

## Engaging Youth in Permanency Planning

- Acknowledge that it is the right of all youth to have permanency.
- Empower youth to be involved by talking to them about different permanency options early on. Use language that youth understand as they may not understand the concept of permanency.
- Identify and address barriers to permanency for youth who have not achieved permanency.
- Youth involvement in permanency planning and decision-making is absolutely essential. Planning must genuinely be guided by each youth's wishes, hopes, and dreams and must respectfully honor his or her feelings about past and current relationships.
- Consider your attitude about permanency. One study on permanency found that social worker attitudes and turn over impacted youth achieving permanency. Social workers, who believed permanency was important for youth, had higher rates of youth achieving permanency. Workers, who did not believe permanency was important for youth, had lower rates of youth achieving permanency. This gives us hope and empowerment that all youth, no matter their history, past experiences, behavior, and their level of trauma, can achieve permanency.
- Keep a sense of urgency about permanency.
- Engage youth in cooperative and collaborative relationships. How are we engaging youth? Is it working? Do we need to change our engagement style to connect better with each youth we are working with?
- Youth may be resistant to discuss permanency because of previous experiences or rejection of adult suggestions.
- Review or "mine" the youth's file for family members, past connections and contacts that may be a permanency resource for the youth now. Review the case file from the time the youth first entered care to the present. People to look for are:
  1. Relatives/family members people who lived in the youth's household or friends of the youth/family
  2. Siblings that the youth is no longer living with or has contact with
  3. References to people in the house hold even if they are not named
  4. Child care providers/babysitters
  5. Who made the original report of abuse or neglect?
  6. Teachers, coaches, other school-connected adults who cared about the youth
  7. Pastors, youth group leaders, other faith-community connected adults who cared about the youth
  8. Current/former foster families/caregivers
  9. Therapist, doctors, dentists and other providers who have a history with the youth
  10. Attorneys, GALs, police officers, judges, probation officers and other legal and court-related adults who have a history with the youth
  11. Did the youth run away? Where did he/she go?
  12. Did the youth need transportation to appointments or family visits? Who provided transportation?

- Continue exploring permanency options for youth and/or revisit options that were previously tried and try them again.
- Talk to the youth, current and former workers, current and former caregivers, and past and present parties involved to get the most complete picture.
- Use the team approach in permanency planning to get a fresh perspective. Consult your supervisor, co-workers and permanency team about permanency options, activities and planning for all youth you are working with.
- Ask questions to engage youth in a discussion about permanency:
  1. Do you have someone who will miss you if you do not show up now and in the future?
  2. Do you have an adult committed to you, even when you are not committed to them, and available to them now and in the future? Who can you turn to at age 20, 30 and beyond? Who will you call when you lose their job and have parenting questions or questions related to day-to-day life?
  3. When you are an adult, where do you plan to spend the holidays?
  4. If you were going to be part of a family, what would be the best part? What would be the hardest part?
  5. Who cared for you when your parents could not? Who paid attention to you, looked out for you, cared about what happened to you?
  6. Who do you like? Feel good about? Enjoy being with? Admire? What to be like someday?
  7. Do you have someone who has the authority to visit and make decisions when you are hospitalized or incapacitated?
- Develop a permanency plan by using the information from above and asking the following questions:
  1. What will it take to achieve permanency?
  2. What can we try that has been tried before?
  3. What can we try that have never been tried before?
  4. How many things can be done concurrently?
  5. How can we engage the youth in planning?
- Talk about permanency and lifelong connections and keep talking about it. Don't allow youth to say no to permanency and permanent connections. Instead use it as an opportunity to help youth explore their fears and needs for permanency.