



Permanency Planning

What is permanency planning?

Permanency planning is the case management practice now used by the Department to prevent children from 'drifting' in care, by ensuring they are provided with safe, continuous and stable care arrangements.

In recognising that all children in the CEO's care need to have a clear plan for their future, the Department will ensure timely consideration is given to whether a child can be reunified with their birth family or whether long-term out-of-home care options need to be considered.

What are the timeframes for the Department making permanency planning decisions?

A child's permanency and stability will be a priority from the moment the Department becomes involved in a child's care. However, final decisions will only be made by the Department after a protection order (either time-limited or until the child turns 18) is granted by the Children's Court.

Once a protection order (time-limited or until 18) is granted by the Children's Court, then the Department will make decisions about the child's long-term future within

- 12 months for children less than 2 years of age; and
- 24 months for children over 2 years of age.

What are the permanency planning options?

There are a number of permanent options to consider for a child in the care of the CEO including:

- reunification to the care of birth family;
- long-term placement through a protection order (until 18); and
- long-term placement through a protection order (special guardianship).

Reunification of a child in the care of the CEO with his/her birth family is the Department's first consideration, wherever possible. As such, the Department is committed to the principle that the preferred way of safeguarding and promoting a child's wellbeing is to support the child's parents and family to care for the child.

However, in accordance with permanency planning, the Department must consider the best interests of the child by

balancing the goal of reunification with the responsibility to also consider long-term out-of-home placements in all case work.

What is parallel planning?

In most cases the Department will be considering more than one permanent option for a child's care at any given time through the use of parallel planning. Parallel planning is used by the Department to simultaneously plan for both reunification and long-term out-of-home care as a safeguard in the event that reunification is assessed as no longer being in the best interests of the child.

How will I know what the permanency plan is for a child in my care?

As part of the commitment to partnership with carers, you will be involved, or invited to be involved in *Signs of Safety* planning meetings and Care Plan meetings to talk about what the goal of a child's permanency plan is.

What if I disagree with the permanency plan?

If you disagree with a decision made at a Care Plan meeting regarding a child's permanency plan, you can ask for the matter to be referred to the chairperson of the Care Plan meeting. Contact details of the chairperson will be on the copy of the Care Plan provided or you can contact the case manager to ask for more details.

If you feel the matter has not been resolved by the chairperson, you can apply to the Case Review Panel to have the Care Plan decision reviewed. *Case Review Panel* brochures are available to help you understand more about this process.

Will there still be contact between the child I'm caring for and their birth family?

Yes. Contact between a child and their birth family as well as with significant others is an important element of permanency planning, regardless of the Care Plan goal, as it helps to maintain a child's identity as well as their sense of belonging and culture.

In some situations, contact between a child and their family will need to be supervised by either the carer, a relative, or a departmental worker. This happens with some children to be sure that they feel safe at all times.



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Will the Department work with birth families towards reunification even after a protection order (until 18) has been granted, if, later down the track, parents have made significant changes?

No. The emphasis of permanency planning is for children to have a long-term plan and for them to know where they will grow up. The Department will not be seeking to revoke long-term protection orders where a child is considered to be in a permanent and stable placement.

However this does not prevent the birth family from directly applying to the Children's Court for a revocation of any type of protection order.

As a non-Aboriginal carer, could I be given the long-term care of an Aboriginal child that I have been caring for?

Aboriginal children have a right to maintain links with their family and community. This connection enables them to maintain or develop a strong sense of their identity, which includes their culture and belonging to their country.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle requires that a child's connection to their family and culture be considered within all placement decisions.

Where it is necessary for an Aboriginal child to be placed with non-Aboriginal carer/s, the Department must make assessments regarding the potential carer's long-term suitability, taking into account the child's cultural background, to ensure preservation and enhancement of the child's cultural and spiritual identity. In these instances, it is important that potential carers be willing to engage with the child's birth family and/or cultural group.

What about children who have already been in my care for a long time before permanency planning was introduced?

Permanency planning applies to all children in care (under provisional protection and care or time limited orders), not just those that came into care after permanency planning was introduced.

Where a child came into care prior to July 2010, the Department will meet with the child's birth family at the earliest possible convenience, to make sure the Department's permanency planning requirements are clear.

The decision making timeframes for permanency planning might not always apply in cases where a child has been in care for a substantial period of time (under provisional protection and care or time limited orders) as the child's birth family must have been given an opportunity to work together with the Department towards reunification (where it is believed to be in the child's best interest).

In these instances, the timeframes for making final decisions about a child's permanency will be based upon the child's best interests. This includes consideration of the child's developmental needs, length of time already spent in care and existing attachments.

How long will the Department work with birth families towards achieving reunification?

In most cases, the Department will work with birth families towards achieving reunification for the duration of the prescribed timeframes outlined in the permanency planning framework. This will usually mean during the two years following the making of a protection order which, for children under 2 years of age, will occur in the first 12 months, and for children over 2 years of age, will occur across that two year period.

How will the Department ensure the timeframes for permanency planning are met?

The prescription of timeframes in the Department's permanency planning policy is intended to guide best practice. There may be circumstances where decisions cannot be made within these timeframes however case managers will be required to make all reasonable attempts to adhere to the timeframes.

Where can I find out more about permanency planning?

If you have any questions about permanency planning or you would like to know what it means for you as a carer you should contact your local District Office and make a time to speak to the Senior Officer of Care Services (SOCS), Case Manager or Team Leader.

Alternatively, you may wish to contact the *Foster Carer Association of WA* on 9384 5577. The Foster Carer Association provides support and information to relative and foster carers.