



FAMILY SEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT



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WHY IT MATTERS

Children and youth in foster care have better outcomes when they are placed with relative caregivers including decreased time in foster care and less time to permanency, increased placement stability, and less likelihood of re-entry into foster care.¹ Children need a sense of belonging and unconditional love for health, growth, and development. Connections to family can often be a remedy to loneliness and a prerequisite to healing.²

The goal of *family finding* is to provide numerous safeguards for child and family well-being by identifying a lifetime family support network and maintaining existing family relationships. This can help empower the family in emotional and legal permanency decisions and provide children with multiple adult resource connections once they leave care.

Family finding includes casting a wide net to identify and search for family members and other important

people in the lives of children in foster care, making them aware that children have entered care, and then engaging family members in the case decision making process, including the development and fulfillment of case plans. Although family finding

was initially used as a tool to enhance permanency for youth aging out of foster care, the *Fostering Connections to Success on Increasing Adoptions Act of*

2008³ requires state agencies to identify and locate family members within 30 days of removing a child from his or her home.

While the operationalization of family find models varies among jurisdictions, they typically include an intensive relative search component and subsequent family engagement activities that comply with federal legislation and enhance placement and permanency options for the child.

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ADVOCATES IN ACTION

Finding family requires persistency, a sense of urgency and placing the youth at the center of the search and decision-making process. As their advocate, we can never stop looking for a permanent connection for children and youth who have experienced loss and isolation.

— CASA Volunteer

ACTIONS

The *National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice & Permanency Planning* identifies seven steps to finding a family, any of which an advocate could help with. The stages include:⁴

1. **Engagement and Searching**— discover family members and important people in the child’s life. Advocates can help locate family members through different search technologies and by talking to existing family members in the child’s life.
2. **Preparation** – Convene a preparation conference with possible network members, caregivers and system representatives with decision making authority. Advocates can take a lead role in helping convene such a meeting or participate in such a meeting.
3. **Planning and Decision-Making** – plan for the successful future of the child with the participation of family members. Advocates can insure that family members identified understand their potential influence and importance in the child’s life currently and in the future.
4. **Explore and plan: Lifetime network** – make decisions during family meetings that support the child’s legal and emotional permanency through a permanent network of relationships. As a representative for the child’s best interests, share how these family connections will impact the child’s permanency, safety and well-being.
5. **Healing and development** – evaluate the permanency plans developed. As the “keeper” of best interests for the child, advocates can carefully evaluate the permanency plans and insure that family connections are front and center. This step should also be continuously considered and prioritized in all meetings until the child or youth exits the formal system of care and a permanent parent assumes responsibility for the child.
6. **Legal Permanency**— Provide follow-up support to ensure the child and family can maintain the permanency plans. Advocates can act as the bridge or liaison to the child and their family members, ensuring that they maintain regular interactions and contacts. In addition to a “permanent” parent, the network of other connected people in the child’s life should continue to be cultivated and supported.

ACTIONS TO ENGAGE FAMILIES:

- Relative notification [due diligence guidelines](#).⁵ See this resource for a comprehensive list of activities that one can and should engage in when locating family members not yet identified;
- Family Teaming models, such as [Family Group Conferencing](#) (FGC)⁶, with the use of video or teleconference to support participation by family members who are not in the local area. A description of FGC can be found here as well.
- Narrative [discovery of lost connections](#)⁷ uses storytelling and memory prompts to help spark recall of additional family and friend connections;
- [Father involvement interventions](#)⁸ have been traditionally neglected in the family find process and yet can offer up rich connections for children;
- [Kinship support interventions](#)⁹, such as [Kinship Navigator](#)¹⁰ programs, can also be effective in identifying relatives;
- [High quality Internet searches](#)¹¹; and,
- Use of [mobility or connectedness mapping](#)¹² techniques with youth.

BRIGHT SPOT

COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TEXAS CASA

Recognizing that the strongest indicators for child well-being is the number of committed adults in a child's life, Texas CASA has worked to stay at the forefront of connecting children and youth to these important adults by developing several new initiatives, including *Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE)*. After the success of a five-year federally funded *Diligent Recruitment* project, Texas CASA approached the 84th Legislature and received appropriated funding for a two-year *Family Finding* collaboration between CASA and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

CFE is an integrated or embedded approach that establishes a true team between CASA and Child Protective Services (CPS) to work together to complete the steps of [Family Finding](#).¹³ CFE takes "finding" of the family much further by ensuring an authentic commitment from CASA and CPS to truly and meaningfully engage with found connections. Once these connections are made, the CFE team welcomes their presence in the child's life and their continued involvement in the planning and decision making.

A unique function of the CFE team that differs from the traditional "Family Find" specialist model, is that family find activities are conducted by the CFE team with an emphasis on utilizing the child's CASA volunteer. This teaming approach models the need for and goal

of establishing a community of support, or network, around the children and their families. Everyone involved must complete specific CFE training which covers an overview of the approach, the process, and the tools involved. Ongoing training for CFE continues as Texas CASA is implementing CFE through a coaching modality, with CFE Coaches regionally located to provide hands on support to the programs involved.

To date, there are 20 programs in approximately 30 Texas counties utilizing CFE with plans to spread the approach to half of the CASA network in the state by 2020. More than 2,000 CASA and CPS staff, care providers and members of the legal community have participated in training sessions. In the CFE approach to case practice, each child's case is supported by a team consisting of the CPS caseworker and CASA volunteer assigned to the case, as well as the CPS supervisor, CASA volunteer supervisor, a CPS family meeting facilitator and other professionals as needed. Team members work together engaging in family find strategies and develop a shared plan for supporting the child.

In 2015, Texas CASA worked with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) to conduct a two-year implementation study of the CFE project. In year one, CFRP found that: 1) CFE provides a framework and tool to enhance standard family engagement practices and strengthen collaboration between CASA and CPS; 2) CASA and CPS focused on building implementation capacity and aligning

the CFE approach and CPS processes and timelines; 3) Many components of CFE can be implemented widely to enhance family engagement and collaboration; and, 4) CASA and CPS staff reported that using the CFE approach increases meaningful family engagement, enhancing case management and planning.¹⁴ In year two, CFRP found that CFE is identified as an important tool to increase family



engagement and collaboration. The evaluation results also provide recommendations for the spread and replication of the CFE to other CASA programs in the state. In year three and four of the evaluation, the impact of CFE on child outcomes including well-being will be measured.

For more information contact
training@casaforchildren.org

To learn more:
<https://texascasa.org/collaborative-family-engagement/>

SELECTED RESOURCES

Below are tools and a selection of resources to support effective family finding and engagement.

Name	Description
<u>California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), Family Finding and Engagement (FFE) Toolkit</u> ¹⁵	The <i>Family Finding and Engagement (FFE) implementation Toolkit</i> provides important information, documents, and materials about searching for and locating family members and other adults who will and can serve as long-term and permanent connections to children. This <i>Toolkit</i> details the process of putting a new practice, program, or intervention into action in a county or organization. It is a set of practical tools, which can be used together or separately, to help implementers systematically execute and evaluate the new practice, program, or intervention.
<u>CASA of Los Angeles, Family Finding Discovery and Engagement Presentation</u> ¹⁶	CASA of Los Angeles has created a number of in-service handouts on family finding strategies including the <i>Tree of Life Exercise and Template</i> ; a case scenario, mobility-mapping example and signs of safety residency handout.
<u>Child Trends, Piecing Together the Puzzle: Tips and Techniques for Effective Discovery in Family Finding (2011)</u> ¹⁷	A critical component of the family find process is the discovery phase. This document provides tips and techniques for effective discovery of relatives and other important people in the child's life and shares examples of what has been successful.
<u>Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, Completing the Circle: Uncovering, Discovering and Creating Connections for Your Foster and Adoptive Children</u> ¹⁸	This guide was created to help foster and adoptive parents identify, locate, and engage as many caring individuals as possible – biological and other – to support the child in their care over his or her lifetime.

Name	Description
National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, <i>Developing Recruitment Plans: A Tool for States and Tribes</i> (2016) ¹⁹	<p>This toolkit helps child welfare agencies develop data-driven recruitment plans, offering ideas for creating short-term plans, targeted recruitment plans focused on particular populations or areas, and comprehensive diligent recruitment plans. It provides ideas and strategies to consider, examples of ways to develop recruitment plans, tools to use in the planning processes and adapt to meet needs, key considerations, worksheets to help analyze data and use for planning, and suggestions for other resources and information to help with developing recruitment plans.</p>
National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, <i>Diligent Recruitment Planning Tool for Tribes</i> (2016) ²⁰	<p>This tool is designed specifically for tribal child welfare systems, providing an easy-to-use guide for discussions to develop a comprehensive diligent recruitment plan and program. This brief tool includes ideas for discussion questions and people to include in planning discussions. It can be used either as a companion to the full <i>Diligent Recruitment Navigator</i> or on its own.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 See <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/child-welfare-2/path-foster-care-crisis-runs-family/28707>
- 2 See <https://www.childtrends.org/research/research-by-topic/evaluating-family-finding/>
- 3 See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/6893>
- 4 Note: These steps were adapted from the original resource to reflect updates to the model made by Kevin Campbell in October 2014. See <https://www.childtrends.org/research/research-by-topic/evaluating-family-finding/>
- 5 See <http://www.familyfinding.org/assets/files/Defining%20Due%20Diligence%20-%20Identifying%20Relatives%20for%20Foster%20Youth%20Article%202.2014%281%29.pdf>
- 6 See <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/family-group-decision-making/detailed>
- 7 See <http://www.familyfinding.org/assets/files/Family%20Finding%20and%20Engagement%281%29.pdf>
- 8 See <http://www.cebc4cw.org/topic/father-involvement-interventions/>
- 9 See <http://www.cebc4cw.org/topic/kinship-caregiver-support-programs/>
- 10 See <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/kinship-navigator-program/detailed>
- 11 See <http://www.familyfinding.org/assets/files/Quality%20Relative%20Internet%20Searches%2012.2013%281%29.pdf>
- 12 See https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Child_Trends-2011_12_01_RB_FamilyFindingTips.pdf
- 13 <http://www.familyfinding.org/>
- 14 Child and Family Research Partnership (August 2017). *Evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Project: Final Report*. The University of Texas at Austin: Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs.
- 15 See <http://calswec.berkeley.edu/toolkits/family-finding-and-engagement-ffe-toolkit>
- 16 <http://casala.org/in-service-handouts/>
- 17 See https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Child_Trends-2011_12_01_RB_FamilyFindingTips.pdf
- 18 See http://www.ifapa.org/pdf_docs/completingthecircle.pdf
- 19 See http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/developing-recruitment-plans-toolkit.pdf
- 20 See http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/dr-navigator-tribal-supplement.pdf