

# NWF Health Network Policy & Procedure

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**Policy Name:** Adoption Principles & Concurrent Case Planning  
**Policy Number:** 416  
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65C-16, F.A.C.  
CFOP 170-12  
Ch. 409  
Senate Bill 664  
DCF Adoptions Process Memorandum, January 26, 2024

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## Policy

It is the policy of Northwest Florida Health Network (NWFHN), to support adoption as the best option for children who cannot be reunited with parents or placed permanently with relatives/non-relatives who are able to provide permanent support and assume legal custody in accordance with 65C-16, F.A.C.

## Procedure

### A. General Information.

1. Adoption and Safe Family Act (ASFA) requires a permanency hearing and decision within twelve (12) months of a child's entry into out of home care.
2. ASFA also requires that states file a petition to terminate parental rights and concurrently identify, recruit, process, and approve a qualified adoptive family on behalf of any child, regardless of age, that has been in foster care for fifteen (15) of the most recent twenty-two (22) months.
3. "Concurrent planning" means establishing a permanency goal in a case plan that uses reasonable efforts to reunify the child with the parent, while at the same time establishing another goal that must be one of the following options:
  - (a) Adoption when a petition for termination of parental rights has been filed or will be filed;
  - (b) Permanent guardianship of a dependent child under s. 39.6221;
  - (c) Permanent placement with a fit and willing relative under s. 39.6231; or
  - (d) Placement in another planned permanent living arrangement under s. 39.6241.
4. Factors for establishing a concurrent goal include the history of child welfare involvement, severity of any mental health diagnosis, severity of substance abuse/misuse, pattern of violence, significant criminal and/or incarceration history, severity of abuse or neglect on the child, level of parental engagement with the child and quality of parent's support system.
5. When establishing a concurrent goal, all permanency options, including expectations, available supports and required timelines must be shared.
6. When a goal other than reunification is considered, the parents must be provided information about alternative permanency options.

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7. Every case involving a child in an out-of-home placement shall be evaluated to determine if concurrent case planning is appropriate. Every case involving a child in an out-of-home placement shall be evaluated to determine if concurrent case planning is appropriate.
8. Prior to approving case plan modifications, supervisors should determine whether there is a genuine concurrent plan that is being actively pursued and sustained in the event behavior change is not likely in a timely way.
9. The appropriateness of concurrent goals shall be evaluated at each permanency staffing.
10. When recommending a concurrent goal at a permanency hearing, the new case plan reflecting the concurrent tasks should be filed before the permanency hearing. If the case plan is not filed before the hearing and the concurrent goal is approved by the court, the new case plan must be filed no later than 10 calendar days after the hearing.
11. Birth Verification of Children.
  - (a) A copy of a birth certificate or birth verification shall be obtained for each child under court ordered in-home supervision within 15 days after the case transfer conference.
  - (b) A copy of a birth certificate or birth verification shall be obtained for each child entering out-of-home care within 15 days of initial placement.
  - (c) For children born out-of-state or out-of-country, verification of the child's birth shall be requested within 15 days from initial placement and documented in the case file. Refer to subsection 65C-30.007(12), F.A.C., regarding the necessary actions when it is determined that a child was born in another country and has not established legal alien status.
12. Within 30 days of the TPR Petition being filed, the child welfare professional will ensure that the child's birth records are requested and obtained within 90 days.
13. Within 30 days of the TPR Petition being filed, the child welfare professional will ensure that all health history records, school records, mental health records, hospitalization records and residential setting records are requested and obtained within 90 days.
14. Within 30 days of the TPR Petition being filed, the child welfare professional will ensure that the following documents are in the Child Welfare Information System:
  - a. Shelter Petition and Shelter Order
  - b. Dependency Petition and Dependency Order
  - c. Modification Petition and Modification Order if applicable
  - d. Original Predisposition Report (Ongoing Family Functioning Assessment)
  - e. Case Plans that address the child's needs
  - f. Protective investigations identifying the child as a victim
  - g. Guardian ad Litem report filed with the court concerning the child
  - h. Psychological Evaluations and Comprehensive Assessments
  - i. Names of providers who provided services to child while in foster care
15. The adoption packet given to prospective adoptive parents to initiate the adoption process shall only include the "Adoptive Home Application" form, CF-FSP 5071, July 2021, which is available online at <http://www.flrules.org/Gateway/reference.asp?No=Ref-13385>.

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## 16. Data Entry

- a. All decisions made regarding case closure or redirection, along with the rationale for the decisions reached, will be clearly documented in the case record.
- b. All decisions made regarding services and compliance will be clearly documented in the case record.
- c. Other contacts with clients, including telephone conversations and in person and virtual visits will be clearly documented in the case record.
- d. Documentation should be accomplished within 48 hours of the activity.
- e. Documentation should include:
  - i. Who was present
  - ii. Where the meeting/contact occurred
  - iii. Type of contact
  - iv. What was discussed
  - v. Date of meeting/contact (day, month and year)
- f. Documentation will be placed in the electronic case file and/or in the Child Welfare Information System. Case record is defined as a combination of Florida System of Record and the electronic file record in Perceptive Content.
- g. Pertaining to Supervisory Review, the following must be documented quarterly in each child's chronological notes utilizing the Review, Supervisor note type:
  - i. Date of Supervision and individuals present
  - ii. Topics discussed including progress and barriers to permanency as it relates to the Family Plan
  - iii. Tasks and who is responsible
  - iv. Follow-up on tasks from previous supervision.
  - v. The Case Manager Supervisor must note in the Child Welfare Information System that a "supervisory review" has occurred.
  - vi. Discussion of monitoring of oversight of safety plan management.
  - vii. Discussion surrounding what should be changed in order to meet conditions for return.
  - viii. Child needs.
  - ix. Evaluation and scaling of protective capacities.
- h. The Case Manager Supervisor shall review child welfare professional case notes to ensure timeliness of case note documentation.
- i. The Case Manager Supervisor will provide consultation prior to approving the following: safety plans, (within 5 business days of case transfer), critical junctures, progress updates, case plans and modification of case plans, judicial reviews, case closure and case preparation activities. The Supervisor will use Case Notes page in the Child Welfare Information System utilizing the Supervisor Consultation note type.

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- j. All case activities, including contacts and attempted contacts with a child, the child's parent or caregiver and collaterals must be entered in the Child Welfare Information System no later than 48 hours after the actual contact or other event.
  - k. The Supervisor shall ensure that documentation of a completed home study is within the statewide child welfare information system pursuant to 39.521, F.S., CFOP 170-1 Chapter 5 and 65C-28.012(2).
17. NWFHN will promote adoptions through their adoptions provider's recruitment activities, and training of adoptive parents.
- a. When the child does not have an identified family to adopt, NWFHN adoptions provider will use all available venues to recruit adoptive families.
  - b. These venues will be networking adoptions within the community, provider recruitment activities and Florida and national adoption registries.
18. NWFHN has oversight responsibility for the provision of case management services for adoption and adoption subsidies.
- a. NWFHN's adoptions provider will facilitate successful adoptive outcomes.
  - b. The Adoption Provider will be assigned as a secondary case manager and assume secondary case management responsibilities once the petition for Termination of Parental Right (TPR) order is filed with the courts.
  - c. When children have an identified family the adoption provider will meet and prepare the child and family for adoption, complete the child study, adoptive home study, determine lifelong connections and discuss with the family child's current and future needs. When there is not an identified family the adoption provider will meet with the child, complete the child study, conduct and update recruitment activities which include the child and respond to all inquiries within three (3) business days.
  - d. The adoption provider will receive primary responsibility when a TPR order is signed and filed on all cases in which there is an identified family. The adoption provider will continue to be assigned as secondary on cases where there is no identified family. Once a family is identified the adoption provider will assume primary case management. All legal paper work in both scenarios; identified family and no identified family are the responsibility of the adoption provider.
  - e. NWFHN assist in providing relative searches at the time of removal and provide the case manager assigned with the results.
  - f. It is not the practice of NWFHN to place children in at-risk placements. However, occasionally it may be in the child's best interest to be placed in a prospective adoptive applicant's home prior to completion of legal termination of parental rights. Examples of situations where an at-risk placement may be appropriate include:
    - i. The child's termination of parental rights is on appeal and all known relatives have been considered and have been found unavailable or not appropriate;
    - ii. The child has been voluntarily surrendered and termination of parental rights by the court is anticipated;
    - iii. The child must be moved from his or her current foster home placement, and the placement in a pre-adoptive home will result in one less move for the child.

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- g. Approved adoptive families entering into an at-risk placement must and understand that there is no guarantee that permanent commitment to the Department will occur. Families entering into an at-risk placement must indicate in writing that they understand and accept the risks involved. They will also need to be a relative or non-relative home study completed as a child can't be placed in a high risk placement with an adoptive home study.
- h. All at risk placements require a formal staffing which include, but are not limited to: case management, adoptions, NWFHN Permanency Specialist, NWFHN Placement and BBCBC Operations. The final approval for placement will be made by NWFHN.
- i. Adoption-related services provided by the Adoption provider include:
  - i. Recruitment and completing monthly recruitment plans;
  - ii. Review of each children without an identified monthly;
  - iii. Document all match staffing in FSFN;
  - iv. Assessment and completion of the Child Study;
  - v. Completion and updates as required of Adoptive Home Studies;
  - vi. Approved Adoptive Parent Training;
  - vii. Family Preparation;
  - viii. Preparation for the child;
  - ix. Placement and Supervision;
  - x. Post- adoption supports;
  - xi. Adoption Subsidy Services Preparation.

## B. Principles to Guide Adoption Services.

1. The child's interests are paramount.
2. Parental rights and responsibilities will be safeguarded.
3. The child for whom permanency with his/her family is not an option will be legally freed for adoption and placed with an adoptive family in a timely manner that recognizes his/her developmental needs.
4. The legal responsibility for the care and protection of the child should be clear at all times.
5. When considering adoption placement of a sibling group, consideration must include the fact that a sibling relationship is the longest lasting relationship for a child and placing siblings together, whenever possible, preserves the family unit.
6. The child should be placed in a family that is suitable and supportive of the child's well-being and healthy development as determined through an Adoption Home Study.
7. The purpose of adoption is to provide a secure, stable, and permanent family for the child.
8. The selection of a family for a particular child is based on identification of the strengths of the approved and prepared adoptive families and how their strengths best meet the child's needs. Factors to consider include:
  - a. The family's structure;
  - b. Interests;

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- c. Abilities;
  - d. Experiences with children; and
  - e. The family's capacity to understand and value the life experiences and cultural and racial heritage of the child.
  - f. The willingness to adopt siblings
9. Prior to presenting a child to an adoptive family with whom the adoptive home study was approved by another licensed Child Placing Agency the adoption provider will:
- a. Review the Adoptive Home Application and initial Adoptive Home Study to determine the needs of a child that best match the strengths of the family.
  - b. Make contact with the agency to discuss in detail the strengths of the family and the needs of the child.
  - c. Share with the agency a copy of the child study and provide additional documentation related to the needs of the child.
10. Full disclosure of child and child's family-related information prior to adoption is mandatory. As required by Ch. 63, F.S., and 65C-16, F.A.C., all documentation and information to fully disclose the history of each child to be adopted shall be collected, redacted (as necessary) and made available to the prospective adoptive parents prior to the child's placement with the prospective adoptive parents. Upon receipt of the information, the prospective adoptive parents shall complete and sign DCF Disclosure Form 5328.
- C. Eligibility for Adoption Services.
1. All special needs children whose parental rights are terminated are eligible for adoption.
  2. The adoption provider will accept and be assigned secondary responsibility to the case when a TPR petition is filed. The adoption provider will accept and be assigned primary upon verbal TPR.
- D. Exclusion. All children whose parental rights are terminated and have a permanency goal of adoption are adoptable.
1. If the goal of adoption is changed by the court, a staffing will be held to assess whether the adoption provider is the appropriate continuing service provider for the child.
  2. The best interests of the child and the most effective and timely means to achieve permanency are the primary relevant aspects of this assessment.
- E. Continuing Reviews of Adoption Activities. Reviews will occur every ninety (90) days in the form of permanency staffings, every sixty (60) days within the adoptions unit and through ongoing supervision of the Adoption Specialists. During these staffings, the following will be reviewed/assessed:
1. If adoption is determined to be inappropriate for a child, an alternative permanency plan will be developed and provide as much normalcy and permanency as possible.
  2. Options such as permanent guardianship of a dependent child, permanent guardianship to a fit and willing relative, or another plan leaving arrangement rather than adoption may be available and found to be in the child's best interest.
  3. The preparation for adoption shall proceed with participation, at the appropriate level, of the child, birth family, and adoptive family as defined in the Case Plan.

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4. Adoption home studies shall be consistent with Florida Administrative Code and Big Bend policies and procedures.
- F. Approval shall not be granted in any case in which:
1. A record check reveals a felony conviction for:
    - a. child abuse;
    - b. abandonment or neglect;
    - c. spousal abuse;
    - d. crime against children, including child pornography;
    - e. crime involving violence, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide but not including other physical assault or battery, if the Adoption Provider finds that a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the felony was committed at any time.
  2. A record check reveals a felony conviction for physical assault, battery, or a drug-related offense, if the Adoption Provider finds that a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the felony was committed within the past five (5) years.
- G. Requirements to be Completed Prior to Adoptive Placement.
1. Multi-Ethnic Placement Act requirements have been met while supporting each child in developing cultural, ethnic, religious, and racial identities.
  2. Each child who has been legally freed for adoption shall have all required data entered in FSFN no later than thirty (30) days after the TPR order has been filed with the court.
    - a. The required data in FSFN includes a photograph and narrative/web memo about the child if the child has no identified adoptive family.
    - b. Children who are web authorized and for whom there is no available family shall also be registered with existing regional and national adoption exchanges.
    - c. Children 5 and under web memo and photo must be updated every six (6) months. Children over the age of 5 web memo and photo must be updated annually.
    - d. A child may only be placed on hold if a TPR appeal has been filed or if there is a prospective adoptive family. The Adoption Specialist is responsible for reviewing the child's status and updating within sixty (60) days.
    - e. The agency will wait until thirty (30) days after the TPR has been signed to web-authorize a child for the statewide website.
    - f. Children without and identified family must be registered on the national website, AdoptUSKids and local recruitment resources after the child registered on the Florida Exchange.
    - g. If there is no appeal entered, the child will be "web-authorized" – which means that the general public can view the child's photo and web memo in order to express interest in the child.
  3. The child will receive a psychological and/or psychiatric health evaluation if there are known or suspected mental health issues and the evaluation must be obtained prior to adoptive placement.
  4. Prior to placement into an approved adoptive home, every child will be given a complete physical examination as required in 65-C16, F.A.C.

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5. The Adoption Placement Agreement also, known as the Memorandum of Agreement, with the adoptive family has been signed.
  6. Original copies are kept in the adoption provider's case file for the child, and copies are sent to the NWFHN Adoption Eligibility Specialist as well as provided to the family.
- H. Requirements for Post Placement Activities.
1. The placement plan shall include the child being placed in the home under supervision of the adoptions provider for a minimum of ninety (90) days before consents are sent to the private attorney.
  2. Also, the adoption case plan serves as the tasks that are expected of the adoptive parent, Adoption Specialist, and the child (if applicable) during supervision period.
  3. The adoptions provider also has an "On Call" system where an Adoptions Specialist is available every day during business hours to take inquiry calls.
  4. Occasionally the adoptions provider receives calls from families that have adopted previously. The adoptions provider assists them by referring them to services in the community, inviting them to the next adoption support group meeting etc. All request for Post Adoption Services must be entered into FSFN.
  5. Home visits shall be occurring every thirty (30) days in the home or more frequently as need determines.
  6. The child and family shall receive the services and supports defined in the Case Plan.
- I. Post Adoption Services.
1. The adoption provider shall respond to calls received from families who have adopted previously from the department in the state of Florida.
  2. The adoption provider shall coordinate and conduct adoptive parent support group meetings.
  3. The adoption provider of origin must make reasonable efforts to contact all adoptive families who adopted on after July 1, 2015, one (1) year after their adoption finalization and document contact(s) regardless of where they resided. The first contact attempt must be made within ten (10) business days after the one-year adoption anniversary date. All attempts [minimum of three (3)] must be completed within thirty (30) days for the one-year anniversary. The first contact attempt must be made by telephone. The documentation of a successful contact must be made within FSFN. Earlier contact will not count as the required one-year post adoption.
  4. The adoption provider shall assist adoptive parents with referrals for services, assessments that may require a home visit and assistance in accessing services within the community.
  5. The adoption provider of origin is responsible for payment of post adoption services.
  6. If an adoptive family who requests service resides out of the state of Florida, the adoptive provider will contact the state agency in which the family resides and notify them that the family is in need of post adoption support and services.
  7. All request for post adoption services must be documented on the Post Adoption Services Page in FSFN.
- J. Other Considerations. The adoptions provider's supervisor or designee will participate in permanency staffings to become aware of children for whom adoption is being considered as a goal in anticipation and consideration of an upcoming adoptive placement need.