	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	8 – Case Planning for the Foster Child
	Section No./Name	Case Planning for the Foster Child
	Document No./Name	6-803 Connections for Permanency
	Effective Date	October 15, 2024

I. STATEMENT OF POLICY

Connections for Permanency is a term used to describe a set of strategies for locating and engaging relatives and other significant individuals who are committed to maintaining a permanent connection to a child in foster care. Placement is not the primary purpose in using Connections for Permanency, although it could be an outcome. An individual who serves as a permanent connection for a child may be anyone who has a significant relationship with the child including a relative, family friend, former teacher or coach, a former neighbor, church member or an adult the child met while in a foster care placement.

Permanent connections may * serve as any of the following to children and youth in foster care:


- Visiting Resources
- Pen Pals
- Mentors
- Family historian and resource for family connections
- Cultural supports
- Advocates
- Potential caregivers
- Spiritual supports
- Friends

For youth ages 14 to 21, Foster Care (FC) and Extended Foster Care (EFC) case workers are additionally responsible for documenting a permanent connection's level of commitment to the youth in a Permanency Pact, CW Form [Permanency Pact](#). While all youth ages 14 to 21 shall have at least one signed permanency pact, additional permanency pacts are encouraged. The youth's case plan must include a specific plan for contact/visitation with each identified permanent connection. The permanent connection and their relationship with the youth must be reassessed and documented at ** each subsequent case planning meeting. Any updates found necessary to the permanency pacts should also be made at that time.

II. PROCEDURES

A. EXPECTATIONS

Case workers shall gather as much information as possible about the child's life at the beginning of the case. This would include *** * having ** a discussion with other significant persons (i.e. teachers, neighbors, friends, church members, clergy, coaches, etc.) regarding the child's needs and level of functioning/development. The process of gathering information on significant persons should be ongoing throughout the life of the case. The *** [Family Connections](#) form shall be used to document efforts to locate permanent connections and identify them. Case workers *** * may also use the [Circle of Influence](#) form to assist youth in identifying relatives and kin. **

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At transfer from Child Protective Services (CPS) or Family Services (FS) to *** Foster Care (FC)**, the case documentation shall contain identifying and contact information for the child's parents, relatives, godparents, and significant others unless the child has been abandoned or is a Safe Haven infant. Connections for the child are most easily identified at the beginning of a case. However, if a FC case worker receives a case in which a permanent connection is not established or potential connections have not been identified, the FC case worker shall begin the process of seeking to identify all individuals related to or important to the child. All information related to these individuals shall be reviewed at the first and all succeeding case planning meetings to assess potential **connections** as a resource/support to the child and/or family. Per Act 350 of the 2021 legislative session, DCFS must conduct diligent search efforts for relatives and those with a significant relationship to a child within the first 30 days of a child entering care, and ongoing thereafter. DCFS must submit documentation of these efforts **to the court**, through submitting the Family Connections Form, at least ten days prior to the Disposition Hearing and each subsequent hearing


B. SEARCH AND DISCOVERY

The Connections for Permanency process begins with diligently searching for the names and contact information of all individuals who are or have been important to the child through interviews/contact with the parents, child, neighbors, school personnel, pastor, etc. Next, any identified individuals must be contacted in writing to explore their interest in establishing or maintaining a connection with the child. There are several strategies for identifying and locating prospective permanent connections.

1. Discovery Conversations

Conversations shall be held with the child and other known family resources in order to learn of individuals who are important to the child and who may be a permanent connection. Conversations should focus on identifying individuals who have been important to the child in the past and currently, through discussing family stories, pictures or any information to help the child have a positive sense of identity and connection to another person. **Though connections must be contacted in writing**, prospective connections may **also** be contacted in person, or via telephone, email or mail, whichever would produce the best exchange **of information.** ****** At minimal the case worker shall mail the Relative Notification letter to identified individuals within 5 days of identifying the person. The initial contact should explain who the case worker is and address the reason for the contact.

When an important individual is mentioned, the FC case worker should seek to learn as much about the individual and his/her relationship with the child as possible. The case worker should also make an effort to obtain the individual's specific whereabouts and contact information. If the individual's contact information is unknown, the case worker should utilize the CLEAR Search to determine the person's whereabouts.

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When contact is made with a prospective connection who is interested in contact with the child, the case worker shall obtain as much information as possible from the individual about his/her (past and/or current) relationship with the child and the child's parents. The case worker shall consult with his/her supervisor, *** please see necessary steps in Section C. 2. of this policy,** prior to arranging for a child to meet the prospective permanent connections. Safety will always be the priority when assessing permanent connections.

Valuable information may be obtained by engaging in conversations with:


- Previous case workers
- Case workers for other siblings **or** relatives
- Currently known family members
- **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)**
- Previous foster caregivers
- Previous neighbors
- Previous school officials/teachers
- Pastor at family church

Documentation, including any contact information (address, phone number, email address, etc.) and efforts to identify, notify and assess shall be documented on the child's Family Connection Form **(filed in the record)** and in the case **documentation** notes in **FATS. ****

2. Mining the File

"Mining the File" is the process of searching through all case records on the family to locate information which will identify the names and/or contact information about family members, friends, and other individuals who are important to the child. The FC case worker searches through records, paying attention to details noted in documents, including:

- Case documentation/narrative
- CW Form 10
- Assessments of Family Functioning
- Birth Certificates
- Court Reports
- Previous Case Plans
- Lifebooks
- Obituaries
- Previous educational and medical records (emergency contacts and responsible parties)
- Current school records
- Prison, jail or other correctional facilities where parents or relatives are known to have spent time *******
- Correspondence

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Names and contact information obtained during “Mining the File”, along with the results of any contacts made to the individual shall be documented in the child’s current case record. The dates of contacts with these individuals and the results of each contact shall be documented in the case notes and on the child’s Family Connection form under diligent efforts.

When the FC and SP case worker are in different regions, either case manager may make contact with a prospective permanent connection, while keeping each other informed of efforts at mining the file, contacts made, and outcomes. The case workers shall each be responsible for documenting their individual efforts in the online case documentation system. The FC worker shall also document efforts on the Family Connection Form.

3. Database Searches

If a potential connection with no known contact information is identified for a child, the FC case worker must make an active effort to locate and/or obtain the individual’s contact information to determine their interest in the child. Free discovery tools include:

www.facebook.com	www.infospace.com
www.virtualgumshoe.com	www.prisonlocator.com
www.vinelink.com	www.redcross.org
www.zabasearch.com	www.google.com
www.whitepages.com	http://obits.eons.com (obituaries)
www.people.yahoo.com	


* When unable to locate connections through these resources the Consolidated Lead Evaluation and Reporting (CLEAR) ** search process shall also be utilized. Refer to [1-1140](#), Consolidated Lead Evaluation and Reporting (CLEAR). Verified contact information should be updated and maintained in the child’s case record.

Another resource for collecting information related to relatives who may be a placement resource for the child is the Federal Parent Locator system through DCFS Child Support Enforcement (CSE). *** * A case worker may access [this system](#) by submitting the CW [Form 200](#), Request for Federal and State Parent Locator Service, to the Social Services Analyst, in accordance with federal public laws 110-351 and 112-34. Please refer to [6-305 Guidelines for Care Setting Decision Making for Children Under Age Six](#), for additional information on identifying and assessing relative and kin.

C. POST-DISCOVERY ** ***

1. Post Discovery Conversation

Prior to arranging a meeting between the child and a potential permanent connection, the case worker must have a conversation with the child about individuals identified during the

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“Discovery” process, while being careful not to raise expectations of the child. Conversations should center on the child’s view of their relationship with the individual as well as the child’s feelings about possible contact with the individuals identified.

2. Status Staffing

Once individuals are identified and the child’s feelings explored, the case worker shall discuss the status of the search process with the supervisor along with any identified problems or safety considerations in pursuing a relationship for the child with any of the individuals. The FC case worker and his/her supervisor must staff the case prior to arranging an initial contact between the child and an identified prospective permanent connection. Documentation of the Status Staffing must be indicated on a CW [Foster Care Case Staffing Form](#) and maintained in the child’s case record.

Permanent connections for a child shall continue to be a part of the discussion and planning at every quarterly case staffing, permanency staffing, and case planning meeting throughout the life of the case.

3. Contact with the Connection


The FC case worker shall contact the potential connection to explain the Connections for Permanency mission and desired outcomes for a child. Discussion should then focus on:

- The ability of the potential connection to make a long-term commitment to the child.
- * The type and manner of contact the potential connection desires with the child.
- The ** expectations and parameters of contact between the child and the individual.
- Not making promises to the child which may be unrealistic. ***
- The child’s expectations of the connection.

Additionally, the case worker shall also discuss with the potential connection all the options they have to participate in the care and placement of the child and any options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notification. The case worker shall stress if the relative or significant individual fails to respond or show interest in caring for the child, a judge may excuse DCFS for considering that individual in the future.

After the discussion, decisions are made regarding plans for the child to contact and/or visit the proposed connection.

If the proposed connection will be the caregiver for the child during overnight or extended, unsupervised contacts, the FC case worker shall assess the safety of the individual, * and follow steps as outlined in [6-921](#), Mentors, Volunteers, and Visiting Resources, prior to any unsupervised contacts. **

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Documentation of all discussions and decisions are entered into case notes in the child's case record.

The case worker must advise the individual against making promises to the child which may be unrealistic. The case manager must also prepare the child by discussing expectations of contact to establish or reestablish a relationship with the individual and no promises can be made regarding the future of the relationship or additional contacts/visits.

4. The Initial Meeting

Initial meetings should be brief, supervised, occur in a natural setting, and allow the child to feel comfortable. Initial meetings are opportunities to create memories and reestablish relationships. The FC case worker should take pictures during the meeting of the child and his/her permanent connection. The case worker should advise the child's caretaker to monitor behaviors of the child after the visit. The case worker shall also discuss with the child's foster caregiver the potential for normal, reactive behaviors from the child both before and after the contact/visit.

5. Developing the Relationships

Contacts are arranged as frequently as possible to build and maintain the relationship. In the process of developing the relationship, it may be beneficial to develop a "permanency pact" * using the [Permanency Pact Guide and Agreement](#), CW Form [Permanency Pact](#), which creates a formal relationship between the child and the supportive connection. It is the responsibility of the FC or EFC case worker to ensure all youth ages 14 to 21 have at least one signed permanency pact. Additional permanency pacts are encouraged when the youth has more than one permanent connection.

III. FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS

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

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

Form 10 DCFS Investigation Report

[Form 200](#) / [Instructions](#) Request for Federal and State Parent Locator Service

Foster Care Case Staffing [Form](#) / [Instructions](#)

[Permanency Pact Form](#)

IV. REFERENCES

P.L. 110-351, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

P.L. 112-34, Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011

[1-1140 Consolidated Lead Evaluation and Reporting \(CLEAR\)](#)

[6-305 Guidelines for Care Setting Decision Making for Children Under Age Six](#) **