

SUMMARY

**T**rauma-informed practices in child welfare involve both recognizing the varying impact of traumatic stress on children, caregivers, and families, and responding in a manner that supports psychological safety and healing for both the child and family as well as the child welfare workforce. Trauma-informed strategies integrate with existing practices and are infused throughout the permanency planning process.

## PERMANENCY PLANNING

- Participate in trauma training, coaching and ongoing support.
- Support the role of caregivers as healers through the use of training and coaching to encourage transfer of knowledge.
- Utilize the Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting as a forum to reduce the likelihood of placement disruptions.
- Bring any placement concerns to your supervisor early on to prevent disruption.
- Ensure that parents and caregivers are receiving appropriate services, including trauma-informed services as needed, to address barriers to permanency.
- Educate parents and caregivers about secondary trauma and link them to support groups and treatment as needed.
- Ask resource and birth parents what you can do to support them during this process.
- Integrate Safety Organized Practice (SOP) throughout the entire permanency planning phase, including utilizing the “three questions” and safety networks.

## REUNIFICATION

- Create or amend safety plans with the family, including psychological safety (what makes the child feel safe and unsafe, and what parents can do to make the child feel safer).
- Convene CFT Meetings to establish expectations, address any physical or psychological safety concerns, and plan for the transition.
- Prepare parents for reunification by assisting them in understanding their own trauma as well as the trauma their child may have experienced.

### TIPS FOR HELPING CHILDREN REGULATE EMOTIONS DURING THE PERMANENCY PLANNING PROCESS

- Use words to reflect the child’s experience; ask open-ended questions labeling the emotion you’re seeing.
- Be at the same level so the child feels more comfortable.
- Have an open, relaxed body posture, including a positive facial expression; listen and respond in a timely manner; and speak in a soft to normal volume, using normal to low pitch and a slow, even tempo.

- Consult your supervisor if you have any concerns regarding reunification; be sure to share reunification success stories that involved identifying and addressing parent and child trauma.
- Help parents create a crisis plan, including respite care.
- Schedule overnight/weekend family time prior to reunification to ease the transition for the child and family.
- Provide parents with the child’s schedule/routine, including appointments, medications, etc.
- Encourage parents to attend appointments, especially therapy appointments, with the child prior to reunification.

## TRAUMA-INFORMED AND SAFETY ORGANIZED PRACTICE

Utilizing SOP’s “three questions” is one effective strategy to gather critical information related to trauma.

1. **What are we worried about?** Listen for responses that suggest trauma exposure, such as fear of a caregiver due to concerns of violence and/or abuse, not feeling safe in the community, or other symptoms of trauma exposure.
2. **What is working well?** Conversely, responses to this question can suggest areas in which the child and caregiver is feeling safe and competent, respectively.
3. **What needs to happen next?** This question actively engages the child and caregiver in identifying solutions to increase their sense of safety and self-employment to make positive changes.

In addition to the three questions, the circles of support (or family safety networks) encouraged within SOP can help parents identify existing safety networks that they can turn to in need. Within a strong network, these individuals will be in their lives long after the child welfare case has closed.

- Keep children in the same school when possible to minimize disruption and promote ongoing peer support.
- Ensure that children and parents can continue therapy prior to and throughout the transition.
- Help children maintain their connection with the resource family, and actively facilitate and support connections between the birth and resource family prior to reunification to ease the transition for the child.

## ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP

- Provide training for adoptive parents and guardians that is especially focused on trauma and loss.
- Match children to adoptive families based on their individual needs, including trauma-related needs.
- Partner with courts to ensure judges and legal staff understand the nature and implications of trauma.

- Ensure ongoing connections for children.
- Ensure that adoptive families and guardians have all the information about the child's trauma history and reactions that they need to care for the child and meet their needs.
- Promote adoptive parent and guardian involvement in the child's therapy as well as conjoint or family therapy (where indicated) prior to adoption/guardianship.
- Prepare children for adoption/guardianship; let them transition at their own pace.
- Help children process their feelings about being adopted or entering into legal guardianship.
- Ensure that children have a voice and choice in the process.
- When it is in the best interest of the child, support ongoing contact with the birth family, siblings, relatives and kin connections; educate adoptive families and guardians as to the importance of maintaining connections for children.
- Help adoptive parents and guardians plan a special celebration for finalization of adoption/guardianship.
- Link families to resources and trauma-informed services.
- Consult with your supervisor if you have any concerns regarding the permanent placement.

### POST-PERMANENCY SUPPORTS

- Work with partnering agencies and systems to ensure ongoing access to mental health and support services for families.
- Ensure ongoing access to trauma-informed therapy (individual and family) and services (including in-home services) for families upon permanency/case closure.
- Ensure ongoing access to crisis intervention services, respite care, and support groups for children and caregivers, along with educational support, parent training, and financial assistance.
- Work with the family to prepare for change and provide tools for managing placement changes, social worker changes and other significant transitions.
- Reduce the role of child welfare and professional services over time; facilitate an increased role for the family's network and natural supports.
- When placement or permanency changes are necessary, work to ensure that the CFT agrees with the plan, or, at minimum, understands why a decision is being made.
- Make sure that any referrals for continuing care or supportive resources are in place and working before the transition is complete.
- Prior to closing a case, ensure that appropriate supports are in place for the child and family to help them manage any residual trauma issues.

### TIPS FOR CREATING SAFETY THROUGHOUT THE PERMANENCY PLANNING PROCESS

- Be as transparent as possible about what will happen (without making promises if something is uncertain).
- Provide as many opportunities as possible for the child and parent to have control over the situation.
- Try to keep children and parents with familiar, trusted supports that can stay in place long after their case with child welfare has closed.
- Be very clear with the next steps, sharing information in multiple ways to make sure that all parties involved understand what will happen next.

### TRANSITIONING INTO ADULTHOOD

- Participate in training focused on the trauma of aging out of foster care without a permanent adult connection.
- Understand trauma-related behaviors youth may exhibit prior to transition.
- Evaluate independent living skills programs to ensure they are adequately preparing youth to succeed in life.
- Work with mental health providers to ensure ongoing access to trauma-informed mental health and substance abuse treatment for transitioning youth.
- Conduct a thorough assessment of youth needs, including trauma-related needs, as they prepare to exit the system. Engage youth in determining what services and supports are needed.
- Link transitioning youth to ongoing community support services, including mentorship programs and other programs that provide concrete services such as housing and financial support.
- Ensure that youth have permanent connections to supportive adults; help youth connect or re-connect with relatives, teachers, coaches and other supportive adults.

### CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF TRANSITIONAL PLANNING

- Every youth in the foster care system has a network of supportive adults who will genuinely coach, mentor, and guide their transition to adulthood.
- Every youth leaving foster care is on a path to college and/or post-secondary education and training.
- Youth in foster care are prepared to succeed in college/post-education and training.
- Youth in foster care have access to internships and meaningful work experiences that position them for successful careers.