Achieving timely permanency through concurrent planning for children and youth remains a core process for the public child welfare system.

Concurrent planning is an approach that seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanent family placements for children and youth in foster care and focuses on permanency planning beginning when the child enters care. It holds the concept and value that each child deserves to be placed into a permanent family and not to linger in foster care, which is designed to be temporary.

Concurrent planning requires that social workers focus on the needs of the child for permanency while simultaneously working with birth families towards reunification. Should reunification not occur, the planning for the child’s move to another permanent family is already well underway and has been discussed thoroughly already rather than having such discussions and planning after the child has already been in care for a year or more. This requires an understanding on the part of the social worker, their supervisor, the foster care/adoptive parents, and a way to communicate that information to relatives/kin as well as the child.

Systems, training, and infrastructure to support such planning must be in place and involves the entire spectrum of the caseworkers, not just those in the adoption program near the end of the process.

The concept of concurrent planning, though not the label, was formulated in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Irmgard Heymann and her colleagues in Chicago (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption, 2008). The practical applications of concurrent planning were first carried out in small, private agencies and later grew into practices in larger public child welfare agencies. Permanency case planning practice has continued to evolve since then.

In 1997, concurrent planning received federal endorsement under the Adoption and Safe Families Act. In addition to initiating a number of other changes to child welfare processes, ASFA required that agencies provide reasonable efforts to find permanent homes for children should reunification fail, and clarified that these efforts may be made concurrently with efforts to reunify. (D’Andrade, Frame, & Berrick, 2006).

Concurrent planning is the process by which a social worker plans for a child in foster care to reunite with his or her family (often referred to as “Plan A”), while simultaneously considering and preparing to implement an alternate, permanency plan such as adoption (often referred to as “Plan B”) (Gerstenzang & Freundlich, 2006).

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning formulated nine core concurrent planning components used to train foster care workers nationally. These components also are used in the Adoption Competency Curriculum training of adoption workers, developed by the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption.

These nine components represent the foundational practice knowledge in preparing and executing concurrent planning within agencies. They are:

1. success redefined
2. differential assessment and prognostic case review
3. full disclosure
4. crises and time limits as opportunities
5. motivating parents to change
6. frequent parent-child visitation
7. Plan A and Plan B: permanency planning resource families
8. written agreements, scrupulous documentation and timely case review
9. legal/social work collaboration

Most agencies use an assessment matrix to support the decision-making process and to determine the prognosis for placing children. The core elements of the matrix sustain effective State practices for placing children and youth in timely, permanent placements. Examples of State
Effective Concurrent Planning, compiled by the Division of Child and Family Services of the Iowa Department of Human Services. Excerpts from this list are below:

- Individualized and early assessment of the core conditions that led to out-of-home placement, the strengths of the family, and prognosis of the likelihood of reunification within 12–15 months.
- Early paternity determination.
- Early aggressive search for birth family resources for achieving permanency.
- Early identification and consideration of all permanency options.
- Frequent and constructive use of parent-child visitation as part of the reunification efforts.
- Full disclosure to the parents of problems, changes, possible consequences, time lines, and alternative permanency decision making.
- Initial placement with a relative or foster/adoptive family who can, if necessary, become the permanent home of the child.
- Effective and timely court hearings with firm timelines for permanency decision making during which documented steps are taken to achieve reunification and an alternative permanency option.
- Involvement of foster/adoptive and kinship caregivers in teaching and skill-building with birth parents.
- Case planning that includes early and targeted strategies for family change to improve parental capacity and move to safe case closure and permanency for the child.

**References**


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