



Permanency Planning Requirements for Children

ODP Announcement 26-099

AUDIENCE:

Supports Coordination Organizations

Administrative Entities

Providers of Community Homes licensed under 55 Pa. Code Chapter 6400

All Interested Parties

PURPOSE:

To clarify permanency planning requirements for children under age 18 with an emphasis on requirements when a Community Home licensed under 55 Pa. Code Chapter 6400 is being considered.

DISCUSSION:

Children under age 18 need a constant and nurturing person in their day-to-day care for healthy emotional and social development. The guiding principle underlying permanency is that all children need to grow up in a family environment. The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) requires outcomes relating to strengthening or securing a permanent caregiving relationship for children in the Individual Support Plan (ISP) or individual plan. This requirement is included in 55 Pa Code §§ 6100.56(d) and 6400.25(c).

A “permanent caregiving relationship” generally means a consistent, nurturing adult in day-to-day care within a bonded connection anticipated to last throughout the child’s lifespan. Permanent caregiving relationships may include living with relatives, Life Sharing families, foster homes, adoptive families, and legal guardians.



Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services

A staff member in a Community Home performing duties as part of their job responsibilities for a child is not considered a “permanent caregiving relationship.”

When discussing living options for children, the ISP team or individual plan team (6400.183) must discuss current and potential relationships that could be explored as a permanent caregiving relationship for the child. The conversations may include:

- Helping the child identify what they want in a family, current relationships that are important to them, and if they have any relatives or supports that could be considered as a permanent caregiving relationship. These individuals may be able to have permanent caregiving relationships for the child or support the child in permanent caregiving relationships with another family. The ISP team could use the LifeCourse tools related to [mapping relationships and reciprocal roles](#) to support these conversations.
- Identifying the child’s activities, likes, and dislikes. This can help identify prospective permanent caregiving relationships.
- Deciding if Life Sharing would be a good option for a permanent caregiving relationship.

In circumstances where no permanent caregiving relationship has been identified, and the ISP team or the individual plan team, including the Administrative Entity (AE) or County Mental Health/Intellectual Disability Program, determines that a Community Home is the least restrictive placement to meet the child’s needs short-term, the Community Home provider must submit a [regulatory waiver](#) of 6100.56 (d) and/or 6400.25 (c) and receive approval from ODP. **Prior to adding and authorizing the Residential Habilitation service on the ISP, the Residential Habilitation provider must share the approved regulatory waiver with the AE and Supports Coordinator.**

When placements are made by and funded through the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) or the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), the Community Home provider should include documentation about teaming meetings that have occurred with the submission of the regulatory waiver. This documentation



must include who participated in the teaming meetings. Information about teaming can be found at [Child Welfare Mental Health](#). This will enable ODP to determine whether all impacted offices and parties are aware of the decision and the plan for permanency.

A Community Home should be regarded as short-term with active planning to transition to a family-centered, private home. If a child has existing caregiver relationships, the Community Home must provide opportunities and activities that preserve the child's relationship with their caregivers through visits and frequent communication. If a child does not have existing caregiver relationships, the Community Home must explore ways to secure such relationships, such as establishing or strengthening connections with adults who have some kind of relationship with the child.

These requirements are applicable to all Community Homes licensed under Chapter 6400 regardless of the funding source.

Timeline for Implementation

New placement of a child under 18 in a Community Home: The requirements in this communication, including submission and approval of a regulatory waiver, must be completed prior to placing a child under 18 in a Community Home. This is effective immediately.

Continued placement for a child under 18 in a Community Home (children residing in a Community Home prior to publication of this communication): The requirements in this communication, including submission and approval of a regulatory waiver, must be completed no later than December 31, 2026.

QUESTIONS:

Please contact the respective ODP Regional Program Office for questions related to this communication.