PERMANENCY PLANNING SERVICES POLICY, PROTOCOL, AND GUIDANCE

Purpose

Permanency Planning Services are provided to children who must be separated from their own parents or caretakers when they are unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection and care. As a result, the child enters the custody of a North Carolina County child welfare services agency. When this happens, the county child welfare services agency has legal custody and/or placement responsibility, whether the child has been removed from their home, and regardless of the type of placement.

County child welfare custody must not be considered until reasonable efforts have been made to preserve a child's safety, health, and well-being in their own home. County child welfare agencies are required to provide services to preserve or reunify families until parental rights have been terminated by the juvenile court.

When county child welfare custody is necessary, it is the responsibility of the county child welfare services agency to ensure the child remains in its custody for the shortest time possible. Permanency Planning Services require a thorough assessment of the child and family's needs and careful planning prior to and throughout a child's experience in county child welfare custody.

Permanency Planning Services must be provided to any child in the custody or placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency. Permanency Planning Services include but are not limited to:

- Careful planning and decision making with the family about placement, when necessary, and preparing the child, the child's family, and the foster family for separation and placement, including developing a family time and contact (visitation) agreement;
- Assessing children's needs to ensure appropriate placement and services;
- Arranging and monitoring a placement appropriate to the child's needs;
- Involving the kinship network to provide planning, placement, and other support for the child and family;
- Assessing family strengths and needs to determine the appropriate plan for service;
- Developing and arranging community-based services to support the child and family;
- Collaborating with other community service providers working with the family to ensure continuity of services and to prevent duplication of services;
- Referring the child and family to needed services, including clinical treatment;
- Collaborating with educational agencies to ensure school stability for the child and that all factors relating to the child's best interest are considered in determining the child's educational setting; all appropriate educational services are provided to the child; and documentation of educational planning is in the case file;
- Providing ongoing assessment to determine risk to the child and to guide the case planning process;
- Working with the family to develop and implement the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement;

- Helping the family meet the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement objectives by providing information, instruction, guidance, and mentoring related to parenting skills, and by monitoring and updating the agreement with the family;
- Providing case planning and management;
- Concurrent permanency planning with the family to develop alternative options to provide a permanent home for a child should reunification fail;
- Supervising the placement to ensure the child receives proper care during placement;
- Preparing for and participating in court proceedings;
- Preparing for and facilitating Child and Family Team /Permanency Planning Review meetings;
- Providing transportation for children in county child welfare agency custody when needed and not otherwise available, including visits with parents, siblings, and relatives;
- Providing LINKS services to assist older youth in learning life skills necessary to make a successful transition from foster care to living on their own;
- Ensuring placements across state lines comply with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC);
- Recruiting and assessing relatives and other kin as potential caregivers;
- Involving foster parents in planning and decision making for children in county child welfare agency custody;
- Preparing children for adoptive placements and maintaining life books; and
- Maintaining the permanency planning case record and thorough documentation of case activities.

Foster care can be defined as a situation in which, for a period, a child lives with and is cared for by people who are not the child's parents. There are different forms of foster care, including but not limited to:

- Family foster homes,
- Therapeutic foster homes, and
- Residential care.

For child welfare, "foster care" refers to children in the legal custody of a county child welfare services agency; however, a child may also be placed in foster care by their parent without involvement of a county child welfare services agency.

In order to keep children in foster care connected to their family, it is important to consider the child's culture. Child welfare defines **culture** as "*a set of learned values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and practices shared by a group of people and can be passed from one generation to another. This can include, but is not limited to: religion, ethnic customs, traditions of family and community.*"

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Policy and Legal Basis

Policy	Legal Basis
Permanency Planning Services must be provided to any child in the custody or placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency. Reunification with the parents, guardians, or custodian from whom the child is removed must be the primary or secondary plan unless the juvenile court makes findings under G.S. 7B-901(c) or G.S. 7B-906.1(d)(3), that the permanent plan is or has been achieved, or the court makes written findings that reunification efforts clearly would be unsuccessful or would be inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety. When removal is necessary to preserve a child's safety and well-being, the county child welfare services agency must: • Provide services to preserve or reunify families until the juvenile court has determined reunification would not meet the child's need for safety and permanency within a reasonable length of time; • Ensure the child is in county child welfare custody for the shortest time possible; • Provide family-centered services that are time limited and goal oriented;	Foster care services are provided in compliance with the statutory requirements of federal and state laws. Federal and state law is intended to provide protections for children in foster care, who need safety and permanency, and for their families to ensure that their legal rights are maintained. N.C.G.S. § 108A-14 states the County Director of Social Services has the responsibility and the duty to investigate reports of child abuse, neglect, and dependency; to take appropriate action to protect such children and to accept children for placement in foster homes and to supervise placements for as long as such children require foster care. N.C.G.S. § 108A-48 states the Department of Health and Human Services is authorized to establish a State Foster Care Benefits Program with appropriations by the General Assembly for the purpose of providing assistance to children who are placed in foster care facilities by county departments of social services in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Social Services Commission. Such appropriations, together with county contributions for this purpose, shall be expended to provide for the costs of keeping children in foster care facilities. N.C.G.S. § 7B-505.1 states that unless the court orders otherwise, when a juvenile is placed in the non-secure custody of a county department of social services, the director may arrange for, provide, or consent to any of the following: (1) Routine medical and dental care or treatment. Treatment, including but not limited to treatment for common pediatric illnesses and injuries that require prompt intervention. (2) Emergency medical, surgical, psychiatric, psychological, or mental health care or treatment. (3) Testing and evaluation in exigent circumstances. It further states the court may authorize the director to consent to a Child Medical Evaluation upon written findings. In addition, the director shall obtain authorization from the juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian to consent to all care or treatment not covered above, except that the court may authorize the director to provide consent after a hearing at which the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the care, treatment, or evaluation requested is in the juvenile's

Policy and Legal Basis

Policy	Legal Basis
• Complete a thorough assessment of the child and family's needs; and • Provide careful planning prior to and throughout a child's placement. Ensuring a child's safety and working to achieve permanency must always be parallel functions. A permanency planning hearing is required if the child was placed in nonsecure custody and custody is not returned to the parent, guardian, or custodian at initial disposition. The permanency planning hearing must occur within 90 days from the date of the initial dispositional hearing and must be at least every six months thereafter. Each child placed in county child welfare services agency custody must have concurrent permanency plans at all permanency planning hearings. *If the child is 14 years or older, the child must be consulted regarding any permanency planning arrangements.*	best interest. Care and treatment includes: prescriptions for psychotropic medications, participation in clinical trials, immunizations when it is known that the parent has a bona fide religious objection to the standard schedule of immunizations, CMEs, comprehensive clinical assessments or other mental health evaluations, surgical, medical, or dental procedures or tests that require informed consent, psychiatric, psychological, or mental health care or treatment that requires informed consent. For any care or treatment provided, the director shall make reasonable efforts to promptly notify the parent, guardian, or custodian that care, or treatment will be or has been provided and give the parent or guardian frequent status reports on the juvenile's treatment and the care provided. Upon request of the juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian, the director shall make available to the parent, guardian, or custodian any results or records, except when prohibited. Except as prohibited by federal law, the department may disclose confidential information deemed necessary for the juvenile's assessment and treatment to a health care provider serving the juvenile. Unless the court has ordered otherwise, except as prohibited by federal law, a health care provider shall disclose confidential information about a juvenile to a director of a county department of social services with custody of the juvenile and a parent, guardian, or custodian. N.C.G. S. § 7B-903.1 states the director of a county department of social services with custody of a juvenile shall be authorized to make decisions about matters not addressed herein that are generally made by a juvenile's custodian, including but not limited to educational decisions and consenting to the sharing of the juvenile's information. The court may delegate any part of this authority to the juvenile's parent, foster parent, or another individual. "When a juvenile is in the custody or placement responsibility of a county department of social services, the placement provider may, in accordance with N.C.G.S. 131D-10.2A, provide or withhold permission, without prior approval of the court or county department of social services, to allow a juvenile to participate in normal childhood activities. If such authorization is not in the juvenile's best interest, the court shall set out alternative parameters for approving normal childhood activities."; "If a juvenile is removed from the home and placed in the custody or placement responsibility of a

Policy and Legal Basis

Policy	Legal Basis
	county department of social services, the director shall not allow unsupervised visitation with or return physical custody of the juvenile to the parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker without a hearing at which the court finds that the juvenile will receive proper care and supervision in a safe home." Public Law 96-272, Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, is one of the most significant federal laws shaping the provision of services to children needing foster care. The requirements of this law were developed to ensure that children do not linger unnecessarily in foster care placements. It also frames many requirements for receipt of federal Title IV-E funding. Public Law 105-89, The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, expands and clarifies the intent of P.L. 96-272. This legislation establishes unequivocally that our national goals for children in the child welfare system are safety, permanency, and well-being. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, P.L. 110-351, addresses outcomes for children who have entered foster care.

Required Timeframes

• Date of Non-Secure Custody Order	• Permanency Planning Services case begins
• Within 24 hours of placement	• Verification of Custody Letter given to placement provider and the juvenile's school
• Within 3 days after the day of placement	• Determination of Foster Care Assistance Benefits and/or Medical Benefits Only (DSS-5120) initiated
• Within 7 business days of placement	• Determination of Foster Care Assistance Benefits and/or Medical Benefits Only (DSS-5120) completed

• Within 7 calendar days of placement	• Face-to-face visit with child(ren); this contact is in addition to any contact or interaction with the child(ren) on the day of placement
	• Face-to-face contact with placement provider (at least one adult caretaker) in the provider's home; this is in addition to any contact or interaction with the placement provider(s) on the day of placement
	• Family Time (visitation) for child(ren) with parent(s)/caretaker(s) and sibling(s)
	• Complete the following:
	  ○ Face-to-face contact with parent(s)/caretaker(s)
	  ○ Initial Health Screening (Health Summary Form – Initial Visit) (DSS-5206)
	  ○ Educational Stability addressed (Child Education Status) (DSS-5245) or NC Best Interest Determination Form (DSS-5137) completed) including BID meeting (within 5 school days) prior to any school change
	  ○ SIS Client Entry Form (DSS-5027)
	  ○ Child Placement and Payment System Report (DSS-5094)

• Within 14 calendar days of placement	• Shared Parenting meeting • Family Time and Contact Plan (DSS-5242) developed jointly with parent(s) • Family Time and Contact Plan developed for siblings to visit each other (if in separate placements) (DSS-5242)
• Within 30 calendar days of placement	• Develop the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240) • Develop the Transitional Living Plan (TLP) (DSS-5096a) for any child 14 years old or older

Required Timeframes

	• Make diligent efforts to identify and notify adult relatives and other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile. When it is safe and appropriate children must be placed with relatives.
	• All information about diligent efforts to locate must be documented and filed with the court.
	• Complete the following:
	  ○ Relative Notifications [e.g., via Relative Notification Letter (DSS-5317)
	  ○ Health Summary Form - 30-day Comprehensive Visit (DSS-5208)
	  ○ Health History Form (DSS-5207), and provide copies to the placement provider
	  ○ Review and update (if needed) the Child Education Status (DSS-5245)
	  ○ Review of the Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs (DSS-5229)
	  ○ Review of the Risk Assessment (DSS-5230)
	• Begin the child(ren)'s life book

• Within 60 calendar days of placement	• Initial Permanency Planning Review and complete the following:
	  ○ Permanency Planning Review (DSS-5241)
	  ○ Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (DSS-5229)
	  ○ Family Reunification Assessment (DSS-5227)
	  ○ Review and update (if needed) the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240)
	• Adjudicatory Hearing (within 60 days of the filing of the petition, unless the judge orders it be held later)

• Within 90 days of the 60-day CFT/PPR (150 calendar days of placement), and every 90 days thereafter throughout the life of the case	• Permanency Planning Review and complete the following:
	  ○ Permanency Planning Review (DSS-5241)
	  ○ Review and update the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240)
	  ○ Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (DSS-5229)
	  ○ Family Reunification Assessment (DSS-5227)

• Every 12 months	• Update the Education Status (DSS-5245) • Update the Health History Form (DSS-5207)* • Complete Redetermination of Foster Care Assistance Benefits and/or Medical Assistance Only (DSS-5120A)

Required Timeframes

	• Complete credit check for any youth 14 years old or older • Photograph of the child • Update the Verification of Custody Letter **See Planning Forms for additional required timeframes*
• Frequency of contacts with parent(s), child(ren), home visits, and collaterals	• See Required Contacts Section
• Documentation	• Current within 7 days of any case activity or action
• Case Staffing	• Once a month • Whenever there is a change in circumstance that impacts permanency
• Permanency Planning Hearing	• Permanency Planning hearing held within 90 days of initial Disposition: subsequent permanency planning hearings must be held within every 6 months thereafter.
• Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings	In addition to the timeframes noted above, a CFT must be held on the following occasions: • Change in placement (or potential change in placement) of the child; • Change in family circumstance and it is necessary to reconvene the team to discuss the case, this includes when there is a change in the juvenile's school; • Change in the permanent plan; or • Any time the family or child request the team be convened.
• Family Reunification Assessment (DSS-5227) • Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (DSS-5229) OR Family Risk Reassessment (DSS-5226)	• Track with required Permanency Planning Review (PPR) / Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement Updates (on the DSS-5240) • See Decision-Making Tools Section for additional requirements
• Case Closure	• Close SIS Client Entry form (DSS-5207) • Close Child Placement and Payment System Report (CPPS) (DSS-5094)

Case Staffing/Two-Level Decision Making/Role of Supervisor

Policy	Guidance
CASE STAFFING / TWO-LEVEL DECISION MAKING / ROLE OF SUPERVISOR The county child welfare supervisor and assigned county child welfare worker must staff each permanency planning case: • At least once a month throughout the life of the case; and • Whenever there is a change in circumstance that impacts safety and/or permanency of the child. At least monthly, staffing must cover but not be limited to: • Safety, well-being, and permanence; • Family's strengths and needs; • Discussion of juvenile's placement if not placed with siblings and efforts that have been made to place the juvenile siblings together; • Family's progress; and • Review of the ongoing family and collateral contacts. Two-level decisions/reviews must occur on every permanency planning case at the following times: • At the time of the development and required reviews of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement; • At required PPR meetings; • Whenever there is a potential placement disruption and/or placement change; • Whenever there is a change in circumstance that impacts the safety or risk to a child(ren); • The child is an abducted or runaway child; • Whenever there is a change in circumstance that impacts permanency; and • Prior to any court review or permanency planning hearing.	CASE STAFFING Case staffing can occur in various forms. The focus of case staffing is to ensure that the case county child welfare worker follows North Carolina child welfare policy, addresses child and family needs, and monitors: risk, safety, and family progress. Supervision provides coaching and support to the county child welfare worker. Achieving these goals may be accomplished through an office meeting but could also occur when a supervisor attends a home visit or other family meeting with a county child welfare worker. Participation in the case CFT/PPR meeting by both the case worker and the supervisor could be considered as a staffing during that month. TWO-LEVEL DECISION MAKING / ROLE OF SUPERVISOR Two-level decisions for Permanency Planning Services cases should involve the assigned county child welfare worker and that worker's supervisor. However, there may be circumstances that require another county child welfare worker or another supervisor or a higher-level manager in the agency to participate in the decision making. The child welfare supervisor should review every permanency planning electronic NC FAST record at least quarterly and prior to case closure.

Case Staffing/Two-Level Decision Making/Role of Supervisor

Policy	Guidance
Two-level reviews of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement, Family Reunification Assessment, and Family Strengths & Needs forms must be indicated with signatures of the county child welfare worker and supervisor. The supervisor must review every Permanency Planning Services electronic record for compliance with policy and protocol.	

Required Forms: Planning Forms

RELATIVE NOTIFICATION

Legal Basis
Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, P.L. 110-351 requires county child welfare agencies to exercise *due diligence* to notify all close adult relatives of a child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents) within 30 days of the child's removal from the parent of their options to participate in the care and placement of the child. N.C.G.S. 7B-505 (b)Requires the department of social services to use due diligence to identify and notify adult relatives and other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile within 30 days after the initial order removing custody. The county social services agency must file with the court all information regarding attempts made to identify and notify adult relatives of the juvenile and persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile. In placing a juvenile in nonsecure custody under this section, the court shall first consider whether a relative of the juvenile is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. If the court finds that the relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision in a safe home, then the court shall order placement of the juvenile with the relative unless the court finds that placement with the relative would be contrary to the best interests of the juvenile.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
RELATIVE NOTIFICATION County child welfare agencies must identify and notify all adult relatives and other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the child within 30 days of the child's removal from their parent(s)/caretaker(s). County child welfare agencies must provide documentation of those efforts to the court. The county child welfare agency must thoroughly search for relatives, and when it is safe and appropriate juvenile children must be placed with relatives. Relative is defined as an individual directly related to the juvenile by blood, marriage, or adoption. This includes but is not limited to the following examples: grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles.	Notification to relatives is subject to exceptions due to family circumstances such as domestic violence. County child welfare agencies should provide to the court efforts made to contact relatives and/or a legal custodian of a sibling and include the date the notification was sent, the response from the notification, and the reasons why the relative or legal custodian of a sibling was or was not recommended for placement by the agency. The local county agency should also provide copies of all correspondence with relatives and/or a legal custodian of a sibling in the case file.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Adoptive parents of siblings are not considered relatives of the legal child; however, they must be considered in the identification and notification of individuals who have legal custody of a sibling. *Per federal law, individuals are considered siblings of a child even if termination or disruption of parental rights, such as death, has occurred.* The county child welfare agency must make diligent efforts to notify the following people within 30 days after the initial order removing custody: • Adult relatives and kin suggested by parents; • Adult maternal and paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, great grandparents, nieces, and nephews; • All parents of a sibling where such parent has legal custody of such sibling; and • Relatives and other persons with legal custody of a sibling. The following are the relative notification forms generated through NC FAST: • Relative Notification Letter (DSS-5317) • Relative Interest Form (DSS-5316) NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS • The following must be included in relative notifications: • That the child has been removed from the custody of the parent; • The options the relative has under federal, state, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child; • The options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice; • The requirements to become a family foster home;	The Relative Search Information form (DSS-5318) should also be used to document relative information and subsequently scanned and attached in the electronic record. The purpose of relative notification is to ensure adult relatives of children under the care and supervision of county child welfare agencies are given the consideration and opportunity to be placement resources and/or to be able to participate in the child's care plan. The Relative Notification Letter and the Relative Interest Form should be sent together to identified relatives and kin because these forms complement each other. The Relative Search Information Form should also be sent with the Relative Notification letter to obtain additional relative information. • Efforts to notify should include, but are not limited to: • Interviewing the child and the child's parents or caretakers about the child's relatives and their preferences for placement; • Using family decision-making meetings such as Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings to ask participants to help identify other relatives of the child; • Contacting identified relatives and requesting names of other relatives, divulging only information necessary to help identify additional relatives and assess their interest in accepting placement of the child or providing connections; • Accessing the services history in NC FAST or internal county agency databases such as child welfare and child support; and • Utilizing internet-based search tools, including social media.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• The services and supports that are available for children in a foster home; and • How relative guardians of the child may receive kinship guardianship assistance payments if the county child welfare services agency has elected to offer such payments. County child welfare agencies may choose an alternate format to notify relatives; however, it must include the minimum criteria listed above to ensure compliance with the federal law. Relative notification must be an ongoing process. Documentation must include the agency's ongoing efforts to locate and notify relatives. County child welfare agencies must provide documentation at each permanency hearing of thorough efforts that utilize search technology (including social media) to find biological family members for children. For more information on placement with relatives, see Kinship Care.	The county child welfare services agency should work with parents and caretakers to notify relatives and kin they have suggested, in addition to pursuing those close relatives that are mandated to receive notification. The county child welfare services agency should inform parents of the requirement to notify relatives beyond those they have identified. Parents may be able to provide necessary background and history of these relatives to assist the county child welfare services agency in determining their suitability. In situations of family domestic violence, it may not be appropriate to notify such relatives if it is deemed that it would pose a risk to the child or caretaker. If after a thorough assessment of domestic violence, the county child welfare services agency deems that it is not in the child's best interest to contact a relative or kin, then the justification should be thoroughly documented in the case file. Upon receipt of the Relative Interest Form, county child welfare workers should follow up with relatives to discuss their desires and options in becoming resources for children. Relatives who demonstrate ambivalence should receive support from the county child welfare services agency to assist them in determining their level of interest and commitment. County child welfare agencies should discuss with relatives any potential barriers that may prevent them from being a placement option. Once those barriers are identified, the agency should discuss, if appropriate, possible resources to assist the prospective relative placement in providing care to the juvenile.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
	Additional relatives and kin may be identified or come forward later in the case and should be afforded the same information and notification as those relatives identified earlier in the case.
PERMANENCY PLANNING OUT OF HOME FAMILY SERVICES AGREEMENT The Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240) generated through NC FAST, serves as the framework on which the agency's work with the family and child is based and drives the agency's work with the family. The Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement must document the objectives and action steps that the family, agency and other resources will take while working to achieve permanency for the child. The purpose of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement planning process is to: • Clarify with the family reasons for county child welfare services agency involvement; • Identify resources within the family that will help the child achieve a safe, permanent home; • Involve the family in identifying areas that need improvement; • Clarify expectations for behavioral change with all persons involved; and • Acknowledge the family's strengths and commitment to their child. The development of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement must include:	The Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement should involve the child and family during planning, and recognizes each family has strengths and is unique. Services to the family should be collaborative and community-based. The Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement is a living document that can be revised and updated as often as needed based on the circumstances of the case. Good case planning, using the either the PPR Review and/or the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement, should include the problems which led to agency intervention, as well as establish goals directed toward achieving safety, well-being, and permanence for the child within a 12-month period. The Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement should reflect both the strengths and needs of the child and family identified in the Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs and the Family Reunification Assessment. The Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement should document what must change for the parents to meet the needs of the child. The county child welfare worker should immediately engage the family, both maternal and paternal, in the planning process, which is focused on correcting the conditions that caused the county child welfare services agency to be involved in the family.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Involving the entire family, including the parent(s)/caretakers, child(ren), and any other significant family member, in the process; • Identifying goals that are both realistic and achievable; • Using family strengths when outlining objectives and activities to attain the goals; • Spelling out the steps necessary for success; and • Documenting who will do what and when they will do it. Permanency Planning Family Services Agreements must identify the desired changes and provide documentation of the changes that have or have not occurred. The agreement must address the services to be provided or arranged, expectations of the family, agency, placement provider, and community members, as well as target dates and expected outcomes. Efforts must be made to involve both parents in the development of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. The agreement must always be current and relevant. For children in the legal custody of the agency, the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement must be: • Completed within 30 days of removal of the child from the home; • Reviewed within 60 days of removal of the child from the home and updated as needed. • Updated every 90 days thereafter or when circumstances change (these updates track with required PPR meetings); • Updated within 30 days of the court's decision to change the child's permanent plan; and	The information contained in a well-prepared Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement should: • Assure attention to critical needs in the family; • Guide overall planning and service delivery for families and children; • Provide structure for the involvement of all parents and relatives; • Document objectives that parents must meet for reunification and document behaviorally-specific activities necessary to meet objectives; • Assign responsibility for activities; • Document the level of the family's progress toward reunification; • Meet the requirements of federal and state law; • Provide documentation necessary to draw federal IV-E funding for agency staff; • Provide documentation for the court; and • Document reasonable efforts by the agency, in preparation for termination of parental rights. The initial Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement can be developed during a CFT or individually with the family. The youth may select up to two individuals, other than the placement provider and county child welfare worker, to assist and support the youth in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement planning process. If the agency has good cause to believe an individual selected by the youth would not act in the best interests of the youth, it may reject that selection. One of the individuals selected by the youth may be designated

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Developed in consultation with any youth who has attained the age of 14 years or older. NOTE: Time frames for reviews are the maximum period between reviews. If major changes occur that impact the objectives or activities, a review must be scheduled, and the plan updated as soon as possible. If a Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement is not completed within 30 days of removal, documentation must reflect diligent efforts made or the rationale for extra time to develop the plan. If an agreement is not updated, documentation must reflect diligent efforts to engage the family or the rationale for continuing the previous plan. The development of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement documents the implementation of the concurrent plans. If the plan is not updated, documentation must reflect the rationale for continuing the current plan. The agreement must be updated at required intervals even if reunification is no longer the primary or secondary plan. See "Parent Engagement & Needs Assessment" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual for more information. Permanency Planning Review The PPR (DSS-5241), generated through NC FAST, serves as the agency's framework in providing Permanency Planning Services to children and families at all stages of a permanency planning case. The purpose of the PPR process is to:	to serve as the youth's advisor and as a necessary advocate for application of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to the youth. To locate a parent that is in prison, contact the NC Department of Public Safety Prison Administration Office at 919-838-4000. Names and addresses for prison facilities can be found here. Public tools to search for offenders are available online through NC Department of Public Safety Criminal Offender Search feature. All inmates have a case manager or social worker that can assist in making contact. If a parent has expressed a desire not to be involved in the child's life, has never had any involvement in the child's life, or refuses any contact with the child, the county child welfare worker should engage that parent to see if there are any possible relatives that may be a resource in supporting the child.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Focus on the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of the child; • Allow each participant involved to have input into service needs of the child and family; • Facilitate the sharing of information to ensure the appropriateness of the permanency plan, the child(ren)'s placement, and the parent(s)' progress; and • Review the effectiveness of agency and community services. Permanency Planning Review Meetings must be held periodically to review the strengths, needs, placement, and permanent plan of each child placed in the custody of a county child welfare services agency. The PPR must be completed during each PPR Meeting. Recommendations made by the team must be documented in the electronic record. For children in the legal custody of the agency, this section in NC FAST must be completed: • Within 60 days of removal of the child from the home; and • Every 90 days thereafter.	
FAMILY TIME AND CONTACT (VISITATION) PLAN (DSS-5242) Within 14 days of placement, a Family Time and Contact Plan for the parents to visit their children must be jointly developed with the child's parents and placed in the record. A signed Family Time and Contact Plan must always be current, scanned and attached. If the Family Time and Contact Plan is not signed, there must be documentation as to why it is not signed. Whenever circumstances warrant a change in visitation, a new Family Time and	The Family Time and Contact (Visitation) Plan is a mutual contract between the county child welfare services agency and the child's parents. The plan should be thoughtfully developed in partnership with the parents, while complying with court ordered visitation. For more information regarding visitation, please see Parent/Child Visitation.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Contact Plan must be developed with the parents within 7 days. Any unsupervised visitation must be approved by the court. The Family Time and Contact Plan must comply with the current court order always. A Family Time and Contact Plan must be developed within 14 days for siblings to visit each other if they are in separate placements. A signed sibling Family Time and Contact Plan must always be current. The sibling Family Time and Contact Plan is a separate document from the Family Time and Contact Plan developed with the parent. Whenever circumstances warrant a change in visitation, a new sibling Family Time and Contact Plan must be developed within 7 days. If siblings are not placed together, the county agency must arrange for frequent and ongoing visitation between the juveniles unless contrary to their safety and well-being. The visitation plan must specify who is responsible for ensuring the visits between the siblings occur and how often. The visitation plan must also specify how the visits will take place including face to face interaction, phone calls, video conferencing, or email. .	The agency should develop the Family Time and Contact Plan for siblings with all placement providers and parents, while complying with all court orders. The placement providers and parents for the juveniles should be involved in developing the plan to support ongoing sibling contact and visitation. Placement providers and parents should be given a signed copy of the sibling Family Time and Contact Plan after it is jointly developed. Sibling visitation should occur in addition to visits that occur with parents. When planning visitation for siblings, the county agency should consider the children's ages and developmental needs, routines, and school schedule. Visitation between siblings should be face-to-face whenever possible to help promote and maintain the sibling bond and connection while separated. **Note:** A sibling Family Time and Contact Plan does not need to be developed if juvenile siblings are placed together. If the juvenile siblings are originally placed together and then separated, the sibling Family Time and Contact Plan must be completed within 7 days of the separation/move.
TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN	A TLP is specifically designed with youth ages 14 to 17 who are in the

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Transitional Living Plan Part A (DSS-5096a) • Transitional Living Plan – 90 Day Transition Plan Part B (DSS-5096b) • Transitional Living Plan – 90 Day Transition Plan Part C (DSS-5096c) • Transitional Living Plan – Helpful Resources Part D (DSS-5096d) These forms must be scanned and attached once completed. The (TLP) must be developed, reviewed, and updated according to the following table. **Youth turning 14**: • Developed no more than 30 days following the youth's 14th birthday; • Reviewed within 60 days of the youth's 14th birthday; • Updated at least every 90 days thereafter **Youth age 14 or Older**: • Developed within 30 days of the youth entering custody if they are 14 years old or older; • Reviewed within 60 days of the youth entering custody if they are 14 years old or older; • Updated at least every 90 days thereafter, The TLP is required by federal law as well as state policy. The Fostering Connections Act of 2008 requires that within 90 days prior to a youth aging out of foster care custody at age 18, the agency must develop a plan with the youth to discuss their plans for emancipation from agency custody. Therefore, Part B of the Transitional Living Plan – 90 Day Transition Plan for Youth in Foster Care (DSS-5096b) must be	custody of the county child welfare services agency. This plan is jointly developed between the agency, youth, placement provider, youth supporters, and others who are involved with the youth. It is based on a life skills assessment and should directly target those areas that need to be addressed before the youth becomes an adult. For more about the life skills assessment see NC LINKS. The 90 Day TLP should be personalized at the direction of the youth, be as detailed as he or she chooses, and include: specific options regarding how to access housing; health insurance; education; local opportunities for mentoring services and continuing services; sexual health services; and resources to ensure the youth is informed and prepared to make healthy living decisions about their lives. While the TLP is developed to address independent living needs of the youth while in care, the 90 Day Transition Plan for Youth in Foster Care is considered an extension of the TLP because it provides details and resources for the youth after he or she exits care. The Transitional Living Plan – Helpful Resources for Young Adults should include contact information for resources within the youth's community. Information from the youth regarding their plans upon exiting care as well as contact information should also be obtained.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
developed with the youth to address the elements mandated by federal law. Part D of the Transitional Living Plan – Helpful Resources for Young Adults (DSS-5096d) must be provided to all youth exiting foster care upon their 18th birthday.	
DECISION-MAKING TOOLS Completed in NC FAST: • Family Reunification Assessment (DSS-5227) • Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs (DSS-5229) • Family Risk Reassessment (DSS-5226) NOTE: When a child enters the custody of a county child welfare services agency, the Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs and Family Risk Assessment/Risk Reassessment must be reviewed within 30 days by the assigned permanency planning worker. FAMILY REUNIFICATION ASSESSMENT The Family Reunification Assessment must be completed when the agency holds legal custody and the child has been placed outside of the home with a goal of reunification. The form must be completed at the following intervals: At the time of required scheduled PPR Meetings. The Family Reunification Assessment must be completed until parental rights have been terminated or until the children are placed in the home	Before the development of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement, it is important to review the most recent Family Strengths and Needs Assessment and Family Risk Assessment/Risk Reassessment completed by the CPS Assessments or In-Home Services worker. This will help inform the development of the plan. FAMILY REUNIFICATION ASSESSMENT The Family Reunification Assessment consists of the Family Risk Reassessment, Visitation Plan Evaluation, Reunification Safety Assessment, and the Recommendation Summary. The Family Reunification Risk Reassessment (Part A) results, and the Visitation Plan Evaluation (Part B) results, indicate whether a child(ren) can return home or if a new recommendation regarding another permanent plan should be made to the court.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
with their biological parents, at which time the Family Risk Reassessment would be completed in its place. NOTE: When a child has been placed back in the home for a trial home visit, the Family Risk Reassessment is completed in place of the Family Reunification Assessment. FAMILY ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND NEEDS The Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs must be completed when the agency holds legal custody and the child remains in the home, or the child is placed outside of the home. The form must be completed at the following intervals: • At the time of required scheduled PPR Meetings; and • When a child is placed back in the home for a trial home visit, the Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs must be completed within 30 days of recommending legal custody be returned to the parent(s)/caretaker(s). The Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs must be completed until parental rights are terminated or until case closure. FAMILY RISK REASSESSMENT The Family Risk Reassessment must be completed when the agency holds legal custody and the child has not been removed from the home. The Family Risk Reassessment must be completed at the time of scheduled PPR Meetings.	If families have effectively reduced risk to low or moderate and have achieved at least moderate compliance with visitation, a reunification safety assessment is conducted, and results are used to determine whether the home environment is safe. The permanency plan guidelines and recommendation sections should guide decisions to return a child(ren) home, to continue with current/concurrent planning, or proceed with a new recommendation for a new permanent plan goal for the next court hearing. FAMILY ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND NEEDS A Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs should be completed with each parent that wants to be involved in the child's life. This includes completing the Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs with a parent that has had limited contact/involvement with their child. Their needs should be addressed within the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. If a parent expresses they do not wish to be involved in the planning of their child, it is important to ask what it would take for them to become involved. Documentation should reflect the discussion with the parent. FAMILY RISK REASSESSMENT The Risk Reassessment should be used to guide decision making following the provision of services to clients. While the initial assessment projects a risk level prior to agency service provision, the reassessment considers the provision of services. The reassessment of each family provides an

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
It is also required when a child has been removed but is placed back in the home for a trial home visit. When a child is placed back in the home for a trial home visit, the Family Risk Reassessment must be completed: • At the time of the PPR Meetings, and • Within 30 days of recommending legal custody be returned to the parent(s)/caretaker(s). NOTE: If a PPR Meeting is not held within 30 days prior to a court hearing, the county child welfare services agency must prepare the case for court by updating the required decision-making forms, as needed, or document that there are no changes. OTHER CHILDREN IN THE HOME Any children remaining in the home must be assessed for risk and safety. Documentation of these ongoing services and risk assessments must be incorporated into the court report. For more information, please see "Risk and Use of Assessment Tools" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	efficient mechanism to assess changes in family risk due to the provision of services. At reassessment, a family may be continued for services or the case may be closed.
CHILD HEALTH SUMMARY COMPONENTS The following are the Child Health Summary Components that must be completed at the required intervals and subsequently scanned and attached in NC FAST: • Health Summary Form – Initial (DSS-5206); • Health History Form (DSS-5207); • Health Summary Form – Comprehensive (DSS-5208); and • Health Summary Form – Well Visit (DSS-5209)	Children and adolescents in foster care are considered children with special health care needs and are at greater risk of negative health outcomes. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) published standards for healthcare for children and youth in foster care. AAP standards recommend more frequent medical visits than North Carolina protocol/policy. These standards, which address physical health, mental health, dental care, and substitute caregiver education, are

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
The Child Health Summary Components document current, critical health information about the child. These components must be maintained in the record. A copy of each of the forms, as well as updates to the forms, must be provided to each placement and medical provider that cares for the child. The Health Summary Form – Initial (DSS-5206): • When a county child welfare agency obtains non-secure custody, the juvenile must be seen by a medical provider for an initial health screening appointment. This appointment must be made, and the child must be seen within 7 calendar days of custody being obtained. The DSS-5206 must be completed at the initial health screening appointment and signed by the medical professional. The Health History Form (DSS-5207): • Completed by the county child welfare worker within 30 days of a child's initial placement and given to the medical provider at least one week prior to the comprehensive visit; • Updated every 12 months (in conjunction with the PPR & Family Services Review 12-month update); and • Updated whenever medical circumstances change. Documentation must reflect revision dates and that the information was given to the placement providers. Please refer to Health History Form Instructions (DSS-5207ins) for additional information. The Health Summary Form – Comprehensive (DSS-5208):	designed to help professionals from all disciplines understand the complexity of health problems and the quality of care issues in foster care. AAP Standards Children and teens in foster care should be seen early: • To assess for signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect • To assess for presence of acute and chronic illness • To assess for signs of acute or severe mental health problems • To monitor adjustment to foster care • To ensure a child or teen has all necessary medical equipment and medications • To support and educate parents (foster and birth) and kin Children and teens should be seen often upon entry into foster care: • Health screening visit within 72 hours of placement • Comprehensive health visit within 30 days of placement • Follow-up health visit within 60 to 90 days of placement Children and teens in foster care should have an advanced health care schedule. Because of a high prevalence of health care problems and often multiple transitions that can adversely impact their health and well-being, children/teens in foster care should have an enhanced health care schedule to monitor for all the items mentioned above. Children and teens should be seen often while they are in foster care: • Monthly for infants from birth to age 6 months • Every 3 months for children age 6 to 24 months • Twice a year for children and teens between 24 months and 21 years of age

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Completed by the medical provider at the 30-day comprehensive medical appointment. The Health Summary Form – Well Visit (DSS-5209): • Completed by the medical provider at each well visit; and • Follow-up appointments must occur as recommended by the medical provider. Children in the custody of a county child welfare services agency must undergo a physical examination at least every 12 months, or more frequently as recommended by the medical provider. Within 30 days of entry into foster care, children must have the following comprehensive evaluations scheduled: • A mental health evaluation, with ongoing monitoring and assessment as needed; • A developmental health evaluation if under the age of 6, with ongoing monitoring and assessment as needed; • An educational evaluation if over the age of 5; and • A dental evaluation (NOTE: if known, this should be based on the last time the child had a dental evaluation). If, after assessing the child, one or more of the above evaluations are determined to be not needed, documentation as to why must be provided. If the child ages out of foster care at age 18 or otherwise emancipates from custody, the agency must provide the youth with copies of their health records, including all completed Health Status Components, at the point of discharge.	Children and teens in foster care should have comprehensive evaluations. Whenever possible, the child's connections and relationships with health care professionals should be maintained. This is especially true if the child has a previously established medical home. If the child comes into care without these connections, a medical home for the child should be established and maintained. All known medical records of the child should be requested as soon as possible. Copies of health records should be given to the parent/custodian when permanency is achieved. The Health History Form (DSS-5207) should be an ongoing effort from the time custody is taken to a week prior to the 30-day comprehensive medical visit. All psychotropic medications should be monitored for side effects and, where indicated, appropriate metabolic monitoring should be completed. Additional information and guidance regarding psychotropic medications can be found on the Resources page of the Fostering Health NC website/library (www.ncpeds.org/fosteringhealthnc).

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
For more information, please see "Child Well-Being" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual. **Verification of Custody Letter (DSS-5760):** When non-secure custody is obtained by the county child welfare agency, the Verification of Custody Letter must be provided to the placement provider within 24 hours of placing the juvenile. If the juvenile has a change in placement, the Verification of Custody Letter must be updated and provided to the new placement provider within 24 hours. It is the responsibility of the county child welfare agency to ensure that all medical providers, including mental health clinicians and dentist/orthodontist, have a current copy of the Verification of Custody Letter. The letter must be provided to the medical office at the initial 7-day screening appointment and again at the 30-day comprehensive visit if the medical provider or placement has changed. N.C.G.S. § 7B-505.1. outlines consent for medical care for a juvenile placed in nonsecure custody of a county department of social services. Unless the court orders otherwise, when a child is in the custody of the county child welfare agency, a county director or the director's representative under N.C.G.S. § 7B-101(10) is authorized to arrange for, provide, or consent to any of the following without prior parental consent: • Routine medical and dental care or treatment, including but not limited to, treatment for common pediatric illnesses and injuries that require prompt intervention • Emergency medical, surgical, psychiatric, psychological, or mental health care or treatment • Testing and evaluation in exigent circumstances	

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
For more information regarding authorization for consent, please refer to General Authorization for Treatment and Medication (DSS-1812) and General Authorization for Treatment and Medication Instructions (DSS-1812ins). The Verification of Custody Letter must also be provided to the juvenile's school within 24 hours of the juvenile entering custody. If there is a change in the juvenile's school, the Verification of Custody Letter must be provided to the new school at initial enrollment. It is the responsibility of the county child welfare agency to ensure that the school maintains a current copy of the Verification of Custody Letter. **Court orders are not to be shared unless otherwise authorized in a court order.** As outlined in N.C.G.S. § 7B-2901(a), court orders must be withheld from public inspection unless authorized by an order of the court. The following persons may examine the juvenile's record and obtain copies of written parts of the record without an order of the court: • The person named in the petition as the juvenile; • The guardian ad litem; • The county department of social services; and • The juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian, or the attorney for the juvenile or the juvenile's parent, guardian, or custodian. If no changes occurred during the year (i.e., change in placement) the Verification of Custody Letter must be updated annually. Copies of the updated Verification of Custody Letter must be provided to all medical,	

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
dental, and mental health providers for the juvenile. Additionally, the juvenile's school and placement provider must be given an updated copy annually. The county child welfare agency is responsible for maintaining copies of the Verification of Custody Letter in the juvenile's case record.	
CHILD EDUCATION STATUS FORM (DSS-5245) AND BEST INTEREST DETERMINATION FORM (DSS-5137) Both these forms must be completed for all children within 5 school days of a child's initial placement and subsequent placement. Once completed they must be scanned and attached in NC FAST. The Child Education Status form (DSS-5245) must be completed for all children within 7 days of a child's initial placement, a change in placement, or a change in school. The Child Education Status documents current education information about the child. It is maintained in the record and a copy must be provided to each placement provider that cares for the child. The Child Education Status Form must be updated: • Every 12 months (in conjunction with the PPR & Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement 12-month update), and • Any time there is a change in schools or when other circumstances change. A Best Interest Determination (BID) meeting must be held within 5 school days of the child's initial placement and subsequent placements.	Copies of school records should be given to the parent/custodian when permanency is achieved. For more information regarding education stability, please see ESSA requirements. NOTE: If the child's initial or subsequent placement occurs during a holiday or summer break, a BID meeting must occur within 5 days of school resuming.

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
If the child is not school-age, any developmental needs must be documented on the Child Education Status Form. Documentation must reflect dates the revisions were made, and that the information was given to the placement providers. If the child ages out of foster care at age 18 or otherwise emancipates from custody, the agency must provide copies of their school records. Please see the Child Education Status Form Instructions for additional information.	
MONTHLY PERMANENCY PLANNING CONTACT RECORD • Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record (DSS-5295) • Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record Instructions (DSS-5295ins) Monthly face-to-face contacts with children in county child welfare services agency custody must be documented on the Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record generated through NC FAST. • More than half (4 out of 6) of monthly visits must occur in the place where the child lives. • Time must be spent speaking privately with the child; and • Observations of interactions between the child and foster/kinship parents must be made. If juvenile siblings are not placed together, the county social services agency must include documentation regarding how often visitation between the juvenile siblings occurs, what efforts are being made to	During monthly face-to-face contacts, discussion and attention should be on safety and well-being for children in county child welfare services agency custody and their placement providers. Each item on this tool should be assessed thoroughly. However, exactly how each item is addressed or assessed should be decided by the worker on a case-by-case basis. Although speaking with the child privately is a requirement, when and how this is done should be decided by the worker on a case-by-case basis. Any concerns or needs identified during the monthly contact and documented on the Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record should be addressed during monthly staffing between the county child welfare worker and supervisor. After the Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record has been signed by the supervisor, the worker should distribute copies of the form to

Required Forms: Planning Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
maintain the sibling connection, and what efforts are being made to place the juvenile siblings together. If it is in their best interest to not have sibling visitation or be placed together, the county agency must explain the reasoning and justification behind the decision on the monthly permanency planning contact record tool. Supervisors must review and sign the completed Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record, scanned and attached in NC FAST. Monthly face-to-face contacts must be documented on the Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record until the child has achieved permanency. The form must continue to be completed when a child has been returned home, but the county child welfare services agency retains custody.	relevant members of the team serving the child, including the agency's licensing worker, county child welfare worker, and the foster/kinship parents caring for the child.

Required Forms: Eligibility/Payment/Reporting Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
CHILD PLACEMENT AND PAYMENT SYSTEM REPORT • Child Placement and Payment System Report (DSS-5094) • Child Placement and Payment Report Continuation Page (DSS-5094c) All data on the Child Placement and Payment System (CPPS) Report must be completed for all children in a county child welfare services agency's custody/placement responsibility, regardless of the child's living arrangement, within 7 calendar days of the child entering county child welfare agency custody. In addition, the form must be completed on children from other states who are placed in the county under an Interstate Compact Agreement. The CPPS Report must be maintained and updated as required and when there are any changes related to any field.	Every effort to report accurate information on the CPPS Report should be made. Data from this report is used for the Children's Services Outcomes Reports for counties, and for the Report on Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody in North Carolina. Data from county child welfare agencies is scrutinized to identify strengths in the child welfare system and areas for program improvement. The accuracy of data is critical in this analysis. Data is provided on request to the NC General Assembly, county commissioners, county managers, media, public officials, etc. Entries on this form are critical for accurate payments to foster placements. Data is collected from other fields that are used for statistical analysis. For more information on completing this form, please see Appendix 2 in the NC Child Welfare manual.
SIS CLIENT ENTRY FORM (DSS-5027) The Services Information System (SIS) Client Entry Form must be completed within 7 calendar days of the child entering county child welfare agency custody. It must be updated as required and when there are changes related to any field. The SIS Client Eligibility Form must be used to: • Transmit authorization to service providers to claim reimbursement for services provided;	Prior to completing the SIS Client Eligibility Form, agencies should search to see if the child already exists in the system, so the information is not duplicated, creating two different client identifications. All fields are important and are used for statistical analysis.

Required Forms: Eligibility/Payment/Reporting Forms

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Open a service client information record in SIS and • Update service client information in SIS.	
DETERMINATION OF FOSTER CARE ASSISTANCE BENEFITS AND/OR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ONLY (DSS-5120) AND REDETERMINATION OF FOSTER CARE ASSISTANCE BENEFITS AND/OR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ONLY (DSS-5120A) The Determination of Foster Care Assistance Benefits and/or Medical Assistance Only form is the required form used for gathering the information which will assist in eligibility determination for children, under the age of 18, entering county child welfare agency custody. The form must be initiated by the county child welfare worker within 72 hours of the child entering county child welfare agency custody, and then submitted to the Income Maintenance Case Worker, for a determination regarding AFDC need. The actual determination of IV-E eligibility must be made based on the combination of circumstances around removal, the AFDC eligibility, and the contents of the court orders or Voluntary Placement Agreement. The entire form must be completed within 7 business days of the child entering county child welfare custody. The Redetermination of Foster Care Assistance Benefits and/or Medical Assistance Only form must be completed to document ongoing eligibility for minors in county child welfare agency custody. Eligibility for IV-E must be determined every 12 months. At a minimum, redeterminations of IV-E eligibility must be completed before the end of the 12th month.	

Domestic Violence and Permanency Planning

Protocol – What you must do
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PERMANENCY PLANNING Assessment for the presence of domestic violence and its impact on the safety of children must occur throughout Permanency Planning Services. Careful consideration must be given to cases involving domestic violence when: • Developing the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement; • Developing and implementing the Family Time and Contact Plan; • Scheduling and holding CFT Meetings and PPR meetings; • Planning Shared Parenting meetings; and • Assessing the family for reunification. For more information, please see "Domestic Violence" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.

Human Trafficking

Protocol – What you must do
HUMAN TRAFFICKING A child who is sold, traded, or exchanged for sex or labor is an abused and neglected juvenile, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. County child welfare agencies must continue to assess the safety and well-being of children during the provision of Permanency Planning Services, including children who are suspected or confirmed to be victims of human trafficking. County child welfare agencies must document in the electronic NC FAST records and determine appropriate services for children who are believed to be or are at risk of being victims of human trafficking. County child welfare workers must follow North Carolina child welfare policy and practice on Human Trafficking. For additional information see “Human Trafficking” in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.

Placement Decision Making: Maintaining One Single, Stable Placement

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
CHOOSING THE BEST PLACEMENT RESOURCE (See also "Placement Preparation and Follow-Up" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.) The North Carolina Division of Social Services and county departments of social services are prohibited from discriminating for reasons of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex (including on the basis of sexual orientation and on the basis of gender identity), religion, age, disability, and/or political beliefs. This includes when working with youth, families, parents, caregivers, kinship providers, adoptive parents, and licensed foster parents. PREVENTING PLACEMENT DISRUPTION Placement disruptions must be documented in the electronic record for both the child and foster parent's record. When a CPS report involves an allegation against a placement provider and the child is placed in the home at the time of the report, the child must only be removed from the home prior to the case decision if a safety threat to the child exists. If the child remains in the home, the county child welfare services agency must develop and monitor a Safety Plan that ensures safety until the case decision is made.	PREVENTING PLACEMENT DISRUPTION The county child welfare services agency should have a plan to manage placement disruption. Documenting the disruption in both the child's record and the foster parent's record can provide valuable information as to what kinds of behaviors the foster parent cannot handle. This analysis can guide future placement decisions, as well as identify training needs of foster parents. One of the best tools to manage placement disruption is to plan for placement supports such as regular and consistent respite care. The county child welfare worker should have sufficient contact with the placement provider to know when conditions exist that could lead to disruptions. Intensive Family Preservation Services, as available, are also a resource for preventing placement disruptions.

Placement Decision Making: Maintaining One Single, Stable Placement

PLACEMENT WITH SIBLINGS

Legal Basis

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, P.L. 110-351 requires that agencies make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, adoptive, or guardianship placement, unless it is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings to do so.

N.C. G.S. 7B-505 and N.C. G.S. 7B-903.1 (c1) states **if** juvenile siblings are removed from the home and placed in the nonsecure custody of a county department of social services, the director shall make reasonable efforts to place the juvenile siblings in the same home. The director is not required to make reasonable efforts if there is documentation that placing the juvenile siblings together would be contrary to any of the sibling's safety or well-being. If, after making reasonable efforts, the director is unable to place the juvenile siblings in the same home, the director shall make reasonable efforts to provide frequent sibling visitation and ongoing interaction between the juvenile siblings, unless the director documents that frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between the juvenile siblings would be contrary to the safety or well-being.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – what you should do
The agency must make ongoing efforts to locate an appropriate placement provider that will reunite the siblings in the same home. Siblings who are not in the same placement must have frequent and ongoing visitation unless it is contrary to the siblings' well-being or safety. There are times when it is not in the child's best interest to be placed with siblings because of each child's developmental, treatment, and/or safety needs. In some situations, for example, children may be endangered by unsupervised contact with their more aggressive or sexually active sibling. County child welfare workers must document the basis for the decision not to place siblings together on the monthly permanency planning contact record tool. There must also be a discussion regarding the juvenile's	NOTE: siblings refer to full or half-siblings, including any relinquished or removed at birth, as well as step-siblings. To be separated from siblings adds to the impact of loss and trauma. When siblings can remain together in an out-of-home placement, there can be a greater sense of continuity of family. Frequently, older children will have had some responsibilities for caring for younger siblings when in their own home, and they may feel worried and protective regarding these siblings if separated from them. Likewise, younger siblings may have looked to their older siblings for comfort and guidance. County agencies should ensure appropriate services are in place to help the juvenile siblings remain in the same placement. A discussion regarding services to keep siblings together should occur during

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placement if not placed with siblings and efforts that have been made to place the juvenile siblings together during monthly supervision. When siblings are not able to be placed together, county child welfare agencies must arrange and provide frequent supervised or unsupervised visitation and ongoing contact for the siblings to maintain their connection to one another. Whenever a placement disruption occurs, county child welfare agencies must make diligent efforts to place/keep siblings together. See Sibling Visitation for additional information.	monthly home visits with the juvenile siblings, monthly supervision and case staffing, and any other times as needed. If it was initially determined to be contrary to the juvenile sibling's safety or well-being to not be placed together then the agency should discuss with a licensed therapist or mental health provider, the therapeutic recommendations that could reunite the siblings in the same placement. This should occur on an ongoing basis. The licensed mental health provider should also provide input if there continues to be a safety threat preventing the siblings from reuniting in the same home. County child welfare agencies should provide documentation regarding the therapeutic recommendations in the case record.

PLACEMENT OPTIONS

Legal Basis	Definition of Kinship
At the non-secure stage of proceedings, N.C.G.S. 7B-505 states: A juvenile may be placed in a temporary residential placement in: • A licensed foster home or a home otherwise authorized by law to provide such care; or • A facility operated by a county child welfare services agency; or • Any other home or facility, including a relative's home approved by the court and designated in the order. The statute further states that in placing a juvenile in non-secure custody, the court shall first consider whether a relative of the juvenile is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. If the court finds that the relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision in a safe home, then the court shall order placement of the juvenile with the relative unless the court finds that	Kinship is the self-defined relationship between two or more people and is based on biological, legal, and/or strong family-like ties. Most people have loosely structured kinship networks that are available in times of difficulty. When children cannot be assured safety in their own homes, the best alternative resource can often be found within the extended family and other kin. Informal kinship care arrangements are commonplace in times of shared crisis for many families. Such arrangements are most effective when other members of

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placement with the relative would be contrary to the best interests of the juvenile. If the court does not place the juvenile with a relative, the court may consider whether other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile are willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. This placement must be approved by the court and designated in the court order. Placement with non-relative kin and former appropriate foster parents must be considered after all relatives and any legal custodians of a sibling have been excluded. If the home is assessed to be appropriate, placement must be approved by the court and designated in the court order. The court shall also consider the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), as amended in 1996 by the Interethnic Placement provisions (MEPA-IEP) as they apply. The court may order the department to notify the juvenile's state-recognized tribe of the need for non-secure custody to locate relatives or non-relative kin for placement. The court may order placement of the juvenile with non-relative kin if the court finds the placement is in the juvenile's best interest. After adjudication, N.C.G.S. 7B-903 states: (a1) In placing a juvenile in out-of-home care under this section, the court shall first consider whether a relative of the juvenile is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. If the court finds that the relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision in a safe home, then the court shall order placement of the juvenile with the relative unless the court finds that the placement is contrary to the best interests of the juvenile. In placing a juvenile in out-of-home care under this section, the court shall also consider whether it is in the juvenile's best interest to remain in the juvenile's community of residence. Placement of a juvenile with a relative outside of this State must be in accordance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.	the family and community resources provide emotional and tangible support to the care provider. A kinship care placement can be a licensed or unlicensed home of a relative or non-relative kin. N.C.G.S. § 7B-101(15a) defines non-relative kin as an individual who has a substantial relationship with the child. **Legal Guidance for N.C.G.S. 7B-903** County child welfare agencies should discuss with a county attorney the best way to address language in court reports and orders to indicate when the Court has authorized or sanctioned an unlicensed placement, especially for the purposes of placement authority that is required for IV-E funding.

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(a2) An order under this section placing or continuing the placement of the juvenile in out-of-home care shall contain a finding that the juvenile's continuation in or return to the juvenile's own home would be contrary to the juvenile's health and safety. (a3) An order under this section placing the juvenile in out-of-home care shall contain specific findings as to whether the department has made reasonable efforts to prevent the need for placement of the juvenile. In determining whether efforts to prevent the placement of the juvenile were reasonable, the juvenile's health and safety shall be the paramount concern. (a4) If the court does not place the juvenile with a relative, the court may consider whether nonrelative kin or other persons with legal custody of a sibling of the juvenile are willing and able to provide proper care and supervision of the juvenile in a safe home. The court may order the department to notify the juvenile's State-recognized tribe of the need for custodial care for the purpose of locating relatives or nonrelative kin for placement. The court may order placement of the juvenile with nonrelative kin if the court finds the placement is in the juvenile's best interests.	

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KINSHIP CARE (RELATIVE AND NON-RELATIVE KIN) County child welfare agencies must strive to strengthen and preserve the family. Parents must be given a reasonable opportunity to identify and come together with their kinship network to plan for and provide safety, care, nurture, and supervision for the child. The county child welfare services agency must assess the suggested resource to ensure the child will receive appropriate care and must give preference to an adult relative or other kin when determining placement, provided that: • The placement is assessed by the county child welfare services agency to be in the best interest of the child in terms of both safety and nurture; and • The prospective kinship care provider and the living situation are assessed and determined to meet relevant standards. The agency must first address available and appropriate relatives and whether a relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision for the child. If the home is assessed to be appropriate, placement must be approved by the court and designated in the court order. Adoptive parents of siblings are not considered relatives of the legal child; however, they must be considered in the identification and notification of individuals who have legal custody of a sibling. Placement with a legal custodian of a sibling must be considered after all relatives have been excluded. If that home is assessed to be appropriate, placement must be approved by the court and designated in the court order. Placement with non-relative kin and former appropriate foster parents must be considered after all relatives and any legal custodians of a siblings have been excluded. If the home is assessed to be appropriate, placement must be approved by the court and designated in the court order.	Whether licensed as a foster home or not, kinship care providers should be valued and treated as partners with the birth family and the county child welfare services agency. This includes notifying relatives and non-relative kin providing care for a child of any court review or hearing to be held about the child and of their opportunity to be heard in court regarding the juvenile's well-being. County child welfare workers should use family-centered practice tools, such as CFT meetings. CFT meetings provide a model for engaging the kinship network at the earliest stages of agency involvement. The family's understanding incorporates a historical perspective of the problems faced by the family, as well as the efforts to remedy those problems. They can confront the problems and to help provide realistic supports to help the child and their family of origin move toward healing. The county child welfare services agency should engage with the members of the kinship network and share responsibility for planning. This helps the family, the relatives, and other kin to take ownership of the family's needs, to bring their own resources to address those needs, to reduce the likelihood of child placement outside the kinship network, and to provide a system of oversight to the family's progress in the resolution of the issues.

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Potential kinship care providers must be informed of: • The option to become a licensed foster parent and receive monthly foster care board payments; • Available agency resources, such as Child-Only Work First funds, Child Only Medicaid, child care, and food and nutrition services benefits; • Any available community resources for free or low-cost clothing or furniture, minor home repairs, or other such incidental needs that may unnecessarily prohibit their approval to provide care for children; and • Child specific needs and agency expectations, including a child-specific alternative discipline plan. For more information, please see "Kinship Providers" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	

KINSHIP CARE ASSESSMENT: LINCENSURE AND APPROVAL
A thorough assessment must be conducted to evaluate the suitability of the placement for any potential kinship care provider. The following forms must be completed and subsequently scanned and attached in NC FAST after assessing potential kinship placements:
 	
• Initial Safety Provider Assessment (DSS-5203)
  ○ Completed prior to placement
 	
• Kinship Care Comprehensive Assessment (DSS-5204)
  ○ Completed within 30 days of the child entering custody if the child is already placed out of the home, or within 30 days of the child's placement in the home of the kinship provider (if placed after entering custody)
 	
Refer to the Instructions for Provider Assessments (DSS-5204ins) for additional information.
	Kinship care providers should be assessed for their interest and ability to adopt the child or to assume guardianship or legal custody in the event reunification does not occur.
	
	Assessments of potential kinship placements should be based on an understanding of the kinship family's culture and community, child rearing approaches, and family dynamics, and should focus on the ability of the family to meet the immediate and ongoing needs of the child.
	
	If the child is placed with a non-licensed relative or non-relative kin, services should be provided to assure the kinship care provider has the best chance of meeting the child's needs for physical and emotional security.

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When a Kinship Provider is identified, the following must occur prior to the child(ren) being left in the care of the provider:
• Background checks, including:
  ○ Criminal check. A review of ACIS for any criminal charges or convictions in North Carolina through the AOC database or equivalent;
  ○ Check of Civil Case Processing System (VCAP) for civil actions such as domestic violence protective orders; and
  ○ Review of county child welfare services, and or services history through NC FAST, agency records and RIL records. Complete the DSS-5268 RIL Information Request form by having the prospective placement complete applicant information and acknowledgement sections. County child welfare agencies must complete a search of the RIL register by completing both a "Search by SSN" (RIL050FM) and a "Search by Name" (RIL060FM) for each prospective placement. The completed RIL050FM and RIL060FM, regardless of whether there are any findings or not, must be printed. The printout of the RIL checks and the signed DSS-5268 must include the date the search was completed and be retained by the county child welfare agency in the child(ren) file.
 	
The status of kinship care assessments must be included in the electronic record in NC FAST and the court report.
 	
When necessary and appropriate to the needs of the child, the county child welfare services agency must make efforts to provide or procure reasonable assistance to help relatives and kin meet assessment and/or licensing standards, so they can provide care for the child.
	Kinship care providers may need agency supportive services. Some services that are frequently requested by kinship care providers are:
	• Relative or "grandparent" support groups open to all kinship care providers regardless of age;
	• Assistance navigating the social services system to get approved for food and nutrition services benefits, Work First funds, Medicaid or state supported insurance coverage for the child, child support, or child care services; and
	• Information and referral services to connect with informal and formal services providers in the local community.

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If the kinship care provider wishes to be licensed as a foster parent, the county child welfare services agency must determine whether the family meets state licensing requirements, which would enable them to receive foster care board payments, Medicaid, and other benefits. Note: If a placement is determined to be suitable for the care and nurturing of the child, but the home cannot meet all foster care licensing requirements, the county child welfare services agency may submit justification for a waiver to the licensing authority. In North Carolina, many licensure requirements may be considered for waiver if approval is in the best interest of the child(ren); if the health, safety, and protection of the child is assured; and if the county child welfare services agency recommends the waiver(s) be granted. Whether or not the home is licensed as a foster home, county child welfare workers must meet minimum requirements regarding contacts with the child and placement provider to assure the basic physical and emotional needs of the child are being met and the kinship care provider is receiving adequate informal and formal support to meet those needs.	

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REIMBURSEMENT FOR UNLICENSED KINSHIP CARE PROVIDERS

The General Assembly during the 2023 legislative session in accordance with Senate Bill 20 established a ***reimbursement*** fund for unlicensed kinship care providers. The purpose of the Fund is to support those kinship care providers related by blood, marriage, or adoption providing foster care as defined under G.S. 131D-10.2(9). The maximum rates for State participation in reimbursement for unlicensed kinship foster care are established on a graduated scale and based on half of the standard foster care board rate identified in the Foster Care Funding Manual. Counties provide 50% of the cost of the incentive; the state provides the other 50%. The entire amount of the payment is paid to the kinship care provider by the county and the county charges the State for its share of the cost.

Eligibility Criteria

Children and families must meet certain criteria to be eligible to receive reimbursement funding for unlicensed kinship care provider. All the following criteria must be met:

a. Child(ren) must be in the custody of a local child welfare agency while receiving payments;
b. The County must have the Court sanction or authorize the placement. This can be done at the earliest court hearing or by consulting with the County legal staff to ensure this is completed at the appropriate time (please refer to N.C.G.S. 7B-505 for non-secure cases and N.C.G.S. 7B-903 for adjudicated cases);
c. Child(ren) must be related to the kinship care provider through blood, marriage, or adoption, providing foster care as defined under G.S. 131D-10.2(9);
d. Child(ren) must be between the ages of 0 and 17;
e. The placement must be an unlicensed kinship care provider;
f. The kinship provider must agree to receive payments by signing the DSS-5802 Unlicensed Kinship Payment Acknowledgement;

The unlicensed kinship program is designed by Senate Bill 20 to ***reimburse*** unlicensed kinship providers for the costs incurred while caring for children in foster care placed in their home who are related by blood, marriage, and adoption.

Safety and Court Orders

To be approved for unlicensed kinship care payments, there must be an approved Initial Kinship Care Assessment (DSS-5203) prior to initial placement and Comprehensive Kinship Care Assessments (DSS-5204) within 30 days of placement. Kinship caregivers who do not meet the safety standards would not be appropriate candidates for this program.

Safety remains a priority. If the Court orders placement to occur with a kinship care provider that the County was not in agreement with, the County should document their objection to placement and the Courts overrule of their objection.

Counties should follow policy under "Legal Basis" section of Placement Options in the Permanency Planning Policy Manual.

Changes in Placement

If a child or youth moves from one eligible unlicensed kinship placement to another, the payment is available at the date of the new placement and a court sanction can be retrieved at the next court hearing.

Permanency

Efforts to achieve permanency must remain a priority throughout the life of the case. **Permanency remains a priority.** If a county is submitting a request for renewal of payments, the county should continue assessing the efforts to achieve permanency as these payments should not be a barrier to achieving permanency.

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g. County child welfare agency has completed and approved appropriate background checks and kinship care assessments at appropriate intervals. ***Note**: refer to section Kinship Care Assessment: Licensure on page 43* The kinship placement does not need to meet requirements of foster care licensure and does not have to be pursuing licensure to be eligible to receive payments. Termination of Payments Reasons for termination are listed below: a. Unlicensed kinship care provider obtains a foster home license. b. Child ages out of the foster care placement at age 18. c. Placement change-new placement will need to be evaluated for eligibility. d. Child(ren) are no longer in the custody of the local Department of Social Services through a judicial determination. e. Kinship care provider requests payments to be stopped. f. County DSS requests termination. **Payment Issuance – CPPS-Legacy Counties** Unlicensed Kinship Form – Facility ID Request The DSS-5801: Unlicensed Kinship Form – Facility ID Request form is used to generate a facility ID as well as unlicensed kinship payments for children and kinship caregivers who qualify. The DSS-5801 is required for these actions: new applications, updates, renewals (after 1 year), and terminations. Directions for how to complete the form are found in the Child Placement and Payment System Manual.	**For example**, placing a child with a relative and renewing these payments without demonstrating efforts to achieve a plan of adoption (where that is the plan) would not be the intent this program and delays permanency. Please follow policy for the Permanency Options section, page 39, of the manual for additional information. **Eligibility Checklist** Counties should use DSS-5800 Unlicensed Kinship Payment Eligibility Checklist form to assist in verifying eligibility. All children in the home (who are in the custody of DSS) should be listed on the checklist. However, all children may not be recipients of the unlicensed kinship payment. For example, half siblings may be placed in the home of a relative of one of the children. That child might be related to the payee by blood, marriage, or adoption and the half sibling might not be related to the payee, therefore, ineligible for the unlicensed kinship payment. It is important to list all the children placed in the home even if the child(ren) does not receive a payment. Reunification, trial home placements, and placement with non-removal parent do not qualify for funding under the unlicensed kinship care provider payments. Children in the home of the parents do not qualify for this program. **Verification of Kinship** The definition of "specified relative" from the ACF Child Welfare Manual is as follows: A specified relative is defined as any relation by blood, marriage or adoption who is within the fifth degree of kinship to the dependent child. This includes great-great-great grandparents and first cousins once removed (children of first cousins). Accordingly, for determining title IV-E eligibility, any otherwise eligible child who is removed from the home of a relative

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Renewal Unlicensed kinship payments must be renewed annually. To renew the payment the worker must: a. Review steps A through G of DSS-5800 Unlicensed Kinship Payment Eligibility Checklist form to ensure all eligibility are met. b. Once eligibility has been determined, submit DSS-5801 for renewal 60 days prior to expiration. c. If the renewal is not completed and the eligibility expires, payment will be discontinued. If the renewal is completed and submitted after expiration of the unlicensed kinship payment, the benefits will be effective the date of form DSS-5801 is received in the State office. Termination Monthly payments will continue until the County advises the Division to terminate the payments via submitting an updated DSS-5801. **Payment Issuance – Child Welfare Information System (CWIS) Counties** The Child Welfare Information System automatically creates an ID number for placements, including kinship providers. When selecting a kinship care provider as a living arrangement, counties will need to select whether the payment is "paid" or "non-paid." The county will then be prompted to review the eligibility criteria based on DSS-5800 Unlicensed Kinship Payment Eligibility Checklist to verify the child and kinship caregiver are eligible for payments before completing the placement enrollment. Termination Monthly payments will continue until the county updates the living arrangement to a different type of living arrangement or selects "non-paid" when prompted.	who is within the fifth degree of kinship to the child will be eligible for assistance under Title IV-E. Also included are spouses of any persons named in the above groups, even after the marriage is terminated by death or divorce. Step relationships are included to the same degree as blood relationships. Chapter 104A.pdf (ncleg.gov) provides the method to computing the degrees of kinship. Verification of kinship can be made through birth certificates, marriage licenses, testimony in court, and court orders. As a final resort, the county director can make the decision with reasonable information. **Age Requirement** While a licensed foster parent must be an individual 21 years of age or older, an unlicensed kinship care provider can be an individual 18 years of age or older. For example, an adult sibling between the ages of 18 and 20 would qualify for unlicensed kinship care payments if they meet the eligibility criteria and have approved kinship care assessments and background checks. **Licensing** Counties must still provide information to kinship care providers about the benefits and support available to becoming licensed foster parents and receiving the full monthly foster care board payments. **18 to 21 Program** If the county submits a termination of payments based on a child aging out of foster care at age 18, the county must follow the policy outlined in the Foster Care 18 to 21 Services section of this manual to discuss this program as a voluntary option for the youth. This is available to the youth even if they remain with the unlicensed

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	kinship care provider if the young adult meets criteria of the 18 to 21 Program. **Out of State Placements** A child placed through ICPC with a kinship care provider out of state is eligible for unlicensed kinship payments. **Citizenship Status of Unlicensed Kinship Caregivers** Unlicensed kinship caregiver's applicants must be citizens of the United States through birth or naturalization or be able to verify lawful immigration status. Green cards provide verification of lawful immigration status. A copy of the green card shall be placed in the child's record maintained by the county agency. Information about green cards can be found at the following website: https://www.uscis.gov/green-card. The kinship caregiver must have an SSN or EIN/tax ID number to receive payments. **Impact on Other Programs** Supplemental Security Income Children who receive SSI payments would not be impacted by this program, however, there are some things to consider. • The funds drawn down are not IV-E. The SSI/ IV-E rule does not apply here because the funding source is State and county 50/50 split. • The child's SSI funds should be used to cover the half-board payment. If the funds do not cover the half-board payment, State funds must be used. • Admin cost for unlicensed homes should be coded to an alternative fund than IV-E. • If counties do not use the child's funds for the placement payment, counties will need to consider the $2,000 limit for Medicaid eligibility.

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	Food and Nutritional Services (FNS) Caregivers receiving FNS benefits have the option to add children in foster care who are placed in their home to their FNS case. However, if they choose to add them to the family household composition, the unlicensed kinship care payments would be required to be reported to FNS. Counties should encourage the kinship caregiver to discuss their options with their FNS worker. Child Support A child receiving child support payments is still eligible for this program. Work First/TANF Child-Only Payments Children in this program would remain eligible for TANF Child-Only. Medicaid Children eligible for Medicaid are also eligible for this program. Kinship care providers also receiving Medicaid should report all sources of income to their Medicaid worker. For the purposes of this program, the income is non-countable. **Additional Guidance** If a family disagrees with the county's eligibility decision, their concern should be addressed through the county escalation process or chain of command and the county DSS Director would make the final decision. The family and county should reach out to the State for policy and program eligibility assistance when necessary.
OTHER PLACEMENT RESOURCES If a relative or non-relative kin cannot be identified as an appropriate placement resource for the child, a licensed foster care placement must be chosen for the	If there are no relatives or non-relative kin who are willing and/or able to care for the child long-term, the foster family should be

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child that ensures the child is placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting available that best meets the needs of the child. Licensed foster care placement resources must be carefully evaluated and prepared prior to placement to help assure the child will remain in that placement until reunification or another permanent home is achieved. Pursuant to the Foster Parent's Bill of Rights, the county child welfare services agency shall provide licensed foster parents any known information to help the foster parents better care for children, including health and behavioral health history, disability, exposure to trauma, and educational needs. County child welfare services agencies shall also provide any known information to help the kinship parents better care for children, including health and behavioral health history, disability, exposure to trauma, and educational needs. Licensed foster care placement resources include: • A foster family home or group home supervised by the county child welfare services agency and licensed by the NC Department of Health and Human Services; • A child-caring institution licensed or approved by the NC Department of Health and Human Services and in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), as amended in 1996 by the Interethnic Placement provisions (MEPA-IEP); • A foster care facility under the auspices of a licensed or approved private child care or child-placing agency; such foster care facilities must be licensed by the NC Department of Health and Human Services and in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), as amended in 1996 by the Interethnic Placement provisions (MEPA-IEP); • A foster care facility licensed by the NC Department of Health and Human Services as a public or private group home and in compliance with Title VI	considered the first alternative for permanent placement through adoption. Placement providers are bringing a child into their home that they may have no prior connection to or knowledge about. For the initial transition to be successful, county child welfare agencies should provide any known information about the child that would be necessary for the care of the child, both physical and psychological. At the time of placement, the placement provider should be provided with any additional information that may have been discovered during the removal, if it is relevant to the care of the child. A child's trauma and the impact of the trauma may be shared with the placement provider, but the specific details and story of the trauma should not be shared. For example, it would only be appropriate to share that a child's trauma is physical abuse, and the impact of the trauma is that the child will only take a shower and that the child has an aversion to cooking utensils.

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of the Civil Rights Act, Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), as amended in 1996 by the Interethnic Placement provisions (MEPA-IEP); • A foster care facility located in another state. The child's placement must have been approved and in compliance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). The other state must agree to supervise the child, and the facility must be in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), as amended in 1996 by the Interethnic Placement provisions (MEPA-IEP), and must be licensed or approved by that state; • A therapeutic home that is a residential facility primarily located in a private residence that provides professionally trained parent substitutes and is licensed by the NC Department of Health and Human Services; • A licensed residential treatment facility that provides a structured living environment for children and adolescents who are primarily mentally ill and who may also be multi-handicapped and for whom removal from the home is essential to procure appropriate treatment; • A licensed residential therapeutic camp that is a residential treatment facility provided in a camping environment which is designed to help individuals develop behavior control, coping skills, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills; or • A school or institution operated by the NC Department of Health and Human Services. **Rapid Response Team:** If a juvenile in the custody of the department of social services presents to a hospital emergency department for mental health treatment, certain steps must be taken: 1. The director, or their designee, must contact the appropriate LME/MCO or prepaid health plan to request an assessment within 24 hours of the determination that the juvenile should not remain at the hospital and no	When county child welfare agencies notify the Rapid Response Team, the DSS-6190 should be utilized . The best method to contact the Rapid Response Team is through email at

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appropriate placement is immediately available. 2. The assessment will be performed by either the juvenile's clinical home provider; the hospital, if able and willing; or other qualified licensed clinician within five business days following notification from the director. An assessment pursuant to N.C.G.S §122C-142.2 is defined as a comprehensive clinical assessment, psychiatric evaluation, or a substantially equivalent assessment. 3. The LME/MCO or prepaid health plan must, when applicable or required by their contract with the Department, arrange for the assessment. After the assessment has been completed, based on the findings and recommendations, the following steps must occur: 1. If a comprehensive clinical assessment recommends a traditional foster home or a Level I group home, the director must identify and provide the placement within five business days. The county department of social services is responsible for transporting the juvenile to the identified placement within five business days after the identification. 2. If the assessment recommends a level of care requiring prior authorization by the LME/MCO or prepaid health plan, the LME/MCO or prepaid health plan must authorize an appropriate level of care and identify appropriate providers within five business days and assign a care coordinator for the duration that the LME/MCO or prepaid health plan provides services to the juvenile. Once an appropriate level of care has been authorized and providers identified, the director must place the juvenile in the appropriate placement within five business days. The county child welfare agency is responsible for transporting the juvenile to the identified placement.	rapid.response.behavioralhealth@dhhs.nc.gov. When submitting the DSS-6190, the LME/MCO Care Coordinator, if one is assigned, should be included in the email notification to the Rapid Response Team. Additionally, your Regional Child Welfare Consultant, child welfare supervisor, program manager and county director should be included in all communication with the Rapid Response Team and notified of all scheduled meetings. The Rapid Response Team will evaluate the information provided and coordinate a response to address the immediate needs of the juvenile. The role of the Rapid Response Team is to assist facilitation for child placement at the appropriate level of care. The Rapid Response Team makes recommendations to assist and expedite the work occurring at the local level. The county child welfare agency should follow through with any action plans/steps developed by the Rapid Response Team to address the needs of the juvenile.

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3. If the director or LME/MCO or prepaid health plan is unable to identify an appropriate available placement or provider for the juvenile, or if the assessment recommendations differ, the director must immediately notify the Department of Health and Human Services' Rapid Response Team. Pursuant to G.S. 7B-302(a1)(1), the director is authorized to disclose confidential information to the Rapid Response Team to ensure the juvenile is protected from abuse or neglect and for the provision of protective services to the juvenile. All confidential information disclosed to the Rapid Response Team must remain confidential and will not be further redisclosed unless authorized by state or federal law as well as rule; it will not be considered a public record. 4. Notification to the Rapid Response Team does not relieve the county department of social services from carrying out their responsibilities to the juvenile. Ongoing case management to address the juvenile's educational and social needs must continue during the juvenile's stay in the hospital. Case management can occur virtually or in person so long as the juvenile's needs are met. Emergency Motion for Placement and Payment: In situations where the requirements of N.C.G.S. 122C-142.2 (b) through (f) are not satisfied, a motion can be filed in the district court in the county with jurisdiction over the juvenile in the abuse, neglect, and dependency matter regarding the juvenile's continued stay in an emergency department or subsequent admission at the hospital. The motion filed with the court must contain a specific description of the requirements of N.C.G.S. 122C-142.2(b) through (f) which were not satisfied. The motion shall be served on all parties to the juvenile proceeding, the hospital where the juvenile is receiving services, the LME/MCO or prepaid health plan for the juvenile, and DHHS. Upon service of the motion, the hospital, the LME/MCO	For clarification purposes, the court can make the following findings as identified below: If the court finds that there is clear and convincing evidence that there is no medical necessity for the juvenile to remain in the hospital and that the responsible party has not satisfied the requirements of G.S. 122C-142.2 (b)through (f),the court may order any of the following:

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or prepaid health plan, and DHHS shall automatically become a party to the juvenile proceeding. Upon request of the person filling the motion, the department of social services must provide certain information required under 7B-903.2(d). After the scheduled hearing occurs, the court will make written findings of fact and conclusions of law, including whether: 1. The person filing the motion established by clear and convincing evidence that there is no medical necessity for the juvenile to remain in the hospital. 2. The responsible party has not satisfied the requirements of G.S. 122C-142.2(b) through (f). After the hearing, the clerk of court for juvenile matters must schedule a subsequent hearing for review within 30 days of entry of the order. Note: If at any time after the motion is filed, the juvenile is discharged from the hospital and placed by the director, the court must dismiss the motion.	1. That the responsible party pay reasonable hospital charges of the juvenile's continued admission at the hospital. The reasonable charges would be limited to those incurred after the date it was no longer medically necessary for the juvenile to remain in the hospital. 2. That the responsible party pay for any damage to property caused by the juvenile incurred after the date it was no longer medically necessary for the juvenile to remain in the hospital. 3. That the court could order that the responsible party satisfy the requirements of N.C.G.S. 122C-142.2 (b) through (f). 4. Any additional relief necessary.

Placement Decision Making: Special Legal Considerations in Placement Decision Making

MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT OF 1994, AS AMMENDED IN 1996 BY THE INTERETHNIC PLACEMENT PROVISIONS (MEPA-IEP)

Please refer to Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.

INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT OF 1978

Please refer to Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.

MEXICAN HERITAGE

Please refer to Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.

Preparing Parents, Children, and Providers for Placement

Protocol – What must be done	Guidance – How you should do it
PREPARING PARENTS AND CHILDREN Please refer to in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	
PREPARING PLACEMENT PROVIDERS Please refer to in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	

Legal Basis
REASONABLE AND PRUDENT PARENT STANDARD N.C.G.S. § 131D-10.2A states the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard is the standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that are reasonably intended to maintain the health, safety, and best interests of the child while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the state to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. In this context, "placement provider" means a foster parent, relative, or non-relative kin with whom a child in the custody or placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency has been placed, or a designated official for a child care institution in which a child in the custody or placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency has been placed.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
The county child welfare services agency must use the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard when determining whether to allow a child in county child welfare services agency custody to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities. • This means activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally-appropriate for a child based on the development of cognitive,	Placement providers should be adequately prepared for the placement of the child by being informed of the specific needs of the child. Preparation should be continued after placement of the child, and include knowledge and skills relating to the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard for the participation of the child in age- or developmentally appropriate activities, including:

Preparing Parents, Children, and Providers for Placement

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emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for age or age group; and in the case of a specific child, activities or items that are suitable for the child based on the developmental stages attained by the child with respect to the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities of the child. Normal childhood activities include, but are not limited to, extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities, and may include overnight activities outside the direct supervision of the caregiver for a period of over 24 hours and up to 72 hours. The placement provider may provide or withhold permission from, without prior approval of the county department of social services, guardian ad litem, or court, the child in the placement providers' care to participate in normal childhood activities based on a reasonable and prudent parent standard. County child welfare agencies must verbally inform and provide placement providers with written policy addressing the following issues regarding discipline: • Corporal punishment is prohibited; • Child discipline must be appropriate to the child's chronological age, intelligence, emotional make-up, and experience; • No cruel, severe, or unusual punishment must be allowed; and • Deprivation of a meal for punishment, isolation for more than one-hour, verbal abuse, humiliation, or threats about the child or family will not be tolerated.	• Knowledge and skills relating to the developmental stages of the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities of a child, and • Applying the standard to decisions such as whether to allow the child to engage in social, extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities, including sports, field trips, and overnight activities lasting one or more days and involving the signing of permission slips and arranging transportation for the child to and from extracurricular enrichment and social activities. Reasonable and Prudent Parent Activities Guide Applying the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Required Contacts

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
INITIAL CONTACTS INITIAL CONTACT WITH CHILD (FOLLOWING PLACEMENT) A face-to-face contact with the child must occur within **7 days** after the day of initial out-of-home placement and within **7 days** after any subsequent placements (any time there is a change in placement). • The visit can take place in the home of the placement provider, at school, or in the community. • Prompt contact following placement provides reassurance to the child and the placement provider. It also allows the county child welfare worker to answer any early questions about the care of the child. • This contact with child(ren) is in addition to any contact or interaction with child(ren) on the day of placement. Documentation in the electronic NC FAST record must reflect diligent efforts made and/or rationale for the delay must be provided if the **7-day** contact does not occur.	CONTACT WITH CHILD Out-of-home placement is one of the most traumatic events that can occur in a child's life. A timely check regarding the adjustment, answering questions the child may have, and addressing any concerns is trauma informed. Making face-to-face contact with the child within 3 days after the day of initial out-of-home placement and any subsequent placements helps to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. During the early stages of placement, the child should have close contact with the county child welfare worker, until a relationship with the placement provider is established. Children removed from their homes need special attention and frequent contacts at the time of placement in county child welfare services agency custody, as well as any time a move from one placement to another is made. The placement provider and the child should know as early as possible when the next face-to-face contact with the county child welfare worker will be, and when the first visit for the child with the birth parents and/or siblings will be.
INITIAL CONTACT WITH PARENT(S)/CARETAKER(S) (FOLLOWING PLACEMENT) Face to Face contact must be made with all parents or caretakers within 7 days of initial placement.	CONTACT WITH PARENT(S)/CARETAKER(S) The 7-day contact with the parents should be made face-to-face at the initial parent/child visitation or 7-day court hearing. The parents should be informed of how the child(ren) is adjusting to the placement, and of any upcoming medical and/or educational appointments.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Required Contacts

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Documentation in the electronic NC FAST record must reflect diligent efforts made and/or rationale for the delay must be provided if the **7-day** contact does not occur.	ABSENT PARENTS (See also "Parent Engagement & Needs Assessment" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual) Documentation regarding absent parents and relatives should be reviewed and supplemented. The court will ask about the whereabouts of absent and/or non-residential parents, including legal and biological fathers, at the 7-day non-secure custody hearing, as well as at subsequent hearings. Available information should have been recorded during the CPS-A phase, but unknown or unsearched information should be updated. The Child Support Enforcement Unit and the internet White Pages are two useful sources to locate the addresses of missing persons.
INITIAL CONTACT WITH PLACEMENT PROVIDER (FOLLOWING INITIAL PLACEMENT OR PLACEMENT CHANGE) Face-to-face contact with at least one placement provider (if more than one adult caretaker resides in the home) must occur within **7** days after the day of placement. NOTE: The 7-day contact with the placement provider is in addition to any contact or interaction with the placement provider on the day of placement. Documentation in the electronic NC FAST record must reflect diligent efforts made and/or rationale for the delay must be provided if the **7-day** contact does not occur. Face-to-face contact must occur with all placement providers (including both spouses and any other adult caretakers who reside in the home) at the next required quarterly contact following the 7-day contact and quarterly thereafter.	

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Required Contacts

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
ONGOING CONTACTS CHILD: The following are the minimum required contacts with the child: • Face-to-face contact, which includes alone time meeting with the child, at least monthly; • The majority (4 out of every 6) of these visits must be held in the child's residence; • The county child welfare worker must have more frequent contact when indicated by the child's needs; and • The contact must be documented in the electronic record for the Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record. Every required contact with a child must include an individual face-to-face contact that is of quality and that focuses on safety, risk, and well-being needs. PARENT: Every required contact with the parent(s)/caretaker(s) must: • Assess the needs of parent(s)/caretaker(s); • Identify services necessary to achieve case goals; • Address the issues relevant to the agency's involvement with the family; and • Promote achievement of case goals. The following are the minimum required contacts with parent(s)/caretaker(s): • Face-to-face contact with all parents or caretakers at least monthly, if reunification is the primary or secondary permanent plan;	CHILD: When meeting with each child, the county child welfare worker should use interviewing strategies and techniques appropriate to the child's developmental level. Workers should use their professional judgment in deciding how to interview a child. From the OSRI: If the child is older than an infant, the county child welfare worker must see the child alone for at least part of each contact. PARENT: Even if reunification is neither the primary nor secondary permanent plan, the county child welfare worker should maintain contact with the parent(s) at least monthly until termination of parental rights. A quality visit with a parent consists of one-on-one contact in an environment conducive to open and honest conversation; the focus should be on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal achievement. Appropriate locations include a private home or in a private space, such as an office, where the parent/caretaker feels comfortable. This contact should not be made in a public or group setting (e.g., courthouse, restaurant, parent/child visitation) that might be uncomfortable for the parent, or in the presence of the child. A

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Required Contacts

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
○ If the parent is living in a home to which the child could be returned, half of these contacts (3 out of every 6) must be held in the parent's home. Documentation of diligent efforts made and/or rationale for the above requirements not being met must be provided. If a TPR is on appeal, and if reunification was the secondary plan at the time the court terminated parental rights, the county child welfare services agency must continue to contact the parent/caretaker at least monthly.	review of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement with the parent should occur at each required contact. Contacts should be of sufficient duration to address key issues with the parent/caretaker. There may be cases where the home from which the child was removed, or the home/environment in which the parent/caretaker is currently residing, is unsafe for the county child welfare worker to visit. If the parent/caretaker's home is deemed unsafe by the county child welfare worker and child welfare supervisor, documentation as to the rationale for the contacts not occurring in the home of the parent/caretaker should be documented in the electronic record in NC FAST. County child welfare agencies should be promoting, supporting, and maintaining positive relationships between the child and their parent(s)/caretaker(s). Contacts should focus on keeping parent(s)/caretaker(s) connected to their child regardless of where the parent/caretaker is located.
PLACEMENT PROVIDER (LICENSED OR KINSHIP): Every required contact with placement providers must: • Adequately assess the needs of the placement provider on an ongoing basis; and • Identify any services needed to help the placement provider provide appropriate care and supervision to ensure the safety and well-being of the child(ren) placed in the home. The following are the minimum required contacts with placement providers: • Face-to-face contact with at least one placement provider (if more	PLACEMENT PROVIDER: All members of the home, including adult and minor children of the placement provider, should be seen at least quarterly. This will allow the county child welfare worker to observe interactions between all family members and address any concerns in a timely way. The placement provider should be provided all additional and/or necessary information that the county department of social services has that may be relevant to the care of the child. Additional information could include information about the child, the family of origin, any home conditions, or other pieces of information that could

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Required Contacts

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
than one adult caretaker resides in the home) at least monthly. • Face-to-face contact with all placement providers (including both spouses and any other adult caretakers who reside in the home) at least once per quarter. • The county child welfare worker must assess the home of the placement provider at least once per quarter. ○ This must include a tour of the child's physical living environment focusing on where the child eats, sleeps, and plays, etc. to assess the child's safety, risk, and well-being. NOTE: If a child is placed in a group home or residential placement, a face-to-face contact must occur with the caregiver(s) present at the time of the visit.	impact the care of the child. Examples: the child had DV exposure that was not previously known, the child had previously been referred to a service that was still needed, or a specific fear that the child has. More frequent contacts with all adult caretakers in the home should occur when needed. Decision making around providing long-term care for children, through adoption, guardianship, and APPLA should be made with both caretakers in the home to ensure agreement with the permanent plan. In addition, any time there is a change in circumstances in the case, contact should be made with all adult caretakers in the home. County child welfare permanency planning workers and licensing workers should coordinate and conduct quarterly visits with licensed foster parents together whenever possible. If the child is placed through a private child-placing agency, the county child welfare worker should make every effort to coordinate and conduct home visits with the private agency worker whenever possible.
COLLATERALS: • The agency must have contact with persons significant to a child's case, other than the placement providers, when indicated by the child and family's needs. ○ This includes but is not limited to family members who reside outside of the home, relative or non-relative kin, guardians ad litem, service providers, school staff, or others who have information regarding the family.	COLLATERALS: Collateral Contacts / Service Collaboration Although important, contact with family members who reside outside the home, relative or non-relative kin or others who have information about the family are not considered persons who are significant to the case.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Required Contacts

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• The agency must have more frequent contact with collaterals when indicated by the child's needs. • Diligent efforts made and/or rationale for the delay must be documented if the minimum requirements for ongoing contacts are not met.	One of the goals of permanency planning is to meet the needs of the child while in foster care, the purpose of collateral contacts is to assess if the needs of the child are being met. Therefore, there should be an effort to speak to a variety of collaterals from month to month over the life of the case. This contact is to gather additional information through multiple perspectives. Service collaboration is a vital part of providing comprehensive, coordinated and family-centered services to families to address child safety and risk. This may be especially valuable on cases that involve domestic violence.
OTHER REQUIRED CONTACTS WHEN REUNIFICATION IS THE PRIMARY PLAN When reunification is the primary plan, county child welfare agencies must contact all adult household members residing in the home to which the child will return if reunification is achieved, at least 30 days prior to the child's return home. Background checks on all adult household members must also be conducted prior to recommending the child's return home. NOTE: Background checks on all adult household members must be conducted within 3 days of the child being placed in the home of the parent/caretaker when the court orders the child's return home prior to the county child welfare services agency recommending the return home.	OTHER REQUIRED CONTACTS WHEN REUNIFICATION IS THE PRIMARY PLAN Household members include, but are not limited to, relatives, romantic partners, family friends, roommates, and any other adult residing in the home.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Water Safety Hazards

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
INDIVIDUAL WATER SAFETY PLAN & LICENSED FOSTER HOMES According to Administrative Code 10A NCAC 70E .1112, exterior spaces around the foster home must be clear of any direct access to water. Where there is a known potential water safety hazard, the licensing worker must provide the Individual Water Safety Plan (DSS-5018a) and it must be: • Completed by the foster parent(s)/placement provider(s) within 3 calendar days after the day of placement and provide it at the initial visit; • Maintained in the home of the foster parent(s)/placement provider(s) where it is always accessible to all caregivers; and • Updated when changes occur. • Scanned and attached in the electronic record in NC FAST In addition, all licensed foster homes must follow the protocol found in the Foster Home Licensing in the NC Child Welfare manual regarding Exterior Setting and Safety and supervise the child's access to potential safety hazards in accordance with the Individual Water Safety Plan and the prudent parent standard. The county child welfare worker must review the completed Individual Water Hazard Safety Plan with the placement provider within 7 calendar days after the day of placement in the home. Any modifications to the plan based on the individual needs of the child must be made at that time. UNLICENSED KINSHIP PLACEMENTS When a child is placed in an unlicensed out-of-home kinship placement and a potential water safety hazard has been identified during the completion of the Kinship Care Initial Assessment (DSS-5203), the county	Placement providers, whether licensed or unlicensed, should take measures to protect children placed in their home from having unsupervised access to water and other safety hazards. County child welfare workers and supervising agency licensing workers should work closely together to ensure children who are placed in licensed homes do not have access to a water hazards. The Individual Water Safety Plan must be appropriate for the individual needs of the child.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Water Safety Hazards

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
child welfare worker completing the assessment must provide the placement provider(s) with the Individual Water Safety Plan (DSS-5018a). The placement provider(s) must complete the safety plan within 3 calendar days after the day of the placement and provide the plan to the county child welfare worker at the initial visit. The county child welfare worker must review the completed Individual Water Hazard Safety Plan with the placement provider within 7 calendar days after the day of placement in the home. Any modifications to the plan based on the individual needs of the child must be made at that time. The Kinship Care Initial Assessment and the Individual Water Safety Plan, once completed, must be scanned and attached in the electronic record in NC FAST.	

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Ongoing Placement Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
The first 30 days of permanency planning are critical in the child's transition and to the family's engagement in the change process. Assessment and planning are the activities that lay the foundation for the future work with the family and are important tasks in the initial placement process. Assessment and planning should involve collaborative efforts by all the parties involved with the family. The county child welfare worker should obtain as much information about the child and family as soon as possible so appropriate resources may be chosen and the county child welfare worker can help the placement provider meet the child's needs. The placement provider should be provided any known information to help better care for children, including health and behavioral health history, disability, exposure to trauma, and educational needs.	
REQUIRED SERVICES FOR CHILDREN For children who are placed in out-of-home placements, county child welfare agencies must provide the following services: • Evaluate and supervise the placement of children to ensure they are receiving proper care; • Face-to-face visit within 7 days of any placement change; • Make, at a minimum, monthly visits with children in foster care placement; • Ensure visitation occurs for children and parents to visit each other; • Ensure visitation occurs for siblings to visit each other, if placed in separate placements; • Ensure the child's well-being needs are met, including emotional and developmental needs; • Engage children in the planning process of the case, including participation in CFT meetings, PPR meetings, and developing the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement; • Assist children in mitigating the feelings of grief and loss that result from removal from the home; • Ensure children receive all needed evaluations, educational services, medical care and psychological treatment services through referral to other agencies and providers;	Special attention should be given to changes affecting the relationship between the worker and the child/youth, such as changes in frequency of contact, vacation, transfer, or termination of contact through the worker leaving the agency. Changes of the county child welfare worker may bring up the child or youth's fears of separation and abandonment. These fears can lead to disturbances in behavior and subsequent consequences in their relationships with placement providers, teachers, friends, and others. Children need and deserve adequate preparation for changes in service delivery and need to understand why changes are taking place. The child's participation in team planning can help reduce the anxiety both the child and family experiences when individual county child welfare workers leave the agency. Children should be given an opportunity to discuss openly their feelings about a placement. This exchange should occur prior to a placement and during the placement. Often the county child welfare worker is the only person the child feels they can talk to.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Ongoing Placement Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Encourage participation in activities that are age- and developmentally-appropriate; • Youth 12 and older must be provided a copy of the Understanding Foster Care – A Handbook for Youth (DSS-1516); • Youth 14 and older must have a credit report run annually, from each of the three credit reporting bureaus (Equifax, Transunion, and Experian); • Develop a TLP with youth ages 14 and older and provide services to help them transition to successful adulthood; • Assess youth ages 16 and 17 to determine their needs for services to prepare them for making the transition from foster care to independent living; • Explain the child's rights while in foster care placement; and • Create and maintain a life book for each child in foster care.	Children under age 12 should be provided a copy of the Understanding Foster Care – A Handbook for Youth (DSS-1516), if developmentally-appropriate.
INVOLVMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE JUVENILE CONSULTATION MEETINGS According to N.C.G.S 7B-2710, "the parent, guardian, or custodian of a juvenile being provided services through a juvenile consultation shall attend all scheduled meetings with the juvenile court counselor provided sufficient notice of the meeting was given to the parent, guardian, or custodian." If the local county agency has non-secure custody of the juvenile, they must attend all scheduled consultation meetings with the juvenile court counselor and juvenile unless sufficient notice was not given.	The county agency with non-secure custody of the juvenile should be notified about the juvenile consultation meeting through telephone, email, or mail by the Department of Juvenile Justice. The placement provider should attend the consultation meeting with the juvenile, court counselor, and county agency representative.
CARE REVIEW TEAM WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE	

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Ongoing Placement Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
N.C.G.S. 7B-2502(a2) states that "in the case of a juvenile with a suspected mental illness, developmental disability, or intellectual disability that has been adjudicated delinquent, the court shall order that the Juvenile Justice Section of the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice of the Department of Public Safety make a referral for a comprehensive clinical assessment or equivalent mental health assessment, unless the court finds a comprehensive clinical assessment or equivalent mental health assessment has been conducted within the last 45 days before the adjudication hearing. An assessment ordered by a court under this subsection shall evaluate the developmental, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of the juvenile." N.C.G.S. 7B-2502(a3) states that" if an assessment is ordered by the court under subsection (a2) of this section, the court shall review the assessment prior to the date of disposition in the case. If the court finds sufficient evidence that the juvenile has severe emotional disturbance, as defined in N.C.G.S. 7B-1501(24a), or a developmental disability, as defined in N.C.G.S. 122C-3(12a), or intellectual disability, as defined in N.C.G.S. 122C-3(17a), that, in the court's discretion, substantially contributed to the juvenile's delinquent behavior, and the juvenile is eligible for a Juvenile Justice Level 3 disposition and/or is recommended for a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) placement, the court shall order a care review team to be convened by the Juvenile Justice Section of the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice of the Department of Public Safety and assigned to the case." N.C.G.S. 7B-2502(a4) states that "if a care review team is assigned to a case by the court under subsection (a3) of this section, the care review team shall develop a recommendation plan for appropriate services and resources that address the identified needs of the juvenile. The care review team shall submit a recommendation to the court within 30 calendar days of the date of the court order convening the care review team. The court shall review the recommendation plan when determining the juvenile's disposition in	

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Ongoing Placement Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
accordance with G.S. 7B-2501(c). A care review team shall consist of, at a minimum, all of the following: (1) The juvenile. (2) The juvenile's parents, guardian, or custodian. (3) Representatives from the Juvenile Justice Section of the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice of the Department of Public Safety. (4) A representative from the local management entity/managed care organization or prepaid health plan (PHP) in which the juvenile is enrolled. (5) Representatives from any State agency or local department of social services that is currently providing services to the juvenile or the juvenile's family" N.C.G.S. 7B-2502(b) states that "if the juvenile does not have health insurance coverage for the recommended treatment, the court must conduct a hearing to who should pay the cost of the assessment, evaluation, or treatment pursuant to this section. The county manager, or any other person who is designated by the chair of the board of county commissioners, of the county of the juvenile's resistance must be notified of the hearing and allowed to be heard. The court must permit the parent, guardian, custodian, or other responsible persons to arrange for evaluation or treatment. If the parent, guardian, or custodian declines or is unable to make necessary arrangements, the court may order the needed evaluation or treatment, surgery, or care, and the court may order the parent to pay the cost of the care pursuant to Article 27 of this Chapter. If the court finds the parent or funding from the Juvenile Justice Section of the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice of the Department of Public Safety is unable to pay the cost of evaluation or treatment, the court must order the county to arrange for evaluation or treatment of the juvenile and to pay for the cost of the evaluation or treatment." If the county department of social services has non-secure custody, they must attend all care review meetings and be a part of the care review team	

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Ongoing Placement Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
as outlined in N.C.G.S. 7B 2502. The local county agency must ensure that the recommendation plan submitted to the court addresses all appropriate services and identified needs for the juvenile. The county agency must ensure that the juvenile has appropriate health insurance coverage for the recommended treatment and must attend any hearings, if necessary, regarding who should pay for the cost of assessment, evaluation, or treatment of the juvenile. AUTHORIZATION FOR HEALTHCARE SERVICES Unless the court orders otherwise, county child welfare agencies have the authority to arrange for, provide, or consent to the following: • Routine medical and dental care and treatment, including but not limited to treatment for common pediatric illnesses and injuries that require prompt intervention; • Emergency medical, surgical, psychiatric, psychological, or mental health care or treatment; and • Testing and evaluation in exigent circumstances. Counties must obtain authorization to consent from the parent/caretaker for the following: • Prescriptions for psychotropic medications; • Participation in clinical trials; • Immunizations when it is known that the parent has a bona fide religious objection to the standard schedule of immunizations; • Child medical evaluations not otherwise authorized by the court; • Surgical, medical, or dental procedures or tests that require informed consent; and • Psychiatric, psychological, or mental health care or treatment that requires informed consent.	To refer children and youth in foster care to care management with CCNC, Child Welfare Staff will complete the CCNC Custody Status Notification Form available at https://www.ncpeds.org/page/FHNCLibrary and fax the document to CCNC at 833-282-0884. Care Management can: • Assess/address needs as child comes into custody by coordinating with DSS Staff, e.g. imminent medical needs, emergency appointments, medications, and devices, etc. • Provide child welfare workers assistance with monitoring of psychotropic and high alert medications. • Ensure caregivers are aware of the child's health history and provide education on medical conditions, medications including red flags, devices, and care plans. • Support continuity of care by encouraging the medical home concept. In the absence of a medical home, Care Managers can assist with linkage to a medical home and other needed services. • Facilitate information flow between DSS staff, medical providers, foster/biological parents. • Support the foster family by assisting with navigation of the medical and behavioral health system and removing barriers to care. • Coordinate with Care Managers across the state when children are placed out of county. Link DSS to out-of-region Care Managers who know services and resources in the child's placement area.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Ongoing Placement Services

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NOTE: The court may authorize the director to provide consent after a hearing at which the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the care, treatment, or evaluation requested is in the juvenile's best interest. For more information regarding authorization for consent, please refer to General Authorization for Treatment and Medication (DSS-1812) and General Authorization for Treatment and Medication Instructions (DSS-1812ins). Once completed, authorization for consent must be scanned and attached to the electronic record in NC FAST. For children and youth in foster care receiving psychotropic medications, agencies must: • Refer and coordinate services for all children in foster care who receive psychotropic or other high alert medications included in the *Best Practices for Medication Management for Children & Adolescents in Foster Care* to care management through Community Care of North Carolina (CCNC) within 7 days and request a medication reconciliation from the CCNC Care Manager. ONGOING NEEDS ASSESSMENT Physical, dental, developmental, psychological, and/or educational assessments must be scheduled, when needed, within one week from the identification of the need.	All psychotropic medications should be monitored for side effects and, where indicated, appropriate metabolic monitoring should be completed by the prescriber of the medication. Additional information and guidance regarding psychotropic medications can be found on the Resources page of the Fostering Health NC website/library (www.ncpeds.org/fosteringhealthnc).

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LIFE BOOKS County child welfare agencies must create and maintain a life book for each child in an out-of-home placement. The child's life book must be initiated within 30 days of the child entering custody and updated on an ongoing basis. The following are items that must be in each child's life book: • A copy of a certified birth certificate (or date and time of birth, location of birth, and weight and length at birth); • Schools/daycare centers the child has attended; • Medical information, including immunizations, diseases, and allergies; • Medical history of birth family; • Pictures of the child at various ages; • Names and pictures of siblings; and • Pictures of birth parents. If the items above are not available for the child's life book, documentation in the NC FAST electronic record must reflect efforts made to obtain the items.	LIFE BOOKS Life books should be updated at least every 90 days, and whenever a significant event occurs, including but not limited to a change in placement or school, graduation, birth of a sibling, and changes to the child's medical history. A life book is a tool and a process. It can be applied as a therapeutic tool by assisting the child to cope with emotions that result from the child's experiences. It can also be beneficial for the child's therapist to assist in processing exposure to traumatic events. The collecting, recording, and processing of the child's feelings enlightens the "how" and "why" of what has happened. Life books should be used by county child welfare workers as a tool to assist the child to grieve over losses, celebrate successes, begin to heal in preparation for building trust and attachments in foster care, and to prepare for reunification or adoptive placement if reunification is not possible. Building the life book is a process that involves the continuous collaborative efforts of the child, county child welfare worker, birth parent(s) and foster/adoptive parents. It allows everyone to focus on the child's current, historical, and memorable events and their effects on the child's life. Creating a life book is a process that continues for the duration of the child's journey to permanency. The life book is one page, one picture, and one story at a time. It can start in the present moment and proceed forward with future events. Early in the work with the child and family, the county child welfare worker should begin building the child's life book by taking and procuring photographs of the child, birth family, and foster family. Gradually, prior history should be

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	collected from the birth parents (such as pictures and stories) regarding the child to be placed in the life book. Involving the birth parents demonstrates what the child had prior to being placed in an out-of-home placement as valuable, and imperative to maintain as a part of their life. Children will continue to need physical documentation of their histories throughout their time in county child welfare services agency custody. It is important to allow the child to personalize their life book by allowing the child to design and capture their story and/or memories that connects to the pictures in the book. The creation of the pages of the life book can be either digital or traditional or a combination of the two. The traditional life book can be a three-ring photo album or an expandable scrapbook. Additional items to be placed in the life book should include, but are not limited to: • The child's family tree (genogram, dates and locations of parents' births, physical description of parents, educational/employment experiences of parents, special health information about parents, statements of reason for placement away from parents, number of siblings of parents, and number/ages of other children of the parents); • Names and pictures of social workers and agencies involved with the child and family; • Names and addresses of foster families or other placement providers, if appropriate; • Letters and/or mementos from parents/relatives or significant others; • Pictures (birthparents' home, friends, foster family, pets, schools, special occasions such as birthdays, graduation, Christmas, vacation, awards, etc.);

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	• Drawings by the child (include any comments by the child regarding drawings or feelings); • Achievements of child (school, church, athletics, hobbies, activities, developmental milestones); • Report cards (comments of teach, samples of school work); • Stories from foster parents / social workers; • Anecdotes (a funny occasion, a scary time, an important experience, jokes); • Friends' comments about the child; and • Health and medical information (process of dealing with loss, separation and attachment, past abuse, therapists' names, frequency and duration of therapy, therapy goals, correspondences).
REQUIRED SERVICES FOR PARENTS Parents of children in county child welfare services agency custody retain many of their rights, including the right to visit their child, unless the court has ordered that visitation is not allowed. County child welfare agencies must ensure parents: • Are provided a copy of the Understanding Foster Care – A Handbook for Parents (DSS-5201); • Have the information to which they are entitled, including a copy of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement and Family Time and Contact Plan; • Have information regarding their child's circumstances, adjustment in placement, and in school; • Are involved in making decisions regarding their child's placement, whenever possible;	Services should be supportive of the parents and the parents should be made aware of the behavioral changes expected because of the service. Risk factors identified during the risk assessment process should be clearly discussed with the parents and extended family. It should be stated clearly to the parents from the beginning that, although reunification is the desired outcome (in cases where reunification is the primary permanency plan), a concurrent permanency plan will also be developed. Parents need to know that the goal is to achieve permanency for their child within one year and that it is in their control to determine whether their child's permanent home will be with them or in another permanent placement. The family should be informed of the CFT process to develop the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. The county child welfare worker should assure the parents that they will be treated as

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• Are included in the development of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement;
• Are invited to participate in every PPR of their child's case, and are provided adequate notice of meetings;
• Are notified of their right to attend judicial review hearings and of their right to be represented by counsel; and
• Are offered services that are appropriate to the needs of the individual and designed to best address the behavior or condition that necessitated the removal of their child.
 	
PROCEDURAL NOTICE TO PARENTS OF A PLAN TO CHANGE PLACEMENT
Parents must be given written notice, in advance of any intended change in the placement of their child. The exceptions are:
• The child's health or well-being would be endangered by delaying the action; or
• The child would be endangered if prior notice were given.
 	
To comply with the above requirement, the agency must complete the following forms that are generated through NC FAST:
• Notice to Parent Regarding a Proposed Change in the Placement of the Child (DSS-5189i)
  ○ This form must be completed by the agency when the decision is made to move the child.
  ○ This notice specifies the parent has 10 days within which to advise the agency of their desire to discuss with the county child welfare worker or the PPR team the plan for the proposed change.
  ○ If the parent does not agree with the decision of the county child welfare worker or the PPR team, they have the right to request the agency file with the court a motion for review. Pending the hearing on the motion for review, the agency may move the
	partners and full participants in the planning for their child, whenever possible. Parents also have the right to know honestly what the agency will do if they do not follow through with the activities and objectives of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement.
	
	All parents of the child have the same rights and should be involved in case planning for the child. Therefore, it is the duty of the county child welfare worker to make diligent efforts at the time of placement (if not accomplished before) to locate parents, including legal and biological fathers.
	
	Even after the court has removed legal custody, parents continue to have the right to information about their child's living situation and condition if reunification is the plan. The parents should be told appropriate details about the placement. When appropriate, the parents should have the opportunity to meet the foster care provider or to see pictures of the home and family where their child will be living.

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child as planned; however, the court review will determine if the child should continue in the new placement. ○ If the parents of the child are not living together, each parent must be given this notice. • Notice to Parent Regarding a Change in Placement of the Child (DSS-5189ii) ○ This form must be completed by the agency when a child has been moved without prior notice to the parent. ○ This notice specifies the parent has 10 days within which to advise the agency of their desire to discuss concerns about the change with the county child welfare worker or the PPR team. If the parent does not agree with the decision of the county child welfare worker or the PPR team, they have the right to request the agency file with the court a motion for review. The court review will determine if the child should continue in the new placement. ○ If the parents of the child are not living together, each parent must be given this notice. For more information, please see "Parent Engagement & Needs Assessment" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	
REQUIRED SERVICES FOR PLACEMENT PROVIDERS All children who are in the custody and placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency must be in a placement licensed by the state, or in a relative or non-relative kinship care placement specifically approved by the court. This includes placement with unlicensed relatives. County child welfare agencies must provide the following services to:	The State recognizes the importance of foster parents and kinship parents in the vital role of supporting children and families experiencing foster care. When children are placed in the custody of a county department of social services, families are almost immediately integrated into a team, including child welfare workers, resource parents, a guardian ad litem, attorneys, and others who are working together to address the issues leading to the foster care.

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• Monitor the level of care offered in the placement to ensure the child's needs are being met; • Provide consistent and ongoing support to the placement provider and facilitate the resolution of problems that occur while the child is placed in their home; • Education and information regarding shared parenting; • Education and information regarding the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard; • Work cooperatively with the placement provider to help the child overcome the trauma of placement; and • Engage in discussions that are supportive of the placement provider/agency relationship, • The director of the county child welfare agency must make a timely request to the clerk to calendar each review or permanency hearing at a session of court scheduled for the hearing of juvenile matters and the clerk must give 15 days' notice of the hearing to the person providing care for the juvenile as provided for in G.S. 7B-906.1.	The county child welfare agency should include the person providing care for the juvenile when they make the request to the clerk to calendar each review or permanency hearing so that the clerk will know who to notice for the hearing. Placement providers should be informed by the Clerk of Court of periodic reviews of the juvenile case of a child in foster care at least 15 days before each review, and the placement provider can provide input, verbal or written, during periodic reviews of any information that may be relevant to a child's best interests so that the court may use that information in forming its opinion on the case. The county child welfare agency should provide verbal notification to the placement provider of upcoming court hearings should they not receive notice from the Clerk of Court. The notification should occur during monthly home visits and documentation should reflect that the conversation occurred.
As part of the Foster Parent's Bill of Rights, the county child welfare agency supports and promotes the following for all placement providers: • Their receipt of any known information, relevant to the care of the child, at the time of non-secure custody to help the placement provider to better care for children • Their receipt of 24/7 emergency contact information for the county child welfare agency in the event of crisis or emergency • Their receipt of any additional and/or necessary information that the county child welfare services agency has that may be relevant to the care of the child at any time during which a child is placed with the placement providers	At the time of the placement of a child, the placement provider should be provided with basic information to be able to provide care to the child. At a minimum, this information should include: a 24/7 emergency contact phone number for the county child welfare agency, the child's health history, any behavioral health history, disabilities, educational needs, and trauma history.

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• Reasonable opportunities to be consulted with and considered in the scheduling of home visits, therapies, and other meetings related to the care of the child and regarding case planning that the foster or resource parents are allowed or required to attend, with reasonable advanced notice • Active participation by the placement provider in the decision-making process regarding the child • Reasonable notice, subject to the circumstances of each case, to a foster parent regarding the removal of a child from the foster home, including participation in the transition planning when it is in the best interest of the child • Receive information regarding the professionals working with the child, including any physicians, therapists, teachers, and other school personnel • Notification of any costs or expenses that may be eligible for reimbursement. • Timely allocation of resources, including submission of childcare vouchers and a monthly stipend that meets or exceeds the rate established by the Division of Social Services • Foster parents the opportunity to provide input to and seek out support from the Division of Social Services • **S.L. 2021-144** (HB 769): An Act to Provide a Bill of Rights Recognizing the Rights of Foster Parents in the State of North Carolina RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LICENSING WORKER The licensing worker must: • Make a minimum of quarterly visits with the foster parents (including both spouses and caretakers, if two are in the home), and at least half of these visits must be in the foster home.	Placement providers have critical information about the child in their home. Their attendance should be a priority at meetings, home visits, therapy, and other types of meetings where input and feedback about the child is needed. The county child welfare agencies should consult the placement provider prior to scheduling meetings and appointments. At a minimum, county child welfare agencies should provide updated information to the placement providers that could be relevant to the care of the child during monthly home visits. This could include but is not limited to; new information about the child's experiences prior to entering foster care, new providers, sibling visits, and shared parenting.

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As part of the Foster Parent's Bill of Rights, the county child welfare services agency supports and promotes the following for foster parents: • Access to required training and resources to ensure preparedness for caring for children experiencing loss and trauma, and child-specific training as needed • Access to the Division of Social Services and licensing agency policies • Their input to, advocate for, and seek out support from the supervising agency without fear of reprisal, including the right to request respite as needed or to request a break between placements • Referrals to resources for dealing with loss and separation when children return home to their parents • Consideration to a request to change licensing workers For more information, please see Placement Preparation and Follow-Up.	The licensing worker and permanency planning worker should conduct quarterly visits with foster parents together whenever possible. Placement providers need agency support and the support of other placement providers. The agency should help placement providers meet by providing space and arranging childcare for meetings on a regular basis. The agency should participate in these meetings, so placement providers' concerns are communicated to the agency. If a foster parent makes a request for a new licensing worker, the county child welfare agency should acknowledge the request, consider the appropriateness and feasibility of the request, and provide a timely response to the foster parent.
ONGOING RISK ASSESSMENT Please refer to in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Educational Stability

Policy
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE County child welfare agencies must ensure every child in foster care, who has attained the minimum age for compulsory school attendance under state law, is enrolled as a full-time elementary or secondary school student or has completed secondary school. "Elementary or secondary school student" is defined to include a child that is: • Enrolled in an institution which provides elementary or secondary education in compliance with state law; • Instructed in elementary or secondary education at home in accordance with state law on home schools; • Participating in an independent study program in elementary or secondary education that is administered by the local school or school district and is in accordance with state law; or • Incapable of attending school on a full-time basis due to the medical condition of the child, which incapability is supported by regularly updated information in the child's case plan.
EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT
Legal Basis
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (P.L.114-95) reauthorized the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) and includes new provisions that promote educational stability for children in foster care. Effective December 10, 2016, these provisions complement those in the Fostering Connections Act and require state educational agencies and local educational agencies to work with child welfare agencies to ensure the educational stability of children in foster care. In particular 42 U.S.C. 671 (a)(30) and 42 U.S.C. 675(1)(G) require both county child welfare agencies and local education agencies to collaborate to ensure school changes are minimized, and children in care who do change schools are promptly enrolled. ESSA also removed "awaiting foster care placement" from the McKinney Vento Act definition of homeless. ESSA requires assurances that children enroll or remain in their school of origin unless a determination is made that it is not in their best interest. That determination must be based on all factors relating to the child's best interest, including consideration of the appropriateness of the current educational setting, and the proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of the foster care placement. For child welfare county agencies, this requires:

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Educational Stability

N.C.G.S. §7B-903.1 states that when a child is in the custody of the county child welfare services agency, the county director may arrange for, provide, or consent to decisions about matters that are generally made by a juvenile's custodian, including but not limited to educational decisions and consenting to the sharing of the juvenile's educational information, without obtaining parental consent.

County child welfare agencies are entitled to all educational records of a child in non-secure custody through the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (P.L. 112-278).

Each child's privacy and confidentiality are ensured by the federal Educational Records Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) and the confidentiality of information provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1444).

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it

Every child in the custody of a North Carolina county child welfare services agency must have a plan for educational stability. The plan must address:
• School stability:
  ○ A child must remain in their school of origin upon entering the custody of a county child welfare services agency or experiencing a placement change, or
  ○ A Best Interest Determination meeting must occur before a child changes school;
• School enrollment must be completed in a timely manner;
• Educational needs and services:
  ○ A child's ongoing educational needs must be reviewed at least every 90 days and documented on the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240) and the PPR generated in NC FAST (DSS-5241); and
  ○ Services to address a child's educational needs must be provided in a timely manner.	

Documentation regarding educational stability must be maintained in every case file and the outcome of the BID meeting must be documented on the Best Interest Determination Form (DSS-5137), scanned and attached to the electronic record in NC FAST. The Child Educational Status form must be completed at a minimum of every 12 months.	The Best Interest Determination form, together with the Child Educational Status form (DSS-5245), meets the requirements of the Fostering Connections and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that documentation be maintained in the child welfare case file for

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Educational Stability

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Ongoing educational stability must be updated and documented in the NC FAST electronic record at the PPR (DSS-5241) and on the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240). Every county child welfare services agency must monitor and ensure educational stability for the children in its legal custody. ESSA requires county child welfare agencies must provide assurances that: • The child's placement decisions by child welfare agencies consider the appropriateness of the current education setting and the proximity to the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of the placement; • The county child welfare services agency has coordinated with appropriate local educational agencies to ensure the child remains in the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement; and • If remaining in the school is not in the child's best interest, the county child welfare services agency and the local educational agencies provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all the educational records of the child provided to the school. Additional requirements with ESSA include each county child welfare services agency must: • Designate a point of contact and notify the school district(s) in writing that the county child welfare services agency has designated an agency point of contact and request the school district(s) designate a corresponding point of contact. • Develop and implement clear, written procedures for school enrollment including the sharing of records. • Document efforts to maintain the child in their current school or, if not feasible, document why a change of school was in the child's best interest; • Collaborate with local school agencies regarding funding for any additional cost of the school transportation for children in agency custody.	every child in the custody of a county child welfare agency regarding educational stability.
CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM (CFT) MEETING AND BEST INTEREST DETERMINATION (BID) MEETING Once a decision is made initial placement or a change in placement, a CFT meeting must be held. The BID will determine what school the child will attend. Educational professionals must participate in this decision. The following decisions impact educational stability:	Scheduling of the BID meeting is the responsibility of the county child welfare worker. The worker should collaborate with

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Educational Stability

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
○ The decision regarding the child's placement; and ○ The Best Interest Determination (BID) regarding the school the child will attend. If the BID did not occur during the CFT, the child must remain in their current school until the BID is held. The county child welfare agency and local education agency should consider all factors relating to the child's best interest, including: • Preferences of the child; • Preferences of the child's parent(s) or education decision maker(s); • The child's attachment to the school, including meaningful relationships with staff and peers; • Placement of the child's sibling(s); • Influence of the school climate on the child, including safety; • The availability and quality of the services in the school to meet the child's educational and socioemotional needs; • History of school transfers and how they have impacted the child; • How the length of the commute would impact the child, based on the child's developmental stage; • Whether the child is a student with a disability under the IDEA who is receiving special education and related services or a student with a disability under Section 504 who is receiving special education or related aids and services and, if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin; and • Whether the child is an EL and is receiving language services, and, if so, the availability of those required services in a school other than the school of origin, consistent with Title VI and the EEOA. Transportation costs should NOT be considered when determining a child's best interest. The following parties should be invited to attend the BID meeting: • The Point of Contact for the county child welfare agency, and/or the social worker with the most information about child;	the local education agency to schedule a BID Meeting prior to the child(ren) entering custody or a placement change as a part of a CFT meeting. The county child welfare agency must also discuss with the child the purpose of the meeting, prepare the child for the meeting (unless it is determined that the child should not attend the meeting), and assist the child in the identification of a supportive adult who the child would like to attend the meeting. Exceptions may exist when a change in the school placement is necessary for emergency placements or placement changes. A change in school placement should only occur before the BID meeting when it is detrimental to the child's best interests to remain in his or her school of origin and requires approval by the county child welfare agency director (or designee). One of the responsibilities of the county child welfare services agency point of contact is data collection regarding compliance with educational stability policy for all children in a county child welfare services agency's custody. The BID meeting may need to be scheduled separately from the CFT meeting, depending on the family circumstances and desires.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Educational Stability

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• The Point of Contact for the local education agency, and/or the representative from the school of origin who has the most knowledge about the child and who is best able to provide feedback on significant relationships the child may have formed with staff and peers and how changing schools would impact the child's academic, social, and emotional well-being. This could be a teacher, counselor, coach, another meaningful person in the child's life, or any or all the above;
• If the child has an IEP or a Section 504 Plan, the relevant school staff members who could speak to the special needs of the child should also be invited to participate;
• If the child is an English Learner, a student identified as having limited English proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, or writing English, other relevant school staff may need to participate;
• The child, depending on age;
• Foster parents, when appropriate;
• Biological parents, guardians, or custodians when appropriate;
• Relatives of the child with perspective on which school the child should attend while in foster care; and
• The child's court appointed GAL, or a representative from the appropriate GAL program.
 	
The county child welfare worker must invite, and prepare as needed, the child, parents, and court partners (GAL, etc.). The local educational agency point of contact must invite teachers, coaches, special education services, transportation services, or any other educational services, as appropriate.
 	
<u>School Notification / Educational Services (ES) Meeting</u>
When the outcome of the BID is that the child will remain in the same school OR if a BID meeting was not held prior to the child's placement, the Foster Care Notification of Placement (Change) form (<u>DSS-5133</u>) is provided to the current school by either the county child welfare services agency or the placement provider within one school day of the BID meeting, or within one school day of the child's placement, if a BID meeting was not held prior to placement. This ensures:
  ○ The school's records are updated;
  ○ The county child welfare services agency obtains the child's educational records;
	Consider scheduling the BID at the time of the Child Planning or Day One Conference.
	
	An Educational Services (ES) Meeting should be scheduled after enrollment in the new school. The purpose of the ES meeting is to ensure the child has all required educational services and to discuss the child's school transition. Scheduling of an ES meeting is the responsibility of the county child welfare agency.
	
	An Educational Services meeting should also be scheduled when there are concerns related to a child's performance in school that may require a change of schools.
	
	The BID Form must be used to document the ES meeting. On the top of the form, check the box for Educational Services meeting. For an ES meeting, all questions in Section I may not apply. Section II is not required for an ES meeting but will be used in circumstances when a change in school, independent of a placement change, is being considered.
	
	Immediate enrollment means that a child in foster care should be enrolled in a new school as soon as possible to prevent educational

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○ The school determines the mode of transportation for the child; and ○ If a BID did not occur prior to the placement, a BID meeting occurs within five school days. If the outcome of the BID is that the child will enroll in a new school, the Foster Care Immediate Enrollment form (DSS-5135) is provided to the new school by either the county child welfare services agency or the placement provider within one school day. This ensures: ○ The child is immediately enrolled; ○ The school's records are updated; ○ The county child welfare services agency obtains the child's educational records; ○ The school determines the mode of transportation for the child An Educational Services (ES) meeting is scheduled by the county child welfare services agency within one month (or 30 days of the child's enrollment). When there is a placement change or school change, the county child welfare services agency must arrange for transportation until school transportation can be provided for the child to and from the placement and their school (at a minimum until the BID meeting has occurred). Once completed the Foster Care Notification of Placement (Change) form (DSS-5133) and the Foster Care Immediate Enrollment form (DSS-5135) must be scanned and attached to the electronic record in NC FAST. NOTE: The Best Interest Determination Meeting can be waived only upon the county child welfare services agency director's approval. Please see the Best Interest Determination Meeting Override form (DSS-5137a).	discontinuity, in most cases by the next school day. In addition, enrollment must not be denied or delayed because documents normally required for enrollment have not been provided. The receiving school must immediately contact the child's school of origin to obtain the relevant records and documentation, and the school of origin should immediately transfer those records. In addition to ensuring immediate enrollment, local educational agencies and county child welfare agencies should ensure that children in foster care are regularly attending and fully participating in school and that all their educational needs are met. The Foster Care Immediate Enrollment Form will also be used at the time of enrollment for a child that was not enrolled in public school prior to entering foster care or a foster care placement change (i.e., a pre-school aged child). An Educational Services (ES) meeting is not required for this child but may be considered if the child has any special needs.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Parent/Child Visitation/Family Time

PARENT/CHILD VISITATION/FAMILY TIME

Legal Basis
N.C.G.S. 7B-905.1 states an order that removes custody of a juvenile from a parent, guardian, or custodian or that continues the juvenile's placement outside the home shall provide for visitation that is in the best interests of the juvenile consistent with the juvenile's health and safety, including no visitation. The court may specify in the order conditions under which visitation may be suspended. If the juvenile is placed or continued in the custody or placement responsibility of a county department of social services, the court may order the director to arrange, facilitate, and supervise a visitation plan expressly approved or ordered by the court. The plan shall indicate the minimum frequency and length of visits and whether the visits shall be supervised. Unless the court orders otherwise, the director shall have discretion to determine who will supervise visits when supervision is required, to determine the location of visits, and to change the day and time of visits in response to scheduling conflicts, illness of the child or party, or extraordinary circumstances. A parent's positive result from a drug screen alone is insufficient to deny the parent court-ordered visitation with the juvenile. The director shall promptly communicate a limited and temporary change in the visitation schedule to the affected party. Any ongoing change in the visitation schedule shall be communicated to the party in writing and state the reason for the change. For parents with unsupervised visitation that have a positive result from a drug screen, the department of social services shall expeditiously file a motion for review and request that a hearing be scheduled within 30 days for the court to review the visitation plan to ensure the safety of the child. While the motion is pending, the director may temporarily impose supervision requirements to all or part of the visitation plan. The director shall promptly communicate the limited and temporary change in the visitation plan to the affected party. No motion or notice of hearing is required if a review or permanency planning hearing is already scheduled to be heard within 30 days of the imposed suspension requirement.

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INITIAL PARENT/CHILD FAMILY TIME Family Time (visitation) must occur between the parent(s)/ caretaker(s) and the child(ren) within 7 calendar days of the child entering agency custody. Family Time (visitation) between siblings (if placed in separate placements) must occur within 7 calendar days of entering agency custody. DEVELOPING THE FAMILY TIME AND CONTACT (VISITATION) PLAN	The initial visit between the parent and child should be as structured as possible. In many cases, the Family Time and Contact (Visitation) Plan will not be developed prior to the initial visit. It is important to prepare the parent(s)/caretaker(s) for the visit by discussing expectations, who will participate, and what is and is not appropriate for the visit. Family Time and Contact Plans should be addressed in every court hearing and reflected in every court order, particularly when unsupervised visits are considered.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Parent/Child Visitation/Family Time

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
The Family Time and Contact (Visitation) Plan (DSS-5242), generated in NC FAST, must: • State, for each child, the type, level of supervision, frequency, duration, and location of visits; • Always be current; • Be revised as often as necessary; and • Be signed by all parties. Each must address the following critical elements: • Attendees/participants approved by the county child welfare services agency to attend the visits; • Transportation arrangements for the parents and the child; • Whether visits will be supervised or monitored, and by whom; and • Whether other kinds of contacts are appropriate such as telephone calls, emails or letters, skype, or social media, and if monitoring of them is needed. NOTE: The Family Time and Contact Plan must be signed by the parents. If the parents refuse to sign, the county child welfare worker must document their refusal on the form, scan and attached it to the electronic record in NC FAST. Separate Family Time and Contact Plans must be developed for each parent, if they are not visiting the child together, and for siblings, if placed separately. Parents must be notified within 7 days of any change in the Family Time and Contact Plan.	If parent attorneys advise parents not to sign anything, involve the attorney in developing the Family Time and Contact Plan. Parents have the responsibility for and maintain their right for visitation with their children. Frequent and meaningful visitation between parent/child should occur because: • Visits maintain and improve the parent/child relationship; • Visits enable children to see their parents realistically and rationally and can help calm separation fears; • Visitation is often the only means of maintaining, improving, or developing the child's relationship with their parents; • Visits provide the opportunity for parents to improve their parenting skills and to demonstrate their ability to care for their child; • Visits provide the county child welfare worker the opportunity to observe and to evaluate the parent-child relationship; • Visits are a good indicator of the possibility of reunification; and • Visits provide documentation of the parent's progress. Visits can be a motivator for parents who are making progress on the objectives of their Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. When county child welfare workers have observed a parent's progress, they can ask the court to review the Family Time and Contact Plan and revise it to allow more frequent visits, longer visits, or unsupervised visits, as appropriate. Children need visits to: • Keep a connection to their family; • Mitigate their grief; • Have their worth reaffirmed; • Have the assurance that their parents "exist"; and • Re-establish and strengthen a relationship with their parents.

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Parents must also be informed of the following regarding visitation: • Anticipated changes in the visiting arrangements as the case progresses; • Advance request for visits other than those regularly scheduled; and • Explanation of possible consequences if the parties do not carry out their responsibilities.	Parents need visits to: • Remain attached to their children; • Stay motivated to work for reunification; • Practice what they have learned in treatment and improve their parenting skills; • Understand the unique needs of their children; • Mitigate their grief; • Re-establish and strengthen a relationship with their child; and • Demonstrate their attachment and parenting abilities.
The county agency must assess the need for supervised visitation on an ongoing basis. The agency must evaluate the strengths and needs of the parent/child relationship during supervised visitation and provide feedback to the parent as needed. The parent must have the opportunity to improve their parenting skills and demonstrate to the agency their ability to safely care for their child.	
Before the agency can recommend to the court, that unsupervised visitation of a child occurs with the parent, the county child welfare agency must first observe the parent from which the child was removed for a minimum of two visits. The agency's **observed** visits MUST occur no more than 30 days prior to the scheduled permanency planning hearing in which the agency recommends the unsupervised visitation. Each visit must: • Be at least one hour in duration; and • Be held at least seven (7) days apart. Observations during these required visits must be documented and provided to the court and must support a recommendation for	The county child welfare agency should observe the interaction between the child and the parent and document what activities took place and how the time was spent. The county agency should observe how the parent disciplined the child, the parent's attentiveness to the child's needs and any affection that was displayed. In addition, the agency should observe the environment in which the child is visiting and assess and document any safety concerns. When a child begins unsupervised visitation with their parent/caretaker, the agency should continue to observe frequent interactions between the parent/caretaker and that child to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

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unsupervised visitation to the removal parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker. Note: The court maintains the right to allow unsupervised visitation against agency recommendations if it so determines. Unsupervised visitation between the parent(s) or caretaker and child must not occur without prior court approval.	
FAMILY TIME County child welfare workers must observe and document the following during visits: • Who participated in the visit; • How long the visit lasted; • How the parent(s) greeted the child(ren); • What the child(ren)'s response was; • How the parent(s) and child(ren) interacted; • What activities took place / how the time was spent; • Whether the parent(s) set limits or disciplined the child(ren); • Whether the parent(s) was attentive to the child(ren)'s needs; • Whether the parent(s) and child(ren) displayed affection; • How the child(ren) behaved; • Whether it was necessary for the county child welfare worker to intervene at any point; • How the parent(s) and child(ren) separated; • What happened after the visit; and • Whether the worker provided coaching or modeling for the parent(s).	FAMILY TIME County child welfare workers should use parent/child visitation to: • Assess parents' ability to respond to the child's needs; • Prepare the child and parent for reunification; • Assist parents to understand the child's needs and behaviors; • Guide and observe parents' responses to the child's behaviors; • Observe parents' relationship with their child; • Observe changes in parents' behavior over time; • Observe the child's reactions and responses to parents; and • Document all the above and thus provide evidence to support the permanent plan. Parents and children remain attached even when separated by out-of-home placements. The emotional impact of separation results in grieving that will be intensified during and after visits. Parental behavior during visits may be unpredictable, disturbing, and further traumatize the child. When the reaction to Family Time is negative, discussion about why should take place and subsequently suggestions on how to improve it. Appropriate suggestion should be considered before terminating visits completely. Family time should occur frequently in a natural setting. Limiting visits to what is convenient for the agency limits the agency's knowledge of the parent's ability and limits the parent's opportunity to learn and demonstrate how to care for their children.

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RESTRICTION OF FAMILY TIME AND CONTACT (VISITATION)
Family Time and Contact Plans are required, and parent/child visitation must continue until the court orders termination of visitation, or termination of parental rights. Before visits can be limited or terminated, the agency must:
• Identify specific parental behaviors which are having a negative impact on the child;
• Demonstrate the child's difficulties are not a child's normal anxiety response to parent-child visits,
• Demonstrate that reasonable efforts have been made to explain to parents the implications of not working to improve visits;
• Support for the decision through consultation with medical, psychiatric, or other appropriate professionals; and
• Petition for a court order limiting visitation, even if parents agree with this plan.
 	
The agency must not withhold or cease court ordered visitation based on a parent's substance use or a positive drug screen alone. If at the time visitation between the parent and the juvenile occurs, a parent is under the influence of drugs or alcohol and exhibits behavior that could create an unsafe environment for a child or the parent appears to be actively impaired during that visitation, the county agency may cancel that visit. Changes in the visitation plan as a result of the parent's substance use must not occur unless there is an unsafe environment for the child.
 	
The agency must file a motion for review and request that a hearing be scheduled within 30 days when a parent with unsupervised visitation has a positive result from a drug screen.
	County child welfare workers should think creatively about family time to make it a real tool for assessing families.
	
	<u>Strategies for Creative Family Time</u>
	• Family time in the foster home:
	  ○ Allows the parent to observe a positive approach to child care and allows the child to see all those who care for him/her as allies
	  ○ Promotes a sense of partnership between the foster parents and birth parents and is a potential permanent resource for the future
	• Family time at school or in day care:
	  ○ Most children would welcome lunch with their parents, which is something most schools allow and encourage
	  ○ Allows parents to learn about this important aspect of their child's life and meet their child's teacher or day care provider.
	• Include parents in regular appointments:
	  ○ Participating in doctor or dentist appointments gives parents an opportunity to take responsibility for medical concerns and keeps them informed.
	  ○ May reassure the child, who may be fearful about the appointment.
	• Take family time outside:
	  ○ Parks, playgrounds, fast-food restaurants, and other places allow for family time that more closely resembles normal parent-child interaction.
	• Recruit volunteers and make them Family Time Specialists. Transportation and the need for supervision should not limit their opportunity because volunteers may also become role models and mentors.

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While the motion is pending, the director may temporarily impose supervision requirements to all or part of the visitation plan. The director must promptly communicate the limited and temporary change in the visitation plan to all affected parties until the hearing. NOTE: county child welfare agencies must continue to have contact with the parent(s) even if visitation has ceased unless there has been a completion of termination of parental rights.	The agency should assess how the positive drug screen impacts the parent and child with unsupervised visitation and assist the parent with addressing any needs identified if the county agency chooses not to alter the visitation plan prior to the hearing. If the agency is not able to address the safety issues with the parent, then the agency should reconsider whether the visits should be waived.

Out-of-Home Placement Services: Sibling Visitation

SIBLING VISITATION

Legal Basis	
The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, P.L. 110-351 requires agencies make reasonable efforts to facilitate visitation or ongoing contacts with siblings that cannot be placed together, unless it is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings to do so.	
Protocol – What you must do	**Guidance – How you should do it**
Siblings who are not in the same placement must have frequent and ongoing visitation unless it is contrary to the siblings' well-being or safety. Sibling visitation includes visits between any sibling, including biological and/or step-siblings with whom they have a significant bond, and whom they are not currently placed with. This also includes adult siblings of the child.	Preserving connections between siblings is critical for children who have been removed from their family. Sibling bonds are among the strongest humans ever experience. They are emotionally powerful and critically important not only in childhood but over the course of a lifetime. Sibling relationships can provide a significant source of continuity, which allows children to maintain a positive sense of identity as well as knowledge of their family history. It also keeps them connected with their cultural background. When siblings are placed separately, placement providers should be encouraged to plan for and host sibling visits and activities. When appropriate, county child welfare workers should ensure that siblings are informed of significant life events that

	occur within their family. These events include but are not limited to the death of an immediate family member, the birth of a sibling, significant changes regarding a sibling such as changes in their placement, hospitalizations, or changes in the permanent plan.

Agency Plan for Abducted and Runaway Children

AGENCY PLAN FOR ABDUCTED AND RUNAWAY CHILDREN

Legal Basis
The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183) requires agencies to identify, document, and determine appropriate services for any child or youth in the placement, care, or supervision of a county child welfare services agency who is at-risk of becoming a sex trafficking victim or who is a sex trafficking victim. Agencies must report immediately (no later than 24 hours) to law enforcement children or youth who the agency identifies as being a sex trafficking victim. Agencies must also have protocols in place to locate children missing from foster care, determine the factors that lead to the child's being absent from foster care, and determine the child's experiences while absent from foster care, including whether the child is a sex trafficking victim. Agencies must report immediately (no later than 24 hours) to law enforcement any missing or abducted children for entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database, and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Public Law 117-348 – Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 22 reauthorizes and amends the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). Amendments include additional communication and details when title IV-E agencies report missing or abducted children to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Each county child welfare services agency must follow the policy below for reporting, locating, and returning children missing, runaway, or abducted from foster care.
Definitions
Abduction of Children – Per N.C.G.S. § 14-41 any person who, without legal justification or defense, abducts or induces any minor child who is at least four years younger than the person, to leave any person, agency, or institution lawfully entitled to the child's custody, placement, or care. High Risk Child – The missing child's safety is severely compromised for one or more of the following reasons: • The child is believed to be or has been abducted; • The child is believed to be in the company of adults who could endanger their safety; • The child is younger than 13 years of age and/or is believed to be out of the zone of safety for their age or developmental stage; • The child has one or more health conditions that, if not treated daily, will place the child at severe risk; • The child is drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency is life-threatening; • The child has severe emotional problems that, if not treated, will place the child at severe risk; • The child has a developmental disability that impairs the child's ability to care for him/herself; • The child is pregnant and/or parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with their parent(s); • The child is missing more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement; • The child is believed to be in a life-threatening situation;

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- The child's absence is inconsistent with their established patterns of behavior and the deviation is not readily explained;
- The child is known or believed to be a victim of human trafficking (sex trafficking, labor trafficking, or both); and/or,
- Other circumstances involved in the disappearance that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the child should be considered "at imminent risk."

Kidnapping – Per N.C.G.S. § 14-39 any person who shall unlawfully confine, restrain, or remove from one place to another, any other person 16 years of age or over without the consent of such person, or any other person under the age of 16 years without the consent of a parent or legal custodian of such person.

Missing Child – Per N.C.G.S. § 143B-1011, a juvenile as defined in N.C.G.S § 7B-101 whose location has not been determined, who has been reported as missing to a law enforcement agency, and whose parent's, spouse's, guardian's, or legal custodian's temporary or permanent residence is in North Carolina or is believed to be in North Carolina.

Missing Foster Child – A child who has either left voluntarily (ran away) or involuntarily (abduction, kidnapped, or lost), and cannot be accounted for by the agency responsible for their care and placement.

Runaway – A child who has voluntarily left their placement provider or home and whose whereabouts are either unknown by the child's parent, guardian, custodian, caretaker, foster parent, or county child welfare worker or whose whereabouts are unknown by the child's parent, guardian, custodian, caretaker, foster parent, or county child welfare worker but who maintains periodic contact with the county child welfare worker or others.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
REPORTING REQUIREMENTS Upon learning a child is missing, county child welfare agencies must notify law enforcement immediately. Placement providers, including foster parents, relative and non-relative kin, and staff of residential facilities must immediately report any missing child or youth to: • A local law enforcement agency; and • The county child welfare services agency.	Regular Communication with National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and Local Law Enforcement Agencies Policy states county agencies shall maintain regular communication with NCMEC and law enforcement agencies in efforts to provide a safe recovery of a missing or abducted child or youth. Communication by a county agency shall occur at a minimum of every two weeks, with a county Director having discretion for more frequent contact as needed.

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The placement provider must obtain the number of the missing person report from the law enforcement officer taking the report and provide the report number to the county child welfare worker.
 	
REQUIREMENTS FOR COUNTY CHILD WELFARE WORKERS
When a child or youth that the county child welfare services agency has legal responsibility for is missing, the agency must:
• Check the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to see if the child(ren) or youth has been reported missing and the appropriate local law enforcement agency to see if the child(ren) or youth has been reported missing/runaway. County agencies shall maintain regular communication with NCMEC and law enforcement agencies in efforts to provide a safe recovery of a missing or abducted child or youth, including by sharing information pertaining to the child's or youth's recovery and circumstances related to the recovery. County agencies shall include in their reports, to NCMEC and law enforcement agencies the following information, where reasonably possible:
  ○ A photo of the missing or abducted child or youth; and
  ○ A description of the child's or youth's physical features, such as height, weight, sex, ethnicity, race, hair color, and eye color; and
  ○ Endangerment information, such as the child's or youth's pregnancy status, prescription medications, suicidal tendencies, vulnerability to being sex trafficked, and other health or risk factors; and
  ○ County child welfare worker's contact information or other preferred point of contact (e.g., the worker's supervisor).
• Reports to National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and local law enforcement agencies should be made immediately (and in no case later than 24 hours) after the agency
	Factors that should be assessed to determine a child or youth's risk of running away include, but are not limited to:
	• History of running away;
	• Demonstrating a desire to run (or stating a desire to run);
	• Demonstrating independence, including an ability to survive on the streets;
	• Demonstrating limited social skills and/or peer relationships;
	• Have strong bonds with siblings, but siblings are not placed with siblings;
	• Have a history of engaging in risky behavior;
	• Have a history of out-of-home placements;
	• Fall between the ages of 13 and 18 years old;
	• Have a record of school absences;
	• Have significant emotional issues;
	• Abuse alcohol or other substances;
	• Have an unstable family/home environment;
	• Seem to accept placement/custody;
	• Have history of juvenile referrals and/or arrests; and
	• Reported abuse or other victimization.
	
	Factors that should be assessed to determine the child's risk of being abducted by a parent of family member include, but are not limited to:
	• Family members have threatened abduction (or there has been a prior incidence of abduction);
	• Limited ties to the area or have family/social support in another community;
	• History of mental illness;
	• Feel alienated from the legal system;
	• History of child abuse/neglect;

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receives information about missing or abducted foster children. • Provide immediate verbal notification to the appropriate law enforcement agency, and follow up by sending a subsequent written notification within 48 hours; ○ NOTE: A copy of the law enforcement report must be obtained for the case file. • Provide immediate verbal notification to the child's family (if the child is not believed to have been abducted by family members) and GAL and discuss collaborative efforts that all parties can take to locate the child; • File a motion with the court within 10 to 14 business days after the child was known to be missing to inform the court of the child or youth's status and efforts being made to locate the child or youth; and • Document in the case record or NC FAST electronic record notification to the appropriate parties (law enforcement, parents and caretakers, NCMEC, GAL, and the court) and the agency's continuing efforts to locate the child or youth and collaborate with law enforcement, GALs, family members, NCMEC, and other appropriate persons. These tasks must be completed within 24 hours of the time of notification. Additional Information that must be shared with law enforcement includes: • A photo of the missing or abducted child or youth; and • County child welfare worker's contact information or other preferred point of contact (e.g., the worker's supervisor). • The child or youth's full name, aliases and nicknames, age and date of birth, social security number, driver's license number (if applicable), and other biographical information;	• History of alcohol/substance abuse; • History of unlawful behavior and/or arrests; • Do not accept relevant court orders; • Exhibit a desire to retaliate; • History of short-term employment or unemployment; and • Stability of relationship with the other parent. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) will fax the county child welfare worker a questionnaire which includes an Information Release and Verification Form requiring the guardian's signature or caseworker. This form is to be completed and faxed back to NCMEC. Upon receipt of the release of information and the child's photograph, NCMEC will publish the child's photograph on its website and distribute posters of the child both locally and nationally. The child's name and identifying information will be published with their photograph, but the child/youth will not be identified as a foster child in the legal custody or under the placement responsibility of the county child welfare services agency. Providing information to NCMEC, including the child's photograph, DOES NOT violate North Carolina confidentiality laws and rules. It is important to inform law enforcement about any circumstances that could severely compromise the safety of a child or youth who is missing. These circumstances include anything that would fall in the definition of a high risk child, which includes the following: • The child has a developmental disability that impairs the child's ability to care for him/herself;

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• A description of the child or youth (i.e., height, weight, hair color, eye color, skin color, braces, clothes worn, book bag, shoes, contact lenses or glasses, dentures, gold or silver teeth, any impairments [physical, hearing, speech, vision], moles, scars, body piercings, tattoos) and recent photographs; • Physical or psychological conditions, developmental delays, or any condition that may affect the ability of the child or youth to respond to environmental dangers; • Other factors of endangerment, such as young age, hazardous location, medical needs, disability, etc.; • Medication and/or history of suspected substance use/abuse; • A copy of the most recent court order granting legal custody of the child or youth and other relevant facts about the child or youth's custody status; • Type of missing episode (if known), including runaway, family abduction, non-family abduction, or other; • When, where, and with whom the child or youth was last seen; • Possible method of travel (e.g., car, bicycle, public transportation, on foot); • Names and addresses of friends, relatives, present and former placement providers, including child care facilities/staff, and acquaintances; • Locations the child or youth is known to frequent; • Suspected destinations and accomplices; and • Prior disappearances and outcomes. If a child or youth is identified as "high risk," this must be communicated to law enforcement.	• The child is pregnant and/or parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with him/her; • The child is missing more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement; • The child is believed to be in a life-threatening situation; • The child's absence is inconsistent with their established patterns of behavior and the deviation is not readily explained; • The child is known or believed to be a victim of human trafficking (sex trafficking, labor trafficking, or both); and/or • Other circumstances involved in the disappearance that would cause a reasonable person to conclude that the child should be considered "at imminent risk."

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REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPERVISORS
Upon notification that a child or youth is missing, the supervisor must:
• Within 24 hours, confirm the county child welfare worker has completed all the required reports and contacts as described above;
• Assist the worker in developing and implementing a plan that contains specific strategies to locate the missing child or youth and assure the child and youth's safety as quickly as possible;
• Confirm that the plan is documented in the NC FAST electronic record and includes daily and weekly activities to locate the child;
• Ensure that the plan is revised, as needed, to ensure progress is made toward locating the child and establishing their safety;
• Meet with the worker on a weekly basis after the initial reporting requirements are completed;
• If the child is high risk, obtain and review daily progress reports from the worker that include:
  ○ Ongoing strategies and efforts to determine the child or youth's whereabouts;
  ○ Contacts with law enforcement and others;
  ○ Additional steps taken to assist in finding the child;
  ○ A placement plan for when the child is located; and
  ○ Confirming the worker completes appropriate changes to the Child Placement and Payment Record.
• Ensure all supervisory meetings are documented in the electronic record in NC FAST.	

SEARCHING FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND YOUTH In addition to the steps described above, specialized interventions must be considered, depending on whether the child has been abducted, is missing, or is missing with periodic contacts with the worker.	When a child is located, careful consideration should be given to their ongoing placement. When deciding whether to return the child or youth to the placement they were in before being reported as runaway or missing, the county child welfare worker should interview the

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Abducted Children and Youth If the child is believed to have been abducted, the county child welfare services agency's efforts to locate the child must focus on the child's relationship with the abductor and the agency must work closely with law enforcement. In addition, the following must be completed on a weekly basis: • Contact law enforcement to both provide and obtain any new information regarding the alleged/suspected abductor; • Contact the assigned NCMEC case manager; and • Contact relatives, previous caregivers, friends of the child or any other individuals in the child's family or social support network to obtain new information on the suspected/alleged abductor and the child or youth. Missing Children and Youth When a child's whereabouts are unknown, and/or the circumstances of the child's disappearance are unknown, the county child welfare worker must make a sustained effort to locate the child by contacting the following individuals, agencies, or organizations each week: • Local police, sheriff's office, or other law enforcement agency working to locate the child or youth; • Local emergency shelters and homeless youth programs; • Most recent caregiver and any other caregivers with whom the child or youth is known to have had a close or long-term relationship; • Relatives, including the child's parents and siblings; • Neighbors and landlord of the child's last known address; • Close friends and classmates of the child, including any known boyfriends, girlfriends, or anyone else in the community with whom the child may have developed a significant relationship;	caregiver and the child separately to determine why the child ran away. Workers should review reasons provided with a supervisor to determine if the reasons for running away are related to the placement itself. Workers and supervisors should determine whether placement stabilization or other services would be beneficial. If the child or youth was missing from care for another reason (i.e., they did not run away) county child welfare workers should carefully assess the factors associated with the child or youth's disappearance and their experiences while absent from care to address possible safety and risk issues and plan for placement accordingly. If the child or youth has a history of running away or indicates that he or she will not accept any placement selected by the agency, the worker should discuss with the child or youth where he or she wants to live or what type of placement he or she is willing to accept. Such alternate placements may include: • A relative with whom the child is comfortable and has a relationship; • A former caregiver or another adult with whom the child has formed a relationship and with whom the child expresses a desire to be placed; • An independent transitional living arrangement, if appropriate; or, • Reunification with the child's parent(s). Any or all these options must meet certain requirements, depending on the placement type, including any necessary approval by the court.

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• Teachers, counselors, and other school personnel from the school the child last attended if there is knowledge that the child had close relationships with persons at the school; • Employees of the county child welfare services agency or placement provider who may have knowledge of the possible location of the child or youth; • Probation offices, when appropriate; and • County juvenile or adult detention centers. • Initiate a CPS Alert <u>Missing Children and Youth with Periodic Contacts</u> The county child welfare worker must make every effort to return the child to an authorized placement. In addition to making required contacts listed above, the following information must also be sought from the missing child or youth: • The child's location at the time of contacts; • Any information about where they are staying currently or for any period; • Any information about the individuals that they may be with; • Information about the health and safety of the child/youth (if parenting, also inquire about the health and safety of the infant or child); • Whether they are attending school and where; • Whether they are employed and where; and • Any contact they have made with family members, friends, probation and parole agents, etc.	
Guidance – How you should do it	

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PREVENTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM RUNNING AWAY

Prevention efforts on the part of county child welfare agencies should include, at a minimum, the following activities:

- Maintaining administrative oversight of its program and practice to ensure agency compliance with laws and policies concerning case contacts, reviews, and hearings;
- Maintaining photographs of foster children in the NC FAST electronic record;
- Assuring supervisory review and staffing of all permanency planning cases on a regular schedule;
- Recruiting and supporting foster homes in communities from which foster children come into care;
- Training foster parents regarding the dynamics of human trafficking cases and the specific needs of children and youth who have been trafficked;
- Educating individual foster parents and placement providers regarding the specific needs of the child or youth for whom they are providing care;
- Utilizing the child or youth's PPR meetings to facilitate community service provision and collaboration to meet individual needs; and
- Maintaining close communication with foster parents, group home staff, and GALs to assure that information is shared on a timely basis;

In addition to these agency-level runaway prevention efforts, county child welfare agencies should engage in individualized, case-by-case runaway prevention strategies. This is particularly important if the agency identifies that a child or youth is at risk of running away from their placement or has a history of running away from their placements or previous caregivers (including their biological families).

The following are runaway prevention strategies that can be utilized with all children and youth in county child welfare services agency custody and can be tailored for the specific needs of the individual:

- Increase protective factors by ensuring foster parents and care providers are implementing the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and that children and youth have regular opportunities to engage in age or developmentally-appropriate activities;
- County child welfare workers should make efforts to provide a stable relationship with children and youth in county child welfare services agency custody through case planning, case management, and frequent visits;
- County child welfare workers should assist children and youth in their personal, social, and emotional development while they are in foster care. This includes efforts to maintain their relationships with members of their own family and other persons while addressing problems they face because of placement;
- County child welfare workers should provide referrals to counseling or other services for children and youth, as needed; and

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• The frequency and intensity of contact should be determined by the individual needs of the child or youth, but no less than monthly face-to-face contact. More frequent contacts with children and youth should be considered if there is a history of prior runaway events or if the child or youth would be at high-risk if they were to leave placement.	

Shared Parenting

Legal Basis
North Carolina Administrative Code 70 E .1104 requires that foster parents shall develop partnerships with children and their parents or guardians, help children maintain and develop relationships that will keep them connected to their pasts, and help children placed in the home build a positive self-concept and positive family, cultural, and racial identity.

Policy
Foster parents must engage in shared parenting by: • Developing partnerships with children and their parents or guardians; • Helping children maintain and develop relationships that will keep them connected to their pasts; and • Helping children placed out of their own home build a positive self-identity and positive family, cultural, and racial identity.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
No later than 14 days of a child being placed out of the home by a county child welfare services agency, a shared parenting meeting between the parent(s) and the placement provider must occur. This includes placement in: • Licensed foster homes (therapeutic and family foster care); • Relative and non-relative kinship placements; • Group home placements; and • Any other placement in which the county child welfare services agency has legal custody of a child and the child is separated from their parent or caretaker. Foster parents, whether supervised by a private agency or a county child welfare services agency, must participate in shared parenting.	Trauma-Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting- (TIPS-MAPP) training is a 10-week training curriculum that is used as a tool in the mutual assessment of prospective foster and adoptive parents in their ability to successfully provide trauma-informed care for children in county child welfare services agency custody. Shared parenting and shared parenting meetings can be an intimidating process for both foster and birth parents. Much like Child and Family Team meetings, preparation is the key for shared parenting to succeed. This requires advanced planning by county child welfare workers, so all parties understand the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the care of the child, not “the case.” The meeting is not to assign blame. It is first and foremost about creating the best possible transition for the child. Sharing parental responsibilities can be enjoyable activities such as working on the child’s life book together, exchanging pictures, reading with the child, etc. They can also plan a joint fun activity that is specifically catered to the child.

Shared Parenting

Before the shared parenting meeting, the county child welfare worker must:

- Be aware that they do not impose their own biases about a birth parent's previous decisions;
- Model positive communication about the birth parent to the foster parent and about the foster parent to the birth parent;
- Brief the foster parents about any birth parent fears or needs and help the foster parents understand these needs;
- Be prepared to discuss how the needs and interests of the child will be recognized during the shared parenting meeting;
- Plan for the birth parent visiting with the child, if appropriate;
- Make visitation arrangements when the child is visiting with the birth parent before or after the meeting; and
- Encourage the foster parents to share with the birth parents a positive attribute they see in the child.

The county child welfare worker must prepare the foster parents and birth parents to exchange information essential to shared parenting, including:

- Medical information;
- School progress;
- Sleeping habits;
- Eating habits;
- Response to discipline; and
- Any of the children's strengths and needs.

Deciding when and where the shared parenting meeting should be held, the county child welfare worker should:

- Take into consideration the work schedules of the foster and birth parents as well as children's schedules, especially if there is a need for child care while the adults discuss parenting issues; and
- Ask the foster and birth parents where they would like to meet. Meeting in a neutral location that allows for privacy is important. The following can be good options:
- A neighborhood recreation center or social center;
- The library; or
- A child's therapist office.

County child welfare workers should initially focus on items that might seem simple but can be very important such as:

- Asking for a picture of the family to have for the child; and
- Discussing the child's favorite foods, toys, clothes, activities, likes, and dislikes.

Both the birth and foster parents should be encouraged to talk openly. County child welfare workers should assist foster and birth parents in managing conflict by:

- Recognizing the fears of all parties;
- Focusing on the strengths;
- Looking beyond behaviors to identify needs; and
- Developing interventions to meet needs.

County child welfare workers should also assist foster and birth parents in understanding cultural or family differences by helping them to:

- Cultivate a mutual understanding and appreciation of religious beliefs and practices;

Shared Parenting

County child welfare agencies must explore opportunities to (if the court ordered visitation/contact plan allows): • Encourage the placement provider to host sibling visits if applicable; • Allow the birth parent to call the placement provider's home; and • Allow the placement provider to participate in the parent/child visitation.	• Openly discuss differences in family rituals, such as meal times or where they eat; • Discuss appearance preferences for things such as haircuts, earrings, make up, etc., as well as other family experiences. • Discuss the benefits of aligning discipline practices. This includes what discipline practices have been effective and can be continued as well as recommendations of alternative practices the foster parent has used effectively in the past. Aligning practices provides consistent structure during visits and when transitioning from one home to the other. The foster and birth parents are supported in their combined efforts. If allowable, placement providers should be encouraged to invite birth parents to attend school and medical appointments. If the birth parent is unable to attend an appointment, the placement provider should provide progress reports to the birth parent on how their child is performing in school, home, updates on any medical information, and other activities. The placement provider can be a wonderful resource for the birth parent, as they can model what others might assume parents know how to do, such as play with the child, encourage positive responses in their child, or how to care for their physical and medical needs.
Foster Parents may request a shared parenting agreement that includes clear expectations and appropriate boundaries for all parties. A shared parenting agreement should be updated frequently. When safety concerns are present, the foster parents may request their contact information be kept confidential by the supervising agency.	Clear expectations, appropriate boundaries, and ground rules for shared parenting should be discussed and put into writing, with input from the birth family, the foster family, and the county child welfare services agency. The Family Time and Contact Plan (DSS-5242) can be utilized to help with this discussion/plan to: • Address personal and emotional safety issues for the child, birth family, and foster family; and • Discuss ground rules regarding phone calls, visitation, and transportation.

INVOLVING ABSENT/NON-RESIDENTIAL PARENTS The county child welfare worker must engage both parents in the planning process for shared parenting.	• Discuss what each person will be responsible for as part of shared parenting. Examples: The biological mother will provide pictures to the foster parent and the foster parent will display the photos in the child's bedroom. The biological father will provide family recipes to the foster parents and foster parents will incorporate the recipes into their weekly meals at least one time per week. The foster parent will provide the biological parents with frequent updates about how their child is doing, to include: photographs, artwork, progress reports from schools or daycare, report cards, etc. After there is an approved Family Time and Contact Plan in place that is flexible and allows the placement provider to convene visits/contacts, the county child welfare worker should be involved with observing contact between the birth parent and child, when appropriate. The county child welfare worker can provide positive feedback on how their relationship is developing. An absent or non-residential parent may have important information to share about the child's development. Working to develop an early partnership that includes the absent parent may provide an excellent foundation for them to become more involved in their child's life, but also may be a permanent placement option, and/or a long-term support. The county child welfare worker should: • Ask the question: "How can the county child welfare services agency obtain the absent parent's involvement?" If the birth mother and father have a tenuous relationship: • Consider facilitating separate meetings between each birth parent and the placement provider. If one birth parent is unable to travel a long distance for a meeting:

Shared Parenting

INVOLVING RELATIVES

County child welfare agencies must decide whether to include relatives in shared parenting meetings by considering the following:

- The relationship between the birth parent and the relative;
- Will the relative disrupt the development of the partnership between the birth parent and foster parent?
- Does the relative have information critical to the daily care of the child, and is this information needed to meet the needs of the child and/or provide support to the biological parents?
- Would involving the relative disrupt the long-term goals between the biological and foster parent?
- Could the relative be a mentor and support that would help develop a continued partnership beyond reunification?
- Other opportunities for the relative to be a part of the child's life/planning, such as involvement in child and family team meetings; and
- Will the decision alienate the birth parent or relative? (Make sure all feel heard.)

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Consider facilitating a phone conference call or web meeting to begin developing a relationship between the birth parent and placement provider.

Prior to removal, the parents may have had tremendous support from other relatives in raising their child. For example, a grandmother that has been the primary caretaker for the child over the past 6 months may have some information that is essential for the care of the child. The biological parents may want the relative provider to be a part of a shared parenting meeting.

Eventually, birth parents and placement providers may come to build a good relationship and choose to share personal information with each other.

SAFETY DURING SHARED PARENTING

The safety of the participants should always be considered when planning shared parenting meetings. The county child welfare worker should be aware if there has been a history of domestic violence between birth parents as well as if a birth parent has any history of violence towards others.

It would not be appropriate to facilitate or encourage any shared parenting meetings together if there are any court orders, including those imposed by probation and parole, that do not allow contact between the birth parents. However, it is possible that separate meetings could take place with the placement providers and each individual birth parent at separate times. Document any safety concerns.

Consider what special arrangements can be made to help everyone feel safe and comfortable such as:

- Choose a safe location;

Shared Parenting

It is recognized that placement providers have a need to know medical conditions that a child may have. Re-disclosure of the information is prohibited without consent of the child, parent, or guardian. County child welfare workers must: • Avoid sharing information about the birth parents to the placement providers or about placement providers to the birth parents if it is not information that is pertinent to the child's care. • Inform birth parents and placement providers that information shared within a shared parenting meeting remains confidential. • Discuss any questions with their supervisors and seek out agency policy around specific situations for the sharing of information.	• Create specific ground rules and expectations ahead of time together with all participants that are catered to the specific needs; • If the meeting cannot be held safely, do not hold the meeting; and • Choose other avenues such as a phone conference call to facilitate the meeting.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Policy	Legal Basis
The county child welfare services agency must be committed to a permanent resolution of the child's foster care status. Permanent resolutions include: • Reunification; • Guardianship; • Custody; • Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA); • Reinstatement of Parental Rights (RPR); or • Adoption. Permanency planning promotes a permanent living situation: • For every child entering the foster care system; • With an adult with whom the child has a continuous, reciprocal relationship; and • Within a minimum amount of time. For children and youth in the custody and placement responsibility of the county child welfare services agency, permanence occurs when they have a lasting, nurturing, legally secure relationship with at least one adult that is characterized by mutual commitment. A "legally secure placement" is defined as a placement in which the direct caretaker has the legal authority to make parental decisions on behalf of the child. Permanency planning are all the casework activities and decision-making activities that guide permanency planning. They are the following: • When children must be removed from their parents, reunification should occur as soon as possible when concerns that precipitated the child's removal have been alleviated, and	N.C.G.S. § 7B-906.2 (b) states at any permanency planning hearing, the court shall adopt concurrent permanent plans and shall identify the primary plan and secondary plan. Reunification shall remain a primary or secondary plan unless the court made findings under G.S. 7B-901(c) or makes written findings that reunification efforts clearly would be unsuccessful or would be inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety. The court shall order the county department of social services to make efforts toward finalizing the primary and concurrent permanent plans and may specify efforts that are reasonable to timely achieve permanence for the juvenile. PL 113-183 requires agencies to provide documentation at each permanency hearing of the "intensive, ongoing, and, as of the date of the hearing, unsuccessful efforts made by the county child welfare services agency to return the child or secure a placement with a fit and willing relative (including adult siblings), a legal guardian, or an adoptive parent, including through efforts that utilize search technology (including social media) to find biological family members for children." According to N.C.G.S. § 7B-101 (18), reasonable efforts are defined as the diligent use of preventive or reunification services by a department of social services when a juvenile's remaining at home or returning home is consistent with achieving a safe, permanent home for the juvenile within a reasonable period of time. If a court of competent jurisdiction determines that the juvenile is not to be returned home, then reasonable efforts means the diligent and timely use of Permanency Planning Services by a department of social services to develop and implement a permanent plan for the juvenile.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Policy	Legal Basis

parents can demonstrate their ability to provide a minimum sufficient level of care and ensure safety.
• When reunification is not possible, efforts made to achieve the least detrimental concurrent plan for the child must be made.
• County child welfare agencies must make concerted efforts to assist parents when reunification is the primary or secondary plan.
• County child welfare agencies must explore and develop concurrent permanent plans that can be implemented, even when reunification is the primary plan.
• Goal-oriented casework ensures all activities are focused on achieving permanency.
• Placement of the child for adoption provides the most permanent alternative when reunification is not possible. Adoption by a relative, other kin, or foster family should always be considered as a secondary permanent plan. If neither reunification nor adoption is possible, custody or guardianship to relatives, kin, or foster parents provides another permanency option.
• County child welfare agencies must make concerted efforts to achieve permanence for the child in a timely manner. The following timeframes must be met for the corresponding permanent plans:
  ○ Reunification: 12 months
  ○ Guardianship/Custody: 18 months
  ○ Adoption 24 months
	According to N.C.G.S. § 7B-101 (18b), reunification is defined as placement of the juvenile in the home of either parent or placement of the juvenile in the home of a guardian or custodian from whose home the child was removed by court order.
	
	N.C.G.S. § 7B-903.1(c) states if a juvenile is removed from the home and placed in the custody or placement responsibility of a county department of social services, the director shall not allow unsupervised visitation with or return physical custody of the juvenile to the parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker without a hearing at which the court finds that the juvenile will receive proper care and supervision in a safe home. NCGS § 7B-903.1(c) further states that before a county child welfare services agency may recommend return of physical custody of the juvenile to the parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker from whom the juvenile was removed, the agency must first observe that parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker with the juvenile for at least two visits that support a recommendation to return physical custody. Each observation visit shall consist of an observation of not less than one hour with the juvenile, and each observation visit shall be conducted at least seven days apart.
	
	N.C.G.S. § 7B-600 states that guardianship assigns legal authority for the guardian to act on behalf of the child without further county child welfare services agency involvement, but with continued supervision of the court. The authority of the guardian continues until the court terminates the guardianship or until the child is 18 years of age or is emancipated by the court. A guardian may resign from the position of guardian, but their authority cannot be removed unless the guardian is determined by the court to be unfit. N.C.G.S. § 7B-600(c) If the court appoints an individual guardian of the person pursuant to this section, the court shall verify that the person being appointed as guardian of the juvenile understands the

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Policy	Legal Basis
	legal significance of the appointment and will have adequate resources to care appropriately for the juvenile. The fact that the prospective guardian has provided a stable placement for the juvenile for at least six consecutive months is evidence that the person has adequate resources. N.C.G.S. § 7B-912(c) states if the court finds the juvenile is 16 or 17 years old, the county child welfare services agency has made diligent efforts to place the juvenile, however the court has found compelling reasons exist that it is not in the best interest of the juvenile to be placed permanently with a parent or relative in a guardianship or adoptive placement, and Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement is the best permanency plan for the juvenile, the court shall approve APPLA, as defined by P.L. 113-183, as the juvenile's primary permanent plan. Reinstatement of Parental Rights (RPR) became a permanency option when N.C.G.S. § 7B-1114 went into effect October 1, 2011. Circumstances that would allow this permanency option are very narrow. Only the youth, the county child welfare services agency, or the youth's GAL attorney advocate may file a motion to reinstate parental rights. When the court enters an order to reinstate a former parent's rights, these rights include custody, control, and support of the youth.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Child welfare agencies must never cease efforts to obtain permanency for children and youth in its custody or placement responsibility, regardless of age or behaviors.	

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Both in-state and out-of-state options must be considered when making reasonable efforts to place the child in accordance with the permanency plan and to finalize the permanency plan.	
REUNIFICATION Reunification must occur as soon as possible when concerns that precipitated the child's removal have been alleviated, and parents can demonstrate their ability to provide a minimum sufficient level of care and ensure safety. To make this assessment county child welfare workers will: • Observe and supervising child or youth and parental/caretaker contact • Planning and preparation activities with the family • Results of decision-making tools Reunification must remain a primary or secondary plan until the court makes written findings that such efforts would be futile or inconsistent with the juvenile's need for a safe, permanent home within a reasonable period. Whether reunification is the primary or secondary plan, efforts to reunify the family must not cease until the above findings have been made by the court. Reasonable efforts to reunify the child with the parent(s) or caretaker must be demonstrated and documented to the court. A child who has been removed from the custody of a parent(s) or caretaker must not be returned for any period without a judicial review and findings of fact to show the child will receive proper care and supervision as observed during a trial home visit.	REUNIFICATION Reunification should be considered when: • The issues that precipitated the child's removal have been addressed and resolved; and • Risk to the child has been reduced to a reasonable level; and • The parents have made changes in their behavior and circumstances that were identified as needing to change before the child could be returned safely to the home; and • The parent has demonstrated capacity and willingness to provide appropriate care for the child; and • The child's safety and care in the home is reasonably expected to remain secure; and • Supports from the agency and community are in place to assist the family to remain intact. Family Reunification Services are available to families in which the child has been removed from the home. These services support the family's effort to resolve the conditions which led to the child's removal and to build protective factors that enable the child to return home. For more information regarding these services, please see "Family Reunification Services" in Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Note: A supervised visit does not fall within the meaning of the term "return" if a county child welfare worker is always present. RYLAN'S LAW/CPS OBSERVATION/ Before a county child welfare services agency can recommend that physical custody of a child be returned to the parent(s) or caretaker from which the child was removed, the agency must first observe the parent(s) or caretaker and child together for a minimum of two visits. Each visit must: • Be at least one hour in duration; and • Be held at least seven (7) days apart. The agency's observed visits should occur no more than thirty (30) days prior to the scheduled permanency planning hearing in which the agency recommends the child begin returned home. Observations during these required visits must be documented and provided to the court and must support a recommendation to return physical custody to the removal parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker. Note: The court maintains the right to return the child against agency recommendations if it so determines.	When a child is placed back in the home of a parent/caretaker for a trial home visit, the agency should make frequent visits to the home to observe interactions between the parent/caretaker and the child to ensure the child's safety and well-being.
GUARDIANSHIP When reunification efforts are determined to be contrary to the health, safety, or best interest of a child who is in the legal custody or placement authority of the county child welfare services agency, the county must assess relative or kinship placements as a permanency	GUARDIANSHIP Guardianship can be awarded to a relative or any other person deemed suitable by the court. Persons other than relatives to consider include foster parents or adults who have a kinship bond with the child, even if they are not related by blood.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
option, including both maternal and paternal relatives. If the family is willing to provide a permanent home for the child but is not willing to adopt, then legal guardianship must be offered to the family as alternatives. Guardianship must only be considered when reunification and adoption are ruled out as permanency options. The legal authority of the guardian includes: • The care, custody, and control of the juvenile; • The authority to arrange placement for the juvenile; • The right to represent the juvenile in legal actions before the court; • The right to consent to actions on the part of the juvenile including marriage, enlisting in the armed forces, and enrollment in school; and • The right to consent to remedial, psychological, medical, or surgical treatment for the juvenile.	Juvenile court guardianship does not confer authority over the disposition of a child's estate or management of his assets. If the child has an estate or receives income such as through Social Security Administration (SSA), and there is no representative available, a separate court action should be initiated to establish guardianship of the estate.
North Carolina law requires the court to consider whether an appropriate placement with a relative is available. If the court finds that a relative is willing and able to provide proper care and supervision in a "safe home," the court must order placement of the child with the relative. When the primary or secondary permanency plan is guardianship, the county child welfare services agency must: • Document diligent efforts to locate a suitable person who is willing to assume guardianship of the child. • Assess the suitability of the home for guardianship placement and make a recommendation of their findings.	For a parent to reverse guardianship, the court must find that the parent is willing and able to care for the child, <u>and</u> the guardian is unfit or has neglected his or her duties.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
• Assist the prospective guardian through the court process and help them understand the responsibilities of guardianship. • Make the guardian aware of resources that may be available to the family should they later decide to adopt the child. • If the youth is between 14 and 17 years of age, make the guardian aware of the youth's Guardianship Assistance eligibility, and the requirements of the program. (For more on this, see Appendix 3.7 of the NC Child Welfare manual.) • Remain available to provide follow-up services to the guardian on an as-needed basis for six months, to ensure the stability and health of the placement. Efforts to achieve a permanent plan of guardianship must be documented in the NC FAST electronic record and the court report. If the agency is unsuccessful in locating a person willing to assume guardianship of the child within one year of the court ordering a plan of guardianship, the permanent plan must be changed unless the agency is able to justify to the court why the plan should remain "guardianship." Justification includes the agency's progress toward locating a suitable person willing to assume legal responsibility for the child.	Prior to recommending guardianship be awarded to specific person(s), including relatives, fictive kin, and foster parents, the county child welfare services agency should assess the potential guardian by completing the Comprehensive Provider Assessment (DSS-5204). See also Instructions for Provider Assessments (DSS-5204ins). If a person accepts guardianship of a child who was in county child welfare services agency custody and later adopts that child, they may be able to receive adoption assistance payments on behalf of the child until the child is 18 years of age, or 21 years of age if the adoption is finalized when the child is 16 or 17 years old.
KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM The purpose of the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) is available for the financial support of youth who are determined to be: • In a permanent family setting; • Eligible for legal guardianship, and • Otherwise unlikely to obtain permanency.	KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM Subsidized guardianship allows children and youth to maintain their family and community roots when they can no longer live with their parents and adoption is not an appropriate permanent plan.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
For a child to be eligible for KinGAP, the following requirements must be met: • The child has been removed from his or her home pursuant to a voluntary placement agreement, or because of a judicial order, and the child is in the placement responsibility of a North Carolina county child welfare services agency; • The court has determined that reunification and adoption are not appropriate permanency options for the child; • The child is eligible for foster care maintenance payments and has been placed in the licensed home of the prospective legal guardian for a minimum of 6 consecutive months; • The child is at least 14 years of age but not yet 18 years of age, or the child is not yet 14 years of age but is being placed in a legal guardianship arrangement with a sibling who meets the age requirement; • The child demonstrates a strong attachment to the prospective legal guardian and has been consulted regarding the guardianship arrangement; • The prospective legal guardian has a strong commitment to permanently care for the child; and • The prospective legal guardian has entered into a guardianship assistance agreement with the county child welfare services agency who holds custody of the child prior to the order granting legal guardianship. NOTE: Foster parents, relatives, and fictive kin are eligible for KinGAP payments if they are committed to permanently caring for the child, and they have been licensed and receiving foster care maintenance payments for the child for at least 6 consecutive months.	In the event of the death or incapacity of the legal guardian, the child is still eligible for assistance if a replacement guardian is named in the Guardianship Assistance Agreement. It is not a requirement for a successor guardian to be named but doing so allows for the continuation of benefits with only a short suspension while the county child welfare services agency assists the successor guardian in obtaining legal guardianship and completing the necessary paperwork and safety checks. The conversation about successor guardianship should begin as early as possible to allow the prospective guardian an opportunity to consider options and discuss the implications with the named individual. County child welfare agencies should inform relatives and fictive kin early on of their option to become licensed foster parents, and about available funding for licensed providers. They have the right to know and understand their options as it pertains to the care they are providing to children in foster care. If the family is already licensed, it will save time later if the child's plan becomes guardianship and the child is otherwise eligible for guardianship assistance payments.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
For a child or youth whose permanent plan is guardianship and is eligible for guardianship assistance payments, county child welfare agencies must include in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement a description of the following: • The steps the agency 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 kinship provider through legal guardianship is in the child's best interest; • The ways in which the child meets the eligibility requirements for a guardianship assistance payment; • The efforts the agency has made to discuss adoption by the child's placement provider, and documentation of the reasons why adoption is not being pursued; and, • The efforts made by the agency to discuss with the child's parent or parents the guardianship arrangement, or the reasons why the efforts were not made. NOTE: Foster parents, relatives, and fictive kin are eligible for KinGAP payments provided they are committed to permanently caring for the child, and they have been licensed and receiving foster care maintenance payments for the child for at least 6 consecutive months. The following forms must be completed prior to legal guardianship being awarded: • Guardianship Assistance Checklist (DSS-1813) • Guardianship Assistance Agreement (DSS-1810) This must be documented in the electronic record in NC FAST.	

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
For more information on KinGAP, see Appendix 3.7 in the NC Child Welfare manual.	
CUSTODY Legal custody is an acceptable permanency option, although it does not have the same level of security or permanency as adoption or guardianship. Custody can be challenged before the court and terminated any time there is a change in circumstances, regardless of the fitness of the custodian. When the primary or secondary permanency plan is custody, the county child welfare services agency must: • Demonstrate diligent efforts to locate a suitable person who is willing to assume custody of the child. • Provide information to the potential custodian about more permanent and legally secure options, including adoption and legal guardianship. • Assess the suitability of the home for custodial placement and make a recommendation of their findings. • Evaluate and discuss any potential conflicts the custodian may have with the birth parent(s). Efforts to achieve a permanent plan of custody must be documented in the electronic NC FAST record and the court report. If the agency is unsuccessful in locating a person willing to assume custody of the child within one year of the court ordering a primary permanent plan of custody, the permanent plan must be changed unless the agency can justify to the court why the plan should remain	CUSTODY Legal custody is not well defined in law; however, it typically implies responsibility for the oversight of a child's care, protection, education, and personal relationships. Custody has most of the same advantages and disadvantages as guardianship. The specific rights and responsibilities of a custodian, however, are defined by the court order rather than being fully defined in law. The rights of a custodian can be as extensive as those of a guardian, or more limited. Just as with guardianship, custody can be awarded to a relative or any other person deemed suitable by the court. Foster parents or adults who have a kinship bond with the child, even if they are not related by blood, should be considered as possible custodians. Legal custody does not confer authority over the disposition of a child's estate or management of his assets. If the child has an estate or receives income such as through Social Security Administration (SSA), and there is no such representative available, separate court action should be initiated to establish guardianship of the estate. Prior to recommending custody be awarded to a specific person(s), the county child welfare services agency should assess the potential custodian by completing the Comprehensive Provider Assessment (DSS-5204). See also Instructions for Kinship Care Assessments (DSS-5204ins). For more information, see Kinship Care.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
"custody." Justification includes the agency's progress toward locating a suitable person willing to assume legal responsibility for the child.	Legal custody can be reversed if the court finds the parent is willing and able to provide appropriate care for the child.
ANOTHER PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT (APPLA): APPLA is a permanent living arrangement for a youth age 16 or 17: • Who resides in a family setting which has been maintained for at least the previous six concurrent months; and • In which the youth and caregiver have made a mutual commitment of emotional support; and • The youth has been integrated into the family; and • The youth and caregiver are requesting that the placement be made permanent; and • Other permanency options, including adoption, guardianship, and custody have been determined to be inappropriate for the situation due to the youth's long-term needs. NOTE: A youth must be 16 or 17 years of age and meet the above requirements to have a primary or secondary plan of APPLA. APPLA must be initially approved by the court and the PPR/CFT prior to the change in the permanency plan and reviewed by the court at least every 6 months. The youth must actively participate in court decisions regarding APPLA either through direct testimony or written depositions to ensure the youth's preferences are heard and respected. The county child welfare services agency must retain custody of the child while the permanent plan is APPLA. If the home in which the child is placed is a licensed caregiver or becomes licensed, they must receive standard board payments to help support the placement. If they are not	APPLA may be appropriate for relative or non-relative placements in licensed or court-approved non-licensed homes when the criteria for APPLA is met. For youth 17 and older, the option of continuing in extended foster care through the Foster Care 18 to 21 program, as well as the eligibility requirements of the program, should be discussed with the youth.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
a licensed placement, they must be informed of and given the opportunity to become licensed. When the youth's permanent plan is APPLA, the county child welfare services agency must provide and document services as follows: • Permanency Planning Services to ensure the child's ongoing safety and well-being needs are met; • Provision of relevant LINKS services, based on a written, objective assessment, and a Transitional Living Plan developed with the youth; • Access to resources for the youth through the LINKS program and other resources as appropriate; • Diligent efforts to help the youth establish a strong personal support network with friends and relatives; • Ensure the caregivers are following the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, supporting the youth's engagement in age- or developmentally-appropriate activities and social events; and • Ongoing support for the caregiver to avoid placement disruption. APPLA must be reviewed at least every six months, or more often as needed, at a facilitated Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting, which includes the youth, caregiver and their supports, as well as the agency LINKS Coordinator. The CFT must review the plan and the agency's effort to maintain the stability of the placement and to assist the youth in their transition to independence.	
ADOPTION Adoption is the permanent plan offering the most stability to the child who cannot return to their parents. Factors to consider include whether the child is likely to return home and whether the child can be freed for adoption. For the child to be adopted, both parents must voluntarily relinquish their parental rights, or their parental rights must be	ADOPTION When adoption is being considered as a permanent plan, satisfactory answers to the following questions should be considered: • Have all relative placement options been considered and eliminated? • Have the child's ethnic and cultural needs been considered and addressed?

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

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terminated by the court. Adoption by relatives or kin must be considered if the relative or kin are willing to adopt and can provide a safe home. Current foster parents of the child have the right to be considered as prospective adoptive placement after a termination of parental rights hearing or relinquishment pursuant to G.S. 7B-1112.1. When the court has ordered a primary permanent plan of adoption, the county child welfare services agency must: • File a petition for termination of parental rights within 60 calendar days of the hearing that determines the primary permanent plan is adoption unless the court makes other findings. Note: there must be legal grounds to terminate each parent's rights. When the child is legally freed for adoption (both parents' rights have been voluntarily relinquished, or terminated by the court), the agency must do the following: • Make every effort to locate and place the child in an appropriate adoptive home; • Develop a child-specific, written strategy for recruitment of an adoptive home within 30 days. At a minimum, the plan must document the child-specific recruitment efforts such as the use of state, regional, and national adoption exchanges, including electronic exchange systems, to facilitate orderly and timely in-state and interstate placements; • Develop a Child Profile that describes the child needing placement to be available for prospective adoptive families; • Conduct or arrange for a Pre-Placement Assessment (PPA) or a PPA Addendum based on potential adoptive family's status; and	• Has the best interest of the child been considered and documented? • Are the parents willing to relinquish their rights, or is the agency ready to proceed with termination of parental rights? • Do legal grounds for termination of parental rights exist? • Is the child already living with caretakers who are willing to adopt? • How soon can the child be placed in an adoptive home? • How long will the court process take? • Who will help the child through the placement process? • Has a pool of potential adoptive families been recruited, or is the agency willing to commit to child-specific recruitment? • Have the child's specific needs and strengths been thoroughly assessed and evaluated? • Has a placement option that will be able to meet the child's needs been identified? • What is the child's relationship with siblings? • Should the child be placed with siblings and, if so, can this be accomplished? • Is the child able to accept "parenting?" When considering relatives or kin, care should be taken in assessing this option to consider whether there may be conflict or divided loyalties between the parent of the child and the adopting relatives, and how these issues would be handled. If an adoption by relative or kin can be achieved, the child's sense of identity and family history can be preserved. After a termination of parental rights or relinquishment, the county child welfare agency should contact the current placement provider to determine if they want to be considered as the prospective adoptive placement and notify the placement provider of the next required steps.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

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• Register all children who are free for adoption and who are not in their identified adoptive home with the North Carolina Adoption Exchange (NC Kids), as well as regional and national adoption exchanges including electronic exchange systems, in order to facilitate matches between persons interested in adoption and the children who are available. When adoption is the secondary permanency plan for a child, the agency must search for an appropriate adoptive family. If the agency is unsuccessful in locating a person willing to adopt the child within one year of the court ordering a primary permanent plan of adoption, the permanent plan must be changed unless the agency is able to justify to the court why the plan should remain "adoption." Justification includes the agency's progress toward locating a person willing to assume legal responsibility for the child through adoption. Youth ages 12 and older who are reluctant to consider adoption must be given an opportunity to talk in a facilitated CFT meeting about their concerns. Other permanency options must be offered, and the youth's preferred plan must be given strong consideration whenever feasible.	This should not be the first time that the county child welfare agency has discussed adoption with the child's placement provider. If adoption by a relative, kin, or foster parent is not an option, the agency should recruit an appropriate adoptive home for the child. Children and youth who can provide input should be asked for their recommendations regarding potential adoptive families, since they may know individuals or families with whom they are comfortable. Adoption by foster parents is often an appropriate plan, especially if the child has developed a close relationship with the foster family. Such a plan has the benefit of providing continuity for the child with a family that they already know without requiring an additional move. Increasingly, foster families are working with the team toward reunification efforts and are encouraged to consider committing to the child permanently through adoption if reunification is not possible. Sometimes the child's parent(s) recognize they cannot be the permanent family for the child. When they know and respect the care their child is receiving from the foster family, they may voluntarily relinquish their parental rights, so the child can be adopted by that family. The advantage in this situation is that it allows for the possibility that the child and birth parent continue some relationship while the child is raised by a committed and caring adoptive family. Note: §7B-909.1 states that before the relinquishment of a juvenile to a department of social services for the purpose of adoption may be executed by a parent, whose retained counsel has entered a notice of appearance or who has an attorney whose provisional appointment has

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	been confirmed by the court, a notice must be given to the parent's counsel and the parent must be advised of the right to seek the advice of their counsel prior to executing the relinquishment and to have the parent's counsel present while executing the relinquishment. When adoption by a relative, kin, or foster parent is not an option, the agency should place the child in an approved adoptive home. There may be approved families waiting that may be appropriate for the child, or potential adoptive families may need to be recruited specifically for the child. Recruitment activities should include the use of media resources and the faith community. A child may be placed in a "legal risk" placement before the child is legally cleared for adoption. The purpose of legal risk placement is to move the child into a permanent home as soon as possible without jeopardizing the legal or social well-being of the child. A legal risk placement does not allow the agency to consent to the child's adoption. Therefore, the home in which the child is to be placed must be licensed as a foster home or approved by a court order. Legal risk placements are appropriate when the child is not yet legally free for adoption but there is a high probability that parental rights will be terminated.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

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REINSTATEMENT OF PARENTAL RIGHTS (RPR) Three conditions must be met to consider filing a motion for RPR: • The youth is at least 12 years of age or if under age 12, and extraordinary circumstances exist that warrant consideration of reinstatement of parental rights; • The youth does not have a legal parent, is not in an adoptive placement, and is not likely to be adopted within a reasonable time; and • The order terminating parental rights was entered at least 3 years prior unless the youth's plan is no longer adoption. If these three conditions are met, only the youth, the county child welfare services agency, or the youth's GAL attorney advocate may file a motion to reinstate parental rights. If a former parent whose rights have been terminated contacts the county child welfare services agency or contacts the youth's GAL regarding RPR, then the youth must be informed of their right to file a motion for RPR. When a motion for RPR is filed and the court determines it to be the permanent plan for the youth, the county child welfare services agency will continue to have responsibility for the youth's placement and care. This must include supervising visitation and monitoring placement with the former parent, if ordered, until a final determination is made to either reinstate parental rights or determine another permanent plan.	When considering RPR, the agency should hear from the youth and explore with them their thoughts, concerns, needs, etc. A youth may be afraid to speak freely in front of a parent and/or placement provider for fear of being disloyal or hurtful. Therefore, the youth should be given an opportunity to express themselves without the former parent or placement provider present. The youth should be able to speak with the county child welfare worker or therapist prior to any CFT meeting. The agency should ensure the former parent is interested and appropriate. The agency should consider what the impact might be for the youth. A CFT meeting should be held to discuss RPR. There should be flexibility in who should attend this CFT. The youth should be able to invite any supports or connections that are important to them. The CFT should assist the youth in making an informed decision and provide them with an understanding of any possible repercussions. If a youth does not currently have a GAL, one should be requested and will be required if a motion to reinstate parental rights is filed. Questions for the youth and their team to consider when RPR is an option: • What efforts have been made to achieve adoption or find a permanent guardian? Has the agency actively worked toward other permanency plan options? • Has the former parent remedied the conditions that led to the youth's removal and placement in foster care and subsequent termination of parental rights? What specifically has changed? What evidence is there that the change will continue?

Permanency Planning: Permanency Options

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
	• Will the youth receive appropriate care and supervision with the former parent? • How mature is the youth and is the youth able to express their preference? Is there any reason to believe the youth is receiving pressure from the former parent to choose this plan? • Is the former parent willing to resume contact with the youth and have rights reinstated? • Is the youth willing to resume contact with the former parent and have rights reinstated? • What services would the former parent and youth require to succeed if rights are reinstated? Will therapy be required and will access to it be available, including insurance and transportation? • Would this plan support the best interests of the youth? What LINKS services, including educational support, would still be available to the youth? Would the former parent and the youth be open to those services, if in the youth's best interest? Will the youth have health insurance? • Would the youth be able to maintain current meaningful connections, including those with siblings? Does the youth have an ongoing relationship with any sibling? How is the connection supported? Will there be new family dynamics to work through for the connection to continue? What are the other meaningful connections the youth has and how will they be impacted?

Permanency Planning: Concurrent Planning

Legal Basis
N.C.G.S. § 7B-906.2(b) states that at any permanency planning hearing, the court shall adopt concurrent permanent plans and shall identify the primary plan and secondary plan. Reunification shall be a primary or secondary plan unless the court made findings under G.S. 7B-901(c) or G.S. 7B-906.1(d)(3), the permanent plan is or has been achieved in accordance with subsection (a1) of this section, or the court makes written findings that reunification efforts clearly would be unsuccessful or would be inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety. The finding that reunification efforts clearly would be unsuccessful or inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety may be made at any permanency planning hearing, and if made, shall eliminate reunification as a plan. Unless permanence has been achieved, the court shall order the county department of social services to make efforts toward finalizing the primary and secondary permanent plans and may specify efforts that are reasonable to timely achieve permanence for the juvenile.
Definition:
CONCURRENT PLANNING Concurrent permanency planning is the process of working towards a primary permanent plan for a child, such as reunification, while developing at least one alternative, or secondary, permanent plan at the same time. Concurrent planning is used to keep the focus on the child's urgent needs for safety and permanence and to reduce the length of time a child spends in county child welfare services agency custody. Concurrent planning ensures a secondary plan is developed if efforts to achieve the primary plan are unsuccessful. A secondary permanency plan is developed, and efforts to achieve the primary and secondary plan are made concurrently. If the primary plan is unsuccessful, the secondary plan has been developed and can be fully implemented. It is not inconsistent to work toward reunification while building a case which will support concurrent planning and alternative resolutions. When a child enters county child welfare services agency custody, the primary plan is usually reunification with the parents or caretakers from whom the child was removed. In concurrent planning, the county child welfare worker is developing at least one secondary permanent plan jointly with the family.

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
County child welfare agencies must develop concurrent plans for each child in county child welfare services agency custody. In addition, agencies must make diligent efforts to achieve both the primary and secondary permanent plans.	Conditions supporting early concurrent planning include: • The reasons the child is being removed are fresh on the minds of county child welfare workers and parents;

Permanency Planning: Concurrent Planning

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Concurrent planning is required and must continue throughout the life of the case unless one of the following circumstances occurs: • A permanent plan is or has been achieved or • A post TPR review hearing is held, and a concurrent plan is deemed to not be in the juvenile's best interest. If it is determined to be in the best interest of the juvenile to have a concurrent plan, it must be outlined in the court order.	• Parents have not yet adjusted to their loss and are motivated to change; • If a parent is missing, it is easier to find them and involve them in planning for the future; and • The child has not settled into a psychologically permanent relationship with the foster parents, nor have they been subjected to subsequent moves. In concurrent permanency planning, relatives and kin should be identified early and assessed for their interest as a possible permanent placement for the child. If the court determines reunification to be inconsistent with the juvenile's health or safety, relatives and kin that have been assessed to be appropriate resources for a child may become the permanent placement resource. Adoption by a relative, non-relative kin, or foster family should always be considered as a secondary permanent plan. If neither reunification nor adoption is possible, custody or guardianship with relatives, kin, or foster parents provides another permanency option. If the juvenile court determines the primary plan is not possible because it is inconsistent with the child's needs for safety and permanence, the secondary plan should be implemented. **Example of when a concurrent plan would not be needed:** A three-year-old child who is legally free for adoption has been living with his licensed foster parents, who want to adopt him, consecutively for 13 months. The county child welfare agency has not identified any barriers to adoption. At the post TPR review hearing the court deemed that a concurrent plan was not in the best interest of the juvenile.

Permanency Planning: Concurrent Planning

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
	Example of when a concurrent plan would be needed: A ten-year-old child who is legally free for adoption has been living in a group home for the past three months. At this time, the county child welfare agency has not identified a potential adoptive placement. There is currently a staff member at the group home who expressed interest in taking custody of the juvenile child. The staff member said they have also considered adoption but would like more time to consider. At the post TPR review hearing, the county child welfare agency has adoption as the primary plan and custody with a court approved caretaker as the concurrent plan as that is in the best interest of the juvenile at this time.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Planning Hearing

Legal Basis
N.C.G.S 7B-906.1 (a) states when custody has been removed from a parent, guardian, or custodian, the hearing shall be designated as a permanency planning hearing. The court shall conduct a permanency planning hearing within 90 days from the date of the initial dispositional hearing. Permanency planning hearings shall be at least every six months thereafter to review the progress made in finalizing the permanent plan for the juvenile, or if necessary, to make a new permanent plan for the juvenile. According to P.L. 113-183, with each permanency hearing held with respect to the child, the agency shall document the intensive, ongoing and, as of the date of the hearing, unsuccessful efforts made by the agency to return the child or secure a placement for the child with a fit and willing relative (including adult siblings), a legal guardian, or an adoptive parent, including thorough efforts that utilize search technology (including social media) to find biological family members for children.

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PERMANENCY PLANNING HEARING A permanency planning hearing must occur: • For all children under the responsibility for placement and care of a county child welfare services agency; and • Must be conducted within 90 days from the date of the initial dispositional hearing pursuant to G.S. 7B-901 and held at least every six months thereafter. During permanency planning hearings, the court must review agency recommendations and reports of the placement. Written reports to the court must document the following: • Intensive, ongoing and, as of the date of the hearing, unsuccessful efforts made by the agency to return the child to the parent(s) or caretaker from whom the child was removed; or • Efforts to secure a placement for the child with a fit and willing relative (including adult siblings), a legal guardian, or an adoptive parent. These include efforts that utilize search technology (including social media) to find biological family members for children; and • Steps the agency is taking to ensure the placement follows the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and whether the child has regular opportunities to engage in age- or developmentally-appropriate activities.	The Model Court Report for Dispositional and Review Hearings (DSS-5310) and the Model Court Report for Permanency Planning Hearings (DSS-5311) should be utilized by the agency when preparing information to report to the court. The agency should have a clear plan for permanence that is based on a shared decision-making process. **Guidance:** The court should provide the juvenile's caregiver the opportunity to address the court regarding the juvenile's wellbeing.

Permanency Planning: Permanency Planning Hearing

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
In any hearing or review the child must be consulted in an age-appropriate manner about any permanency plans for the child. If the child is 14 years or older, the child must be consulted regarding any permanency planning arrangements. The agency must request a Permanency Planning Hearing be held within 30 days of the court's decision to discontinue the plan of reunification if a new permanent plan has not been established. For more information on permanency planning hearings, please see the Cross Functions Manual.	

Child and Family Team / Permanency Planning Review Meetings

Legal Basis
Sec. 475. [42 U.S.C. 675] of the Social Security Act states that the status of each child is reviewed periodically by a panel of appropriate persons, at least one of whom is not responsible for the case management of, or the delivery of services to, either the child or the parents who are the subject of the review. The purpose of the review is to determine the safety of the child, the continuing necessity for and appropriateness of the placement, the extent of compliance with the case plan, and the extent of progress which has been made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating placement in foster care, and to project a likely date by which the child may be returned to and safely maintained in the home or placed for adoption or legal guardianship and, for a child for whom another planned permanent living arrangement has been determined as the permanency plan, the steps the county child welfare services agency is taking to ensure the child's foster family home or child care institution is following the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and to ascertain whether the child has regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age- or developmentally-appropriate activities (including by consulting with the child in an age-appropriate manner about the opportunities of the child to participate in the activities).

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
PERMANENCY PLANNING REVIEW TEAM MEETINGS For children who are in the legal custody or placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency, a PPR must be held at the following required intervals: • Within 60 days of the child coming into agency custody or placement responsibility; and • Every 90 days thereafter throughout the life of the case; and • When there is a recommended change in the permanent plan outside of the regular review schedule. PPRs are open, non-adversarial forums for focusing on casework practice and planning. The PPR process allows each party involved to have input into service needs of the child and family; to document progress of the parents in improving the conditions that led to county child welfare services agency custody; to develop the most appropriate permanent plan; and to ensure permanency is achieved for every child.	PPRs should be action-oriented. These reviews are valuable in achieving a safe, permanent home for every child in the legal custody or placement responsibility of a county child welfare services agency within one year. While these reviews are needed to discuss the child, family, and agency efforts, they also ensure that every county child welfare services agency custody case moves quickly toward a permanent resolution. There are many variations of when a permanency planning review will need to be held outside of the regular review schedule. Additional reviews should be held based on the needs of the family and any significant change in circumstances. Because permanency planning reviews occur every 90 days, every effort should be made to make decisions regarding permanency within the regular review schedule. A PPR meeting should be used to discuss and strategize for concurrent planning options at various points throughout the life of a permanency planning case. While primary plans must reflect reunification, early inclusion

Child and Family Team / Permanency Planning Review Meetings

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The PPR process also ensures the plan that is developed will be followed regardless of changes in child welfare staff. In addition, disagreements can be addressed prior to court hearings, helping each party to understand the position of the others, thus providing the opportunity for informed negotiation. Cases that must be reviewed include: • Children who are in the legal custody of a county child welfare services agency; and, • Children who are in foster care placement under a Voluntary Placement Agreement. Note: PPR meetings must continue after children are legally free, until the Decree of Adoption has been issued. PERMANANCY PLANNING REVIEW PURPOSE The primary purpose of the PPR is to ensure reasonable efforts are made to achieve a safe, permanent home for a child and that they are actively pursued. The PPR is also an opportunity to bring the family and their supports together to engage and partner with one another, and to review and update the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. The PPR must be documented in the NC FAST electronic record and the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement must be documented in the NC FAST electronic record. The PPR must provide an unbiased, objective, and thorough review of all elements of a child's placement in county child welfare services agency custody and the agency's plan for the child's future.	of family in understanding and planning for concurrent, long-term placement options can be an appropriate use of the PPR process. Families should be informed about and allowed to plan for all the options they feel can support permanence for their children. PPR Teams are valuable tools for assessing the strengths and needs of families and children in the early phase of permanency planning. By involving the child's family, relatives, and other kin, foster parents, community supports, and all the agencies involved with the child and family in an early assessment process, everyone involved can understand clearly the reasons for child's removal. Everyone also can understand the issues that need to be resolved for reunification to occur or, if reunification is not the plan, the child's need for permanency. Each PPR should include the following in the discussion: • At the initial review, discuss reasons that necessitated placement and the type of placement provided. Include in the discussion what efforts have been made, why those efforts did or did not work, and what efforts are currently being made. • At subsequent reviews, discuss why the child still is in care, why the placement was chosen, any changes in the placement, and whether the placement remains appropriate. • Specific tasks to be completed by the agency and the parents: Do these tasks or services relate to what brought the child into care? Will these tasks or services result in the desired changes in behavior? • Tasks completed or not completed by the agency and by the parents: Are these tasks reasonable and appropriate? Has progress been documented? Why have some tasks not been completed?

Child and Family Team / Permanency Planning Review Meetings

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The PPR includes a review of the child's needs, permanent plan and placement as well as a review and update of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. During the meeting, the PPR Team discusses and makes recommendations regarding the following: • The need for continued custody of the child with the county child welfare services agency; • The child's current educational, developmental, physical, mental, and social statuses and any ongoing needs the child may have; • The appropriateness of the child's current placement; • If the Family Time and Contact Plan is reasonable and appropriate, or if changes need to be made; • Review of the child's primary and secondary permanent plans, and whether those plans remain appropriate for the child; • If reunification is the plan, the extent of progress made by the parents toward improving the conditions that caused the child to be removed; • If reunification is the plan, the barriers or safety issues that prevent reunification from being achieved today; • The extent of agency efforts to achieve the child's permanent plan; • The services that have been provided by other community agencies to help the family achieve the goals identified in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement; • The services that are still needed from the county child welfare services agency or other community agencies to	• Are there any changes that any party feels should be made to the placement, the permanent plan, services needed, or behaviors required of the parents? • Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard: Does the child have regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age- or developmentally-appropriate activities? Are the placement providers following the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard? Are there any barriers to applying the standard? What is the agency doing to address these barriers? • The long-range plan for permanence for this child: What treatment and services are being provided for the parents and the child, and what support is being provided to the foster parents (including respite)?

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help the family achieve the goals identified in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement; and/or • The extent of compliance with the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. PARTICIPANTS IN THE PPR Participants who must be invited to the PPR include (but are not limited to) the following: • The child's parent(s), unless parental rights have been terminated; • The child, if appropriate; • The child's placement provider; • Natural supports identified by the family; • Community resource persons, at least one of whom is not responsible for the case management or delivery of services to the child or parents; and • The GAL If reunification is no longer the primary plan, any identified permanent placement resources (custodian/guardian/adoptive parent) must be invited to participate in the PPR. Parent Participation: Parents have the right to participate in every PPR of their child's case. Parents must be provided timely written notice of team meetings and every reasonable effort must be made to meet at a time and location that enables the parents' attendance. The agency must notify the parent(s) of:	Children/youth should always be consulted as to whom they would like to have on their team; this is especially important if the birth parents are no longer attending the meetings. The child should have a voice at the meeting and should be encouraged to share their wishes for their future. Decisions made at PPRs should be made "through the eyes of the child." The more agencies can empower children by including them in the decision-making process, the better those agencies serve them. One of the individuals selected by the child may be designated to be the child's advisor and, as necessary, advocate, with respect to the application of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to the child. It is considered appropriate for the child to participate in a PPR meeting if the child is of sufficient age and maturity, and it is developmentally-appropriate for the child to be present. Foster parents and other placement providers have the most current and complete knowledge of the child's adjustment in foster care. They play a vital role in the planning and decision-making regarding the child's future. They should always be strongly encouraged to attend and participate fully in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement planning and review meetings.

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• Their right to attend and present information from their perspective; • Issues that will be discussed; • The date and location of the meeting; and • The right to have an attorney present. NOTE: If the parent(s)/caretaker(s) are not willing or able to participate in a PPR within the required timeframes, the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement must still be updated. Child/Youth Participation: The child must be consulted in an age-appropriate manner about any permanency plans for the child. If a youth has obtained the age of 14 years or older, by federal law the child must be consulted and given the opportunity to select up to two members as part of the team who are not a foster parent of, or caseworker for, the child. Signatures of all persons attending the PPR meeting must be documented.	Parents should be encouraged to bring relatives, kin, or any other support person they would like to have present at the meeting. A broad definition of family should be used when considering who should be a part of the PPR. By providing services to children and/or their families, community resource providers may have information essential to planning and decision-making. It is crucial to involve them in the planning and review process. The child's teachers and/or guidance counselors should be included in this process. In addition, having at least one resource person who has no direct service or case management responsibilities to the case strengthens case decision-making. Not only does this provide for additional input into the child's case, but an individual with no direct case responsibility is better able to view the "big picture" objectively and make recommendations from the broader community perspective. Community resource persons with no direct case management responsibility can include, but are not limited to the following: • Mental health representative; • School representative; • Healthcare provider/representative; • Fatherhood initiative representative; or • Social services representative such as a Work First or economic services worker, if the representative has no knowledge or association with the case. The child's GAL can bring a different perspective to the case review.

Child and Family Team / Permanency Planning Review Meetings

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CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS (CFTs) For children who are in the legal custody of a county child welfare services agency, a CFT meeting must be held when there is a: • Change in placement (or potential change in placement) of the child; • Change in family circumstance and it is necessary to reconvene the team to discuss the case, this includes when there is a change in the juvenile's school; • Change in the permanent plan; or • Any time the family or child request the team be convened.	As identified in the protocol a Child and Family Team meeting must be scheduled when there is a change in placement or potential change in placement. This meeting should occur **as soon as possible** and address the following: • Is the juvenile able to remain safely in their current placement? • What factors have been identified contributing towards placement disruption? • What resources and supports may help sustain the placement? • If a placement change is inevitable, what information regarding the juvenile can be shared to assist the new placement provider? • Has the agency received input from the juvenile's biological family regarding the child's needs? • Does the child's mental health provider have recommendations regarding placement? • If there will be a change in placement**,** a Best Interest Determination meeting (BID) can occur during the CFT. An educational professional must be present if the BID meeting occurs during the CFT. Depending on family circumstances and desires the BID may need to be scheduled separately from the CFT meeting. When there has been a change in the permanent plan, as explained in the protocol, there must be a CFT. The county child welfare agency should: • Clearly communicate the new primary and concurrent plan to all those impacted by the plan change. • Discuss the next action steps towards achieving permanency. • The Permanency Planning Family Service Agreement, as outlined in protocol, must be updated within 30 days of the court's decision to change the child's permanent plan. The county child welfare agency should provide an opportunity for the Permanency Planning Family

Child and Family Team / Permanency Planning Review Meetings

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	Services Agreement to be developed or updated during a CFT meeting, or individually at a later time if family preferred. A CFT meeting should include the juvenile's parents, a county child welfare worker, supervisor, and a neutral facilitator. The agency should consider the juvenile's wishes regarding their participation and invite a support person and/or mentor who can advocate and assist the juvenile with their input throughout the meeting. The juvenile's development and cognitive abilities should be taken into consideration. Current placement providers, and former placement providers (when appropriate) should be invited to participate in CFT meetings.

Termination of Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
PREPARING THE CHILD County child welfare agencies must help prepare the child for an exit from county child welfare services agency custody, no matter the permanent plan being achieved. For youth exiting foster care at age 18 the agency must: • Provide important documents to the youth prior to the exit; • Complete the Transitional Living Plan: 90 Day Transition Plan for Youth in Foster Care (DSS-5096b); and • Discuss the option of participating in Foster Care 18 to 21 with the youth.	Whether a child has been in county child welfare services agency custody for a short or a long period of time, the move out of care is equally as significant as the move into care. The child may have conflicting feelings about the change in living arrangements. It is the county child welfare worker's responsibility to help him/her express and understand these conflicting feelings and to move gradually toward making the change. The county child welfare worker should plan with the child, age appropriately about the kinds of responsibilities the child can take in getting ready for the move. Whether a child is being discharged from family foster care, relative placement, or from institutional care, the caretaker should plan with the county child welfare worker for the move and participate in preparing the child for the changes. Changes in living arrangements usually mean changes in relationships. If it is appropriate, the child may need to visit their former placement after discharge. Services may be extended by the agency to youth ages 13 to 21 who leave foster care and meet the eligibility requirements for LINKS services, regardless of their living arrangement and whether the agency retains custody or placement responsibility of the youth during this time. This extension of services will allow the county child welfare worker to provide needed support to the youth after discharge from foster care placement. The services should be based upon an assessment of the youth's needs, to assist him/her in making a successful transition to living independently. The child's life book should be given to the child and/or the parent(s)/guardian/custodian/ adoptive family.

Termination of Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
PREPARING THE FAMILY FOR REUNIFICATION The agency must request that visitation between the child and parent(s) increase, including unsupervised visitation and a trial home visit. The agency must also comply with the requirements of Rylan's Law/CPS Observation prior to recommending reunification occur. The county child welfare services agency must provide the family with any important documents and other items pertaining to the child including, but not limited to: • Medical records; • Medications; and • School records.	The child and family have changed during the time of placement. Even over a matter of months, the child will have achieved developmental milestones, will have formed new relationships with foster parents, and may have new interests. Families will have adjusted their daily routines around the absence of the child. Parents may have learned new parenting skills that impact familiar family practices. During the planning process, the county child welfare worker should keep the child and family abreast of the changes that are occurring. When placement providers are encouraged to work with the birth families, both the child and the family can benefit from a significant increase in the amount of information shared. As the family moves toward reunification, the county child welfare worker should be very sensitive to the fears of the family. They may be afraid they are not ready for the child's return and could lose their child again. The county child welfare worker should work with the family to assure needed supports are in place. Family Preservation Services may be included during the trial home visit or as part of the aftercare plan to further stabilize the family. County child welfare agencies should aid with transitioning Medicaid and other services the child is receiving, when appropriate.
PREPARING THE FOSTER FAMILY The foster family must participate in planning for the child's exit from county child welfare services agency custody. The foster family must assist in transitioning the child to their permanent living arrangement.	The foster family needs the county child welfare worker's full support and recognition of the contributions they have made in the child's life. The foster family should be informed of why the county has reached a decision to move a child to a permanent placement. Such information and preparation will help the foster family come to an acceptance and understanding of these events, so they can help a child adjust to the move. If it is in the best interest of the child, a contact between the child and the foster family should be arranged by the agency after a child has moved to a more permanent placement.

Termination of Services

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
PREPARING THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY OR OTHER PERMANENT CAREGIVER If the adoptive family or other permanent caregiver has not lived with the child, the agency must arrange for a transitional period of visitation to help the child and family learn about each other. The adoptive family or other permanent caregiver must be provided with all information that is relevant to the child's history, relationships, behaviors, health, interests, and educational needs. Non-identifying information about the child's birth family must be provided to the adoptive family so the child will be able to know the reason for their adoption. The agency must make post-adoption services available to every adoptive family. These services must be provided to facilitate the integration of the child and family and to resolve problems they may encounter. The agency must provide regular and ongoing support, monitoring, and/or counseling of the family as appropriate. A referral to Family Preservation Services may be appropriate for post-adoption services.	
AFTERCARE SERVICES The agency must inform families and children that they can request services from the agency and obtain these services on a voluntary basis, as available. Families must be informed of services that may be available to them including, but not limited to: • Adoption assistance; • Post-adoption support; • Guardianship assistance; • LINKS services and funding; and • Foster Care 18 to 21 services.	The agency should establish a minimum period for providing supportive aftercare services and supervision to the child and their permanent family. In most cases, agency supervision can be terminated after six months unless the court orders otherwise and/or the final Risk Reassessment indicates additional service needs. Guardians and legal custodians should also be made aware of available services, so they can select services they need. If they indicate no need for services, they should be informed that services are available to them, should they need them later.

Documentation and Record Keeping

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
Documentation and record keeping are critical in managing a permanency planning case. Documentation and record keeping must be maintained to meet federal, state, and local mandates. **MAINTENANCE OF THE PERMANENCY PLANNING RECORD** The electronic NC FAST record for each child in the custody of a county child welfare services agency must be maintained throughout the life of the case.	Documentation and record keeping should be viewed as a valuable tool for the county child welfare worker and child welfare supervisor, as well as for the court. The NC FAST electronic record should provide and maintain a history of the child and family's involvement. Electronic records in NC FAST should include documents that constitute legal evidence. A comprehensive and up-to-date record will alert the county child welfare worker and the child welfare supervisor when required action is needed in the case, such as agency case reviews, court reviews, and contacts with the child, family, and others.
CONTENTS OF THE PERMANENCY PLANNING RECORD Case documentation must be current within 7 working days. Documentation in the electronic record must include: • A description of the actions taken; • Current progress toward the goal and objectives stated on the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (DSS-5240); • A current copy of the Child Placement and Payment Report (DSS-5094); and • The rationale for agency involvement and services delivery on an ongoing basis. The agency must maintain an individual electronic record for each child or sibling group in NC FAST. Each electronic record must contain: • Demographic information, which must include:	

Documentation and Record Keeping

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
○ The name, address, sex, race, ethnicity, Social Security Number, date of birth, and birth place of the child; ○ The names, addresses, telephone numbers, Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, races, ethnicity, religion, and marital status of the child's parents; and ○ The names, addresses, and telephone numbers of siblings and other significant relatives and kin.	It is extremely important that this information be updated as new information is acquired and as changes develop.
• Annual pictures of the child ○ At the time permanency is achieved, the pictures must be given to the adult assuming responsibility for the child's care. ○ All additional pictures of the child must be maintained in the record or life-book, so they are available to the child, their family, or their adoptive family after resolution of the case.	
• Child Placement and Payment Report (DSS-5094) ○ This form must be maintained and must be updated as required and when there are changes related to any field.	
• SIS Client Eligibility Form (DSS-5027) ○ This form must be maintained and must be updated as required and when there are changes related to any field.	
• Eligibility forms ○ All relevant eligibility forms, including the IV-E Eligibility Determination forms, must be maintained.	
• Placement history ○ A placement history log must be maintained in each child's record. Copies of required notifications to parents regarding a change in a child's placement must be included.	The placement log should contain a record of the child's prior placements with names of caregivers, addresses, dates of placement, and specific reasons for the move.

Documentation and Record Keeping

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• Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement (Family Services Agreement)
  ○ All applicable parts of the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement, including the health and education components, Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs, Family Reunification Assessment and/or Family Risk Reassessment, must be and signed by all appropriate parties.
 	
• Transitional Living Plan for youth ages 14 and older
  ○ All applicable parts of the Transitional Living Plan, including documentation of LINKS services provided and/or offered.
 	
• Court documents
  ○ All court documents must be maintained, including the original petition, all motions for review, all court orders, all procedural notices, and court reports.
 	
• Legal documents
  ○ Legal documents of importance to the child, including a birth certificate, must be maintained.
 	
• Reports and evaluations
  ○ Medical, dental, and psychological reports, including history, written assessments, and immunization records must be maintained and updated annually.
 	
• Educational information
  ○ A plan for educational stability must be in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement for each child in a county child welfare services agency custody and efforts to maintain the child in their current school whenever a placement change occurs must be documented.
  ○ Efforts to maintain a child in their current school—or if not feasible, documentation why a change of school was in the child's best interest—must be documented.	

Documentation and Record Keeping

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance – How you should do it
○ Educational records and reports for school-age children, including IEPs (when appropriate), must be maintained and updated annually. • Written assessments, including: ○ Any assessments of relatives or kin who may be considered as a potential placement resource for the child; and ○ Assessments for consideration of a child for Independent Living, including the Transitional Living Plan, must be included. • Interstate Compact documents ○ All required documentation for accessing the Interstate Compact must be included. • Correspondence ○ Letters of attempts to contact parents, relatives, and/or kin; reminder letters of scheduled visits and reviews; and referral letters to service providers must be carefully maintained. Copies of notifications to participants in the PPR meetings must be maintained in the child's record.	Correspondence letters constitute legal evidence and document attempts to contact absent parents and attempts to provide services. Maintaining correspondence from parents, relatives, and kin document the family's response to these attempts.
<u>DOCUMENTATION</u> Documentation must reflect the following: • The dates and content of the county child welfare worker's face-to-face and telephone contacts with the child, the parents, the foster parents or other caregivers, and collaterals. • Progress the county child welfare worker is making in providing the services reflected in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. This documentation is important to show reasonable efforts toward reunification or another identified permanent plan are being made.	Documentation should assist in tracking progress toward the case goal, guiding service delivery and decision-making, and pointing out when the case goal may need revision. Documentation should reflect the frequency of county child welfare worker visits (monthly contact

Documentation and Record Keeping

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• When reunification is the plan, documentation must reflect the progress or lack of progress the parent is making toward the goals and objectives identified in the Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement. Dates and length of visits between the parent and child, as well as the substantive interactions between the child and parent during the visit. See the "Documentation" in Cross-Function topics in the NC Child Welfare manual for definitions and additional protocol and guidance.	required). It should also document reasons that justify when the requirements for a child are adjusted or not met. Documentation should focus on parental behaviors and efforts that relate to the central issue that must be corrected for the child to return home safely. Since visitation is an indicator of progress or lack of progress in achieving Permanency Planning Family Services Agreement plan objectives, quality documentation of visits should be used to support decision-making. Documentation should also reflect issues related to compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act.

Adolescent Services: NC LINKS

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance
Introduction In December of 1999, the Congress enacted, the John Chafee Foster Care (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/chafee-foster-care-program). This Act replaced the Independent Living Initiative as described in Public Law 99-272 and made substantial changes in the federal efforts that target youth in the foster care system and young adults who have been discharged from foster care. The law has since been amended to include Education Training Vouchers for youth aging out of foster care and youth who are adopted after their sixteenth birthday. This program is described later in this section. The name of the North Carolina program, **NC LINKS**, is not an acronym, and therefore does not "stand" for anything. Instead, it is a word that captures the purposes of the Chafee Act and the intent of North Carolina: to build a network of relevant services with youth so that they will have ongoing connections with family, friends, mentors, the community, employers, education, financial assistance, skills training, and other resources to facilitate their transition to adulthood. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH AND MRS PRINCIPLES Youth development is the process through which adolescents become adults. This process is the result of the interaction between the adolescent, and all that he or she is, and the environment. All adults have been through this process. For many adults, the process included some negative experiences; however, the vast majority of adolescents do become self-sufficient adults. Adolescents in foster care are also engaged in the normal but sometimes chaotic process of youth development. Because of their personal history, many of these youths are facing additional barriers to achieve positive outcomes, such as a history of abuse or neglect. Research has shown that caring adults can influence positive outcomes for all adolescents. While there is no guarantee, positive outcomes are much more likely to occur if: • Youth are engaged in making the decisions that affect their lives; • Youth are recognized and valued for their strengths and the resources they are to themselves; • Youth have a variety of opportunities to learn and to try out their new skills in a supportive environment; and • Youth have increasing responsibility for themselves for handling issues that confront them.	

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The parallels between the Positive Youth Development Approach and MRS / Family-Centered Practice are clear: The youth is viewed as the expert on his or her own needs. The agency encourages the youth's active participation in services and decision making. The approach to the youth is strengths-based, acknowledging that all youth have strengths. The agency treats the youth with respect and supports his or her right to self-determination and to make decisions about his or her life. It supports the youth's right to be heard and to be understood. It avoids premature judgments about the youth, and remains open to new information. It promotes the sharing of power. It engenders partnership between the youth and the agency. The traditional foster care system is formed around the protection of children. Children are removed from their families only when supportive services are not adequate to ensure safety. Children remain in foster care only when, despite the efforts of families and agencies, permanent placement is not possible. Teens in foster care who are, in essence, a family of one, may be denied these critical aspects of family-centered practice: • Decisions about their lives are frequently made for them without their involvement; • The focus of the agency's work is often on fixing the youth's problems, rather than on building on their strengths; • Liability concerns take precedence over allowing youth to learn through experience or to take over responsibility for aspects of their lives; and, • Programmatic barriers result in delaying the maturational process and make positive outcomes far less likely. The LINKS program is based on positive youth development principles. In this approach, the LINKS social worker intentionally creates and/or allows opportunities for youth to experience growth-enhancing interactions with their environment. Rather than treating the youth as an object who has no say in decisions, or as a recipient who needs to be repaired, the agency interacts with the youth as a resource, a person with unique experiences and abilities who can become self-sufficient if given needed information and a supportive environment. The following example illustrates these three approaches to Jeff, a 17-year-old youth who wants to go back to live with his mother, an alcoholic who has often broken promises to seek treatment, to visit, to bring him home from the group home for holidays, etc. The agency is seeking Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) because Jeff has been in care for almost two years. Jeff is furious about this, and says that no matter what the agency does, he will go back to his mom when he is 18.	

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Object The local child welfare agency continues with its petition to terminate parental rights. It cannot find justification for exempting the agency from this ASFA requirement. The agency will not even consider allowing Jeff to visit his mother given her lack of progress and the liability issues they could face were something to happen. ***Recipient*** The local child welfare agency refers Jeff to a therapist to help him with his anger and frustration with his mother. The social worker meets with Jeff regularly to develop an alternative plan which includes his signing a CARS agreement and continuing in school so he can get his diploma, even though he will be 19 when he finishes. Jeff expresses no interest in this option. The agency explains the benefits of the LINKS Special Funds program, and how the agency will be able to help him set up his own place, to rent an apartment, and to get further training. When Jeff does not participate in some of his planning meetings, the plan is discussed without him. ***Resource*** The local child welfare agency accepts Jeff's plan to return to his mother's home and stops the TPR proceedings. The services agreement includes increasing visitation with the mother, including school holidays. Jeff will be responsible for arranging his own transportation. The focus of social work time will be on helping Jeff to develop strategies to cope with issues that confront him. The agency makes available services and resources that Jeff needs to explore his plans, always open to the option of changing the plan if this does not work out as he hopes. When the agency respects the youth as a resource, it recognizes that this is Jeff's life and ultimately Jeff's decision to make. Jeff needs to explore his choices when he has the support he needs to make his plans work or to make different choices if they don't. While it is rarely appropriate to treat a youth as an object (such as when they are sick and have to get medical treatment) or occasionally as a recipient (such as insisting that a sexually aggressive youth attend group therapy sessions,) it is only when the youth is treated as a resource that they can make rapid progress toward responsible adulthood. The LINKS program is unique in that its total focus is on helping youth to make that transition. Other aspects of foster care case management and child protective services have different responsibilities to these youths. Taking a youth development approach is difficult for many LINKS social workers, who often want to protect youth from making mistakes and to step in to exert well-meaning influence on their decisions.	

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The role of the LINKS social worker must change when the agency takes a youth development approach. The role becomes that of a teacher, a coach, and an advocate. • **Teacher:** As a teacher the social worker works with the youth to determine what he or she needs to know to proceed toward self-sufficiency. This may mean preparatory training in life skills, driver's education, work or volunteer experience, money and credit management etc. As teacher, the social worker is alert to planned and spontaneous opportunities that will encourage positive youth development. • **Coach:** Coaching includes on-the-spot teaching as well as allowing experience to do the teaching and encouraging youth to figure out their own solutions. For example, if youth are given the responsibility for reading a map and following directions for an outing and become lost, the social worker might wait for the youth to figure out what to do rather than rescuing him from the situation. Learning what to do when lost is an important life skill! • **Advocate:** As advocate, the social worker not only speaks on behalf of youth but also seeks opportunities for youth to advocate on their own behalf. As advocate, the social worker may work diligently to keep agency staff aware about the program. An advocate may challenge the usefulness of outdated existing agency policy that thwarts youth development. An advocate has a critical role in helping the agency to learn about an individual youth's strengths and abilities, rather than always making decisions that are focused on problems. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LINKS LIAISON The responsibilities of the LINKS liaison expanded significantly with the passage of the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act and the resulting NC LINKS program. Every county is required to designate one or more persons who will assure that required LINKS services are provided to their county youth and young adults. Among the responsibilities of the county LINKS liaison are: • Develop a good working relationship with eligible teens and young adults, their caregivers, supporters and social workers, using a positive youth development approach that will provide a challenging and supportive environment which will help their preparation for adulthood; • Work cooperatively with eligible county youth and young adults to develop and conduct a relevant and effective county LINKS program; • Engage the broader community in providing a supportive learning and living environment for teens and young adults from the foster care system, which may include engaging community partners in mentoring youth in jobs, providing tangible supports to	

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the LINKS program, sponsoring achieving youth, training youth in groups about subjects such as banking, credit, car purchases, comparison shopping, and other life skill areas; • Develop budget for operation of the county LINKS program; • Verify eligibility for LINKS and for LINKS Special Funds; assure that ineligible youth and young adults are not served using additional Federal IV-E funds. • Register eligible youth for LINKS Special Funds; submit requests for reimbursement of Special Funds to the state LINKS coordinator on behalf of county. Assure that expenditure of LINKS funds are allowable; • Refer eligible young adults for ETV; • Consult with state coordinator as needed; • Conduct diligent outreach efforts to all young adults ages 18-21 who aged out of foster care in the county and provide appropriate services to those young adults; • Creatively advocate for teens in foster care and for young adults who have aged out of foster care; encourage youth to be self-advocates and leaders; • Prepare an annual plan for the county LINKS program; • Respond to requests for data from the state coordinator; • Participate in LINKS training offered through the Staff Development Section (LINKS 101, 201 and Groups Course, as appropriate); • Participate in Regional training and meetings with state LINKS coordinator when schedule allows; • Participate in monthly conference calls with county liaisons and state coordinator when schedule allows; • Assure transportation for county youth to attend regional events such as SaySo conferences, Real World, and LINK-UP conferences and participate actively with youth and other adults in attendance; • Meet with liaisons from other counties to consolidate or coordinate services as appropriate.	

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LINKS IS AN OUTCOME-BASED SERVICE The Federal government has identified seven outcomes that they will monitor to assure that Chafee-funded independent living services are effective. Our goal in North Carolina is for every youth and young adult who lives or has lived in foster care as a teenager to achieve the following outcomes by age 21. LINKS program staff should be constantly alert to ways in which they can promote accomplishment of these outcomes. 1. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have **sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs.** 2. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a **safe and stable place to live.** 3. All youth leaving the foster care system shall attain **academic or vocational/educational goals** that are in keeping with the youth's abilities and interests. 4. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a **sense of connectedness** to persons and community. This means that every youth, upon exiting foster care, should have a personal support network of at least 5 responsible adults who will remain supportive of the young adult over time. 5. All youth leaving the foster care system shall **avoid illegal/high risk behaviors.** 6. All youth leaving the foster care system shall **postpone parenthood** until financially established and emotionally mature. 7. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have **access to physical and mental health services,** as well as a means to pay for those services. LINKS liaisons are encouraged to track and review progress toward these outcomes to provide guidance for all program activities. Strategies that are not effective should be revised. *Outcome #1: Youth has Sufficient Economic Resources to Meet Daily Living Needs* 1. If youth is a dependent child, the family provides sufficient resources for basic daily living needs. 2. Job stability for youth or young adults, as indicated by at least six months in the same job during the previous year. 3. The youth or young adult pays own portion of daily living expenses or contributes to an agreed-upon amount.	

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4. If unable to pay own portion of expenses, the youth has stable and consistent income/resources, such as SSI or stable financial support, that is sufficient to pay his bills. Some examples of program elements for youth capable of eventually earning sufficient resources to meet their daily needs include: • Job readiness skills; • Conflict resolution skills: • Vocational interest testing; • Volunteer work for younger and older youth in their fields of interest; • Competency-based training for the work environment, e.g. money and time management, credit management, conflict management, personal conduct in a work environment, tax preparation, etc.; • Experiences preparing for employment while in custody, such as part-time employment, participation in school-to-work programs, job sharing or apprenticeships, and job coaching; • Part-time or full-time employment for youth 16 and older; • Youth responsibility for saving own money and paying part of their personal expenses; • Driver's education and driver's license before discharge; • Vocational Rehabilitation testing and training, when appropriate; and • Transitional education and training resources such as Job Corps, AmeriCorps, college or vocational training, military options, WIA/JobLinks, etc. Additional or alternative program elements for young adults with unrealized potential to support themselves completely (those continuing their education/training, currently unemployed, or temporarily disabled) and who need temporary financial support: • Family/extended family/community support; • Public assistance, e.g. TANF, Food Stamps, Work First, Section 8 or other public housing, etc. • Vocational Rehabilitation;	

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• Educational/Vocational scholarships and grants as well as other postsecondary school assistance; and • CARS/Voluntary Placement Agreement with the local child welfare agency while attending school full time. Program elements for disabled or developmentally delayed young adults who will continue to need financial support may include: • Life skills training to help young adults be as independent as possible; • Eligibility determination for SSI and Medicaid; • Extended family/community support; • Public assistance; • Sheltered workshops/supported employment programs; • Supported housing programs; • CAP-MR/DD adult programs; and/or • Assisted living programs for adults. *Outcome #2: Youth has a Safe and Stable Place to Live* 1. The youth is living in a stable housing situation and can afford the cost. 2. The housing situation is not hazardous and is not in high-crime area. 3. The youth has not been victimized since discharge. Some examples of program elements include: • Learning about housing/utility costs for various types of housing in the intended home community; • Learning to evaluate safety; using police and crime statistics, news reports, etc. as resources to learn about the location of safe neighborhoods;	

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• Learning to enhance personal safety in the home including basic knowledge about home repair and avoiding common hazards; • Learning to avoid danger and to defuse volatile interpersonal situations; • Learning basic non-lethal self-protection techniques; • Having a stable place to live upon discharge, with a primary and backup discharge plan to minimize the likelihood of homelessness resulting from a disrupted plan; • Having trusted friends who can offer temporary sanctuary, if needed; and • Making concerted efforts toward permanence for every youth prior to discharge, including learning about adult adoption procedures. *Outcome #3: Youth is Attaining or has Attained Academic or Vocational Educational Goals in Keeping with their Interests or Abilities* 1. Youth is on or above grade level or, if not, is receiving assistance to attain grade level. 2. Youth's stated educational and vocational goals are openly explored. 3. Education/vocational training is reasonable given level of academic/vocational ability and interests. Some examples of program elements include: • Proactive remedial academic assistance for youth who are not achieving grade level: educational testing, tutoring, computer-based learning, vocational interest/ability testing, tutoring based on academic deficits etc.; • Early exposure to a variety of academic/vocational schools and possible means to attend those schools;	

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• Positive reinforcement for achievement of steps toward personal academic and/or vocational goals- recognition, rewards, privileges, etc.; and • Developing strong working relationships between the local child welfare agency and the public school to establish in-school mentors and advocates for participating youth. *Outcome #4: Youth has Connections to a Positive Personal Support System* 1. Youth has a broad-based personal support system of at least 5 adult supporters who are not related to the agency and who are personally interested and invested in the youth's future. 2. Youth has a responsible caring adult outside the child welfare system to call on for support or advice. 3. Youth has consistent, welcoming place to visit, if desired. Some examples of program elements include: • Helping all youth to seek out lifetime connections and permanence while in care and beyond; providing information on adult adoptions to youth and adults that are in family-like relationships; • Build on the youth's existing support system; • Build tribal connections for American Indian youth; • Assure cultural connections as appropriate to individual self-identity; • Provide opportunities to meet responsible caring adults, e.g. through volunteerism, faith communities, athletics, clubs, etc.; • Re-explore birth family, former foster families, etc. as potential support resources; • Involve youth in activities that build healthy life-long interests; and	

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• Build relationships between teens and the business community, e.g., mechanics, plumbers, electricians; potential employers, and other business professionals. *Outcome #5: Youth is Avoiding Illegal / High Risk Behaviors* 1. No convictions, detentions, or incarcerations since discharge. 2. Leisure activities and source of income are legal activities. 3. Youth has a support system that includes positive role models. 4. Youth is drug and alcohol-free, does not have needle/sexually transmitted diseases. Some examples of program elements include: • Building peer community within the LINKS program that expects, rewards and supports pro-social, positive behaviors; • Creating open discussions about handling pressures regarding drug and alcohol use; • Providing education and exposure to realities of drug/alcohol abuse- involve volunteers from former LINKS participants or other young adults who were involved in illegal/high risk activities and have learned the negative effects of that experience; • Encouraging watchfulness on part of staff, family, caregivers, etc. and providing education regarding signs of gang involvement, drug and/or alcohol abuse, etc.; • Assuring early intervention/timely treatment for substance or alcohol abuse problems; • Providing specific preventive health education re: AIDS, hepatitis, the impact of STDs and other health risks; and • Helping youth to become connected with family members, mentors and other caring adults who care about what goes on with the individual youth from day to day and who are regularly engaged with the youth. Visits with family members are protected and are never denied as a form of "punishment" for the youth or the family.	

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Outcome #6: Youth is Postponing Parenthood until Financially and Emotionally Capable of Parenting 1. Is not a parenting or pregnant teen. 2. If youth has given birth or fathered a child, is purposefully and effectively avoiding another pregnancy. 3. Has responsible adult assistance or guidance in parenting any offspring. Some examples of program elements: • Open, gender-specific group, mixed group and/or individual discussions about intimate and friendship relationships and respect for personal boundaries; • Sex and abstinence education; • Using "Baby Think-it-Over" computerized infant simulators for boys and girls; Education about impact of parenthood on income, education, vocational plans; • Adoption presented as a caring option, perhaps involving persons who have adopted infants or who have relinquished their child to talk to the group or individuals; • Responsible parenthood instruction for boys and girls- babysitting instruction, supervised and unsupervised opportunities to be around small children in a caregiving role; • Pregnancy prevention posters and audio-visuals; and • Coordination of LINKS program with Adolescent Parenting Program/Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs.	

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Outcome #7: Youth has Access to Physical, Dental and Mental Health Services 1. Routine physical, dental and mental health preventive care are provided while in care. 2. Identified physical, dental and mental health needs are being treated quickly and appropriately. 3. Youth has insurance that will cover the cost of physical/dental/mental health care after discharge. 4. Self-care/self-monitoring is sufficient to avoid serious physical/ dental/ mental health crises. Examples of program elements: • Exploring availability of health insurance through the family, employment or school; • Establishing Medicaid/Health Choice eligibility; • Visiting free/low cost services through Mental Health Clinic, Public Health, free clinics, etc.; • Providing information and instruction on self-care- medication information, health maintenance, when to worry; what to do if seriously ill; avoiding contagion, etc.; • Providing opportunities for youth to grieve the losses in their lives that connect to their experience with foster care: death; loss of relationships; loss of time with family; loss of trust; etc.; and • Providing resource materials and referrals, including internet web sites specific to youth's identified needs and concerns. In addition to these seven outcomes, North Carolina's goal is that all youth leaving the foster care system shall have **a sense of well-being**, with **a positive sense of personal and cultural identity.** Some examples of attributes that signify accomplishment of these two outcomes are:	

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1. Youth demonstrates a positive outlook on life. 2. Youth demonstrates resilience in overcoming past problems as well as in facing new problems. 3. Youth has a positive self-identity as a person of worth. 4. Youth has a positive sense of the history of his/her culture. 5. Youth is able to handle prejudice/discrimination without violence. 6. Youth is culturally competent and is at least tolerant of other cultures. 7. Youth is able to assert self appropriately in the face of discrimination. Some examples of program elements include: • Youth are given opportunities to develop a strong reality-based sense of self-worth within a program that consistently advocates youth development. • Youth resilience is recognized, acknowledged, and nurtured even when it is contrary to systemic expectations. • Youth are taught skills for nurturing their own resilience, such as decision making, self-care, recreational activities, and confidence building experiences. • Youth are supported in their participation in activities that develop skills, talents, spiritual development, positive relationships, recreational interests, physical and intellectual conditioning. • Involvement in these activities is considered a part of the overall transitional plan and is not denied as a form of “punishment”. The agency accesses appropriate funds to help the youth to participate in positive developmental experiences. • Youth are given opportunities to develop leadership and self-advocacy skills through organizations such as Say-So and through participation in statewide and national conferences that promote youth development.	

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• Youth are given opportunities to construct and maintain life books. • Youth are given opportunities to learn to openly discuss their experiences of being in foster care and any resulting negative feelings about themselves. • Youth experience positive exposure to a variety of cultural groups, learning the value of diversity. • American Indian youth are given opportunities to strengthen their tribal connections. • Youth are given opportunities to maintain cultural connections as appropriate to individual self-identity. • Youth are given opportunities to provide group leadership in learning about different cultures. • Youth participate in sensitivity exercises regarding all types of discrimination, including that based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. • Youth receive assertiveness training. • Youth learn about civil rights, including their own. ELIGIBILITY FOR LINKS SERVICES In North Carolina, all youth who are now 13 or older and are not yet 21 and who are or were in a local child welfare agency foster care after the age of 13 are eligible for LINKS services, with two exceptions. Otherwise eligible youth are not eligible for LINKS funds if: • they have personal reserves of more than $10,000, or • they are undocumented residents or illegal aliens. For the purposes of this policy, being in “foster care” means that the child was removed from the home and is receiving 24-hour substitute care, and the local child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. Non-paid relative care is included in this	

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definition if the child is not living in the removal home. Youth who, as teenagers, have been discharged from foster care and were reunified, placed with relatives, adopted, married, or emancipated remain eligible for LINKS services until their 21st birthday. **Detention facilities, forestry camps, training schools, and any other facility operated primarily for the detention of children who have been determined to be delinquent are not considered foster care placements.** Eligibility for LINKS services and funds requires that the youth be an active participant in his or her planning, including sharing in the responsibility for designing and implementing their transitional plan. Youth involvement in case planning must be documented in the case record and reflected on the case plan. Youth and young adults who refuse services, who refuse to be active participants in designing the case plan, and/or who refuse to do their part in resolving problems cannot be provided LINKS services or resources. Eligibility for LINKS services is intentionally broad, in order to permit agencies to serve youth and young adults who need the services and who are willing to do their part in resolving problems. PRIORITIES FOR SERVICE DELIVERY Most counties cannot provide LINKS services to all youth and young adults who meet the eligibility criteria and must prioritize the use of their resources. The following priorities are guidelines for prioritizing LINKS services. *Required Services* Local child welfare agencies must offer and provide appropriate services to youth and young adults ages 13-21 that are in agency custody and to young adults who aged out of agency custody at age 18 and who are not yet 21. Outreach efforts are required for young adults who aged out of care and who are not yet 21 to determine their current situations, their interest in continued services, and their need for resources through the LINKS Special Funds program. • Eligible teens and young adults in foster care or on Contractual Agreement for Residential Services / Voluntary Placement Agreement (CARS/VPA) agreements ages 13-21 **must** be offered skills training, counseling, education and other appropriate support and services to assist their transition to self-sufficiency. Agencies have the responsibility for teaching skills necessary for teens to become self-sufficient and for providing opportunities to use those skills within a supportive environment.	

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• Young adults who "aged out" of foster care (were in foster care on their eighteenth birthday) **must** be offered any needed assistance for which they are eligible. LINKS Transitional Housing Funds are available to reimburse counties for the cost of rent, rent deposits or room and board arrangements for young adults who aged out of care. In addition, other LINKS Special Funds are available to help with non-housing expenses, such as utilities, furniture, etc. **Note: Young adults who age out of NC foster care, youth who were adopted from NC foster care, or exited NC foster care to guardianship may be eligible for Education and Training Vouchers and/or NC Reach Scholarships to defray the costs of attendance at post-secondary education or vocational training institutions. Please go to Foster Care to Success for more information on Education and Training Vouchers. Please go to NCReach.org for more information on NC Reach.** OTHER PROGRAM ELEMENTS OF NC LINKS The State is required by law to make LINKS benefits and services available to American Indian children in the state on the same basis as other children. North Carolina interprets this responsibility to include all Native American children, regardless of Federal recognition status. State statute effective July 27, 2001 established an understanding between local child welfare agency and the Indian tribes on Indian child welfare issues, including LINKS services that effect Indian teens that are placed in foster care. Particular effort shall be given to identifying American Indian youth who are eligible for the LINKS program, and to eliminating barriers to their participation in the LINKS program. Focus of LINKS involvement should include helping Indian youth maintain cultural ties to their tribes. *Serving Ineligible Youth* Some youth are ineligible for LINKS-funded services but need what the program offers. The primary focus of the LINKS program should always be on serving those teens that are eligible for the funds. However, if other youth can be served without using any Federal funds, including LINKS funds, and without displacing an eligible youth, the county can opt to include them in the program. The following are examples of ineligible youth who may want and need services. There may be other examples that arise, which would be handled in the same way.	

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a. Youth in care who are not yet 13 years of age, or young adults who were in care as teens but are now over the age of 21 If a youth or young adult is in need of involvement with the LINKS program and would be a constructive addition to the program, they can be served if their involvement does not require additional expenditure of LINKS funds and no eligible youth is denied services in order for the ineligible person to participate. One way to involve young adults over the age of 21 is to have them participate in leadership roles in the program. Young adults who are experiencing difficulty in their transition can be particularly effective leaders for youth who are preparing to go out on their own. b. Youth receiving CPS In-Home Services Much concern has been raised regarding the lack of local child welfare agency services to teens who have been subjected to abuse or neglect but who remain in their own homes with agency services. LINKS funds cannot be used to provide services to teens in conjunction with CPS Services unless the youth qualifies as a person who was previously in foster care as a teen. These youth may, however, participate in ongoing LINKS programming if that seems appropriate, so long as no additional costs are incurred due to that youth's participation, and so long as no eligible youth is denied services in order for the ineligible youth to participate. c. Undocumented Immigrant Children State foster care funds help provide for housing and limited emergency medical assistance for undocumented children who enter foster care through child protective services. **No federal funds can be applied to assistance or services for undocumented persons.** If an otherwise eligible youth is disqualified from LINKS because of residency status, the agency can serve him or her so long as no Federal funds are used to provide those services. Once legal residency is established, LINKS funds may be used to provide services. d. Ineligible Siblings of LINKS Participants Occasionally the sibling of a teen will be in care and will want to participate in LINKS activities. If the sibling is sufficiently mature to participate, and no eligible youth or young adult is denied services due to his/her participation, and if participation does not require additional expenditure of LINKS funds, then they can participate.	

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e. Youth with Personal Reserves of $10,000 or More Youth are not eligible for LINKS funds if they have personal reserves of more than $10,000. As is true with other ineligible youth, services may be provided if no additional LINKS funds are used to provide the service and if no eligible youth is denied services because of participation by the ineligible youth. A youth with excess reserves may, of course, pay for costs of full participation in LINKS activities. In order to provide services to a youth who is not eligible for LINKS funding: • Assure that the inclusion of the youth involves no additional cost to the agency, or, if the inclusion of the youth does involve additional cost, the additional costs will be paid through other funding sources (family, the youth, private donations, county funds, etc.). • If the participant is in agency custody, document in the Family Services Case Plan what service is requested and provided as well as how the additional cost is being managed. • If the ineligible participant is not in agency custody, document in the LINKS program documentation what service is requested and how any additional cost will be managed. Financial Aspects of the LINKS Program, including LINKS allocations, Special Funds, and the Education Training Voucher program are now described in Appendix 3.5 of the NC Child Welfare manual. YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING FOR SERVICES As mentioned in the first section, it is critically important that youth be involved in the planning process at all levels: from the identification of issues that need to be addressed through definition of goals and activities and the identification of personal and systemic resources. All youth need and want an opportunity to have a say in their lives, to be taken seriously, and to have adults understand them.	

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A highly effective means of demonstrating openness to youth in the planning process is to have youth invite family, mentors, friends, and/or other supporters to their service plan reviews. This arrangement accomplishes several goals- • it gives the youth more ownership of the planning process; • it gives significant persons in the youth's life an opportunity to engage in the planning process; and • it helps the agency to identify support persons that may have been previously unknown to them. Some states that use this strategy have discovered multiple permanency resources among the supporters identified by youth. Confidentiality issues can be handled by having participants sign a confidentiality form that states that the participants are aware that information shared during the meeting is confidential, and that they agree not to divulge any information shared without the expressed permission of the youth. *Assessment Tools for Youth Ages 13-21* Life skills assessments for youth 13-18 must involve both the youth and a person who knows the youth's skills and abilities first-hand, such as a family member or caregiver. The purpose of the assessment is to determine the youth's strengths and skill areas as well as the need for additional training or experiences. This enables the LINKS social worker to engage youth in teaching and program leadership as well as learning opportunities. Proper use of the tools provides a "roadmap" for identifying skills and resources youth need to achieve their goals. The Strengths/Needs Inventory, which is available through Independent Living Resources, Inc. (http://ilrinc.com/), is a good interview tool that helps the youth and social worker (or other caring person) share their interests. Some agencies use the Strengths/ Needs Inventory in conjunction with the automated tools. It is not a stand-alone assessment. This is available through the LINKS 101 training or directly through Independent Living Resources, Inc. a. Preferred and Recommended Assessment Tool: The Casey Life Skills Assessment (CLSA) is available free over the internet at http://www.caseylifeskills.org/. The CLS tool also has a version for Spanish-speaking adolescents. The tool assesses the behaviors and competencies youth need to achieve their	

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long-term goals. It aims to set youth on their way toward developing healthy, productive lives. Examples of the life skills CLSA helps youth self-evaluate include: • Maintaining healthy relationships • Work and study habits • Planning and goal-setting • Using community resources • Daily living activities • Budgeting and paying bills • Computer literacy • Their permanent connections to caring adults The CLSA is designed to be used in a collaborative conversation between an educator, mentor, social worker, or other service provider and any youth up to age 21. It is appropriate for all youth regardless of whether they are in foster care, kinship care, live with their parents, or reside in a group home. Youth will complete the assessment online and their answers are available instantly to be reviewed with the youth in a strengths-based conversation that actively engages them in the process of developing their goals. A resource guide is also available to help caregivers and providers create a learning plan that can help youth gain the skills they need. Child welfare agencies and youth-serving providers may register with Casey Life Skills to create an account that lets them administer the assessment to youth and access all of the sites reporting tools. Registration is free and instantaneous. Records of the youth to whom agencies have administered an assessment are stored for later reference. The CLSA is helpful in meeting the requirements of transitional planning for youth.	

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Assessments for young adults 18 to 21 may be completed using the CLSA, if appropriate. However, the focus for young adults who seek LINKS services is typically about one or more life crises that they are struggling to handle. In these situations, informal assessments conducted in an interview/discussion are frequently more appropriate. The discussion should be documented in the case narrative. Some of the issues to be addressed in the discussion are: • What is the young adult's overall assessment of the crisis? • What has he/she tried so far? How did that work? • What does he/she think is needed which would help to work through this situation both now as well as in the future? Assess with the young adult additional resources that may be available. The plan should address both the short term "fix" and long-term problem avoidance. For example, a loan or grant may help a money shortfall, but assistance with budgeting may prevent a similar shortfall in the future. • What part of this solution does he/she need the agency to do, and what part is he/she willing to do in resolving this situation? • How will the young adult and agency know if the plan is working? When does the plan need to be reviewed? The results of this discussion will be formulated into a plan that reflects the description of the statement, resources that will be used, the young adult's and agency's activities that will contribute to resolution of the problem, time frames for review, and dated signatures of the young adult and agency representative. *Transitional Living Plans for Youth Ages 14-21* Transitional Living Plans are required for young people age 14 and older in the custody of a county child welfare agency. See Transitional Living Plans for more information. *Permanency Planning Hearings and Report to the Court*	

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N.C.G.S. 7B-912 (b1) requires county departments of social services to report to the court, at *every* hearing after a young person's 17th birthday, all the following: • The department's efforts to identify and secure viable placement options for when the young person attains 18 years of age • A list of appropriate adults who can serve as resources for the young person when the young person attains 18 years of age • Contact information of the person responsible for overseeing voluntary foster care placements with young adults in the county department of social services with custody or placement responsibility of the young person and in the county department of social services in the county where the young person plans to reside at the age of 18 years • If appropriate, whether the young person has information about how they may maintain contact with their siblings, parents, or relatives when they reach 17 years of age • Whether the department has provided the young person with a point of contact to secure Medicaid and maintain physical and mental health services for which the young person will be eligible when they reach 18 years of age • Whether the department has provided the young person with information about educational, vocational, or job plans when the young person reaches 18 years of age • Whether the department has provided the juvenile with a copy of their birth certificate, Social Security card, health insurance information, driver's license or other identification card, and any educational or medical records and information about how the juvenile may participate in the foster care 18-21 program authorized by N.C.G.S. 108A-48. *90 Day Transition Plan (Completed 90 days prior to 18th birthday)* Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110351) requires that within 90 days prior to a youth aging out of foster care at age 18, the agency shall develop a plan with the youth to discuss his or her plans for emancipation from agency custody. As with any services for youth, the plan should be personalized at the direction of the youth, be as detailed as he or she chooses, and include specific options regarding how to access housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentoring	

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services and continuing services, sexual health, services and resources to ensure the youth is informed and prepared to make healthy living decisions about their lives. To this end, the Transitional Living Plan - 90 Day Transition Plan for Youth in Foster Care (DSS-5096b), must be developed with the youth that includes the required elements mandated by federal law. While the Transitional Living Plan is developed to address independent living needs of the youth while in care, the 90 Day Transition Plan is considered an extension of the Transitional Living Plan, as it provides details and resources for the youth after he or she exits care. Additionally, the 90 Day Transition Plan provides the youth with a portable document regarding resources they may need when they are out of care as well as to gain information from the youth regarding their plans and contact information. The DSS-5096b Transitional Living Plan - 90 Day Transition Plan for Youth in Foster Care document captures details about the young adult's resources – where they plan to live after exiting from foster care, their level of educational attainment, their educational or vocational plans and goals, transportation, health insurance – and provides additional resources for the young adult should they need additional supports upon exiting care. The 90 Day Transition Plan document also verifies the young adult has received the required documents prior to exiting care. The DSS-5096b Transitional Living Plan – 90 Day Transition Plan for Youth in Foster Care provides a method for counties to confirm that the young adult has been informed about the Foster Care 18 to 21 Program and the young adult's interest in the program. This document is required for all young adults in foster care within 90 days prior to their 18th birthday. The young adult must be informed of his/her option to continue in the Foster Care 18 to 21 Program at the time the 90 Day Transition Plan is completed. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) also requires the plan to include information on the importance of designating someone to make health care treatment decisions on behalf of the youth if the youth is unable to do so and does not have or want a relative who would otherwise be so designated under North Carolina law to make such decisions. This requirement provides the youth with an option to execute a health care power of attorney or health care proxy. The North Carolina Department of Secretary of State maintains an Advance Health Care Directive Registry which provides a document for those who wish to execute a health care power of attorney. The document entitled, "Health Care Power of Attorney" may be accessed at: https://www.sosnc.gov/forms/by_title/_advance_healthcare_directives. Counties must ensure that information is provided that assists the youth in clearly understanding that the individual designated as their health care agent will have broad powers to make health care decisions for the youth when the youth is unable to make those decisions or cannot communicate their decision to other people. It is important that the youth and the person they designate as their health care	

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agent discuss the youth's wishes concerning life-prolonging measures, mental health treatment, and other health care decisions. Except for any specific limitations or restrictions expressed, the youth's health care agent may make any health care decision the youth could make for themselves. The 90 Day Transition Plan meeting for young adults approaching their 18th birthday should be structured as a Child and Family Team Meeting, which creates an environment in which youth can invite their family and other support persons to help finalize this plan. For information on the Child and Family Team Meetings, please refer to Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual. While the 90 Day Transition Plan is to be developed 90 days prior to the youth exiting foster care, counties should prepare and fully engage a youth in his or her plan development well in advance of the 90-day period. The social worker may meet with a youth to discuss the plan's purpose and the importance of how the youth is expected to participate in the development of the plan, who they can invite to the planning sessions to represent their needs, how it differs and is similar to the Transitional Living Plan, and what topics can and will be discussed. For instance, it may take more than one planning session to develop the final 90 Day Transition Plan as there are several aspects to the plan such as housing, health insurance, transportation, education, and employment. Counties may find it useful to utilize their LINKS support groups and/or SaySo to develop youth led recommendations on what youth need to know prior to the transition planning session. These activities and recommendations will assist the youth in developing their own plans of emancipation. On page one of the document, the agency must indicate whether the Foster Care 18 to 21 Program has been explained to the young adult and whether the young adult wishes to participate. Referral information for agencies, which includes contact information, should be prepared by the social worker, based on where the young adult intends to live after discharge. The Families First Prevention Services Act (Public Law 115-123) Section 475(5)(I) was enacted on February 9, 2018. The law requires county child welfare agencies to provide official documentation to prove the young adult was in foster care before they age out of care. Per Public Law 113-183 and Public Law 115-123, the agency must make arrangements to have the following documents available to give to the young adult at the time of the meeting: • Verification Letter – Proof of Child's Placement in Foster Care • Original or certified copy of the youth's birth certificate (https://vitalrecords.nc.gov/) • A Social Security card issued by the Commissioner of Social Security (http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.pdf)	

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• All copies of all required Health Forms (DSS-5203 Initial Provider Assessment, DSS-5204 Comprehensive Provider Assessment, DSS-5206 Health Summary Form - Initial Visit, and DSS-5207 Child Health History) • All medical records • Health insurance information • Copies of all DSS-5245 Child Education Status Component forms • All educational records • Driver's license or identification card issued by the State • Copies of any credit reports and documentation related to issues resolved on the credit report • The original signed copy of the DSS-5096b Transitional Living Plan • Plan - 90 Day Transition Plan • Transition Checklist The entire 90 Day Transition Plan should be copied for agency files. The original plan as well as original or certified documents should be provided to the youth in a permanent binder to take from the meeting. The young adult must sign the Transition Checklist to validate receipt of the items identified above. Copies of the discharge documents shall be retained in the youth's record. Reimbursement from the county LINKS allocation or LINKS Special funds may be used to pay for the required documents, costs of copying, and a protective portable file in which these documents may be stored. CONSUMER CREDIT REPORTS	

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Significant concern exists that foster children are vulnerable to being victimized by identity theft because their personal information passes through many hands, increasing the chances that someone will open an account in their name or use their Social Security number. Since children typically have no credit records, it makes it easier for thieves to link their unused Social Security numbers to other names and birth dates. Most parents, caretakers and foster parents see no reason to suspect a problem, which means the theft can go undetected for years. In some instances the suspected theft may be someone of the youth's own family or a foster parent. Additionally, youth may voluntarily allow a family member or friend to obtain credit or services in their name with the assumption that the bills will be paid in a timely manner because they are not aware of the consequences of damaged credit. As a result, youth who age out of care may be greatly challenged by credit issues upon exiting the system. Additionally, they lack a support system to help them resolve their credit issues. These problems hinder the youth's ability to access resources and obtain basic services such as housing, transportation and employment, thus thwarting their successful transition to adulthood. To this end, federal legislation requires that each child in foster care under the responsibility of the State who has attained 14 years of age receives without cost a copy of any consumer credit report year until they are discharged from foster care and must be assisted (including, when feasible from their court-appointed advocate) in interpreting the credit report and resolving any inaccuracies in the report. Counties are strongly encouraged to maintain this requirement for youth who sign Contractual Agreements for Residential Services. While the legislation mandates that the credit checks begin at age 14, there is nothing that precludes the local child welfare agency from implementing this requirement for younger youth in care, particularly if there is suspicion that the youth is a victim of identity theft. It is important to note that this is a two-step mandate for the local child welfare agency: 1. provide the credit report; and 2. provide any needed assistance in resolving any inaccuracies with the report. The intent is for the child welfare agency to work with the youth in reviewing the credit report, resolve any issues and help the youth understand the importance of conducting a credit check so that they will continue the practice upon their exit from care. Counties may collaborate and/or contract with community-based providers to fulfill this requirement. A copy of the credit report must be placed in the youth's case file as well as evidence of discussion with the youth about the report and efforts to resolve any inconsistencies. Planning for obtaining the credit report should be included in the youth's Transitional Living Plan as well as the 90 Day Transition Plan. For more information on obtaining a free credit report visit the Federal Trade Commission consumer fact website at http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/credit/cre34.shtm.	

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LINKS SERVICES TO YOUTH *Youth in Foster Care Ages 13-18* Counties will serve all youth in this age group who are in foster care. Public Law 113-183 requires states to provide services to youths in care ages 14 and older that will assist the youths to make the transition from foster care to successful adulthood. North Carolina's Child and Family Services Plan designates all teenagers in foster care as being "at risk of remaining in care until they are 18," thus making the eligibility pool for LINKS services very broad. Developmentally, young people in this age group are more interested in peers and group activities than are older teens. They are often more open to exploring the resources that will be available to them, and usually respond well to opportunities to do so. They enjoy activities that will help to prepare them to handle responsibilities, such as role playing the experience of being in a judicial review hearing. They like to volunteer, particularly when volunteering genuinely helps other people. By serving this age group, agencies have an earlier start in assuring that young people have and will continue to seek out strong personal support systems, and in helping youth explore family and other adult relationships that youth find supportive. • Among the activities included in services to youth 13-15 are: • An individualized life skills assessment designed for younger adolescents and completed by the youth and caregiver. The assessment identifies strengths and needs for life skills training and the need for other learning opportunities; • With the youth, developing written service agreements specifying the responsibilities of the agency and youth to accomplish immediate and intermediate goals that lead toward successful transitions to adulthood as well as implementation of services identified as needed by the youth and agency to achieve the goals; **Note: Youth 12 years and older have the legal right to be involved in the development of the service plans if they are cognitively and emotionally able to participate. Agencies are encouraged to have youth take on a leadership role in their planning meetings.** • Life skills training based on training needs determined by the written assessment; • Agency or contracted services that are provided to help youth to overcome barriers that are interfering with achievement of educational or vocational goals, self-sufficiency, relationships with family and significant others, etc.; • Specific activities to develop and strengthen the youth's personal support system;	

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• For more mature youth 13 through 15, participation in the agency's LINKS activities for older youth; • Opportunities to learn about resources available in the community, such as public transportation, health resources, resources for educational/vocational training, military service options, recreational organizations, participation in school activities, and volunteer opportunities; • Opportunities to volunteer in a working environment in order to learn about possible vocational interests, to build a resume, and to give back to the community; • Role playing potentially stressful activities, such as testifying in court or being interviewed for a job; • Participating in local, state, and/or national trainings and conferences relevant to LINKS services to younger teens. *Youth in Foster Care Ages 16-18* The child welfare agency is also **required** to provide LINKS Services to youth 16 to18 who are in foster care or are participating in CARS arrangements. While a youth may refuse to engage in services, the local child welfare must offer services on an ongoing and frequent basis. A youth is more likely to engage in LINKS services if the services are relevant to his or her life. When circumstances or opportunities help to make that connection, the social worker or care provider should make a point to engage or re-engage the youth in services. It is a federally required for youth to be fully involved in designing and implementing LINKS services for LINKS funds to be provided. Among the activities included in services to youth 16-18 are: • An individualized assessment by the youth and caregiver that identifies strengths and needs in self-sufficiency skills as well as other areas relevant to adult functioning; • With the youth, developing written individual transitional plans spelling out the responsibility of the agency and youth to accomplish a successful transition to self-sufficiency. Transitional plans are developed concurrently with the service agreements.	

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Note: Youth 12 years and older have the legal right to be involved in the development of the service plans if they are cognitively and emotionally able to participate. • Skill development activities that are as close to real life as possible; i.e., hands-on activities combined with or instead of classroom lecture, interesting activities that lend themselves to a variety of learnings, etc. These activities should be related to learning needs identified in the assessments and may include activities related to budgeting, housing, career planning, money management, basic home maintenance, health maintenance, avoidance of high risk behaviors, prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, job seeking and job maintenance, etc. • Services directly related to educational and/or vocational needs such as tutoring to assist youth to achieve grade level, learning about and visiting educational/training institutions, paying for placement tests, providing transportation to and from classes, tools, work clothing or equipment necessary to vocational training, etc. • Assistance with locating and maintaining employment. • Formal counseling and informal personal support to help the youth handle the losses connected with being in foster care, grief, anger and other difficult emotions. • Development and nurture of a personal support network with family, friends, and other caring adults; exploration of relationships while still in agency custody to determine realistically their opportunities for involvement after discharge, etc. Other services to this age group might also include: • Helping youth to attend meetings such as Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SAYSO) (http://www.saysoinc.org/), training, state and national youth conferences, or other youth events that help youth to build competence and self-confidence. • Coordinating services with other counties or state services to provide experiences for youth in custody to meet with other youth in foster care. • Helping the youth to purchase goods or services needed to help him or her to become self-sufficient.	

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Youth Aged Out of Foster Care Counties are **required** to make diligent efforts to locate and offer needed services to young adults who: • were discharged from a local child welfare agency's custody at age 18, and • who are not yet 21 years of age, and • who may be in need of further services. Outreach services should include: • Diligent, persistent, and ongoing efforts to locate and contact aged out young adults whose whereabouts are unknown to determine their current status and to offer access to needed resources. • Once located, an assessment of the young adult's current situation, barriers that they are experiencing, efforts they have made to overcome those barriers, and plans and strategies for agency assistance if requested. • Engagement of the young adult in planning, determination of what responsibility the young adult will handle, and choice of services that will supplement his or her own efforts. • Informing the young adult of the availability of Education/Training Vouchers for vocational and/or educational training to enhance employment opportunities. • Reimbursement to the counties through LINKS Special Funds for assistance with completion of high school or GED, job training, utilities, furniture, uniforms, equipment, or other items or services that are needed to facilitate achieving self-sufficiency • Assistance in strengthening a personal support network that will continue to be available through adulthood. • Access to existing county LINKS program services.	

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Transitional housing assistance for young adults: • who have aged out of care; and • are moving to a permanent living arrangement; and • need assistance with rent, rent deposits, or room and board arrangements. Transitional housing assistance includes help with housing costs as well as agency services to learn to handle the responsibilities that accompany living on one's own. Counties may use Transitional Housing Funds to pay for room and board at residential colleges or vocational training schools if these costs are not being paid by other Federal sources. Young adults 18 to 21 from other states who have aged out of foster care **must** be offered LINKS services through their new (NC) county of residence if they request it. In addition, the LINKS social worker should notify the state LINKS coordinator in this circumstance in order to determine what financial assistance can be provided through the home state. Young adults who age out of foster care in North Carolina and move to other states have the right to receive Independent Living services from their new state of residence. The state LINKS coordinator should be contacted to help coordinate these services and resources. Counties are strongly encouraged to provide outreach services to young adults who were discharged before age 18, who are not yet age 21, and who need and are requesting further services. CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS FOR RESIDENTIAL SERVICES (CARS) Prior to January 1, 2017, state law N.C.G.S. § 108A-48 provided that: 1. The Department is authorized to establish a State Foster Care Benefits Program with appropriations by the General Assembly for the purpose of providing assistance to children who are placed in foster care facilities by county departments of social services in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Social Services Commission. 2. No benefits provided by this section shall be granted to any individual who has passed his eighteenth birthday unless he is less than 21 years of age and is a full-time student or has been accepted for enrollment as a full-time student for the next school	

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term pursuing a high school diploma or its equivalent, a course of study at the college level, or a course of vocational or technical training designed to fit him for gainful employment. This law encouraged county child welfare agencies to offer young adults who have been in county custody the opportunity to remain in a licensed foster care facility while continuing their education. Effective January 1, 2017, state law N.C.G.S. § 108A-48 reads as revised: 1. The Department may continue to provide benefits pursuant to this section to an individual who has attained the age of 18 years and chosen to continue receiving foster care services until reaching 21 years of age if the individual is (i) completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential, (ii) enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education, (iii) participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment, (iv) employed for at least 80 hours per month, or (v) incapable of completing the educational or employment requirements of this subsection due to a medical condition or disability. 2. With monthly supervision and oversight by the director of the county department of social services or a supervising agency, an individual receiving benefits pursuant to subsection (c) of this section may reside outside a foster care facility in a college or university dormitory or other semi-supervised housing arrangement approved by the director of the county child welfare agencies and continue to receive benefits pursuant to this section. Young adults who aged-out of foster care and entered into a CARS with a county child welfare agency prior to January 1, 2017 can remain on their CARS until: • The young adult terminates the agreement; • The agency terminates the agreement; • The young adult and the agency determine the young adult would be better served by the Foster Care 18 to 21 Program, the CARS is terminated, and the youth enters into the Foster Care 18 to 21 Program; or • The young adult turns 21 years of age.	

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The Contractual Agreement for Residential Services (CARS) (DSS-5108a) is a voluntary agreement between the young adult and the agency that allows for State foster care board payment to a licensed foster care facility. The young adult is not in the child welfare agency's custody. Rather they have voluntarily agreed to be in the agency's placement authority for the duration of the agreement. A CARS agreement differs from a VPA agreement in that the young adult, rather than his parents or guardian, is exercising his legal authority to request the placement arrangement. A CARS agreement is a voluntary agreement between the young adult and the agency. The agency agrees to provide payment to assist with the cost of housing while the young adult is in an academic or vocational training program, and to provide foster care services and other services for which the young adult is eligible. The state pays half the standard board rate and the county pays the balance of cost of care. The agreement clarifies that the young adult's eligibility for LINKS services, including • LINKS Transitional assistance, scholarship assistance through the ETV or Postsecondary Educational Support Scholarship, and eligibility for the Extended Foster Care Medicaid program are not contingent upon nor related in any way to the young adult's participation in a CARS agreement. • The young adult agrees to "remain enrolled in a full-time program of academic or vocational training, or accepted for full-time enrollment for the next term in an academic or vocational program in order for foster care assistance payments to be paid on his/her behalf." The young adult further agrees to "discuss any problems arising from the placement with the social worker, and to handle his/her responsibility to work through any problems that are within the young adult's control." The young adult further agrees to "notify the agency and placement provider in advance if he/she decides to leave school, the vocational program, or foster care." • When a young adult elects to terminate the 18-21 agreement, the process can move forward. The young adult can notify the agency of termination verbally or in writing. The agency must document in the young adult's case record the method in which the young adult terminates the agreement. • When the county agency decides to terminate the agreement and the young person disagrees, a motion for review must be filed for the courts to make a resolution. There are no criteria for what the court should consider when resolving whether to terminate.	

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• If the agreement is not terminated by one of the parties, it will automatically be terminated on the young adult's twenty-first birthday. FOSTER CARE SERVICES PROVIDED TO YOUNG ADULTS ON CARS *Agency Reviews* When a foster youth is 18-21 years of age and signs a CARS agreement, he or she is participating as an equal party in a contractual agreement with the local child welfare agency. The Out of Home Services Agreement form is no longer appropriate or required. However, it is important to meet regularly with the young adult to assure that the conditions of the agreement are met and that the young adult is on track for his or her transition to self-sufficiency. Agency reviews of the agreement should be conducted every six months in a format similar to the Child and Family Teams. Persons involved with the young adult (employer, caregiver, representative of school, friends, family, et cetera) should be invited by the young adult to these planning sessions. Agency participation should include the social worker, supervisor, LINKS liaison in addition to any community representatives that may have relevant input. Six-month reviews offer a formal opportunity to review the living arrangement and to make rule modifications as appropriate, to consider the effectiveness of services provided by the agency and to modify the services provided. Form - DSS 5108A gives structure to the CARS review. *Assessments* The Casey Life Skills Assessment is an appropriate tool to help young adults track their progress toward mastery of life skills and to arrange for additional assistance as needed. Assessments should be completed every six months, prior to the CARS review. These assessments can be accessed on line at: http://www.caseylifeskills.org/. *Services* Young adults on CARS agreements remain eligible for all LINKS services and resources, and will continue to be eligible until age 21 regardless of their status on CARS. The LINKS liaison is normally assigned as agency contact, although this decision is made by the county agency. A menu of service options includes but are not limited to:	

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• Involvement with ongoing LINKS activities at the agency, especially as youth leaders; • Life skill training; • Crisis management; • Assistance to strengthen personal support system; • Assistance in obtaining employment; • Negotiation with employers, creditors, placement providers, etc.; • Accessing LINKS Special Funds for transitional needs; and • Information and referral to appropriate community resources. LINKS Coordinators are usually a good resource to help young adults to become familiar with resources that can help them achieve positive outcomes. Workforce Investment Programs for young adults, Vocational Rehabilitation, state and federal scholarship programs and community college programs are just a few of the community-based resources outside of the local child welfare agency that can help students transition successfully, and collaboration between the local child welfare agency and these agencies should be maintained. LINKS liaisons are tracking data on young adults who age out of county custody and should be informed of any changes in the CARS agreement or in the student's situation. *Paying for the Cost of Care on CARS* Often, older youth age out of foster care in a therapeutic placement that costs significantly more than the standard board rate. Whenever possible, the agency should plan ahead to step the youth down to a less structured placement well before their 18th birthday. Most therapeutic foster care placements are highly structured and do not allow youth sufficient opportunity to develop the life skills and experiences needed to transition successfully. While IV-E funding may have been used to help with the costs of placement	

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prior to the youth's 18th birthday, these funds cannot be used to pay for the young adult's placement beyond the 18th birthday unless the young adult qualifies for mental health residential treatment as an adult. The county typically pays the difference between the placement costs and the state contribution to the board payment. *Placement in Unlicensed Homes* There are circumstances in which the young adult student can live with a suitable relative or unrelated adult while he is in school if the provider receives some help with the cost of care. State foster home funds cannot be used to help pay for these placements unless and until the care provider is licensed as a foster parent, but counties can use county funds for this purpose if they choose to do so. If the youth is working and can contribute to the cost of room and board, this is a good way to help them learn about costs of living. If the student is receiving ETV or the new Postsecondary Education Support Scholarship, housing costs can be included as costs of attendance. LINKS Housing funds can also be used to offset these costs, up to the allowable limit. These arrangements are not CARS Agreements, and there are no state requirements for reviews. Counties are required to provide services to all young adults who aged out of their county custody, so requirements for offering LINKS services continue regardless of the placement. PERMANENCY FOR ADOLESCENTS *Development of Permanent Placement Resources* Successful adoption recruitment strategies for teens are very different from those directed at locating families for younger children. Traditional adoption recruitment efforts tend to attract families seeking to adopt infants and young children. If those same strategies are used to attempt to attract families interested in adopting teens, the rate of success is minimal. There are logical reasons for this: • Teens in foster care are, first and foremost, teenagers. Average teens from average families are at a developmental stage that is typified by pulling away from family, not by joining into a family. • Teens in foster care are unfairly prejudged as being emotionally disturbed, delinquent, violent, and/or generally incapable of being part of a family.	

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• Many adoption recruitment workers would rather put their energies in getting more younger children adopted, rather than focusing on the few teens who need adoptive placement. • Most families would not consider adopting a teen unless they knew him or her personally. • Most teens would not consider being adopted, unless they knew the potential adoptive parent personally. • Many teens resist the concept of adoption for a variety of reasons: they may not want to change their name (although they do not have to do so), or they may feel that accepting adoption means that they would not see their relatives again, (although this may be worked out). They may feel that they do not deserve a permanent home. They may be concerned that if they agree to adoption, no family would step forward to provide a permanent home for them. They do not want to be rejected again. • Many agencies do not make a concentrated effort to help teens to create new connections with caring adults, nor do they ask the youth to help them identify adults that they already know and trust. *General Recruitment for Permanent Homes* As with all recruitment efforts, outreach efforts should be targeted to the communities that have a racial, ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural background similar to the youth for whom we are recruiting. Educational presentations should be held to advertise the need to find permanent homes for teens and preteens. The specified purpose of these events is to encourage the community to help to prevent homelessness of teens exiting the system. We know that youth leaving the foster care system as adults without strong personal support systems are much more likely to face homelessness than those who do have these relationships. During these presentations prospective adoptive parents should be given an opportunity to hear directly from adolescents in foster care and to learn about the type of "parenting" that is needed by these teens. Advertising for these events are distributed where the people are likely to see them: supermarket bulletin boards, ethnic newspapers and media, leaflets in restaurants, announcements in churches, mosques, and synagogues, within tribal organizations, etc.	

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Youth-Specific Recruitment All teens in foster care have some emotional attachments to others in order to have survived. They have created their own "families." These "families" may consist of friends, parents of friends, current and/or former foster parents, teachers, coaches, cottage parents, maintenance staff, relatives, older siblings or friends who are now adults, neighbors, church members, Guardians ad Litem, social workers, employers, counselors, etc. We need to ask these youth about these connections and to help them strengthen these relationships. There are often more than a dozen people currently in each youth's life that could be approached about offering a permanent home to the youth. Asking youth to invite persons of their own choosing to participate in their planning reviews helps us to know who some of these people are. In addition to identifying existing resources, we have the responsibility to help youth to develop connections that may develop into lifelong supportive relationships. Some of the program activities that can help this process are: • establishing a mentor program within the LINKS program, matching the youth with a volunteer who has similar interests; • researching the interest of relatives, neighbors, and friends who were once involved with the youth as a younger child but have since lost contact; • contacting older siblings who are now on their own; • helping the youth to develop Eco-maps to identify their support systems; • involving youth in volunteer activities that also engage adult volunteers from faith and civic groups, such as blood drives, environmental restoration, working one on one with disabled children, fund drives for community recreation programs, etc.; and • involving community persons in the LINKS program as volunteers. Even if these activities or efforts do not result in adoptive placements, they will help youth to develop the kinds of friendships and supports that they will need as adults.	

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Adult Adoptions North Carolina's adoption law does not restrict adoption to children. Adults may also be adopted. For purposes of the adoption law, an adult is defined as an individual who is at least 18 years old, or, if under the age of 18, is either legally married or has been emancipated under applicable state law. County child welfare agencies are responsible for facilitating the adult adoption of a young adult receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services in accordance with the provisions of N.C.G.S. §48, Article 5. For more information on adult adoptions see Adoptions in the NC Child Welfare manual. TRAINING FOR STAFF AND FOSTER / ADOPTIVE PARENTS The Chafee Act requires that agency staff, foster parents and other providers who work with adolescents receive training specific to working with teens. This training should also be made available to adoptive parents who either have adopted or who are planning to adopt a teen. Training should include topics such as: • Normal child and youth development; • How child and youth development are influenced by the foster care experience; • Strategies to help children and youth successfully handle the impact of abuse, neglect, and placement disruptions; • Co-parenting with the child/youth's biological family in order to improve family connections even for youth who are not reunified with their family; • Establishing a mentoring relationship with teens; • Appropriate discipline; helping teens build self-discipline; • Accessing community resources for teens and their caregivers; • Using "teaching moments" to impart needed information;	

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• Talking with teens about difficult subjects, such as relationships, sexuality, sexual orientation, substance abuse, risk avoidance; • Helping teens to identify and strengthen their personal support systems; • Encouraging teens to identify and build on their own strengths and interests; and • The caregiver's role in implementing transitional plans. **Note: Agencies must use Title IV-E Training funds designated for training adults, since LINKS funds cannot be used to train social workers, foster parents, or other adults in a caregiving role.** PLACEMENT SERVICES FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS Raising an adolescent is a challenging, rewarding, frustrating, exhausting, and exhilarating experience for anyone. Foster and adoptive parent support groups, buddy systems pairing experienced and new foster or adoptive parents, foster parent associations and community resources are extremely important resources that help adoptive and foster placements avoid disruptions. Similarly, youth need opportunities to withdraw for short periods in order to deal with the frustrations and anxieties that accompany being in a foster or adoptive placement. Visits with families and friends, and sponsored participation in conferences, workshops and camps offer needed breaks while providing new information and skill building. INDEPENDENT LIVING AS A COORDINATED SERVICE OF FOSTER CARE Every child who experiences out-of-home care, from toddler to teen, should receive developmentally appropriate training and exposure to experiences that encourage the consistent development of independent living skills. While LINKS Funds cannot be used to provide such services before the child is 13 years of age, foster parents and social workers can address the need by intentionally creating opportunities for the child to learn how to make good choices, to become self-confident, to handle personal responsibility, and to develop a network of resources. A key to helping youth in foster care placement develop adult living skills and attitudes is the positive **attitude of the worker**. Often youth lose developmentally critical information due to placement instability. It is easy to overlook the possibility that youth may not	

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have been exposed to common life experiences, and easier yet to interpret that their failure to participate in simple tasks is due to a lack of motivation or rebellion, rather than a lack of information. Some agencies are concerned that eligible youth do not want to participate in their LINKS programs. Perhaps the most critical step in developing or redesigning LINKS services is the meaningful involvement of the youth to be served. For programs with 8 or more eligible participants, this could take the form of establishing a youth advisory committee made up of natural youth leaders who perform an integral role in the development of the program to be offered. Natural leaders are those to whom other youth look for leadership. This may or may not coincide with the adult's perspective of leadership qualities. These youth advisors will learn from their role as leaders, organizers and implementers. Participating youth appreciate their voice being heard. Even mistakes provide excellent teaching opportunities, and youth learn that failure is not fatal. Staff members should promote flexibility in programming, so long as the basic general purposes of the LINKS program are being addressed. For all programs, youth involvement also means meeting with individual youth, their supporters, and their service providers to identify goals and activities that will help youth to achieve self-sufficiency. Some aspects of LINKS programming are best accomplished through group activities. For most counties with few eligible youth, group services are not usually offered. There are ways to create groups even in the smallest counties, and agencies are encouraged to do so. Some options are to: • co-sponsor a group with another agency that serves teenagers, such as schools, Workforce Investment Act programs, 4-H, Mental Health or Community Based Alternatives. Costs above and beyond those incurred by eligible youth may not be paid with LINKS funds. • co-sponsor a group with neighboring county LINKS programs, planning for monthly, quarterly and/or semiannual youth events. Small counties may qualify for salary supplements if the participating counties serve a combined total of 9 or more eligible youth ages 16 to 21 and/or aged out young adults. • encourage youth in agency custody to participate in skills courses through schools, agricultural extension programs, recreation programs, community resource centers, and other such programs.	

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TRACKING OUTCOMES One requirement of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act is to participate in national evaluations of the effectiveness of services provided in achieving the purpose of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. A critical component of these evaluations is the collection of data regarding outcomes as well as data regarding the specific services provided to youth through the program. County child welfare agencies that receive federal funds through the LINKS program share in the responsibility of gathering and reporting this information. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/nytd/about_nytd.htm) is the data reporting system that will be used to determine the relationship between the types and intensity of services and the outcomes achieved. In addition to tracking the data required by NYTD, counties may wish to begin tracking their own longitudinal data on teens who participate in the LINKS program, including the types of services provided by the agency and the outcomes achieved as young adults. *Demographic Information:* • Name / SIS ID • Gender • Race • Ethnicity • Date of Birth • Date of Entry into Foster Care (most recent episode) • Whether or not the youth is a member of a Federally recognized Indian tribe • Marital status • Number of children parented by this individual • Last grade completed	

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Educational Information: • Currently attending educational or vocational school? • Special education • Driver's education provided • Highest educational certificate received *Foster Care Information:* • Date of most recent assessment and case plan • Types of LINKS services needed • Types of Planned and Spontaneous Services provided or paid for by a local child welfare agency • Academic support, e.g. tutoring, scholarship assistance • Post-secondary educational support • Driver's education • Career preparation • Employment programs or vocational training • Budget and financial management • Housing education and home management • Planned supervised Independent Living • Health education and risk prevention • Mentoring	

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Participation: • LINKS services provided by the agency • Whether the youth did/did not participate in LINKS program. If not, why not. • Refused • Not Needed *Employment Information:* • Current full or part time employment • Employment experience • Hours and wages sufficient for self-support? *Income Other Than Work:* • Social Security • Scholarship • TANF *Housing Information:* • Safe and stable Housing? • Homeless in previous year? *Personal Support System:* • Connection to responsible, caring adult(s) • Access to health care (free or has insurance)	

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High Risk Behaviors (behaviors that endanger physical or mental health): • Substance abuse (alcohol/drug) • Risky sexual behaviors • Domestic violence in intimate relationships • Other criminal/delinquent activities • Incarceration The job of LINKS county coordinator can be demanding, rewarding, frustrating and fulfilling at the same time. It is a job that gives us an opportunity to make a significant and positive difference for teens in foster care as well as young adults who have left the foster care system.	

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PURPOSE For many young people in foster care, not having a license to drive is a barrier to education, health care, employment, and other activities that promote independence. To address this barrier, Session Law 2017-41 directed the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services to establish a two-year pilot project to assist youth in foster care in obtaining their learner's permits or driver's licenses. In collaboration with county child welfare agencies, former foster youth, family partners, and other stakeholders, the Division created Transportation Really Is Possible (TRIP) to serve as the pilot project designated by Session Law 2017-41. The purpose of TRIP is to provide, on a first-come, first-served basis, funding to support young people and caregivers with costs associated with obtaining a learner's permit or driver's license. Reimbursement is provided based on availability of funds. ELIGIBILITY OF YOUTH AND CAREGIVERS a. Eligibility of Youth and Young Adults Young people are eligible for assistance through TRIP if they: • Meet one of the following criteria: ○ Are at least 14 ½ years of age, but less than 18 years of age and are in foster care as defined in G.S. 131D-10.2(9); or ○ Were in foster care upon their 18th birthday and have entered into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county to participate in Foster Care 18 to 21; • Have contacted the county child welfare agency, as needed, to obtain approval or information needed to attend driver's education courses, obtain a leaner's permit or driver's license and consulted with the county and their caregiver regarding their readiness to drive;	

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• Have one or more goals on their DSS-5096a Transitional Living Plan which specify the steps they must take to meet the criteria for which they are seeking support (i.e. enroll in and complete driver's education); and,
 	
• Have a written agreement with their caregiver and county child welfare agency that includes, at a minimum, the following:
 	
  ○ Their plan to contribute toward ongoing costs associated with driving that are not or will not be covered by TRIP or LINKS;
 	
  ○ Any educational criteria needed, such as budgeting and understanding insurance; and,
 	
  ○ Caregiver's agreement to support the young person in obtaining driving experience.
 	
b. Eligibility of Caregivers
 	
Caregivers are eligible for reimbursement under TRIP for costs incurred in association with assisting youth in their care with obtaining a learner's permit or driver's license if they;
 	
• Meet one of the following criteria:
 	
  ○ Are providing care for a youth in foster care as defined in G.S. 131D-10.2(9), who is at least 14 ½ years of age, but less than 18 years of age; or,
 	
  ○ Are providing placement to a young adult 18 years if age or older, but less than 21 years of age, who has entered into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county to participate in Foster Care 18 to 21; and all the criteria below,
 	
• Have contacted the county child welfare agency, as needed, to obtain any other approval or information needed for the young person to attend driver's education courses, obtain a leaner's permit or driver's license and consulted with the county and the young person regarding the young person's readiness to drive; and,	

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• Have a written agreement with the young person and the county child welfare agency that includes, at a minimum, the following:
  ○ Young person's plan to contribute toward ongoing costs associated with driving that are not or will not be covered by TRIP or LINKS;
  ○ Any educational criteria the young person must meet, such as budgeting and understanding insurance; and,
  ○ Caregiver's agreement to support the young person in gaining driving experience.
 	
ASSESSING READINESS
 	
For many young people in foster care, not having a license to drive is a barrier to accessing education, healthcare, and other activities. For these youth, driving is not merely a privilege, but a route to independence. Thoughtful planning between the county child welfare agency, the young person, and the caregiver to ensure the young person is prepared to assume the responsibility of driving is key to addressing this barrier to independence.
 	
To assess readiness, county child welfare agencies should work with youth (under age 18) and their caregivers to complete the TRIP Readiness assessment. The assessment facilitates discussion about safety issues related to medical, mental health, or emotional conditions, substance use, and other areas that may impact a young person's judgement and safety behind the wheel. This assessment tool is used to facilitate a conversation about a young person's readiness to drive and jointly plan to address barriers to a young person's readiness. This assessment should not be used to create or contribute to barriers to driving.
 	
ELIGIBLE COSTS
 	
The following are eligible costs under the TRIP program.
 	
1. Driver's Education Courses
 	
a. Driver's Education Courses Offered through Public High Schools
Most public high schools in North Carolina offer driver's education courses onsite. Public high schools in the state can charge a fee for students to take a driver's education course. Under TRIP, costs associated with driver's education courses offered through public high schools can be covered, if the identified school charges fees for the course and the young person is unable to obtain a waiver of the fees.	

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b. Driver's Education Courses Offered through Private Driving Schools For individuals in communities where public high schools do not offer driver's education or struggle to meet demand for the course, private driving schools present an opportunity for youth in foster care to complete the course. The cost of attending a driver's education course through a private driving school can vary. Some schools offer complete packages that include classroom and road instruction for approximately $300 or more. Rates for private driving schools are typically broken down by the hour or by the number of sessions. Driver's education courses through private driving schools may be an option for young people who are unable to access driver's education through the public school system. Young people and caregivers are responsible for demonstrating to the county that driver's education courses are not available through local public schools. 2. Learner's Permit and Driver's License Fees a. Learner's Permit Fees Limited learner's permit fees up to the amount set by the Division of Motor Vehicles. b. Driver's License Fees Limited provisional license fees up to the amount set by the Division of Motor Vehicles. For young adults who are at least 18 years of age, but not yet 21, full provisional licenses up to the amount set by the Division of Motor Vehicles. Costs associated with obtaining a duplicate permit or license are not covered under TRIP. 3. Vehicle Insurance Vehicle insurance premiums may be covered for eligible youth, young adults, and caregivers, up to $1,000. This is a one-time cost and may not be provided to the same young person in both years of the two-year pilot program. Young people who receive assistance with insurance premiums through LINKS may also be eligible for assistance with insurance premiums through TRIP. County child welfare agencies must first apply LINKS Special Funds (Transitional) to a young person's	

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insurance costs. Once a young person has received assistance with insurance premiums through LINKS for three months or up to $650, counties may then provide additional support through TRIP. This applies to young people who obtain their own vehicle insurance policy for their own vehicle, obtain non-owner's insurance for the operation of a caregiver or other person's vehicle, or caregivers who have added young people to their policies. 4. Other Costs Associated For the purposes of this program, other costs associated with obtaining a driver's license are as follows. a. Vehicle Inspection For young people obtaining their own vehicles, the cost of the state inspection required by law, within the first year of the young person obtaining, owning, and maintaining the vehicle. Fees related to vehicle inspections include safety inspection fees and emissions inspection fees (as required, depending on the vehicle). b. Registration Fees Every state requires motor vehicles to be registered and titled with the state's transportation agency or department of motor vehicles. A vehicle registration plate, usually referred to as a license plate, is attached to a vehicle for the purposes of identification. Registration fees are the annual fees associated with maintaining a vehicle's registration and license plate. TRIP can cover registration fees up to the cost of the registration if a young person is acquiring their own vehicle. These costs are eligible under TRIP within the first year of the young person obtaining, owning, and maintaining the vehicle. c. Taxes The cost of North Carolina vehicle property taxes, only if a young person is paying for their own vehicle or otherwise responsible for paying this cost. This cost is eligible under TRIP within the first year of the young person obtaining, owning, and maintaining the vehicle. d. Additional Fees For young people who may not have access to a vehicle for taking the driver's test at a local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), fees associated with paying a private driving school for access to a vehicle for this test are eligible under TRIP.	

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e. Incentives for Caregivers Caregivers may be provided an incentive from $75 up to $100 for allowing a young person to use their vehicle for the driver's test to obtain their learner's permit or driver's license. TRIP will not cover costs associated with any damages to the vehicle caused by the young person during the driver's test. f. Vehicle History Report For young people obtaining vehicles, the cost of vehicle history reports (Carfax, AutoCheck, etc.) up to $100. This cost is eligible under TRIP when such a report is not provided by the owner or dealership selling the vehicle. APPLICATION, REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION, AND REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS Young people do not have to incur driving-related costs to be eligible for assistance through TRIP. County child welfare agencies may pay for an eligible cost on behalf of a young person and receive reimbursement from the State. However, if a young person has incurred a cost for an eligible driving-related expense, they may request reimbursement through TRIP. To request reimbursement through TRIP, a caregiver must incur an eligible driving related cost, outlined in Eligible Costs and submit the required documentation to the county child welfare agency to request reimbursement. Counties will provide reimbursement to the eligible young person or caregiver for eligible costs incurred, and then submit a request for reimbursement to the Division of Social Services. Reimbursement is provided based on availability of funds. Steps Young People or Caregivers Must Take In addition to meeting the eligibility criteria previously described, young people or caregivers must provide the following documents to the county child welfare agency to receive reimbursement: • Receipts of eligible costs incurred, if applicable • Documentation of enrollment in driver's education enrollment / documentation of course completion	

Transportation Really Is Possible (TRIP) Program Criteria

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Steps County Child Welfare Agencies Must Take 1. Submit TRIP Request for Reimbursement Assistance through TRIP may be provided in any of the following ways: a. The county child welfare agency receives a request for reimbursement for an eligible driving related cost that was incurred by a young person's caregiver and the county child welfare agency reimburses the caregiver; b. The county child welfare agency receives a request for reimbursement for an eligible driving related cost that was incurred by a young person and the county reimburses the young person; or c. The county child welfare agency pays the eligible cost on behalf of the young person and requests reimbursement from the state. If the county child welfare agency receives a request for reimbursement for an eligible driving related cost from a young person or caregiver, the county will reimburse the caregiver for the incurred costs by using county funds. To receive reimbursement from the state, whether the county pays an eligible driving-related cost directly or is reimbursing a young person or caregiver for costs they incurred, the county must submit a request for reimbursement, along with the supporting documentation directly to the State LINKS Coordinator, using the TRIP Request for Reimbursement form. Reimbursement requests must be submitted by the 15th of the month for services rendered the previous month. The county must provide the young person's name, date of birth, SIS number, the amount the county is seeking in reimbursement and the eligible cost for which the county is seeking reimbursement. 2. Provide Required Documentation When a county child welfare agency submits the TRIP Request for Reimbursement, the agency must also provide the following supporting documentation: • Receipts for eligible costs incurred, if applicable • Documentation of driver's education enrollment / documentation of course completion	

Foster Care 18 to 21

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Foster Care 18 to 21 is a program that offers young adults opportunities to continue foster care placement and transition to independence with county child welfare agency supervision. There are some young adults who may not be ready to exit foster care upon turning 18 years of age, and may choose to stay in Foster Care 18 to 21 as long as certain requirements are met. Young adults who exit foster care at age 18 are also able to return to the Foster Care 18 to 21 program at a later date as long as they have not reached their 21st birthday. County child welfare agencies are responsible for providing eligible young adults who enter into an agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21 services with ongoing efforts to help prepare and ensure the young adult's successful transition into adulthood. This policy defines the legal basis for providing foster care benefits and services to young adults, as well as eligibility requirements, development of the Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA), county oversight, required court hearings, and placement options for young adults receiving services. LEGAL BASIS In 2008 the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351) allowed states to receive federal Title IV-E reimbursement for costs associated with supports for young adults to remain in foster care up to age 21. In 2015 the North Carolina General Assembly revised N.C.G.S. §108A-48 to extend the provision of benefits under this statute to young adults between 18 and 21 years of age effective January 1, 2017. In addition, N.C.G.S. § 131D-10.2B provides authority under which young adults who turn 18 in foster care can continue to receive foster care services until the age of 21 through the Foster Care 18 to 21 program. ELIGIBILITY AND FUNDING *Program Eligibility Criteria* Young adults who were in foster care upon their 18th birthday may continue to receive foster care benefits and services up to 21 years of age as long as one of the following criteria is met on an ongoing basis (N.C.G.S. §108A-48(c)): • Completing high school or a program leading to an equivalent credential; or	

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• Enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education; or • Participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment; or • Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or • Incapable of completing the educational or employment requirements due to a medical condition or a disability. The young adult must also: • Have been in foster care upon his/her 18th birthday; and • Be 18 years of age, but not yet 21 years of age; • Enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county child welfare agency and agree to abide by the provisions of the agreement; and • Agree to reside in an approved placement. Young adults who initially choose to opt out of foster care upon attaining 18 years of age may choose to receive Foster Care 18 to 21 services at a later date as long as they have not reached their 21st birthday, and they meet at least one of the program eligibility requirements listed above. *Funding for Foster Care 18 to 21* All young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services remain eligible for foster care maintenance payments. Eligible young adults will receive the standard board rate as set forth by N.C.G.S. § 108A-49.1 the NC General Assembly. Entry into Foster Care 18 to 21, whether upon the young adult's 18th birthday, or re-entry between 18 years of age and up to 21 years of age, is considered a new foster care episode, therefore a new eligibility determination is required. Upon the young adult entering into a	

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Voluntary Placement Agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21, the Determination of Foster Care 18 to 21 Benefits and/or Medical Assistance Only form (DSS-5120E) must be completed. Determinations are based solely on the young adult without regard to the parents, legal guardians, or others in the home in which the young adult was removed from as a child, or relatives the young adult is currently residing with. Eligibility redeterminations are required every twelve months. *IV-E Eligibility Determination* For more information regarding IV-E eligibility for Foster Care 18-21, please review the Foster Care Funding Manual. *Funding for Young Adults Who are Not IV-E Eligible* For young adults who are not IV-E eligible, State Foster Home Funds (SFHF) are available to pay 100% of the standard board rate. County child welfare agencies are held harmless from contributing fifty percent (50%) of the nonfederal share of the cost for an individual receiving benefits pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 108A-48(c). **Note:** The young adult does not have to be placed in a licensed foster care facility in order to be IV-E eligible. *Foster Care Maintenance Payments* All young adults in Foster Care 18 to 21 remain eligible for foster care maintenance payments. Maintenance payments can be made to a licensed foster parent, child placement agency, foster care facility, or a relative or host family. The individual receiving the maintenance payment is not required to be a licensed foster parent. Maintenance payments can also be paid directly to the young adult whether he or she is residing in a licensed or unlicensed placement setting. The county child welfare agency is responsible for conducting individual assessments to determine if this is in the young adult's best interest. If payments are paid directly to the young adult, financial management must be a goal on his or her Transitional Living Plan, and the agency must work closely with the young adult to ensure that he or she is budgeting the money appropriately. Maintenance payments may cover room and board/rent and other living costs the young adult may have.	

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Healthcare Eligibility The Affordable Care Act (ACA) extends Medicaid coverage to youth aging out of foster care on or after their 18th birthday, to age 26. Individuals who turn age 18 while in foster care continue to be eligible for Medicaid. To qualify, young adults must meet all of the following criteria: • Age 18 to 26 • In foster care at age 18 and enrolled in NC Medicaid • A resident of North Carolina • Not receiving Medicaid from any other state • Not an inmate of a public institution All young adults aging out of foster care must be referred to their local Medicaid office to apply for continuing healthcare coverage. *Young Adults Receiving Social Security Benefits* Young adults receiving Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Retirement, Survivors, Disability Insurance (RSDI), or other monthly benefits designated for the young adult's care and support, does not affect his or her eligibility for Foster Care 18 to 21 benefits. Once the young adult turns 18 years of age, he or she becomes the payee for all benefits. In these cases, the young adult's Transitional Living Plan should reflect goals and activities geared towards financial management. It is the responsibility of the county child welfare agency to assist the young adult with managing the SSA benefits to ensure his or her financial needs are met. *Education and Training Vouchers and NC Reach* Young adults participating in Foster Care 18 to 21 services may be eligible to receive Education/Training Vouchers (ETVs) and NC Reach Scholarships to defray the costs of attending postsecondary education or vocational training institutions. ETVs cannot pay for items which the foster care maintenance payment covers, such as housing and food. ETVs can be used to pay for tuition, fees, books, computers, etc. For more information, visit the ETV website: http://www.fc2sprograms.org/.	

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NC Reach provides state-funded grants to young adults who were in foster care upon their 18th birthday. Young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 benefits can use the funding to attend public community colleges and universities in North Carolina. These funds can be used to pay for tuition, fees, books, and room and board. The foster care maintenance payments can then be used for other living expenses. For more information, visit the NC Reach website: www.ncreach.org. TEMPORARY BREAKS IN PARTICIPATION It is likely there will be times when young adults will be in transition between eligibility requirements. For example, a young adult may lose a job, or have to quit school for medical reasons. These circumstances alone do not make young adults ineligible for Foster Care 18 to 21 services. As long as the young adult is still working towards goals on his/her Transitional Living Plan, a setback does not automatically disqualify them from the program. A fully developed backup plan must be included in the young adult's Transitional Living Plan to address unexpected gaps in eligibility. Participation in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, can be used during such breaks in participation. In addition, medical conditions/disabilities that prevent the young adult from meeting the education and employment requirements can be used when temporary medical issues arise. Scheduled school breaks do not affect the eligibility status of young adults in Foster Care 18 to 21 as long as they are enrolling for the following semester. Young adults can continue to receive benefits and services up to 60 days following the break in participation. During this time, the young adult must make reasonable efforts to meet at least one of the eligibility requirements for the Foster Care 18 to 21 program. If the 60-day mark is approaching and/or the young adult is not making reasonable efforts to meet an eligibility requirement, a Transition Support Team (TST) meeting must be held to develop a plan and determine if the case needs to be reviewed in court and termination of services requested. TEMPORARY ABSENCES FROM PLACEMENT Temporary absences from placement are those in which a young adult is absent from his or her approved placement on a short-term basis, and intends to return to the same placement. These absences are different from a young adult leaving foster care with no concrete intentions of returning, yet later opts to re-enter Foster Care 18 to 21. Examples of temporary absences from placement include short-term hospitalizations, family visits, or vacations.	

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During a temporary absence from placement, a young adult may continue to receive Title IV-E Foster Care Maintenance payments if the absence does not exceed 14 days. An absence that exceeds 14 days, can either be a suspension of services or a termination of services. a. Suspension of Services: A suspension of services occurs when the young adult has been away from his or her placement for more than 14 days with a valid explanation and has communicated his or her intent to return to the program. In addition, the young adult continues to meet at least one eligibility requirement for Foster Care 18 to 21 services. The extended absence must be approved by the county child welfare agency. Foster Care 18 to 21 services are temporarily suspended, however, foster care maintenance payments may continue. SFHF can be used to cover the amount of days the young adult is absent beyond 14 days and up to 30 days. b. Termination of Services: Termination of services occurs when the young adult has been away from his or her placement for 14 or more days without approval from the county child welfare agency. In addition, the young adult has not communicated his or her intent to return to the placement. Foster care maintenance payments must be terminated immediately, and a court review hearing must be held to terminate Foster Care 18 to 21 services. LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PLACEMENT Young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services are adults for all purposes except the continued provision of foster care services. These young adults need the same degree of independence and decision making that other young adults over age 18 are granted. A young adult who is at least 18 years of age but less than 21 years of age and was in the custody of a county child welfare agency upon reaching his or her 18th birthday, must enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with the county child welfare agency in order to receive Foster Care 18 to 21 services. The court will hold an initial review hearing and may periodically review placement and services for young adults receiving services.	

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VOLUNTARY PLACEMENT AGREEMENT When a young adult opts to receive Foster Care 18 to 21 services, a Voluntary Placement Agreement must be discussed with and signed by the young adult, as well as the director of the county child welfare agency. The young adult is an equal party in the contractual agreement and must agree to the provisions of the agreement. The Voluntary Placement Agreement gives the county child welfare agency authority to continue placement responsibility and provide foster care services to the young adult. 1. The agreement must be signed within the month of the young adult's 18th birthday, or at time of re-entry into Foster Care 18 to 21. 2. If the agreement is signed before the young adult's 18th birthday, an additional signature must be obtained on or after the young adult's 18th birthday. 3. The agreement is effective on the date of the young adult's 18th birthday, or if the young adult is over 18 years of age, the date the agreement is signed. 4. The agreement is valid until the young adult turns 21 years of age, the young adult no longer meets eligibility criteria, the young adult terminates the agreement verbally or in writing, the court determines the young adult is not meeting the goals of the Transitional Living Plan and/or the young adult has violated the Voluntary Placement Agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21, or the young adult has been absent from his / her approved placement for more than 30 days without prior approval from the county department of social services, and the court terminates services. 5. The termination date, along with a statement as to why Foster Care 18 to 21 services were terminated must be documented on the agreement. COURT HEARINGS Court shall review the placement of the young adult in foster care 18-21 no more than 90 days from the date the voluntary placement agreement is executed. For more information on Court Hearings for young adults in Foster Care 18 to 21 please refer to Cross Function Topics in the NC Child Welfare manual.	

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COUNTY OVERSIGHT OF PLACEMENTS Ongoing casework is required for young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services. County child welfare agencies must make reasonable efforts to implement a plan for supports and services for independent living. Ongoing casework requirements include: • Development and maintenance of an individualized Transitional Living Plan that includes goals that will assist the young adult in transitioning into self-sufficiency; • Development of a Transition Plan 90 days prior to the young adult's 21st birthday, or planned exit from Foster Care 18 to 21; • Monthly contacts with the young adult, including quarterly in-home assessments of the young adult's living arrangements; • Periodic case review meetings to provide support to the young adult in developing and achieving the goals identified on his or her Transitional Living Plan; • Regular reviews and verification of eligibility conditions; and • Yearly credit checks. TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN *Purpose of the Transitional Living Plan in Foster Care 18 to 21* The purpose of the Transitional Living Plan (TLP) is to develop individualized goals that will assist the young adult in transitioning into self-sufficiency. It also includes specific information the young adult will need in preparation of exiting Foster Care 18 to 21. The TLP must be developed in partnership with the young adult and individuals identified as his or her supports. The goals and anticipated outcomes on the TLP will ensure the young adult's active and meaningful participation in one or more of the eligibility requirements for Foster Care 18 to 21. It will also outline independent living services, document the young adult's approved placement setting, include a plan for transitioning into adulthood and living independently, and provide steps the young adult, social worker, and other support team members are taking to ensure the young adult achieves independent living, including but not limited to:	

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housing, education and/or employment, money management, and maintaining permanent connections to caring and committed adults. The TLP will also include a fully developed backup plan in the event of an unplanned break in participation, as well as a transition plan for young adults approaching their 21st birthday, or a planned exit from Foster Care 18 to 21. *Development and Maintenance of the Transitional Living Plan* For information on the development and maintenance of Transitional Living Plans, see Required Services for Children. 90 DAY TRANSITION PLAN The Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110351) requires that within 90 days prior to a young adult being discharged from foster care at the age of 18 or older, the county child welfare agency must develop a personalized transition plan with the young adult in preparation of transitioning into adulthood. For young adults in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program, this would either be within the 90 days of the young adult turning 21 years of age, or within 90 days of a planned exit prior to turning 21 years of age. If the young adult makes an unplanned exit from the program, the transition plan is still required and must be provided to the young adult. The transition plan must: • Be executed during the 90-day period immediately prior to the date planned exit date; • Be young adult driven and as detailed as the young adult chooses; • Include specific options regarding how to access housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentoring services and continuing services, sexual health, services and resources to ensure the young adult is informed and prepared to make healthy living decisions about their lives; • Include information on the importance of designating someone to make health care treatment decisions on behalf of the young adult if the young adult is unable to do so and does not have or want a relative who would otherwise be so designated under North Carolina law to make such decisions; and	

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• Include information about how to execute a health care power of attorney, health care proxy, or other similar documents recognized under North Carolina law. A "Health Care Power of Attorney" document is provided by the North Carolina Department of Secretary of State and can be accessed at: https://www.sosnc.gov/forms/by_title/_advance_healthcare_directives. The Transition Plan for exiting Foster Care 18 to 21 services is an extension of the Transitional Living Plan. MONTHLY CONTACTS AND SUPERVISION County child welfare agencies must conduct monthly contacts with young adults in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program. Within a three-month cycle, two of the three contacts must be made face-to-face. The other contact within the three-month cycle can be made via email, phone call, or skype. The non-face-to-face contact must address the same items that would be addressed during a face-to-face contact and cannot occur in consecutive months. The face-to-face contacts can take place at a location agreed upon by the young adult and social worker. Quarterly in-home visits are required to assess the young adult's living arrangements and determine whether ongoing approval of the placement is appropriate. The only exception is young adults who reside in a college / university sponsored dormitory. In home assessments are not required for these type placements. Documentation of the monthly contact must be made on the Monthly Contact Record for Foster Care 18 to 21 and include the following: • Date and location of visit; • Progress made towards personal goals and activities on young adult's transitional living plan; • Access to community resources and services to enhance independent living skills; • Concerns that have been identified and services that are needed to address the concerns; and • Action steps that need to be taken prior to next visit and who is responsible. CASE REVIEWS	

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The case of every young adult receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services must have a support team who is responsible for developing and reviewing the young adult's transitional living plan on an ongoing basis. This is to be done through Transition Support Team (TST) meetings and documented on the young adult's Transitional Living Plan. The team should be led primarily by the young adult, who plays a large role in the development and maintenance of the Transitional Living Plan with input and help of the support team.
 	
Required Transition Support Team Participants
 	
The following are required participants of a young adult's support team:
 	
• Young adult
 	
• Social Worker
 	
• At least one person the young adult identifies as a support
 	
• Other participants may include, but are not limited to:
  ○ Service providers
  ○ Placement resource representative, if applicable
  ○ Other individuals the young adult identifies
 	
Note: The young adult must agree to each participant being a part of his or her support team.
 	
Required Timeframes for Transition Support Team Meetings
 	
TST meetings are required at the following intervals:
 	
• within 30 days of the young adult turning 18 years of age, but prior to the initial court hearing; **OR** if a re-entry, within 30 days of the young adult signing the Voluntary Placement Agreement and 90 days from that date;
• every three months thereafter;
• no more than 90 days prior to the young adult's 21st birthday, or planned exit from Foster Care 18 to 21; and	

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• whenever there is a significant change in circumstances, or a break in participation. **Note**: Young adults can request to meet with their Transition Support Team more frequently than required. *Purpose of the Transition Support Team Meetings* The primary purpose of the Transition Support Team is to provide support to the young adult in developing and achieving the goals identified on his or her Transitional Living Plan. During these meetings, the support team must: • Ensure the young adult has a sufficient social support system in place; • Review the short and long-term goals identified by the young adult and support team, and discuss action steps needed for the young adult to achieve those goals; • Discuss young adult's willingness to actively participate in an education program and/or employment in order to meet eligibility requirements; • Development of a backup plan in the event of unexpected breaks in participation; • Other factors affecting the young adult's transition to independence; and • Any issues/concerns the young adult would like to discuss. Young adults have the right to participate fully in every Transition Support Team meeting, and the meetings should be scheduled with consideration of the young adult's schedule. A timely written notice must be sent to the young adult, and other participants, prior to each meeting that includes the date, time and location of the meeting. Signatures of all persons attending the TST meeting must be recorded on the Transitional Living Plan. REVIEW OF PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY	

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Once program eligibility conditions have been established, the county child welfare agency is responsible for ensuring the young adult continues to meet the eligibility requirements on an ongoing basis. This is done through monthly contacts with the young adult, and information obtained is documented in the Monthly Contact Record for Foster Care 18 to 21. Written verification supporting the young adult's eligibility must be reviewed and documented in the record every six months. The court must review cases in which the young adult fails to meet one of the eligibility requirements in N.C.G.S. § 108A-48(c) for 60 or more consecutive days and determine if services should be terminated. In addition, young adults must immediately contact the county child welfare agency concerning any changes that would affect their eligibility such as the loss of a job, withdrawal from school, or completion of a program. CREDIT CHECKS FOR YOUTH 18-21 County child welfare agencies are responsible for assisting young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services with obtaining his or her credit report once every year until reaching 21 years of age. Since young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services are legal adults, permission must be obtained prior to the agency accessing credit reports. Young adults also have the right to refuse this service. If a young adult does refuse assistance in obtaining his or her credit report, this must be documented on the young adult's Transitional Living Plan. Credit reports can be accessed at www.annualcreditreport.com. The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) requires each nationwide Credit Reporting Agency (CRA) to provide adults with a free copy of their credit report once every 12 months. PLACEMENT OPTIONS Young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services may reside in a licensed foster care home or facility, a college or university dormitory, or in a semi-supervised independent living setting such as an apartment or a host home. Semi-supervised independent living settings must be approved by the director of the county child welfare agency. *Foster Care Home / Facility* For purposes of Foster Care 18 to 21, foster care homes and facilities are defined as licensed private homes or group facilities that provide continuing full-time care for young adults who are placed there by a county child welfare agency. Types of foster care homes and facilities include: • Family foster home • Therapeutic foster home • Group home	

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College / University Dormitory College or University Dormitory settings are buildings containing a number of private or semiprivate bedrooms for housing a number of persons in a community whose inhabitants are in school and commute to class, work, and/or other personal and social activities. These housing settings are affiliated with and managed by the College or University the young adult is attending. Dormitory settings are usually supervised by a dorm supervisor, or Resident Assistant (RA), who is responsible for conducting room checks, enforcing dorm rules, and ensuring adherence to the established norms and regulations. *Semi-Supervised Independent Living Settings* The definition of "Semi-Supervised Independent Living" associated with this policy is as follows: An unlicensed, least restrictive housing arrangement with approval and ongoing oversight by county child welfare agency staff and, as applicable, a contracted provider. Semi-supervised independent living settings are not licensed placements and do not have to have an identified "caretaker" or supportive adult. These placements should be selected based on the young adult's best interest, and an individual assessment of his or her needs, goals, and personal preference. These placements allow young adults to live on their own, while still receiving support services to help them become independent and self-sufficient. For the purposes of the Foster Care 18 to 21 program, semi-supervised independent living settings may include, but are not limited to, the following:	

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Semi-Supervised Housing / Living Arrangement	Description
Apartment	An apartment setting is a room or suite of rooms with kitchen facilities designed as a residence and generally located in a building occupied by more than one household. This setting may include on-site management.
Other Shared Housing Setting (House, Townhome, or other Rental)	Other shared housing settings are described as a number of people living cooperatively as an unrelated family in a house with an individual or shared bedroom with a limited number of persons to a bedroom. This involves people renting a house or townhome in the community, similar to an apartment situation. This may include on-site management.
Off-Campus University Sponsored Apartments	An off-campus University Sponsored Apartment setting is a room or suite of rooms with kitchen facilities designed as a residence and generally located in a building occupied by more than one household. These specific settings are managed by the University or College to which they are associated and may include on-site management.
Non-College Dormitory	A non-college dormitory setting is a building containing a number of private or semiprivate bedrooms for housing a number of persons in a community whose inhabitants are either employed and/or in school and commute to these and other personal and social activities. This is similar to a college dorm without the relationship to an institution of higher learning. This may include on-site management.
Host Home	A host home setting is a family home with a rented room or garage apartment with access to a kitchen and preferably laundry facilities in the home. The young adult agrees to the household rules and has the independence to come and go as needed for employment, school and other personal and social activities.
Extended Relative or Family Friend	This setting is in the home of an extended relative or close family friend who is willing to allow the young adult to reside in their private residence and support the young adult in his or her transition into adulthood.

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Health and Safety Standards for Semi-Supervised Independent Living Arrangements The following minimum standards regarding health and safety must be met when assessing semi-supervised independent living arrangements: 1. The young adult must have an appropriate sleeping area with a bed and room to store his or her belongings. The sleeping area has no more than two adults and is not a kitchen or bathroom. 2. The young adult must have access to a functional bathroom that contains at least one toilet, one sink, and one tub or shower maintained in safe, operating condition free from health hazards. 3. The young adult must have an area to prepare meals, with adequate storage for food free from health hazards. Appliances are in safe operating condition, if applicable. 4. Waste is stored, located and disposed of in a manner that will not permit the transmission of communicable disease or odors, create a nuisance, or provide a breeding place of food source for insects or rodents. 5. Home has adequate and functioning ventilation including heating systems, has running water and electricity. 6. Lighting and outlets are provided in rooms used by the young adult and no electrical hazards are present. 7. Home has a functioning smoke detector installed near the young adult's sleeping area and is audible in each room used by the young adult. 8. The home has at least one exit that ensures a safe, direct, emergency exit to the outside. 9. Indoor and outdoor halls, stairs, ramps and porches are free from obstructions and no structural damage that poses a safety hazard is observed. Living space appears to be safe and free from hazards.	

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TERMINATION OF FOSTER CARE 18 TO 21 SERVICES *Termination Reasons* Foster Care 18 to 21 services **must** be terminated when: • The young adult reaches 21 years of age; or • The young adult no longer meets the eligibility criteria; or • The young adult requests that services be terminated; or • The court has determined the young adult is not meeting the goals of the Transitional Living Plan and/or the young adult has violated the Voluntary Placement Agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21; or • The young adult has been absent from his / her approved placement for more than 14 days without prior approval from the county department of social services, and the court has terminated services. In the event the young adult is refusing to live in an approved placement, is not making reasonable efforts to meet the goals on the Transitional Living Plan, refuses to participate in the development of the Transitional Living Plan or participate in Transition Support Team Meetings, has become involved in criminal activity, or has violated the Voluntary Placement Agreement, the county child welfare agency must request that the case be heard in court to determine whether or not services should be terminated. This should only be done after the county child welfare agency has made reasonable efforts to engage the young adult in services. In addition, if the young adult no longer meets the eligibility criteria, he or she is allowed a 60-day grace period in which reasonable efforts to achieve eligibility must be made on the young adult's behalf, with the assistance of the county child welfare agency. A transition between eligibility requirements does not automatically disqualify young adults from the program, however, if the 60-day transition period is coming to an end and the young adult has not made reasonable efforts to meet eligibility requirements, the county child welfare agency must request the court to review the case and determine if the young adult's services should be terminated.	

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Any time Foster Care 18 to 21 services are terminated by the court, a 30-day written notice of termination of services must be sent to the young adult noting that their Foster Care 18 to 21 benefits and services will terminate 30 days from the date of the notice. The young adult has the right to motion the court to review the case if he or she disagrees with the decision to terminate services. A Motion for Review (AOC-J-140) form must be attached to the 30-day notice, and can be found at the following link: http://www.nccourts.org/forms/Documents/479.pdf. Instructions on how to motion the court for review must be included in the written notice. After termination, young adults can later re-enter the Foster Care 18 to 21 program at any time prior to their 21st birthday, as long as one of the eligibility requirements in N.C.G.S. § 108A-48(c) is met. NOTE: Medicaid must be notified whenever Foster Care 18 to 21 services have been terminated. RE-ENTRY INTO EXTENDED FOSTER CARE A young adult who was in foster care upon his or her 18th birthday may re-enter Foster Care 18 to 21 any time before reaching 21 years of age. Upon exiting foster care at age 18 or older, the young adult must be provided information on how to enter the Foster Care 18 to 21 program at a later date. If the young adult does choose to return, he or she may contact the county child welfare agency that previously held custody, or the agency in the county where the young adult is currently residing. The re-entry is considered a new foster care episode and eligibility determination is required. The county child welfare agency must verify program eligibility as well as determine funding eligibility. In order to re-enter Foster Care 18 to 21, the young adult must meet the following conditions: • The young adult is 18, 19, or 20 years old; • The young adult was in foster care upon his or her 18th birthday; • The young adult meets at least one of the eligibility requirements for Foster Care 18 to 21; • The young adult is willing to enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement and abide by the provisions of the agreement; and • The young adult agrees to reside in an approved placement.	

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If the young adult meets the above conditions, the county child welfare agency and the young adult must enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21, and the agreement is effective the date it is signed. A Transition Support Team meeting must be held within 30 days of entering into the VPA and the Transitional Living Plan must be updated at that time. A court hearing must be held within 90 days of the date the VPA is signed. ADULT ADOPTIONS North Carolina's adoption law does not restrict adoption to children. Adults may also be adopted. For purposes of the adoption law, an adult is defined as an individual who is at least 18 years old, or, if under the age of 18, is either legally married or has been emancipated under applicable state law. County child welfare agencies are responsible for facilitating the adult adoption of a young adult receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services in accordance with the provisions of N.C.G.S. §48, Article 5. For more information on adult adoptions see Adoptions in the NC Child Welfare manual. INTERCOUNTY PLACEMENTS AND TRANSFERS Young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services may be placed out-of-county for education and employment purposes. The placement county must continue to provide case management and supervision. County child welfare agencies can agree to courtesy supervision and must develop an Intercounty Agreement for the Provision of Foster Care 18 to 21 Services (addendum to the Voluntary Placement Agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21). Foster Care 18 to 21 cases can be transferred to the county in which the young adult resides if it is in the best interest of the young adult to do so, and both counties involved agree to the transfer. Young adults who reside in a county other than the one that he or she was in foster care as a minor, can contact either county to request to enter the Foster Care 18 to 21 program. The county that is contacted by the young adult must initiate Foster Care 18 to 21 services by entering into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with the young adult. In these instances, both counties, the county of origin as well as the county the young adult resides in, must develop an Intercounty Agreement for the Provision of Foster Care Services (addendum to the Voluntary Placement Agreement for Foster Care 18 to 21) at the time the Voluntary Placement Agreement is signed. This should be a partnership driven plan in which the young adult is involved in the planning process along with the two counties. The agreement must outline what each county will be responsible for and must be signed by each party involved. Counties must take the young adult's best interest into consideration when developing the agreement.	

Foster Care 18 to 21

Protocol – What you must do	Guidance
INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN (ICPC) AND FOSTER CARE 18 TO 21 The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children regulates the interstate movement of children to ensure protection and services when placed across states lines for foster care and adoption purposes. ICPC regulations must be followed when placing young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services across state lines. However, since ICPC uses the broad definition of "child" and does not specify an age restriction, receiving states may not agree to supervise Foster Care 18 to 21 placements. If the receiving state does agree to provide supervision and services for the Foster Care 18 to 21 placement, the placement must be made in accordance with and adhere to all existing ICPC regulations. If the receiving state is unwilling to provide supervision and services through ICPC, the county child welfare agency is responsible for Foster Care 18 to 21 services and benefits are met on an ongoing basis.	

END OF PERMANENCY PLANNING POLICY, PROTOCOL, & GUIDANCE SECTION