

Concurrent Planning for Timely Permanence

Concurrent planning is an approach that seeks to shorten a child's or youth's stay in foster care by identifying and working toward multiple permanent family solutions at once. While returning a child to his or her family of origin is the primary goal for a child in out-of-home care, concurrent planning involves the parallel pursuit of an alternative permanency goal (e.g., guardianship or adoption) that would best serve the child if reunification is not possible. Federal law supports concurrent planning by requiring child welfare agencies to make reasonable efforts to reunify families while also promoting timely, stable permanence for all children in out-of-home care.

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Concurrent planning involves engaging families and relatives early while developing a network of relatives, kin caregivers, or foster parents willing to work with families to serve as permanency and supportive resources for children when reunification is not possible. By considering all reasonable options for permanency as soon as a child enters foster care and pursuing those that best meet his or her needs, concurrent planning advances the child's best interests and achieves timely permanence.

This bulletin describes concurrent planning, outlines how it is practiced, and discusses how child welfare systems can support it. The bulletin also provides information on how to evaluate a family for reunification; how to prepare kinship, foster, and adoptive families for concurrent planning; and State and local examples of best practices related to concurrent planning and timely permanence. The end of this bulletin includes some key takeaways for professionals to keep in mind as they work to incorporate concurrent planning into everyday practice.

WHAT IS CONCURRENT PLANNING?

When a child enters out-of-home care, the primary goal of child welfare agencies is usually to reunite the child with his or her family. Concurrent planning is a type of permanency planning in which reunification services are provided to the family while working toward an alternative permanency plan for the child in case reunification is not possible. To be effective, concurrent planning requires considering multiple permanency options as soon as a child enters foster care

and pursuing those that best meet the child's needs. This approach supports the child's best interests and helps achieve timely permanence.

Concurrent planning emerged in the 1980s as a response to delays in achieving timely placements and permanency for children in foster care (Families Rising, n.d.). The goal of concurrent planning has remained to move children quickly toward a permanent home, reducing the amount of time spent in out-of-home care. Current State statutes differ in how they define concurrent planning and in how they guide its implementation. Some States require concurrent planning under certain circumstances—in accordance with diligent recruitment efforts, for example—or they require the State agency to establish a concurrent planning program. As of August 2021, approximately 41 States and the District of Columbia define or describe the basic concepts of concurrent planning in statute, regulation, or policy (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). For more information, see Information Gateway's [*Concurrent Planning for Timely Permanency for Children*](#) from its *State Statutes Series*.

Federal child welfare law directly supports the practice of concurrent planning through legislation requiring child welfare agencies to work toward family reunification and timely permanency for children and youth in foster care. Concurrent planning is how agencies meet both goals at once. It keeps reunification efforts strong while providing children with another path to permanency if they cannot safely return home within federally required timelines.

The following Federal laws provided the foundation for, strengthened, and expanded concurrent planning:

- The [Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 \(ICWA\)](#) governs the out-of-home placement of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and youth. The law establishes standards for the removal of AI/AN children from their families, establishes preference for out-of-home care with family and Tribal members, and more.
- The [Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 \(AACWA\)](#) emphasizes permanency planning and seeks to reduce time spent in out-of-home care. The law requires State agencies to make "reasonable efforts"¹ to prevent the removal of children from their homes and to reunify families while providing Federal funding for foster care and adoption assistance.
- The [Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 \(ASFA\)](#) mandates shortened timelines for achieving permanency for children in foster care and allows efforts toward family reunification and efforts to place a child for adoption or guardianship to occur concurrently.
- The [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008](#) allows States to offer financial assistance for relative guardianship and requires agencies to notify relatives within 30 days of a child entering foster care to inform them of their eligibility to become caregivers. By requiring identification and notice, the act seeks to involve relatives early and aims to keep families together.

- The [Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 \(FFPSA\)](#) promotes kinship care for children in foster care and emphasizes the importance of keeping children connected to their families. The FFPSA encourages States and Tribes to create greater flexibility in their standards and procedures for licensing kinship foster parents while allowing Federal title IV-E reimbursement for prevention services that support children, families, and relative caregivers before foster care involvement.

Since fiscal year (FY) 2000, the Children's Bureau has awarded several rounds of discretionary grants to promote concurrent planning efforts that stem from ASFA and the Fostering Connections Act, including activities that seek to do the following:

- Promote concurrent planning
- Improve early, meaningful engagement with children, youth, and families
- Facilitate concurrent planning through enhanced permanency planning meetings
- Involve the extended family network, aiding in early relative identification through family search and engagement to increase the likelihood of kinship care

Specific examples of this work are included in the State and Local Examples section later in this bulletin.

¹ "Reasonable efforts" refer to activities of State social services agencies that aim to provide the assistance and services needed to preserve and reunify families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). This implies that agencies provide services in a timely manner to achieve the case plan goal, and there are no unnecessary delays in services. A judge determines whether reasonable efforts have been made (Hudson, 2017).

CONCURRENT PLANNING IN PRACTICE

Through concurrent planning, two plans begin when a child enters foster care: a reunification plan with the family of origin and an alternative permanency plan if reunification is not possible.

CONCURRENT PLANNING GOALS

The goals of concurrent planning include the following:

- Expedite sustainable permanency through reunification or by kinship care, adoption, or guardianship when reunification is not possible
- Engage families and relatives early, including fathers and paternal relatives
- Maintain permanent connections for children, including by keeping siblings together
- Involve parents and family members in alternative permanency plans when reunification is not possible
- Place children with relatives or kin caregivers, when possible
- Communicate consistently with parents and family members regarding their children's need for permanence and the agency's concurrent planning policy

CONCURRENT PLANNING BENEFITS

Apart from reducing the amount of time a child spends in out-of-home care, the benefits of concurrent planning include the following (Missouri Department of Social Services, 2021):

- Quicker resolution and permanency for the child

- Meaningful engagement between the agency, parents, family members, foster parents, other caregivers, and the child regarding the plan for permanency and time limits
- Fewer placements for a child if reunification is not possible
- Involvement of family members in identifying potential kinship care options
- Ongoing relationship between the family of origin and the child's caregivers to support the child's well-being
- Trust building between the family of origin and foster parents or other caregivers

Reasonable efforts to finalize a concurrent goal should be made at the same time as efforts to preserve and reunify the child and family.

EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE EFFORTS

Reasonable efforts may include the following:

- Establishment of paternity
- Identification and notification of relatives in and out of State (also known as [family finding](#))
- Identification of AI/AN heritage and notification of the Tribe or Bureau of Indian Affairs office, if applicable
- Placement of children with relatives or kin caregivers, when possible
- Frequent discussions of permanency goals with the parents, child, relatives, and foster parents or other caregivers, confirming whether they would like to be a permanency option if reunification is not possible

ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES

Successful concurrent planning depends on clear goal setting and strong engagement with families whose children are in out-of-home care. Child welfare professionals should begin working toward permanency from the first contact with the child and family. Concurrent planning involves considering all permanency options as soon as a child enters foster care and moving forward with those that best meet the child's needs. This approach supports the child's best interests and promotes timely permanence.

Throughout this process, it is important for caseworkers to maintain meaningful engagement with all family members, including the child or youth, parents and caregivers, relatives, and others—through ongoing, consistent, clear, transparent, and honest communication. Because workers may be uncertain about what information can be shared with relatives, structured opportunities such as regular child and family team meetings can support appropriate information sharing. These meetings bring everyone together to discuss progress toward reunification and, as needed, alternative permanency options in a supportive setting. Engaging family members at the same time helps ensure that all participants receive consistent information, promotes a shared understanding of the child's permanency plan, and reduces concerns about sharing information outside the family's presence.

In recent years, the child welfare system has prioritized a kin-first approach, which reorients its engagement with families. Kin may include a child's immediate and extended family members, as well as close family friends (referred to as "fictive kin"). Some of the

principles and values reflected in the kin-first approach include the following:

- Children do best with family.
- Children need their families for safety and healing.
- Children need connections with their families, cultures, and communities.
- Families are experts on their own lives and should drive decision-making.
- Kinship foster families deserve the same support as non-kin foster families.

Child welfare agencies incorporate a kin-first approach into concurrent planning with policies and practices that impact families at several points along the child welfare continuum, including the following:

- Early identification and notification of kin, beginning at a child's first contact with the system
- Family-driven decision-making throughout all involvement with the child and family
- Building and embracing natural supports to help families stay safely together
- Ensuring a child's first placement is with kin when entry into foster care is necessary
- Conducting ongoing [family finding](#) and engagement for children in foster care who are not placed with relatives

To promote kinship care, the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recently adopted [a rule on licensing standards](#) permitting States to develop separate, more flexible licensing standards for kinship foster family homes. The Children's Bureau website features a map showing [States and Territories that have adopted separate licensing standards or approval standards](#) for relative or kinship family foster homes.

KEEPING SIBLINGS TOGETHER AND PROMOTING FAMILY TIME

Keeping siblings together in out-of-home care plays a crucial role in helping children achieve permanency, offering greater stability, fewer placement disruptions, and emotional benefits that strengthen children's sense of identity (AdoptUSKids, n.d.). Child welfare agencies can support frequent, regular interactions between the child(ren), birth parents, siblings, and other family members, also known as "family time," which helps maintain connections and hope.

Family time helps strengthen relationships and prepares families for reunification. Children and youth who have consistent, meaningful time with family [are more likely to reunite with them](#). Family time should never be treated as a reward, but as a necessary component of achieving stability for children. Typically, the child welfare agency will set the terms of the family's time together. Open communication between caseworkers, family members, and caregivers about progress and expectations can enhance outcomes. All parties involved should follow the prescribed plan for family time.

Additionally, it is important that child welfare agencies prioritize strategies that promote timely permanency to prevent children from staying in foster care too long and to preserve family, community, and cultural connections. Timely permanency is a core element of concurrent planning because it supports reunification efforts, advances alternative permanency goals, and promotes stability and emotional well-being for youth.

PERMANENCY PATHWAYS

In child welfare, legal permanency is a permanent, stable living situation, ideally one in which family connections are maintained. Permanency planning begins right away, when a child first comes to the attention of the child welfare system. It is [most often](#) achieved when a child is reunified with his or her family of origin. Still, it may also occur when another court-mandated permanency goal, such as guardianship or adoption, is obtained.

Although it is not a legal permanency goal, relational permanency is also essential to the well-being of children and youth. Relational permanency refers to the lasting, supportive connections young people form with caring adults and peers that continue beyond their time in foster care. Child welfare professionals can support relational permanency by honoring, strengthening, and nurturing young people's relationships with their families of origin, friends, and communities. This support can include facilitating shared experiences, such as birthday parties and celebrations, family outings or trips, cooking together, or other events that help reinforce ongoing connections and a sense of belonging. For more information, visit Information Gateway's [Relational Permanency webpage](#).

The following permanency options exist for youth in out-of-home care:

Reunification

Reunification is the process of returning care and custody of a child to his or her family of origin after foster care involvement. Family reunification is the primary permanency goal for most children and youth in care. To support reunification, courts typically require parents to complete their case plan,

participate in services, and demonstrate that the home is safe. Reunification is considered timely when it occurs within 12 months of a child entering out-of-home care and is successful when the family remains safely together without the child reentering care. Under [ASFA](#), States must make reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families. These efforts may include connecting families with services, conducting home visits, and engaging parents and youth in case planning. Relational permanency is a critical component of reunification because strong, supportive relationships help children maintain emotional security and trust while families work toward safely reunifying. By strengthening connections between children, parents, siblings, and extended family, child welfare professionals can support stability, promote healing, and increase the likelihood of successful and sustained reunification. Learn more by visiting Information Gateway's [Reunifying Families webpage](#).

Kinship Guardianship

Legal guardianship is a court-established relationship in which a responsible adult assumes many of the rights and responsibilities of a parent. Kinship guardians are relatives or close family friends identified by parents or appointed when parents cannot safely care for their child. Courts may also appoint a kinship guardian for a child in foster care when the caregiver has been providing ongoing care, and reunification or adoption is not possible. Kinship guardianship provides a permanent, self-sustaining caregiving arrangement without requiring the termination of parental rights. Kinship

guardianship offers a stable, permanent home while helping to maintain legal connections to the child's family. By supporting relational permanency through connections with parents, siblings, and extended family, kinship guardianship helps children maintain a sense of identity and belonging, which contributes to their emotional well-being. For more information on kinship guardianship, read Information Gateway's [Kinship Guardianship as a Permanency Option](#).

Adoption

Adoption is a legal process that transfers parental responsibility from a child's family of origin to his or her adoptive parents. Unlike foster care or guardianship, adoption is intended to be permanent, legally terminating the rights of the birth parents. Adoption provides an opportunity for children to achieve permanency in a stable, supportive family while ideally maintaining connections to their family of origin, culture, and community. Preserving connections can be achieved through open or kinship adoption and by offering adoptive families services and supports that help sustain important relationships. Even after adoption, honoring relational permanency with siblings, extended family, and other significant adults can help children adjust to their new family while preserving important ties to their history and culture. Learn more by visiting Information Gateway's [Adoption webpage](#).

HOW CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS CAN SUPPORT CONCURRENT PLANNING

Promoting positive outcomes for children and families involved with child welfare requires a comprehensive approach to building workforce capacity, supportive supervision and leadership, and a healthy organizational culture and climate. These elements work together to support the child welfare workforce and improve service delivery.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY

Maintaining a stable, skilled, and engaged child welfare workforce is essential to supporting the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children and families. Positive outcomes depend on the capacity and competence of child welfare professionals, yet agencies across the country continue to experience challenges in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified staff. Workforce instability can disrupt relationships, hinder meaningful family engagement, reduce continuity, and impede progress toward stable outcomes.

Building child welfare workforce capacity involves strengthening staff skills regularly and reducing turnover. Jurisdictions use a range of strategies to improve retention and better prepare staff, including mentoring and coaching, professional development, training, data-informed capacity planning, and enhanced supervision and staff recognition efforts. Community-based programs can also support a strong workforce by sharing responsibility for meeting the needs of children and families. Learn more by reading Information Gateway's [Workforce webpage](#).

SUPERVISION AND LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT

Supervisors play a critical role in supporting concurrent planning and promoting timely permanency for children and youth in foster care. Supervisors and managers help equip caseworkers with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to engage children and families effectively; assess safety, needs, strengths, and resources; make sound casework decisions; and develop and implement appropriate service plans. Effective management and supervision are essential for delivering high-quality services, reducing staff stress, and supporting workforce retention.

Supervisors' administrative, educational, and supportive responsibilities directly influence practice quality and positive outcomes for children and families. Leadership at all levels should demonstrate a strong commitment to concurrent planning and other permanency strategies. This includes fostering an agency-wide understanding that family connections are essential to children's sense of identity, belonging, and [well-being](#). It is also important for child welfare agency supervisors to have support from agency leadership and to work within a shared organizational commitment to prioritizing family reunification. To learn more, read Information Gateway's [Supervising for Quality Child Welfare Practice](#).

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Characteristics related to a child welfare agency's [organizational culture and climate](#) can influence service delivery priorities, staff turnover and job satisfaction, how services are delivered, and the relationships between caseworkers and the children and families they serve (Elgin et al., 2025). Agencies with

healthy organizational cultures, where shared values, norms, and practice expectations are clearly communicated, are more likely to use evidence-based practices, experience lower staff turnover, and achieve successful outcomes for children and families.

When agencies demonstrate a commitment to family engagement and kin-first practices, including prioritizing placement with relatives whenever possible, they are better positioned to support effective concurrent planning. Agencies that engage families and relatives early and consistently have greater success in achieving timely permanency than agencies that rely primarily on nonrelative placements and pursue adoption only if reunification efforts are unsuccessful. A positive organizational climate, in which staff feel valued and supported, reinforces these practices by contributing to higher morale, increased job satisfaction, and stronger engagement with children, families, and kin.

CROSS-SYSTEM COLLABORATION

Many families involved with child welfare also experience co-occurring needs such as mental or behavioral health needs, domestic violence, or juvenile justice involvement. [Cross-system collaboration](#) and coordination across child welfare and other child- and family-serving systems (such as behavioral health, legal and judicial communities, education, early childhood programs, and community organizations) is essential for responding to families' complex and interconnected needs. Cross-system coordination helps agencies deliver more comprehensive, consistent, and effective supports for children and families.

THE ROLE OF THE COURTS

Strong collaboration between child welfare agencies and the courts is essential. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 entrusts family courts with oversight of permanency planning and decision-making for children in foster care. Additionally, ASFA sets time limits and establishes juvenile and family court judges as the gatekeepers of foster care cases. Judges play an important role in introducing the subject of concurrent planning at the first court hearing, making sure that the concurrent permanency plan is clearly identified, and disclosing ASFA timeframes and expectations to all involved parties (American Bar Association, 2010).

Concurrent planning begins as soon as the court and child welfare agency become involved with the family. To achieve timely decision-making and permanency, it is important that services be provided to the child and family as soon as possible and that frequent and comprehensive court reviews occur throughout the case (Gueller et al., 2020).

At each hearing, the judge should inquire about the status of reasonable efforts to achieve reunification, monitor progress toward the primary permanency goal, and assess progress toward pursuing the concurrent permanency plan. All parties involved, including children and parents, should feel encouraged to participate meaningfully in court processes. Children and families are entitled to [high-quality legal representation](#) by attorneys and guardians ad litem, and (when developmentally and age appropriate) judges must ensure the child's wishes are presented to and considered by

the court. A [court-appointed special advocate](#) (CASA) can also advocate for the best interests of children and speak up for a child's interests in court. A CASA can provide trusted support to children and help guide decisions about out-of-home care and overall well-being.

In some cases, courts are not able to meet these demands, and the resulting delays in legal proceedings can slow permanency efforts. It is also common for cases of child abuse and neglect to have related cases pending in other courts or before other judges, further slowing the permanency process. It is best when the same judge oversees all cases involving the care and custody of a child. Judges should strive for open communication, collaboration, and cooperation among all courts handling cases involving the same family (Gueller et al., 2020).

The following resources, prepared by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, may help judges, attorneys, and other court and child welfare professionals achieve timely permanence for children in the child welfare system:

- [Judges' Action Alert: Judges' Roles in Promoting Youth-Centered Legal Permanency](#)
- [Judicial Tip Sheet on Kinship Care](#)
- [Key Principles for Permanency Planning for Children](#)
- [Questions Every Judge and Lawyer Should Ask About Infants and Toddlers in the Child Welfare System Bench Card](#)
- [Youth Engagement in Court Bench Cards](#)

Families involved with the child welfare system can refer to the Information Gateway

publication, [Understanding Child Welfare and the Courts](#), for additional information about the court system, including how to prepare for court hearings and frequently asked questions about court proceedings.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEWS

The [Child and Family Services Reviews](#) (CFSRs) are an important continuous quality improvement tool that enables the Children's Bureau, States, and Territories to understand the challenges within their systems better. This process allows jurisdictions to determine what is happening to children and families receiving child welfare services and to assist in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being.

To help children achieve timely permanency, the CFSR assesses how well agencies and the legal and judicial communities work together so that appropriate permanency goals are set and approved in a timely manner, children's placement stability is supported, ASFA requirements are followed, and reasonable efforts are made and monitored to achieve timely permanency goals (JBS International, Inc., 2021).

A [report](#) for States and Territories reviewed across all 4 years of Round 3 of the CFSRs shows that around three-quarters (72 percent) of children in foster care had a single permanency goal, while about one quarter (28 percent) of children had concurrent permanency goals (Children's Bureau, 2020).

According to a [brief summarizing States' performance](#) in achieving timely permanency during Round 3 of the CFSRs, States had the

following strengths and challenges relating to permanency goals (Capacity Building Center for Courts, 2022):

What Some States Are Doing Well

- A child's needs and the family's circumstances were considered by the agency and the court when permanency goals were established and reviewed (e.g., children and families were involved in permanency planning meetings, permanency goals were reviewed during hearings).
- Permanency hearings were held in a timely manner and in coordination with other court hearings, such as juvenile probation hearings.
- ASFA requirements were followed (e.g., timeframes were monitored and exceptions to the termination of parental rights requirements were identified).

What Some States Need to Improve

- Reunification goals were in place too long, given the child's needs and the family's circumstances.
- Inappropriate permanency goals were set based on the child's age, family circumstances, and need for permanency.
- The agency delayed completing the paperwork to file the termination of parental rights.
- Agency and/or attorney turnover and high caseloads affected achieving permanency goals in a timely manner.
- Delays affected scheduling hearings and legal proceedings, or there were multiple court continuances.
- Lengthy appeals processes for contested termination of parental rights.

Read your [State's Round 3 final report](#) to determine how your jurisdiction is doing on concurrent planning.

ASSESSING REUNIFICATION AND PREPARING FAMILIES

Concurrent planning requires caseworkers to conduct assessments to evaluate a family for reunification, while also preparing relative, foster, and adoptive families for the possibility of both reunification and adoption or guardianship.

EVALUATING CIRCUMSTANCES FOR REUNIFICATION

Concurrent planning models may use an assessment checklist to assess family strengths while checking for family dynamics or circumstances that may make family reunification unlikely. Such an approach strives to balance a child's need for permanency with the recognition that parents have the capacity for change. Under ASFA, reasonable efforts for reunification are not required when the court has determined certain circumstances would make it unsafe for a child to return to the family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

PREPARING KINSHIP FOSTER FAMILIES

Kinship foster parents can help support concurrent planning by providing children with safety and stability while maintaining connections to their family of origin. By nurturing relationships between children and their birth parents, engaging in consistent communication, and participating in team permanency planning meetings, kin caregivers help support reunification efforts while remaining prepared for alternative permanency outcomes if reunification is not

possible. Because kinship foster parents must navigate the often-blurred line between being a family member and assuming responsibility for a relative's children, misunderstandings may arise between family members. As family roles and responsibilities shift, the relationship between the caregiver, the child, and the child's parents may evolve. Parents and kinship foster parents may experience a wide range of emotions during this transition, and it's natural for these feelings to surface as everyone adjusts. It is important for kinship foster parents to establish clear boundaries with birth parents so that children can remain in a safe and stable home, and birth parents will have a good understanding early on.

Transparency and ongoing communication are essential components of kinship care and effective concurrent planning. Regular family team meetings provide structured opportunities to discuss parental progress, clarify roles and expectations, and support shared decision-making regarding the child's permanency. These meetings promote collaboration among kinship foster parents, parents, and caseworkers, prioritize the child's best interests, and reinforce strength-based and trauma-informed practices that center the voices of family members.

Kinship foster parents should be prepared for all possible permanency outcomes, including reunification, guardianship, or adoption. In some cases, this may include the termination of parental rights, which shifts the child from temporary to permanent legal custody of the State with the goal of adoption by the kin caregiver. For kinship foster parents, this transition may involve complex emotions and significant changes in family relationships.

² Details regarding meetings with parents, family time, contact between families and children, and respite care will be set by the child welfare agency and may not be up to the caregiver's discretion.

Caseworkers can help connect caregivers with resources, including educational support, community caregiver support groups, grief and loss support, and others. State-specific kinship care resources are available on the [grandfamilies.org website](https://www.grandfamilies.org).

PREPARING FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Well-prepared foster and adoptive families help support successful concurrent planning. Foster families who agree to take part in concurrent planning should be ready for all possible permanency outcomes and be aware of their ability to manage their own feelings of anxiety, stress, and loss. They should also assess the support they may have from family and friends.

Tips for Prospective Foster and Adoptive Families

To prepare for becoming a caregiver, prospective foster and adoptive families may benefit from the following tips (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2025):²

- **Meet the birth parents right away.** When appropriate, foster caregivers should meet with members of the child's family as early as possible—even on the first day of placement—to share information and to help ease concerns.
- **“Icebreaker meetings” can be a first step** toward developing a relationship between birth parents and foster caregivers. These meetings introduce birth parents and foster caregivers and provides an opportunity for them to exchange information about the child, themselves, and their home.

- **Maintain connections with family members.** Regular check-ins—through calls, texts, emails, notebooks, children’s artwork or other school work, or photo sharing—help children feel connected, support emotional well-being, build trust with families of origin, and encourage reunification.
- **Support consistent family time.** Consistent family time helps birth parents strengthen their relationship with the child and prepare for reunification.
- **Understand parents’ emotions.** When parents lose custody of their children, they may experience grief, anger, shame, and guilt. By empathizing and acknowledging these feelings, you can better support the family and help the child thrive.
- **Plan for respite care.** Identify someone willing to provide respite care—even if not needed yet (Families Rising, n.d.). If using family or friends, they can attend training with foster parents.

To learn more about preparing foster and adoptive families for concurrent planning, visit Families Rising’s [Considering Concurrent Planning: Is It Right for You?](#)

Children who have been separated from their parents experience losses, including loss of family, sense of safety and stability, and sense of self (Creating a Family, 2023). Foster and adoptive parents are expected to bear the emotional burden of the children in their care and may need help comforting a child and managing related challenges.

Caregivers should remember that when they take a child into their home, they are acting as foster parents, and the primary goal is most

likely for that child to return to his or her family of origin (Families Rising, n.d.). Child welfare agencies seek families who are willing to serve as caregivers while living with the ambiguity of not knowing whether the child will return to the family of origin, be adopted, or achieve permanency through guardianship. The priority in a concurrent plan is to help the birth parents meet their requirements to reunify with their children.

Child welfare professionals can refer parents of children in foster care to [Reunification From Foster Care: A Guide for Parents](#) for a general overview of the reunification process. For additional information on reunification, including strategies to prevent reentry into foster care and promising practices implemented by States and localities, see Information Gateway’s [Reunifying Families webpage](#).

STATE AND LOCAL EXAMPLES

Evidence shows that concurrent planning can improve outcomes for children in out-of-home care. The Children’s Bureau has awarded several [discretionary grants](#) to promote concurrent planning, kinship care, and other strategies to enhance timely permanency. The following are examples of funded projects:

Family Safety Program, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians: The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Department of Public Health and Human Services was awarded a 5-year grant in 2021 to support the [Family Safety Program](#). The program used a family-centered approach to help kin caregivers and reunified families keep children safe and stable. Services included family group

decision-making, caregiver education, a caregiver resource website and phone application, and enhanced access to licensing for kin foster homes. The project aimed to create a sustainable, culturally integrated, and community-supported system that provided vulnerable families with strong support networks and accessible resources so that reunified families could remain safe and stable, and kin caregivers had what they needed to help families thrive.

Family Support Services, New Mexico:

In 2018, the New Mexico Judiciary Court was awarded a 5-year grant for the [Family Support Services Program](#). The program aimed to improve permanency outcomes for children and families by focusing on concurrent planning; achieving timely permanency; meaningful engagement with children, youth, and families; and conducting family assessments to provide timely and individualized services. As part of the grant, parents involved with child welfare had access to an interdisciplinary team designed to strengthen their engagement with caseworkers, foster parents, and services. Each team included an attorney, a social worker, and a peer mentor, all trained in the Family Support Services model.

Kansas Strong for Children & Families,

Kansas: A public-private-university collaborative that included the Kansas Department for Children and Families was awarded a grant in 2018 for the [Kansas Strong for Children & Families](#) initiative. The project aimed to improve permanency outcomes for children and families by preventing entries into foster care, increasing reunifications among children in foster care with a goal of reunification, and increasing adoptions

among children in foster care with a goal of adoption. To support these goals, the initiative created a skills-based coaching program for child welfare agency supervisors. The coaching program focused on strengthening agency practices in four priority areas: parent and youth engagement, risk and safety assessment, relative and kin connections, and concurrent planning.

Kinship Services, Washington: In partnership with the Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families and the University of Washington School of Social Work, the nonprofit organization [Amara](#) was awarded a 5-year grant in 2021 to implement a comprehensive program for kin caregiver preparation and support. The program promoted shared parenting between families of origin and kin caregivers to strengthen parent and child well-being and support timely permanence. Amara provided services to help kin caregivers meet immediate needs and connect them to long-term resources. The program also offered kinship services designed to help children, youth, and their families feel safe, supported, and connected throughout the reunification process.

Permanency From Day One, Washington:

The Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families was awarded a 5-year grant in 2018 for its [Permanency From Day One](#) initiative. The initiative aimed to help children in foster care achieve timely permanency by supporting caseworkers in concurrent planning and increasing early engagement with families. By strengthening engagement and enhancing permanency planning meetings, the project sought to promote greater child and family involvement and to develop individualized plans that better

met their needs. This approach also extended engagement to the broader family network to identify and involve relatives early, which helped increase kinship care. Additionally, the initiative aligned concurrent planning efforts with court improvement efforts in the State and supported adoption for children who were legally free. This multi-part strategy aimed to strengthen the system's ability to support the workforce, families, and children in achieving improved permanency outcomes.

Say Yes to FAMILY, Michigan: In 2021, Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, MI, was awarded a 5-year grant for the [Say Yes to FAMILY](#) (Family Always Matters In the Life of Youth) program. Program funds supported the implementation of 30 Days to Family, a search-and-placement model for kin caregivers in the State. The program aimed to support placement stability, maintain children's connections to their communities, strengthen shared parenting relationships between parents and foster or kin caregivers, and honor and sustain family and other important connections for children and youth in foster care. It also focused on addressing family trauma, supporting healing, and meeting children's and families' wellbeing needs. The project provided ongoing assistance to kin caregivers through a kinship support specialist and incorporated visit coaching into permanency plans.

CONCURRENT PLANNING TRAINING

Concurrent planning requires ongoing engagement with members of the family of origin, open communication, and planning toward timely permanency. Several training resources are available to help prepare child

welfare professionals to work collaboratively with children, families, and all systems involved in the concurrent planning process:

- The Spaulding Institute [concurrent planning training course](#) assists child welfare professionals in balancing efforts toward family reunification with ongoing work toward an alternative permanency plan. Trainings teach professionals how to manage risk and support birth families; the importance of recruiting, developing, and supporting foster and adoptive homes; how to perform culturally responsive assessments; and more.
- The Virginia Department of Social Services offers a 90-minute video, "[Concurrent Planning for Permanency](#)," on the core elements of concurrent planning. The presentation offers tips on promoting timely permanence for youth, improving communication with families, and more.

CALL TO ACTION FOR CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

In 2025, ACF launched the national initiative, "[A Home for Every Child](#)," which aims to increase the availability of safe foster homes for children and youth through diligent recruitment, prioritizing kinship care, and improving the retention of existing caregivers while reducing entries into foster care through prevention efforts and faster pathways to permanency. This Federal initiative aligns closely with concurrent planning in practice by focusing on prevention, kinship care, increasing foster home availability, and reducing system delays, which directly support the conditions needed for strong concurrent planning outcomes.

The following are some key takeaways for child welfare professionals to keep in mind when working on concurrent planning:

- **Treat concurrent planning as a federally supported, best-practice approach**, not an optional addition.
- **Consider all permanency options from day one**, as soon as a child enters foster care, and urgently pursue those that best meet the child's needs.
- **Begin meaningful engagement with children and family members from the first contact.** Communicate about permanency goals and timelines so families feel supported and understand expectations and options.
- **Utilize a kin-first approach** and conduct early and ongoing identification, notification, and engagement of relatives and fictive kin to preserve family, community, and cultural connections.
- **Encourage shared parenting practices**, early meetings with birth parents, and consistent family time to strengthen connections between families of origin and foster and kinship families and to support reunification.
- **Partner with courts, attorneys, CASAs, and other legal professionals** to ensure timely hearings, clear permanency goals, and adherence to timelines.
- **Help child welfare supervisors and leadership** to reinforce a culture that values reunification, a kin-first approach, and timely decision-making.
- **Invest in workforce capacity, training, and cross-system collaboration** so professionals are well-equipped to practice concurrent planning.

CONCLUSION

Concurrent planning helps expedite permanency by developing an alternative solution in parallel when returning a child to his or her family of origin might not be possible. Such an approach honors a child's attachments and best interests while also acknowledging that reunification is not always the safest option. When concurrent planning is well-supported and implemented effectively, it can provide an efficient and compassionate approach for helping birth parents and foster parents work together toward the best interests of the child and expedite permanency. By consistently implementing the principles in this bulletin, child welfare professionals can help every child achieve timely, stable, and meaningful permanency, whether through reunification or another permanent family solution.

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