

<b>31.1 Family Permanency Plans</b>	
<b>Application:</b> To caseworkers in all programs of DCS, Provider Agency Staff and Supervisory Staff	
<b>Authority:</b> Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act 2008 (P.L.110-351), <b>TCA:</b> 37-2-403, 37-2-408, 37-5-105, 37-5-106, Adoption and Safe Families Act 37-5-106.	<b>Standards: None</b>
<b>Commissioner:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Original Effective Date: 01/07/11 Current Effective Date: 07/30/21	Supersedes: 03/29/18 Last Review Date: 07/30/21
<b>Glossary:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Kin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Any person who has a significant relationship with a child or youth</li> </ul> </li> <li>◆ Family Permanency Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A working document created by the child and family team that outlines the permanency goal, strengths, needs, responsibilities, and individuals responsible to assist a family in achieving safety and permanency. A Family Permanency Plan is created for all non-custodial and custodial clients.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

**Policy Statement:**

Family Centered Permanency Planning is the process by which families, in conjunction with DCS, community partners, informal supports, specific interventions and services reinforce family strengths and meet the needs of the children/youth and their families involved with the Department of Children's Services. Family Permanency Plans are working documents that include the entire family in addition to addressing the specific needs or behaviors of one or more individuals within the family, including community safety. Children/youth within the Family Permanency Plan may have different permanency goals and action steps based upon their specific needs. A Family Permanency Plan can include both custodial and non-custodial children/youth. Family Permanency Plans are developed and monitored through the Child and Family Team process.

**Purpose:**

To outline the process of developing family-centered, strengths-based Family Permanency Plans that achieves safety, permanency and well-being for the children and youth served by DCS. These practices are based on the premise that the best way to aid, protect and nurture children/youth over time is to strengthen and support families within their own homes, communities and cultures. The thoughtful and skilled mobilization of the natural family, community and cultural resources is the most effective intervention for stabilizing and strengthening families in their totality.

**Procedures:****A. Family Composition**

1. A family is a system of interrelated people. DCS practice demonstrates an understanding that any change in one part of the system impacts all other members of that system. Though the ultimate goals are the safety, permanence and well-being of the child(ren) or youth, the entire family is the focus of intervention. Family composition varies with every family. It is essential that children/youth and their families are given the flexibility to define who is a part of their family. This may include nuclear and extended family members as well as kin. The family's definition of family is used in determining the case members, Child and Family Team members, and which members are included in a Family Permanency Plan.
2. Diligent search is used to expand family and kin options to participate in case planning. Upon a child's entry into state custody, the DCS worker notifies all parents, maternal and paternal grandparents and other relatives by birth marriage or adoption identified by the family. (Please refer to Policy [31.9, Conducting Diligent Searches](#)). Each family member should be entered into the case in TFACTS as a "case member."
3. In TFACTS, a family case is named by establishing one of the case members as the "case reference person." In most cases, this is the birth mother. Where there are multiple birth mothers involved with a sibling group, an individualized determination has to be made regarding how to best define the family case. If the birth mother is deceased or her parental rights have been terminated, a legal or biological father should be used as the case reference person. If there is no clearly identifiable parent, a legal guardian can be designated as the case reference person. In the event there is no identifiable parent or legal guardian available, the case reference person is the oldest child in the family receiving services.
4. When children enter full guardianship, they are de-activated from the "family" case and established as a separate adoption case in TFACTS. For sibling groups in full guardianship, the oldest sibling is the case reference person. If any child within a

sibling group is adopted separately, that child may have an individual case established.

## **B. Engagement**

1. Engagement between the family and DCS Worker is the first step in creating collaborative relationships and assessing family strengths and resiliencies. To achieve the best possible outcomes, families must be invested in a problem-solving process to address the underlying conditions that contribute to unwanted outcomes and behaviors. Good engagement is critical for developing an effective Family Permanency Plan. To facilitate permanent change, problem-solving strategies must be built upon the strengths and resources unique to each family. Promoting positive, trusting, reciprocal, and flexible relationships encourage pro-social, family and community-friendly values.
2. The DCS Worker's responsibility is to collaborate and build relationships with the family that fosters an atmosphere of trust and empathy. Workers should communicate a belief in family strengths and open, collaborative decision-making in permanency planning. By developing meaningful relationships with families, individuals and agencies, the worker demonstrates competence and empathy, increasing the likelihood of compliance. While legal measures and consequences exist for families that do not engage with DCS, the primary vehicle of obtaining cooperation should be engagement and relationship building.

## **C. Team Formation**

1. Teaming is the process of surrounding the family with formal and informal supports to help them achieve their goals. All team members play a role and contribute to the success and stability of the child and family.
2. The value of teaming to develop the Family Permanency Plan is:
  - a) Families are more inclined to participate in a plan they have helped develop;
  - b) More team members representing different perspectives provides an opportunity for a creative and appropriate mix of services;
  - c) Families need to have support and connections within their own communities and
  - d) DCS partners with other professionals and organizations to best meet each family's needs.
3. The DCS Worker has the primary responsibility for building, preparing and maintaining the Child and Family Team. This requires working closely with the family to identify their support systems, nuclear and extended family members and community resources that can help the family achieve their goals. The family and

child (if age appropriate) should always be central to the decision making and planning process of the team.

4. If a family has more than one DCS Worker, the supervising Team Leaders collaborate and determine which worker is designated the primary and secondary worker in TFACTS. There is a case conference between both workers and their Team Leaders for sharing information, planning, and clarifying responsibilities. This meeting can take place in person or by phone and it is critical in clarifying roles to ensure that the family gets the services they need. Once that has taken place, the responsibilities of each DCS Worker is shared with the child, family and other team members.
5. Some considerations for determining responsibilities include:
  - a) The DCS Workers' relationship with the family;
  - b) Examination of each assigned DCS Worker's caseload assignments, level of complexity of the cases, number of children, level of need, etc.; and,
  - c) Number of children in the family involved with a specific program area.
6. A diverse team is preferable to assure that the necessary combination of technical skills, cultural knowledge; community resources and personal relationships are developed and maintained for the family. Collectively, the team should have the expertise, family knowledge, authority and ability to flexibly mobilize resources to meet the specific needs of the child and family to build a Family Permanency Plan. Members of the team should have the time and availability to fulfill commitments made to the child/family. Team competence, support and ongoing involvement are essential.
7. For more information on teaming and suggestions for individuals to make up the child and family team, refer to [\*Child and Family Team Meeting Guide\*](#).

#### **D. Assessment & Understanding**

1. As part of the DCS Practice Wheel, Assessment and Understanding are essential in the formation of a Family Permanency Plan. Each division of the Department utilizes an ongoing assessment of the family as a whole unit and each family member individually throughout the life of a case. In general terms, the assessment begins with the "first knock on the door" or first contact, and focuses on the strengths of the family as well as their needs and concerns. DCS Workers document formal and informal assessments (including assessments from providers and community partners) regarding the child/youth/family in TFACTS. These assessments assist the team in identifying the needs and strengths that should be addressed in the Family Permanency Plan. Major treatment and safety issues for the child/youth and family identified through formal (FAST/ CANS/ professional assessments from providers) or informal assessment (safety issues identified in the

child protective services investigation, drug treatment, sexual offense victim or sex offender treatment, special education, domestic violence, any contributing factor that brought the child/youth/family to the attention of the Department etc.) are integrated in the Family Permanency Plan with associated responsibilities to address the identified needs.

2. Prior to the development, review, or revision of a Family Permanency Plan, the DCS Worker assigned to the case is responsible for obtaining and reviewing all current and past assessment information to gain a complete understanding of the family's situation.

## **E. Planning**

1. All family permanency plans shall reflect and build on the family's strengths and needs identified by the family as well as by assessment tools. The DCS Worker's role during permanency planning meetings includes assisting the family to verbalize their functional strengths, and to identify gaps in resources, knowledge or skills relevant to any safety and risk concerns presented. Families with youth who have committed delinquent and/or unruly acts should also understand how reducing certain risk indicators can decrease the likelihood of future delinquent activity. The plan must outline responsibilities and services uniquely matched to the family's situation and preferences.
2. Family members and children are encouraged to have a meaningful voice in the planning and decision-making process. Particular attention should be paid to the wants and desires of adolescents when identifying the Family Permanency Plan goals and outcomes. While the Department is ultimately responsible for the decisions made in the planning meeting, actively involving youth in the decision-making process is crucial to achieving positive outcomes. Prior to the meeting, children/youth are prepared for what to expect in the planning process and encouraged to bring someone with them to the meeting if this would help them feel more comfortable participating. If an adolescent does not attend the CFTM, or if it has been determined that it is not in his/her best interest to attend, the reasons are clearly documented in TFACTS. All family members should be informed when there are circumstances that cannot be changed (such as court orders defining contact etc.) during the planning process, due to legal or policy restraints.
3. A Family Permanency Plan may include children/youth receiving services from various program areas of DCS simultaneously. The Family Permanency Plan reflects this work in a centralized planning process and document.
4. Custodial and Non-Custodial plans for families with delinquent or unruly youth should include risk-reduction activities that increase protective factors, decrease the potential for future delinquent activity, and improve community safety. Additional

information about planning for youth who are adjudicated delinquent, refer to [Protocol for Juvenile Justice Family Permanency Plan](#) and [Work Aid: Juvenile Justice Family Permanency Plan Quarterly Review](#).

5. Plans developed for non-custodial families should include activities that are directly related to the reason for involvement and any other safety risks identified to increase the likelihood of the child/youth remaining safely with their family. For more information on permanency planning for non-custodial families, refer to [14.12, Family Permanency Planning for Child Protective Services Non-Custodial Cases](#) and [14.18, Family Support Services Program](#).
6. Plans developed for youth in foster care should include activities that directly relate to the reason for involvement and any other safety risk identified to reduce safety risk and achieve timely permanency for the child/ youth in foster care. For more information on permanency planning for youth in foster care, refer to [16.31, Permanency Planning for Children/Youth in the Department of Children's Services Custody](#).
7. Plans that are developed for young people who are enrolled in Extension of Foster Care Services should focus on activities related to the youth living independently. For more information on planning for youth who are enrolled in Extension of Foster Care Services, refer to [16.51, Independent Living and Transition Planning](#).
8. Family Permanency Plans must be time-limited, goal-oriented and specific about the action steps to be taken by DCS, service providers, children/youth, and families toward meeting the goal(s) on the plan. They should include responsibilities that specifically include action steps that each party should take including behavioral, assessment, service, and DCS action steps needed to address the identified concerns. To determine compliance with the plan, parents are expected to be able to demonstrate their completion of the action steps as well as demonstrate behavioral changes that decrease risk to the child(ren). The responsibilities of all team members should be clearly outlined with language that everyone can understand.
9. Every Family Permanency Plan contains the following components:
  - a) **Permanency Goal:**

The overall expected result that allows a child or youth to achieve a safe, permanent, living situation in a timely manner.
  - b) **Strengths:**

Skills, abilities, talents, resiliencies, and resources that have enabled a family to be successful or to overcome adversity in the past.
  - c) **Needs:**

Areas of risk or needed intervention for the child/youth/family identified through formal and informal assessment are described.
  - d) **Indicators:**

Reflect categories of strengths or needs identified on DCS assessments. Indicators can also include topic areas relating to independent living and probation/aftercare cases.

**e) Responsibilities:**

A set of actions and interventions that lead the family to be able to achieve the desired outcomes. Items listed should be time specific, observable and measurable. They should include the names of the persons responsible for each step and time frames for when the action should begin and be completed. Interventions should utilize the strengths that already exist within a family and involve informal supports when available. Whenever possible, the family should be given different options of interventions to choose from to include. Actions and responsibilities for DCS staff should also be included in the Family Permanency Plan which identifies action steps related to helping the child/youth and family receive services and move the child towards permanency.

**Note:** For more information on specific requirements and the development of Family Permanency Plans, please refer to [Permanency Plan Development Guide](#).

## F. Implementation

1. Services and interventions are intentionally directed toward teaching the family skills to function independently without the formal helping system. Services and interventions should focus on needs identified through assessment or related to the reason for involvement.
2. The individual responsible for implementing services should be identified within the responsibilities related to the need the service is addressing. The identified individual should ensure that services are implemented timely.
3. The DCS Worker is responsible for documenting the implementation of the Family Permanency Plan and the effectiveness of the action steps and interventions in TFACTS. If a family has more than one case worker, the supervising Team Coordinator(s) determines how the assigned workers document this information.

## G. Tracking & Adaptation

Tracking and Adaptation is a critical element of effective planning. As the family continues to evolve during their partnership with the Department, the plan must also evolve to reflect the progress that has been made, as well as those areas still needing improvement. This is tracked by each division through the child and family team process and ongoing assessment. Regular CFTMs are used to review and document the progress of the responsibilities and goals outlined in the Family Permanency Plan and

make revisions as the family's goals are met or circumstances change. During CFTMs the team reviews the effectiveness of the interventions and services identified in the Family Permanency Plan and can make adjustments to the required services if another service could better meet the child/youth/family's needs. All family members and assigned DCS Workers should be involved in each CFTM to ensure the family's progress is reviewed holistically. The DCS Worker is to use full disclosure when discussing a family's progress towards outcomes. This process of tracking and adjustment continues until the family has achieved safety and permanency.

**Forms:**

None

**Collateral Documents:**

[\*Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Procedures Manual\*](#)

[\*Permanency Plan Development Guide\*](#)

[\*Child and Family Team Meeting Guide\*](#)

[\*13.10, Custody Requirements for Delinquent Youth\*](#)

[\*14.12, Family Permanency Planning for Child Protective Services Non-Custodial Cases\*](#)

[\*14.18, Family Support Services Program\*](#)

[\*16.31, Permanency Planning for Children/Youth in the Department of Children's Services Custody\*](#)

[\*31.9, Conducting Diligent Searches\*](#)

[\*16.51, Independent Living and Transition Planning\*](#)