

Child-centered transition planning

Placement – Research

Here are some general conclusions we can draw from the research to inform you in your advocacy:

- A study based on a sample from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well Being (NSCAW) found that **children’s behavior problems became worse with every change in placement.**
- A recent survey found that youth in **BRS placements averaged 6.5 placements prior to their first BRS placement.**
- Number of placements is less important than the number of **unplanned placement changes.**
- Children and youth who are **quickly stabilized in foster care are much more likely to be reunified, adopted or placed in guardianship** than children/youth who bounce from home to home.

Source: “Does Foster Care Do More harm than good” presentation by Dee Wilson at the 2018 Washington State Conference

Placement Stability

One of the biggest ways you can support a positive outcome for your child is to promote **placement stability**.

Placement stability means avoiding **unplanned moves** for the child that are not a part of the case plan.

It does not mean advocating for the child to remain in their current placement at all costs.

Part of your “investigatory” role can be to assess how stable the child’s current placement is...

...and to have some idea of where the child might go next (**think familiar!**)

Unplanned Moves

Abrupt, unplanned moves are one of the worst things we can do to kids in care.

It's super easy to MOVE a kid from one placement to the other. It's a little more difficult to TRANSITION the child from one home to another.

Transitioning means: transferring attachment, child focused, time based, sensitive.

Successful transition planning

There will undoubtedly be transitions from one placement to another throughout the life of the case. The following are some considerations that you can help all involved successfully navigate the change in placement.

(And remember...this doesn't mean you have to carry all the water...but you can help the team by ensuring that someone is covering each of the tasks.)

When a move is necessary...

- Can the child go back home?
- Are there any relatives who have stepped forward?
- Others familiar to the child?
- Can we avoid interim/foster care if it's not a good fit for the case plan?

When a move is necessary...

Minimize unnecessary changes to the child's routine and surroundings.

You're going to be the only person approaching this move from the kid's perspective...be an advocate!

BEFORE a move

As soon as the placement starts to look unstable or not meeting the needs of the child:

- Ask the SW to do another round of relative searches
- Ask the SW to convene an FTDM ASAP. Bring the adults together to do additional case planning as soon as possible (and before the SW develops his/her own plan)
- Start gathering/confirming additional details about the child. (Preference would be to do this at the FTDM...but sometimes that's not possible.)
- Figure out how long we'll have to make the transition work for the child

FTDMs

Who to make sure are included

Giving caregivers

(Potential) Receiving caregivers

Parents

Respite providers?

The child?

(SW, you, attorneys, etc.)

FTDMs

You might need to have (and request) more than one FTDM. It's okay!

The first might involve identifying where the child might be going, the second to introduce the new caregivers to the child's previous caregivers and the parents.

Successful transition planning

Before the Transition:

- Request an FTDM to create the written transition plan and timeline.
- Encourage positive contacts between caregivers.
- Develop a collaborative transition plan.
- Ask current caregivers to share child's medical needs, services, likes and dislikes, soothing strategies and routines with receiving caregivers.
- Ask all caregivers to look at transition books and photos with the child to assist with preparing for transition.
- Consider cultural connections and needs of child. Embed these components throughout the transition plan.
- Consider the experience of all caregivers and discuss appropriate additional supports.
- Ask the child what they want to know about where they're going – and follow up!
- Ask the child what they want the new caregiver to know about them.
 - (Older youth often feel judged when entering a new home...especially when the only info the new caregivers are getting are from the social workers file. Encourage the youth to share what they want the new caregivers to know about them.)

Successful transition planning

During the Transition:

- Introduce the child slowly to receiving caregivers with current caregivers present whenever possible.
- Send a soothing object (e.g., blanket, toy) and photo of current caregivers with the child to all visit with receiving caregivers.
- Schedule the first meetings in the child's home environment or "home turf" (e.g., familiar playground, library or playgroup, etc.). Current caregivers should be present for the entire visit, but they are not there to supervise. Help build the child's trust of receiving caregivers by encouraging all caregivers to interact with one another during subsequent visits.
- Encourage current caregivers (and entire family, when possible) to be involved in *literally* handing off the child to receiving caregivers when it is time for the child to officially move. Make sure that a concrete "good-bye" takes place between the child and current caregivers.
- Encourage new caregivers to use the transition book with photos with the child often to assist with coping with the transition.

Successful transition planning

After the Transition:

- Facilitate the scheduling of a minimum of 2 in-person, phone, and/or virtual post-placement contacts between previous caregivers and receiving caregivers for after the transition takes place.
 - The first visit is recommended to occur within the first 3-5 days of the move. The visit can occur in the receiving caregiver's home or out in the community.
 - The visit should *not* occur in the previous caregiver's home, as this is confusing for the child. These visits help decrease stress and will result in a better relationship with the receiving caregiver. Children process their grief better when allowed contact with previous caregivers.
- Instruct caregivers to continue using transition books, items, and photos often to support the child through this transition process.
- Encourage receiving caregivers to reach out to previous caregivers with questions about the child's care, and for possible respite care after the first months following the transition.

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

Does everyone agree that this transition should be done with the child in mind?

How much time do we have until this transition has to/should happen?

Have we considered (and looked for) additional family members instead of foster care? Have we done background checks?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

On what date should we make the actual move?

What does the child's therapist say about how to help the child transition to the new placement?

How are we introducing the new caregivers to the old ones?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

How, when and where and how often should we introduce the new caregivers to the child (*Should be on the child's "home turf" to start, gradually progressing to overnights at the new caregivers.*)

How can the child's parents be involved in assisting their child with the move?

How and when are we letting the child know about the move?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

What does the child want to know about we're they're going?

What does the child want the new caregivers to know about them?

What are we using to pack the child's belongings in?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

Who should help/be present when packing?

How will the current caregivers “send-off” the child?

What about school? Has a best interests determination been made about the child’s school?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

DAY OF THE MOVE

Who's taking the child to the new home?
(Should be old caregivers)

Who will be present during the hand-off?
(old and new caregivers, parents, SW? GAL?)

How will the old caregivers say goodbye?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

Who should help in unpacking?

How can we all support the child's transition and (perhaps) grief?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

Where will the first visit take place between the old caregiver and the new caregiver?
(should occur within 3-5 days of the move, and at the new caregivers location (not at the old place!))

What about subsequent post-placement visits/check-ins?

How can the new caregivers keep in contact with previous caregivers about questions they might have about the child?

FTDM Transition Planning Guide

Are the old caregivers willing to provide respite care after the first few months following the transition (but not too soon—that may confuse the child!)

Who needs to be notified/told about the move?

Placement Stability

Scenario #2

Now let's imagine we're a little further into the case. Unfortunately, Diane is unable to overcome her addiction, and both children have been with the same foster parents for over a year. They're ready and willing to adopt.

Right before the termination trial, a cousin steps forward who just found out that the kids have been in foster care and wants to be the placement and future family of this child.

How might have this situation been avoided?
Where do we go from here?