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|  | <b>GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES<br/>CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL</b> |                     |                           |                |
|   | <b>Chapter:</b>   | (10) Foster Care    | <b>Effective Date:</b>    | August 2014    |
|   | <b>Policy Title:</b>  | Permanency Planning |                           |                |
|   | <b>Policy Number:</b>   | 10.22               | <b>Previous Policy #:</b> | 1006.2- 1006.9 |

## CODES/REFERENCES

O.C.G.A. §15-11-2, §15-11-232, §15-11-240  
Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (Public Law 96-272)  
Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89)  
Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Sections 471(a)(15)(E)(i); 471(a)(29); 475(5)(C) and (D); and 475(7)  
45 CFR Part 1356.21(b)(3), 1356.21(h), 1356.21(h)(2), 1356.2(h)(3), 1356.21(h)(4)

## REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall identify the permanency plan for each child within thirty (30) days of the child's entry into foster care (as part of the initial case plan). In order of preference, the permanency plan options include:

1. Reunification;
2. Adoption;
3. Permanent Guardianship; or
4. Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), if the court finds and documents a compelling reason that reunification, adoption or permanent guardianship are not in the best interest of the child.

**NOTE:** Although "Permanent Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative" is a permanency option outlined in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), effective 01/01/14, Georgia no longer recognizes it as a permanent placement for a child.

*DFCS may seek the services of the Federal Parent Locator Service to search for absent parents at any point in order to facilitate a permanency plan. (See [Diligent Search](#))*

DFCS shall assess all cases for concurrent planning to determine if concurrent planning is in the best interest of the child. If concurrent planning is in the best interest of the child, DFCS should simultaneously implement a concurrent permanency plan with a primary permanency plan of reunification.

DFCS shall obtain court approval via a court order whenever the permanency plan is changed.

DFCS shall obtain a judicial determination regarding "**reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan**" at each permanency plan hearing, but no later than twelve (12) months of the [date the child is considered to have entered care](#) (and at least every 12 months thereafter as long as the child remains in care). (See [Reasonable Efforts](#) and [The Juvenile Court Process-Practice Guidance](#))

DFCS shall comply with all requirements of the [Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\)](#).

The County Department shall not finalize permanency plans with any caregiver who has a pending investigation until concurrence on the investigation is received from the State Office.

### **Adoption**

DFCS shall obtain a certified copy of the official long form birth certificate (with state registration number and raised seal) for any child in foster care when adoption becomes the primary or concurrent goal. (See [Case Planning](#) for procedures on obtaining a certified copy of a birth certificate.)

### **Guardianship**

*DFCS defines legal guardianship as a judicially created relationship between the child and relative/non-relative caregiver which is intended to be permanent and self-sustaining as evidenced by the transfer to the relative/non-relative of the following parental rights with respect to the child:*

- 1. Protection;*
- 2. Education;*
- 3. Care and control of the person;*
- 4. Guardianship of the person; and*
- 5. Decision making.*

**NOTE:** Georgia has opted out of the Title IV-E Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program.

DFCS shall ensure there is a court order finding for non-reunification, an approved Relative/Non-Relative Care Assessment (R/Non-RCA) and at least six (6) months of DFCS' supervision of a child's placement with the relative or non-relative caregiver prior to recommending permanent guardianship.

The County DFCS shall request a waiver from the State Office Permanency Unit Director/Designee for guardianship to be selected as a permanency plan whenever a child is under the age of 14 or whenever a child is legally free for adoption. Waivers should be submitted to the State Office through the Regional Director/Designee via email to [DFCS-WAIVERS@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:DFCS-WAIVERS@dhr.state.ga.us).

### **Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)**

If the court finds there is a compelling reason that it would not be in the child's best interests to be reunified, adopted or placed with a permanent guardian, the court's order shall document the compelling reason and provide that the child should obtain permanency via APPLA.

DFCS shall rule out all other permanency plans (reunification, adoption, and guardianship) prior to selecting APPLA as the permanency plan and shall document a compelling reason for choosing APPLA as the permanency plan in the Family Plan in the GA Statewide Automated Child Welfare System (SHINES).

The County Department shall obtain written approval from the Regional Director prior to selecting APPLA as a permanency plan for a child under the age of fourteen (14).

## PROCEDURES

In selecting a permanency plan, the SSCM will:

1. Participate in the case transfer staffing from the Child Protective Services (CPS) unit to:
  - a. Review background information;
  - b. Discuss potential relative resources;
  - c. Explore whether [reasonable efforts](#) to reunify are required;
  - d. Explore whether a concurrent permanency plan is appropriate to expedite permanency when the primary plan is reunification.
2. Review the [Comprehensive Child and Family Assessment \(CCFA\)](#) and all other assessments received on the child and/or family.
3. Participate in the Family Team Meeting (FTM)/Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting or any other family meeting to engage the family and decide on an appropriate permanency plan for the child. The discussion at these meetings should include, but not be limited to the following:
  - a. The negative impact of foster care on children and why it needs to be temporary in nature;
  - b. The child's urgent need for a stable, caring and permanent family;
  - c. The birth parent(s)' rights and options including the option of surrendering parental rights as a means for the child to attain permanency;
  - d. Time limits for achieving a permanent placement for the child as designated by law;
  - e. Involvement of the court in ordering as well as periodically reviewing the case plan;
  - f. Obligations of DFCS to provide support through direct services and referrals;
  - g. Permanency options available, including concurrent permanency planning;
  - h. Consequences for not meeting the case plan expectations or inaction on the part of the parent(s);
  - i. The [Critical Actions in Managing the Permanency Case](#);
  - j. The CPS history of the family including any previous foster care episodes for the child;
  - k. The circumstances around the current maltreatment;
  - l. Whether or not there are any suitable relatives available to care for the child;
  - m. The parent's protective capacities and whether or not their issues may be chronic and unable to be rehabilitated;
  - n. Child vulnerabilities and the parent's protective capacities related to them;
  - o. The child's wishes and desires, particularly if the child is fourteen (14) years or older.
4. Exhaust all efforts to place with a relative.
5. Thoroughly explore any information which suggests that a child is of Native American heritage, in compliance with the [Indian Child Welfare Act](#).
6. After consideration of all the information gathered and in collaboration with the family, determine the most appropriate [permanency plan](#) for the child including any concurrent plan. (See [Practice Guidance Concurrent Planning](#))  
**NOTE:** When a sibling group enters care, all permanency planning must include diligent efforts to ensure the children remain together in their placement and their permanent home.
7. Develop the case plan in collaboration with the family. (See [Case Planning](#))
8. Initiate services to achieve the primary and concurrent plan.
9. Document in the narrative of the Contact Detail and/or the Family Plan in SHINES:
  - a. The initial permanency plan selected within 30 days;
  - b. Why the permanency plan selected is in the best interest of the child;
  - c. All services initiated to achieve the permanency plan;
  - d. Why a concurrent permanency plan was or was not utilized;
  - e. Why placement with a relative is or is not possible;

- f. The efforts made towards reunification;  
**NOTE:** The agency should make diligent efforts towards reunification unless the court determines reunification efforts are no longer necessary; (See [Reasonable Efforts](#))
- g. If guardianship is selected, the positive relationship and/or emotional bond and attachment that exists between the child and potential guardian;
- h. If APPLA is selected:
  - i. The compelling reason why all other permanency plans are not in the child's best interest;
  - ii. The current placement's willingness to allow the child to remain until age 18 or beyond if child participates in Extended Youth Support Services (EYSS);
  - iii. Ongoing steps to be taken to try to place a child in a more permanent living arrangement or via a more permanent plan;
  - iv. Efforts made to assist youth with resources/services after emancipation, including Independent Living (IL) services, EYSS, etc.
  - i. A discussion with the potential permanent caregiver of all the [financial and non-financial supports](#) available for each permanency option;
- 10. Present the selected permanency plan to the court for approval and incorporation into a court order.
- 11. Re-evaluate the permanency plan every ninety (90) days if the case plan is a concurrent plan. (See [Case Review](#))

When a change to the initial permanency plan is necessary, the SSCM will:

- 1. Discuss the need for the change with the supervisor;
- 2. Schedule a FTM with the family to discuss the need to revise the permanency plan;
- 3. Conduct the FTM; (See [Family Team Meeting](#))
- 4. Select the new permanency plan and amend the case plan in SHINES;
- 5. Present the newly revised permanency plan and case plan to the court.

## PRACTICE GUIDANCE

### Assessing the Family

A thorough understanding of the family is the foundation of all child welfare interventions. The assessment process is ongoing and involves gathering facts, observations and information about and from the family. Such information is then analyzed and conclusions are drawn about family strengths and needs. The SSCM gains a better understanding of the family as a unique system. There is insight into how family members think, feel, behave, relate to others and respond to various situations, including the removal of the child.

Assessment results guide staff in making sound decisions about the best placement for the child, critical service needs of the child and family and the most viable goal of achieving permanency. Initially, the assessment assists staff in making a prognosis regarding the likelihood for reunification, the preferred option for achieving permanency when safety can be assured. For some children in care (particularly young children and children whose families are less likely to respond to time-limited reunification services), a concurrent permanency plan may be developed. Should reunification not be possible or safe, an alternative plan is already in place. The assessment process is ongoing. The plan may have to be continuously refined according to which permanency outcome is achievable and what is in the best interest of the child.

### Permanent Placement

Georgia law defines a permanent placement as:

- 1. Return of the legal custody of a child to his/her parent;

2. Placement of a child with an adoptive parent pursuant to a final order of adoption; or
3. Placement of a child with a permanent guardian.

### **Permanency Planning**

All children are entitled to a safe, permanent and nurturing home. In order to grow up to be healthy, self-sufficient adults, children need to experience stability and continuity in a lifetime relationship with a parent, and if this is not possible, with a parent substitute.

Foster care is a temporary setting and not a place for children to spend any more time than is absolutely necessary. It is critical to begin planning for permanency from the time the child enters care. Consistent with the principles of Family Centered Practice, the birth family needs to remain actively involved in permanency decisions for their child. DFCS must clearly explain to parent(s) the permanency options being considered and how their progress or lack of progress impacts the ultimate permanency outcome for the child. Regardless of the permanency plan, the safety and well-being of the child must be reasonably assured.

### **The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)**

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) includes a number of provisions that are intended to move children more quickly through the foster care system into safe, permanent families including:

1. A time frame of 12 months to have a permanency plan in place for every child in foster care.
2. A permanency hearing within twelve (12) months of the child's removal (and every 12 months thereafter as long as the child remains in care).

**NOTE:** Georgia law requires the initial permanency plan hearing within 9 months of a child under seven (7) years old is considered to have entered care and within 12 months of a child seven (7) years and older is considered to have entered care.

3. A judicial determination regarding "reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan" within 12 months of the child's removal (and every 12 months thereafter).
4. Case plan documentation of a compelling reason whenever DFCS recommends in its case plan a permanency plan other than reunification, adoption or guardianship or permanent placement with a fit and willing relative.

**NOTE:** Effective January 1, 2014, "live with a fit and willing relative" is no longer a permanent placement option.

5. The mandatory filing of a petition to terminate parental rights whenever the court has determined the child to be abandoned or the parent has been convicted of certain felony offenses or the child has been in care 15 out of the most recent 22 months unless a compelling reason is documented.
6. Concurrent planning with respect to two practices:
  - a. The selection of dual permanency plans; and
  - b. The concurrent efforts to identify, recruit, and approve a qualified family for a child at the same time that the County Department files a petition to terminate parental rights.

### **Selecting a Permanency Plan**

Consideration should be given to the following when deciding on a permanency plan:

1. The [best interests](#) determination factors considered by the court;
2. The parent-child relationship

- a. The parent(s)' emotional commitment to the child;
  - b. The parent(s)' empathy for the child;
  - c. The parent(s)' ability and willingness to meet the child's needs;
  - d. Realistic expectations of the child based on development and ability.
3. The vulnerability of the child involved and the severity of the maltreatment
  - a. Serious physical abuse (e.g., burns, fractures, poisoning);
  - b. Caretaker(s)' sexual abuse of child;
  - c. Significant neglect (e.g., child denied food, clothing or shelter and/or locked in a room for years);
  - d. Diagnosed failure to thrive;
  - e. Child has been the victim of multiple forms of abuse.
4. The parents' history
  - a. Previous agency interventions (CPS history, law enforcement, mental health, family violence, etc.);
  - b. Childhood and birth family history;
  - c. Desire to parent (e.g., any prior abandonment of a child?);
  - d. Degree to which parent has maintained contact with the child;
  - e. Ability to meet the child's needs;
  - f. Any high risk relationships (e.g., abusive, exploitive);
  - g. Chronic substance abuse, physical health, medical or mental health issues.
5. The behavioral, cognitive and emotional characteristics of the parents to assess their ability to care for and keep the child safe.

### **Reunification**

Reunification is the process of returning a child in the temporary custody of DFCS to the legal and physical custody of the parent or legal guardian from whom custody was removed. Reunification is an appropriate permanency plan when the child requires temporary foster care and the family requires time-limited reunification services (generally provided no longer than twelve (12) to fifteen (15) months) to make it possible for the child to return home. When selecting reunification as a permanency plan, consideration should also be given to the following:

1. Can the parental conduct/condition that resulted in the child entering foster care be remedied within the next six (6) to twelve (12) months?
2. Is the parent ready, willing and able to participate in and benefit from time-limited reunification services?
3. Does the parent have issues that cannot be addressed in the near future? (e.g., lengthy period of incarceration; significant mental health or developmental delays, etc.);
4. Do the parent and child both desire reunification?
5. Is the parent-child relationship meaningful with observable attachment?
6. Does the parent have formal/informal supports available via extended family and/or community?

### **Adoption**

Adoption is an appropriate permanency plan when the parent(s) are unable to safely care for the child or reunification is not in the child's best interest. Relatives and non-relatives may be selected as the adoptive resource. Children may be reluctant about consenting to adoption due to not wanting to sever ties with their birth family. The Regional Adoption Coordinator (RAC) can assist in discussing adoption with the child and/or family or refer the child to a counselor

specializing in adoption preparation.

When selecting adoption as a permanency plan, consideration should also be given to the following:

1. Has it been determined the child cannot be safely returned home?
2. Is the child or can the child become legally free? Are there legal grounds that can be established (or already exist) for termination or has a voluntary surrender been Executed?
3. Can an adoptive home be recruited and/or is one already available for selection?
4. Does the child wish to be adopted (if age 14 or older, the child must provide written consent to the adoption), and/or can the child accept and respond to family life?
5. Does the child have a strong sense of birth family; or, if the child has a need to maintain an identity through continued contact with the birth family, is that possible?
6. Is the foster parent that the child is placed with meeting the child's needs and willing to adopt and does the child have an attachment to this foster parent?
7. Is the County Department committed to using its resources to pursue the plan of adoption and willing to make reasonable efforts to quickly achieve permanent placement for the child?

### **Guardianship**

Permanent guardianship arrangements have the advantage of being less vulnerable to disruption than more formalized long-term foster care arrangements. Permanent guardianships granted by the Juvenile Court may only be dissolved or modified if there is a material (important and substantial) change in the child's or guardian's circumstances. However, a temporary guardianship can be threatened whenever a parent, who has agreed to the guardianship, petitions for the guardianship to be dissolved. Guardianship may be ordered by the Juvenile Court or the Probate Court. The County Department should work closely with the judicial system (Juvenile and Probate Court) to establish a protocol for notification when there are petitions for changes or amendments to the guardianship order.

Georgia statute provides for both temporary and permanent guardianship of a minor child to a suitable adult. However, permanent guardianship, until the child reaches age 18, is the preferred method of permanency for a child who has been in the custody of DFCS.

DFCS' recommendation of temporary guardianship is permissible in the following situations:

1. The circumstances that lead to the need for guardianship are of a temporary nature and do not pose a long-term threat to the child's safety;
2. The parent agrees to the guardianship and/or will not object to the guardianship when notified.

For children in foster care, permanent guardianship would be granted by the Juvenile Court. The guardianship order establishes a permanent guardian and outlines the permanent guardian's rights and responsibilities concerning the care, custody and control of a child. Permanent guardianship is possible when:

1. Reasonable efforts to reunify the child with his parents would be detrimental to the child or the living parents have consented to the permanent guardianship; and
2. Adoption has been thoroughly explored and is not possible or not in the best interest of the child; and
3. If the child is 14 years of age or older, does not wish to be adopted and the individual



chosen by the child to be the permanent guardian is the most appropriate person; and

4. The proposed guardian can provide a safe and permanent home for the child and is the most appropriate placement for the child taking into account the child's best interests.

**NOTE:** The court may enter an order of support on behalf of the child against the parents. (See [Financial and Non-Financial Supports](#))

### **Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)**

Another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA) is an appropriate plan when:

1. The court has ordered non-reunification;
2. The child is at least fourteen (14) years of age;
3. Adoption and guardianship have been ruled out as not being appropriate or in the best interest of the child;
4. A compelling reason is documented in the case plan and court order for choosing APPLA.

The two options that classify as APPLA include Long-Term Foster Care (LTFC) by Agreement and Emancipation. Long-term foster care is feasible when no other plan is appropriate and the present caregiver is available and willing to provide a home for the child as long as foster care is needed. It should not be selected for a young child. With long-term foster care, in most instances, a child, the caregiver and the County Department sign an informal, non-legal agreement indicating the intention for the placement to last until the child no longer needs foster care placement. If possible, the child's parents also sign. (See [LTFC Agreement](#))

Emancipation is feasible when no other plan is appropriate, there is no consistent adoptive or foster family for the child and the child requires foster care placement until age 18. Although the plan lacks permanence, its selection provides a planned living arrangement for maintaining the child in foster care until eventual emancipation to independent living or to a protective environment. For youth whose special needs or severe limitations will require some type of protective environment beyond age 18, planning must begin well in advance of the youth reaching age 18 due to the number of limited resources and the long waiting list for placement consideration.

### **Limitations of Long-Term Foster Care**

1. Long-term foster care lacks permanency;
2. As the child becomes increasingly independent, he/she may determine that the placement is no longer desired, and there is no legal bond to the caregiver;
3. The caregiver may decide the child is presenting problems and there is no legal responsibility to the child;
4. The parent's situation or attitude may change and the parents may choose to pursue custody at a later time that would prove harmful to the attachment between the child and the caregiver;
5. The placement may not meet the child's needs at a future time and/or the child may be placing such stress on the caregiver, that another placement is needed.

### **Emancipation and the Independent Living Program (ILP)**

For youth fourteen (14) years of age and older preparing for independent living, a referral to the Independent Living Specialist must be made. (See [ILP-Eligibility and Enrollment](#)). In addition, the Written Transition Living Plan (WTLP) must be developed with the youth outlining the goals



and services necessary for emancipation.

### **Concurrent Planning**

Concurrent planning involves working towards a permanency plan of reunification while ***simultaneously*** working towards an alternate *non-reunification* permanency plan, in the event that it becomes necessary. Concurrent rather than sequential planning efforts help to move children more quickly from out-of-home care to permanency. In concurrent planning, the primary plan is always reunification and the alternate (concurrent) plan can be any of the other *non-reunification* permanency plan options with the exception of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). When developing the alternate permanency plan, ensure:

1. Full involvement of parents so they clearly understand:
  - a. The alternate plan is a secondary plan and not an attempt to undermine their efforts toward reunification. The purpose of the alternative plan is to prevent their child from lingering in out-of-home care;
  - b. It is in their child's best interest to have a plan that helps them achieve permanency as soon as possible;
  - c. The status of their reunification efforts throughout the case.
2. Early exploration of absent parents, relative resources, fictive kin and other persons committed to the child is critical in ensuring that all potential permanency options are assessed;
3. Early identification of the permanency resource;
4. Intensive and time limited reunification efforts and documentation of such efforts and progress;
5. Effective building of the legal case for the alternate permanency plan, while reunification efforts are ongoing (i.e., collecting information required to pursue adoption or guardianship).

### **Early Assessment/Identification for Concurrent Planning**

A thorough assessment of the case is critical to establishing the foundation for a solid concurrent planning process. Therefore, information gathered before a child enters out-of-home care can make a significant difference in making an early determination of the likelihood of reunification and identification of alternate permanency options. When SSCMs receive a new case, it is important for them to understand the context in which the child and family lives in order to develop an individualized case plan to ensure safety, well-being and timely permanency.

All cases should be assessed for concurrent planning services, but not all will be appropriate. For instance, cases with a non-reunification court order in place are not appropriate for concurrent planning. Use of the [Concurrent Planning Assessment Guide](#) in conjunction with a thorough review of the families' history and circumstances, will assist in determining the cases which are most appropriate for concurrent planning. When the family's circumstances indicate a poor prognosis for early reunification based on a thorough assessment of the family's circumstances, then concurrent planning should be considered.

In most cases the decision to pursue a concurrent permanency plan will be made when the initial case plan is developed. The SSCM must ensure the discussion with parents reflects the required elements for concurrent planning.

## Concurrent Planning Assessment Guide

When assessing a family's suitability for concurrent planning services, the [Concurrent Planning Assessment Guide](#) is used to target the specific strengths and needs of the family. All case information should be thoroughly reviewed. Supervisors and SSCMs should review the guide together to determine whether a family is appropriate for concurrent planning. The guide provides specific indicators for early reunification and indicators of poor prognosis for reunification. The guide is **not** a form. It should be used to help the agency make an informed decision regarding whether or not concurrent planning is appropriate in a particular case. In cases where it has been determined that additional information is needed, the SSCM should contact the CCFA provider to ensure this needed information is included in the CCFA. The [Concurrent Planning Assessment Guide](#) should be utilized:

1. When CPS Investigations or Family Preservation Services assessments determine a child will be placed in out-of-home care;
2. Within the first 30 days of a child entering out-of-home care;
3. Periodically during the first six (6) months of a case, when a case is deemed not appropriate for concurrent planning during the initial assessment; and
4. When additional information is received indicating a change in the family's circumstances during the initial six (6) months of a case.

## Implementation of the Alternate Permanency Plan

Alternate permanency plans for concurrent planning include adoption or permanent guardianship. When implementing the alternate plan, the actions necessary will depend on the alternate plan that was selected. Some examples:

1. If the alternate plan that is selected is adoption, then much of the work required in the implementation of this alternative plan involves:
  - a. Thoroughly documenting intensive efforts towards reunification and the birth/removal family/caregiver's compliance with case plan goals;
  - b. Making the birth/removal family/caregiver and placement resource fully aware of the case status and the agency's plan to seek termination of parental rights if reunification efforts fail;
  - c. Collecting the required information for the adoption process including the legal case building for termination of parental rights; and
  - d. Creating the Life Book for the child(ren). (See [Creating and Using a Life Book](#))
2. If the alternative plan is permanent guardianship, the SSCM will ensure:
  - a. Thorough documentation of intensive efforts towards reunification;
  - b. The birth family/caregiver and resource parents (including relative caregivers) are fully aware of case status and the steps for filing a guardianship petition should reunification efforts fail;
  - c. The resource parent (including relative caregiver) is knowledgeable of supports available through the subsidized guardianship program.

## Documentation for Concurrent Planning

Concurrent planning requires meticulous documentation of all actions related to assessment, development and implementation of the primary permanency plan of reunification as well as the alternate permanency plan. The SSCM and supervisor must ensure all efforts to support permanency for a child are thoroughly documented. This includes documentation of the following:

1. Family's response to services, as well as their efforts and progress in meeting goals.
2. All visits, attempts to schedule visitation and missed visits.  
**NOTE:** Documentation should be entered on the Visitation Plan in SHINES and include how, when and where visits were scheduled, parent/child interaction, resource parents/birth parents interaction, parenting opportunities, etc.
3. All contacts (face-to-face or telephone) and correspondence (email or regular mail) with birth families, service providers, relatives, etc.
4. Reports and referrals to and from service providers, schools, etc.
5. Discussions with resource parents, relatives or other permanency resources regarding the alternative permanency plan.
6. Actions taken towards the alternative permanency plan.

The SSCM must ensure the case documentation is thorough and reflects the following:

1. Intensive efforts are being made to reunify the child with the birth/removal family/caregiver;
2. Efforts to locate relatives and other individuals who have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the child;
3. The birth/removal family/caregiver is provided with opportunities to maintain a bond with the child, through increased visitation; and
4. The resource parents are engaged and are fully prepared to be a permanent resource for the child/children should reunification efforts fail.

### **Finalizing the Permanency Plan**

In accordance with ASFA, a permanency plan is to be finalized within twelve (12) months of a child entering care. Once a concurrent permanency plan has been approved by the court, court approval is required for the agency to cease reunification efforts and focus solely on the alternate (non-reunification) permanency plan. Reunification services for the birth family must continue until a non-reunification order or TPR order is issued by the court. A permanency plan is finalized when the permanency outcome has been achieved (i.e., child is reunified with birth parents, child is placed with adoptive parents and the adoption is finalized, etc.)

### **Permanency Time Frame**

It is important to determine whether or not a concurrent permanency plan is needed **early** in the case planning process. Likewise, it is critical that DFCS immediately engage the birth family in services and supports necessary to achieve permanency for a child. Frequent contacts with the birth family enable the County Department to notice indicators of poor prognosis for reunification well before the end of twelve (12) months. A [permanency plan hearing](#) will be held no later than twelve (12) months from the date a child entered foster care. (See [The Juvenile Court Process](#) for requirements of permanency plan hearings in Georgia.) At this hearing, the court is required to make a determination regarding whether or not DFCS made reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan in effect at the time of the hearing (i.e., reunification, adoption, guardianship or APPLA). When there are concurrent plans, DFCS must demonstrate that it has made reasonable efforts to finalize all permanency plans.

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| <h2><b>FORMS AND TOOLS</b></h2> |
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Critical Actions in Managing the Permanency Case

[Concurrent Planning Assessment Guide](#)

Creating and Using a Life Book