

CHILD-CENTERED TRANSITION PLANNING

Information and tools to support Transition Planning

MISSION STATEMENT

Family, Youth & Children's Services is committed to transitioning all children in a thoughtful, purposeful & child-centered manner that honor's the child's individual developmental needs. The goal of a transition plan is to help transfer the love & bond the child has with one family, onto another family, while striving to preserve all relationships. We value the experience & wisdom of all involved & will strive to create a transition plan that takes into consideration everyone's input. We understand that the final transition plan will be developed by the team. We believe & expect that the individualized nature of transitions will require flexibility to make changes as they become necessary & in the child's best interest.

VISION STATEMENT

The children with whom we work have experienced significant trauma & disruption, including the trauma of an abrupt separation from a primary care provider when that child initially enters foster care. While this may be unavoidable, we recognize that children deserve better. Our goal is to provide transitions that are sensitive, thoughtful & well planned to lessen the trauma experienced by the child. Additionally, we recognized that all children have important relationships that should be nurtured & maintained during & after a transition. The reverse transition visits are a tool to help ensure the continuation of positive & supportive relationships in the child's life.

WHAT IS CHILD-CENTERED TRANSITION PLANNING

Transition Planning is a thoughtful and planned approach to preparing a child to move from one home to another. Within this document, the sending family refers to the child's current caregivers. This includes a foster home, relative caregiver, STRTP or a shelter. The receiving family refers to the family the child will move into, such as a potential concurrent home, a new foster home, a relative caregiver or a birth parent(s). Each of these moves means a significant change in a child's living situation, affecting every aspect of their life.

A transition plan is an agreed upon written document created by a child's team to help a child get familiar with the receiving family before moving into that home while at the same time ensuring they can stay connected to their previous home, aka sending family. Transition Plans are also important when a child is moving to a known family (e.g., relative or birth parent) as any move can be delicate and there is often a need to refamiliarize the child to the home and its routines. The plan includes dates, times and locations of when a child will meet with the receiving family and what these visits or overnights will look like. Regardless of the length of placement, a transition plan should be developed for every child, including a reverse transition. At times it is appropriate for the social worker to invite the child to a transition planning meeting or lift up what the child's requests are without having to attend the meeting themselves.

A reverse transition is when the sending family has scheduled times that they meet with the child after the child has moved to their new home. This helps the child not to feel abandoned and to understand that their

previous family is still there and cares about them. This experience helps to transfer the child's love and bond to the new family and ensures healthy attachment patterns for the child into the future.

Why do we value Transition Plans?

Transition plans, when done well, reduce the trauma on the child by helping them to get familiar with their new home and the people in that home before they move. Transition plans take into consideration the individual and development needs of the youth in determining what should be included in the plan and how long it should take. When a child feels comfortable in moving to the new home, and realizes they don't have to sever their relationship with their previous home it can:

- Improve placement stability
- Prevent attachment and abandonment issues for the child in the future
- Help to create lifelong connections for the child with their previous home

Who is part of the Transition Planning?

Members of a child's team should all be involved in working together to come up with the plan. This includes the case carrying social worker, receiving family, sending family or STRTP representative, and placement or support social worker. In most cases, the case carrying social worker will take the lead on convening the team and facilitating the transition plan.

Social workers are key to helping set the stage for families about the need to have a transition plan and the reasons they are important to the child's well-being. Helping families to develop positive working relationships during a transition can be particularly delicate, especially when the transition is happening between relative caregivers and birth families who have pre-existing relationships. Talking about transition plans as a standard part of our practice can help normalize the process for families. It is helpful when social workers can explain that any transition for a child can be difficult, even when it's a move to people they already know and love. Using the transition planning tools and documents can help guide social workers in this practice and can be shared with the sending and receiving families prior to the transition planning meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS

The children we work with have experienced significant trauma, often including the trauma of an abrupt removal from a primary care provider when that child initially enters foster care. While this may be unavoidable, we recognize that children deserve better. Our goal is to provide transitions that are sensitive, thoughtful, and well planned to lessen the trauma experienced by the child. Additionally, we recognize that all children have important relationships that should be nurtured and maintained during and after a transition. The following recommendations offer general guidelines for successful, healthy transitions for children.

- The **adults set the tone** for how the child will respond to and understand the transition. All parties should treat each other with respect and cooperation. If disagreements arise these should be dealt with away from the child in a collegial manner that continues to put the best interest of the child first.
- **All families have valuable information.** It's beneficial for the **social worker to have a conversation** with the sending and receiving family separately about expectations and transition needs **before the initial transition meeting takes place.**
- All children shall have a **written transition plan** (see attached samples) that includes a designated transition coordinator and that individual's contact information.
- **Transitions should always be child-centered** and allow for flexibility based on the age, emotional needs, and developmental needs of the child. Adjustments to the transition plan should be based on the child's best interest.
- Whenever possible, transition visits should **begin in the home of the child's current placement**, where the child is most comfortable. This helps the new family to become familiar with the routines and patterns of the child before the child has visits in the receiving family's home.
- **The sending family should provide written information** to the receiving family on the child's schedule, routines, likes and dislikes, and other information that will help the child acclimate to their new home. **This helps the receiving family create familiar experiences in their home that will help the child adjust.**
- **The receiving family should strive to maintain a child's existing routine** in the new home during and immediately following the transition as the child adjusts to the new environment. This can include keeping a similar schedule, using the same brand of diapers/formula, having familiar foods available, maintaining expectations and discipline techniques, keeping the same naptime/bedtime, etc.
- It can be helpful to use a **transitional object** (e.g., blanket, toy, stuffed animal) to help the child bring something familiar and comforting into the receiving family's home. For infants, it can also be helpful for the receiving family to provide something that smells like their home to meet the infant's sensory needs and assist in making the new home seem familiar.
- When moving a child, the child's belongings should always be packed with respect in suitcases, duffle bags, totes, or boxes. **Garbage bags should never be used to transport their belongings.**
- Anticipate that children **may regress during the transition** (e.g., changes in sleep patterns, toilet training, eating habits, aggressive behavior, anger, sadness). This is a normal response to dealing with the stress and uncertainty of change.
- **Reverse transition visits** (the sending family visiting the child in the receiving family's home after the placement change, and/or the child returning to the prior placement for a brief visit) should be used when possible **to help the child and both families grieve, celebrate, and/or adjust to the placement change and achieve closure.**
- A Parent-Caregiver Introduction/Conversation meeting should be considered with every placement change to allow the birth parents and receiving family to meet and discuss the child.

TRANSITION PLAN FORM

(Typically, this plan is developed in person at the first visit, through discussion/negotiation with both the sending and receiving families and with the guidance of the transition coordinator. For each visit, list who will attend, who will provide transportation, and specific tasks to accomplish at the visit, and appointments that need to be included as part of the visit, etc.).

From Transition Planning Meeting on:

Child Transitioning (initials):

Sending Family	
Receiving Family	

***Sending caregiver should complete the HSD1242 Discharge Transition Information form before child transitions to new home**

Introduction of the Child *(Discussion of what are the child's routines, such as naptime, bedtime, mealtimes, favorite foods, comfort animal or comfort routine, and what works best to help child through tough moments?)*

Important appointments *(such as visits and therapy, as they may have changed recently):*

Pre-placement Visits and Reverse Transition Visits Schedule *(This is a proposed plan. Some children will need fewer visits while other children may need more. The suggested visits below are meant to be spread out over time, maybe over a period of one to three weeks. However, every transition is unique and should be centered around the child's needs and the current circumstances of the transition.)*

	Day/Date	Time	Where is visit and who drives, etc.
First Visit			
Second Visit			
Third Visit			
Fourth Visit			
Fifth Visit			
Sixth Visit			
Seventh Visit			
Proposed Placement			
Reverse Transition Visit			
Reverse Transition Visit			
Reverse Transition Visit			

Calendar

Outline child's current scheduled appointments and planned transition visits

MONTH:

YEAR:

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY