

Category:

	Policy Title:	Family Search and Engagement Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 001	Version:	1	Effective Date:

Approved By: Operations Team

Date: 04/02/2018

Overview

Description: The family search and engagement policy seeks to provide guidance and instruction in engaging families and identifying relatives and fictive kin to provide a wide range of support and connection to children and families.

Purpose/Rationale: The Family Search and Engagement policy will guide Youth and Family Services to continuously provide family interaction and involvement, identify and locate family members, kin, non-residential parents and other significant adults throughout all phases of casework. Continuous relative search ensures that no stone is left unturned, and acknowledges that family circumstances change, as do the needs of youth in the system. Someone who is not able to help the child today, for instance, may be a source of support in the future. These identified persons can serve as: possible placement options, respite care, emotional and tangible support, resources for family history and information as well as provide permanence. In most circumstances, kinship care is the best option when children cannot live with their own parents and relatives and caring adults can provide critical support for youth and families involved in child welfare. Practice experience and research demonstrates that children in kinship care experience fewer moves in foster care and can lead to permanent living arrangements for children when their parents are unable to provide safe and timely permanence. Stability and timely permanence are two key outcomes we are seeking to improve with the YFS Practice Model.

Applicability:

Youth and Family Services Social Workers, Social Work Supervisors, and Resource Development Staff.

Definition(s):

Engagement: Engagement is the skill of interacting and establishing a trust-based relationship with families which is not limited to biological relatives. The purpose of engagement is to collaborate, encourage, and motivate families in developing a partnership to set shared goals, seek opportunities for joint decision making and achieve desired outcomes for children's safety, well-being and permanence. These relationships and partnerships are

Category:

	Policy Title:	Family Search and Engagement Policy			
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built through empathy, respect, authenticity and professionalism.

Non-Residential Parents: A non-residential parent may be divorced, separated or never married to the custodial parent.

Fictive Kin: A term used to refer to individuals that are unrelated by birth or marriage who have an emotional significant relation with another individual that will take characteristics of a family relationship (Glossary of Adoption.com)

Relative: A person related to the child by blood marriage.

Natural Supports: Relationships and connections developed, within the extended family and in the community, that enhances a child's quality of living.

The goal is to identify, locate and engage as many caring individuals as possible who can provide a range of support and connection for the child.

Caring kin have many roles in a child's life and can provide many forms of support that children need. Some may be willing to have children placed with them. Others can provide respite for parents or other caregivers, temporary care, personal contact through visits, letters, phone calls, and email, encouragement and emotional support, concrete and financial assistance, connections with siblings and other relatives, mentoring, lifelong relationships, connections with and knowledge of cultural traditions and practices.

Failure to Comply:

Policy

Youth and Family Services seeks to engage the family in planning and decision making in every facet of the case. In order to promote and achieve positive outcomes for children and families, the department will ensure there are meaningful visits with families, recognizing the value of families and their expertise regardless of their circumstance, including incarcerated parents.

Procedure(s) that apply:

Engagement in Pre-Custody:

It is important to conduct meaningful, face to face visits, with family members in order to

Category:

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obtain viable information regarding the family of origin, the child's needs, child and family strengths and protective factors and the most appropriate accommodations for the child in question.

- **Meaningful Contact:** Face to face contact with families includes the following:
 - The social worker is to provide the family with a clear and concise explanation of the reason for department involvement, the service delivery and department and parental expectations.
 - Informing the family, in detail, of what to expect during the life of the case. For instance: In the Family Assessment/Investigative phase explaining the duration of a case, what happens if a child is at imminent risk, and what to expect if the child cannot safely be maintained in the home.
 - The social worker will ensure that conversation about the identified risk is ongoing and pertinent interventions are put in place to decrease risk and safety concerns.
 - Risk based contact should be ongoing, as defined in the state policy, throughout the life of the case.
 - Non-custodial and non-residential parents should be contacted and be given the opportunity to meet face to face if they are not involved in the allegations.
 - Face to Face contact with the youth should be conducted. To gain their perspective of the current situation and elicit from them names of extended family, kin and other significant adults they feel safe with and are important to them. The use of youth practice tools is highly encouraged.
- Utilize the CFT process to encourage parental and family involvement. The CFT will:
 - Clearly communicate expectations to the family, formal, and informal supports as well as explore what the family defines as their primary strengths and needs and expectations of the Department.
 - Communicate all updates for the family, service providers, department representatives, and all those involved in the case, in a timely manner.
 - Identify and discuss the family's strengths and needs in order to provide a safe and risk-free environment within-which the child will thrive.
 - Throughout the relative search process families must be engaged in ways relevant to their situation and sensitive to their cultural values and background, integrating their cultural practices into plans for the child's care. The family defines their culture which includes traditions, spirituality, beliefs, language, and expression. Respect for the family's race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, disability, economic status, health status, and country of origin should be demonstrated at all times.

Engagement for Post-Custody:

- **Meaningful Contact:** Face to face contact with families includes the following:

Category:

	Policy Title:	Family Search and Engagement Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 001	Version:	1	Effective Date:

- The social worker is to provide the family with a clear and concise explanation of the service delivery, department and parental expectations, and how the legal and departmental systems operate.
- Informing the family, in detail, of what to expect during the life of the case. For instance: Explain to the family what occurs at every juncture of the case. (i.e. adjudication, disposition, permanency planning, placement change, filing of termination of parental rights petition, and adoption).
- The social worker will convey the importance of engaging relative and natural supports, case planning, permanency and relevant families.
- Risk based contact should be ongoing, as defined in the state policy, throughout the life of the case.
- Non-custodial and non-residential parents should be contacted and given the opportunity to meet face to face regarding permanence and decision making as it relates to their child(ren).
- Continue to have conversations with children throughout the life of the case about important persons to whom they would like to maintain contact.

Search:

This information pertains to both pre and post custody expectations. All YFS representatives searching for biological and fictive kin are expected to complete the following tasks:

- Gather information on biological parents for two generations.
 - Create a genogram, or the equivalent (see document), to include maternal and paternal grandparents, maternal and paternal aunts, and uncles, adult siblings, parent of a half-sibling, and fictive kin who are important to the child(ren). This information should include: full government name, aliases, veteran status, birth date, age, last known address, telephone numbers, present and last place of employment.
- Conduct a thorough review of the case record making note of all names and contact information for relatives or non-relatives that were in the youth's life. Review of the youth's placement history. Consider focusing on transfer narratives, closing summaries, visitation plans
 - If the caregiver is not a biological parent, inquire about the whereabouts of the biological parents, any legal documentation regarding custody, any civil agreements including power of attorney
 - Ask children about important adults in their lives and search for these individuals.
 - Use youth practice tools – Family Safety Circles, 3 Houses, etc. to identify natural network supports
 - Make in person visits to last known addresses of any parent or perspective relative.
 - If the parents are deceased, make efforts to locate living relatives and obtain a death certificate for the deceased parent.

Category:

	Policy Title:	Family Search and Engagement Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy 001	Version:	1	Effective Date:

- Partner with the courts to order parents to provide possible placement options.

Documentation requirements can include people interviewed, files reviewed, databases examined, relatives and others identified, their contact information, the efforts to engage them, and the outcome of those efforts. Incorporating documentation into the child's electronic case file demonstrates the agency has made reasonable efforts and ensures that the information is available in the future.

- Social worker will search database systems to include, but not limited to the following:
 - Westlaw/Lexis Nexis
 - Utilize YFS case managers to obtain Online Verification information (OLV), Employment Security Commission, NC Department of Motor Vehicles.
 - Mecklenburg County Real Estate Lookup <http://meckcama.co.mecklenburg.nc.us/relookup/>
 - Mecklenburg County Clerk of Courts <http://www1.aoc.state.nc.us/www/calendars/CriminalQuery.html>
 - Mecklenburg County Vital Records <http://rodpublicsearch:8080/?session+timeout>
 - North Carolina DOC <http://webapps6.doc.state.nc.us/opi/offendersearch.do?method=view>
 - Federal Bureau of Prisons <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>
 - Local Sheriff's Department Jail/Arrest/Warrant Search <http://www.mecksheriff.com/inmatesearch.asp>
 - Board of Elections Voter Registration <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup/>
 - United States Postal Services (Forwarding Address requests)
 - **Should all other methods of search fail complete the following:** Internet/Social Media Search (Google search, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)

Form(s) that apply:

Reference(s):

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Contact(s):

Policy & Practice Model Supervisor

Category:

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Policy History:

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