



## Youth Welfare Approach

### The Good-Better-Best Continuum of Service Provision Permanency and Lifelong Connections

Think about the services your agency provides in permanency and life-long connections. First, outline the local and federal policies or procedures your agency follows for services in this area. Then, consider your own work with youth and that of other caseworkers at your agency—where do the services you provide fall along the Good-Better-Best continuum. Below is an example of Permanency and Lifelong Connections.

#### Types of Permanency Definitions

**Legal permanency** means having a legally permanent family. This can be achieved through family reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship. (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/glossary/glossary/> )

**Relational permanency** means “having a relationship or connection with a caring adult (e.g., maternal and paternal kin, teachers, neighbors, former foster parents)” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013a, p. 1).

**Physical permanency** can be defined as “having a home or a place to be” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013a, p. 1)

#### Permanency and Lifelong Connections using the Good-Better-Best Continuum

**Service need:** Permanency and lifelong connections for all youth in foster care

**Good:** A Good level of service provision includes: Satisfying federal and state requirements, i.e., Workers send letters to relatives/ fictive kin, does diligent search per agency guideline

- Federal policies/procedures: [Federal Laws Related to Permanency - Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- State, county, and agency policies/procedures: [Vol. 35 Iss. 5 \(Final Regulation\) 22VAC40-201, Permanency Services - Prevention, Foster Care, Adoption And Independent Living October 29, 2018 \(virginia.gov\)](#)
- Basing service provision on individualized planning
- Ensuring that permanency services provision takes into account each youth’s level of cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development

- Providing the youth with printed or digital information on the importance of lifelong connections, i.e., Legal and Relational Permanency
- Meeting regularly with the youth and responding when the youth reaches out for advice or assistance
- Documenting work and permanency services provided and making the youth's official records and documents readily accessible

**Examples:**

- Workers send letters to relatives/ fictive kin, does diligent search per agency guideline
- Keep youth informed of permanency plan and progress
- Meet with youth regularly and respond when youth reach out regarding their permanency plan/status.
- Document permanency services in the youth's record

A **Better** level of service provision includes: In addition to the service provisions listed under Good, beginning the permanency services planning when a youth enters care regardless of age. Even when a youth turns 14, continue to focus on permanency services planning as you introduce the need for Independent Living services. (Youth need both)

- Beginning the permanency services planning when a youth enters care regardless of age
- Consistently following up with the youth, monitoring and keeping them updated on the permanency planning work
- Using the caseworker's understanding of the importance of Legal and Relational Permanency, help the youth develop their knowledge of the importance of lifelong connections. Answer questions and concerns they may have.
- Building a close relationship with the youth, which will form the foundation for all assessment, planning, and service provision
- Connecting young people with community partners and resources to help them better understand permanency planning and creatively plan for the future with lifelong connections.

**Examples:** In addition to the service provisions listed under **Good** workers can:

- Continue to build a close relationship with the youth, which supports good communication and will improve their overall foster care experience. (Having a good working relationship with the youth is key)
- Work with youth to develop their knowledge and capacity for understanding permanency to include understanding the significance and difference between Legal and Relational Permanency
- Encourage and allow youth to ask questions about their permanency planning progress
- Continue to document permanency and lifelong connections efforts in the youth records

The **Best** level of service provision includes all the service provisions listed under Good and Better and include evaluating permanency services provided from the youth's perspective. Engage the youth in conversation on who they believe can be permanent and lifelong connections, and explore these options.

- Ensuring that permanency services provisions are transparent, equitable, and developmentally appropriate

- Ensuring that permanency services provided add real value to the youth’s life from the young person’s point of view
- Working with the youth to develop “soft skills” so that concrete skill development occurs in the context of family, peer, and community relationships
- Evaluating permanency services provided from the youth’s perspective and providing many opportunities for youth feedback
- Framing peer advocacy for permanency and other youth rights within the child welfare system as a normal healthy behavior, providing opportunities for this advocacy, and modifying programming, when possible, based on youth feedback
- Creating a culture of problem-solving related to permanency led by young people themselves

Example: In addition to the service provisions listed under **Good and Better**, workers can:

- Exhaustively explore all forms of permanency for youth throughout the life of the case. Including Reunification, Custody to a Relative, Adoption, and even adult adoption when a young person turns 18
- Engage the youth in conversation on who they believe can be permanent and lifelong connections for them and explore these options
- Worker engages supervisor, additional resources, and other programs in and outside of the local agency to find supportive permanency services for youth
- Use Best Practice tools such as Family Finding, Permanency Pacts, Connectivity Mapping, etc. to help support all youth leaving foster care with permanent and lifelong connections (We could include links/references for each example listed)
- Arrange for youth to connect with other youth who have reached permanency to explore the importance of permanent and lifelong connections
- Encourage youth to participate in a youth advisory board or other programs that advocate for the services for youth in foster care, i.e., SPEAKOUT, Project LIFE, VA Voices for VA Children, etc. (We could include links/references for each example listed)
- Continue to document permanency and lifelong connections efforts in the youth records. Allow youth as they leave care to review their records and, as appropriate, have copies of information on the work that was done to achieve permanency and lifelong connections. (Transparency)

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<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/youth-development/youth-welfare-guide/>