

MAKING IT POSSIBLE



N C C W E

National Center for Child Welfare Excellence

at the Silberman School of Social Work

Building and translating practice knowledge and evidence into child welfare excellence

Permanency Pathways

For Older Youth in Care

Facilitator's Guide

Facilitator's Curriculum Guide

Modules 1-6

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Introduction

This one day curriculum was developed by the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence (NCCWE) to provide a focused overview toward improving permanency outcomes for older youth in care. “Making it Possible—Permanency Pathways for Older Youth in Care” seeks to shift long held assumptions about what can and cannot happen for older youth in care and provide concrete steps for achieving positive permanency outcomes. One of the biggest barriers to successful permanency for older youth is that child welfare professionals have traditionally not pursued permanency for this population, and in fact many do not even believe it possible. Studies dating back to Cornell University’s research in the late 90’s found that 41% of workers did not believe that older youth were adoptable (Avery, R.). We continue to struggle with this challenge, especially as it contrasts so starkly with the 41% of emancipated youth who state they would have wanted to be adopted. (Courtney, et.al.) In a field that focused primarily on permanency for younger children and mistook independent living services for youth permanency, it is no wonder that child welfare staff continue to struggle with even believing that positive outcomes are possible for older youth. Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, Director of the NCCWE states, “All children and youth need permanent, loving families—not just babies and young children—and as a child welfare profession we need to continue to work to establish these meaningful connections for every teenager and young adult in foster care.” But to succeed we have to believe it is possible. “Making it Possible” is about opening up possibilities, thinking out of the box, and mobilizing youth-centered child welfare teams to achieve permanency.

In developing this curriculum we utilized content from several significant sources. Efforts were made to cite sources throughout the curriculum. However we want to recognize the following materials, which influenced the writing of the overall curriculum. Many of these resources are available on the internet.

Youth Permanency Toolkit

National Center for Child Welfare Excellence

<http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/youth-permanency>

“Unpacking the “NO” of Permanency for Older Adolescents”

Presentation by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon at the Western Region, Virginia on September 13, 2013

Emancipated Youth Connections Project: Final Report/Toolkit

The California Permanency for Youth Project

Cheryl Jacobson

A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood. Lauren L. Frey with Sarah B. Greenblatt and Jim Brown. 2005.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, Director of the NCCWE for his vision and guidance in developing this competency-based training, and his long term leadership and commitment toward youth permanency.

Competencies and Learning Objectives

Competencies:

Knows and understands federal, state, and local policies and legislation related to permanency for young people in out-of-home care.

Knows and understands the definition of youth permanency and the importance of developing permanent connections.

Knows and understands the four permanency pathways for youth in foster care.

Knows how to engage and prepare youth for permanency.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the impact current federal, state, and local policies and legislation have on permanency practices for older youth.
- Describe the various definitions of youth permanency.
- Explain the consequences of not developing permanent connections.
- Explain the importance of developing permanent connections.
- Explain the four pathways to permanency: reunification, kin/fictive guardianship, adoption, and APPLA.
- Compare and contrast the four permanency pathways.
- Describe specific strategies to develop permanency for each pathway.
- Explain the four permanency pathways including the preferred sequence for permanency.
- Explain the importance of developmental readiness when exploring permanent connections.
- Appreciates the importance of actively engaging young people in planning for permanency.
- Describe each permanency pathway and list two strategies for engaging youth.
- Apply engagement strategies to case examples.

Day-at-a Glance

Activity Name	Time	Methods	Materials Needed
Activity One: Making Permanency Possible	30 minutes	Introductions and Attachment Icebreaker	Easel pad and markers Handout: Stories of Our Lives Handout: Competencies and Objectives Prepared Easel Pad Page
Activity Two: Permanency—How Did We Get Here?	60 minutes	Pairs Lecture Guided Discussion Group activity	Handout: Child Welfare Legislation and Policies Since 1974 Handout: The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Handout: How Are We Doing? Are We Making it Possible?
Activity Three: A Closer Look at the Meaning of Permanency	75 minutes	Vignette Small Group Activity Guided Group Discussion	Handout: What Youth Say About Permanency Handout: What the Grown-Ups Say About Permanency Handout: State/County Definition of Permanency Handout: Beyond the Definition—A Framework for Youth Permanency
Activity Four: Navigating the Permanency Pathways	75 minutes	Vignette Guided Group Discussion Group Activity	Handout: Permanency Pathways Handout: Permanency Pathways--Reunification Handout: Reunification—Making it Possible for Older Youth Handout: Permanency Pathways—Guardianship Handout: Guardianship—Making it Possible for Older Youth Handout: Permanency Pathways—Adoption Handout: Adoption—Making it Possible for Older Youth Handout: Permanency Pathways APPLA Handout: APPLA—Making it Work for Older Youth Handout: How Permanent is a Permanency Goal?
Activity Five: Engaging to Make it Possible	90 minutes	Guided Activity Group Discussion Small Group Work with Case Scenarios	Handout: Developmental Considerations that may Impact Permanency for Older Youth Handout: Youth Engagement—Making Permanency Possible Handout: Youth-Drive, Family-Centered Permanency Meetings Handout: Three Houses Handout: Making Reunification Possible—Family Finding Handout: Finding Permanent Resources—Timeline Handout: Finding Permanent Resources—My Social World Handout: Finding Permanent Resources—My Support System Handout: Getting Behind the “No” Handout: Preparing Makes it Possible—3-5-7 Handout: Scenarios—Making Permanency Possible
Activity Six: Transfer of Learning	10 minutes	Transfer of Learning activity	Handout: Action Plan Evaluation

Activity One: Making Permanency Possible

Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

Easel pad

Markers

Handout: Competencies and Objectives

Handout: Stories of Our Lives

Prepared Easel Pad Page:

INTRODUCTIONS

Name

Location

Job

Share one permanency fact about the person

Facilitator's Notes:

Welcome the participants to the training day, *Making it Possible: Permanency Pathways for Older Youth in Care*. Facilitator should provide their background information and share professional experiences related to working with children, youth and families in the child welfare system; as well as a personal commitment to permanency planning.

Explain that this training was developed by the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence with the goal of improving permanency outcomes for older youth in care.

Set ground rules for the session.

Examples of Ground Rules:

- Only one conversation at a time.
- Training starts at _____. Please be on time.
- Respect one another's opinions.
- Participants need to tell facilitator if they are lost or do not understand.

Direct participants to the resources in their Participant Notebook and *Handout: Stories of Our Lives*. Ask participants to work with a partner to complete the interview on the handout. Tell participants they will each have around 3 minutes to interview their partner. Encourage participant to take notes as they will be asked to introduce their partner.

Call time after 3 minutes (or give an extra minute if participants are still engaged) and ask that they now switch roles. Call time again after 3 minutes (or give an extra minute if participants are still engaged).

Refer to the prepared easel pad page “Introductions” and ask participants to introduce their partners as you go around the circle-- starting with the partner’s name, where they work, their role or job, and one important permanency fact about the person.

Thank participants for sharing and emphasize some of the most important learning points or stories that were shared during the activity. These points are likely to include some of the following:

- So many things in our lives as adults, whether holiday traditions or activities or things we carry with us, relate to important relationships and connections.
- Regardless of our age or developmental stage, our connections to our family and friends remain paramount.
- Much of what we do in life is about building, maintaining, and remembering these important connections.
- Almost all of the artifacts represented something significant about our relationships with important people in our lives.

Challenge participants to think of permanency as something that is needed by everyone of all walks and stages of life because permanency is about connections, relationships, and feeling loved and cared for; as well as having a sense of who is going to be there today and tomorrow.

Ask participants why they think this activity was conducted as a way to start the training.

Encourage the following responses:

- To get us thinking about permanency and why it is important.
- To get us to relate to permanency on a personal level.
- To help us see that permanency is not just for little kids—that in fact, everyone needs to feel a sense of permanence.

Acknowledge the responses and emphasize the following:

- In this training we are going to be talking about permanency with older youth and young adults.
- In child welfare permanency has traditionally been presented as something very important for children. However, as children aged and became young adults, subtle assumptions were sometimes made: that teens could not be adopted, that it was “too late”, that energies were best directed toward younger children, that at a certain age kids just need to “get it” and go on with their lives, and finally, an assumption that adults don’t need permanency.)
- From the beginning we wanted to challenge these subtle assumptions, and a good way to do that was to have you personally share pieces of your life to demonstrate that the “stories of our lives” are about permanency—our need to belong, to be connected, and to be loved. It is not something we outgrow and it is not something that becomes trivial.
- Knowing this on a very personal level helps us to better understand the importance of permanency for our older youth and young adults.
- Gerald P. Mallon, DSW, a long time child welfare advocate for permanency, has referred to the process of dispelling these subtle assumptions as, “Unpacking the No” and has challenged child welfare professionals to develop the tools and skills to say “yes” to permanency for our older youth.
- While certainly making some strides in the area of permanency for older youth, especially in terms of raising the issue, our national statistics (and state statistics if this is the case) show that these subtle assumptions must still be prevalent. While perhaps we may have learned to “talk the talk” by acknowledging that we need to have better outcomes for older youth, in reality it appears we are not “walking the walk.”
- This training is about giving you the motivation, commitment, knowledge, and tools to “walk the walk” and get to “yes” for permanency for youth. Getting to “yes” is all about “making it possible.”

Refer participants to the *Handout: Competencies and Objectives* and review with the group.

Note that the title of this training day is very important. “Making it Possible” refers to the importance of believing that permanency outcomes are possible, that older youth want to be adopted and that there are people who want to adopt them, that sometimes youth can return to parents that the child welfare system gave up on years ago, that there are caring adults who can and will commit to youth, and there are youth who deeply desire to belong to a family. “Permanency Pathways” refers to the fact that there are identified best practices associated with each permanency goal that will help ensure that the possibilities are realized.

State that this training will first explore the laws, policies, and practices that have had an impact on child welfare's approach to permanency; then move to the four pathways for youth permanence; and finally address skills and practice tools to maneuver those pathways.

Ask if there are any questions or comments.

Activity Two: Permanency—How Did We Get Here?

Time:	60 minutes
Competency:	Knows and understands federal, state, and local policies and legislation related to permanency for young people in out of home care.
Learning Objective:	Explain the impact of current federal, state, and local policies and legislation on permanency practices for older youth.
Materials:	Handout: Child Welfare Legislation and Policies Since 1974 Handout: The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

The facilitator needs to compile county and or state data related to permanency, and especially regarding permanency of youth age 14 and over to present with the presentation of the national data in this session.

Sources: *Youth Permanency Toolkit. A Brief History: Youth Permanency.* Mallon, G., Morse, J., Freundlich, M, and Frey, L. National Center for Child Welfare Excellence. Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College. 2013.
<http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/youth-permanency>

Fact Sheet: Child and Family Service Reviews. Children's Bureau.
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index>.

Major federal Legislation Concerned with Child Protection, Child Welfare, and Adoption. Child Welfare Information Gateway.

Concept and History of Permanency in U.S. Child Welfare. Child Information Gateway.

Timeline of Major Child Welfare Legislation. Child Welfare League of America.

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. National Resource Center for Youth Development.
<http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu.chafee>.

Facilitator's Notes:

Note that historically child welfare practice has been heavily guided by federal legislation and it is interesting to look at how this legislation has influenced and guided us to get where we currently are in practice. Note that as a result of each piece of legislation, practice evolved to a different place, sometimes surfacing new challenges and/or exacerbating existing challenges, leading in turn to the need for new legislation.

Refer participants to *Handout: Child Welfare Legislation and Policies Since 1974*, noting that this training will not cover all the legislation regarding children's services, but will address the major pieces of legislation that have had an impact on permanency planning and especially permanency for older youth.

Explain that the legislation is on the left side and an explanation is on the right side; and that some random historical information is included on the far right in the small italics writing. Explain that these interesting bits of historical information are not necessarily relevant to child welfare, but rather serve as a reference to the time period to help participants think about what life was like at that time.

Ask participants to take a moment before reviewing the legislation on the timeline and identify two or three significant points on the timeline that are relevant in their lives—such as the date they began working in child welfare, got married, moved, had a child graduate from high school etc. Instruct participants to write these directly in on the timeline. Encourage participants to think about how what was happening in their own lives may have influenced how they experienced things happening in child welfare, and how all of these things impact current practice.

Note: Proceed quickly through the earlier part of the timeline as you are only trying to establish a context for the more recent legislation that is significant in permanency planning for youth. If participants are familiar with the historical development of permanency planning legislation you may simply refer to the earlier pieces of legislation and begin a more detailed presentation with the 1997 passage of ASFA.

Note that the timeline begins in 1974, at a time when the Viet Nam War had just ended and Gerald Ford had assumed the presidency. It is sometimes surprising to people that it was not until the mid 70's that Congress enacted the first major federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect. Explain that the legislation was called The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and that it established mandatory child abuse reporting and investigation procedures.

Ask participants what unintended consequences might have occurred as a result of this legislation.

Ensure that the following is covered:

- States implementation of mandatory reporting resulted in large increases of child abuse and neglect reports, which in turn resulted in rapid growth in the number of children who were removed from their homes and placed in foster care.
- This also resulted in a large number of Native American children being removed from their families and many were placed in non-Native American foster cares.
- The higher number of children in care, combined with a weak focus on reunification or adoption services, resulted in youth staying in care for longer periods of time.
- Higher numbers of children in care, combined with longer stays in care, resulted in multiple placements for many children and what became known as “foster care drift”—children moving from home to home with no long term plan for stability.

Note that in response to these unintended consequences two significant pieces of legislation were passed:

- The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978 was the next significant piece of legislation to pass due to the high concern about the number of Native American children being placed outside of their families and communities. ICWA provided guidelines for family reunification and to better ensure placement within the Native American Community.
- The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (P.L.96-272) was passed in 1980 to address concerns of unnecessary separations from families, foster care drift, and lack of reunification efforts or adoption efforts. This was essentially the beginning of the modern child welfare system, which established a federal role in the administration, and oversight of services, including requiring reviews, timeframes on permanency, state plans, adoption assistance, and court reviews.

Point out that the next significant piece of legislation passed was the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program in 1993 in response to rising numbers of children in foster care and concerns that too little was being done to prevent placement and reunify children with their families. Home-based services and increased efforts to keep children with their families were emphasized.

Ask participants if they can identify what may have been some unintended consequences of the Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program.

Encourage the following response:

Concerns arose that the child welfare system was biased toward family preservation at the expense of children's safety and well-being, and there was great concern that attention and resources were not devoted to adoption as a permanency option for children in care.

Acknowledge the responses and note that due to these concerns The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was passed which sought to expedite permanency decisions through establishing tighter timeframes, implementing reviews, increasing adoptions, and ensuring that child safety, permanency, and well-being were all taken into account for any child welfare decisions. Note that the concepts of "safety, permanency, and well-being" remain relevant to current practice.

Note that up until this point the challenge of permanency for older youth was not significantly addressed in legislation. For permanency planning purposes the goal of "independent living" was often utilized for older youth in foster care when no other plan was identified (such as return home or adoption).

Ask participants if they can identify any concerns with the goal of "independent living" as it relates to permanency planning.

Encourage the following responses:

- In some cases independent living was identified as the goal simply because the child was older. "Aging out" of the system was viewed as the most reasonable option rather than seeking to establish a permanent goal with a family through guardianship or adoption.
- Independent living was the "default", the goal that was identified when everyone gave up.
- Independent living does not address the youth's need for permanent connections. At its best it referred to ensuring that the youth had a set of specific skills needed to live on one's own—like cooking, shopping, budgeting etc. But we all know that permanency is much more than a set of skills.

Note that in part, out of recognition for the concerns just identified, as well as a sense that ASFA had not met the needs of older youth, The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was created in 1999 with the passage of the Foster Care Independence act.

Refer participants to *Handout: The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program* and briefly review noting that due to the importance of the Foster Care

Independence Act the group will spend a few minutes exploring the purpose of the Chafee program.

Explain that the Chafee programs in each state continue to provide a range of supports to older youth (including education vouchers) and that the group will look specifically at these supports and how they can be used to support permanency. Also note that each state has its own policies and procedures for the program and encourage participants to look for their state's web site or state specific information on the aspects of the Chafee Program.

Refer participants back to the timeline and point out that the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is next, the result of a rule that became effective in March 2000 enabling the Children's Bureau of the federal government to ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements and identify what was happening with children in the child welfare systems through a monitoring system.

Ask participants how they think the CFSR Reviews may have impacted permanency planning efforts for youth in care.

Encourage the following response:

CFSR Reviews in some states may have highlighted poor permanency outcomes for older youth in care. At the same time, CFSR Reviews may have identified best practices and strategies opening up the opportunity for shared learning and more innovative practice.

Summarize the responses by noting that the CFSR Reviews, as well as the increasing prevalence of outcome studies (often indicating poor outcomes for older youth), helped lead to a greater focus on permanency for older youth in the early to mid-2000's. The reviews also identified strategies and practices that were effective in achieving permanency outcomes. These will be noted this afternoon in our discussion of effective ways to engage youth and families toward permanency.

Introduce the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 as a means for the federal government and the child welfare field to give increased attention to youth in foster care who are transitioning to adulthood and need a permanent connection.

Make the following points regarding how the Fostering Connections law promotes permanency planning and assists older youth in achieving permanence:

- Supports guardianship by relatives through extending guardianship assistance payments to relative caregivers, extending Chaffee services (including training and education vouchers) to youth who leave foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption after age 16, and permitting waivers on a case by case basis for a non-safety licensing standards in a relative foster home.

- Supports reconnection with family members through kinship navigator programs, efforts to find biological families, family group decision making, and residential family programs.
- Permitted states to extend services to youth in foster care up to age 21.
- Improved adoption assistance and incentive payments.
- Required transition plans 90 days prior to a youth's emancipation.
- Authorized additional grants to Tribes to promote permanency.

Ask participants if anyone would like to share something from their personal history that has impacted how they reacted to certain legislation or that influenced their practice in a certain way. (Note: The trainer needs to be prepared to provide a personal example if the group does not respond. An example might be, "My first child graduated from high school in 2008. I don't think I fully understood how difficult it was to fund education and to prepare a child for adulthood until we had our own experience. I knew about the Chafee Act but I just didn't get how hard it was for these kids.)

Summarize the experiences by noting that it is always important to look at our own personal experiences as we look at how practice evolves and how we are impacted not just by legislation and policies, but also by our own life events.

Refer participants to *Handout: From Legislation to Practice* and conduct a pairs activity that is designed to take them back to the year 1975 before many of the legislative reforms had been put in place. Instruct participants to read each of the brief scenarios, discuss how the situation might be very different today, and identify the specific laws that have made the most significant impact on the situation.

Process the activity by reading each of the scenarios aloud and then asking for two or three pairs to share their responses to the scenario.

The following may be of help as you process the activity:

Mario turns 18 years old today. His foster parents are having a dinner for him and baked a cake, but they have asked him to leave the next day. He is packing his bags. He has no place to go.

- How might this be different today?

Youth may now remain in care after their 18th birthday. If Mario was involved in school and engaged with his case plan he would be able to remain in care.

- What legislation would impact this difference and why?

Fostering Family Connections allows states to continue to provide services to youth involved in school until age 21.

17 year old Erin is very smart and doing well in both her foster home and at her school. She would like to pursue a college education. Her foster parents even said they would be willing to let her stay there if she went to the community college, but she has been unable to save the money. She has given up on going to college and plans to move in with a friend who is a drug dealer.

- How might this be different today?

Today there would be funding options available for a youth to pursue post-secondary education.

- What legislation would impact this difference and why?

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides vouchers and has also (in some places) built a momentum within states to seek out other funding sources (such as state universities) and options for youth seeking post-secondary education. The Fostering Connections legislation extended Chafee services including vouchers.

17-year-old Michael was placed in care two years ago and has been in eight different homes. However for the past six months he has done great living with his Aunt Lou. She has even discussed adopting or taking guardianship of Michael, but decided she could not handle the financial obligations. The worker told Aunt Lou that Michael was too old for adoption anyway. In the meanwhile the worker decided to place Michael with a foster family because he had some concerns about the number of people in Aunt Lou's house. Michael ran away.

- How might this be different today?

There would be serious discussions about both adoption and guardianship. Subsidies are now available to assist with financial barriers. Practice has evolved so that adoption is viewed as an option at any age. Also, decisions about a move would consider "safety, permanence, and well-being", and non-safety concerns about a home would not be a reason to take a youth from a home where the youth is stable and doing well.

- What legislation would impact this difference and why?

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (1980) provided for adoption subsidies. The concept of subsidies to ensure permanency has continued. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) further supported subsidies and they

were expanded to guardianship situations. ASFA also encourages connections to relatives, and permits waivers on a case by case basis for non-safety licensing standards in a relative foster home.

Summarize the activity by noting that legislation has led to many improvements in practice, however there is a need for continuing efforts to make practice more consistent and ensure more focused efforts toward permanency planning.

Refer participants to *Handout: How Are We Doing? Are We Making it Possible?* Note that research and data indicates that despite the efforts to improve practice, it does not appear that we are making it possible for our youth to have permanent families, enter the workforce, and live their lives with a sense of positive well-being.

Note that if you analyze the data you will see that this means that one third of the children/youth in care are awaiting adoption, those who are adopted waited over three years to be adopted, and there are many who will not be adopted.

Present the information regarding ethnicity, pointing out the over-representation of minority youth in foster care.

Present additional research related to how our youth fare. Starting at one point in the room ask the participant to read the first bullet, moving to the next person ask that they read the second bullet, until all the bullets are read.

Note that the issue has become so serious that the term “legal orphans” is now used to describe youth whose ties to their birth families have been legally severed through the termination of parental rights, yet the youth has never been adopted. Further, the number of legal orphans increases each year even though the total number of children in care is going down. (USDHHS, 2010).

Ask participants how they were feeling as they listened to these statistics and as they reflect on the plight of our older youth entering adulthood. (Expect responses to reflect how sad it is, how discouraging, and how important it is to improve our outcomes.)

Summarize the discussion by noting that indeed the statistics show clearly why building permanent connection's is so critical for our youth in care. Point out that while it may make us feel badly that we have not done a better job, it also provides an opportunity for us to improve our practice and learn more and more about the different strategies and tools we can use to make permanency possible for all of our youth.

Ask if there are any remaining comments or questions before moving to the next part of the training, which will explore the definition, and meaning of permanency for older youth.

Activity Three: A Closer Look at the Meaning of Permanency

Time:	75 minutes
Competency:	Knows and understands the definition of youth permanency and the importance of developing permanent connections.
Learning Objectives:	Describe the various definitions of permanency. Explain the consequences of not developing permanent connections. Explain the importance of developing permanent connections
Materials:	Handout: What Youth Say About Permanency Handout: What the Grown-Ups Say About Permanency Handout: State/County Definition of Permanency Handout: Beyond the Definition—A Framework for Youth Permanency Prepared easel pad page

Set up work stations in the room by hanging up two easel pad pages on the wall for each station and placing 3-4 markers on the floor under the pages. Assign 5 participants to each work station. (If you have 25 participants in the training then set up five work stations.)

Sources:

University of Iowa school of Social Worker, National Resource Center for Family Center Practice, *Improving Outcomes for Youth in Transition*, 2009.

Youth Permanency Toolkit
National Center for Child Welfare Excellence
<http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/youth-permanency>

“Unpacking the “NO” of Permanency for Older Adolescents”
Presentation by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon at the Western Region, Virginia on September 13, 2013

Emancipated Youth Connections Project: Final Report/Toolkit
The California Permanency for Youth Project
Cheryl Jacobson

A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood. Lauren L. Frey with Sarah B. Greenblatt and Jim Brown. 2005.

The trainer needs to complete the handouts by inserting your state or county’s definition of permanency and any relevant policy or definition of permanency for older youth/young adults.)

Facilitator's Notes:

Explain that this part of the training will focus on exploring the meaning and components of youth permanency. Note that permanency is a word that is used so frequently in child welfare that we can falsely think that everyone is talking about the same thing; and the concept of permanency can be even more confusing when exploring what it means for older teens or young adults in care.

Conduct an activity to explore the meaning of permanency with older youth.

- Explain that participants will be assigned to work groups to focus on identifying the important components of permanency for older youth.
- Assign five participants to each work station.
- Challenge participants to think specifically about older youth, the developmental needs of older youth, and the experiences that older youth have likely had (multiple placements, failed permanency plans, delayed plans etc.) and to identify from the youth's perspective what the components are of permanency. Encourage participants to try to think beyond typical or traditional definitions of permanency, which generally developed with younger children in mind.
- Note that the groups will have 10 minutes to discuss and record their responses.
- After ten minutes call time.
- Ask participants to move clockwise to the next work station, read the responses, and note similarities and differences.
- After 2-3 minutes ask that the groups rotate clockwise again to the next station, read the responses, and again note similarities and differences.
- After 2-3 minutes ask that participants return to their seats.

Note: The groups will not visit every station due to time constraints, but will have the opportunity to view the work of two other groups besides their own.

Conduct a discussion asking participants to identify similarities and differences in their responses. Make a list of the common theme that were identified in the discussions.

Refer participants to *Handout: What Youth Say About Permanency*. Read the quotes alternating with asking volunteers to read a quote.

Ask participants to identify some of the themes reflected in the statements. Encourage discussion that highlights the following:

- Youth definitely want connections that are going to last over time.
- Some youth are most concerned about the relationship—having someone who care for them and will remain a part of their lives.
- Some youth do see adoption as an option.

Note the similarities between the themes reflected in the youth statements, and the components that the small groups identified; note any themes identified by the youth that were not reflected in the components identified by the small groups.

Refer participants to *Handout: What the Grown-Ups Say About Permanency* and give participants a few minutes to read the handout. Then ask the following questions:

- Which of the definitions best reflects the feelings expressed by youth regarding permanency? The components of permanency as identified by the small groups earlier?
- What concerns do you have about any of the definitions?
- Do you feel that the definition of permanency for youth has changed over time, or needs to change in order to better reflect the permanency needs of older youth?

Refer participants to *Handout: State/County Definition of Permanency* and review. Ask participants the degree to which they feel the definition reflects how youth view permanency.

Refer participants to *Handout: Permanency—Then and Now* explaining that historically our understanding of permanency has evolved, and address the following points:

- Traditionally agency staff led the permanency planning process, often with little participation from families, children, or youth. Now we know that youth can be, and need to be, active participants in planning for their lives. It is the youth who best knows his or her own life, capacities, and desires. Further, when people participate in their own planning, they are more likely to have the drive and motivation to fulfill the plan.
- Early permanency planning efforts focused on specific points in time to focus on permanency. Specific timeframes were identified for case reviews,

permanency hearings, and court processes. While it's understandable that this was the approach, over time it became obvious that permanency planning needed to be considered from day one, and throughout the life of the case. Six month time frames passed very quickly, as young children suddenly became teens.

- These six month timeframes coupled with a focus on one goal at a time, together created significant permanency delays. Now we generally consider more than one option for a youth. There may be one preferred goal, but contingency goals are also identified in the event that the preferred goal cannot be achieved. The concept of concurrent planning has allowed permanency to proceed on a faster track.
- Hierarchical consideration of goals corresponds with the practice of focusing on one goal at a time. Goals were generally considered in order of what is considered "best" for the youth, and if this option is eliminated then proceeding to the "next best" goal. Generally speaking goals that afforded the greatest legal protection were considered first. It is still important to consider legal permanency, but it is not the necessarily the biggest or only aspect of permanency for older youth. The "best goal" is the goal that best meets the needs of the youth and that has a likelihood of being fulfilled.
- Assumptions based on age refers to things we believe to be true about what goals are best, simply due to age. Most notably is the fact that professionals have not viewed adoption as a viable goal for older youth; assuming perhaps that an older youth has had too many negative experiences, has attachment issues that might interfere, or simply that an older youth does not wish to be adopted. These assumptions have led professionals to abandon adoption without adequate exploration or assessment with the youth. Many older youth do desire to be adopted, and are adopted each year. In fact, some young adults choose to be adopted after age 18.
- We are now considering all possible positive relationships in the youth's life, and may even consider a birth family whose rights were terminated many years ago. In the past it was even frowned upon for a teacher or a child care worker or anyone who knew the child to indicate their interest in adopting or being a permanent resource for a child. Now we view this as an opportunity to capitalize on a meaningful relationship and promote continuity of care. Likewise, birth parents whose rights were terminated would never have been considered as resources for the child later in life. While this is rare, there have been some situations where youth have returned to their birth families. Obviously this is assessed to ensure continuing safety and stability for the youth.
- As noted previously, a legal focus remains important. If a child cannot return home, adoption affords the greatest legal protection. However, older youth

should not be forced into an adoption situation. Also, other types of meaningful relationships, which the youth has forged in the absence of permanence, must be valued and respected as well. Most youth yearn for a meaningful permanent connection-- not a legal connection. Obviously a meaningful permanent connection that also affords a legal connection would be the preferred option.

Ask participants to take a minute and look at each of the components on the *Handout: Permanency—Then and Now*, and assess the degree to which they feel they have fully made the transition from “then to now” in their practice. Instruct them to put a number from 1 to 10 designating the extent of the transition with a 10 indicating they are fully aligned with the new way of thinking, and a 1 meaning that they are not at all aligned.

Ask participants to share their responses, indicating their highest scores (indicating a strong movement toward new and more progressive practice); and where they remain challenged to adopt new ways of thinking about permanency.

Refer participants to *Handout: Beyond the Definition—A Framework for Youth Permanency* and note that the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections and Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice have considered the complexities of youth permanency and developed a framework for practice. Briefly review the handout, and ask participants how they feel the framework addresses the issues and challenges of youth permanency.

Note that sometimes we can better understand a concept by thinking through what it is not and review the following:

Permanency is NOT:

A philosophy (it is something that can be concretely planned for achieved)

A placement (it may end up being the outcome of a connection made in placement, but the placement in and of itself is not permanency, not even an adoption placement or a return home)

Something that ends at age 18 (but is, rather, lifelong)

A goal (it may be the end result of a goal, but a goal in and of itself does not provide a youth with a sense of permanency)

Independent living (which refers to a set of life skills, that are indeed important, but that do not provide the youth with a lifelong nurturing and caring connection)

A legal process (it includes a legal process, and the legal process may enhance a youth's sense of permanency, but a legal process in and of itself does not provide permanency)

Summarize the discussion by noting that the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence has identified three components of permanency that when considered together form the context of a youth's permanency.

- Legal permanency which refers to legally established relationships through reunification, adoption, or guardianship;
- Relationship permanency which refers to the emotional attachment between youth and caregivers and other family members and kin; and
- Cultural Permanency, which refers to the continuous connection to family traditions, race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion.

(Source: University of Iowa school of Social Worker, National Resource Center for Family Center Practice, *Improving Outcomes for Youth in Transition*, 2009)

Note that some of the definitions emphasized different aspects of these components, some viewing legal permanence as critical, other definitions focusing more heavily on relationships; but there is probably little disagreement that ideally permanency would include all three of these aspects.

Note that when making permanency decisions it is critical to consider all three aspects, realizing that in some situations high permanency in one area may offset concerns in another area, thus all three components need to be assessed when considering a permanency decision.

Explain that there are generally four Pathways to Permanence as recognized by the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence.

- Reunification with birth family;
- Legal guardianship with kin/fictive kin;
- Adoption;
- Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

Note that in the remainder of the training the group will be looking at the different permanency pathways, the degree to which they reflect these three components of permanency, and the tools to move through the permanency pathways.

Activity Four: Navigating the Permanency Pathways

Time: 75 minutes

Competency: Knows and understands the four permanency pathways for youth in foster care.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the four pathways to permanency: reunification, kin/fictive guardianship, adoption, and APPLA.
- Compare and contrast the four permanency pathways.
- Describe specific strategies to develop permanency for each pathway.
- Explain the four permanency pathways including the preferred sequence for permanency.

Materials: Handout: Permanency Pathways
Handout: Permanency Pathways--Reunification
Handout: Reunification—Making it Possible for Older Youth
Handout: Permanency Pathways—Guardianship
Handout: Guardianship—Making it Possible for Older Youth
Handout: Permanency Pathways—Adoption
Handout: Adoption—Making it Possible for Older Youth
Handout: Permanency Pathways APPLA
Handout: APPLA—Making it Work for Older Youth
Handout: How Permanent is a Permanency Goal?
Prepared easel pad page

Digital player and screen to show the Digital Story of Jessica (Relative Guardianship):
http://www.NCCWE.org/digital_stories/syt/Jessica.htm

Digital story of Leslie (older youth adoption):
http://www.NCCWE.org/digital_stories/YP_Fuller_L/index.htm

Sources:

Youth Permanency Toolkit
National Center for Child Welfare Excellence
<http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/youth-permanency>

“Unpacking the “NO” of Permanency for Older Adolescents”
Presentation by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon at the Western Region, Virginia on September 13, 2013

Facilitator's Notes:

Review the competency and objectives for this activity.

Explain that this activity focuses on the four Permanency Pathways, how each reflects the three components of permanency and general guidelines for making permanency decisions.

Refer participants to *Handout: Permanency Pathways* and make the following points:

- Notice that the youth is in the center of the diagram. This says something very important about the process—that it is youth centered. While historically in child welfare the child may have had little voice in decision-making, we know that permanency will not be effective with older youth unless they are given a voice in the process.
- This diagram is called Permanency Pathways because it shows the different paths a youth can take in order to achieve permanency.
- Earlier we talked about how the permanency process has changed. Historically one pathway was selected. If permanency was achieved this was great. But if not, then another pathway was selected. In the life of a child or youth these processes could take long periods of time.
- Now we are not so linear. The arrows in the center of the page, which circle the youth, demonstrate the ongoing nature of considering permanency goals. The youth and child welfare team may look at all the possibilities, may circle back and identify a couple of pathways or even two to explore (referred to as concurrent planning), may circle back and identify a primary pathway along with a back-up, may circle back and switch those. All pathways are considered—even those that perhaps were rejected in the past.
- The process may be messy, may circle back several times, and may change focus. For example, we know that many youth will initially say no to adoption. But as they explore other goals and better understand permanency, they may begin to shift toward a “yes”. The pathway to guardianship may detour over to adoption; or the pathway to APPLA could detour toward guardianship. A diagram cannot accurately portray all the various routes, paths, and detours.
- The important thing is to begin the process, explore the pathways, and help the youth and team to work to successfully move down the pathway and toward a goal.
- You will notice that Independent Living is no longer considered a permanency pathway. There’s nothing wrong with independent living. In fact, independent living refers to a set of services that can be very helpful to youth in assisting

them to learn life skills. It is not however a way to support lifelong connections and family based relationships.

Refer participants to *Handout: Permanency Pathways—Reunification* and make the following points.

- With over 5,000 youth are aging out of the system each year without being adopted or having a secure and stable permanency plan, it is incumbent on the child welfare system to examine every possible option for these youth.
- Consider also that many of these youth end up returning to their families after aging out, but unfortunately at this point they do not have the support of the child welfare team to help them maneuver the challenges of returning home to parent(s) with whom they have sometimes not seen in years or perhaps still have interpersonal conflicts or challenges.
- Further realize that the bond between parents and children often remains strong, even in situations where there has been abuse and neglect. In fact, many youth say that they have dreamed of being able to return home.
- While it would never be appropriate to return a child to an unsafe situation for lack of a better plan, it cannot be denied that many parents turn their lives around, make positive changes, and recover from addictions. Some have subsequent children that they are able to parent well. Some may have been young and unable to make good choices, others may have been drug or alcohol involved, and others may have had situational challenges that prevented them from being able to parent in that period of time. Finally, the demands of parenting an older teen or young adult are vastly different from parenting a baby or young child.

Refer to the handout and review the considerations for selecting this goal.

Refer to the handout and discuss how the goal reflects legal, relationship, and cultural permanency.

Ask participants what they think some of the challenges might be to implementing this goal.

- Making the shift from working with parents to terminate parental rights, to trying to support them in parenting.
- Engaging effectively with parents who may still have anger that their parental rights were terminated; and even further anger that their child did not have good experiences or was not adopted.
- Ensuring a good safety assessment.

- Ensuring that the youth and the parents are able to deal with emotions and reactions to what has happened in the past.

Refer participants to *Handout: Reunification—Making it Possible for Older Youth*.

Ask participants if they have ever had a situation where they pursued a goal of reunification after termination of parental rights that they would like to share.

Summarize by noting the importance of keeping an open mind when looking at the permanency pathways and being willing to consider the possibility that a youth can successfully return to his or her family after many years, and even after termination of parental rights, but that the process must be considered carefully and on a case by case basis.

Refer participants to *Handout: Permanency Pathways—Legal Guardianship with Kin and Fictive Kin* and review the considerations for selecting this goal.

Refer to the handout and discuss how the goal reflects legal, relationship, and cultural permanency.

Ask participants what they think some of the challenges might be to implementing this goal.

- Ensuring that the parents are in agreement with the goal if the parents' rights have not been terminated.
- Helping relatives who are becoming guardians to deal with ongoing family issues or reactions to the guardianship, including working out what role the birth parent will have in the youth's life.
- For youth who have no relative or fictive kin identified as a potential guardian, it may be challenging to find a potential guardian who will make a permanency commitment and with whom the youth wants to build his or her future.
- In situations where parental rights have been terminated, ensuring that adoption has been adequately explored.

Play the Digital Story of Jessica noting that this is a true story of a relative guardianship. Ask participants to pay close attention to the number of losses Jessica experienced. After the digital story ask for reactions from the group.

Refer participants to *Handout: Legal Guardianship—Making it Possible for Older Youth*.

Ask participants if they have ever had a situation where they pursued a goal of legal guardianship that they would like to share.

Summarize by noting that legal guardianship has proven to be an effective goal in many situations, especially when youth are placed with relatives or when the parents' rights have not been terminated.

Refer participants to *Handout: Permanency Pathways—Adoption*. Read the definition and make the following points:

- Generally speaking, adoption for older youth no longer means the replacement of the birth family by the adoptive family.
- Adoption for older youth today likely involves open adoption, shared parenting, and practices that permit and encourage the adopted youth to maintain contact with their birth family members or perhaps even with a past foster family.
- The greatest barrier to older youth adoption is probably our own misguided beliefs about what is possible.

Ask participants why they think it is so challenging for workers to move toward “Yes” when considering adoption for older youth.

Encourage the following types of responses:

- The youth is too unstable and is not yet ready for adoption.
- There are too many attachment issues or the youth has experienced failed adoptions and it is irresponsible to risk that happening again.
- The youth has said no to adoption.
- The youth expresses that they do not want to betray their birth family.
- The youth is stable where they are and there is no need to disrupt things.
- I am afraid it will not work out.

Acknowledge the responses and that there is definitely reason to competently assess the situation and make the following points:

- There indeed may be times that a youth's mental health and emotional state are not conducive to adoption. However, this may be somewhat like looking at “the chicken and the egg”. It may be that the youth's lack of permanence,

stability, and belonging are what is causing the mental health and behavioral challenges.

- Youth who have experienced extensive losses and failed adoptions may need extra time and help in determining what permanency means for them at this point in their life. But they deserve the opportunity to make this determination themselves. Exploration of adoption still needs to happen.
- It is to be expected that youth will say no to adoption. Remember our discussion of developmental issues—this is a rebellious time, youth need to express themselves. Listen and acknowledge the “no”, but continue the discussions and to revisit the issue. Educate youth who feel that adoption would mean that they would not see their birth families to understand the concept of open adoption and continued birth family contact.
- Youth who have successfully managed to stabilize their life certainly deserve a chance to participate in decision-making toward their permanency. This is a youth who may well have the skills and motivation to seek a more permanent pathway.
- Probably one of the most challenging barriers is being afraid of failure and of hurting the youth yet again. This can be a real and daunting concern as we indeed work with some youth who have had harrowing experiences in the child welfare system. But honest conversations and exploration with the youth will give the youth what they need to make an informed decision. This is not your decision to make.

Refer to the handout and review the considerations for selecting this goal.

Refer to the handout and discuss how the goal reflects legal, relationship, and cultural permanency.

Ask participants what they think some of the challenges might be to implementing this goal.

- Helping the youth to move toward a willingness to consider adoption and to understand the permanency advantages to adoption.
- Finding adoptive resources for older youth or working with a current relative caregiver or foster parent to work toward an adoption goal.
- Helping youth with significant losses or past failed adoptions to be able to commit to an adoption pathway.

Play the Digital Story of Leslie noting that this is a true story of an older youth adoption. Ask participants to pay close attention to how long it takes for Leslie to

achieve all of her goals, demonstrating that clearly youth are not prepared to age out of the system at age 18. After the digital story ask for reactions from the group. Note that Leslie's adoption is an example of an adult adoption, demonstrating once again that permanency—the sense of belonging to a family—is something that one needs regardless of the age.

Refer participants to *Handout: Adoption—Making it Possible for Older Youth*.

Ask participants if they have ever had a situation where they pursued a goal of adoption for an older youth that they would like to share.

Summarize by emphasizing the importance of considering the adoption goal for older youth and of continuing to ask/address the question throughout the planning process.

Refer participants to *Handout: Permanency Pathways—APPLA*. Read the definition and make the following points:

- Generally speaking APPLA is the least preferred permanency goal. It provides no legal permanence.
- APPLA is to be used only when other more permanent plans, including reunification, adoption, and guardianship have been ruled out.
- APPLA replaces the independent living goal that was utilized in the past. Both independent living, and then APPLA, have been utilized as the goal of last resort. Unfortunately it is overused, sometimes when diligent efforts might have resulted in a more preferable permanency goal.
- However, there are situations where the other options are aggressively pursued, but the youth and child welfare team rule out other options and identify APPLA as the best choice for the youth's permanency.
- It is not that APPLA does not provide the opportunity for a sense of permanency. But permanency is not inherent in APPLA. Instead its' success relies on the child welfare team to “go the extra mile” in order to ensure that the youth has a sense of permanency. Foster family agreements, and special ceremonies or rituals may be created to reinforce a sense of permanency, but these are not legally binding. Still, many youth do feel a sense of safety and security with their foster family.

Refer to the handout and review the considerations for selecting this goal.

Refer to the handout and discuss how the goal reflects legal, relationship, and cultural permanency.

Ask participants what they think some of the challenges might be to implementing this goal.

- Ensuring that adequate efforts are made to pursue and rule out other permanency pathways.
- Accurately assessing and determining ways to strengthen relationship permanency and cultural permanency, given that there is no legal permanency with this goal.
- Ensuring that the agreement reflects a sense of commitment and permanency for the youth.
- Helping create rituals and celebrations that make the process feel real and meaningful to the youth, and that promote a greater sense of family and connectedness.

Refer participants to *Handout: APPLA—Making it Work for Older Youth*.

Ask participants if they have ever had a situation where they pursued a goal of APPLA for an older youth that they would like to share.

Summarize by emphasizing the importance of making the APPLA pathway a meaningful way for the youth to achieve permanency.

Conduct an activity designed to help participants consider the different degrees of permanency that each of the pathways would afford.

- Divide participants into small groups of 4-5 participants.
- Refer participants to *Handout: How Permanent is a Permanency Goal?*
- Ask that they complete each of the case scenarios by rating the degree of permanency each component would provide for each of the Permanency Pathways.
- Note that a 0 means no degree of permanency, 1 means a little, 2 means there is some permanency with the opportunity to strengthen the permanency, and 3 means that you see a high degree of permanency.
- Acknowledge that this is a training activity based on short case scenarios, and that in real life much more information would go into the decision making process; however this will help participants to think through the components of permanency in difference case situations and considering different pathways.

- Tell them there will be 15 minutes for the activity and call time after 15 minutes.

Process the activity by quickly reading each scenario aloud and discussing the ratings and identified pathways.

Note: Do not get bogged down in assuring that each rating is exact as people may use different thresholds for their ratings, but are likely to still come out with the same identified pathways and/or concerns about pathways. Ratings should however not vary to a large degree.

Use the following to assist in the discussion:

Kylie, 16, has been in foster care for two years with the Donis family. They have repeatedly stated that they do not wish to make any type of commitment to Kylie's long term care, yet they express great concern whenever it is suggested that Kylie's mother be contacted to explore if she is interested in caring for Kylie. Kylie loves the Donis family and has expressed a desire to be adopted by them. Kylie's mother's parental rights were terminated when Kylie was 9 years old. Kylie's mother was living with an abusive man at that time that physically abused both Kylie and her mother. Kylie's mother was also severely depressed and she was unable to follow through with a restraining order or means to keep the boyfriend away. Kylie's mother has been trying to re-establish contact with her for the past four years. Kylie has good memories of her mother and feels the issues were related primarily to the boyfriend. Kylie's mother has received mental health treatment for depression, as well as completing a Victims of Domestic Violence Group after the boyfriend was arrested for running over her foot with the car. Kylie lives in a state where TPRs can be legally vacated.

PATHWAY	Legal (0-4)	Relationship (0-4)	Cultural (0-4)
Reunification	3	2	3
Legal Guardianship by Donis family	2	3	2
Adoption by Donis family	3	3	2
APPLA with Donis family	0	4	2

What pathway(s) would you select?

Most likely Reunification would be the first choice, with a back-up plan to continue to work with the Donis family to make a decision regarding adoption or if not adoption, then guardianship.

DeMarco, 14, recently left the group home and was placed with his Aunt Demeris. He has been in care since age 10 due to serious physical abuse by his grandmother. His mother died of AIDS and his birth certificate does not identify a father. DeMarco has been through multiple foster homes but states he has no good memories of these homes. He remembered staying with his Auntie Demeris (mother's sister) when he was small. His worker contacted his aunt and after several positive meetings decided

to place DeMarco with her. The aunt is unable to commit to anything other than a foster care placement at this time. Meanwhile the worker has been talking to DeMarco about adoption, but he states he wants to stay with his aunt.

PATHWAY	Legal (0-4)	Relationship (0-4)	Cultural (0-4)
Reunification	0	0	0
Legal Guardianship With aunt	2	2	4
Adoption by adoptive family to be identified	4	0 at this point	0 at this point
Adoption by Aunt	4	2	4
APPLA (with aunt)	0	2	4

What pathway(s) would you select?

Would seek a permanent pathway with the aunt (preferably adoption, then guardianship) as DeMarco wants to remain with her. At this point she has not really had enough time to consider guardianship or adoption, so her initial “no” could possibly move in time toward a “yes.” However, it would also be a good idea to proceed with an adoption referral in case placement with the aunt does not work out.

Summarize the activity by noting that it is important to look at all the permanency pathways and consider the possibility for permanency, rather than making quick assumptions about what may or may not be possible.

Activity Five: Engaging to Make it Possible

Time: 90 minutes

Competency: Knows how to engage and prepare youth for permanency.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain importance of developmental readiness when exploring permanent connections.
- Appreciates the importance of actively engaging young people in planning for permanency.
- Describe each permanency pathway and list two strategies for engaging youth.
- Apply engagement strategies to case examples.

Materials: Handout: Developmental Considerations that May Impact Permanency for Older Youth
Handout: Youth Engagement—Making Permanency Possible
Handout: Youth Driven, Family Centered Permanency Meetings
Handout: Three Houses
Handout: Making Reunification Possible—Family Finding
Handout: Finding Permanent Resources—Timeline
Handout: Finding Permanent Resources—My Social World
Handout: Finding permanent Resources—My Support System
Handout: Getting behind the “No”
Handout: Preparing Makes it Possible
Handout: Scenarios—Making Permanency Possible
Prepared easel pad page

Set up five work stations in the room by hanging up two easel pad pages on the wall for each station and placing 3-4 markers on the floor under the pages. Have five prepared easel pad pages or one for each station.

Station 1: “No one will want me.”

Station 2: “If I commit to adoption (or any permanent plan) I will not get to go home.”

Station 3: “I don’t understand what adoption or any of this is about. But it’s probably not good.”

Station 4: “Fear of being disloyal to family or of losing whatever connections remain.”

Station 5: “Fear of failure”

Sources:

Youth Permanency Toolkit

National Center for Child Welfare Excellence

<http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/youth-permanency>

Increasing Your Agency's Capacity to Respond to Prospective Parents and Prepare Older Youth for Adoption. AdoptUSKids to support the 2012 Children's Bureau National Recruitment Campaign.

Facilitator's Notes:

Review the competency and objectives for this activity noting that we will focus on specific tools and best practices to engage youth on the permanency pathways.

Note that as we begin the process of making permanency decisions it is important to first look generally at how to approach permanency decision making with older youth, and to consider their developmental level and understanding of permanency concepts.

Read the following quote from a youth in foster care:

They're always talking about this permanency stuff. You know social workers. . .lawyers. . . always using these big social work terms to talk about simple things. One day one of them finally described what she meant by permanency. After I listened to her description, which was the first time anyone ever told me what the term meant, I said, "Oh, that's what you mean? Yeah, I want permanency in my life. I don't think I ever got that! When can I get it?"

Ask what lessons this comment teaches us and record the responses on an easel pad page.

Encourage the following types of responses:

- We easily make assumptions that youth know what we are talking about.
- It is important to get to know the youth, spend time talking with them, and developing a relationship; when you have a relationship it is easier to talk about challenging topics and to get real and honest responses.
- Part of communicating with youth is understanding where they are developmentally and being able to talk with them in a way that they understand.

Refer participants to *Handout: Developmental Considerations that May Impact Permanency for Older Youth*. Note that these are core developmental tasks that may be especially relevant when considering working with youth toward permanency.

Note that there are also behaviors that may be a part of the youth's efforts to achieve these tasks.

Ask participants to work with a partner to answer the question regarding each of these developmental considerations-- How does this impact how we work with the youth toward permanency? The following will help you process the activity:

- a) Don't be put off by older youth expressions of identity. Youth are trying to make all kinds of statements about who they are--stripes in their hair, piercing, crazy clothes etc. This does not mean they don't want permanency or positive connections with adults. Unfortunately these expressions can be "off-putting" to adults, making youth feel even more estranged and unworthy of positive connections. It also leads adults to make assumptions about these youth that may not be true. Keep an open mind and encourage potential adult resources to do the same. The youth's focus on identity may make family issues more important to them, and could possibly make them say "no" to adoption as they might think they could lose another part of their identity and their connection to family.
- b) Youth may go to great lengths to belong to a peer group, a gang, or a social/cultural identification (Goth, urban, hip-hop etc.) This is a sign of a youth who wants to belong and may actually be a positive sign for the youth's desire and ability to connect to other caring persons. Also, as youth care more about what their peers think, it could be helpful to have a youth talk to another youth who has perhaps been adopted or who has returned home.
- c) This is where our youth often vastly differ from other youth of the same age. Many of our youth have not had the advantage of strong family connections, so the developmental process of separating and developing independence is meaningless, if not totally frustrating. The process of trying to develop independence while still having to listen to social workers and judges is also frustrating. Youth may feel anger, reject the agency's plans, decide it is too late, and simply want to give up. Understanding and expecting this struggle is important as you work with older youth toward permanency.
- d) This speaks to the great need to engage with the youth and really seek their input and put them in the driver's seat. It also helps explain why many youth say "No" to permanency when their workers present it. This clearly directs us to expect the no, and find ways to "get to yes".

Summarize by noting that this discussion clearly points out some of the challenges of working with older youth and why engagement is so critical.

Refer that participants to *Resource: Youth Engagement—Making Permanency Possible*. Review the handout and note that active youth **engagement** in permanency planning and decision-making is absolutely essential.

Note that while collaboration with youth is a key strategy in addressing permanency for youth in foster care, the Child and Family Services Reviews indicate that in 42 states (84%), the agency did not make concerted efforts to involve children and youth

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MAKING IT POSSIBLE: PERMANENCY PATHWAYS FOR OLDER YOUTH IN CARE

in case planning—pointing out that this very critical best practice is essentially not practiced.

Refer participants to *Handout: Youth Driven, Family Centered Permanency Meetings* and note that these meetings are one of the most significant tools we have for promoting youth permanency—regardless of the permanency pathway(s) that are chosen. Often the meetings are used as decision making forums to put the case on a particular pathway and then continue to hold team members accountable for certain permanency tasks. Note that there are many different models including team Decision Making (Annie E. Casey), Family Team Conferencing (out of Alabama), Family Group decision Making (out of New Zealand), and Permanency Teaming (from the Lifelong Families Model of Casey Family Programs.) Further, family decision making is another key strategy for successful permanency planning identified by the Child and Family Services Reviews.

NOTE: If your agency uses a specific model use this time to discuss how the process works for older youth.

Explain that the remainder of the training will focus on tools and best practices to assist in engaging youth in the pathways for permanency. Note that a range of tools will be presented, some that are useful with specific goals, others that may be useful for more than one goal; and the training will end with the opportunity to practice use of some of the tools.

Note that we will first look at some tools that may be particularly effective in engaging youth in conversations about reunification.

Ask participants why reunification might be challenging to discuss with youth.

- It brings up a painful and traumatic time in their life.
- They may have strong feelings of grief and loss around their family that have never been addressed.
- It may make them feel unsafe.
- They may be angry with all that has happened to them.

Acknowledge all of these responses, but remind participants that one of the things we have learned from youth aging out is that many of them return to their birth families, and unfortunately do so without the guidance and support of child welfare staff. Thus while talking to youth may be painful for them (and us) it is a process that may be helpful to them whether or not the reunification pathway is chosen. Further, it is particularly important because it involves safety concerns.

Refer the participants to *Handout: Three Houses* noting that the activity was designed for use within the “Signs of Safety” framework (www.signsofsafety.net), a protective service approach used in Australia. The tool is used to elicit a youth’s views about what’s working well, what he or she is worried about and what needs to

happen. The worker uses the diagram as a tool to facilitate face-to-face discussions that are likely to relate to permanency.

Review the handout noting that the Three Houses is especially relevant when looking at reunification as safety issues are very important, but that the tool is also relevant when looking at other permanency pathways.

Ask participants what other tools they may have used in the past to engage youth in discussions of family connections. (Expect them to identify genograms and ecomaps.) Encourage them to continue to use these tools if they find them helpful in initiating good conversations. Note that this process may be helpful in assisting the youth to identify additional family connections or other connections that might be able to be a permanency resource or provide some type of ongoing support.

Refer participants to *Handout: Making Reunification Possible—Family Finding* and note that in some situations the youth may not be able to locate the birth family and that Family Finding/Family Search is another strategy that can be utilized.

Note that all of the resources mentioned so far would also be helpful in making guardianship or adoption possible with a relative. Family finding in particular may also be utilized when reunification is not possible in order to locate extended family resources for possible guardianship, adoption, or even APPLA; and in some cases extended family may be found who are able to provide supports to help reunification (or another permanency goal). For example, there have been situations where an extended family member took guardianship of the youth, while the birth parent served as a visiting resource and an ongoing support.

Explain that the group will explore some additional tools that may be used to engage the youth in the process of finding permanency resources—or people from the youth’s past that may be willing to step forward and be a permanent connection. Finding a permanent resource can help lead to adoption or guardianship. These tools may also help the youth process or clarify their life events, a task that will be covered shortly as we talk about how to prepare youth for permanence.

Note that the training will directly address three tools that can be used to engage the youth in the process of talking about their life and what resources may be available—My Timeline, My Social World, and My Support System.

Refer participants to the three handouts-- *Handout: Finding Permanent Resources--My Timeline*, *Handout: Finding Permanent Resources--My Social World*, and *Handout: Finding Permanent Resources-- My Support System*. Ask participants to look at each one and think about how they might use it to engage a youth under different types of circumstances.

- Ask participants when the timeline might be most helpful? (When youth have been in a lot of placements and are having a challenging time thinking through their history or people they have known.)

- Ask participants when the diagram of the social world might be most helpful? (With youth who have a lot of contacts but may not be thinking about who they are.)
- Ask participants when the diagram of the support system might be most helpful: (With a youth who you sense has a range of supports but who has not been verbal. The different areas of support may encourage the youth to identify people.)

Ask participants if there are other tools they might use to help the youth engage in permanency conversations?

Ensure that the following is covered:

- Lifebooks are ideal for encouraging conversations about past connections. If the youth does not have a Lifebook the process of putting one together can be helpful in both preparing the youth for permanency and finding new resources for the youth.
- Genograms are another tool that helps the youth to think about supports.
- The assessment process or past assessments may identify significant parts of the youth's history. The process of talking to youth about past assessments or doing a new assessment may engage the youth in identifying possible resources.

Summarize by noting that each of these are essentially tools for engaging youth in permanency conversations—conversations to help the youth get to “yes” and that make permanency possible. Permanency conversations, and especially adoption, needs to be addressed on an ongoing basis—just because you hear “no” doesn’t mean it will stay “no”.

Note that through engagement with the youth you may learn what the barriers are to “yes”. Through talking, using the tools above, and involving the youth in planning you may be able to better discern the permanency barriers.

Ask participants to identify issues/concerns/feelings that may reside “behind the no.”

- Ensure that the following are covered:
- Fear that no one will adopt them.
- A continuing desire to be reunited with the birth family and saying “yes” would prevent that from happening.

- The youth may not understand what adoption means—they may hang on to previous understandings such as that it is for little kids, that it means you cannot have contact with your family, or that you will never see your friends again.
- Fear of never seeing the parents again, of never seeing siblings again.
- Fear of being disloyal to the birth family, of having another “mom” or “dad”, or even of losing the family name.

Refer participants to *Handout: Getting Behind the “No”* and conduct an activity designed to help participants identify strategies to help remove barriers to adoption and other permanency goals.

- Divide participants into five groups.
- Direct them to the work stations set up around the room.
- Explain that they are to identify actions, strategies, or tools to use to help youth move beyond “no” for the barrier written on their easel pad page.
- Note that they will have 10 minutes.
- Ask that they identify a recorder/reporter.
- Ask the recorder/reporter for each group to remain with the easel pad pages, but direct the other participants to return to their seats.
- As each recorder/reporter reports back to the larger group encourage participants to listen closely and record the ideas and responses on the handout.

The following may assist you in processing the activity:

No one will want me.

- Share statistics and case examples about youth who have been adopted or achieved a permanent goal.
- Provide opportunities for the youth to talk to prospective foster parents.
- Explain the process of recruitment, family finding (to identify relatives), and other steps that have been successful.
- Share your hope and belief that the youth can be adopted or find a permanent family.

If I commit to adoption (or another pathway) I will not get to go home to live.

- Provide youth with ongoing and accurate information about their birth families and help the youth understand why there is not a plan for reunification, while at the same time acknowledging their deep desire to return home.
- Explain that in some adoptions youth maintain contact with their families—openly let the youth know if this might be possible.
- Assess with the youth the possibility of reunification—if the youth is able to assess that it should not happen it may be easier for them to move on.

I don't understand what adoption or any of this is about. But it's probably not good.

- Spend time talking with the youth about what adoption is, how it will impact the youth's life.
- Clarify that being adopted or with another permanent family does not mean one forgets about the birth family.
- Explore what the youth thinks adoption means and provide accurate information.
- Work with the youth's foster parent to have ongoing conversations with the youth about what adoption and what permanency means.
- Let the youth talk with older youth who have been adopted so that the youth is able to see adoption in a more positive way.

Fear of being disloyal to birth family or of losing whatever connections remain.

- Work with the birth family and the foster family on how to help the youth understand that they have permission and support to consider adoption or another permanency goal.
- If birth parents are not available to grant permission, talk to the youth about the possibility that the parent, regardless of all that has happened (perhaps the parent has passed away or moved away or is impaired by substance abuse), would want the youth to be happy.
- Explain that older youth adoptions are different—the youth does not have to use “Mom” or “Dad”, may still be able to have contact with family members, and may choose to keep the birth family name.

Fear of failure.

- Share success stories.
- Talk about the situations that did not work out before and how the youth can be involved in planning so that these things would not happen again.
- Share your belief in the youth and their ability to commit to a family.

- Arrange for the youth to talk with other youth who have experienced failed adoptions, but were later able to belong to a family.

Summarize the activity by acknowledging that getting behind the “no” takes significant effort to engage youth in permanency conversations, and that they need to revisit these conversations over time.

Refer participants to *Handout: Preparing Makes it Possible* and review. Note that 3-5-7 is a wonderful tool in guiding your work with youth in the permanency process. Remind participants of the importance of “getting behind the no” as they work to prepare youth for permanency.

Refer participants to *Handout: Case Scenarios—Making Permanency Possible* and note that this is the final activity of the training day and it is designed to help participants pull together all the different tools, processes, means of engagement, strategies, and approaches and determine what they would use to help make permanency possible for an older youth.

- Divide participants into triads.
- **Note that they will be working on the two cases they used earlier, however this time they are being asked what strategies or steps they will utilize to make permanency possible for Kylie and DeMarco.**
- Note that they will have 10 minutes for the activity so to be focused in their efforts.
- Call time after ten minutes.
- Process the activity by asking participants to volunteer their responses. The following may help you:

Kylie:

- Youth driven, Family Centered Permanency Meetings to continue decision-making and progress toward the goal of reunification, or some type of permanency with the foster parents.
- Three Houses to help Kylie think about safety issues as part of the reunification pathway. My Timeline could be helpful as part of the process of helping Kylie to understand her past.
- Permanency conversations with the Donis family to help them determine their possible long term commitment to Kylie, and repeated discussions.

DeMarco:

- Youth driven, Family Centered Permanency Meetings to continue decision-making and progress toward the goal of adoption or

guardianship with the aunt, or a possible referral for adoption if the placement with the aunt does not work out.

- Three Houses might help him sort out how safe and stable he feels in his aunts' home as the placement progresses.
- Ongoing permanency conversations will be needed with all parties. If the placement with his aunt does not proceed toward permanency focused use of My Timeline, My Support System, and My Social World might help reveal potential resources that DeMarco says he can't remember. Conversations to "get behind the no" will also be critical in order to move forward on the adoption pathway.

Summarize the module by noting that participants have reviewed many different tools and strategies that can be used to help make permanency possible.

Activity Six: Transfer of Learning

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Easel pad and markers
Handout: Action Plan
Participant Evaluation

Facilitator's Notes

Acknowledge the hard work of the group through the training day.

Refer participants to *Handout: Action Plan* and give participants five minutes to complete the form. State that this form is to be shared with their supervisor.

Ask if anyone would like to share anything from his or her Action Plan.

Administer and collect participant evaluations.

Thank the participants for their participation.