

CHILD PROTECTION BEST PRACTICES BULLETIN

Innovative Strategies to Achieve Safety, Permanence, and Well-Being

TRANSITION HOME PLANS

What are *Transition Home Plans*?

Under the New Mexico Children's Code, a permanency goal must be selected at the permanency hearing. Options for permanency goals include reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship, and another planned permanent living arrangement. If the goal is reunification, a Transition Home Plan is required. A Transition Home Plan describes progressive visitation, efforts to preserve connections with school and community, and other steps to achieve the transition home.

What is *current practice*?

Currently, there is no standardized statewide practice regarding Transition Home Plans. Counties and Courts require varying degrees of formality in these plans.

What is *best practice*?

Written Transition Plans should be developed by the CYFD worker and ordered by the judge. The plan provides a clear directive on how the transition will happen for the child and the parents. It should be developmentally appropriate, created in conjunction with the family, and tailored to the circumstances of the case. The plan should include provisions for graduated visitation, wraparound services and support, therapeutic services, transportation, exit and entry into schools, opportunities for closure with connections made in foster care, time frames and progress indicators. A six-month calendar is developed and given to the foster parents, respondent attorney, guardian ad litem or youth attorney, and case worker.

What are the advantages of *Transition Home Plans*?

- ◆ Transition Home Plans increase the likelihood of safe and successful reunification.
- ◆ All parties involved in the transition know the expectations and timelines well in advance.
- ◆ Young people understand the efforts made to preserve important connections.

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- BENCHMARK REVIEWS
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- EDUCATION ADVOCACY
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- FOSTER PARENT INVOLVEMENT
- MAXIMIZING THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE
- OPEN ADOPTION AND MEDIATED CONTACT AGREEMENTS
- PACING PERMANENCY
- PARENT-CHILD VISITATION
- PRESERVING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS
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Child Protection Best Practices Bulletin

What is my ROLE...

As a *JUDGE*, you would require a written Transition Home Plan from the caseworker once the goal of reunification has been adopted. You would also inquire about the reunification process, whether the plan is being implemented, and whether progress is being made. The Transition Home Plan should typically be reviewed at every court hearing. You would inquire about barriers to the plan and seek solutions, including such matters as visitation, transportation, and scheduling.

As a *CASEWORKER*, you would assess birth parents' strengths and needs in terms of transition, as well as the child's developmental needs. You would develop the Transition Home Plan with birth and foster parents. You would explain expectations to birth parents, make sure foster parents know what is expected of them, and explain the process to the child. You would provide supervision, facilitation, and coaching as appropriate. You would also document progress towards meeting timelines.

As a *CHILDREN'S COURT ATTORNEY*, you would present recommendations from caseworkers about the Transition Home Plan in an informed manner.

As a *RESPONDENT ATTORNEY* or *YOUTH ATTORNEY*, you would advocate for the provisions in your client's Transition Home Plan, including visitation, in accordance with your client's wishes.

As a *GAL*, you would advocate for the provisions in your client's Transition Home Plan, including visitation, in accordance with the child's best interests.

As a *CASA VOLUNTEER*, you would give feedback on the Transition Home Plan and make sure that the necessary support resources are in place. You would observe visits and speak with the child privately about the transitioning home experience. You would make recommendations to the Court regarding the child's best interests in transitions as well as the timeliness of hearings, deadlines, and meetings.

As a *CRB MEMBER*, you would inquire specifically about the Transition Home Plan and its components, as well as progress being made. CRB's recommendations and comments on strengths and barriers would then address these issues.

As a *PARENT*, you would work with the caseworker, your child's foster parents, and others to develop a plan for transitioning your child home. You would comply with all the provisions of the plan, including visitation and meetings with school staff, foster parents, service providers, etc.

As a *FOSTER PARENT*, you would work with the caseworker and the child's parents to develop the Transition Home Plan. You would facilitate visitation between the child and the parent and report to the caseworker if you observe any problems. You would work with the caseworker, the parents, and the child to maintain contact with you after the child returns home if appropriate.

As a *CHILD* or *YOUTH*, you would take part in visits with your parents as spelled out in your transition plan. You would tell your caseworker, foster parent, CASA, or attorney if you are having any problems with your visits. You would let the caseworker know what kind of contact you would like to maintain with your foster parents, neighborhood, school, and others after you go home to your parents.

Transition Home Plans

Sample Transition Home Plan

On [date], a team of [CYFD, court-appointed attorneys, clinical providers, etc.] determined that it is in the best interest of the child to return home and that transition can be safely accomplished. The Court approved the goal of reunification on [date].

The [CYFD caseworker] convened a meeting to finalize the Transition Home Plan on [date]. Input was solicited from [clinicians, teachers, others] who have had contact with the child and family. Birth parents and [foster parents, the child, others] participated. The plan calls for [services, supports, meetings, etc.] to meet needs for [emotional support, problem-solving tools, parenting skills, wraparound and therapeutic services and support, etc.].

A home visit to the place where the family is going to live is scheduled for [date]. The [CYFD caseworker] will assess the safety and appropriateness of the home, and gather additional information about what is in place to support the transition. Any needs identified will be incorporated in the Plan.

A meeting with the foster parent, the case worker and the parent(s) has been scheduled for [date]. At this meeting, the foster parent will review the care for the child; the child's school and other activities; and observations of the child's current strengths and needs. At this meeting a plan for the child to say goodbye, and have closure with, or decide on future contact with [current school, church, etc.] will be developed.

Unsupervised visits between the parent(s) and the child will commence on [date]. Visits will occur [frequency, duration, days]. [Parent(s)] will pick up [child] after school and after the visit, return him/her to his/her [foster home]. If all goes well with unsupervised visits, overnight visits will begin. The first overnight visit will take place [date]. If the overnight visit goes well and no concerns arise, then overnight visits will continue on [series of consecutive dates].

On [date], [parent(s)] will pick up [child] from school and take him/her home where he/she will live permanently.

The six-month calendar for this plan is attached.

Tips for *Transition Home Planning*

There are many factors to take into account as you create a Transition Home Plan for children and young people. The following are suggested tips for facilitating transition home planning with parents.

- ◆ Create a list of all upcoming events or appointments for the child. Review this list with the parent(s). Ensure that all events are recorded on the calendar. Discuss transportation logistics. Work with the parent(s) and the child to develop a comprehensive plan that will facilitate the child attending all appointments and events.
- ◆ Schedule special meetings and appointments with the child's school, doctors, and therapists. Ensure that the parent(s) can attend. Use these meetings as an opportunity to explain to the teachers, administrators, doctors, and therapists that the child will be returning home and to express your trust in the parent's ability to be involved. Explain that CYFD will no longer be attending meetings and appointments.
- ◆ Have a realistic conversation with the parent(s) before the transition home regarding budgeting and expenses. Often the reality of the expense of supporting a child with high needs can be overwhelming. Discuss realistic options with the parent(s). Encourage them to seek resources such as budget management training that will help them succeed.

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