



CENTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
CHILD WELFARE PERMANENCY REFORMS

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Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning:

Specific Recruitment, Screening, Training and Support for Concurrent Placements

2 of 6

This series of brief publications, *Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning*, provides descriptions of select practices identified through preliminary analysis of data from the study: **Child Welfare Permanency Reforms**. This study examines the implementation of concurrent planning in 6 California counties through focus groups and interviews with a variety of stakeholders in concurrent planning cases (i.e., social workers, supervisors, and child welfare managers; attorneys and judges; and foster parents and birth parents). Promising Practices from several non-study counties and agencies with well-developed concurrent planning approaches have also been examined. The practice approach described below represents work conducted in one or more of the following county child welfare agencies: Contra Costa, Mendocino, Monterey, Placer, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Mateo, and Yolo counties, as well as the Foster Family Agency, Sierra Adoptions. Although none of these Promising Practices have been empirically examined in terms of their impact on child and family outcomes, each of those highlighted appears to reflect and support efforts to implement concurrent planning.

Promising Practice: *Specific recruitment, screening, training and support is provided to concurrent placement families (kin and non-kin), to assist in preparing for the emotional and practical challenges of concurrent planning.*

Although much concurrent planning practice occurs in the public child welfare setting, some public agencies have forged relationships with private Foster Family Agency (FFA) providers to develop concurrent planning services. One agency works with several California counties and offers a model for recruiting, training, selecting, and preparing caregivers for the tasks of concurrent planning. Some notable features of their work are:

- The service approach is built on the concurrent planning philosophy that adults, rather than children, should assume the emotional risk in foster care.
- Recruitment efforts for adoptive families, foster families, and “flexible families” (concurrent planning caregivers) are the same. The agency works out the caregiver’s ultimate status as their involvement progresses.
- Caregiving families are placed in the adoptive family, foster family, or “flexible family” pool over a period of approximately five months. During this time they all participate in a standard foster parent/adoptive parenting training program in which significant attention is paid to the subject of concurrent planning.
- Families are asked to complete a survey developed in-house at the agency, that is designed to help assess a family’s appropriateness for concurrent planning or other types of care. During the licensing and home-study processes, social workers continue to educate caregivers about the different types of care and continue to assess families for their appropriateness for concurrent care.
- When a placement is made, families are asked to sign a concurrent planning agreement form that helps to identify agency expectations, potentially challenging issues, confidentiality, etc.
- This FFA/county model mirrors the two-worker model utilized in some public child welfare agencies. In this setting, the public child welfare worker focuses primarily on family reunification, while the private agency worker primarily focuses on supporting the potentially permanent alternative home.

As an example of one approach to clarifying expectations for concurrent families, a modified version of the agency’s Family Agreement Form is included here and can be adapted to other counties’/agencies’ uses with permission from the agency (listed below).

Many interviewees, including child welfare workers, attorneys, and foster-adoptive parents indicated that screening, training, and clarity of expectations are crucial aspects of support for foster parents providing concurrent placement. Forms and training materials with information such as in the sample below may facilitate such clarity.

CONCURRENT PLANNING & FLEXIBLE FAMILY AGREEMENT

The concept of Concurrent Planning is a child-focused practice designed to:

- Minimize the number of placements a child experiences in foster care.
- Maximize the possibility that the child's foster parents are qualified and willing to be the child's adoptive family.

We have coined the term "Flexible Family" for this special category of family.

A Flexible Family:

- Supports a child's reunification efforts.
- Is willing to adopt if the child becomes free for adoption.
- Recognizes that reunification efforts may include multiple visitations with either or both birth parents, as well as visitation with other relatives (e.g., grandparents, siblings, etc.).
- May encounter emotional challenges as the child "moves through the system."
- May need additional support from their Social Worker.
- Knows that the placement is considered a "foster placement."
- Understands that the placement does not imply that adoption will occur, or even that the child will remain in the home of the Flexible Family during the course of reunification.

Your Social Worker will apprise you, the Flexible Family, of the child's situation prior to placement insofar as we have information. However, the very essence of a "flexible placement" means that there are many as yet undetermined variables and circumstances, and that we, most likely, will only have limited information at the time of placement. Many circumstances impact these placements, including but not limited to the following:

- The court disposition is unknown and unpredictable.
- County Social Workers cannot predict the outcome of a case.
- The birth parent moves to another county and the county agency moves the child.
- The birth parent enters alcohol/drug rehabilitation program and the child is "reunified" with the parent in the rehabilitation center.
- A relative (or "semi-relative") is found and the child is moved.
- A birth sibling or half-sibling is located and the child is moved; this may occur months after the initial placement with the Flexible Family.
- The worker for the child changes, and the new worker has a different philosophy and different plans.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information with regard to what it means to be a "Flexible Family," and that I have received a copy of this information.

Foster Parent #1

Date

Foster Parent #2

Date

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