



## FOSTER CARE JOURNEY

A child's journey through the child welfare system, as it relates to the placement of children in out-of-home care, follows a general flow. The decision to remove a child from her home is based on the investigation of alleged abuse and neglect by child welfare professionals, or a family's request for assistance. Reports and referrals may be received from mandated reporters (eg, physicians, social workers, teachers, or anyone who has regular contact with children as a part of their job responsibilities), or private citizens.

Investigations, assessments, and service planning may include information from the parents (birth or foster) or kin, treating health care professionals, extended family, teachers, or others in the educational system, therapists or counselors known to the child and family, and the reporter of the alleged abuse or neglect. The identity of a reporter of alleged abuse and neglect may be protected upon request.

After removal, service planning may involve the same professionals or combination of professionals as appropriate. Planning for services and the assessment of service needs and outcomes is a continuous process leading to the achievement of permanence for a child. Most children will have an advocate or *Guardian ad Litem* to represent their best interest; this individual participates in court hearings and planning for the child. Birth parents may also have legal representation. Health care professionals may be called upon to testify during some court proceedings — usually the adjudicatory phase of a court hearing. Health care professionals testimony is critical to the court, social workers, and family in understanding the magnitude and implications of serious physical injuries or neglect to the child.

Mandated periodic service and permanency planning, as well as court reviews, assure that adequate services are being provided to meet child's and family's needs, that progress is being made to restore family functioning and assure continued protection of the child, and that the child's well-being (eg, health, education, family connections, mental health, educational needs) is addressed.

The objective of investigations, assessments, service planning, and permanency planning is to assure the safety and well-being of the child ensuring the child's placement in a stable, safe, and long lasting (permanent and secure) living arrangement.

### **Reports of alleged abuse and/or neglect may come in several forms:**

- Every night
- Family self referral or request for assistance
- Referral from another jurisdiction
- Referral from an outside source (eg, pediatrician, teacher, neighbor, etc)

### **The report may lead to one of the following:**

- Child protective service investigation
- Comprehensive child and family assessment
- Preventive services



**Once a child is removed and placed in foster care, the initial service plan during placement and the determination of the child's permanency goal shall involve the following:**

- Parents
- Foster parents
- Extended family
- Age-appropriate child
- Social worker
- Therapist and/or counselor
- Educational representative
- Physician
- Child advocate (CASA, Guardian Ad Litem)
- Parent advocate
- Family court system

**Planning for permanency shall include the following:**

- Continuous assessment of services and plan outcomes and needs
- Implementation of changes in permanency plan and services
- Periodic court review

**Possible permanency plans include:**

- Reunification with parents or initial primary caregiver
- Adoption
- Guardianship legal custody to relative
- For whom the above options are not possible, emancipation from foster care once reaches age 18-21 years, depending on state

