 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 1 of 14
Approved:	Christine Johnson, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 10/20/2020
Supersedes:	Family Services Policy 125	Dated: 9/25/2017

## Purpose

To provide an overview and describe the requirements of permanency planning for children and youth served by the division through a conditional custody order (CCO) or DCF custody, as well as guidance about choosing a case plan goal for children and youth.

## Introduction


Permanency planning guides division practice beginning from the first contact with a family. It is the process of developing and implementing strategies to achieve legal permanency. Permanency is achieved when a child or youth is living in a nurturing family setting which offers legal commitment and continuity of relationships. Continual effort and a sense of urgency toward finalization of the permanency goal should be evident throughout the life of the case.

## Table of Contents

Purpose .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Table of Contents.....	1
Definitions .....	1
Related Policies .....	2
Policy .....	2
Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Placement and to Achieve Permanency.....	2
Establishing a Goal for Permanency .....	4
Child and Youth Involvement in Case Planning and Permanency Planning .....	5
Reunification Case Plan Goal .....	6
Adoption .....	8
Permanent Guardianship .....	9
Permanency Planning for Youth Age 16 and Older .....	11
Another Planned Permanent Placement (APPLA) .....	11
Preparation for Independent Living .....	12
Project Family and District Permanency Meetings .....	12
Case Plan Goal for Children Freed for Adoption .....	13

## Definitions

**Compelling:** A word used in federal statute, which is not defined, but is used to convey a powerful reason why it is in a child’s best interest to continue custody rather than to achieve timely permanency.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 2 of 14

**Project Family:** A collaborative partnership between the Family Services Division and Lund. Project Family recruits for respite providers, foster families, and adoptive families for children currently in DCF’s care and provides the services and supports in order for them to be successful. Project Family workers finalize adoptions of children in DCF custody on behalf of the division.

**Reasonable Efforts:** The exercise of due diligence by the department to use appropriate and available services to prevent unnecessary removal of the child from the home or to finalize a permanency plan. When making the reasonable efforts determination, the court may find that no services were appropriate or reasonable considering the circumstances (33 V.S.A. §5102 (a)(25)).

**Safety Network:** Family, friends, and community members, who care about the child and are willing to take action to support the family and keep the child safe. They are willing to engage child protection staff and understand the concerns. A safety network may also include professionals.

## Related Policies


- Family Services [Policy 68](#): Serious Physical Injury Investigation and Case Planning
- Family Services [Policy 82](#): Juvenile Court Proceedings – CHINS
- Family Services [Policy 83](#): Juvenile Court Proceedings – Delinquency
- Family Services [Policy 84](#): Conditional Custody Orders (CCOs)
- Family Services [Policy 91](#): Kinship Care & Collaboration with Relatives
- Family Services [Policy 98](#): Reunification of Abused or Neglected Children and Youth
- Family Services [Policy 122](#): Case Plan Reviews and Permanency Hearings for Children and Youth in DCF Custody
- Family Services [Policy 126](#): Reinstatement of Parental Rights
- Family Services [Policy 160](#): Supporting Adolescents in DCF Custody
- Family Services [Policy 193](#): Adoption Assistance Program
- Family Services [Policy 195](#): Guardianship Assistance Program
- Family Services [Policy 196](#): Post-Adoption Contact Agreements

[Permanency Position Paper](#)

## Policy

### Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Placement and to Achieve Permanency

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 ([Public Law 105-89](#)), also known as ASFA, promotes timely permanency planning and placement for children in foster care and

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 3 of 14

emphasizes the importance of children's safety and well-being during the permanency planning process. Federal law requires that division staff make reasonable efforts to ensure permanency for children throughout the life of a case, which includes reasonable efforts to:


- Prevent or eliminate the need for removing children from their homes, except when such services might endanger a child's health and safety;
- Place siblings together unless a joint placement would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings;
- Make it possible for children to safely return to their homes; and
- For those children and youth who cannot return home, safely achieve another permanent plan in a timely way.

#### **When Reasonable Efforts Are Not Required**

Under the provisions of ASFA, reasonable efforts to preserve or reunify the family are not required when the court has determined any of the following circumstances apply:

- The parent committed murder of another child of the parent;
- The parent committed voluntary manslaughter of another child of the parent;
- The parent aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit such a murder or voluntary manslaughter;
- The parent committed a felony assault that resulted in serious bodily injury to the child or another child of the parent;
- The parental rights of the parent to a sibling of the child were terminated involuntarily; or
- The parent subjected the child to aggravated circumstances as defined by state law. 33 V.S.A. § 5102 defines those aggravated circumstances as:
  - (A) a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the parent has subjected a child to abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, or sexual abuse;
  - (B) a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the parent has been convicted of murder or manslaughter of a child;
  - (C) a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the parent has been convicted of a felony crime that results in serious bodily injury to the child or another child of the parent; or
  - (D) the parental rights of the parent with respect to a sibling have been involuntarily terminated.

Even in instances where reasonable efforts to preserve or reunify the family are not required by law, the division is required to provide a case plan of services for the parents **unless or until** a termination of parental rights (TPR) order is achieved.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 4 of 14

For some children and youth, it may be clear from the beginning that reunification with parents is contrary to the young person’s best interests due to concerns about danger, risk, and history with the family with no significant change in circumstances. In any instance where the family services worker is recommending an initial case plan goal of adoption and filing for termination of parental rights at disposition, consultation with an assistant attorney general (AAG) is required in advance. Team decision making and permanency team consultations are recommended in these rare cases.

**Establishing a Goal for Permanency**

The permanency goal, or case plan goal, is established through initial case planning. The goal is included in the disposition case plan and is approved by the Family Division judge. 33 V.S.A. § 5316(b)(1) speaks to the permanency goal as follows: “The long-term goal for a child found to be in need of care and supervision is a safe and permanent home. A disposition case plan shall include a permanency goal and an estimated date for achieving the permanency goal. The plan shall specify whether permanency will be achieved through reunification with a custodial parent, guardian, or custodian; adoption; permanent guardianship; or other permanent placement.”


For almost all children and youth who become involved with the division, the initial case plan goal will be reunification with their parent(s). Each situation requires its own assessment of safety and risk to determine what is in the child or youth’s best interests.

**Concurrent Planning**

The division always explores multiple options to attain permanency for children and youth, which is referred to as concurrent planning. Making concurrent efforts to achieve permanency is required in all cases. When the case plan goal is reunification, the division makes reasonable efforts towards reunification while also making efforts to ensure the foster or kinship caregiver may be willing to be a potentially permanent adoptive family if reunification cannot be achieved.

Division staff should always be mindful of whether there are other resources available to the child or youth – both for the purpose of enriching their lives by building connections and as a potential permanency resource if reunification cannot occur. Such efforts could include:

- Conversations with parents about who they would like to care for their child if they cannot resume parenting;
- Conversations with the current caregiver about whether they would be willing and able to care for the child into adulthood;

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 5 of 14

- Providing supports and services to both the parents and caregivers related to grief and loss so they can meet the needs of the child into adulthood;
- Having ongoing conversations with parents and known relatives about extended family members and their connections to the child;
- Thinking about who the child is most connected with and exploring those options on an ongoing basis (i.e., teachers, guidance counselors, coaches).

Efforts to engage relatives and a child’s important connections should be continuous. Even if a relative does not respond to the division’s initial inquiry, the person should be contacted again at the next critical juncture of the case (i.e., case plan reviews, change in case plan goal, change in placement, or other significant change in the case).


**Child and Youth Involvement in Case Planning and Permanency Planning**

At an age and developmentally appropriate level, children and youth will always be involved in the case planning and permanency planning process. When young people can understand the implications of permanency planning, their views will be carefully considered by division staff.

33 V.S.A. § 5307 speaks to children’s presence in court (specifically at the temporary care hearing) and sets a baseline for best practices in court, indicating that children ages 10 and older should be present unless waived by the child’s attorney or good cause is shown.

Guidance at the federal level encourages judges to solicit the perspectives of children and youth in family court proceedings. Judges can request to hear from children at any point in the process, usually intended to gather information about what is in their best interest. Older children may wish to share thoughts or concerns, and judges may wish to observe the well-being of younger children.

Children and youth should be given the opportunity to either attend court and speak to the judge or share their perspective and experience in some other way (i.e., letter, drawing, painting, video, or meeting with the judge in chambers or outside of court). These alternative options may be preferable to children if court occurs during business hours when the child is engaged in school or extracurricular activities, or if there is reason to believe the court setting would be traumatic or stressful for the young person. If court hearings occur virtually, this creates new opportunities for young people to participate in portions of the hearing without significant travel obligations or disruptions in their day.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 6 of 14

### Consideration of Sibling Relationships

Relationships children have with their brothers and sisters are often the longest lasting relationships of their lives. These relationships can take on even more importance for children removed from their parents' care. Federal law requires reasonable efforts to place siblings together in the same foster care, adoption, or guardianship placement unless a joint placement would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings. Vermont law requires "to the extent that it is appropriate and possible, siblings in the Commissioner's custody shall be placed together" (33 V.S.A. § 5106(4)). When making a decision about a child's placement and permanency, division staff should view separating siblings as a last resort.

When siblings are not placed together, federal law requires reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between siblings. If it is not possible for a caregiver to provide a home for all siblings in a family, it is crucial for siblings to maintain contact through a variety of means such as visits, phone calls, video calls, emails, and social media. These ties can provide some stability and permanency for children.

There may be some circumstances where it is not safe or in a child's best interests to be placed together with their sibling(s). In those circumstances, efforts should be made to support those siblings in maintaining contact to develop a safe, healthy relationship.


#### Reunification Case Plan Goal

Reunification case plans should include clearly outlined steps, the expected behavioral changes, and recommended services for parents to exhibit progress to allow reunification to occur. 33 V.S.A. § 5316(b)(5) requires that all case plans must include a statement of family changes needed to correct the problems that necessitated division intervention, with timetables for accomplishing the changes.

Objectives and action plans for each parent should be addressed in reunification case plans. If one of the parents is absent or not engaged, a plan of services is still required for that parent.

See Family Services [Policy 98](#) for detailed information on reunification practices. On an ongoing basis and in conjunction with use of the *SDM Reunification Assessment*, division staff will assess whether the parents are:

- Demonstrating new skills and behaviors consistent with all case plan objectives;
- Demonstrating some new skills and behaviors consistent with case plan objectives;

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 7 of 14

- Minimally demonstrating new skills and behaviors consistent with case plan objectives and/or has been inconsistently engaging in achieving the objectives specified in the case plan; or
- Not demonstrating new skills and behaviors consistent with case plan objectives and/or refusing engagement.

In determining if and when to reunify the child/youth, the family services worker should evaluate the extent to which:

- The objectives of the case plan have been achieved;
- The safety of the youth and community has been successfully addressed; and
- The decision is in the young person’s best interests.


When a child is returned home, a specific plan should be made to support the family and monitor the young person's safety. This plan should be made with the parents, the child/youth, and other members of the safety network. The plan should include specific actions to be taken by specific individuals to address safety for the child. Family Services [Policy 98](#) provides guidance on reunifying children into a home in which the child was previously abused or neglected.

### **Federal Requirements to Address Permanency Promptly**

Federal and state law require the division to address permanency promptly. For children and youth who have been placed in out-of-home care for **15 out of the last 22 months**, ASFA requires that a petition to terminate parental rights (TPR) be filed unless the case plan documents a compelling reason why such an action is not in the child or youth’s best interests.

In determining whether there is a compelling reason, the safety and well-being of the child or youth are the primary considerations. As outlined in 33 V.S.A. § 5114, the court shall consider the best interests of the child in accordance with the following:

- (1) The interaction and interrelationship of the child with their parents, siblings, foster parents, if any, and any other person who may significantly affect the child's best interests;
- (2) The child's adjustment to their home, school, and community;
- (3) The likelihood that the parent will be able to resume or assume parental duties within a reasonable period of time; and
- (4) Whether the parent has played and continues to play a constructive role, including personal contact and demonstrated emotional support and affection, in the child's welfare.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 8 of 14

It is important that family services workers inform the parents of children and youth placed out-of-home of this possibility from the very beginning, while at the same time working towards reunification.

**Options for Permanency When the Identified Goal Cannot Be Achieved**

If it appears a case is not successfully moving towards the identified case plan goal and the goal needs to change, consultation and team decision making should occur. This may include discussions with a team of colleagues, supervisor, district director, permanency planning manager, or local permanency team. Consultation with an assistant attorney general (AAG) is required prior to filing a termination of parental rights petition and changing the case plan goal to adoption.

When changing the family’s case plan goal to anything other than reunification, the division continues making reasonable efforts and offering support for parents towards reunification. This remains true unless or until a termination of parental rights (TPR) order is achieved.

**Adoption**

When reunification cannot be achieved safely or in a timely manner, adoption is the preferable plan. As stated above, family services workers shall consult with their supervisor and the assigned AAG before changing a case plan goal to TPR or indicating TPR on a case plan.


See Family Services [Policy 91](#) for comprehensive information about kinship care and collaboration with relatives. Federal law requires the division to consider giving preference to a relative over a non-related caregiver when determining a placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant child protection standards.

Once a decision to change the case plan goal to adoption and TPR has been finalized, the AAG will file the necessary paperwork with the court to commence the process.

To achieve adoption, the residual parental rights of each parent must be terminated, either voluntarily or by order of the court. If a parent has voluntarily surrendered parental right and the adopting parent and others agree, the judge may make an order establishing enforceable post-adoption contact or communication. For additional information on post-adoption contact agreements, see Family Services [Policy 196](#).

In most cases, children in DCF custody are eligible for adoption assistance. See Family Services [Policy 193](#) on adoption subsidy.



 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 9 of 14

### Permanent Guardianship

For some children or youth, an adoption may not be attainable or necessary to assure safety or to create stability for the young person. Permanent guardianship provides legal permanency without requiring termination of parental rights. In particular, when a child is placed with kin, a termination of parental rights process may damage relationships between adult family members and be harmful to the child. These situations should be assessed on an individual basis in consultation with a supervisor, district director, and local permanency team.


Permanent guardianship is not the preferred or highest level of permanency for young children. It is the division’s position that permanent guardianship as a permanency plan is not in the best interests of children under the age of 12 years old. All instances of permanent guardianship for children younger than 12 years old must be approved by the permanency planning manager. The permanency planning manager may grant a waiver in instances where:

- The proposed permanent guardian is a relative and the TPR process could be traumatic for the child;
- The proposed permanent guardian is already serving as a permanent guardian for the child’s older siblings; or
- Another rationale based on the child’s best interests.

The parent cannot petition the court for custody or to end the guardianship. The plan for parent-child contact is set by the court. The parent retains residual parental rights; that is, the right to visitation, knowledge of where the child lives, information on the child’s well-being, and the right to pay child support.

Should the guardian not be capable of fulfilling their obligation in the future, custody of the child reverts back to DCF. However, the permanent guardian can and should suggest a successor guardian. The court may name a successor guardian in the initial order for permanent guardianship. In the event the permanent guardian dies or the guardianship is terminated by the probate court, custody of the child transfers to the permanent guardian.

For children who have been previously freed for adoption, permanent guardianship is generally not appropriate, as it leaves DCF holding residual parental rights. Consultation with the assigned Assistant Attorney General (AAG) and the division’s permanency planning manager is required in these cases.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 10 of 14


14 V.S.A. § 2664 lays out the circumstances under which a permanent guardianship can be established for a child/youth who has been the subject of juvenile court proceedings:

- (1) Neither parent able to assume or resume parental duties within a reasonable time.
- (2) The child has resided with the permanent guardian for at least six months.
- (3) A permanent guardianship is in the best interests of the child.
- (4) The proposed permanent guardian:
  - (A)(i) is emotionally, mentally, and physically suitable to become the permanent guardian; and (ii) is financially suitable, with kinship guardianship assistance provided for in 33 V.S.A. § 4903 if applicable, to become the permanent guardian;
  - (B) has expressly committed to remain the permanent guardian for the duration of the child's minority; and
  - (C) has expressly demonstrated a clear understanding of the financial implications of becoming a permanent guardian including an understanding of any resulting loss of state or federal benefits or other assistance.

For children/youth whose permanency plan is placement with a relative with guardianship assistance payments, federal law requires that the child's case plan will include a description of:

- the steps that the department has taken to determine that it is not appropriate for the child to be returned home or adopted;
- the reasons for any separation of siblings during placement;
- the reasons why a permanent placement with a fit and willing relative through a permanent guardianship assistance arrangement is in the child's best interests;
- the efforts the department has made to discuss adoption by the child's relative foster parent as a more permanent alternative to legal guardianship and, in the case of a relative foster parent who has chosen not to pursue adoption, documentation of the reasons; and
- the efforts made by the department to discuss with the child's parent or parents to the permanent guardianship assistance arrangement, or the reasons why the efforts were not made.

See Family Services [Policy 195](#) on the Guardian Assistance Program for information about eligibility criteria for the Guardianship Assistance Program, which provides financial assistance and Medicaid for certain children in DCF custody who are the subject of permanent guardianships with a relative or fictive kin. Any agreement to provide assistance must be signed **before** the order for permanent guardianship is made.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 11 of 14

**Permanency Planning for Youth Age 16 and Older**

Every youth deserves permanency. All efforts must be made to ensure youth have an identified permanency plan. When reunification, adoption, or permanent guardianship cannot be achieved, a number of resources should be utilized to achieve permanency. These include:

- Local permanency meetings with Project Family;
- Permanency Round Tables (PRT); and/or
- Family group conferences or connections meetings.

The youth's significant relationships should be evaluated to determine what other options might be available to ensure continuity of relationships and support of the youth into early adulthood.

Additional permanency options include:

- Continued kinship foster care or foster care with a family that has a strong commitment to provide a home for the youth until emancipation;
- Shared parenting models in which the primary parents and kinship or foster parents are actively involved in sharing responsibilities of parenting a youth with serious physical or emotional disabilities.


Because the above listed options do not achieve the highest level of permanency, the family services worker must document why this was determined to be the most appropriate case plan goal.

Adoption after the youth turns 18 should also be considered. Such adoptions do not require termination of parental rights.

**Another Planned Permanent Placement (APPLA)**

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) describes exceptional case circumstances where the division maintains the care and custody of a youth and arranges a living situation in which a youth is expected to remain until adulthood. Per [Public Law 113-183](#), the case plan goal of APPLA shall not be used for children and youth under the age of 16. The APPLA goal should only be used (1) for youth over the age of 16 and (2) when other options have been evaluated and are found not be in the youth's best interest. For youth with an APPLA goal, the division is still focused on achieving permanency.

At every permanency hearing for youth with an APPLA case plan goal, the division is required to provide written documentation of intensive and continuing efforts to place a

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 12 of 14

youth permanently with a parent, relative (including adult siblings), or in a guardianship or adoptive placement. This includes attempts to locate and engage relatives not previously involved in the youth’s case plan, including the use of search technologies and social media.

The assigned policy and operations manager should be consulted on cases with an APPLA case plan goal.

**Preparation for Independent Living**

A case plan goal of independent living is rarely appropriate as it does not achieve permanency or life-long connections for the youth. This goal may only be established at the request of the youth AND after the family services worker has explored other options and engaged in dialogue about the youth’s reasons for this request. This goal must be approved by the district director. The district director may at that time convene a permanency review team to discuss with a consultant group how to best achieve a higher level of permanency. Youth in an independent living situation should be assisted in developing relationships with a network of caring adults to provide advice and assistance into early adulthood.


**Project Family and District Permanency Meetings**

Each district office is expected to have a local process that focuses on timely permanent outcomes for children and youth. This is often achieved through regularly scheduled meetings with our contracted partners at Lund through the joint partnership of Project Family. Permanency meetings are usually attended by family services workers, supervisors, district directors, and Project Family staff. While respecting the role of the family services worker and the supervisor in the case planning process, it is expected the team will work together to achieve permanency for children and youth.

Any young person who has not achieved permanency within two years has **not** achieved timely permanency. These children and youth should take highest priority for permanency planning and teaming through Project Family.

Examples of child/family topics that could be brought to permanency team discussions include:

- Situations where it appears a case is not moving towards reunification (regardless of TPR status);
- When changing a case plan goal to adoption/TPR or permanent guardianship;
- Conditional custody orders (CCOs) issued to someone other than a parent post-Merits Hearing;

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 13 of 14

- Situations where parents are living in the home of the foster or kinship parents;
- When a child freed for adoption experiences a placement change;
- Situations involving a youth being placed in a residential setting without strong family involvement;
- When unidentified relatives come forward and a child is in another placement;
- Situations where a child has complex medical needs, and this is impacting their permanency; or
- Situations where district offices become involved with any child who was previously adopted or achieved permanency through permanent guardianship.


Examples of kinship, foster, or intended adoptive parent topics that could be brought to permanency team discussions include:

- Caregivers experiencing any sort of significant instability (housing, mental health, substance abuse, financial, transportation);
- When there are concerns that a family may struggle to maintain stability or meet the child’s needs;
- When a caregiver struggles to complete paperwork, training, get the child where they need to be, or return communications;
- When a caregiver has a literacy or language barrier, or requires accommodations in the finalization process (i.e., a caregiver needs Braille paperwork or will be unable to provide written documentation to us);
- Situations where caregivers are struggling with their relationship;
- If there are safety concerns with a caregiver or they are facing threats or safety concerns from someone else; or
- When a caregiver has a challenging criminal or child protection history.

**Case Plan Goal for Children Freed for Adoption**

Any child/youth in custody that is freed for adoption should receive services centered on achieving a timely adoption. The case plan goal will be adoption except in unusual circumstances.

For any young person that is not living with a family willing to adopt them, the district office, in partnership with Project Family, will make diligent efforts to locate an adoptive family. The child/youth’s permanency issues will be discussed at a district permanency team meeting. During the meeting, the team will decide upon a specific strategy (including clear tasks and time frames) to recruit an adoptive family for the child. Project Family will assist with specific recruitment strategies.

 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES <b>Family Services Policy Manual</b>		<h1>125</h1>
Chapter:	Planning with Children and Families	
Subject:	Permanency Planning for Children and Youth	Page 14 of 14

The Project Family permanency worker will follow up on all inquiries about the child/youth and keep the family services worker and supervisor informed. The district must consider homes in other districts and in other states that can meet the needs of the child/youth.

Once a decision is made on which family is the best fit, a transition plan is established. The Project Family worker will assist the child/youth with the transition to the adoptive family and provide casework support to the family until the adoption is legally finalized. Jointly, the child/youth's worker and Project Family worker ensure services are in place and the family has all the information about the child/youth's trauma history or special needs prior to the child/youth moving into the home. This should include a discussion and possible referral to post-permanency supports.

For a small number of children/youth, adoption may not be the best plan due to their extraordinary needs. In addition, there may be some children/youth for whom an adoptive family cannot be found. Even in these situations, the division has a continuing responsibility to ensure the child/youth's need for permanency is considered and addressed in the case plan.

When the child/youth's worker is considering a change from adoption to another permanency goal, the child/youth's team, including the Project Family permanency worker, will review that decision. At a minimum, the following issues will be discussed in the decision-making process and addressed in the case plan:

- Have efforts been made to identify an adoptive family for the child/youth? If they have not, those efforts should be made unless it is clearly not in the child/youth's best interest.
- Is the child/youth living with a foster parent or kinship foster parent willing to assume guardianship?
- Is there a member of the extended family who might not have been previously identified or considered who might now be appropriate to assume care for the child/youth?
- What is the plan for the child/youth once they reach the age of eighteen? Do they have the capacity to live independently and support themselves? If not, what adult services will assist the individual? If continuing education is appropriate, how will that be financed?
- Who will provide the concrete emotional supports needed by the young adult? Does the child/youth have meaningful relationships with adults that will last into adulthood? If not, how can they be developed and nurtured?