



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

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## Concurrent Permanency Planning: Reducing time in foster care

Concurrent Permanency Planning is a practice focusing on children who enter foster care in which caseworkers vigorously pursue family reunification while also developing alternative permanency plans if safe reunification is not achievable within legal timelines. By planning concurrently, early on, rather than sequentially, temporary foster care placements can be shortened, and children and youth can thrive in safe, stable, permanent families. Permanency progress reviews are required for all children who have been in foster care for six months.

### Children need stability

Because all children need stable, loving, permanent families for their healthy growth and development, the number of children requiring out-of-home care and the number of months children spend in that care are important measures. In 2015, 13,612 children were in out-of-home care. In most cases, the uncertainty and unpredictability of lengthy foster care placements do not promote children's healthy growth and development.

### Concurrent Permanency Planning requires collaboration

Concurrent Permanency Planning requires that the child welfare agency, community resources and court system work together with children's birth parents, extended families, foster parents and children when appropriate from the beginning of a foster care placement.

In a Concurrent Permanency Plan, everyone involved works with birth parents toward reunification, while also securing a commitment from foster parents that they are willing to make a permanent commitment to children through adoption or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody if reunification with the birth parents is not possible. Together, everyone works toward:

- Achieving safety, timely permanency and well-being goals for children
- Reducing the number of moves and length of stay for children in foster care
- Minimizing the negative emotional impact of separation and loss on children
- Supporting continuity in children's family, culture, school and community relationships.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services contracts with four private child-placing agencies to provide concurrent permanency planning services to children under state guardianship or tribal jurisdiction. If requested by the county or tribal child welfare agency, these private agencies are available to provide services to children in foster care and to the families who care for them by:

- Training and educating prospective parents about concurrent permanency planning, reunification and adoption
- Completing and updating home studies
- Providing placement support for children in concurrent foster homes.

### Timely permanency requires best practices

[mn.gov/dhs](http://mn.gov/dhs)

Concurrent Permanency Planning involves using family engagement, relative searches, targeted case practice and legal strategies to achieve timely permanency. Practices used in Minnesota counties include:

- Encouraging frequent parent-child visits from the moment children are placed in foster care
- Providing intensive services for birth parents, focusing on parental ability and willingness to make changes, and giving family reunification every chance to work within clear timelines
- Conducting a review of the factors that may expedite or delay timely reunification of children with their birth parents
- Informing birth parents early on about the importance of their involvement and actions in planning for the return of their children, and disclosure about the legal consequences if they do not prepare for children to return to their care in a safe, timely way
- Identifying absent birth parents and extended family members early on, and involving them in case planning and visitation with children
- Encouraging all family members and foster parents to work as collaborators, not adversaries, as they develop and implement a timely permanency plan
- Convening Family Group Decision Making meetings, which bring family members together, with the support of professionals and community resources, to plan for the safety, permanency and well-being of children
- Recruiting, training, and retraining relative and nonrelative foster families.

## **Children's Justice Initiative supports permanency planning**

The Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Supreme Court are partners in the statewide Children's Justice Initiative. This initiative has several important objectives that reinforce Concurrent Permanency Planning, including:

- Providing training and ongoing technical assistance regarding permanency laws and Concurrent Permanency Planning best practices
- Improving the process of juvenile foster care cases so courts are poised to make timely decisions about permanency
- Collecting and analyzing data related to timely permanency for children.

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