



# Diligent Search Manual

Tools and Tips for Completing a Diligent Search

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# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to help you become familiar with the search tools that are available and to use them in a systematic way. Knowing how to use the vast amount of diligent search resources will enable you to conduct a meaningful diligent search and improve permanency outcomes for children/youth. TCA 37-5-106, 36-1-102, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, (P.L.110-351), TCA 37-4-201-207 et seq., Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006, (P.L. 109-239) and DCS Policy 31.9 requires a diligent search to identify individuals who may be considered as a resource for placement or custody of children. The search includes the parents or relatives of the child as well as other significant kin who have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the child. Information gathering begins with the first DCS Worker assigned to the family and continues through the duration of the Department's involvement with the family. The CPS and/or the Family Service Worker (FSW)/Juvenile Service Worker (JSW) or Kinship Coordinator share in the responsibility of obtaining relevant information and documenting the search efforts.

By initiating the diligent search at the beginning of the case, the likelihood of making sound placement decisions, reducing trauma, and expediting permanency is increased. Children/ youth should be placed with their families when safe and appropriate options are available.

It is important to remember that the diligent search process is an ongoing process and continues throughout the life of the case. Delays in locating missing parents and interested relatives, create barriers that can unnecessarily lengthen a child/youth's stay in foster care.

Pursuant to DCS Policy 31.9, the Department of Children's Services will assist all children/youth and families in careful search for known and unknown parents, maternal and paternal grandparents and any other adult relatives/significant kin who may provide a support to both the child and family.

## Parents of the Child

Parents of the child includes legal mother and legal father of the child as defined in T.C.A. 36-1-102. This includes legal fathers who may not also be the biological father of the child. There may be more than one legal father. Biological fathers who are not legal fathers should also be considered a parent and requires diligent search efforts be made.

If there is information that indicates that the parent may be located outside the state of Tennessee, the FSW/JSW/Kinship Coordinator must contact agencies and utility providers in the other state pursuant to diligent search procedures.

There are occasions where the mother does not/will not provide DCS with information regarding the father. In these circumstances, the worker should engage the mother to understand more about why she is unable or unwilling to share the information. If the worker is still unable to gain the information, the worker should notify their local legal for further direction. Tasks that can assist with obtaining information about an unidentified father are:

- The DCS Attorney questions the parent or other relatives under oath during a court hearing asking them to provide information regarding the father or paternal relatives.
- The DCS workers should contact relatives and significant kin and ask for information that could identify the father.
- Complete a clear search on the mother and contact any associated persons who are identified within the search.
- Continue to engage the mother, asking for any information that could help identify the father.

- Follow up on all leads.

### ***National Directory of Putative Father Registries***

Tennessee does not permit checking the Putative Father Registry for the purposes of diligent search efforts. However, each state has their own guidelines defined by state law and may have expanded eligibility for a search. If the family has been known to reside in another state, contacting that state's Putative Father Registry could be helpful. The National Directory of Putative Father Registries can be found at <https://adoptioncouncil.org/resources-and-training/important-adoption-laws/putative-father-registries-state-by-state/>.

## **Relatives and Kin of the Child**

### ***Relative of the Child***

Includes those related to the child by blood, marriage or adoption for both the maternal and paternal sides of the child's family (grandparents, great grandparents, uncles, aunts, adult cousins, adult siblings and stepparents). A sibling relationship means the biological or legal relationship between persons who have a common biological or legal parent.

### ***Significant Kin***

Significant kin are identified as non-relative adults who have a significant relationship with a child (e.g. godparents or family friend). A significant relationship is identified as being positive, meaningful and/or a parent-like relationship which includes a demonstrated ongoing commitment to the child. Significant kin may be identified by the child, family or other members of the team. Additionally, the court may order the parents and/or legal guardians to provide the names and addresses of relatives and significant kin who might be considered as possible placements.

### ***Confidentiality***

You have a responsibility to protect the personal identifiable information that you are working with. Your diligent search file, including the CLEAR search results, contain someone's complete identity, social security number, date of birth, address, phone number, and privileged information about family members. You must protect this information. Additionally, you must maintain confidentiality as it relates to the case situation and specific details regarding DCS's involvement with the family. If you have questions regarding what information you can share, consult with your local DCS attorney.

### ***Notification***

All identified adult relatives and identified significant kin identified must be contacted and provided with a notice explaining that the child/youth is in foster care and provide options for involvement in the Child and Family Team and for placement/permanency. This discussion should be guided by information provided in the [Full Disclosure Video](#) and [Guide to Full Disclosure of Permanency Options](#) (exceptions can occur when the relative presents safety issues, but exceptions should be reviewed and discussed with legal for approval).

### *Documentation of Search and Notice*

All diligent search activities and the of the search and any notices sent to relatives and/or significant kin must be documented in TFACTS case recordings as outlined in DCS Policy [31.14 Documentation of TFACTS Case Recordings](#).

Use the Diligent Search Letter when you are reaching out by mail or email to locate parents, relatives or significant kin. This is a prepared letter specifically for this purpose that can be mailed or emailed to recipients.

For custodial episodes, form [CS-1013 Kinship Exception Request \(KER\)](#) must be completed prior to the child/youth's entry into foster care, or within thirty (30) days from the beginning of the custodial episode.

Documentation of diligent search efforts is critical to permanency in many cases and can significantly affect the outcome of a court case if not done properly.

### *Ongoing Diligent Search*

The diligent search for parents, relatives and/or significant kin is ongoing and should continue throughout the life of the case or until the child/youth enters full guardianship. Ongoing diligent search is critical to achieving timely permanency outcomes. Many families involved with the child welfare system have a transient lifestyle due to many factors such as lack of affordable housing, mental health needs, and addiction. If parents unexpectedly move, or become unengaged in planning or service delivery, don't give up. Continuing to make efforts monthly to locate the family and documenting those efforts in the record will prepare the case for seeking alternative permanency options in the future if viable parents or relatives are not located. The lack of appropriate diligent search efforts can cause delays in locating appropriate parents or relatives, delay working with parents or relatives that could become viable with services and could prevent the completion of a successful termination of parental rights when reunification is not possible.

### *Tips for Conducting Diligent Search*

- Use a variety of search resources.
- Speak to other workers who have experience in diligent search and ask them if there are local applications or contacts that are particularly helpful in diligent search (some counties have jail applications for cell phones or online criminal records).
- When contacting relatives, be pleasant and make the person feel comfortable. Be sympathetic and never sound threatening. The relatives of a missing parent may be upset by what has happened in their family or not have any knowledge of the involvement at all. Genuineness, empathy, and respect should be shown in all scenarios.
- Fact check information that is received from relatives and friends. It is not uncommon for a parent, relative, or significant kin to offer limited information or less information that they know. Even if a parent is reported as "not being involved" we must continue the search.
- Make diligent search a part of your normal routine. Diligent search can seem overwhelming, but performing a few diligent search actions and documenting them on a routine basis can help the process seem easier to manage.
- Recheck your sources. Sometimes new information becomes available over time, or individuals may feel more comfortable sharing information after a relationship has been built.

## *Diligent Search Activities Within Other Casework Activities*

Diligent search activities should begin as early as possible. Performing these activities can often fit into your casework tasks that you already do as a worker regardless of program area. When you make efforts as part of another task, be sure to document the efforts using an additional contact type of diligent search so these efforts can be easily located for new workers assigned to the case. When documenting, include the relationships of the individuals searched for, since person associations are not always identified in other areas of the electronic record. Below are some suggestions for completing diligent search activities within other required tasks.

- Talk to the child/youth and current team members and ask for information. This can be done in a variety of settings including, but not limited to, during transportation, Child and Family Team Meetings, court, and monthly face to face contacts. Even young children may be able to provide some detail regarding relatives or significant kin.
- Review the case file thoroughly, included electronic files of prior cases from any program area. Case recordings or Kinship Exception Request may contain valuable information for your search.
- Review intake referrals from the Child Abuse Hotline. Referrals are often called in by individuals who care about the child/youth and could potentially be a relative or have a significant relationship. Even if the referral was screened out and was not assigned, the referral itself could contain important information. Check the referent's information as well as other names individuals in the case and contact information associated with those individuals. Be sure not to disclose confidential information when contacting individuals who are not a party to the case.
- If there are family events, such as weddings, funerals, or family reunions, consider taking the child to the event and gathering potential relatives who may be interested in being a placement or permanency option.
- At the beginning of a case, necessary records should be requested. These records may contain information that also will help you in a diligent search.
  - The birth certificate for the child/youth may contain the mother's maiden name and any married names, identity of the father (who may be the legal father, even though the mother may not have identified him as the child/ youth's father), and the state and county of the child's birth. This information is particularly helpful when enough information is not available to perform a CLEAR search.
  - Law enforcement records can be helpful if the parent has a history of criminal activity or was recently arrested. When children enter foster care, it is helpful to request any law enforcement records to do a proper assessment on what should be included in permanency planning. These records could also contain identifying information or last known/forwarding addresses. Request records from your local law enforcement agency, including but not limited to, police reports, warrants, or forwarding address. You may also be able to obtain this information at the Circuit/Sessions clerk's office.
  - The Child Support Office could provide records that may be helpful in locating addresses of parents who have been previously ordered to pay support. Many counties pursue child support from parents whose children/youth are in foster care. Your local office may have a process that could include this diligent search task. If not, contact your local child support office to see if they have had a child support case on the child or the parent and request records from their support case. Even if they do not have a current address, the child support office may have the contact information for the person seeking support and may well have two or three possible addresses that they are using to try to achieve service of process. The child support office also has access to the Federal Parent Locator Service.



- Medical/mental health records can be helpful if the child/youth was seen regularly by a Primary Care Physician (PCP), a counselor, or was treated at a hospital. When a child/youth comes into foster care, we should request all medical records for that child/ youth as part of our initial assessment. Intake forms for medical or mental health services often ask the person filling out the forms for contact information and identifying information that could be helpful in diligent search.
- Managed Care Organization (MCO) (health insurance companies) for the child/youth may have contact or identifying information for parents. If the child has TennCare or private insurance, contacting the MCO and asking for claim information could be helpful in contributing to the search. This information can also be helpful in determining if services have been delivered in the past and assessing the needs of the child/youth and family.

### *Use the Information You Already Have*

Use information that you know about the family or person to identify resources that may help you locate the person. Consider the following:

- If the parent has a criminal history, outstanding warrants, or prior incarcerations, the county clerk's office, law enforcement, or the jail where the person was incarcerated may be able to offer a last known address or other helpful information.
- If the parent has a known work history, they may continue the same type of work they did historically. Contacting prior employers may be helpful in the event they were used as references, or the person maintains continued relationships with former co-workers at the place of business.
- If the child is a newborn, check with the hospital staff/hospital records to see who roomed in and/or was allowed to visit.
- If the child has been enrolled in a daycare, the daycare staff may provide a wealth of information, including names and contact information of individuals who regularly dropped the child off, were permitted to pick the child up, or were listed as emergency contacts.
- For school-age children, the child's school record could provide helpful information. Typically, parents provide updated enrollment information each year including current contact information and individuals who are permitted (or not permitted) to pick the child up from school. An individual should not be excluded from exploration only because they are listed as someone who is not permitted to pick a child up from school. The child's former teachers may have additional information about the child's history, including relatives and friends of the child or family.
- Review the social media pages of case members and their relatives and friends. Not everyone uses social media the same and some relatives may post more than what is accessed on a parent's page. If children/youth have their own social media accounts that could also contain helpful information.
- Talk to relatives, friends, and neighbors. Consider individuals that you are aware of, but also individuals that may not have been mentioned in prior cases or by the family. Sometimes friends, neighbors and relatives are hesitant, but sometimes they are willing to share the information they have. Even if they are not willing to share information, they may call the person you are searching for and let them know that you are looking for them.
- Follow up on information identified in the CLEAR search and repeat the CLEAR search as necessary. Not every search will lead to immediate results. If you do not find the parent or relative, wait several weeks and try again. Sometimes it takes a few days for new information to be entered into a database. The CLEAR search includes information from many sources that are updated regularly
- If the person has lived in multiple locations, be sure to check resources in all the locations where they have lived.

## *Resources for Diligent Search*

### Outside Agencies

Oftentimes, other agencies or individuals who have had formal contact with a parent have historical information. Contact applicable outside agencies or individuals as appropriate to assist in your diligent search. When contacting an agency, be sure to get the name of the person you speak to and build a relationship with that person, as you will likely need similar information in the future.

- Department of Human Services
- Court Clerk's office
- Youth Services Officers
- Telephone and utility companies
- Employers/past employers- If you receive a letter back from a former employer who states the person is no longer employed, call the individual and ask for additional information.
- Landlords/housing authority
- School personnel, including teachers, coaches, and others who may have contact and information about the family
- CASA
- Guardian ad Litem

### United States Postal Service (USPS)

- Send the USPS's "Request for Change of Address Needed for Service of Legal Process" or "Address Information Request" form, or a letter from your legal staff, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Postmaster of the person's last known address. This form is not online and must be requested from the post office. Some post offices do not have the form but will accept a letter on an attorney's letterhead requesting the same information.
- The "Address Information Request" form requires the signature of an official from the county children and youth services agency.
- If you need assistance with the request, use one of the contact methods listed below.
  - Phone- Customer Service of USPS, 800-ASK-USPS (800-275-8777)
  - Website- [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)
  - Contact the local post office of the person's last known address and request forwarding address information

### Internet Resources

There are many resources accessed through the internet that can help you locate someone. These are some that are commonly used, but feel free to use others that you find helpful. Many search sites are owned and/or powered by the same company, and therefore gather information from the same database. For example, if you conduct a search for a person on [www.whitepages.com](http://www.whitepages.com) and [www.address.com](http://www.address.com), you will get the exact same five results because both of these websites tap into the same database. A list of webpages that could be resources for diligent search are listed at the end of this section.

### Social Media

Checking social media platforms is an easy and accessible search mechanism that may yield significant results. A quick check of the parent's Facebook / Instagram/ Twitter/ or other social media accounts may provide additional information regarding where the person lives or associates/relatives/kin of that person.



## Government Webpages/ Search Engines

- [Tennessee Felony Offender Information Lookup \(FOIL\)](https://apps.tn.gov/foil/) - <https://apps.tn.gov/foil/> shows inmates currently incarcerated in the Tennessee Department of Correction. Most states have a similar database. Search for the state, department of correction, and inmate lookup. An example search: 'AL department correction inmate' returns a result of <http://doc.state.al.us/InmateSearch.aspx>
- [Tennessee Sex Offender Registry](#)- database of registered sex offenders. This search can be conducted with the offender's name or can be conducted for all of the offenders in a specific county. The results include name, primary address and secondary address (if applicable).
- [Vinelink.com](#)- vinelink is an up-to date resource for current incarceration in a local jail.
- [Immigration and Custom Enforcement \(ICE\) locator](#)- database of persons detained in ICE custody or released within the past 60 days.
- [Federal Parent Locator Service](#). This service documents new hire information. It is only accessible to certain agencies, including child welfare agencies that have contracted with the Federal Parent Locator Service to use this service. Use of the State or Federal Parent Locator Service can help to find missing parents, as it utilizes a number of powerful resources, the most valuable being The National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). This database is the largest and most comprehensive repository of employment information dedicated to locating non-custodial parents that is available in the country. The Parent Locator Service should locate where they are working anywhere in the country, even if it is just for a few days. If they are listed in the directory, you will receive a printout showing where they are presently employed, the address of the place of employment, their residence address, and the wages earned during the last fiscal quarter. Repeat checks if no results are initially yielded. Information obtained from this resource should be acted on quickly as it is used to locate those who are evading paying child support who may change their circumstances quickly. Searches through the Federal Parent Locator Service costs an additional fee per search, so only request this search after your CLEAR search and other search methods have not revealed any results. The Child Support Division at the Department of Human Services can access this search tool.
- Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Locator- <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>

## CLEAR Search

DCS has many workers statewide who can assist with completing a CLEAR search. Identify the person in your office who is responsible for completing the searches and the process to request them. The CLEAR search report may include information such as previous addresses, social security numbers, telephone numbers, criminal history, marriages, divorces, licenses held, e-mail addresses, VIN numbers, vehicle tag numbers, vehicle registration information, relatives, associates, neighbors, social media, and internet wish lists (ex. Amazon). When requesting a CLEAR search, provide as much information as possible to the person conducting the CLEAR search. It is better to provide more information than necessary. Because there are so many people with the same name, additional identifiers like the date of birth or last known address are often needed to complete the search. Follow up on the information the CLEAR search yields. Doing the CLEAR search alone is not a diligent search. When looking for permanency options, consider conducting CLEAR searches on parents even if we know their location. Sometimes searches can reveal viable options that the parent did not initially disclose. The CLEAR search is only a starting point for your diligent search, and may not provide any usable information, as CLEAR uses self-reported information, such as when a person applies for credit.

## Other Internet Resources

### General Search Engines

<a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.yahoo.com">www.yahoo.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.goodsearch.com">www.goodsearch.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.ask.com">www.ask.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.dogpile.com">www.dogpile.com</a>	<i>Search engine owned by Infospace, drawing from many leading search engines</i>
<a href="http://www.metacrawler.com">www.metacrawler.com</a>	<i>Search engine owned by Infospace, drawing from many leading search engines</i>
<a href="http://www.webcrawler.com">www.webcrawler.com</a>	<i>Search engine owned by Infospace, drawing from many leading search engines</i>
<a href="http://www.whitepages.com">www.whitepages.com</a>	<i>Business, person, address and phone search powered by superpages.com</i>
<a href="http://www.address.com">www.address.com</a>	<i>Business, person, address and phone search powered by superpages.com</i>
<a href="http://www.411.com">www.411.com</a>	<i>Business, person, address and phone search powered by superpages.com</i>
<a href="http://www.phonenumber.com">www.phonenumber.com</a>	<i>Business, person, address and phone search powered by superpages.com</i>
<a href="https://www.superpages.com/">https://www.superpages.com/</a>	<i>Business, person and state directory search powered by whitepages.com</i>
<a href="https://infospace.com/">https://infospace.com/</a>	<i>Forwards to superpages.com</i>
<a href="http://www.yellowpages.com">www.yellowpages.com</a>	<i>Primarily a business search tool. The people search on this site is powered by whitepages.com</i>
<a href="http://www.anywho.com">www.anywho.com</a>	<i>Business search powered by yellowpages.com. People search draws from local telephone directory assistance records.</i>
<a href="http://www.yellowpages.com">www.yellowpages.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.ussearch.com">www.ussearch.com</a>	<i>Only provides general search information. Requires payment for full report.</i>
<a href="https://www.usa.gov/states-and-territories">https://www.usa.gov/states-and-territories</a>	<i>Search by State to obtain access to other state home pages and our counterparts in those states as well as other sites, these states offer with information that is useful to us. These states seem to be more helpful if you go through the internet and they see you are a state entity.</i>
<a href="http://www.findagrave.com">www.findagrave.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.intelius.com">www.intelius.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.peoplefinder.com">www.peoplefinder.com</a>	
<a href="http://obits.rootsweb.ancestry.com/">http://obits.rootsweb.ancestry.com/</a>	
<a href="http://www.zabasearch.com">www.zabasearch.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.tnrealestate.com">www.tnrealestate.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.naco.org">http://www.naco.org</a>	
<a href="http://www.peopledata.com/">http://www.peopledata.com/</a>	
<a href="http://www.address.com">www.address.com</a>	

### Search Engines Specifically Created to Locate Individuals

<a href="http://www.intelius.com">www.intelius.com</a>	<i>Intelius powers many other website's search sections. Searches will yield simple, limited results. Most identifying information is only available with a fee.</i>
<a href="http://www.peoplelookup.com">www.peoplelookup.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.backgroundcheckgateway.com">www.backgroundcheckgateway.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.reversephonedirectory.com">www.reversephonedirectory.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.zabasearch.com">www.zabasearch.com</a>	<i>A free simple search from many sources of public record information. Only its premium searches are provided by Intelius.</i>
<a href="http://www.integriscan.com">www.integriscan.com</a>	<i>Specializes in criminal record and background checks, but its database also covers public records. Search by name, state and social security number. Name and address results are free. More detailed results are available for a fee.</i>
<a href="http://www.searchsystems.net">www.searchsystems.net</a>	<i>Large searchable database, providing links to many different types of searches by topic and by geographic location. Some searches are free and others require a paid subscription to the site's DirectPass section.</i>
<a href="http://www.censusfinder.com">www.censusfinder.com</a>	<i>Provides links to genealogy and other people search websites. It does not have its own internal search engine or database.</i>
<a href="http://www.searchbug.com">www.searchbug.com</a>	<i>Provides cumulative search of most popular search engines like Google, Yahoo, MSN Search, etc. Also features original "People Finder" search, but many results are only available with a fee. Under Research Tools, it has some unusual searches such as email verification and a reverse IP address search. Business search supported by superpages.com</i>

### Social Media Webpages

<a href="http://www.myspace.com">www.myspace.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.instagram.com">www.instagram.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.pinterest.com">www.pinterest.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.twitter.com">www.twitter.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.tiktok.com">www.tiktok.com</a>	

### Map Webpages

<a href="http://www.maps.yahoo.com">www.maps.yahoo.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.mapquest.com">www.mapquest.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.maps.google.com">www.maps.google.com</a>	

*Zip Code Information Webpages*

<a href="http://www.usps.com">www.usps.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.melissadata.com">www.melissadata.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.areaconnect.com">www.areaconnect.com</a>	