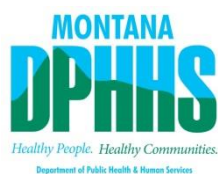


## Department of Public Health and Human Services – Procedure



<b>Category:</b>	<i>Child and Family Services Division</i>
<b>Procedure:</b>	<i>Concurrent Planning: Preserving Connections while defining Permanency Options (PRO)</i>
<b>Procedure Number</b>	

### 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidelines to Child Family Services Division (CFSD) staff on using a concurrent planning approach when a child has been removed and placed into substitute care. This includes conducting diligent searches for unidentified parents and relatives who may be options for achieving permanency for the child. This includes preserving relationships and connections for child in care, as well as permanency placement options.

CFSD will make reasonable efforts to finalize an alternative permanency plan concurrently with reasonable efforts to reunify the child and family by pursuing two different permanency goals simultaneously. Each case has a primary and an alternate permanency goal. Working on both outcomes at the same time allows the child to achieve positive permanency as quickly as possible.

CFSD recognizes the need to ensure that children who are removed from their homes due to child abuse spend the least amount of time in an out-of-home placement by simultaneously working on plans to reunify and other permanency options in the event reunification isn't possible. then one permanent family solution. CFSD also recognizes necessity of sibling being placed together when at all possible.

CFSD recognizes that families have the unique privilege of stewarding a child's past in a way that can promote healing and positive outcomes for their future. By committing to love and nurture a child forever, alternative permanency families should accept all that a child is, including their family history. Honoring that history will look different for each child, depending on case circumstances and the child's needs, but it must be carefully considered.

By CFSD using a concurrent planning approach from the time of first interaction with the family ensures that permanency can be achieved more quickly. This procedure is implemented effectively when children have the following outcomes:

- a. Permanency and stability in their living situation; and
- b. The opportunity to keep relationships with their family and other natural supports

### 2. SCOPE

This procedure begins at the point a child has been removed from the care of their parent and placed into an out of home placement and ends when the child is reunified with the parent from whom they were removed, or another permanency option has been achieved.

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### 3. RESPONSIBILITY

The Child Protection Specialist (CPS) is responsible for ensuring the expectations contained in this procedure are met for concurrent planning and diligent search.

The Child Protection Specialist Supervisor (CPSS) supervises the CPS and supports them in meeting the expectations of this procedure. If the CPS were to be unavailable to meet these expectations, the CPSS is responsible for meeting the expectations contained in this procedure.

The Resource Family Specialist (RFS) assigned to case for licensing purposes, will ensure they meet the expectations of licensing, guardianship, and adoptions steps outlined within this procedure.

The Family Engagement Meeting Coordinator (FEMC) and the Permanency Planning Specialist (PPS) are responsible in ensuring concurrent planning is discussed during meetings they are charged with facilitating for the purposes of identifying connections and placement options.

The RFS, FEMC and the PPS are resources that the CPS can utilize to help ensure the expectations contained in this procedure are met for concurrent planning and diligent search.

### 4. DEFINITIONS

[HYPERLINK TO MT DEFINITIONS](#)

### 5. PROCEDURE

- A. The CPS will begin the Diligent Search immediately upon the removal of a child if the child is not placed with non-custodial parent. The CPS will ensure the following tasks have been completed and documented in case notes:
- Asking the known parent, children involved and any known family members of their family, as well as for any known contact information of the Noncustodial Parent and members of their family. Using step “k” below to assist the parents in completing a family tree.
  - Contacting any known tribal affiliation.
  - Requesting a copy of birth certificate from Vital Statistics. In the case a birth certificate is not available, request a Montana Certificate of live birth. Then verify and clarify who is listed.

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- d. Obtaining a copy of the Divorce Decree if applicable from clerk of courts. If necessary, utilize the local County Attorney (CA) or Assistant Attorney General (AG) to assist in this matter.
- e. Obtaining a copy of the Death Certificate if the noncustodial parent is deceased from Vital Statistics.
- f. Checking the Close Relative Registry.
- g. Completing a case mine by looking through past reports and file documents, ultimately looking at past history/reports/Family Functioning Assessments.
- h. Contacting current daycares, schools, service providers and physicians for any contact list they have in their systems.
- i. Contacting the Social Security Office requesting any known contact information for non-custodial parents or related family members.
- j. Checking the Putative Father Registry.
- k. Completing a Connect Our Kids Search.
  - i. Social Media Search (Facebook, Google, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)
  - ii. PeopleSearch
  - iii. TruePeopleSearch
  - iv. www.findagrave.com
  - v. www.ancestry.com
  - vi. www.newspapers.com
  - vii. Family Tree included in Connect Our Kids
- l. Checking the Combined Health Care Information and Montana Eligibility System (CHIMES). Looking for what non-custodial parents.
- m. Accessing the Federal Parent Locator Service by contacting the Child Support Enforcement Division for proper procedure.
- n. Making telephone calls to last known phone numbers of identified relatives,
- o. When safe and appropriate to do so, visiting last known addresses of identified relatives in person.

- B. Within 10 days of the out of home placement of the child, the CPS will discuss with the parent(s) the concurrent planning process outlining surrounding connections and alternative placement options:
  - a. The CPS will inform the parent(s) of the following:
    - i. The State must exercise due diligence, which is outlined in section 1, to identify these relatives: all grandparents, all parents of a sibling of the child when the parent(s) has legal custody of the sibling, and other adult relatives of the child and parents (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents).

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- ii. The child in an out-of-home placement, must have two permanency plans running concurrently, and the initial goals must be established no later than 90 days from the date of removal.
  - 1. See the [Legal Intervention Post Adjudication Procedure hyperlink](#) outlining options for permanency options: reunification, guardianship, adoption, and long-term custody.
  - 2. The permanency option goal can be identified, and task assigned to the CPS worker to help support and achieve both goals concurrently.
  - 3. The goal is a plan, not specifically the individuals identified to be connections or placement.
- iii. If the parent disagrees with the permanency goal at any point of the case, the CPS must document the parent’s reasons for disagreeing. CPS can still select the permanency goal, even if a parent or other party disagrees.

C. Within 30 days after the removal of a child from the custody of the parent or parents of the child, the CPS shall exercise due diligence to identify the following maternal and paternal relatives for connection and placement options: non-custodial parent, all grandparents, all parents of a sibling of the child when the parent(s) has legal custody of the sibling, and other adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents). Diligent searches will include the identification of:

- a. Family, or significant people, with whom to preserve relationships.
- b. Family, or significant people, who may be willing to be concurrent placement.

D. Once the family members, or close significant persons in a child’s life, have been identified through the diligent search efforts the CPS will send a certified “CFS-170 Relative and Connection Notification Letter” to said members and significant people.

E. In the case, the non-custodial parent has been identified and is a placement option, the CPS will:

- a. Conduct a Child Protective Service check; and
- b. Check the Montana Correctional Offenders Network and Violent and Sexual Offender Registry. When the non-custodial parent resides out-of-state, check that states equivalent registry.

F. The CPS will submit a Family Engagement Meeting (FEM) referral to the FEM coordinator in their region, requesting a meeting to develop a concurrent plan inviting all known maternal and paternal identified relatives and significant people identified through the diligent search to be in attendance.

G. After a Concurrent Plan is developed in a Family engagement Meeting (FEM), the CPS will refer for a Permanency Plan Team (PPT) Meeting to be scheduled.

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- H. The PPT meeting will be used for the following reasons:
  - a. Develop task to support connections and preserve relationships.
  - b. Develop task to support concurrent placement options (reunification with parents, or other placement options).
  
- I. The PPT is made up of the following required members:
  - a. PPS
  - b. CPS
  - c. CPSS
  - d. RFS
  - e. FEMC
  - f. Tribal Social Service representative (when applicable).
  - g. Children when age appropriate and interested in attending, as defined in the Montana Acronyms and Definitions Document
  - h. Parents
  - i. CASA and/or GAL and/or Attorney for the Child
  - j. Other people may be included if their participation is agreed to by the required team members.
  
- J. The PPT will determine if the concurrent plan is appropriate for the child by considering the following for the family and kin members identified by considering the members ability to meet the child’s needs by understanding the following:
  - a. Importance and context of family connections, both maternal and paternal.
  - b. The Primary goal is to reunite the child with the person they were removed from
  - c. Assess the resource family’s willingness to support reunification with the person child was removed from and expect visits will be occurring with multiple members of the concurrent plan including maternal and paternal family, kin, siblings, and person the child was removed from.
  - d. Family’s ability and commitment’s to maintaining the child’s relationships with birth parents and other important family connections (as appropriate) if the child is adopted or has a guardianship established with one of the concurrent plan members.
  - e. When a family has been identified through the FEM as the concurrent plan alternative permanency option, they will also meet the requirements of being:
    - i. Approved or licensed by CFSD as a kin or foster family and meets the requirements to be approved by CFSD as an adoptive or guardianship family.
    - ii. Understand and agree that the child will be permanently placed with them only if reunification with the birth parent(s) is not possible and it is determined that it is in the best interest of the child to remain with the concurrent family.

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- f. ICWA placement preferences as applicable.
  
- K. The PPT will identify the concurrent plan as appropriate or not appropriate.
  
- L. If the PPT determines that the recommended Concurrent Plan is not appropriate, the Team will provide recommendations for the CPS and CPSS to follow to develop an appropriate Concurrent Plan. These tasks may include:
  - a. Specific Diligent Search Steps
  - b. Tools and Resources
  - c. Services specific to the child, parents, or placement.
  
- M. Non-relative resource family may become an alternative permanency option for the child if other relatives cannot be identified as a permanency option.
  - a. Case notes should show in detail the diligent search that has occurred through the life of the case, when the PPT is selecting for a non-relative resource family to be the concurrent alternative permanency option.
  - b. Just because family may not be a concurrent placement, it is imperative that diligent search continue to be made to engage relatives in being part of the concurrent plan for connection and relationship purposes.
  
- N. In the case that more than one family is interested in becoming a concurrent placement option for the child, the PPT will be scheduled to review the families submitted for consideration and the team will select the family that best meets the child's needs by considering the steps outlined in step 10. The Child Welfare Manager (CWM) will be included in PPT when the purpose is for selecting a concurrent placement from multiple options. In addition, the current resource parent will not be part of the PPT if they are wanting to be considered for the concurrent placement.
  
- O. Upon approval from the PPT, the CPS will initiate the concurrent plan by fully disclosing the Concurrent Plan to the parents, child, extended family members, resource family, county attorney, guardian ad litem, and the court.
  
- P. The PPS will support the CPS worker with task created in the PPT to ensure task are completed in a timely manner once developed.
  
- Q. The CPS and PPS will ensure the child's Concurrent Plan is assessed every six months from the date of the child's removal from the home through a PPT meeting.
  
- R. The CPS will continue to conduct key components of the diligent search steps throughout the life of the case to continue to find and make family connections. These Diligent Search steps a, b, c, j, k, m, and n, at a minimum will be used at the key decision points following:

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- a. When a child is to be placed, or has been placed, in out of home care;
- b. When the CPS is considering, or has placed, a child in a non-kinship placement;
- c. When it is likely the child’s placement is going to change or has been changed.
- d. When a concurrent plan is established;
- e. When reunification is no longer the primary goal
- f. Prior to any of the following events:
  - i. Youth Centered Meetings
  - ii. Family Engagement Meetings
  - iii. Permanency Planning Meetings
  - iv. Foster Care Review Committee
  - v. Extension of Temporary Legal Custody
  - vi. Permanency Hearing
  - vii. Termination of Parental Rights Hearing

S. In circumstances, where multiple diligent search attempts have been made by CFSD throughout the life of the case, and connections or alternative placement options have not been identified, the CPS will revisit the diligent search steps g, h, i, l, and o.

### **6. RELATED DOCUMENTATION**

- CFS-170 Relative Notification Letter

### **7. RELATED FEDERAL OR STATE GUIDANCE**

Mont. Code Ann. § 41-3-101  
Mont. Code Ann. § 41-3-301  
Mont. Code Ann. § 41-3-439  
Mont. Code Ann. § 41-7-102  
42 U.S.C. §§ 671(a)(29)  
42 U.S.C. §§ 671(a) (31)  
42 U.S.C. §§ 675(7)