

YOUTH RIGHTS: PERMANENCY PLANS FOR YOUTH IN CARE

What kind of permanency plans are there?

1. Return to Parents—Reunification

The first goal of juvenile court is to reunify each family. The county children and youth agency should provide your family with all the services that are needed so that you can safely return home. Such services could include: help getting appropriate housing, counseling for the parent, family, or child, parenting classes, and mental health or drug and alcohol treatment. People's situations change over time. A parent who was not able to take care of you when you were younger may have gotten themselves together and now be able to care for you. Reunification can always be an option if it will provide you with a safe and nurturing place to live where your needs are met.

You should be informed of what needs to happen within your family before you can return. You should ask your caseworker or lawyer if you do not know. If the plan is reunification, you should be visiting with your parents frequently, usually more than every other week. Sometimes, however, reunification is not a possible option. This is often because it is not safe for you to return home to your family.

2. Adoption

If the rights of your parents have been terminated, you can be adopted. When a court terminates your biological parents' rights that means they no longer have a right to see you and do not have an obligation to provide you any support. When you are adopted, your case with the county child welfare agency is closed and you are discharged to a family who will raise you and provide for you. Your adoptive parents have all the rights of a parent who gave birth to you. Your adoptive parents can let you see your biological parents and relatives if they want to. If you want to be adopted, but also want to keep in touch with your biological family, talk about this with your caseworker, adoptive family, and the judge at court so you can make arrangements that will make this continuing contact possible, but also respect your adoptive family. You can be adopted by a family member or by someone you are not related to.

Sometimes teenagers think they are too old to be adopted. This is not true. You can be adopted at **any age (even after you turn 18)**. If you are 12 years of age or older, you have to give consent to be adopted for the adoption to be finalized. If you want to be adopted let your caseworker, lawyer, and the judge know so that efforts can be made to find an adoptive family for you. You may have said you did not want to be adopted when you were younger. As you get older, you may change your mind. It is okay to change your mind, just let everyone know what you want!

When you are adopted, your adoptive family can receive financial help to help take care of you. This is called an *adoption subsidy*. It can last until you are 18 years old. When you are adopted you can also receive Medical Assistance. If you are adopted at age 16 or older, you are also eligible for Independent Living services, including the Foster Care Independence Act Education and Training Grant (ETG).

Permanency is ...

- Lifelong relationships that extend beyond foster care
- Unconditional love and acceptance
- Someone to spend holidays with
- Someone who checks up on you "just because"
- Someone to walk you down the aisle when you get married
- Having a place to call home
- Someone who is there for you no matter what mistakes you make
- A safety net of love and support

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3. Permanent Legal Custodianship—subsidized and unsubsidized

A permanent legal custodian (PLC) is someone who agrees to care for you and assume legal and physical custody of you until you become an adult. The PLC can be a foster parent, relative, or another person approved by the county child welfare agency. In this case, you would be discharged from the system to the PLC. The rights of your biological parents do not need to be terminated for PLC to be granted. In most cases, a visitation plan with your parents can be agreed to when PLC is awarded.

If the PLC meets the qualifications for financial help, the PLC will receive a subsidy to help take care of you. The qualifications to be a PLC are similar to those for licensed foster parents. The subsidy will continue until you are age 18. You will not have a caseworker and will not go to court once permanent legal custodianship has been given to that person.

4. Placement with Relatives

Placement with a fit and willing relative is another permanency plan. Often this is referred to as kinship care. If the kinship care provider meets all the same licensing requirements as a foster care provider, they can receive financial help to take care of you. If your relative is receiving kinship care payments, your case will stay open, you will continue to go to court, and your case can stay open until age 21 if you are in a program of instruction, like school, college, or training, or are in treatment.



5. Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) with a Permanency Resource

If the plan for you is to live on your own when you leave care at age 18 or after, APPLA may be your permanency goal. If this is your permanency plan, you should be receiving independent living instruction in the following areas: budgeting, household management and maintenance, job readiness, job search skills, educational support (completion of high school and entrance into post-secondary education or training programs), locating housing, accessing community resources, and obtaining health care. Independent living services can also include mentoring, particularly for those youth who do not have supportive relatives in their life.

At the same time, you should also be receiving services to help you find individuals that you are able to establish a consistent and supportive relationship with. This can mean finally finding an adoptive home or a kinship care placement. It could also mean establishing a relationship with a mentor who is committed to being involved in your life. Preparing for adulthood and living on your own should go hand in hand with establishing supportive, family-like relationships that will continue as you become an adult.

You can stay in substitute care until age 21 if you are in a program of treatment or instruction. **You should only be discharged to independence or emancipated when you are able to live on your own and support yourself financially. Youth should never be discharged to homelessness.**