

Transitions

SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS AND
CHILDREN DURING MOVES

Supporting youth who are moving out of one home and into another can be a difficult task. Changes in home environment and physical moves are often cited as some of the major stressors we face in life.

For children involved in child welfare and the caregivers who support them, there are extra factors such as multiple team members, moves to different types of settings, considerations about what is in the child's best interests, and case specifics related to permanency planning and dependency.

TIPS for SOCIAL WORKERS

Supporting Caregivers

It is of vital importance to support foster parents and caregivers who are helping to transition children from one home to another. Here are some key tips to keep in mind:

- Remember that caregivers may be experiencing anxiety, loss, grief or ambivalence about the child's move. Validate their feelings and experiences.
- Stay in close communication with the caregiver to encourage transparency in case planning. Involve the caregiver in shared planning and let them know next steps and expectations around their role. Additionally, give them opportunity and time to voice feedback and observations.
- Watch for signs of stress and depression. If you see caregivers are experiencing grief and loss, be sure to utilize services to support the family.
- After the child has moved out, be sure to follow-up with the previous caregiver. Express our thanks and appreciation for their time, energy, dedication, and good will.

Supporting Children

Children in out-of-home care may experience multiple types of moves; returning home, moving to a new foster home, or moving into an adoptive home. Across all moves, it is important to consider how to maintain consistency, minimize anxiety, and mitigate confusion about caregiver roles.

Here are some key points to consider:

- Be sure to involve all team members in developing the transition plan. From the GAL, CASA, the parents, caregivers, child (when appropriate), community members, to prospective adoptive parents, it is vital to illicit feedback and suggestions from all team members.
- Transition plans need to be case specific and responsive to unexpected variables. When new situations arise, modify your plan.
- Identify when the child will be told about a move, who will tell them, and what will be said. Anticipate the child's response and develop a plan to support him/her.
- Develop a written transition plan and distribute it to all team members. Ensure that roles, timeframes, and plans for follow-up are clear.
- Transitions work best when they are expected. However, even unexpected moves work more smoothly when a transition plan is developed.
- Have the current caregiver and the receiving caregiver help the child pack belongings. If not all items can be packed at the time, make clear, agreed upon arrangements about when belongings will be moved, by whom and to what location.
- Utilize support services such as therapists and case managers to ensure children have space to express their feelings.
- Discuss with the child what the previous and new caregivers' roles will be.
- Utilize "family nights" and celebrations to encourage contact between parties and to honor the child's experience with the previous caregiver.

HOW POLICY GUIDES PLACEMENT DECISIONS

It is important to understand how Children's Administration policies affect the way we make placement decisions. Children's maintains the goal to always provide children in out-of-home care with a safe, stable environment.

According to Children's Administration Policy, our first priorities are to:

- Ensure that the home is as close to the child's family home as possible
- Provide the least restrictive placement appropriate for the child
- Place children with relatives or their Tribe
- Place children with their siblings

If relatives or a Tribal home aren't available, Children's looks for a suitable person who already has a relationship with the child or their family. When all of these potential placements have been explored and it has been determined they are not available, we will place children in a licensed foster home. If children are coming out of a trial return home with their family, Children's attempt to return the child to the previous caregiver.

DEVELOPING A TRANSITION PLAN

A written transition plan allows the child's team to identify major considerations during a child's move to and from any placement. Writing the plan, firms up and clarifies action steps and allows the plan to be distributed to all parties. Transition plans need to clearly identify who is responsible or involved in each step. The plan also addresses the nature of the move. If the move is to a family the child doesn't know, the plan may look different than a move for a return home. Below, is an example transition plan that can easily be modified or reformatted.

Michael's Transition Plan

Michael will be moving out of the Jones' foster home to the home of his maternal Aunt Lynda. Michael has been reintroduced to his Aunt Lynda who lives with her boyfriend and their teenage daughter. This move is scheduled to occur in three weeks. Other than a short stay in a receiving home, this has been Michael's only foster placement. The Jones family was hoping that they would be able to keep Michael and adopt him should he become available. Six-year-old Michael has an IEP and attends weekly counseling. He is generally happy and loves to play with action figures and ride his bike. Areas of challenge include hyperactivity and periods of depression.

Basic Life Domains	Major Considerations	Tasks/Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify who will be completing each task Estimated date of completion or timeframes
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael takes medication to assist him with behaviors associated with ADHD He has a history of recurring ear infections and sees an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist (ENT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mrs. Jones will ensure Michael has at least a month of his ADHD medication The social worker (SW) will request a copy of his prescription Aunt Lynda will identify the pediatrician and ENT they will be using and will provide the social worker with the name and contact information of both individuals
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael has an IEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In order to register Michael for school, the SW will give Aunt Lynda a copy of his birth certificate The Jones family will give Aunt Lynda a copy of the IEP The SW will request a Treehouse Education Advocate The SW and Aunt Lynda will meet with the school regarding services for Michael
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael sees a counselor weekly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SW will request a treatment update or observations from the current therapist that can be shared with the new mental health provider Michael will see his new counselor within the first week of placement in order to make sure his counseling is not interrupted
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael would like to maintain a relationship with the Jones family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mrs. Jones and Aunt Lynda have agreed to stay in touch. They will write down their agreed plans around communication and share with the social worker The families will schedule a get together one month in the future
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael has been in care for ten months and it is likely termination of parental rights (TPR) will be filed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aunt Lynda is aware TPR may be filed and she desires to be an adoptive resource Aunt Lynda will be referred for completion of their adoption home study
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael doesn't know his Aunt and her family very well and will be moving to a new town The Jones family is dealing with grief and loss around Michael moving. They are working very hard to stay child focused and positive, but are struggling with the upcoming move. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael will be scheduled for an overnight visit with his Aunt. During this visit Aunt Lynda will show him around the new town and school. The team suggests using a scavenger hunt to help maintain and encourage Michael's interest. The Friday before his move, the Joneses, Aunt Lynda and her family and Michael will pack his belongings together The Saturday before the move, the Joneses will have a family night with Michael. They will make a favorite family meal, watch a movie and play a game. The Jones family will give Michael a photo with a note from each family member. The SW will call the Joneses after the move to check-in on how things went and how they are feeling about the move