

Supervising for Permanent Connections





What are “permanent connections”

- Positive, reliable caring adults in the youth’s life who will stick by them while they are in care and who will continue to support them after they leave care, through their young adulthood and beyond

Who are “permanent connections”?

- People with whom the youth has some emotional attachment (birth family, extended family, kin, adoptive family, mentors, foster family, etc.)
- People with whom the youth would like to stay connected/re-establish contact
- People who the youth defines as family and/or supports



The meanings of permanency

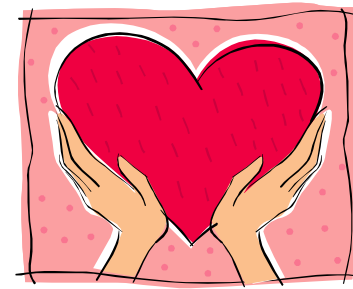
Legal

- Traditional view of permanency, a legally established relationship (adoption, guardianship, birth family)



Emotional/ Relational

- Permanency is more about emotional attachments between youth, caregivers, and other family and kin



The meanings of permanency

Cultural

- A continuous connection to family, tradition, race, ethnicity, culture, language and religion



Iowa's vision of youth permanency (draft)

Every child in Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems will have permanent relationships with one or more caring, capable and supportive adults.





From Casey Family Services:

Youth permanency involves:

- An enduring family (or family-like) relationship that provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well-being



Permanency is....

(according to youth in care)

“having the key to the house”

“a chance for someone to choose you
and for you to choose them”

“knowing where you are going to be
buried”

“having your picture on the wall in
someone’s house”

“having your side [of the church] full
when you get married”

Exercise: Build a Model for Achieving Permanency for Older Youth in Care






Other Important Elements of Permanency

- Opportunity to maintain contacts with siblings
- Involvement of the youth as the participant or leader in the process
 - California Permanency for Youth Project convening



Keep in mind

Most youth who age out of care reconnect with their families of origin, even if parental rights were terminated

- 
-
- Youth may need support in negotiating relationships with parents, setting boundaries, and dealing with disappointments as they re-establish relationships



Best practice planning for permanency:

- Meaningfully engages the significant adults in the youth's network
- Involves birth/former adoptive family members in planning and decision-making
- Honors the role of birth/former adoptive families in the youth's life, though they are unable to parent full-time



Steps for Achieving Permanency Using A Youth-Centered Team Approach*

1. Identify significant adults from within youth's circle of existing relationships
2. Involve the youth and the significant adults in a team planning and decision-making process
3. Explore and support the highest level of commitment that each adult can make as a permanent parent or extended family member

Source: Frey, L. (Casey)

Steps for Achieving Permanency continued

4. If a permanent family is not identified among those present, participants may agree to
 - help recruit a family or
 - be a permanent connection.

Steps for Achieving Permanency, contd.

5. If a permanent family is identified, others may commit to provide support for that family.
6. Engage the youth and adults in joint activities for preparation for adulthood so that reciprocal relationships are strengthened and supported while the youth is still in care.



Until a permanent family or permanent connections are established, the question should always be asked:

“Then what would it take?”

The youth and significant adults/family members are encouraged to “keep the door open” and let the relationships evolve over time



Strategies and Tools for Helping Youth Make “Permanent Connections”

Finding previously supportive adults

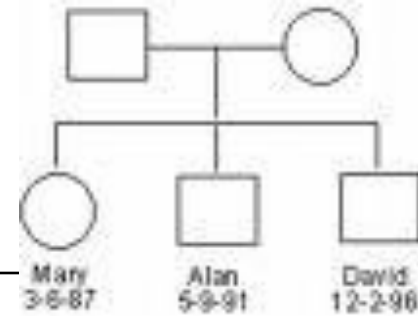
- Placement genogram
- “Remembered People” chart
- Family Finding tools

Strengthening connections

- Permanency Pact
- Relationship “building blocks”


Tips for Initiating the Permanency Conversation with Youth

Placement Genogram



A visual picture of the youth's experience in placement constructed from:

- Case records
- Youth's perspective
- Family and other adults



Understanding the child's experience of adults in placement may help the worker:

- appreciate resilience/understand the cost of multiple losses;
- better understand the reasons for placement disruption;
- identify patterns, leading to new ideas about interventions, appropriate placements, and supports for the young person; and
- uncover important people from the youth's past

Remembered People Chart*

Ages			
Where I lived			
Who I remember especially well			
What I'd like to do about them			

Source: Robert Lewis



How might you use a tool like this in supervision?

- Encourage the conversations—workers should not rely exclusively on the written case record
- Talk about what the youth is saying about his/her desires for permanent connections
- Talk about how to translate this information into concrete action steps
- How to prepare the youth for re-establishing connections/rejections



Tips for establishing **re**connections

- Youth must be interested in making the connection
- Discuss potential connection with youth, including risks. Be honest with youth if a connection is ill-advised.
- It's preferable to begin with a letter to the prospective connection, so that a phone call doesn't catch them off-guard
- Follow up soon with a phone call
- Facilitate contact with youth/invite to a youth centered team meeting

The Permanency Pact (a tool)

- See participant handbook
- a document created by Foster Club
- offers 45 suggested supports that a “Supportive Adult” might offer to a youth transitioning from care.





Uses for the Permanency Pact

- Offers concrete suggestions of ways an adult can help a young person who doesn't have a permanent home
- Suggests that there are ways for an adult to commit to a youth for ongoing support without agreeing to have that person live with you
- This can be formalized in a ceremony, if desired



Limitations of the Permanency Pact

- if there aren't many things checked on the list, it may not really represent the kind of life-long commitment we think of as relational permanence
- as a tool it might be overwhelming to a young person to see the list of things that they may need help on that they *don't* have



“Building Blocks” for Establishing Permanent Connections

Youth:

Identifies need for help

Knows who and how to ask

Experiences support

Learns to trust over time

Learns norm of reciprocity



Making the Connection Between Permanency and Placement Stability

What we know about placement¹ stability

- Most children in foster care do not experience multiple placements
- If a child stays in care for longer than 12 months, increased likelihood of 3 or more placements
- Adolescent placements are more likely to be unstable than those of younger children
- Most movement occurs in the first 6 months of a placement

¹ Wulczyn, Kogan & Harden (2003)

What we know about placement stability, cont'd

- One study found that 70% of placement moves are the result of agency decisions, not youth behaviors²
- Relative placements tend to be more stable than other types of placements

² James, S. (2004)



Placement Stability and Educational Attainment

- Students who change schools 4 or more times lose approximately one year of educational growth by 6th grade
- High school students who changed schools even once were less than half as likely to graduate
- Foster youth are twice as likely to change schools during the year and twice as likely to repeat a grade



Practices to improve placement stability

- Provide substantial support in first 6 months of placement—the most vulnerable time for disruption
- Increase visits and therapeutic support to adolescents in foster care due to their greater vulnerability for disruption
- Use group care strategically to provide initial stability for youth who experience multiple disruptions
- Recruit foster parents who are accepting of/experienced with adolescents and teens



Practices to Improve Placement Stability, cont'd

- Provide more professional support and respite for foster parents; more foster parent to foster parent support;
- Workers emphasize the importance of stability and urge caregiver patience



Permanent connections and placement stability

- Maintaining permanent connections supports placement stability by attending to youths' ongoing need for ongoing emotional connectedness
- Permanent connections are also important when placement changes have to be made—physical location may change, but emotional connections can be sustained

Practices to improve placement stability

- Participation of youth
 - “About Me”
 - “My Foster Care Plan”
- Preparation of youth
 - “Foster Home Intro”

Foster Club: <http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3>

Forms Online at Foster Club website (see handout for url location)

Case Scenarios





Supervising for permanent connections

- Teach staff about the importance of permanent connections for youth
- Set expectations for permanent connections as an essential part of permanency and transition planning
- Coach staff in how to maintain and re-establish connections
- Develop a youth-centered team approach to building permanent connections

Supervising for permanent connections...

Support workers in....

- listening to youth—they are the best source of information
- thoroughly reviewing case file to identify connections from the past (but don't rely exclusively on this)
- searching for lost relatives using locator services
- making contacts with significant adults
- reconnecting youth with birth family
- helping youth through joys and disappointments of reconnections

Supervisors' strategies (what if...?)

- Worker reports that youth has no connections
 - Think about who has shown up for meetings, court hearings; who has called about or visited the youth
 - Talk with caretakers and providers about who the youth calls or goes to, who calls the youth
 - Talk to the youth more about previous placements, family and kin relationships
 - Don't forget the paternal side of the family

Supervisors' strategies (what if...?)

- The worker reports feeling uncomfortable talking with youth about permanent connections
 - Talk about emotional needs of adolescents as they move toward adulthood; normalize the need for connectedness
 - Provide opportunities for further training
 - Provide opportunities for worker to observe a more experienced worker, or co-facilitate meetings with youth to model good practice

Supervisor's strategies (what if...?)

- Permanent connections are identified but not active in case plan
 - Talk with worker about how the youth is involved with permanent connections
 - Encourage worker to talk with youth about the role of permanent connections during transition
 - Suggest using the Permanency Pact as a way to open the conversation with youth



Supervisors' strategies (what if....?)

- Transition plan does not include permanent connections
 - Support conversations about permanent connections in transition meetings and the written plan
 - Review the “Permanency Pact” for ideas of how permanent connections can be helpful for youth in transition

- 
-
- Write a Practice Goal for Permanency