

CASE PLANNING

QUICK-REFERENCE GUIDE | 06

OVERVIEW

The case plan provides a structured framework for addressing the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of the child and family. It outlines the steps necessary to achieve a safe and stable outcome, most often reunification or another permanent placement. The plan must be developed collaboratively with the family, service providers, and relevant stakeholders during a Family Team Meeting within 25 days of a child's entry into foster care. DFCS policy requires CASA to be notified when the case plan is being developed and given an opportunity to participate.

Effective case planning is collaborative and driven by a clear understanding of the family's strengths and needs. Plans should be specific, realistic, and measurable with clearly defined expectations, and services should directly address the conditions that led to removal. Placement decisions should support stability, connection, and permanency, and the plan should promote frequent family engagement and meaningful visitation. For older youth, planning should prioritize independence, transition readiness, and long-term support. When reunification is not possible, the plan must include actions to achieve an alternative permanent outcome. CASA's role is not to write the case plan but to advocate for its quality, monitor its implementation, and collaborate with DFCS and providers to ensure it effectively serves the child and family.

WHAT THE CASE PLAN MUST INCLUDE

Understanding what the law and DFCS policy require the case plan to contain helps CASA identify gaps, ask informed questions, and advocate effectively for a plan that is complete, individualized, and actionable. Written notice of the case planning meeting must be provided at least five days in advanced.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- A description of the circumstances that led to the child's entry into foster care
- Identification of the specific behaviors, conditions, or skills the parent or caregiver must demonstrate to ensure the child's safety
- A description of the services offered and provided to prevent removal and support reunification
- Clear, time-limited goals, action steps, and expected outcomes
- Development with both custodial and non-custodial parents, and with any incarcerated parents, unless the court has determined that participation is not in the child's best interest
- Documentation of participation by the parent, guardian, legal custodian, and child (when appropriate), including signatures or an explanation if unavailable

- A discussion of services that were investigated and considered but are not available, not likely to become available within a reasonable time, or are not safe or appropriate for the child or family
- Identification of the DFCS staff member responsible for implementation

PLACEMENT

- Consideration of the least restrictive, most family-like placement
- Proximity to the child's home, school, and community
- Justification for placement decisions, including out-of-state or distant placements
- Efforts to place siblings together or maintain contact

PERMANENCY PLANNING

- Clear identification of the permanency goal and steps to achieve it
- For youth age 16 and older, documentation of compelling reasons if APPLA is selected and evidence of efforts to achieve permanency, including documentation that the placement is following the reasonable and prudent parent standard and that the youth has opportunities to participate in age-appropriate activities

YOUTH AGE 14 AND OLDER

- Participation in case planning, including the option to involve up to two supportive adults chosen by the youth (CASA has the opportunity to participate outside their request)
- Documentation of the youth's rights related to education, health, visitation, court participation, receiving a consumer credit report, and staying safe and avoiding exploitation, along with the youth's signed acknowledgment
- A transition plan addressing housing, education, employment, and support services, developed within 90 days before the youth's 18th birthday and as detailed as the youth desires

WELL-BEING

- A visitation plan for parents, siblings, and appropriate family members, or an explanation of why visits are not scheduled
- Provisions to ensure educational stability:
 - ▶ Consideration of the suitability of the child's current educational setting and the placement's proximity to the child's school at the time of placement
 - ▶ Coordination with the appropriate local education agencies to help the child remain enrolled in the school at the time of placement
 - ▶ If remaining in that school is not in the child's best interest, cooperation between DFCS and the local education agencies to ensure immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school with prompt transfer of all educational records
- A plan for services provided to the child and the placement provider to address the child's needs while in foster care
- Relevant health and education information, including school records and grade-level performance, immunizations, known medical conditions, current medications, and names and addresses of health care and education providers



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CASA ROLE AND ADVOCACY

CASA's role in case planning is to advocate for a plan that is complete, child-focused, and effective and to monitor its implementation throughout the life of the case. Understanding what the case plan must include equips advocates to ask informed questions, identify gaps, and raise concerns constructively. When challenges arise, such as not receiving timely notice of a Family Team Meeting or limited opportunities to participate, CASA should approach those situations collaboratively and assume that omissions are unintentional. Proactive relationship-building with the case manager and a solution-focused communication style are the most effective tools for ensuring CASA's meaningful participation in the case planning process.



PRACTICE POINTS

Proactive Practice

- Ask early whether a Family Team Meeting has been scheduled.
- Support timely plan development and updates.
- Help facilitate communication and coordination when barriers arise.
- Promote a solution-focused approach that supports timely permanency.
- At case assignment, determine whether the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) may apply. If the child is a member of or eligible for membership in a federally recognized tribe, DFCS is required to engage the tribe in case planning. Flag this early; make sure the court is aware of the family's tribe affiliates, and monitor for compliance.

Participating in Case Planning & Advocating for Quality Plans

- Participate in Family Team Meetings and case plan development when notified.
- Advocate for clear, measurable goals rather than vague or generic requirements.
- Share observations about the child's needs, strengths, and family dynamics.
- Advocate for a plan that is child-focused, realistic, and actionable.
- Ensure the plan addresses the root causes of removal, not just symptoms.
- Advocate for the plan to directly address the conditions that caused dependency.
- Verify that the plan for Family Time (visitation) is adequate for a reunification plan.
- Advocate for meaningful inclusion of non-custodial and incarcerated parents in the planning process unless the court has determined otherwise.
- Promote timely reassessment and updates when circumstances change.

Collaboration and Problem-Solving

- Work collaboratively with DFCS, providers, and caregivers to address challenges.
- Elevate issues through appropriate channels when needed.
- Communicate concerns professionally and assume positive intent.

Monitoring and Accountability

- Monitor implementation of the case plan and compliance with court orders.
- Identify delays, gaps, or barriers and raise concerns promptly.
- Track whether services are provided to the child, family, and placement provider and whether progress is being made after referrals are made.
- Note whether the plan documents services that were considered but not available or not appropriate and whether those gaps are being addressed over time.

Court Advocacy

- Document concerns and recommendations in CASA reports for each hearing after discussing them with DFCS first.
- Use oral advocacy to present concerns, progress, and proposed solutions to the court.
- Understand that the juvenile court formally reviews and adopts the case plan at disposition. CASA's report and oral advocacy at that hearing directly influence whether the court accepts the plan or requires DFCS to revise it. This is one of the most impactful moments for CASA advocacy in the case planning process.
- Review Hearings will focus almost entirely on the progress of the parties on the case plan. Make sure to hold all the parties, both DFCS and the parents, equally accountable.



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