



FACT SHEET ONE: DEFINING FAMILY PERMANENCE

More than 28,000 foster youth age out of foster care or run away every year before they can be reunited with their parents, placed permanently with relatives, or adopted.¹ These vulnerable youth often lack an ongoing connection to family members and other caring adults; without this, and without a safety net in early adulthood, their futures are at risk.

Connecting young people with family provides them with security, or permanence. Family permanence is an enduring family relationship that:²

- Is safe and meant to last a lifetime;
- Offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership;
- Provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual well being; and
- Assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, and other significant adults, and to family history and traditions, race and ethnic heritage, culture, religion, and language.

PERMANENCE IS BOTH A GOAL OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND A VALUE

As a practice: Permanence strengthens or builds a young person's family relationships, prepares him or her for adulthood, and encourages resilience in the face of grief and trauma. This is accomplished while simultaneously attending to needs common to all young people, such as education and health care.

As a value: Permanence is based on the healing power of family, the need for a safety net during difficult times, and the importance of a foundation from which young people can successfully launch their own lives.

According to young people who have been in foster care, good permanency practice:³

- Involves the youth as a participant or leader in case planning;
- Ensures that each young person has a lifelong (preferably legal) connection with at least one adult who can serve in a parenting role; and
- Allows young people to maintain contact with important people, such as extended family and siblings.

Strategies child welfare systems can use to connect young people with families for life include:

- Provide preventive services with concrete family supports so that young people can avoid foster care;
- Help young people who have been removed from their homes reunite safely with parents or family members as quickly as possible;
- Place at-risk youth with relatives willing and able to care for them;
- Discharge young people to legal guardians such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other relatives, providing financial supports if necessary;
- Facilitate adoption with relatives or nonrelatives; and
- Ensure that family-building and relationship-focused efforts continue for those youth who have alternative planned living arrangements (APPLAs) as they are being prepared for adulthood.

¹ Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)
www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, "A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanence and Preparation for Adulthood," in collaboration with California Permanency for Youth Project, Casey Family Programs, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Available at www.caseyfamilyservices.org

³ Sacramento County, California, Department of Health and Human Services. "There's No Place Like Home: A Guide to Permanency Options for Foster Youth" www.sacdhs.com/CMS/download/pdfs/CPS/youth%20permi.pdf