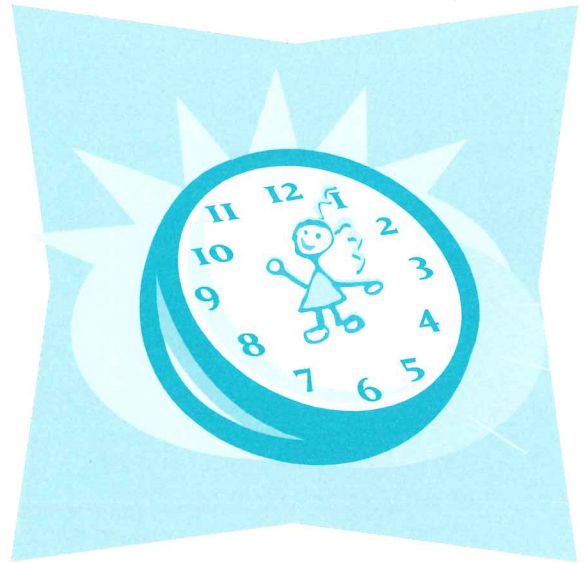


permanency

for your child



A Parent's Guide

Important things for you to know . . .

What is permanency?

Permanency means your child needs a family to provide these things:

- Protection and a home environment where he or she can grow and develop in a healthy way;
- A lifelong commitment;
- Contact with brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family members; and
- Legal responsibility for him or her.

The clock is ticking. Here is a timetable to help you make important decisions. Your child may be returned to your home at any time. However, if your child is still in foster care.....

At 6 months, the court will conduct a hearing to review your progress on your family service plan on both goals – return home and your child's other permanent plan.

At 12 months, the court holds a Permanency Hearing. The Department will make a recommendation to the court regarding your child's permanent plan. The recommendation should not be a surprise to you. It will be what you and your worker have been planning. The recommendation may be to return your child home or to proceed with your child's other permanent plan which may include termination of your parental rights.

At 15 months, the Department is required by law to ask the court to terminate your parental rights so your child can have a safe and permanent home with either a relative or another family you may not know. Termination of parental rights give another family a chance to become your child's legal parents.

Permanency is very important to all children.

Your worker will talk with you about how to focus on the safety and permanency needs of your child. We assume that you want your child to have a safe and permanent home.

The Department's legal obligation is to try our hardest to make it possible for your child to return to your home. Having **you** be your child's permanent home is always our first choice for your child.

You must, however, be able to provide the safety and protection your child needs. You, your family and your worker will develop a **family service plan**.

The purpose of the family service plan is to help you change the situation and behavior in your home which led to your child being removed. The plan should be completed within 30 days of the time your child left your home.

If my child doesn't come home, where will he or she live?

Permanent homes can be with relatives or families you don't know. Sometimes parents decide to voluntarily give up their rights as a parent so their child can be adopted. You can give up your parental rights at any time.

For some parents, it means going to court and giving legal guardianship to a relative who can care for their child. In some cases, the court will terminate parental rights against a parent's wishes. This is called **Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights**.

Termination of Parental Rights is a court process that ends your legal rights and responsibilities for your child. Your emotional relationship cannot be ended in this process, but someone else will become your child's legal parent or parents.

Every child needs a family where he or she doesn't have to worry about whether they will be in foster care again and again. We want to help you make the best decision on behalf of your child. Your child needs your help. If you cannot make decisions that will protect your child and provide him or her with the home they need, the court will make the decision for you.



It is very important to understand that your child must have a permanent home within 15 months. Once your child is removed from your home, the **clock starts**.

This clock is controlled by state and federal laws. If you are unable to provide a safe and permanent home for your child within 15 months, the Department will move forward with permanency for your child.



What is concurrent planning?

Lots of families have difficulty making the necessary changes in the time allowed and are unable to have their child return home. Sometimes families figure that out early and some not until very late. So that your child doesn't have to spend any longer in foster care than is absolutely necessary, your worker will make sure that your service plan is a concurrent plan.

A concurrent plan is basically a two-part plan – Plan A and a Plan B. In a concurrent plan you will work on two things at the same time: 1) Making your home a safe and stable place so your child can return, and 2) Helping prepare your child for another permanent home in case you are not successful with efforts to bring your child home.

What are aggravated circumstances?

Under the law, if you did something really terrible to your child or other children, the court can say the Department **does not** have to try to help you get your child back. An **aggravated circumstance** may be if you severely beat or sexually abused one of your children, or if your parental rights were involuntarily terminated on another child.

The Department will immediately begin to find another permanent home for your child. Your child will still need your help to find a family who will best care for him or her.

What if I am incarcerated or have serious substance abuse problems – do I still have just 15 months?

Yes, in most cases. While you are incarcerated you will have opportunities to maintain contact with your children, other family members and the Department in person, by phone or by letter on a regular basis. Prisons often have programs that can assist you in becoming the kind of parent you want to be. For those of you working on recovery, it is important for you to make significant progress in the time provided. If your child is living with a relative, you may have an opportunity to make this a permanent arrangement for your child.

What if I want to give up my parental rights?

You can voluntarily relinquish your parental rights at any time. If, at any time, you determine you cannot make the necessary changes to keep your child safe, please talk with your worker and your attorney about your options.

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Your Social Worker

Name _____

Phone # _____