

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
(CCDCFS)
Policy Statement**

Policy Chapter: Case Requirements
Policy Number: 5.01.09
Policy Name: Family Search and Engagement Activities

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Approved By: Thomas D. Pristow

PURPOSE: To ensure that all children involved with our agency ultimately have permanent connections, by ensuring that Family Search and Engagement (FSE) activities are completed at all levels of a case as it moves through the agency. In this policy FSE activities, reflecting best practice guidelines and standards, need to be conducted thoroughly and throughout the life of a case.

The practice of Family Search and Engagement activities is done from a perspective that the information being gathered is to establish a support foundation for the family and build a network of information in case of future involvement. The practice of Family Search and Engagement activities can lead to multiple resources in the concurrent planning process.

SCOPE: This policy applies to Hotline, Intake, Ongoing, Adoptions, Youth Permanency and Transition Team (YPTT), Case Review, and Family Search and Engagement units at CCDCFS.

POLICY

A family may share information about current relationships and important persons in their support network, at any time during involvement with the agency. This information can be useful presently or in the future. Seeking out and documenting information on important relationships and support persons is critically important to child safety, permanency and well-being.

CCDCFS adheres to Federal Law reflected in the Fostering Connections Act of 2008 by exercising due diligence to “notify all close adult relatives of a child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents) within 30 days of the child’s removal from the parent, of their options to participate in the care and placement of the child.” (Section 103, Fostering Connections Act of 2008). Due diligence in continued relative search and notification is necessary throughout the life of a case. Notification of relatives continues as new relatives are identified. Contacting relatives previously identified to reconsider their status for a

relationship, connection, or family permanency is another activity that demonstrates due diligence to search and engage relatives. The urgency and timeliness of engaging relatives is critical to support reunification and/or concurrent planning for youth and families who become involved with our agency.

I. Exceptions - Family Violence/Domestic Violence/Sex Abuse & Sex Offenders

A. Notification to relatives is subject to exceptions when there are indications of: 1) family violence/domestic violence; 2) sexual abuse or sex offender identification. If, based on the facts presented, it is deemed by the supervisor and WOR that notification would pose a risk to the child or caretaker, the justification for exception is thoroughly documented in the case record. The facts of the family violence/domestic violence are verified where possible. The facts of sexual abuse or identification of a registered sex offender are also verified through the Sex Offender Registry when possible. All identification of potential domestic violence, facts presented to assess risk of family/domestic violence, and decisions regarding exemptions from the FSE process need to be documented clearly and thoroughly in SACWIS Activity Logs and other assessment tools. It is important to use the subcategory "Family Search and Engagement" for these activity logs.

B. Additional resources to assist in the decision making process include the Domestic Violence Guide provided in the Practice Memo located on the agency intranet and Policy 2.03.07 Cases Involving Domestic Violence.

II. Required Notifications Upon Identification (Except as Noted in 'A' Above)

A. Adult relatives include the following:

B. Individuals related by blood or adoption:

1. Grandparents, including grandparents with the prefix "great", "great-great", "grand", or "great-grand";
2. Siblings;
3. Aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces, including such relative with the prefix "great," "great-great," or "great-grand;"
4. First cousins and first cousins once removed.

C. Fictive Kin (non-relative): A qualified non-relative is defined as a non-related adult whom a child or the current custodial caretaker of a child identifies as having a familiar, longstanding relationship or bond with the child or the child's family that will ensure the child's social and cultural ties. In accordance with OAC 5101:2-42-05(B), if a suitable relative is not available to assume temporary custody or guardianship, the PCSA or PCPA shall explore placement with a suitable non-relative who has a relationship with the child and/or family. (**Note:** A court order is required to place a child with a qualified non-relative prior to adjudication.)

PROCEDURES

I. **The Family Tree** is a tool used to aid the WOR in identifying and documenting relatives.

A. At a minimum, the Family Tree includes the name, address and phone number of parents, minor and adult siblings, and grandparents if available. If the family has DCFS history more information from the case file and SACWIS is expected. The Worker of Record (WOR) submits the document to the designated department support staff for scanning.

B. The Non-Relative Kin Addendum: The Non-Relative Kin Addendum has been created to document the important supportive relationships families have outside of their biological families. Agency staff should consider these individuals as supports and/or possible placement resources throughout the life of the case. *The addendum shall be completed and updated at the same time as the Family Tree in all instances.*

C. Race/Ethnicity Documentation: Race and ethnicity of the identified relative is documented on the Family Tree and in SACWIS. Knowing one's ethnic and cultural history, along with one's extended family members, is an important aspect of every child's life. If Native American heritage is known or discovered during the identification and engagement of relatives, we must follow the guidelines and provisions of ICWA (Indian and Child Welfare Act of 1978).

II. **Case Activities During a Hotline Call:**

A. Clearly document any information obtained about relatives in the intake and/or activity logs, as appropriate.

III. **Case Activities During All Investigations/Assessments:**

A. WOR documents all known information on a Family Tree.

B. Support staff sends the Family Tree to the Records Department for scanning into the Case Review section of the reading file (regardless of case closure or transfer).

IV. **Case Activities at Time of Custody:**

A. Target goal at the time of custody:

1. Locate a minimum of 5 relatives;
2. Engage a minimum of 1-2 relatives to join the team; and
3. Engage fathers.

B. WOR inquires about relatives during interviews:

1. Ask the youth (if age appropriate);
2. Ask the family – include maternal and paternal family; and
3. Ask other connections.

- C. WOR completes (or requests support staff to complete) an Accurint Search on identified parents, whose information is known, within 5 days or sooner of receiving custody.
- D. WOR completes a Family Tree prior to the TDM/staffing and updates it with any new information gathered during the meeting.
- E. Case Review Facilitator reviews the Family Tree, initials and dates it, and submits to Case Review Clerical staff for emergency removals. For non-emergency cases, the Family Tree is returned to the WOR to send out the notification letters.
- F. Case Review Clerical staff sends letters to all relatives identified on the Family Tree within 30 days of the emergency removal. Clerical staff logs the documents and returns the original Family Tree to the WOR.
- G. WOR submits Family Trees with the All About Me to the senior manager following the All About Me meeting.
- H. WOR sends letters and relative interest forms to any additional relatives identified as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days of custody or identification.
- I. WOR documents all responses (or notes non-responses) in an activity log using the subcategory "Family Search and Engagement." WOR includes documentation regarding whether the relative is interested in placement, contact with the youth, contact with the agency, safety concerns, etc.
- J. WOR documents all relative information under the Associated Persons tab in SACWIS. (Note: Everyone listed on the Associated Persons tab is automatically invited to all future Case Review meetings unless the WOR modifies the list of invitees in SARA. Modifications in SARA need to occur two weeks or more before a meeting to ensure that only the appropriate relatives are invited.)
- K. During supervisory conference, the WOR and supervisor:
 - 1. Identify barriers to relative identification and engagement;
 - 2. Discuss referral to FSE unit for increased focus on engagement; and
 - 3. Discuss a plan to refer for FSE assistance.

V. Continuing Case Activities Throughout Ongoing Services:

- A. Target Goal:
 - 1. Locate a minimum of 10 relatives (in addition to relatives identified at the time of custody);
 - 2. Engage 3-6 relatives to join the team (in addition to relatives engaged at the time of custody); and
 - 3. Engage fathers.
- B. WOR sends (or requests support staff to send) letters and relative interest forms to any relatives who are identified in the life of the case. The letters are sent out within 5 days or sooner of identification of the relative.
- C. Ongoing Search:
 - 1. WOR continues attempts to contact unresponsive or uninterested relatives every three months, in conjunction with the 90 Day Case Review or Semi-Annual Review (SAR).

2. WOR revisit and updates past searches (e.g. Accurint) every six months.
 3. WOR contacts birth parents and other family to reconsider their status for a relationship or family permanency every twelve months.
 4. WOR continues to search for biological and adoptive siblings if not already found. (Note: Siblings may be an excellent connection for youth once they become adults.)
- D. WOR works with identified family members and other significant adults to help them understand the difference between becoming a placement option and being a support to a youth in care.
 - E. WOR adds additional relatives to the Family Tree prior to each TDM/staffing or SAR.
 - F. Case Review Facilitator reviews, initials and dates the Family Tree at each meeting.
 - G. Case Review Facilitator reviews and supports the FSE process at all meetings by reviewing efforts made, making recommendations and reviewing permanency planning and connections for youth.
 - H. WOR continues with steps H-K listed in section IV (above).

VI. Case Activities in for Cases in Permanent Custody (PC) or Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA) Status (Adoptions and YPTT Departments):

- A. FSE efforts continue when a child is placed in PPLA or PC and does not have an adoptive match.
- B. Unless a Child Centered Recruitment or Wendy's Wonderful Kids worker is assigned to the child, the WOR:
 1. continues with steps H-K in section IV (above);
 2. continues with steps D-E in section V (above); and,
 3. completes the following activities:
 - a. Re-discover, re-engage, re-plan, and re-explore previous or new connections for the youth.
 - b. Re-contact each relative and introduce yourself and your role.
 - c. Ensure that all grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings on both sides of the family have been explored for possible connections/permanency.
 - d. Mine/review each youth's file and verify that an Accurint search has been completed, and if not, complete the search. Update the search, if it has been more than 3 months since the most recent search was completed.
 - e. When writing letters, send a current flyer about the child, as well.
- C. WOR documents relative responses and relative information in the recruitment screens in SACWIS (in addition to activity logs and associated persons) for youth who are in Permanent Custody. For PPLA status youth, continue to document this information in the activity logs and associated persons tabs.

VII. **Family Search and Engagement Team**

- A. The WOR may request assistance from the FSE Team at any time by submitting the Family Search and Engagement Request Form. A request for support of FSE Team is recommended if efforts have been made, but:
1. No relatives have been identified;
 2. There are fewer than 3 to 10 relatives engaged during services;
 3. Child has been in custody more than six months and there are fewer than 6 to 12 relatives engaged or there is no identified permanency plan or concurrent plan.

SEE ALSO:

State and Federal Rules and Regulations

- Ohio Administrative Code; Section 5101:2-1-01
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, PL 110-351
- Indian and Child Welfare Act of 1978

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedures Manual:

Policy 2.03.07

Cases Involving Domestic Violence

DCFS Practice Memo: Domestic Violence Reference Guide

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

- SACWIS Knowledge Base Guidance Article on Relative Identification and Notification
- SACWIS Knowledge Base Guidance Article on Family Search and Engagement

Additional Reference

- Achieving Permanency: Guidelines for Expectations of County Child Welfare Staff; Prepared by Mardith L. Louisell/California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)

FORMS

Family Tree

Relative Notification Letter

Relative Interest Form

Family Search and Engagement Form