

Allegheny County Department of Human Services Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) Current as of February 2014

Terms in blue ink are defined in glossary

CYF 009 – Custody Removals and Out-of-home Placement Considerations

Protective Custody

When children have been taken into protective custody by a physician/hospital or law enforcement; when parents or youths over age 18 (*meeting certain criteria*) voluntarily request foster care; and at other times when safety and/or risk concerns are so severe that placement in foster care is being considered, Allegheny County's Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) will convene a Pre-Placement Conference Team Meeting to discuss whether there are any alternative plans for safety or services available to keep the family intact.

If it is determined at the conference that it is necessary for CYF to request an "Emergency Custody Authorization" from the Court to remove custody from the parent/s, guardian/s, or custodian/s, a case-specific information form is sent to the [Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas Family Division](#).

If there is agreement from the Judge, an Emergency Custody Authorization (ECA) is issued, giving CYF authority to take emergency protective custody of the child. Parents are notified that a Shelter Hearing will be conducted within 72 hours.

Team members discuss placement options to find the 'least restrictive' option in the child's best interest.

When the court becomes involved, CYF Caseworkers are represented by an Assistant County Solicitor from the [Allegheny County Law Department](#) and children are represented by a [KidsVoice](#) attorney (or a conflict attorney). Each parent has the right to be represented by an attorney, and may be represented by an attorney from the [Allegheny County Bar Foundation, Juvenile Court Project](#) if they want an attorney but are unable to afford one

Placement Considerations

Placements made by CYF are tailored to meet the individual needs of a child with a primary focus on safety, security, stability and nurturing. CYF strives to locate caregiver/s who meet the child's best interest in the shortest possible amount of time. CYF considers many factors specific to the child and family when reviewing placement options, such as whether relatives are available to care for the child (and siblings), whether the child/ren should stay in the same neighborhood, go to the same school, etc.

As soon as it is determined that it is necessary for a child to enter foster care, CYF will immediately ask parents and children about relatives or individuals that have a significant and ongoing relationship with the child that can possibly provide emergency [foster] care for the child (and siblings). CYF staff will visit the relative or family friend's home and quickly obtain criminal background clearances, etc., so the child/ren can stay with the "emergency caregiver/s" while they work toward becoming certified foster parent/s. (*This is known as "kinship care"*)

CYF gives kinship caregivers priority over other out-of-home placement providers when they meet agency, safety and criminal record clearance requirements and the placement is in the child's best interest. Placement with a kinship caregiver is not denied because of a lack of concrete goods (beds, etc.), resource needs of the potential caregiver (childcare, etc.) or location of the caregiver's residence (living out-of-county or out-of-state, etc.). When necessary, Caseworkers assist caregivers with obtaining resources to meet foster parent requirements.

When a child is of Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native or First Nations heritage, CYF will first offer jurisdiction over the matter to the tribe with which the parent(s) is affiliated. *In emergency situations, child/ren may be placed in a shelter foster home or group home until the tribe can be contacted.*

When a relative or someone known to the family cannot be located or approved to become an emergency caregiver for the child/ren, a 'Placement Assessment Tool' is completed to determine the right level of foster care. Staff may also complete a 'Best Interest Tool' to help find the best possible placement.

A child may stay in a "Shelter" Foster Home or Group Home for up to 30 days while CYF continues to search for a kinship care placement (*or other setting that has the potential to be permanent, depending on the situation*). In every case, the "least restrictive, most family-like setting" available to meet the child's needs is chosen.

CYF provides and contracts with many agencies that provide a variety of foster care placements to meet individual needs. DHS' KIDS Information and Demographic System (KIDS) is an electronic case management system used by CYF staff and provider agencies to help match children with the best possible foster care placement.

CYF must document all efforts made to locate fitting placements and the outcome of each effort. If a particular placement resource is not selected, the Caseworker must document case-specific reasons for the decision and present this information during Court proceedings.

CYF will not delay or deny the placement of a child into foster care or for adoption on the basis of race, culture, national origin or geographic location of the prospective caregiver or the child involved. Changes in placement will only be made when it is in the best interest of the child. Each subsequent placement will be carefully considered to best meet the child's documented needs.