

# California Partnership Plan for Children in Out-of-Home Care

## Teamwork, Respect, Nurturing, Strong Families

### Introduction

The Partnership Plan is an action tool designed for you to use to establish a strong team relationship between resource/foster/kinship caregivers and child welfare staff in order to help children in foster care thrive. The Plan is a cooperative effort and was developed jointly by the Quality Parenting Initiative, 20 participating California counties, the County Welfare Director's Association and the California Department of Social Services. The purpose of the plan is to more clearly set out responsibilities and expectations for resource families/foster families and kinship caregivers, case workers, the courts and the Department of Social Services in working together for the benefit of children and families.

Most importantly, the goal of the Plan is to ensure that every child in our system receives excellent care while he or she is out of home and that all children and families receive the support they need to heal. This goal can only be accomplished through a respectful partnership in which the needs of the child take precedence over the interests of the adults or demands of the system.

This plan can be very helpful in several ways. Some possibilities for use are:

- 1) At the time a child is first placed to discuss what his or her needs are and how they will be met. Discussing each element of the plan in this context can avoid confusion and disagreements and lay the ground work for a successful working relationship.
- 2) To make expectations of new and existing caseworkers and caregivers concrete. Incorporating the responsibilities and expectations into recruitment, assessment, pre-service and ongoing training are important opportunities to shape and discuss future practice.
- 3) To evaluate success in meeting responsibilities and expectations necessary for successful teamwork and accomplishment of the case plan goals.

We welcome your questions and comments and hope that you find this Partnership Plan a helpful tool in your work serving children and families.

All of us are responsible for the well being of children in the custody of child welfare agencies. The children's caregivers along with the California Department of Social Services, county child welfare agencies, private foster family agencies, and contractors and staffs of these agencies undertake this responsibility in partnership, aware that none of us can succeed by ourselves.

Children need normal childhoods as well as loving and skillful parenting that honor their loyalty to their biological family and their need to develop and maintain permanent lifelong connections. The purpose of this document is to articulate a common understanding of the values, principles, and relationships necessary to fulfill this responsibility. The following commitments are embraced by all of us. This document in no way substitutes for or waives statutes or rules; however, we will attempt to apply these laws and regulations in a manner consistent with this agreement.

## Caregivers and Agency Staff Work Together as Respected Partners

1. Caregivers and child welfare agency staff will work together in a respectful partnership to ensure that the care we provide to our children supports their healthy development and gives them the best possible opportunity for success.
2. Caregivers, the family and agency staff will conduct themselves in a professional manner, will share all relevant information promptly, and will respect the privacy and confidentiality of all information related to the child and his or her family.
3. Caregivers, the family, and agency staff will participate in developing the plan for the child and family, and all members of the team will work together to implement this plan. Caregivers will participate in all team meetings and court hearings (including review and post-permanency hearings) related to the child's care and future plans. Agency staff will support and facilitate caregiver participation through timely notification, an inclusive process, and the provision of alternative methods of participation for caregivers who cannot be physically present.
4. The Agency will honor and respect the caregiver's right to take a time-limited break from accepting the placement of children into their family without fear of adverse consequence from the agency.
5. Caregivers will work in partnership with agency staff to obtain and maintain records that are important to the child's well being including, medical records, school records, photographs, and records of special events and achievements.

## Nurturing Children and Youth

1. Excellent parenting is an expectation of caregivers. Caregivers will provide and agency staff will support excellent parenting. Excellent parenting includes:
  - a loving commitment to the child and the child's safety and well being;
  - equal participation of the child in family life;
  - awareness of the impact of trauma on behavior;
  - respect for the child's individuality, including likes and dislikes;
  - appropriate supervision;
  - positive, constructive methods of discipline;
  - involvement of the child in the community;
  - a commitment to enable the child to lead a *normal life*;
  - encouragement of the child's strengths; and
  - providing opportunities to develop the child's interests and skills.
2. Agency staff will provide caregivers with all available information in a timely manner to assist them in determining whether they are able to appropriately care for the child. Children will

be placed only with caregivers who have the ability and willingness to accept responsibility for caring for the child in light of the child's culture, religion and ethnicity, physical and psychological needs, sexual orientation, gender identification and expression, family relationships, and any special circumstances affecting the child's care. Agency staff will assist them in obtaining the support, training, and skills necessary for the care of the child.

3. Caregivers must be willing and able to learn about, be respectful of and support the child's connections to his/her religion, culture, and ethnicity.
4. Agency staff will provide caregivers with information on expectations for excellent parenting. Caregivers will have access to and be expected to take advantage of all training they need to improve their skills in parenting children who have experienced trauma due to neglect, abuse, or separation from home; to meet these children's special needs; and to work effectively with child welfare agencies, the courts, biological families, the schools, and other community and governmental agencies.
5. Agency staff will provide caregivers with the services and support they need to enable them to provide quality care for the child. Caregivers will be expected to identify, communicate, and seek out their needs without fear of judgment or retaliation.
6. Caregivers will fully incorporate the child/youth into their family, including equal participation in family activities such as vacations, holiday celebrations, and community activities. Agency staff will support families in overcoming barriers to full participation in family life and activities.
7. Once the caregiver accepts the responsibility of caring for the child, the child will remain with the caregiver unless:
  - the caregiver is clearly unable to care for him/her safely or legally;
  - the child and his/her family of origin are reunified;
  - the child is to be placed with a relative or non-relative extended family member;
  - the child is being placed in a legally permanent home in accordance with the case plan or court order; or
  - the removal is demonstrated to be in the child's best interest as determined through consultation with agency staff and other resource partners.
8. If the child/youth must leave the caregiver's home for one of the above reasons and in the absence of an unforeseeable emergency, the transition will be accomplished according to a plan developed jointly between the caregiver and agency staff. The development of the plan should involve cooperation and sharing of information among all persons involved. This transition will respect the child's developmental stage, psychological needs and relationship to the caregiver family, ensure they have all their belongings, and allow for a gradual transition from the caregiver's home, and, if possible, for continued contact with the caregiver after the child leaves.

## **Supporting Families**

1. When the plan for the child includes reunification, caregivers and agency staff will work together to support that plan and to provide continuity for the child by assisting the biological parents in improving their ability to care for and protect their child, including as appropriate, participation in medical/related care, school, and other important activities. Agency staff will support caregivers in the reunification process, respect their input, and will not *retaliate* against them as a result of this advocacy.
2. When the plan for the child includes adoption, relative placement, or a move to a new foster family, with the support of the agency, the existing and the prospective caregiver will work together, with the support of the agency, to facilitate a smooth transition by sharing information about the needs, experiences and preferences of the child. To provide continuity for the child, prospective families are encouraged to participate in medical/related care, school, and other important activities. Continued contact between the child and the initial foster family is encouraged as long as it is in the child's best interest. The transition plan from foster care to adoption or relative home shall focus on meeting the developmental and other needs of the child.
3. Caregivers will respect and support the child's ties to family (parents, siblings, extended family members), and other significant relationships, and will assist the child in maintaining these relationships through facilitating appropriate visitation and other forms of communication in accordance with the case plan. Agency staff will provide caregivers with the information, guidance, training, and support necessary for fulfilling this responsibility.

## **Strengthening Communities**

1. Caregivers will advocate for children with the child welfare system, the court, and community agencies, including schools, child care, health and mental health providers, and employers. Agency staff will support them in doing so, respect their input and will not retaliate against them as a result of this advocacy.
2. Caregivers will participate fully in the child's medical, psychological, and dental care, including:
  - identifying doctors and needed specialists;
  - scheduling regular and necessary appointments;
  - accompanying children to appointments;
  - sharing information with medical, psychological and dental professionals as needed to provide care to the child and as permitted by law;
  - supporting and comforting children during and after visits; and
  - implementing any needed follow-up care in the home.

Agency staff will support and facilitate this participation. Caregivers and agency staff will share information with each other about the child's health and well being.

3. Caregivers will support the child's school success through activities, including:
  - participating in school activities and meetings, including IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings, back to school nights and other school events;
  - assisting with school assignments;
  - accessing and supporting tutoring;
  - meeting with teachers, including teacher conferences;
  - coordinating school transportation;
  - working with the biological parent as educational rights holder or educational representative or surrogate if one has been appointed;
  - encouraging and supporting the child's participation in extra-curricular activities; and
  - Agency staff will support and facilitate this participation. Caregivers and agency staff will share information with each other about child's progress and needs, academic performance, behavioral functioning and issues regarding school placement.
  
4. Caregivers will provide developmentally appropriate opportunities to allow children and youth to learn and practice life skills and have hands-on experiences in preparation for transition to adulthood, including:
  - participation in family decisions;
  - routine age appropriate household activities and chores;
  - conflict resolution;
  - money management and financial planning;
  - assistance with job and career exploration/development;
  - assistance with higher education and financial aid exploration/processes;
  - obtaining housing;
  - obtaining legal documents; and
  - support the youth in accessing and taking advantage of agency and community resources.

Caregiver Signature:

Name:

Agency Staff Signature:

Name:

Date: