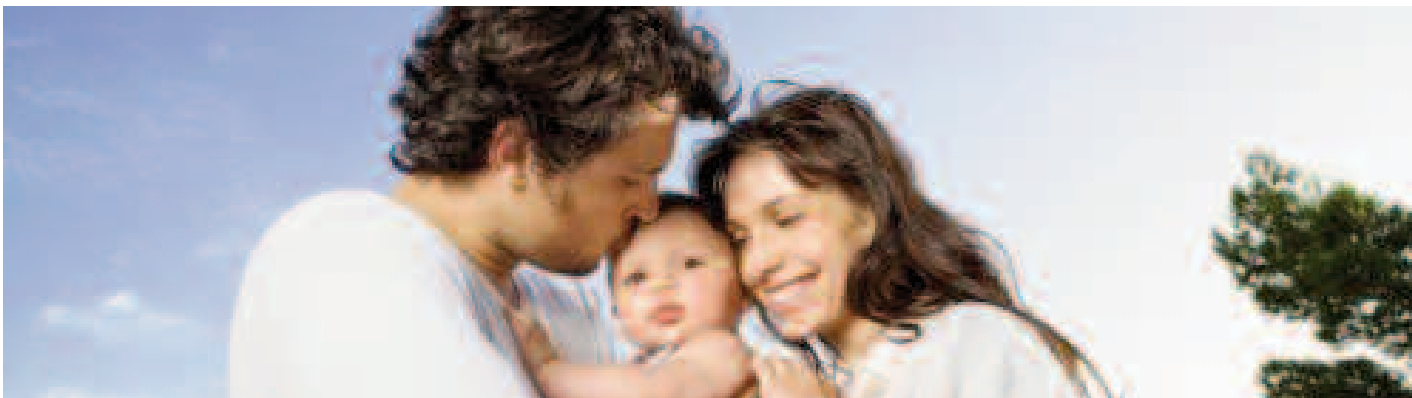
## STEP 5: Decision Making and Evaluation

### Goal:

The team, including the youth and social worker, develops an individualized plan for legal and emotional permanency, a timeline for completion, a process for ongoing monitoring of progress, and a contingency plan.

### Practice Steps:

- A. Team evaluates the permanent possibilities for the youth.
- B. Team devises a primary plan and backup plans.
- C. Legal issues are explored specific to reunification, adoption, guardianship, kinship foster care and non-legal formal commitments.



### California Social Worker:

*I find that I'm consciously using what I have learned from Family Search in my other cases. All children need love and a home. Sometimes in the job, we forget this and lose hope. I realized I was losing hope for one of my teens, but recognized it and decided to talk with my supervisor about it, whereas before I wouldn't have recognized that. In one of my cases, I never thought Mom would be back in the picture - chronic drug use, a 6 and 8 year old out of her home for a long time. Because of my change in attitude, I'm now thinking, "I'm not going to raise these kids until they're 18. I want them out of the system," and so I've been more patient as I work with mom trying to find permanency for these boys, which, as it turns out, may be with her! Because I'm more patient with her, mom is more open and willing to work with me. A year ago, 6 months ago even, my attitude would have been, "No way am I doing this." Now my working relationship is easier - mom has told me about her background and understanding her makes me easier with her. I get a sense that she feels respected as an individual as well as a mother. She is more open to following what is required of her, thinks about her kids and is hopeful that this could work. She has now completed her entire case plan. A month ago I went to her house. As I was listening to her, I looked around and said, "Linda, you've come a long way. I never thought I'd see the day when I was sitting in your living room and listening to your struggles. Look where we are - we're going to have overnights with your kids!"*

# STEP 5: DECISION MAKING AND EVALUATION

## Practice Steps:

### A. TEAM EVALUATES THE PERMANENT POSSIBILITIES FOR THE YOUTH.

- Team reviews the youth's needs and evaluates how each possibility would help him move forward and meet his needs for safety and stability.

### B. TEAM DEVISES A PRIMARY PLAN AND BACKUP PLANS.

- Team discusses the challenges that will arise for the youth and the family and helps everyone develop the confidence to succeed.
- As a social worker, this is the time to allow the long-term team to take over.
- Team develops support for the youth and for each member of the family.
- Team develops a time line for completion.
- Team completes a final review of the plan:

1. Has the youth been involved in selecting his or her permanency?
2. Has a comprehensive home assessment been completed?
3. Have the needs and strengths of youth been addressed?
4. Has this family member been prepared to handle the youth's special needs (i.e. health, behavior, school challenges)? Social worker and others educate the team about attachment disorders and prepare them for the possibility the youth may reject them and what that might look like.
5. Has the current caregiver provided information to the permanent family on what has worked well with the youth? If prior caregivers feel abandoned and unappreciated, has the social worker helped them sort through this?
6. Does the family know why this youth came into care? If needed, can they protect the youth from a parent?
7. If a relationship exists between the family members and the biological parents, how will the family handle it?
8. Does the plan rely primarily on formal services to make it work? If so, the plan is not finished. Use formal services only if they are specific as to goals, time-limited, and help to support the permanent plan. They should not be open-ended and unfocused.
9. Have steps been taken to achieve the legal status envisioned for the youth?
10. What are the enduring supports in place for the family members and the youth (i.e. respite care, financial considerations)
11. In a new setting the youth can be charming, disruptive, or both as he finds out it's not as wonderful as he fantasized, nor as bad as he thought. Has the team maintained connections with prior family, friends, extended family, therapist, etc. to help the youth retain stability?
12. If a youth returns to a family with challenges, has a safety plan been developed? If a youth will live with a mother who uses substances, who will provide food if mom is drunk? Who will take the youth to doctor? School meetings? What if the youth's counselor is out of town and the youth needs to talk? What should the youth do if something occurs for which there was no plan?
13. If challenges arise that threaten the youth's safety and stability, does the team have a plan and the commitment to reconvene? Has a team member been designated to organize and facilitate future meetings?

## STEP 5: DECISION MAKING AND EVALUATION

### Practice Steps:

#### B. TEAM DEVISES A PRIMARY PLAN AND BACKUP PLANS. (cont'd)

14. What is the safety plan if the youth runs or there is a safety incident? Can the youth commit to calling someone when the youth runs? Can there be an "alternate emergency caregiver" when the caregiver needs an unplanned break? Can someone volunteer to listen when the caregiver needs to vent?
15. Who in the family will monitor safety?
16. Does the plan include family members and other adults willing to offer their support if the primary plan is unsuccessful?
17. If this plan fails, will the youth return to the foster care system? If so, then the plan is not finished. There must be back-up plans in case something unexpected occurs.
18. If this relationship fails, what will the impact be on the youth?
19. Has permanency for the youth's siblings been addressed? If not, the plan is not finished.
20. When people are willing to commit, have the adults sign the Intent to Maintain Contact Form, Permanency Pact, or a similar form approved by the child welfare agency. This clarifies the commitment for the adults and the expectations for the youth. It's important for the youth to understand what the relationship will be so the youth won't have false expectations.
21. How will progress towards goals be monitored?
22. Have the contingency plans been written down?

#### C. LEGAL ISSUES ARE EXPLORED SPECIFIC TO REUNIFICATION, ADOPTION, GUARDIANSHIP, KINSHIP FOSTER CARE AND NON-LEGAL FORMAL COMMITMENTS.

Social worker assures the courts, child welfare and other agencies that legal issues, background checks, etc., have been completed and that the plan has addressed all pertinent areas.

#### *PRACTICE NOTE : ASSESSING A POTENTIAL PERMANENCY FAMILY*

1. Parenting style: Has this person raised other children? What was that experience like?
2. Discipline strategies: How will the family manage during a time when the youth will test them?
3. Understanding: How will the person handle the difficult behaviors or emotions the youth may exhibit?
4. References: What do the people around this person say about the person?
5. Health concerns: Are there health issues that might complicate the involvement of this family member?
6. Abuse/neglect: Has the person suffered from abuse in his or her past? How did the person deal with that? What issues might interfere?
7. Has a comprehensive home-family study been completed according to agency protocol, including criminal and child welfare history?
8. Drug/alcohol use: Is the person in recovery? How long has the person been sober?
9. Commitment is shown over a period of time with a person's follow-through with the youth.
10. Have the person fill out an Intent to Maintain Contact form or other similar agency tool.



## STEP 5: DECISION MAKING AND EVALUATION

*Assessing commitment is a difficult area because often people don't know how they will actually feel when someone starts a fire in a wastebasket because they've never had that happen. When a youth steals a grandmother's ring and it's an irreplaceable heirloom, people might react differently than they think. Even though they have verbalized commitment, when they actually face those situations, it can fall apart. This underlines the need for extensive support for the connection.*

### Questions:

- *What if the youth is suicidal?*

If the youth has ever been suicidal, always talk with the youth's therapist about how to help the youth adjust to moving out of foster care. Remind the team that a therapist is necessary but that every youth also needs a relationship with family. Before the youth leaves the system, have at least 3 relatives or adults unconditionally committed to the youth. Help everyone understand that the youth may become suicidal again and develop a safety plan.

- *What if more than one relative wants to parent the youth?*

The uncertainty may be stressful for a youth. Spend time discussing the youth's thoughts on the possibilities: "Wow, you have three relatives who want to talk about you moving home with them. We'll keep meeting so you can be a part of what is being talked about, and you can tell us what you're thinking."

- *What if there is simply no one willing or able to provide permanency for the youth?*

If no one is available, then the team continues to work on finding permanency for the youth and develops a child specific recruitment plan, perhaps through state or county adoption, or the organizations that have a particular skill with youth such as this. For instance, if a youth has spina bifida, the team can contact the Spina Bifida Association and ask its help in finding a permanent family. Other avenues are photo listings such as a Heart Gallery and a posting on an adoption website.

### Summary:

In Decision Making and Evaluation, the team finds a permanent family for the youth and develops a realistic plan for supporting and sustaining that relationship, taking into account the inevitable problems that will arise. The team is now taking responsibility for the youth's success; the social worker acts as a facilitator, raising questions to help the team assess solutions and consider challenges.

### Resources:

[Intent to Maintain Contact Form](#)  
[Permanency Pact](#)

# STEP 6: SUSTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP(S)

## STEP 6. Sustaining the Relationship(s)

### Goal:

The youth, family and team has a plan to support the young person and her family, has achieved legal or non-legal commitments, and has organized the necessary resources to maintain permanency.

### Practice Steps

- Review contingency plans.
- Review legal status and less formal commitments.
- Review formal and informal resources for family members and others to help support permanency.
- Prepare the team to be self-sustaining.

### Explanation

The youth is now either living with family or on the verge of living with family who will support the youth throughout life. Without supports for the family and youth, the normal challenges of life and adolescence can disrupt the permanency. The long-term plan is reviewed to ensure that the contingency plan is sufficient. At this point, the social worker serves as a resource for the team.

### Practice Steps:

#### A. REVIEW CONTINGENCY PLANS.

- Contingency Planning: Review risk factors for the youth and family: mental health and behavioral risks, run away behavior, verbal, physical, and substance abuse, responses to the youth's actions, etc. Develop a contingency plan in each area with the family and informal and formal resources supporting each other.
- Check that background checks, home inspections and court processes have been completed on backup supports for the youth in case of an emergency.
- Use written documentation to track the plan. This also provides evidence to the child welfare and juvenile court systems that the team has considered contingencies.

#### B. REVIEW LEGAL STATUS AND LESS FORMAL COMMITMENTS.

- Understand the financial disincentives to adoption and explore all available resources.
- If not already completed, any legal issues are resolved. For instance, if a biological parent had parental rights terminated and is now going to provide permanency for the youth, then you have begun the process by which this will be achieved.
- If legal responsibility is not going to be transferred to the family through adoption or guardianship, an Intent to Maintain Contact or Permanency Pact has been signed by the persons who are the youth's permanent family and by others who commit to supporting the youth through the youth's life.

## STEP 6: SUSTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP(S)

### C. REVIEW FORMAL AND INFORMAL RESOURCES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND OTHERS TO HELP SUPPORT PERMANENCY.

- Explore and organize financial assistance for the family and supports.
- If needed, organize professional follow-up with the family.
- Will the family need respite care? Daycare?
- Does the family need help addressing health issues? Transportation issues?
- Anticipate and plan for the need for formal support in the future - times that the youth, family and long-term supports are in crisis. Whom will the family contact for such support?
- Does the youth have a list of contact information?

### D. PREPARE THE TEAM TO BE SELF-SUSTAINING.

- Will there be a celebration now that permanency has been found?
- What would the youth like in terms of the team's future interaction?
- How does the team want to interact in the future?
- Who will be responsible for calling a progress meeting?
- Will the team meet regularly? If so, what will the purpose be?
- Does each team member have a list of names and phone numbers of others?
- How will team members keep each other updated?
- Whom should the team call if it needs formal support?
- Does the team want to invite anyone else to join?
- Do involved professionals know which team member to contact if they have concerns?

#### **Summary:**

Sustaining the Relationship(s) is to assure long-term success. The youth, family and team have developed plans to resolve current and future legal, financial and safety needs. They understand how to support each other and how to locate additional resources when, or if, necessary.

#### **Resources:**

Safety Plan Contingency Plans Legal Documents  
[Intent to Maintain Contact Form](#)  
[Permanency Pact](#)

## OUTCOMES

Placement stability studies have demonstrated that care in relative placement is almost twice as stable as care with non-relatives. The costs (including relative and adoption subsidies) of searching for and finding families for youth has been shown to be a county cost saving compared to the cost of raising a youth in the child welfare system. See outcomes and cost breakdowns below for the State of Colorado, 2003, and Alameda County, Oakland, California, 2005.

*Alameda County, Oakland California, StepUp Project:*

Alameda County in Oakland, California, worked with 72 children in group homes during a six month project that began in January 2005. At its close, the county documented the following data:

### • Youth:

- 19 youth left group home care and were placed with relatives or fictive kin
- 6 had pending placements
- 3 ICPC applications were awaiting approval for out of state placement
- 8 youth were connected to families with placement possible in the next quarter
- 4 older youth were placed in transition housing programs, with concerted efforts to have family involved in the decision and supporting the placement
- 12 youth intentionally remained in congregate care for treatment plan completion; however, family were visiting as part of the treatment program and many will become permanent connections for the youth in the years ahead.

The remaining youth not represented above included those where more extensive family finding efforts continue or relationships with family were being built.

### • Homes Found:

Included five parents, 24 relatives, five fictive kin and two foster families. Ten of these placements were supported by a foster family agency.

### • How Homes Were Found:

Only 2 placements were accomplished by utilizing foster family caregivers previously unknown to the child. All other successes were obtained by finding family and solidifying fictive kin relationships. Extensive efforts were made to create financial incentives through special rates for county foster parents and licensing staff were asked to discuss this prospect with all those potentially interested. Despite this, no placements were made with county foster parents.

### Therapeutic Needs:

An important outcome of this project was the reminder that no magic bullet eliminates the need for congregate care. Even the dramatic success of this project saw some youth, who, though happier with their connections with family, remained in need of treatment. In time, we assume these family connections will lead to other better outcomes, including decreased placement disruptions, progress in treatment, success in school placements, and measures taken after emancipation.

## SET-UP COST ANALYSIS

The following monthly rates were used to calculate total and average cost estimates for current and anticipated placements of the 36 youth noted in the above starred bullets:

Group Home: \$5000  
 Foster Family Agency: \$2000  
 Relative/Fictive Kin: \$1000  
 Family Maintenance: \$0

A minor in the StepUp program is about 14.5 years old and expected to remain in the system for 4 years before aging out. The average StepUp new family placement cost is about \$1167 per month. Over a 4-year period, StepUp placement cost averages \$57K whereas group home placement averages \$243K. Thus, a StepUp youth generates about \$186K of savings over time, or about \$46.5K per year. Total StepUp savings are estimated to be about \$6,672,000 over time, with respective savings of \$3.42 million and \$3.25 million associated with current and anticipated placements.

The county assigned 6 staff at an initial financial outlay of approximately \$570,000 (salary and overhead costs for 6 months). Taking the initial outlay into account, StepUp's success in achieving lower placement costs was captured in the first 6 months of the program, but the savings over time far exceeds the investment. Over the 4-year timeframe, the StepUp program is projected to achieve a net savings of \$6,102,000. The county share of this savings - after investing \$171,000 (the county share of the cost for staffing) - would be approximately \$2,270,952

**\*Please note confounding variables:** On the one hand, should a youth placed with a relative now or be adopted prior to the 4 years projected above, the foster care costs reduce even more over time. On the other hand, should a placement disrupt and a youth need to reenter congregate care, costs would increase.



### California:

Counties in a California permanency project were successful in forming lifelong connections for 35 of the 46 youth, a 76% success rate. As of 2007, 15 youth (twenty-two percent) either finalized a "legal" connection or were in the process of adoption, guardianship or reunification. The most common outcome (20 youth) were instances when, according to the caseworker, both the youth and the adult were committed to a lifelong connection, but the parties decided not to pursue a more formal, legal relationship. Based on 106 youth tracked, the workers reported that the number of connections increased for 76 of the 106 youth. Looking at the entire group of 106, at the outset of the project the youth had an average of 3.2 connections and at the time of measurement, they had an average of 7.7 connections.

## Colorado:

The State of Colorado worked with a group of 56 multicultural youth with multiple barriers to permanence, including criminal charges, felony convictions, developmental and mental health barriers and failed adoptions. Over a nine month period in 2003, 122 connections were made for project youth; 8 youth found no connections, including two (2) youth who did not wish any. Results as of the end of the project follow:

### High Level Connection Results:

- 2 youth reunified with family
- 2 youth had an adoption in progress
- 7 youth had families who intended to adopt and had signed a contract
- 3 youth have families who intend to adopt with no contract.

**Cost of Project:** \$80,000 (Remainder of Adoption Opportunities Grant). Spent on four part time contracted permanency social workers.

### Cost Analysis:

#### Level of Care of Youth at time of pilot project intake:

- 4 youth in RTC at \$3900 per month
- 4 youth in foster home or group home at \$1423 per month
- 6 youth in county foster home at \$1022 per month.

### Projected savings:

For 4 youth placed permanently, two of whom require adoption subsidies: \$507,600. Projected savings for all 14 youth achieving high level connections, assuming that those individuals who stated a willingness to adopt will do so and a successful placement will be made: \$1,776,000

## Orange County, California, Outcomes

- Each youth had an average of .58 family connection at Intake. Six months later each youth had an average of 6.8 established family connections.
- Percentage of youth for which possible family connections were identified during the project: 92%
- Percentage of youth for which new family connections were achieved during the project: 70%
- Percentage of new family connections that have remained since the project ended: 88%
- Percentage of youth showing a positive difference in the youth's functioning on the BIS scale with more family connections: 63%
- Percentage of youth that have transitioned (or are being considered for a transition) to a lower level of care or to family as a result of the project: 63%

### EXAMPLE OF ONE YOUTH ON BIS SCALE:

#### *At Intake*

- History of stable GH placement.
- Limited social skills.
- Problem with stealing and property destruction.
- **No family** involvement.

#### *At January 2007*

- Remains at GH placement.
- Now participates in sports.
- No stealing or property destruction.
- Several visits with family in Virginia.
- Plan to place with family in Virginia.

### **Mark Courtney Chapin Hall, University of Chicago**

has been conducting two studies of youth who leave the foster care system due to reaching the age of majority. The first of these, in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, follows 732 youths who have “aged out” of foster care, following them through their twenty-first birthday. The second study, a federally-funded experimental evaluation, examines the effectiveness of programs intended to prepare foster youth for adulthood.

See Chapin Hall website <http://www.about.chapinhall.org/research>

**Barbara Needell**, University of California, Berkeley, found the following data on children in care in California in 2002:

- The majority were at least six years old, but younger than six when they first entered care. Of those age eleven and older, 40% had been in care more than 5 years.
- The older the child, the less likely he or she is to be adopted.
- The rate of adoption for African American children was considerably lower than the rate for White or Hispanic children.
- Half of placed children were eventually reunified with their families, including those who entered at age eleven or older. One third who enter at 16 or 17 will reunify.

**Contact:** Barbara Needell, [bneedell@uclink4.berkeley.edu](mailto:bneedell@uclink4.berkeley.edu)

**Rosemary Avery**, Cornell University examined New York State data and noted the following in two articles, *“Perceptions and practice: Agency efforts for the hardest-to-place children,”* and *“Identifying obstacles to adoption in the New York States out-of-home care system”*:

- Mean time to adoption is 5.95 years.
- Twenty percent of cases take longer than eleven years to achieve permanency.
- After eight years, the probability of adoptive placement is close to zero.
- Older age of youth at entry is related to: Higher number of placements, reduced probability of adoption and increased probability of aging out the system.
- Females are more likely to be placed than males - Black infants were significantly more likely to be adopted
- Black teenagers were significantly less likely to be adopted
- Overall, white children are significantly more likely to be adopted
- Sibling groups listed together are significantly more likely to be adopted.
- Instability while in care:
  - 66% had more than one placement
  - 40% had more than seven placements
  - 32% had three-five different caseworkers
  - 31% had more than six caseworkers
  - 60% of the children had adoptive parents interested in them at some point in time
  - 70% of current caseworkers had not used any of the seven identified recruitment techniques in the last year they had supervised the case.

Avery’s research showed that the attitudes of caseworkers as to whether the youth was ultimately adoptable, influenced outcomes. Lessons from research on best practice showed that general recruitment didn’t work - individualized adoption and recruitment plans must be done for foster children.

**Contact:** Rosemary Avery, [rja7@cornell.edu](mailto:rja7@cornell.edu)

## Introduction:

- Agency Youth Permanence Self-Assessment  
[www.cpyyp.org](http://www.cpyyp.org)
- Agency Declaration of Commitment to Youth Permanency  
[www.cpyyp.org](http://www.cpyyp.org)
- CPYP County Data Collections Forms  
[www.cpyyp.org](http://www.cpyyp.org)
- CPYP Youth Permanency Scale Attached
- Draft Policy for Adoption by Involved Professional  
[http://www.cpyyp.org/alameda\\_files/AlamedaConflictPolicy.pdf](http://www.cpyyp.org/alameda_files/AlamedaConflictPolicy.pdf)
- *The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency*. Henry, Darla L., Children and Youth Services Review. (2005) 27, pp. 197-212 View printable version (pdf)  
<http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/The357model.pdf>
- Form for Tracking Potential Connections Found  
(Intensive Relative Search Contact Information) Attached

## Step 1: Setting the Stage

- Connectedness Map, CASA Santa Cruz/EMQ Attached.
- *Finding Forever Families* (Video)  
[http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/materials\\_list.asp](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/materials_list.asp)
- *Ecomap*: Template  
<http://www.gingerich.net/courses/SSWM517/ecomap.pdf>

### Instructions:

[http://www.writeenough.org.uk/formats\\_ecomap.htm](http://www.writeenough.org.uk/formats_ecomap.htm)

- Genograms Various Internet Sites

### Free site:

<http://www.genopro.com/genogram/symbols/>

### Ohio Caseload Analysis

[http://www.ohiocla.com/form\\_template.htm](http://www.ohiocla.com/form_template.htm)

### Institute

- *ToolBox No. 3, Facilitating Permanency for Youth*, Gerald P. Mallon, CWLA Press
- *The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency*. Henry, Darla L., Children and Youth Services Review. (2005) 27, pp. 197-212 View printable version (pdf)  
<http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/The357model.pdf>
- Youth Digital Stories on Permanence, CPYP  
[www.CPYP.org](http://www.CPYP.org)
- *Youth Permanence Consult Sheet*, CPYP Attached

## Step 2: Discovery

### Resources:

- Antwoine Fisher, movie  
[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)
- Sample Letters Attached
- Free searches and other website resources Attached
- Life Books  
[www.adoptionlifebook.com](http://www.adoptionlifebook.com)  
[www.fosterclub.com/funstuff/lifebooks.ctm](http://www.fosterclub.com/funstuff/lifebooks.ctm)  
[www.ifapa.org/resources/publications.asp](http://www.ifapa.org/resources/publications.asp)



- Phone Scripts for First Telephone Calls with Relatives or Fictive Kin Attached
  - Steps on a Failed Adoption Attached
  - Tips on Searching Attached
  - Form for Tracking Potential Connections Found Attached  
(Intensive Relative Search Contact Information)
  - *Youth Permanence Consult Sheet* Attached
- This sheet is useful to help you decide your next actions and to assess where you are in the process at each step and at team meetings.

### Step 3: Engagement

- Phone Scripts for First Telephone Calls with Relatives or Fictive Kin Attached
- The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency. Henry, Darla L., Children and Youth Services Review. (2005) 27, pp. 197-212 View printable version (pdf)  
<http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/The357model.pdf>
- Form for Tracking Potential Connections Found Attached

### Step 4: Exploration and Planning

- *Ecomap*
- *Youth Permanence Consult Sheet*, CPYP Attached
- Form for Tracking Potential Connections Found Attached  
(Intensive Relative Search Contact Information)

### Step 5: Decision-Making and Evaluation

- Intent to Maintain Contact Form Attached
- Permanency Pact  
[www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com)
- Henry, Darla. put this View Printable Version (PDF):  
<http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/The357model.pdf>

### Step 6: Sustaining the Relationship

#### Checklist:

- |                   |                                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Contingency Plans | Not included (individually developed) |
| Legal Documents   | Not included (individually developed) |
| Safety Plan       | Not included (individually developed) |

#### Forms:

- Intent to Maintain Contact Attached
- Permanency Pact  
[www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)

#### **Related Resources:**

- Outcomes for Youth Permanence Attached
- Relevant Research Attached
- Call to Action, Casey Family Services,  
[http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey\\_permanency\\_0505.pdf](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey_permanency_0505.pdf)
- Effective Partnerships:  
[www.cpyp.org](http://www.cpyp.org)  
*Recommendations for Effective Partnerships on Youth Permanency between the Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare*  
*Recommendations for Effective Partnerships on Youth Permanency between*  
[www.cpyp.org](http://www.cpyp.org)

## *Group Homes and Child Welfare*

### *Recommendations for Effective Partnerships on Youth Permanency between Adoption and Foster Family Agencies and Child Welfare*

- *A Guide to Permanency Options for Youth*, Alameda County, <http://www.cyp.org/Files/AlamedaGuide.pdf>

- *Model Programs for Youth Permanence*, Mardith Louisell, California Permanency for Youth Project. 510-268-0038

- *Youth Perspectives on Permanency*, Reina Sanchez, California Permanency for Youth Project, 510-268-0038

- [www.cyp.org](http://www.cyp.org)

- *Forms for Tracking Potential Connections Found*

Attached

- *The 3-5-7 model: preparing children for permanency*. Henry, Darla L., Children and Youth Services Review. (2005) 27, pp. 197-212

View printable version (pdf)

- <http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/The357model.pdf>

## **YOUTH PERMANENCE SCALE**

This scale is used to assess if a youth has a permanent connection and of what sort it is.

- 1 Youth has no existing or potential lifelong connections**
- 2 Youth has a potential lifelong connection but no commitment has been made**
- 3 Youth has a lifelong connection to a caring adult AND caseworker has obtained a signed agreement acknowledging this relationship**
- 4 A change in legal status: adoption, guardianship, reunification, is in process**
- 5 Adoption, guardianship, reunification has occurred**

# INTENSIVE RELATIVE SEARCH CONTACT INFORMATION POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND/OR SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Date of File Review:  
Reviewed by:

Child's Name:  
Child's Age:  
Child's ID#:

Name:	Relationship to Child:	Quality of Relationship	Dates Appeared in File:	Contact Information:	Follow Up Ideas:

Contacts may be found in many places - for example a birthday card, court appearance, letter, reference in case note.

\* Phone number, last known address, person this individual was in the company of or is known to.

Additional Information Provided:

- Placement History Printout
- Case Manager History Printout
- Other (specify):

Notes:

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Developed by Fresno County, California

## THE CONNECTEDNESS MAP

### KEY:

**Blue = Blood (biological) connection**

**Red = Heart (love) connection**

**Yellow = Spiritual connection**

**Green = Mind (mental) connection**

**Purple = The Richness of Culture Connection**

Place the child in the CENTER. Ask them to think of all the people (living or deceased) they are connected to. Include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, pastors, rabbis, etc. - anyone with whom they have/had a connection.

Use one shape to represent males and a different shape to represent females.

Example:     □ = Male   □ = Female

1. Next to each shape, write the person's name and age (if known).
2. Place individuals who are of similar age as the child on the same level as the child, older people above the child, and younger people below to show different generations.
3. Ask the child how he/she feels connected to each person.

**Is this person a blood relative?**

**Does the child love this person?**

**Does this person teach the child, or do they have good, meaningful talks together?**

**Does the child feel a spiritual connection with this person?**

**How has this person enriched this child culturally?**

The child should then draw the appropriately-colored line between him/herself and the other person. If there are multiple connections, there will be multiple lines. When children have completed their connectedness maps, they may want to hang them up in their rooms. This can be a consistent reminder of all the people in the world with whom they are connected.

**Contributed by CASA of Santa Cruz County and EMQ.**

# YOUTH PERMANENCE CONSULT SHEET

**REVIEW:** Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Youth: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M / F Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Tribal Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_ LGBTQ: Y / N / U

Current Placement Type: \_\_\_\_\_ For how long? \_\_\_\_\_

# of Total Years in Care: \_\_\_\_\_ Total # of Placements \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings: \_\_\_\_\_

Family/Others Connected to the Child currently: \_\_\_\_\_

What the Youth wants:

**Safety Risk** (circle number) 3 - High: Imminent danger of harm from self or others  
2 - Medium: Risk factors are present  
1 - Low: Few, if any, risk factors are currently present

**Loneliness** (circle number) 3 - High: No loving or meaningful relationships are present  
2 - Medium: Some meaningful relationships exist  
1 - Low: Several meaningful and enduring relationships exist

**Placement Stability** (circle number) 3 - Very Unstable: Placement change is imminent  
2 - Moderately Stable: Change is likely, but not imminent  
1 - Stable: Placement change not currently being considered

## **Review of PREVIOUS WORK:**

### Identifying Connections:

What has been done to help the youth identify his/her connections? Who loves this youth?

- Review of record? \_\_\_\_\_
- Adults contacted \_\_\_\_\_
- Adults who responded: \_\_\_\_\_
- Internet search conducted? \_\_\_\_\_

Preparation for Family (re)connection:

Describe the work done with, for or by the youth, on areas of:

- Loyalty to birth Family (loyalties are not exclusive, there is room for many)
- Loss
- Self-Determination
- Self-Esteem
- Behavior Management

### Ongoing meetings with Youth's Permanence Team:

- What has been scheduled?
- Who has attended?
- How have the meetings gone?
- Is the team ongoing?
- Have the team begun to take responsibility for the finding permanency for the youth?

### Youth Development for Success:

Have the worker, youth and team begun working on the youth's sense of the following? How?

- Belonging
- Competence
- Power
- Usefulness

## **FUTURE**

### 3 Concrete Next Action Steps to address the above:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

### POTENTIAL PLAN(S) for THE YOUTH'S PERMANENCY

Plan A)

Plan B)

Plan C)

Plan D)

## **FAMILY LETTER**

Date:

<recipient>

<address>

Dear <recipient>,

I am a People Finder in Sacramento, California. It is my job to help locate relatives for youth in the foster care system. I am writing you about <first name, age> who I believe may be a <maternal/paternal> relative. I understand this letter may come as a surprise.

<First name> is interested in learning more about his/her family. Any information you can provide would be greatly appreciated by <first name>. You could be a huge asset to <him/her> and <his/her> sense of identity.

Unfortunately, I cannot provide you any specific information about <first name> at this time due to confidentiality issues. If you are interested in speaking to me about <first name>, please contact me. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Name:

People Finder

Phone;

Cell:

Email:



## **FAMILY LETTER**

<date>

Dear <recipient>,

I am a People Finder in Los Angeles, California. It is my job to help locate relatives for youth in the foster care system. I am writing you about Justin Timberlake, age seventeen, who I believe may be a <maternal/paternal> relative. I understand this letter may come as a surprise.

Justin is interested in learning more about his family. Any information you can provide would be greatly appreciated by Justin. You could be a huge asset to him and his sense of identity.

Unfortunately I cannot provide you any specific information about Justin at this time because of confidentiality issues. If you are interested in speaking to me about Justin, please contact me. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Name

People Finder

(916) 368-5114 (we will accept collect calls)

email address

## **FAMILY FOLLOW UP LETTER**

April 11, 2007

Dear Mary,

Thank you so much for talking with me today. I am very excited to hear that you and your family want to reconnect with the children. I know the children will be so happy to know that they are part of a large close family who wants to get to know them again.

As we discussed I have included a stamped addressed envelope for you to use to send photos of your family that I can include in the photo albums that I am putting together for each of them. As you can imagine, this will mean so much to them. If you'd like me to send back the originals, please let me know.

I have also included a copy of the family tree with information that you provided to me. Thank you for taking the time to do so today. I know the children will be very happy to receive their family tree as it helps them understand their relationship to everyone in their family. I hope that the information is correct. Please feel free to let me know if there are any corrections.

As we discussed, I will keep in touch with you as contact with the children moves forward. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance to you.

Take care and thank you again for everything.

Sincerely,

Linda Librizzi  
Family Finding Project  
800-864-5437 Ext. 1801  
323-769-7173

## SAMPLE POSTMASTER LETTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
3433 South Higuera Street, Post Office Box 8119  
San Luis Obispo, California 93403-8119

Date: June 21, 2005

WE URGENTLY NEED TO CONTACT THE BELOW LISTED PERSON. ANY INFORMATION YOU CAN PROVIDE US WOULD BE GREATLY APPRECIATED. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

POSTMASTER:

San Luis Obispo, Ca 93401 (send to postmaster of city and state of LKA)

RE: Name (individual trying to locate)  
ADDRESS INFORMATION REQUEST

Please furnish this agency with the new address, if available, for the individual or verify whether or not the address given below is one at which mail for this individual is currently being delivered. If the following address is a post office box, please furnish the street address as recorded on the box holder's application form.

Last Known Address: P.O. Box 8119  
San Luis Obispo, Ca 93403

I certify that the address information for this individual is required for the performance of this agency's official duties. A postage-paid, self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your use. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Name:  
Permanency Case Manager  
Dept. of Social Services

### FOR POST OFFICE USE ONLY

Mail is delivered to address given  
 Moved, left no forwarding address  
 New  
address \_\_\_\_\_

Not known at address given  
 No such address

Boxholder's Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Other  
(specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Completed By: \_\_\_\_\_

# CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH PROJECT

## **INTERNET SEARCH TOOLS**

Free Sites

Area Codes ([www.allareacodes.com](http://www.allareacodes.com))

CA County Codes Chart ([www.cagenweb.com/cpl/sctycode.htm](http://www.cagenweb.com/cpl/sctycode.htm))

Florida, Nevada and Texas marriages

(<http://www.knowx.com/mr/search.jsp?userid=guest&password=welcome>)

General Search Engine ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com))

Google persons. Sometimes you can find a current address, genealogy or other interesting information on individuals online. If you Google an address, you can obtain a map and/or satellite view of the location. This site is a favorite of Stanislaus.

Indian Tribal Records ([www.accessgenealogy.com/native/](http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/))

If you click the "1896 Dawes Applications", this will take you to the Dawes Rolls Database where you can search for ancestors who are on the rolls.

Latter Day Saints (LDS) Genealogy Search ([www.familysearch.org/](http://www.familysearch.org/))

Rootsweb Death Records (<http://searches.rootsweb.com/>)

Go down to "Records from Federal and State Resources:

Social Security Death Index (SSDI) for Federal Death Records

Death Records: California, Kentucky, Maine, Texas

Note: The California records have more information than the Federal records, such as, Birth State, Mother's Maiden Name, Father's Name.

SearchSystems.net ([www.searchsystems.net](http://www.searchsystems.net))

Very large public record directory online. Provides links to over 35,958 searchable public record databases, many of which are free. A good site for finding municipal records and death certificates. SearchSystems also offers a premium service, which is charged on a per-search basis. Recommended by Kevin Campbell.

SSN Allocation Table ([www.ssa.gov/foia/stateweb.html](http://www.ssa.gov/foia/stateweb.html))

Shows the first three digits of assigned SSNs and the state or U.S. Possession in which the SSN was issued.

ZABA ([www.zabasearch.com/](http://www.zabasearch.com/))

Directory-Address assistance. It has added something similar to US Search.

## Other Resources

(California)

CalWORKs Case File

CWS/CMS

Statewide MEDS System

County Automated Welfare System

Statewide Child Support System

## **Order of Contact for Failed Adoption**

Use the following order of searching family to find permanence:

1. Adoptive family
2. Adoptive family's extended family
3. Birth family (but must be sure to have approval of adoptive family) Must keep adoptive family in the loop at all times, court-wise, progress, etc., for legal reasons, also respect.
4. Non-family (mjl nb: however, NACAC position on search, then not upsetting current permanency to do new search).

With adoptive parents who are relinquishing, continue to invite them to meetings and be respectful. Write a letter to them and their attorney saying that the county would to work with them on reunification but if they can't or won't, the county will proceed on finding permanence. Document, document, document that you have done so and their responses. Always keep adoptive parents informed about successes in the youth's life.

If adoptive family balking at moving forward, give them 8 weeks to come up with relatives, otherwise go to adoption.

- A. Reunification with adoptive family
- B. Relative of adoptive family
- C. Birth family
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

An E can become an A by showing accountability, demonstrating responsibility.

Example: to restore relationship with adoptive parent, do following:

Meet with adoptive family

Do concurrent planning

Be transparent

Follow up meeting with adoptive family with a letter documenting meeting

Ask family regarding relatives, then consider birth family.

The team (not the social worker) is the entity that needs to worry about what to do and how to work on it: Team consisting of foster parent, adoptive parent, teacher, prospective foster parent, therapist. This group needs to struggle with the problem and sometimes someone stands up to be counted. Ask them what's Jessica's biggest need." Also consider

How many times she need a contact to work out so she doesn't expect loss? And how long for each contact.

### **Questions to ask:**

1. Can we support the return of youth to the adoptive home?
2. Is there a relative of adoptive parents with whom we can achieve permanency?
3. If # 1 and 2 are not possible, we need child specific recruitment strategy
  - a) With adoptive parents' and court's permission, look for biological family
  - b) Adoptive family may have to relinquish rights.

Social worker will drive the process, not the family. It goes better for a family if they are part of successfully getting her a family (reconciliation) so each (family and youth) can feel whole.

In a failed adoption, it's easy to be mad at the adoptive parents, but one must suspend judgment and put self in their place. Explore unmet needs of adoptive parents and you will see why it happened.

## TIPS FOR SEARCHING

- Several free search engines are available, as are fee for service engines.
- Initially, most agencies use a free search engine on a case and use a fee based search engine when the free search has not provided enough information.
- Fee based search engines often have two methods of billing: a) transactional - the agency pays for each transaction; and b) flat rate - the agency contracts for a specific computer for a set rate per month.
- An agency often will already have a contract with a fee-based search engine through its Absent Parent Unit. Child Welfare divisions should check with their Absent Parent units to find out if a contract exists and if that could be used for family finding.
- Check to see if a fee-based search engine will give a free trial period.
- When contracting with a search engine, ask what the time of turnaround on delivery will be. Will it be one day, one week, one month?
- See the attached list of free search engines as well as sites that provide relevant information.

### **Tips on searching:**

- Information over one year old has limited viability, although if you have nothing else, you might try it. .
- Pay for the father's search first, because you will get the grandmother, etc. as part of the father's relatives.
- Search for names in the following order: the subject, relatives, then neighbors. The category of "associates" is a last resort.
- Go through the report, and highlight the names of all possible leads. Make sure to mark the most recent address. Then, send out letters to each address at which the person is listed. You can use Postmaster letters to ask for forwarding information, etc. (see attached).
- When looking at possible relatives, see if any relatives have shared an address. Try to figure out how they might be related.
- Finding homeless people is very hard.
- Do searches on the deceased - you can still get good relative information.

### **Other tips for family finding**

- Develop a detective mentality.
- Don't believe everything you read - case reports may be incorrect. Don't assume a parent is deceased until you find proof that s/he is. Several parents thought deceased have been found alive and well.
- Criminal records will show when a person was incarcerated.
- If you know the county in which the parent has died, call the coroner's office for funeral home information. The funeral home will know who picked up the belongings and may have the address or telephone information. Newspapers also have information on the deceased.
- Exhaust all options - don't give up!

### **Non-Internet Sources for Family Finding**

- Absent Parent Department
- California MediCal files
- Child Support
- County jails
- CWS-CMS, and history in hard case file
- Department of Motor Vehicles ([www.dmv.org](http://www.dmv.org))
- Eligibility Worker
- Family members
- Friends
- Interviewing the child
- Military agencies (Social and Family Services Departments)
- Obituaries (funeral homes)
- Postmaster
- Tribes
- White & yellow pages (work), online or other
- Assessors Office/assessors records
- CalWIN
- Coroner
- County Vital Statistics
- Department of Justice
- District Attorney's office
- Emergency contact information card from school
- Family Services
- Immigration Services/Consulates
- Medical records (death code)
- Parole and Probation
- Red Cross
- Voter registration (phone or web)

### **Out of country searches**

- Start by contacting the Family Support Bureau to see if they have information. If they say the person is deported, then contact INS, but you will need the alien ID #. The only information INS provides is if the person has been deported and the date of deportation.
- Contact the appropriate consulate. Fax a letter to the consulate, providing all the information available. The consulate usually responds that family is not found.
- Finding relatives in Mexico often involves interviewing family members with whom you are already familiar.

**FRESNO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN  
AND FAMILY SERVICES  
CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH PROJECT**

**First Telephone Call Scripts with Relatives:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am with Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services. I am calling for \_\_\_\_\_. Is this she/he? (Yes) I am working with one of your family members. Do you know (parent/child name)? I am worried about \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm not sure how much you know about \_\_\_\_\_ and his/her life. Are you in a place where you can talk right now? (Yes). \_\_\_\_\_ is interested in information about his/her family, traditions, religion - in general his/her family history. You can imagine that someone in \_\_\_\_\_'s position, being raised away from home, would want to know about his/her past. Do you have any information that we can pass on to \_\_\_\_\_, because your help sharing this information could really make a difference in \_\_\_\_\_'s future.

**Leaving a telephone message:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am with Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services. I am calling for \_\_\_\_\_ regarding (parent and their child - first name only). \_\_\_\_\_ is physically OK, however I am worried about him/her. Please give me a call at (559) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_. If I don't hear from you, I will call you back within the next 24 hours. Thank you.

**If they don't return your call:**

I am calling to follow up on the message that I left you earlier. I can imagine this must be a difficult phone call to receive. Are you in a place where you can talk right now because I am very worried about \_\_\_\_\_. I'm not sure how much you know about \_\_\_\_\_ and his/her life. \_\_\_\_\_ is interested in information about his/her family, traditions, religion - in general his/her family history. You can imagine that someone in \_\_\_\_\_'s position, being raised away from home, would want to know about his/her past. Do you have any information that we can pass on to \_\_\_\_\_, because your help sharing this information could really make a difference in \_\_\_\_\_'s future.

(Allow time for the person called to explain their situation, to tell their story about \_\_\_\_\_.)

**(If the person asks about \_\_\_\_\_'s situation.)**

I know that you must have questions. I really can't answer them right now. There may be a time in the future where we could talk to you and answer some of your questions. Again I realize that this is difficult but my primary concern right now is to help \_\_\_\_\_ get answers to some of his questions. Your help with this information could make such a difference in his life.

One of the things that might really help our conversation today is if you could tell me one of the things you are most proud of about your family. A story or something someone has done in the past that was very special to you.

What about family reunions and gatherings? What are your family traditions? Do you know who plans them (reunions)? (Try to get their name and contact information. Perhaps put them on a conference call with the family member who plan the reunions or other family gatherings.)

**(If they ask about how to have contact with \_\_\_\_\_).**

I want to assure you that I am going to share your information and how to contact you with the rest of my team. It sounds like you're offering to help \_\_\_\_\_ more. Let me make sure I have all of your contact information for future planning for \_\_\_\_\_.

**(If they cannot have any contact with the child).**

This may be your one of the few opportunities you may have to do something to really help \_\_\_\_\_. The information that you share with me could truly improve this child's life. (Default back to questions about family).

**FRESNO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF**  
**CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**  
**CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH PROJECT**

**(If person sounds upset).**

I can't imagine what you must be feeling right now. I am so sorry for what your family has been through. But we're asking for your help now to give some answers to \_\_\_\_\_'s questions.

You might think of some more things that are important for \_\_\_\_\_ to know over the next few days, or you might know other family members who would like to share information with \_\_\_\_\_. Please feel free to contact me at \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_ or e-mail address. Thank you so much for sharing this important information, it is really valuable for \_\_\_\_\_. The simple act of sharing this information may dramatically affect this child's life.

**Trying to reach a neighbor/leaving a message:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am with Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services. I'm trying to reach your neighbor, (relative) regarding one of their relatives. It is very urgent I speak with him/her. Please have \_\_\_\_\_ call me at (559) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_. If I don't hear from him/her, I will call you back within the next 24 hours. Thank you.

**Reaching a neighbor:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am with Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services. I'm trying to reach your neighbor, \_\_\_\_\_(relative) regarding one of their relatives. It is very urgent that I speak with him/her. Is it possible for you to take down my information and walk over to deliver it to \_\_\_\_\_(relative) or put it on the door? (Yes) Please have him/her call me at (559) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_. Thank you.

**If they ask about how to have contact with Justin:**

I want to assure you that I am going to share your information and how to contact you with the rest of my team. It sounds like you're offering to help Justin more. Let me write down the things that you are willing to do and I will share that with the rest of my team.

**If they cannot have any contact with the child:**

This may be one of the few opportunities you have to do something to help Justin. The information that you share with me could truly improve his life.

**Ending conversation:**

Over the next few days, you might think of more things that are important for Justin to know, or you might think of other family members who would like to share information with Justin. Please feel free to contact me at \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you so much for sharing this important information, it is really valuable for Justin. Simply sharing this information may dramatically affect his life.



# CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH PROJECT

## Declaration of Intent to Maintain Contact

(I/We) \_\_\_\_\_ have received notice  
that \_\_\_\_\_ is available for regular contact.

Youth's name and DOB \_\_\_\_\_

(I/We) do declare our intent and commitment to maintain contact  
with \_\_\_\_\_.

Youth's name \_\_\_\_\_

This is how (and how often) (I/We) intend to have contact:

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Name, mailing address and phone number:

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(I/We) do understand that it is very important to have regular contact with said child. Regular contact means no less contact than every other week and during holidays and birthdays.

(I/We) also understand that this document is not a legal document.

Date and Signature \_\_\_\_\_

(copy to family, youth, and caseworker)

Adapted from Project Uplift, State of Colorado

## UNPACKING THE “NO” AND SUPPORTING A “YES”\*

Adults who have a relationship with the young person assist them by helping to reframe the initial “NO!” into a “YES” or “I’ll Think About it” response. This is a process, not a one time event. Many youth do want to be adopted, even if they initially say no, but they have been led to believe they are unadoptable or have been rejected so many times that they are scared of the risk.

### **Some of the statements youth make are:**

- “I don’t want to give up past connections”
- “I don’t want to lose contact with my family”
- “I don’t want to lose contact with important people”
- “I will have to change my name”
- “No one will want me”
- “I am too destructive for a family”
- “Families are for little kids”
- “I don’t want to betray my birth family”
- “Mom said she would come back”
- “I want to make my own decisions”
- “I’ll just mess up again”
- “I don’t want to risk losing anyone else”

### **What do you say instead of accepting “No”?**

- Help the youth play an active role in planning for their permanency
- Who cared for you when your parents could not? Who paid attention to you, looked out for you, cared about what happened to you? This may help them put their thoughts and feelings into the context of permanency
- With whom have you shared holidays and/or special occasions?
- Whom do you like? feel good about? enjoy being with? Admire? look up to? want to be like someday?
- Who believes in you? stands by you? compliments or praises you? appreciates you?
- Whom can you count on? Whom would you call at 2 am if you were in trouble? Wanted to share good news? Bad news?
- Who are the three people in your life with whom you have had the best relationship?
- Let’s review where you lived in the past? Think about important adults in your life?
- To whom have you felt connected in the past?
- To whom from the past had you wanted to stay connected? How? Why?
- How are you feeling about this process? What memories, fears, and anxieties is it stirring up?

Open adoption, shared parenting, and practices which permit the adopted youth to maintain contact with their birth family members can help explain what permanency for a teenager might look like. No longer does adoption mean the replacement of the birth family by the adoptive family. Adolescents should be supported in their desire to remain in contact with parents, grandparents, siblings and other significant members of their extended families.

Engage the youth, his or her parents (if the youth is not currently freed for adoption) and foster parents or prospective adoptive parents in a discussion about shared parenting and ongoing contacts with members of the youth’s birth family after the adoption. Youth and parents need help understanding that although a termination of parental rights ends the rights of the birth parents to petition the court for visits or other contacts with their child, a TPR does not prevent the young person from visiting or contacting members of his or her birth family.

Gary Mallon, NRCFCPPP

# **DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT**

## **TO PERMANENT LIFELONG CONNECTIONS FOR FOSTER YOUTH**

As members of the Child Welfare community in California, we recognize the crisis that exists for youth in foster care, particularly those between the ages of 11-18, who lack a permanent connection with an adult or family. We hereby declare our commitment to support and achieve permanent lifelong connections (permanency) for all children and youth, and that:

We are deeply concerned that approximately 80,000 foster children are in care in California, many of whom are unable to return to their families, and who thus rely on the foster care system to provide them with a family and a sense of permanent belonging; and

Youth in foster care need the same permanent connections to a committed adult or family as youth in the general population; and

A committed adult is one who provides a safe, stable and secure type of parenting relationship; love; unconditional commitment; and lifelong support in the context of family reunification, legal adoption, guardianship or some other form of committed lifelong relationship; and

Many foster youth have no relationships with adults other than the professionals who assist them in foster care and many leave care without a single lasting relationship or connection with any adult; and

Approximately 4,000 foster youth “age out” of the foster care system each year in California when they turn 18 to face daunting odds including high rates of homelessness, school drop-out and unemployment; and

Many negative outcomes experienced by foster youth are a result of having no one to turn to for help and support once they exit the foster care system; and

Former foster youth repeatedly state that a lifelong connection and a relationship with a supportive and committed adult, related by blood or not, is one of the key factors associated with their resilience and the single greatest impact on their ability to navigate the transition to adulthood; and

We commend the innovative work of many in the child welfare community who are adopting and implementing new practices to secure permanent connections for foster children including involvement of the youth as key participants in the process of defining and securing permanent relationships; and

We acknowledge that public and private child welfare professionals must work in partnership with the youth in defining lifelong connections that are permanent, secure and healthy; and

We commend the leadership role of the California Permanency for Youth Project in acting as a resource to public and private child welfare agencies, providing training, inspiration and support to obtain lifelong relationships for teens in foster care; and

We acknowledge that the current resources devoted to achieving permanence for foster youth are not commensurate with the magnitude of the need; so therefore

We commit to work within our organizations, agencies, and communities and through the growing permanency for foster youth movement to support and promote these objectives by doing the following:

Promote recognition of and respect for the urgent need to ensure every foster youth has at least one lifelong permanent relationship;

Educate all we come into contact with about the need, urgency, and promising practices for achieving permanence for foster youth;

Support local and statewide projects and efforts to raise awareness, recommend policy changes, increase funding for and provide assistance to improve older youths' opportunities to develop a lifelong connection with a committed adult before leaving foster care;

Initiate change within our own organizations to support youth permanence and lifelong connections.

Fortify our common commitment to the permanence of foster youth as an obligation of the entire child welfare and human community to the children in our foster care system.

Signed by

Name	Title	Organization	Date
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Name (authorized signer for)		Organization	Date
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## **FIRST TELEPHONE CALL SCRIPTS**

- **If they ask about how to have contact with Justin:**

I want to assure you that I am going to share your information and how to contact you with the rest of my team. It sounds like you're offering to help Justin more. Let me write down the things that you are willing to do and I will share that with the rest of my team.

- **If they cannot have any contact with the child:**

This may be one of the few opportunities you have to do something to help Justin. The information that you share with me could truly improve his life.

- **Ending conversation:**

Over the next few days, you might think of more things that are important for Justin to know, or you might think of other family members who would like to share information with Justin. Please feel free to contact me at \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you so much for sharing this important information, it is really valuable for Justin. Simply sharing this information may dramatically affect his life.