

Steps of Concurrent Planning

- Individualized assessment and intensive, time limited work with families to address problems that necessitate out-of-home placement for children.
 - Within the first 30-90 days of the case, you should examine the family's strengths, as well as poor prognosis indicators, to evaluate the challenges the family might have toward reunification. If the issues or problems are significant, a concurrent service plan should be developed with the family.
- Full, honest, and documented, disclosure with birth parents concerning identified problems, changes that must be made, possible consequences, and time frames.
 - Educate families about the detrimental effects of out-of-home care on children and the urgency of reunification or an alternate permanent plan, such as legal guardianship or adoption.
 - Explain the shortened time frames for reunification and the consequences of not meeting the time frames. This knowledge may help motivate parents to make more effective use of services by actively working toward the changes necessary to regain custody. It will allow them to make informed decisions.
 - Be very clear about the importance of the family and the extended family's involvement in the case.
 - Use language, free of jargon, to communicate the principles of concurrent planning. It is extremely difficult, so you may want to rehearse or role-play in order to find your own words. For example:

“It is very important to understand that your child must have a permanent home within 15 months. Once your child is removed from your home, the clock starts. This clock is controlled by federal and state laws. Our first goal is for you and your child to be reunified. We have talked about the things that need to change for your child to be safe in your home. If you are unable to provide a safe and permanent home for your child within 15 months, by law, we will move forward with another plan for your child. This could be adoption or being placed permanently with a relative or other guardian.”

“In order for your child to have a permanent home within the 15-month time frame, we will develop what is called a concurrent plan. In this plan, you will work on two things at once. Number one is making your home a safe and stable place so your child can return, and second is helping prepare your child for another permanent home in case you are not successful with efforts to bring the child home.”

- Collaboration among parents, foster parents, service providers and those within the child welfare and legal systems in the early identification and consideration of all reasonable options for permanency.

Steps of Concurrent Planning (continued)

- Early on, inform families about the goal and process of concurrent planning.
 - Meet with the family (all interested extended family members, relatives, or close family support persons) and formulate a concurrent plan for permanency for the child.
 - Concurrent permanency planning encourages adults to work together cooperatively as they plan where the child will grow up.
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- Frequent and constructive use of parent-child visitation as part of reunification efforts. This implies visits that are carefully planned, based on the child's planning given its ability to bring together all those with connections to the family and to promote full and honest communication.

 - Within the first three months, conduct an immediate, diligent, and continuous search for possible non-custodial parents and other family members, tribal or community members, or customary kin and friends who are able to commit to participation in a permanent plan.

 - Determine if the child has Native American Indian tribe affiliation and make appropriate tribal contacts so the tribes can be involved in the permanency planning process. Even if the tribe is unable to formally intervene in the court proceedings, there are often cultural and family resources available to assist in the long-term permanency planning. The Tribal family or representatives may be able to participate by telephone conference if travel is prohibitive.

 - Place the child with a family who is willing and able to work cooperatively with the biological parents towards reunification, but is also willing to become the child's permanent family if needed. This could be a kin or a foster family, or one designated by the family that is able to complete a family profile and be approved as an adoptive or Permanent Legal Custodian family. A child needs to hear, "You're either going to go home or remain with us."

 - Make "reasonable efforts" to help the family reunify. For families eligible under the standards of the Indian Child Welfare Act, "active efforts," including culturally appropriate services, are required.
 - Provide immediately accessible, focused intensive services to families while working on the tasks of an alternate permanent plan.
 - Mediation is used in some instances to resolve disputes about permanency planning and child welfare issues. It may also prove beneficial in resolving adversarial family relationships, thereby offering the family additional supports or placement options.
 - Ensure the availability of opportunities and supports needed for meaningful visitation.

Steps of Concurrent Planning (continued)

- Clearly document the family's progress and hold frequent informal and formal reviews. The concurrent service plan should be included as part of the family's service plan. Monitoring the plan can assess the efficacy of services being provided in assisting the family to achieve the service plan goals.
- When reunification seems unlikely, use "options counseling" so the family can consider voluntary surrender, directed consent, kinship care, guardianship, adoption, or independent living.
- Continuously staff the concurrent case with your supervisor. Concurrent planning can be difficult, and it is helpful to get another perspective regarding the case progress.

