

## SECTION 3: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF DCS CASE PLANNING



### WHAT IS A CASE PLAN?

When you become involved with the Department of Child Safety, and it has been determined your case will remain open, you will be asked to participate in creating a written case plan along with the DCS Specialist. This case plan is an agreement between your family and the Department of Child Safety during your involvement with the agency. The case plan is created in a meeting called a case plan staffing. The DCS Specialist provides support and monitors your family's progress and the child's safety as you work toward your case plan goals.

Case plans should describe the following:

- The permanency goal and target date for achievement
- The reason why DCS is involved with your family
- The desired family behaviors
- The services to assist the family
- Child's needs, supports and services
- Educational stability needs and services
- Young Adult/Extended Foster Care, if applicable
- A visitation Plan

The case plan will describe the reason your child was removed from your home. It will describe what needs to happen for the Department of Child Safety to no longer be involved with your family. Case plan staffings provide an opportunity for all participants to discuss progress, exchange ideas and suggestions, and work together cooperatively to resolve family problems. Your involvement in the creation of the case plan is very important, you know your family best, and know what supports you will need to achieve positive changes.

At the conclusion of the case plan staffing, you and your team will be asked to sign the case plan. You will receive a copy of the case plan to keep. Your case plan must be reviewed, in a case plan staffing at least every 6 months, and at specified key decision points in the life of the case; for example, when a decision needs to be made about whether your child can return home. It is important for you to always remain in contact with your DCS Specialist in order to track your progress towards accomplishing the goals that have been outlined in the case plan.

### WHEN WILL MY CASE PLAN BE DEVELOPED AND REVIEWED?

The initial case plan will be created between you, your DCS Specialist and other team members:

- Within 60 days of the case being identified to receive in-home services; or
- Within 60 days of the child's removal from the home; or
- Within 10 working days of a child's placement with a Voluntary Placement Agreement.

All parties involved with your family, including service providers and DCS Specialists should meet to discuss the progress being made on the case plan goals, as well as to identify and resolve any barriers to progress. The case plan staffing should be scheduled with at least two weeks' notice to allow attendees to make arrangements to attend.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A CASE PLAN?

Case plans can be used like a road map. Your family's case plan will tell you where you are going during your involvement with the Department of Child Safety (for example: trying to keep your child at home, helping your child return home, or planning another permanent home for your child). It also gives directions on how to get there. A case plan can help you focus on what needs to change to help your family's situation improve by letting you know how far you have come and by keeping track of the progress that is being made.

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Case plan staffings are an opportunity for you to discuss your accomplishments with your entire team, and advocate for your family if the goals and services are not helping to move you forward.

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## **WHO IS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A CASE PLAN?**

A parent/guardian should always be involved with the Department of Child Safety Specialist in developing, writing, and signing the case plan. It is also important to include children who are old enough to participate (usually over the age of 12).

Often an entire team helps you and the Department of Child Safety Specialist develop the case plan during the case plan staffing. This team should include people that you know such as:

1. Service Providers
2. DCS Specialist & Supervisor
3. Parents
4. Foster Family
5. Attorneys Representing the Parents
6. GAL/Child's Attorney

Your participation in the case planning process is very important, as you are the expert on your child and family. Working cooperatively on the case plan with your Department of Child Safety Specialist gives you the chance to do the following:

- Explain the types of help you and your child may need
- Set goals that are important to you
- Ask for specific services
- Ask questions of your entire team
- Have a say in the type of care your child will receive
- Clarify your rights and responsibilities as a parent
- Understand the responsibilities and tasks of all of the members of the team

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES**

- Let your DCS Specialist know about important scheduling conflicts with your family such as your work schedule or visitation, in order to plan appointments in a way that does not interfere with other obligations.
- It is important that all members of the team hear your voice about your child and family. Some families find it helpful to write letters to the team or bring pictures to a staffing. Talk from your heart and say what you can.
- When you are ready to sign the case plan you should feel comfortable that it reflects what you, the DCS Specialist and your team have agreed upon.
- Request a copy of your case plan.
- You can have an advocate or someone you trust be present with you when the case plan is developed. Let your DCS Specialist know if you want someone else present.

## **WHAT KIND OF SERVICES CAN BE INCLUDED IN A CASE PLAN?**

A case plan staffing will be scheduled by the DCS Specialist to develop a written case plan at a time and location that is convenient for the family. The family and service team should include in the case planning:

- Assessment and identification of family strengths and protective capacities;
- Identification of behavioral changes necessary to enhance protective capacities and/or protective factors;
- Identification of services and supports recommended to achieve the identified behavioral changes; and
- Assessing the family's progress.

The DCS Specialist will provide, or refer the family for services and supports identified in order to enhance diminished caregiver protective capacities, strengthen family protective factors and reduce the likelihood of future abuse or neglect. Many of these services can be obtained through referrals to community organizations and agencies, faith-based and family support networks, and DCS contracted services.

Types of services:

1. Individual, Marriage or Family Counseling
2. Mental Health Services
3. Substance Abuse Services
4. Parenting Education
5. Job Training
6. Community Resources & Concrete Supports

### CAN MY FAMILY HAVE MORE THAN ONE CASE PLAN?

You can only have one case plan with the Department of Child Safety; however, you may have service plans with community partners. If you or your child is involved with several different agencies and/or the school system, you and your family could have multiple service plans. All of these service plans should support the goals identified in the case plan. Always ask for clarification about how the service plan is connected to the case plan if you have questions. Some examples of service plans may include:

- If you participate in mental health or substance abuse treatment, you might have a "treatment plan"
- If you participate in individual, marriage, or family counseling services, you might have a "treatment plan" or a "service plan"
- If you participate in parenting education or in-home support services, you may have a "service plan"
- If your child is under the age of three, has or is at risk of having a disability, and receives early intervention services, you might have an "Individualized Family Service Plan" (IFSP)
- If your child is over the age of three and needs special education services, your child might have an "Individualized Education Program" (IEP)

### HOW DO I MANAGE HAVING MORE THAN ONE SERVICE PLAN?

It is often the case that a family may have multiple service or treatment plans. It is important that your DCS Specialist be aware of all the providers and service agencies you are working with. Additionally, the services and treatment plans must all support the goals in your case plan. When assessing progress in your case plan, at least every 90 days, you and your DCS Specialist should meet with all of your providers and service agencies to determine if positive change is occurring within the family and to reevaluate the protective factors. The protective factors are:

- Social and emotional competency of children;
- Social connections;
- Concrete support in times of need;
- Knowledge of parenting and child development; and
- Parental Resilience

### WHAT WILL MY CASE PLAN LOOK LIKE?

**You, as the parent, should be actively involved in your case plan.** The case plan is an agreement between you, the Department of Child Safety, and the juvenile court (if they are involved) as to what needs to happen. It is your opportunity to voice what kind of help you need to reach the identified goals for you and your family.



The case plan is intended to identify and help you work on both **immediate and long-term issues that cause stress in your family.**

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Remember to communicate with your DCS Specialist about all of the different programs and services your family is participating in. Your DCS Specialist can assist you in streamlining services, avoiding duplication of expectations, coordinating appointments and ensuring all are in support of your case plan.

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Your family's case plan should be **reviewed regularly, at least every 6 months** by you and the Department of Child Safety Specialist. The plan will be flexible as your family's needs and progress change.

**Your case plan should be written clearly in simple, straightforward language.** If you do not understand what is written in your case plan, you can request that the case plan be written in a manner that makes sense to you.

**Goals in your case plan should be reasonable and achievable.** Steps for achieving each of these goals should be spelled out clearly, and timeframes will be understood by everyone.

Your family's case plan should include an understanding of your family's important values and beliefs. It will include services that will best fit your family's culture.

**Your case plan should be individually designed to fit your family.** Each identified goal and service will be tailored to meet your family's needs.

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES**

- If English is not your first language, and you are not comfortable reading or speaking English, ask your Department of Child Safety Specialist to have an interpreter available while you are creating the case plan. Ask for a written copy of your case plan in your first language.
- Keep track of your responsibilities and the agency's responsibilities so that you can show the court the responsibilities that you have fulfilled. You may want to keep all of this information in a journal, so that it is all in one place.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your case plan you are encouraged to discuss this with your DCS Specialist, the DCS supervisor, your attorney or service providers.

## **ARE THERE ANY OTHER TYPE OF PLANNING PROCESS THAT I MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN?**

Yes. Some families whose children are in an out of home placement become involved in a planning process called "concurrent planning."

## **WHAT IS CONCURRENT PLANNING?**

Concurrent planning means that DCS and the juvenile court work on two different permanency goals at the same time. The primary plan is to get a child and parents back together, reunification. However, at the same time, there may be a back-up plan for the child to live in another permanent home if he/she cannot return home to his/her own family. Sometimes the parent is not able to apply the lessons learned from the services offered in the case plan, and a back-up plan is needed. This is one way that DCS and the juvenile court try to shorten the amount of time it takes for children to find permanent homes, giving children stability in their living arrangements and day-to-day lives. When it seems that it will be difficult for a child to return home within a year of removal, concurrent planning often occurs.

## **DO ALL FAMILIES WHOSE CHILDREN ARE IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE HAVE A CONCURRENT PLAN?**

No. Concurrent planning is appropriate for many children in out-of-home care, but not for all.

## **HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY FAMILY HAS A CONCURRENT CASE PLAN?**

If concurrent planning occurs with your family, it will be stated in the case plan. As the parent, you will be fully advised that there is a concurrent plan.

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES**

- If you are uncertain of what this process means for you and your child, be sure to get answers from the Department of Child Safety Specialist assigned to work with your family, your attorney, and/or the court.
- It is important to help your child understand how concurrent planning may affect them.

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A child in foster care lives with a family who is willing to work closely with the parents to help the child return home. This family also is willing to become the child's permanent family, through adoption or legal guardianship, if he/she cannot return home.

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