



Agency Procedures

Family Search and Engagement

CURRENT BINDINGS

Divisions: **Social Services**

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Purpose of the procedure:

To ensure that all SCCS staff understand their Family Search and Engagement roles and responsibilities and that all youth entering the care of SCCS have the opportunity to establish and/or maintain relationships with healthy biological family and non-blood kin.

Statement of procedure:

Family Search and Engagement is a structured model used to build permanent, caring relationships for children by helping adults make realistic decisions on how to be involved in a child's life. Summit County Children Services' (SCCS) is committed to implementation and continuation of Family Search and Engagement practices at each stage of a child's case.

Family Search and Engagement requires the following six steps^[1]:

1. Setting the Stage
2. Discovery
3. Engagement
4. Exploring & Planning
5. Decision Making & Evaluation
6. Sustaining the Relationship

INTAKE DEPARTMENT ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The Intake Department is primarily responsible for locating and notifying relatives, while the Protective and Placement and Permanency Departments are more responsible for engaging, planning, decision making, and sustaining the relationship. Intake caseworkers are responsible for completing a genogram activity log and the associated persons tab in SACWIS for all cases. Information contained in these documents should be obtained from the perspective of establishing a support foundation for the family and to build a network of information in the case of future removals of the child(ren).

Family information must be obtained in a uniform and consistent manner during the

TDM/FTM meetings and by phone room staff. During supervision, the supervisor and worker will discuss actions taken and progress made regarding FSE efforts. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that information is documented uniformly and that documents are kept in a consistent manner.

A Relative Notification letter and response form must be sent by the assigned caseworker to maternal and paternal grandparents and any known adult relatives within the first 10 days of a removal of the child(ren) from the home. Clerical staff is responsible for following agency coding protocol to document all relative forms sent.

Existing Intake Department Procedures Affected by this Procedure:
Identifying and Notifying Relatives Procedure

FAMILY TEAM & TDM FACILITATOR ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Summit County Children Services Family Team and Team Decision Making Meeting facilitators will assist in Family Search and Engagement efforts by using meetings as a vehicle to identify and document kinship information for children who cannot live with their own parents / guardians. During meetings, the facilitators will engage relatives in discussions about the types of support they can provide to the family and educate them about their options. Facilitators will reinforce the importance of identifying relatives not only as a placement resource, but also as a supportive resource for families and a connection for children.

Family interaction (visitation) arrangements are addressed by the facilitators at TDM/FTM meetings. The guidelines and requirements for family interaction are outlined by the supervisor of the case. The initial family interaction plan is developed in the FTM following initial custody and placement of a child in substitute care. The team can explore the relative caregiver's capacity to support quality family interaction time, including visits with siblings placed elsewhere and any issues that might arise out of family interaction.

The Facilitators are required to ask consistent questions regarding identifying information for each relative and to ask family members who are present to assist in completing the relative data checklist. The facilitators will utilize the Accurint search engine to assist in identifying and locating relatives.

All family members should be invited to the TDMs. A key role of the facilitator is to maintain a high level of engagement during the meetings while identifying additional relatives and non-blood kin who can support the family. The assigned caseworker, case-aids, SWAs or other agency representative is responsible for completing follow-up calls with extended family to gather information and ask for their interest in continued involvement:

Existing Family Team and TDM Procedures Affected by this Procedure:
Family Team Meetings, Family Plan Meetings, Team Decision Making Meetings

PROTECTIVE DEPARTMENT ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The Protective Department is responsible for engaging birth relatives and non-blood kin, exploring and planning with them (and the team), and helping to support healthy on-going relationships between the child and relatives. Ongoing efforts of family search and engagement including identifying, finding and locating family through the life of a case is a necessary role for Protective staff. One of the Department goals is to find the least

restrictive setting for youth in custody to allow for regular family interaction and communication with relatives.

Protective caseworkers must understand the importance of emphasizing ongoing supports through communication, and family interaction and involvement. It is the role of the caseworker and supervisor to help team members understand the engagement process and which members will be responsible for linking family with community resources. The caseworker is responsible for working with family members and other significant adults to help them understand the difference between becoming a placement option and being a support to the youth in care.

Caseworkers, aides or social work assistants are responsible for follow-up calls to all family members identified on the relative data checklist and on the associated person's tab, including non-custodial and non-offending parents at times of case reviews, court hearings, SARs and TDMs.

Protective caseworkers are responsible for assuring that every child in custody has a supplemental plan. Family search and engagement efforts support the development of this plan along with input from all team members (agency staff, family, caregivers, and service providers). The supplemental plan must be created prior to the case review or within the first 90 days of the case. Caseworkers must be open and willing to re-discover, re-engage, re-plan and re-explore previous or new connections for the child.

Protective caseworkers are responsible for beginning the lifebook for any child in substitute care for longer than twelve months. The lifebook must be updated every six months.

Both internal and private agency Child Centered Recruitment (CCR) workers are available to assist Protective workers with Family Search and Engagement. Supervisors and case managers complete the referral form and send to the CCR supervisor for assignment. The team works to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the CCR worker and worker and the duration and scope of work to be completed.

Existing Protective Department Procedures Affected by this Procedure:
Family Interaction Procedure, Child Centered Recruitment Procedure

PERMANENCY PLANNING DEPARTMENT ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Kinship Unit Roles and Responsibilities

The Kinship Unit within the Placement and Permanency Department is primarily responsible for assessing relatives and non-blood kin for placement of children in agency care or for custody of children at risk of entering agency care. The Kinship Unit may also assess relatives and non-blood kin for respite / childcare for the current caregiver and to supervise family interaction between the child and parent.

The Kinship Assessor may explore with the relative or non-blood kin how they may be involved in supporting a child, in the event that they are not a placement option or available for care / respite or supervision of family interaction. Support may include telephone calls, e-mails, letters, etc.

Adoption Caseworkers

Family search and engagement efforts do not end when a child is placed in Permanent Custody and does not have an adoptive match.

Adoption unit caseworkers also have CCR workers available to them to assist with Family Search and Engagement. Caseworkers are responsible for the following activities, unless a CCR is assigned to the case and therefore responsible to prevent duplicate work and/or miscommunication.

- Mine each youth's file and verify that an Accurint search has been completed, and if not, complete the search
- Ensure that all MGPs and PGPs and all aunts, uncles, and siblings on both sides have been explored for possible connections.
- Re-contact each relative and introduce yourself and your role. Ask for matriarch or patriarch of the family to discuss youth's situation.
- When writing letters, send a current flyer of the child as well.

There may be times when The Permanency Planning Department is responsible for connecting with birth parents after parental rights have been terminated. This may occur with older youth who have been in P.C. without an adoptive match and want to reconnect with their birth family. Other youth may have returned to agency custody after a disrupted adoption. Special considerations need to be made to include the youth in the discovery phase to understand their perspectives on the birth family.

There are times when team members may have a negative view of birth family as they were not able to work their case plan and achieve reunification. It is the role of the case worker and supervisor to help the team to understand the potential for extended biological supports and the goal of establishing connections -v- developing a placement plan.

The caseworker is responsible for helping to create life books, genograms, obtaining consent forms, Accurint request forms, and criminal background checks. The caseworker is also responsible for facilitating visitation and working with the team to address safety issues after background checks, clarify goal of visitation for the birth family (placement -v- connection -v- respite) and to set realistic expectations for visitation.

When calling a relative, case managers are to explain that they are calling about a relative in the custody of SCCS.

- If they know about the situation, you just start in by saying "We are looking for family connections for this child. We are putting together a history for this child in the form of a life book and we would like to see if you would be able to contribute any photos or other information for this book?"
- If they ask for visits, explain our policy/procedure and that you would need identifying information from them including a SS #, birth date, address etc. in order to complete a background check on them prior to exploring this option. Do NOT make promises of visits, placement, etc.
- If the relative does not have any criminal history, discuss the case with your supervisor and determine what type of contact would be in the child's best interest and the details of how to go about introducing the idea to the child and their care giver.

- If the family does not know about the child or has only a vague recollection , while you are on the phone with the relative, stick to clear facts about the child only and not the birth parents history. (Most of the time the birth family does know a lot of information already)
- Caseworkers are permitted to discuss child's current needs and situation as relevant to preparing the relative for a visit or phone call.

Responsibilities of all Departments:

The supervisor is responsible for providing support to the caseworker verifying that the genogram is updated prior to SAR and regularly document FSE work in supervision notes. The supervisor is also responsible for reviewing the Supervision Checklist on a monthly basis.

The youth's CASA/GAL helps to identify family, kin and other significant adults as they often have knowledge of the case from the initial time it was opened.

The caseworker is responsible for working with birth family, foster parents, therapists, and IL workers to identify significant adults in the child's life to consider as both placement options and connections for the youth

[1] A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement (FSE), THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR FAMILY CENTERED PRACTICE AND PERMANENCY PLANNING at the Hunter College School of Social Work. A Service of the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS and THE CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH PROJECT, WRITTEN BY Meredith J. Louisell

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