

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide	
Division 03: Child Welfare	Chapter 01: Director's Policies
Item 020: Family Finding & Engagement	
Suggested changes send to: DSS PSOA Mailbox	Issued: December 18, 2020
References: Assembly Bill (AB) 938 (Chapter 261, Statutes of 2009); Welfare and Institutions Code (W&IC) Sections 309, 319, 361.3 AND 628; and All County Letter (ACL) No. 09-86	New

Preamble

Child Welfare Policy and Procedure Guides are meant to be used as tools to relay best practice and staff expectations. It is understood that specific case scenarios may not always align themselves with the stated practices and that at all times what is of paramount importance is the Safety and Well-being of the children we are charged to protect.

Policy

The Department of Social Services (DSS) will engage in Family Finding and Engagement (FF&E) activities that demonstrate concerted efforts to maintain and develop permanent connections for children in foster care with relatives, mentors, and other significant persons in the child's life.

Procedure

It is the goal of DSS to achieve shorter timelines to permanency for foster children and youth in order to prevent them from lingering in foster care and transitioning out of dependency without significant connections for successful adulthood. Therefore, referrals to the FF&E Unit will occur early and ongoing throughout the life of a case.

DSS is required, when a child is removed from the home, to conduct, within 30 days, an investigation, in order to identify and locate all grandparents, adult siblings, and other adult relatives of the child. DSS must provide, except when that relative's history of family or domestic violence makes notification inappropriate, those persons, as specified, with information that the child has been removed from the custody of his or her parents or guardians and; an explanation of various options to participate in the care and placement of the child. DSS must report to the court at the initial petition hearing regarding its notification efforts.

In addition to the legal requirement to provide notice to relatives, as specified, that the child has been removed, the Social Worker (SW) shall submit a Family Finding referral in the following instances:

- A child requires a foster care placement
- A potential relative has not been identified for placement

- A Status Review hearing is held and no permanent plan is identified, when no prior family finding efforts have been made.
- Concurrent planning for Adoption, when no prior family finding efforts have been made.
- Specific requests to locate a specific person or an absent parent
- Preventative inquiry i.e. youth at risk of entering foster care as an Imminent Risk Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting

The SW shall send an email to the DSSFamilyFinding@fresnocountyca.gov inbox requesting assistance with family finding and engagement efforts.

FF&E Unit Responsibilities

The FF&E unit Social Work Supervisor (SWS) or designated family finding staff person will monitor children and youth that have been newly placed into foster care via initial removal TDM meetings. The SWS will assign notification efforts for each newly removed child/youth to a family finding SW. The family finding assignment for notification efforts will be documented in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) in the Client Services Notebook on the Special Projects tab.

The FF&E SW will provide findings to the FF&E Office Assistant (OA), who will mail out family informed notification letters to family members within 30 days of child/youth's removal from the parent/guardian. The letter will detail that the child has been removed from the custody of his or her parents or guardians and; an explanation of various options to participate in the care and placement of the child.

In addition to notification, the FF&E unit receives referrals from SWs and Fresno County Juvenile Probation Officers (PO) when there is a need to locate family members such as absent parents and other relatives. Referrals directly initiated by child welfare and probation staff to the FF&E team will be responded to within 48 business hours or sooner. The FF&E SW will document their efforts in CWS/CMS and produce a Contact Information Report, which details the relative finding results that is shared with the case managing SW or PO via email and will be imported into CWS/CMS in the Client Notebook. The family finding SW may also assist with family engagement efforts at the request of the SW or PO. These engagement efforts may include, but are not limited to:

- Attending teaming meetings
- Direct phone calls to families receiving Emergency Response (ER) services, as needed
- Conjoint in-person contact with case manager, when deemed essential

The FF&E SW will review open referrals/cases after 30 days, 90 days, 6 months, 12 months or 18 months to assess for further assistance or closure of continued FF&E efforts.

Emergency Response (ER) SW Responsibilities

In an effort to ensure that every child/youth maintains connections with their biological family, the ER SW will complete a FF&E referral in the following circumstances:

- Absent parent (in addition to parent search for due diligence report)
- No known relatives
- No relative placement options have been located and/or approved
- When a youth is placed in a Short Term Residential Treatment Placement (STRTP) as their initial out-of-home placement

***It should be noted that an ER SW does not need to make a FF&E referral for family notification purposes only, as this is already done for each newly removed child/youth by the FF&E unit. An ER SW will make a FF&E referral in the circumstances as outlined above.**

Ongoing SW Responsibilities

The ongoing SW will continue to make FF&E throughout the life of the case. In an effort to ensure that every child/youth maintains connections with their biological family, the ongoing SW is responsible for the following:

- Review all previously completed FF&E efforts, as documented in the Contact Information Report
- Attempt to make contact with all relatives as documented in the Contact Information Report by phone, email, text message, in-person or mail and document these efforts in CWS/CMS
- Submit an FF&E referral prior to every Status Review hearing when:
 - There is an absent parent
 - There are no known relatives
 - No relative placement options have been located and/or approved
 - No permanent plan has been identified
 - Considering an adoptive placement
 - A youth is placed in a STRTP and no prior family finding efforts have been made

The ER and/or ongoing SW will complete an email to the [DSS Family Finding](#). The mail should include:

- Case name
- Case number
- General explanation of what is needed i.e. absent parent, specific relative, or placement options.
- Additional information to assist with search i.e. last known residence and/or approximate age.

Upon receipt of Contact Information Report, the SW will review and assess appropriate relatives. The SW will make concerted efforts to contact relatives and engage them in a conversation about their willingness and capacity to be involved in the child/youth's life. The SW should invite those relatives that are willing to attend the next scheduled teaming meeting for the child/youth. If the relative is interested in placement, they should be referred to the Resource Family Approval (RFA) Unit. Please refer to the Policy and Procedure Guide [Resource Family Approval Process](#).

Throughout the life of a case the SW will continually assess the need for ongoing FF&E efforts particularly when a child/youth is not in relative placement. If no relative placement can be located and/or approved for a child/youth, the SW will assess a relative's ability to remain involved in a child's life, as appropriate, and facilitate their ongoing involvement.

Documentation in Court Reports of Family Finding Efforts

The SW shall document in every court report, the current FF&E efforts. The SW shall document, not only the FF&E referral and Contact Information Report results, but also their efforts to engage family members on an ongoing basis including, but not limited to:

- Relative's participation in Teaming meetings
- Referrals made to the RFA unit on behalf of relatives
- Visits and phone calls between the child/youth and relatives
- Relative's participation in a child/youth extracurricular activities