

Permanency for Children

All children need a “parent,” a primary attachment figure who will care for them through life’s ups and downs, protect them, and guide them now and into adulthood. In our culture, typically the parents are a father and mother, but one or more other caring adults who are willing to commit unconditionally to the child can also meet the child’s need for permanence.

One of your primary goals is to advocate for a safe, permanent home as soon as possible, honoring the child’s culture and sense of time. While there is never a guarantee of permanence, having such intentions can ensure that you are working toward a plan that supports permanence.

At a very basic level, permanence is most probable when the *legal* parent is also the *emotional* parent as well as the *parenting figure present in the child’s life*.

There are two possible “permanent” resolutions:

1. Return to parent
2. Adoption by a relative or nonrelative

A third option, while not truly “permanent,” is sometimes considered an appropriate choice when the other two are not available to a child. It is the next best thing:

3. Placement and custody or guardianship with relatives

It is important to know that some Native Americans have a strong bias against adoption, and certain tribes do not approve of adoption. This creates a special situation when considering the permanent options for an Indian child. In some cases, placement with an Indian custodian can truly be considered permanent.

Concurrent Planning. Given these possible outcomes, your role is to encourage what is called “concurrent planning,” which means working on two plans at the same time from the very beginning of a case: one to return the child home and another to find an alternative permanent placement. Traditionally, case management in child welfare has consisted of efforts to reunite children with their parent(s), and if those efforts failed, a second plan would be pursued. This created a process that kept many children in foster care for too many years. Concurrent planning was developed as an alternative that moves a case more quickly through the system with better results. The concurrent planning approach is family-centered, with parents involved in decision making from the start. Throughout the case, parents are regularly given direct, culturally sensitive feedback about their progress. From the start of the case, while providing services to the parents, the caseworker explores kinship options, the applicability of the Indian Child Welfare Act, and possible foster/adoptive situations for the child.

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