

 Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	3 – Care Setting Considerations
	Section No./Name	Care Setting Considerations
	Document No./Name	6-305 Guidelines for Care Setting Decision Making for Children Under Age Six
	Effective Date	June 1, 2025

I. STATEMENT OF POLICY

This section of policy is used in conjunction with Chapter 6, Section [6-300](#) in planning for care settings for children under age six.

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) recognizes that an infant or young child’s stable attachment to a caregiver is of fundamental importance for both short and long term well-being. When it is necessary for a young child to be separated from a parent and placed in foster care, there are two primary considerations in placement decision making: 1) the need to facilitate reunification efforts (if applicable) through active visitation and a case plan focused on removing safety threats and building parental protective capacity; and 2) ensuring the child develops a secure, trusting relationship with a primary caregiver who is consistently meeting the child’s daily needs. Furthermore, concurrent planning for permanency is most critical for infants and young children to ensure they do not linger in foster care any longer than necessary, and experience the fewest moves possible, in accordance with their best interest.

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act requires states to “consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining a placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant state child protection standards.” This legislation is supported by evidence that placement with relatives maintains the child’s connections with his or her family, and children generally fare better in many child well-being factors when placed with a relative. It is the expectation of DCFS that the best interests of the child shall be considered in all decision-making related to the placement of the child. Consideration of all elements covered in this section of policy is part of making this “best interests” determination.

While the law requires that relatives are given preferential consideration, it does not mandate that placement shall be with a relative solely because of relationship. Alternatives should be considered when 1) the relative is not able to meet the child’s needs, or 2) when disruption of the child’s attachment and bonding with the current caregiver would cause significant emotional harm and trauma to the child cannot be mitigated by a well-planned transition.

It is important that placement decisions consider the input of all team members including the parents, child’s current caregivers, child’s CASA, child’s attorney, and other individuals involved in the care, treatment, or supervision of the child (e.g., tribe, if applicable).

Additionally, it is an expectation of DCFS, that the Foster Care case worker help relatives/kin and other caregivers recognize the importance of partnering with DCFS to plan for any transition of the child from one care setting to another. Planful Transitions are the thoughtful, collaborative processes, and actions designed to ease the trauma for a child, to maintain established attachments and connections; and, to facilitate attachment with a new caregiver and a successful move. A planful transition means that those responsible for the child’s well-being (e.g., DCFS, foster parents, biological parents, judge, attorney, providers, etc.) work together to ensure that the child’s move is a healthy one. Each plan must be individualized to

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each child specifically considering the child's unique circumstances, developmental stage, psychological needs, safety, and attachment to current and future caregivers.

Establishing the expectation of supportive, planful transitions between DCFS and caregivers of any child in foster care, from the beginning, can ensure greater partnership later.

* When there is a care setting update/change the Foster Care Notification Form shall be completed and submitted within 24 hours of the change to the court and all parties (child's attorney, parents' attorney, state's attorney), mental health attorney (when applicable), and CASA (when appointed):

1. There is a care setting update/change
2. A trial home placement occurs
3. A child will be traveling out of state or out of the country **

II. PROCEDURES

A. IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF RELATIVE/ KIN

Prior to or immediately upon a child entering foster care, it is required that a diligent search for appropriate relatives/kin be conducted in order to assess family members for placement of the child. As with any placement consideration, preference should be given to a relative/kin capable of meeting the child's needs including special medical, psychological or social needs, as well as long-term permanency.

ACT 350, of the 2021 Louisiana Regular Legislative session requires a comprehensive diligent search for relatives and kin who have a significant relationship with the child. This includes a review of databases available to DCFS; interviews with the parents, child, known relatives and others who have knowledge of possible relatives; and appropriate inquiries during court hearings. Search efforts are documented on the Family Connections Form, initially completed within 30 days, and on-going thereafter. Refer to [CW 6-201, Diligent Efforts to Visit Parents](#). This search should begin with a focused discussion with the birth parents and other relatives to identify all adult relatives of the child in accordance with per [Federal Public Law 110-351](#) which includes identification and notice to:

- All grandparents,
- All parents of a sibling of the child, where such parent has legal custody of the sibling,
- Adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents)

Notice should include when the child has been or is being removed from the custody of his or her parents the options the relative has to participate in the care and placement of the child, and the requirements to become a foster parent to the child. This search and notice should not only focus on possible placement resources but on the ability to maintain relative connections and family support. The [Family Connections](#) Form and [Circle of Influence](#) Form should be

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used in discussion with the parents and any other identifiable connections of the family to document all applicable relatives, kin, and significant persons and include family connections, contact information for those individuals, and documentation of the date the [Relative Notification](#) Form was mailed by regular and certified mail. Due to the time-sensitive nature and importance of attachment to a primary caregiver for infants and young children, the Family Connections form shall be completed with all available information within the first 10 days of a child entering foster care, and should be used as a working document to add connections as they are discovered over the course of the child's time in foster care. The form shall be attached to the court report submitted in preparation for the Disposition Hearing. Supervisors shall review the progress of the completion of the Family Connections Form and notification to adult relatives weekly until all known relatives are notified. Details about all efforts to locate relatives and their responses shall be documented on the Family Connection Form. At a minimum, the form shall be formally reviewed every six months during the Family Team Meeting to continue to assess family connections. The DCFS legal representative (DA or BGC) shall request that the parents provide any missing information or certify that the form is complete and accurate at the Disposition Hearing.

The Department's responsibility to notify relatives of the child's entry into care is fulfilled by sending the Relative Notification Form. This form letter shall be mailed via regular and certified mail no later than five working days from the date an address obtained. The letter explains the responsibility of the relative to indicate a desire to provide placement for the child, as well as the potential consequences of not notifying DCFS timely of their interest in doing so.

For relatives who were sent a Relative Notification Form, it is expected they will contact the case worker to demonstrate an interest in providing care or having continued contact with the child, no later than 90 days from the date the letter is received. The intention may be to request legal custody, guardianship with or without a guardianship subsidy, or certification as a foster/adoptive parent. Once a relative has notified DCFS of their interest in providing a home for the child, all preliminary assessments should be started immediately according to [6-400, Placement of the Child](#) to determine what options are available for placement. If the relative is interested in becoming a foster/adoptive parent for the child, it is expected they will begin the certification process as soon as possible, in accordance with the decision about the most appropriate transition plan for the child.

Even in instances where establishing paternity has delayed identification of relatives, or relatives were not otherwise known to DCFS, once the relative has been identified a Relative Notification Form shall be sent to the relative to document official notice and the above timeframes apply. Unless there are extenuating circumstances discussed in a formal Permanency Staffing and approved by the Foster Care Manager, preference for placement based on relationship should not exceed nine months from the date the child entered care, regardless of when the relative became aware of the child being in care. When relatives do not notify DCFS of their intent to provide a home for the child within the above timeframes, the rationale for moving the child based on relationship is significantly diminished. Note, this does

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not mean the child cannot be placed with a relative after nine months in care; it means that other factors, such as a child’s developmental stage, length of time in their current placement, and relationship with and attachment to current caregivers are more heavily weighed.

As this is a very delicate and sensitive discussion with family members, the Foster Care case worker should engage with family members, give them voice by listening to and validating their concerns and answering any questions, then help the family understand the child’s need for a consistent attachment figure. Family members should understand that the child’s needs will drive the case plan and if the relative does not identify themselves as offering a concurrent plan, and maintain communication as outlined in the case plan. The attachment of the child to the other caregiver will likely outweigh that of a relative that has not notified DCFS of their interest in providing a home for the child in a timely manner or maintained contact with the child, their caregiver, and DCFS.

Sometimes, although a relative is willing and able to provide a permanent home for the child, it may not be feasible due to certain circumstances, for instance, distance from the parent’s home that would make reunification efforts impractical. In this instance, the relative must still make their interest known so they can immediately be assessed for placement at a later time if reunification efforts are not progressing. If in accordance with the SDM Risk Assessment there has been “No improvement in behavior; fails to participate or has minimal/sporadic participation with the case plan,” by the child’s sixth month in care, more aggressive transition planning should begin so that all are prepared for a placement move as soon as the decision is made to pursue an alternative to reunification. Additionally, the relative shall be identified in the child’s case plan as being the concurrent plan for permanency and a robust plan for maintaining contact between the relative, and the foster caregiver, child, and Foster Care case worker shall be documented. At a minimum, the relative shall be expected to have at least two monthly contacts with the child and his caregiver, as well as the Foster Care case worker to assure continued willingness to provide a permanent home if reunification efforts are not successful. If DCFS is unable to locate or place the child with a suitable relative who is able to meet the child’s need for safety, stability, and permanency upon entering foster care, approval by the supervisor must be documented before the child is moved to a new home, whether the placement is with a relative or other certified caregiver. All placement moves for a child under six must include a transition plan with approval by the supervisor documented in the case record. When a child has been in a specific family setting for three months or more, or the proposed move would be the child’s third move or more, regardless of the time spent in any previous placement, a formal staffing which includes the Manager, Regional Program Consultant and other appropriate members of the child’s team shall be held prior to considering the move to offer additional expertise in ensuring all factors are considered and a thoughtful transition plan is developed. The longer a child remains with a foster caregiver, the stronger the attachment is expected to be, and the more thoughtful we must be when considering a move.

Some considerations are as follows:

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- The child’s current or previous relationship and attachment with the foster or kin caregivers
- The willingness of each caregiver to provide a permanent home for the child, if needed
- The ability of each caregiver to support reunification or other case plan goals
- The current progress towards reunification and the impact of establishing a new care setting has on the child and the existing relationship the child has formed with the current caregiver
- Proximity of the relatives/kin to the parent when the case goal is reunification; simply having an approved home study does not necessarily indicate the child must be placed in that relative’s home
- The length of time the child has been with the current foster caregiver and the age of the child, as younger children have less ability to understand these moves and early attachment with a caregiver is critical to ongoing development of young children
- Any request the parents have for the child being placed with a specific relative or ~~relative~~ kin
- The willingness of the caregiver to engage with DCFS and other team members in planning how to best meet the child’s needs and how to make a planful, developmentally appropriate transition when necessary from one home to another
- The willingness to maintain a relationship with the previous caregiver and the child’s biological family
- The impact on the existing relationships the child has formed (siblings, caregivers, friends, teachers, etc.)
- Capacity to care for all the siblings in a sibling group if in all the children’s best interests to be placed together or else willingness to collaborate with other relatives/caregivers of any siblings to sustain existing sibling relationships; and, the social and educational impact on the child to include the racial and cultural identity of the child.

If the child’s team has decided placing the child in the care of the relative/kin is not in the child’s best interest, if appropriate, relatives may be encouraged to support the child in other ways, such as: writing letters or sending cards to the child, acting as a visitation resource, providing transportation to the child, or attending school activities. All relatives and kin are to be encouraged to maintain contact with the child while in foster care regardless of whether the relatives/kin provide a home to the child. The Foster Care case worker should inform the relatives/kin “in-person” visits can be arranged with the child, or other contacts such as SKYPE, FACETIME, email, text, phone, written correspondence, etc. All of these options are possible depending upon what is most convenient and appropriate for the child and family in each situation. Planning of this contact should begin upon the first contact with a relative.

If at any point any care setting of a child disrupts, relatives and kin of the child shall be reassessed to determine if it is in the child’s best interests at the current point to achieve care in the home of a relative or kin. There can be many reasons or factors which could have

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prevented a relative from providing care at one point in time, but at a later point, would be the best resource for that child.

Relatives who are interested in providing a home for the child must also understand the Department's expectation of certification as soon as the decision has been made to place the child. If during the certification process it is determined that the relative is unable to be certified, and if the decision is made that it is in the child's best interest to remain placed with this relative, a concurrent plan of guardianship to the relative should be developed.

B. EVALUATING PLACEMENT WITH SIBLINGS OR AN INFANT OF A MINOR PARENT IN FOSTER CARE

Care setting decision making should be based on the best interests of each individual child and when not placed together, sustaining any existing bonds one child may have with siblings is critical. In general, placing children in the same home may minimize further trauma and promote the emotional well-being of young children. Sexual aggression or other harmful behaviors between siblings may contraindicate placement together.

For infants of a minor parent placed in foster care, DCFS is equally responsible for the safety and well-being of the infant and the minor parent. It is expected that when a minor parent is in foster care and wishes to retain the care and custody of their infant, the infant will be placed in the same home with the infant's minor parent, unless contraindicated by the circumstances leading to the infant's entry into foster care or other considerations which would indicate a joint care setting would place either the infant or mother at risk of harm, including emotional trauma. An example of possible emotional trauma would be placing an infant with a minor mother when the infant was a result of rape of the minor mother and the minor mother does not wish to retain the care and custody of the infant. A care setting for any minor parent who does wish to retain the care and custody of an infant must be chosen where the caregiver will support the minor parent in becoming a self-sufficient parent.

If a minor parent has custody of the child, DCFS will ensure the minor parent has childcare while the minor parent is completing their education to the degree available through department resources.

When siblings are not placed together or infants and minor parents are not placed together, consideration should be given to placement in as close proximity as possible to allow for frequent contact. All replacements for any member of a sibling group or infant/minor parent in foster care shall include the prioritized consideration of options for a care setting together. It is recognized there may be extenuating circumstances and if circumstances exist, the Foster Care case worker should consult with the child's team to discuss care setting considerations that are in the child's best interest. If it is contraindicated to place siblings together or an infant with a minor parent, the reasons should be clearly indicated in the case documentation, including how the best interests of each individual child is being served.

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C. PERMANENCY CONSIDERATIONS

It is essential to the well-being of children under age six for the child to be placed with a family committed to providing a permanent home, should the child be unable to return to the parents. Therefore, relatives/kin who are willing to adopt, accept custody, or guardianship of the child should be prioritized as caregivers over relatives/ kin only capable of short term care. Children under age six, who cannot be placed with relatives/ kin and at risk of not being returned to their parents, should be placed with foster caregivers who are prepared to commit to permanency with the child. Please note however, the law and best practice reinforce that it is the responsibility of DCFS to identify, provide notice to, and consider relatives who would be capable and appropriate to provide care to each child who enters custody. Sometimes it can take weeks or even months to establish paternity and identify relatives, as such, caution must be taken by Foster Care case workers not to “promise” or “commit” to a permanent placement decision of the child with any foster caregiver until such a time as that decision has been officially made.

ACT 350 of the 2021 Regular Legislative session provides for a finding within Permanency Review Hearings for children under age six that it would be in the child’s best interests to remain in their current placement if:

- The child is in a stable home environment (minimal of continuous placement for nine months)
- The placement meets the child’s physical and emotional needs by a person who has a significant relationship with the child
- No relative or other suitable caregiver has been identified as a concurrent plan caregiver as part of the child’s case plan or court report and
- It would be detrimental to the child’s well-being if the child is removed from the current caregiver

If this finding is made, the law states that DCFS shall not make any change in placement absent prior written notice to the court and all parties (child’s attorney, parent’s attorney, state’s attorney, and parents). Prior notice for a placement change is not required when necessary to ensure the safety of the child, when the current caregiver requests the removal, or when a child is moving to the home of a parent for a trial placement the purpose of a trial placement. When notice is provided, a motion can be filed by any party within 15 days, including the caregiver with whom the child was moved, for a hearing to determine whether removal was in the best interest of the child.

D. TRANSITION PLANNING IN CARE SETTINGS

Removal of any child from the child’s family is very traumatic even though the child is assessed to be in danger. It is also traumatic for a child to be moved from one care setting to another while in foster care even when the change is made in the best interests of the child or

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to achieve permanency for the child. Therefore, it is critical to the well-being of the child, especially children under age six, regardless of the reason for a transition from one care setting to another, for DCFS to collaboratively strategize with all involved caregivers of the child to reduce the trauma experienced.

Some tools have been developed which can be used to minimize the trauma experienced by a child during a transition from one home to another. Those tools include: the Initial Removal Practice Guide; Initial Calls Practice Guide; Icebreaker Meetings Practice Guide; and, the Planful Transition Practice Guide.

Prior to any move of a child under age six, the case and the transition plan shall be reviewed and approved by the supervisor. Furthermore, if the child has been in the current placement for three months or more, or if the proposed move would be the third move or more for the child regardless of the time spent in any previous placement, there shall also be a formal staffing to allow for input of the child's team (current caregiver, prospective caregiver, CASA, any treatment provider involved with the child, child's attorney, etc.) and shall include the supervisor, manager and Regional Program Consultant. The factors considered, decision, rationale for decision, and transition plan shall be documented in FATS. The transition plan should consider the child's best interest, and to the extent feasible, multiple, extended visits, such as overnight visits as well as other contacts such as SKYPE, FaceTime, etc., to ensure the most positive experience possible for the child. These activities should occur both prior to the move and after the move to allow the child to have a safe separation from previous caregivers and attachment to the new caregivers.

A guide sheet (Guide Sheet for Care Setting Decision Making with Young Children) with examples of scenarios which may occur has been developed to assist Foster Care staff in critically analyzing case situations and thinking through the best option available for each child served. These scenarios are examples only and should be used to guide decision making for best practice.

III. FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Foster Care Notification [Form](#) / [Instructions](#) *

[Form 63](#) / [Instructions](#) ECO-MAPP and Genogram Formats

Circle of Influence [Form](#) / [Instructions](#)

Family Connections [Form](#) / [Instructions](#)

[QPI-IceBrk Ice Breaker Meetings Practice Guide](#)

[QPI-InCall Initial Calls Practice Guide](#)

[QPI-InRem Initial Removal Practice Guide](#)

[QPI-PITran Planful Transitions Practice Guide](#)

[QPI-PlcGde Guide Sheet for Care Setting Decision Making with Young Children Practice Guide](#)

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IV. REFERENCES

[Louisiana Children's Code Article 672](#)

[P. L. 110-351](#), Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

Facts About Child Development: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/facts.html>