



31.9, Conducting Diligent Searches

Application: All Department of Children's Services Employees

Authority: TCA 37-5-106, 36-1-102, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, (P.L.110-351), TCA 37-4-201-207 et seq., Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006, (P.L. 109-239).

Standards: COA: Pa-CFS 3.02, PA-CFS 5.03, PA-CFS 6.02, PA-CFS 9.08, PA-CFS 11.01, PA-CFS 12.03, PA-CFS 13.01-13.02, PA-JJCM 4.04

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Glossary:

- ◆ Case File/Record
 - A written compilation that describes the client and the services delivered. Records can be in hard copy and/or electronic format. The case record can be used as a source of information for quality improvement or other evaluation activities, for research purposes, or to demonstrate accountability to funding bodies.
- ◆ Diligent Search
 - A search for/identification of relatives and/or significant kin to assist in, and/or provide in locating family for the purpose of supportive services to the family/youth or as a placement option.
- ◆ Significant Kin
 - Non-relative adults who have a significant relationship with a child in out-of-home placement (e.g. godparents or family friend).
- ◆ Sibling
 - Anyone having a sibling relationship; "sibling relationship" means the biological or legal relationship between persons who have a common biological or legal parent. An individual who is considered by state law to be a sibling or who would be considered a sibling under state law if it were not for a disruption in parental rights, such as a termination of parental rights (TPR) or the death of a parent.
- ◆ Concerted Efforts
 - A concerted effort is demonstrated by a DCS Worker by using different methods on a monthly basis to engage a client in to participating in assessments, services, or visitation.

Policy Statement:

The Department of Children's Services assists all children/youth and families in careful search for known and unknown parents, maternal and paternal grandparents, and any other adult relatives/significant kin who may provide a support to both the child and family. This search begins with the child/youth's first contact with DCS, includes a thorough search and identification of all potential resources, including those located in-state or out-of-state. The search results are documented as part of the Department's permanency planning efforts. The diligent search process continues throughout the child/youth's involvement with DCS. The tools described within this policy are completed and updated during the family's continuing contact with DCS. This does not apply in circumstances where the child is a Safe Haven Baby.

Purpose:

Maintaining or placement of children in a safe and secure environment is the primary focus of DCS. Building a supportive environment for a child/youth and family to succeed within their own home or in out of home care is of utmost importance. Timely identification of appropriate relative and significant kin resources enhances a child/youth's sense of belonging, lessens trauma, and improves permanency outcomes.

Procedures:**A. Conducting a Diligent Search****For All Cases (Non-Custodial and Custodial)**

Once a case is opened, non-custodial or custodial, the following activities are suggested to conduct a diligent search for resources for the family or as a placement option for the child/youth. The first DCS worker assigned to the case has the responsibility of conducting the initial diligent search and documenting outcomes.

Diligent searches are then completed within ninety (90) calendar days of the last search and continue throughout the life of the case.

1. During conversations with the parent/caregiver, gather information on any relatives, friends, or significant kin (parents of siblings, adult half-siblings, etc). Information collected should include (if available):
 - a) Name/Address;
 - b) Telephone numbers;
 - c) Child's teacher(s), tutor, coach;

- d) Tribal affiliation (if applicable);
- e) Any other information that would be helpful in locating resources for the child/youth or family.

Note: Additional information may be obtained by conducting a CLEAR search

2. Initial diligent search for non-custodial cases occurs within the first thirty (30) calendar days of opening the case.
3. Initial diligent search for missing parents should begin prior to child/youth entering foster care.

Initial searches for relatives/kin begins prior to or as a child/youth enters foster care and must be exhausted prior to out of home placement. If a relative/kin placement cannot be secured, form [CS-1013, Kinship Exception Request](#) must be completed and approved prior to seeking a traditional foster home placement. Refer to the [Protocol for Kinship Exception Request](#).

4. When trying to locate a parent, grandparent, relative, and significant kin, the worker should contact all known relatives and friends. Family members and friends should be asked periodically about the whereabouts of absent parents and relatives since circumstances can change. Share information of relatives and friends with the regional attorney to assist in achieving personal service of court documents (also refer to [Safety Notice: International Assistance Locating Children and Families](#) for additional diligent search resources, if applicable).
5. Child and Family Team members are asked during team meetings if any new information is available for grandparents, relatives, significant kin or missing/avoidant parents (if applicable).
6. Children and youth should be asked to identify their family members, other significant adults or relationships that are important to them when age/developmentally appropriate.
7. If an absent parent is located, concerted efforts and engagement of that parent occurs as soon as possible, and is reflected in case recordings and the permanency plan. Refer to DCS Policy [31.8, Parent/Caregiver Engagement and Support](#).

Custodial Cases

The following activities are to be utilized when determining the identity or location of a parent or relatives:

1. Review social service and public assistance records for identification and last known addresses of the parent, grandparents, adult relatives or significant kin.

2. Request applicable records of other states or countries if the individual being searched for is believed to be residing in another state or country (refer to Section A-3 above [-Safety Notice: International Assistance Location Children and Families](#) for additional information, if applicable).
3. Check post offices, city directories, telephone directories, and online versions of informational directories for name and addressing listings.
4. Check police records for any records of address.
5. If the individual being searched for is believed to have been arrested or in jail, contact the jail and request the forwarding address.
6. Check with in-state or out-of-state Driver's License agencies for an address.
7. If the individuals are believed to be in the military or recently discharged from the military, check with the appropriate branch of the military service for a current address.
8. If the individual being sought is alleged to be a student, check with the appropriate school for information concerning the parent's address.
9. A letter asking for information about the parent is sent to the last known address and marked "**Address Correction Requested – Do Not Forward**", when a current address is unknown. Document the results in the electronic record.
10. Check the following sources, as applicable:
 - a) Last known landlord;
 - b) Department of Labor and Workforce Development;
 - c) Last known employer;
 - d) Utility companies;
 - e) Internet searches and social media;
 - f) County records that are in the possession of the County Tax Assessor;
 - g) Registrar of deeds;
 - h) County Court Clerk; or
 - i) CLEAR search Results
11. If the individual is reported as detained for deportation outside the United States, check the federal database for verifying and locating these individuals. See attached Safety Notice: [Verifying/Locating Case Members Reportedly Detained to Deportation](#), and [Brochure for Online Deportee Locator System](#).

12. Diligent Search is not required for children in full guardianship since other methods are used to recruit adoptive families for children/youth who are not placed in their forever home.

Note: For more specific guidance on conducting a diligent search, refer to the [Diligent Search Guide](#).

B. Notification to Relatives/Kin of Child's Custodial Status

Within thirty (30) calendar days of custody, the custodial worker assigned to the case has the responsibility of notifying all identified relatives/kin from the initial diligent search as identified in items listed in this section. Exceptions to reporting include relatives/kin who have participated in a prevention CFTM which ended in a removal and is clearly documented in a case recording or CFTM Summary.

1. A child's custodial status, excluding any confidential health information, even if the parents will not give permission. The [Diligent Search Letter](#) can be used to document the worker's attempt to notify relatives.

Note: If the Child & Family Team determines that notification to anyone identified above presents a safety risk for the children/youth, the notification does not have to be sent. The official record must reflect the justification for not sending the notification.

2. Placement options and supports available for relatives/kin and are given a copy of [Guide to Full Disclosure of Permanency Options](#). The worker ensures all relatives/kin identified above sign form [CS-0660, Full Disclosure Statement: Permanency Options for Relative or Kin Caregivers](#), and place the form in the child's file.
3. All parents, grandparents, relatives or significant kin are encouraged to join the CFT, even if they cannot be a placement resource for the child. Refer to the DCS [Child and Family Team Meeting Guide](#) regarding building the CFT.

C. Documentation of Diligent Search Efforts and Outcomes

1. Information regarding diligent search efforts and outcomes are documented in the electronic record by the staff person who is responsible for completing the searches. Form [CS-0774, Contact Sheets for Genogram](#) is to be utilized for documenting all relative/kin identified as a resource for the family or as a possible placement option. This form is uploaded in the electronic record and associated to the individual child.

2. All concerted efforts, successful or unsuccessful, are entered into the electronic record under case recordings using contact type "Diligent Search" either under the non-custodial or custodial case. All documentation should meet the requirements outlined in DCS Policy [31.14, Documentation of TFACTS Case Recordings](#).

Forms:

[CS-0774, Contact Sheets for Genogram](#)

[CS-0660, Full Disclosure Statement: Permanency Options for Relative or Kin Caregivers](#)

[Diligent Search Letter](#)

[CS-1013, Kinship Exception Request](#)

Collateral Documents:

Safety Notice: [International Assistance Locating Children and Families](#)

Safety Notice: [Verifying/Locating Case Members Reportedly Detained for Deportation](#)

Safety Notice: [Brochure for Online Deportee Locator System](#)

[Protocol for Kinship Exception Requests](#)

[Diligent Search Guide](#)

[Child and Family Team Meeting Guide](#)