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POLICY 1102 – Exploring Adoptive Resources

A. POLICY

Permanency is critical to the well-being of children. When a child has an approved goal of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)/Adoption, a finalized adoption shall be achieved without undue delay and with the best adoptive resource available.

Children should be placed expeditiously with an appropriate adoptive family. Adoptive placements may not be delayed or denied based solely on the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive parent, or the child involved. The cultural, ethnic, or racial background of the child and the capacity of the prospective adoptive parents to meet the needs of the child may be considered along with other factors used to determine the best placement for a particular child.

B. PROCEDURES

1. Possible adoptive resources for a child must be explored at the time of the decision to change the plan to TPR/adoption. The decision to TPR may be made without the probability of adoption when TPR is still in the child's best interest and legal grounds exist as stated in 13 Del. C. §1103.
2. The caseworker shall explore all possible adoptive resources for a child including relatives and kin, even those who were unable or unwilling to provide for the child in foster care, families who may have adopted a sibling, the current foster family, private agencies, and adoption exchanges and registries. All recruitment activities and findings will be discussed with the supervisor and documented in a separate FOCUS note labeled "Recruitment". The caseworker shall periodically revisit these options as situations may change.
3. The caseworker and supervisor will decide if remaining within the extended family would be in the best interest of the child and shall use the following criteria in making the decision.

CONSIDERING EXTENDED FAMILY:

- a. Type and degree of abuse/neglect by parents.
- b. Functional level of the members of the extended family.
- c. Demonstrated ability of the relative to parent.
- d. Accessibility of the child to the birth parents and possible effects on the child and the adopting relative.
- e. Ability of the relative to meet the child's needs in both the short and long term.
- f. Ability of the relative in terms of age and health status to parent the child to the age of majority.
- g. The relationship between the relative and the child and the child and the relative.

- h. Willingness to facilitate on-going sibling contact if in the child's best interests and there are no safety concerns.
4. The caseworker will approach those relatives and kin who are potential adoptive resources for the child to ascertain their interest in and ability to provide for the child.
 5. If a relative family is interested in adoption and is not an approved foster family, the caseworker shall give the family information about the licensed private agencies that do adoption home studies. An approved adoption home study must be submitted prior to adoption being approved. If the relative family is approved by DFS for foster care, the Policy and Procedures for Approval of Fost/Adopt Homes will be followed.
 6. Although foster care is viewed as temporary care for a child until that child can achieve permanency, there are cases in which the foster family may be considered as an adoptive resource for a child. The caseworker and supervisor will decide if remaining in the current foster family as the adoptive resource would be in the child's best interest using the following criteria:

CONSIDERING THE CURRENT FOSTER FAMILY:

- a. Relationship of the child to the foster family and family to the child.
 - b. The effect on the child of moving from the foster family.
 - c. Ability and willingness of the foster family to accept and commit to the child.
 - d. Length of time child has been residing with the foster family.
 - e. Ability of the foster family to meet the child's needs in both the short and long term.
 - f. Ability of the foster family in terms of age and health status to parent the child to the age of majority.
 - g. Ability of the foster family to validate the child's cultural, racial and ethnic background.
 - h. Willingness to facilitate on-going sibling contact if it is in the child's best interest and there are no safety concerns.
7. If the foster family is assessed to be a possible permanent home for the child, the caseworker and foster home coordinator shall approach the foster family about adoption. It is reasonable to expect that foster parents, who come into the foster care program because they wanted a short-term commitment to a child, may decide not to become an adoptive resource for a child. The foster family's decision is to be respected and supported. If the foster family does not wish to become an adoptive resource, the caseworker and foster home coordinator will discuss how the family can help the child transition from the foster home to an adoptive placement.
 8. If the foster family decides to become the adoptive resource for the child, the caseworker will inform them to submit a letter of intent to the caseworker or foster home coordinator of their desire to adopt the child placed in their home. Once the letter is received, the caseworker shall refer the family to the contractor responsible for doing adoption home studies.
 9. When no relative is appropriate or available for adoption and the foster family or fost/adopt family is not an adoptive resource, the caseworker shall explore approved adoptive families from licensed and authorized adoption programs.

PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCY FAMILIES

1. The caseworker will contact both local and nationwide licensed private adoption agencies to seek appropriate approved adoptive families for a child.
2. The caseworker will share information on the child, family of origin, placement history, and the child's legal, medical, educational and emotional status with the agency staff person. This will be done both verbally and in writing in the form of a child profile to be completed by the caseworker or contracted agency. The caseworker may request via e-mail to the Adoption Program Manager or supervisor designee that the child profile be referred to a contract agency.
3. A Child Profile must be completed for every child with a goal of adoption within 60 days from the date the case was presented to the PPC with a recommended goal of adoption. This document will be shared with the adoptive resource prior to referring the resource to the Permanency Planning Committee for consideration and approval. The information and contacts will be documented in a note in the child's case in FOCUS.

DELADOPT, AND ADOPTION EXCHANGE FAMILIES

1. The caseworker will notify the Adoption Program Manager or Program Support designee at Central Office to list a child on Deladopt as soon as the recommendation is made by the Permanency Planning Committee to change the goal to TPR/adoption with no adoption resource available. The caseworker will also request that the child be included in the My Life Program. The My Life Program helps a child piece together the story of their life and supports their work towards permanence.
2. Once the TPR has been granted, the caseworker shall notify the Adoption Program Manager or supervisor designee via e-mail to register the child with regional and local exchanges, such as National Adoption Center and AdoptUSKids for child specific recruitment and the Delaware Heart Gallery. The child will remain on Deladopt and on exchanges until an adoptive placement has been approved by the Permanency Planning Committee or the Permanency Planning Committee recommends the goal change from adoption to another permanency goal.
3. The caseworker will respond to inquiries from licensed or authorized adoption agencies about the child who is listed on Deladopt or on an exchange, sharing information about the child, including his/her health history, placement history, current status and potential for the future.

SIBLING PLACEMENTS

1. Children who are members of a sibling group are to be placed together whenever possible. Exceptions are made when it is determined that the children would be better separated in adoption. The child's DFS worker and supervisor should determine if it is appropriate to place the siblings in separate adoptive homes based on their knowledge of the children's history, current and past behaviors, and knowledge of the children's special needs, safety issues and the child's best interest. The Division will recruit for six months (or a specified time determined by worker and supervisor) for an adoptive resource for all siblings together before looking for separate adoptive placements.
2. The caseworker will consult with the sibling's current therapist/counselor to help assess the degree of bonding and the benefit or harm that would be done in placing the

siblings in separate adoptive placements. The caseworker may request a written report from the sibling's therapist/counselor as to his/her findings and recommendations regarding placement. The written report should contain detailed information including the following:

- Date therapy began
- Details of the child's placement(s) in foster care
- Frequency of visits with siblings
- Therapist observation of visits (if applicable)
- Basis for therapist recommendations

Other areas to consider by the therapist and the caseworker include

- The readiness of the siblings to become part of an adoptive family
 - Ages of the siblings
 - Number of siblings
 - Sibling conflicts
 - Changing roles
 - Prognosis of siblings to succeed in placement and not sabotage the placement
3. Depending upon the circumstances of the case and/or if the children are not currently under the care of a therapist/counselor, a formal psychological evaluation may be utilized to help assess the degree of bonding and the benefit or harm that may occur in placing siblings in separate adoptive placements.
 4. There may be times when siblings will have different permanency goals given their age, behaviors, and attachment to birth family. These factors may result in siblings being in different placements. Ongoing sibling contact should continue as long as there are no safety concerns and the contacts are in the best interest of the child.

C. FOCUS

No FOCUS functionality

D. FORMS

None