

The Role of the Court and Attorneys in Concurrent Planning

Definition of concurrent planning:

- Making efforts to reunify the family while at the same time, developing an alternative permanent plan.
- Concurrent rather than sequential planning efforts to move children to permanency.
- Result: expedites reunification or alternative permanency plan because of the structured, focused and respectful involvement of parents and family early in the planning process.

Goals of concurrent planning:

- Promote early permanency decisions
- Engage families and relatives early
- Reduce delays and number of placements
- Shorten time children stay in foster care
- Increase voluntary relinquishments
- Develop case plans with sense of direction, measurable goals and shorter time frames.
- Develop network of foster parents and relatives willing to work with biological families and serve as permanency resource for children.

Role of the Court:

- **Assist with full disclosure**
 - Explain child's need for permanency and your role to ensure permanency
 - Disclose ASFA timeframes, expectations and consequences
 - Review all permanency options and involve parent in decision making
 - Open communication with resource parents regarding their role
- **Draft court orders that reflect expectations**
 - Help to clearly identify problems that led to placement
 - Identify obstacles to reunification
 - Help establish and enforce firm time frames
- **Ensure that referrals are made for early and intensive services which are:**
 - targeted to the individual family,
 - timely,
 - available, and
 - accessible
- **Make sure that the concurrent permanency plan is clearly identified and stated in court for all parties to hear**
 - Monitor progress toward achieving primary permanency goal
 - Monitor progress taken toward pursuing the concurrent permanency plan
- **Make child-centered decisions: child's timeframe and need for permanency**
 - Help decide when enough services have been provided

Common Problems in Effective Permanency Planning

- Investing in one outcome only, must let results evolve from family's decisions and actions.
 - Don't predetermine the goal
- Engage parents in process of decision-making
 - Ask them to identify placement and/or permanency resources early
- Above all - honesty with parents and caregivers
 - Explain clear expectations and consequences to parents
 - Explain risks involved to caregivers of child returning, no guarantee of adoption
 - Support caregivers