

Section 7 - Individualized Case Planning Overview

“Pennsylvania’s child dependency system shall: recognize that each family is both unique and diverse and provide services tailored to its unique and diverse strengths and needs by respecting its economic, ethnic, class, cultural and religious beliefs, values, practices, and traditions.”

- Mission and Guiding Principles for Pennsylvania’s Child Dependency System

Families enter Pennsylvania’s child dependency system when safety threats become so significant that Court oversight is needed. Each family is different, with strengths, concerns, and needs unique to their specific experiences, culture, and beliefs. By the Dispositional phase of the dependency process, the Court must identify a primary goal for the child, what improvements are necessary, and what services are likely to facilitate the needed improvements.

In the vast majority of situations, the initial Court established goal is reunification. In these situations, early and accurate identification of the safety threats existing in a family and the services needed to alleviate those threats is critical. Once identified, these services are memorialized into a written document, known as a Family Service Plan, which becomes the “road map” for change.

This section provides two primary resources and three additional resources that highlight Family Service Plans, strategies to involve families in the development of their Family Service Plan including the Pennsylvania practice of Family Group Decision Making, and Concurrent Planning.

- I. Written by a Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judge for judges this resource provides a brief overview of Family Group Decision Making, with a focus on Pennsylvania practice. (See, *Hoover, T.A., 2005*)
- II. How can a Family Court Judge promote primary prevention and ensure critical factors, such as trauma, family time/visitation, and resilience are adequately addressed in Family Service Plans? (See, *Milner, J., & Kelly, D., 2018*)