

Full Disclosure Conversation Regarding Concurrent Planning

Purpose

The purpose of open communication regarding concurrent planning is to inform families about the concurrent planning process and the agency's commitment to permanency for children. This process respects the parents' rights to have information about their children and is consistent with the philosophy of family-centered practice.

The full disclosure conversation should occur fairly early on in working with the family. This provides the family with full information about the agency's policies and procedures on this matter. Having the conversation early also allows the worker to gain information about possible relative or kin placement options should the family disengage from the casework relationship.

Many agencies have specific policies and procedures regarding planning, including when to have this conversation with families and what must be discussed. You should learn about and follow your agency's policy and procedures.

Content to be included in the conversation

The conversation with the parent regarding concurrent planning should include the following:

- Inform the parent of the agency's commitment to permanency and safety for all children. Inform the parent that the uncertainty of long-term foster care is not good for children. Children need stable, secure, permanent homes in order to develop properly.
- Inform the parent you are committed to reunification and will only seek termination of parental rights if all efforts to reunify fail.
- Inform the parent of federal and State laws requiring child welfare agencies to provide permanent homes for children in a timely manner. State law requires that the agency file for termination of parental rights when the child has been in placement 15 of the last 22 months. The only exceptions are if the agency has not been able to provide the services needed by the family to resolve the problems that led to placement, or if it is not in the child's best interest to have parental rights terminated.
- Ask the parent to help you identify the most appropriate permanent home for his/her child(ren). This could be a relative or kin home. The parent should also be asked to identify any relative or kin homes that would be inappropriate for the child. For example, there could be a relative who has a history of maltreating other children.

- Inform the parent of the process you would use to find a permanent home. This would include asking relatives if they could provide a home for the child, conducting home studies of those relatives, etc. This would, of course, include a continued effort to locate and consider a non-custodial parent. Inform the parent that you will consider his/her recommendations about appropriate relative or kin placements for the child.

Strategies

One of the major challenges for workers is their own anxiety about conducting this conversation. This is a delicate subject to discuss and requires considerable finesse from the worker. The following ideas may help with this conversation:

- Many parents are probably already worried about whether their children will be removed permanently. Openly discussing it may be a relief.
- Most parents, whether or not they are involved with child protection, have thought about designating a guardian for their children (informally or through wills) in case something should happen to them. This is a right and a responsibility and is an integral part of concurrent planning.
- Remind parents that planning for a permanent home for the child demonstrates considerable love, concern and responsibility for the future well-being of the child.
- Remind parents that you will file for termination of parental rights only if they are not able to provide a safe home for the child.

Worker Safety

Carefully consider whether the parent may react violently to this conversation. Discuss this issue with your supervisor. If you believe that your safety may be compromised, make appropriate arrangements. For example, you may need to have this conversation at the office, with a supervisor or security guard available who can handle any problems that may occur.