

Participate in a Foster Care Review

Foster care review meetings are an important part of our work to support the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

The purpose of the process is to help reduce the length of time in care and to expedite permanency for children. To that end, we are shifting the focus of reviews from compliance on tasks to progress towards achieving desired outcomes.

Review Panel

A review panel will help lead the discussion and ensure that all key participants, including family members, are engaged and given a chance to participate and share their input. A review panel consists of a case reviewer from the independent foster care review unit, an administrator from a DCF office, and a volunteer from the local community.

The case reviewer from the foster care review unit is the chairperson of the review and will help organize and lead the discussion. Before the meeting starts it's important that the social worker lets the case reviewer know about any significant recent events or developments that may impact the meeting so the appropriate plans can be made.

The DCF administrator, sometimes called the second party, is a manager or supervisor from a local DCF office. The DCF administrator cannot have an assignment to the case being reviewed.

The volunteer case reviewer is someone from the community that is not employed by the department. Volunteers are trained by the foster care review unit.

All foster case review members participate in decision-making with equal authority during the review.

Review Discussion

During the foster care review, the participants will discuss the reason for the department's involvement with the family. The group will also review the family's action plan and discuss the family's progress in demonstrating the observable behavioral changes in the plan's area of focus. The primary social worker is expected to bring and summarize the action plans that have been in effect since the last foster care review. The worker is also responsible for providing a verbal summary of the family's contact with the department.

The department administrator and volunteer panel member are expected to prepare for their review by reading the family's action plan as well as the prior foster care review reports, if applicable.

Throughout the meeting, the panel will ask questions and consider information about the children and the parents or guardians. They will also ask about the department and substitute care providers.

The topics discussed will vary based on the circumstances of the case but typically include discussions pertaining to health and well-being, education, kinship and lifelong connections, visitation, service delivery, and more.

Progress towards achieving permanency will also be assessed. For each child that is in placement, the worker will be asked to propose a permanency plan and the projected date by which the permanency plan is to be achieved.

The panel will ask different questions and consider different information based on the age of the children being reviewed. For children 14 and over, the panels are required to review the youth readiness assessment tool as applicable. For youth who are turning 18, the panel considers the youth's request to receive services from the department beyond the age of 18.

The panel will also consider other information provided in advance of the review. This includes information provided at least 10 days in advance by people who are unable to join the meeting.

Review Determinations

Based on the review discussion, the review panel will make binding determinations. The determinations in the policy and i-FamilyNet have been updated to reflect existing practices and federal law and include determinations pertaining to child safety, placement, reasonable and prudent parent standards, normalcy, DCF actions, action plan participation and observable changes, progress towards permanency, and permanency plan.

Foster care reviews have always included an assessment of a child's safety for those in placement and at home. This has now become a formalized determination.

For each child in placement, the department will continue to assess whether the placement is necessary and appropriate. The determination will now be answered in two parts: is the placement necessary as of today and is the placement appropriate. If the panel determines that the placement is not appropriate, the panel will indicate why not.

For kids in placement, the reviewers will also continue to consider whether the substitute care provider, such as the foster parent or the congregate care provider, fulfilled their expectations.

For substitute care providers, the panel will make new determinations regarding the reasonable and prudent parent standard. The reasonable and prudent parenting standard allows placement resources to make careful and sensible parenting decisions that encourage a child's

emotional and developmental growth while still maintaining the health, safety, and best interests of the child.

Simply put, this allows placement resources greater flexibility and authority to ensure children in care have normal experiences that other children not in care would have. For example, if a child wishes to attend a sleepover at a friend's home, the foster parent, while carefully considering the child's health, safety, and best interest, can make this decision without obtaining prior approval from the child's social worker.

There is also a new determination that considers what DCF has done to ensure the provider offered access to normal childhood activities and experiences appropriate to their age and development. These experiences can include spending the night at a friend's house, volunteering in the community, having an after-school job, or playing sports. Access to normalcy activities and opportunities is especially important for empowering young people in care and improving mental health outcomes.

In addition to looking at family members, the review panel will determine whether DCF took the necessary steps to address the needs of the family.

One of the more significant changes to the foster care review determinations has to do with action plans. The action plan determinations have been updated to reflect the shift from task compliance to instead progress in achieving desired outcomes. For each parent or guardian, as well as the children who are 14 and over, the panel will determine whether or not the family member participated in the action plan. The panel will also determine whether each person demonstrated the desired behavioral changes. For family members, this separates out whether the person engaged in the plan's tasks, services, and supports from whether that person demonstrated the desired behavioral changes to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child.

The review panel will also continue to assess progress toward achieving permanency. As mentioned previously during the meeting, the social worker is expected to propose a permanency plan for each child in care.

Based on all available information from the review process, the FCR panel will determine the most appropriate permanency plan for a child and the projected date for achieving the permanency plan. Please note that consistent with current practice, the permanency plan for a child does not immediately change based on a foster care review determination. A permanency planning conference must be convened to change the permanency plan for a child.

In addition to the binding determinations, the review panel will solicit recommendations from all participants on what is needed to facilitate permanency planning. The binding

determinations and related recommendations provide guidance for the next period of action planning, decision-making, and casework – a period of up to six months.

Review Summary

Finally, at the conclusion of the review meeting, the case reviewer is responsible for summarizing the determinations and recommendations. This information, including each panelist's agreement or disagreement with each of the determinations will be documented in the electronic record and provided, in writing, to the appropriate recipients after the review.

Engaging the family in the process and having up to date information available from all parties supports the panel's ability to make determinations in the best interest of the children.

Follow-Up on a Foster Care Review

After the foster care review is held, the foster care review unit will document the review results. This includes the determinations for each child as well as recommendations for the family, foster parents, substitute care providers and/or the department. The results will be approved within 30 working days of the review.

The department will continue to mail a written report of the review results to applicable review participants, including parents and guardians, children 14 or older, and placement resources including foster and pre-adoptive parents.

The foster care review result report has been updated to reflect the shift in the focus of the review from compliance to progress and demonstrated change.

DCF staff and family's attorneys will receive the FCR results electronically rather than via mail. Children and parents' attorneys will receive a secure e-mail with a PDF attachment of the results.

Staff, including workers, should read and respond to the review determinations and recommendations, if applicable. This includes working with the family and children age 14 or older to update the action plan for the next six months. Workers should also work with the foster parents, providers, and others to make sure they understand the foster care review results and any next steps. As always, consult with your supervisor throughout the process.

FYI Memos and Alerts

If concerns have been identified regarding a child's safety, permanency, or well-being, the foster care review unit will continue to send FYI memos and/or alerts for follow-up. When and to whom FYI and alerts are sent varies based on the issue requiring follow-up. For example; on the day of the review, the foster care unit may send an FYI memo as an informational notice to an area program manager if there is a delay in achieving the child's permanency plan.

Alternatively, an alert may be sent to the area director if the review determined the need for an alternative permanency plan for the child or if there is a clinical issue regarding placement that needs immediate review.

FYIs

For each FYI, the foster care review unit will specify the issue that requires follow-up and the applicable barriers or needs and a narrative description.

The foster care review unit will also determine the recipient or recipients of the FYI memo based on the policy. In addition to area office staff and the regional counsel, the foster care review unit may send the FYI to other DCF staff, such as a nurse or someone from the ICPC unit, who will assist in resolving a concern.

All recipients of an FYI memo will see the FYI notification in the messages section of the i-FamilyNet home page. Staff will also receive a courtesy e-mail about the FYI. i-FamilyNet will show the date the FYI was sent, who sent it, and the subject. Like all i-FamilyNet notifications, click show details to read the full text of the message. You can also use the reply option to send a message back to the sender if needed. Be sure to reply to any FYI memo messages via i-FamilyNet and not to the courtesy e-mail so your reply gets to the right person and so there's a record of the reply in i-FamilyNet.

When you are done and no longer wish to see the FYI message, click the delete icon which will remove the message from your message list. A record of the FYIs that were sent will always be visible from the foster care review record and i-FamilyNet.

Alerts

In addition to FYI memos, the foster care review unit may send an alert to the area director and/or the regional counsel and their designee within 10 days of the review for situations requiring attention. This includes, but is not limited to, alerts for issues pertaining to placement, visitation, medical, 51A filings, permanency, legal status, license studies, interstate compacts, and more. If there is concern regarding imminent safety, the alert will be sent by the foster care review unit within 1 working day. See the policy for additional information on the types of alerts and FYIs.

For each alert that is sent, the alert recipient will get an i-FamilyNet work reminder. By policy, the recipient must respond within 30 days of receiving the alert. To respond, open the work reminder and read the alert information. When ready, on the response page, put in your response date and use the response comments to document the actions taken to address the issues identified.

The comments should also be used to describe what barriers, if any, prevent the resolution of the issue. Once complete, click save to indicate that you have completed documenting your response.

Permanency Planning Conferences

If the foster care review determines an alternative permanency plan for a child, an alert will be sent to the area director. The area office must conduct a permanency planning conference within 20 working days of receiving the alert.

At the conclusion of the permanency planning conference, if there is disagreement between the area office and the foster care review about the permanency plan, it must be referred to the Regional Director within 10 days of the permanency planning conference. The Regional Director determines the permanency plan for the child within 10 working days of the referral.

Appealing a Foster Care Review Determination

Families and identified review participants continue to have the right to appeal the determinations made at a foster care review. Parents, foster and pre-adoptive parents, children 14 and older, or children's attorneys may appeal a determination to change a child's permanency plan by requesting a fair hearing within 30 calendar days of receiving the written foster care review report. All other foster care review unit determinations can be appealed through the grievance process. Note that there is no appeal of foster care review unit recommendations.

Summary

Foster care review is an important process in permanency planning. It is imperative that all key participants are invited to reviews and are afforded an opportunity to participate. Engaging a family in the review process and having up-to-date and comprehensive information available from all parties supports the foster care review panel's ability to make good and accurate determinations in the best interest of children.

As the foster care review determinations and related recommendations provide guidance for the next period of action planning, decision-making, and casework, it is critical to review the outcomes and implement any changes needed.

Thank you very much for supporting the foster care review process and for all that you do every day to support the children and families we serve.