



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Corporate Parenting Service

Early permanence strategy

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

## 1 Introduction and purpose

One of the key duties of Children's Safeguarding and Family Help (CSFH) is identifying the best permanent arrangements for children looked after that ensures their immediate and future needs are met within a stable and secure relationship with their carer. However the process of identifying children's best permanence option can be complex; many different options may be tried before the right one is found, which can lead to delay and instability for the child.

Camden's early permanence strategy is a framework of robust planning and decision making where all possible permanence options are explored from the earliest opportunity in order to ensure the right permanence plan is agreed as soon as possible. The primary purpose of the strategy is to avoid drift and delay at a crucial time in the child's development where attachments to the primary carer are so important.

The strategy should be read together with the *Early Permanence* policy: [Early Permanence: Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent...](#)

## 2 Definition

Early permanence refers to planning for the child's future care from the outset, beginning with the child and family assessment and using the child in need, child protection and looked after children planning and review frameworks to continually assess the child's permanence needs and permanence options at an early stage, often before the child has become looked after.

It includes the use of concurrent planning whereby two or more permanence plans are explored simultaneously to ensure the best plan for the child can be identified and put in place quickly and enables CSFH to react quickly to changing circumstances when making decisions on permanence.

## 3 Main principles

Camden's principles are underpinned by the National Early Permanence Practice Standards:

- The child's immediate and future welfare is the paramount and their wishes and feelings will be taken into consideration as appropriate to their age and understanding when decisions are being made.

- CSFH will work in a sensitive, respectful and culturally competent manner with birth families when planning for permanence, recognising the importance of families as a source of information about the child that can influence permanence decisions.
- Children's permanence will be considered as early as possible.
- Children are best placed living with their birth family where this is consistent with their welfare and for most children known to CSFH remaining or returning home will be their permanence plan.
- Where this is not possible, early identification through assessment and robust, concurrent planning and decision making will help to achieve permanent care arrangements for the child as soon as possible.
- All CSFH social work staff will work in partnership with the Adopt North London Regional Adoption Agency and other agencies to implement this strategy.
- CSFH will secure legal permanence for the child as early as possible, working in partnership with Camden Legal Services to explore options and making appropriate applications for court orders.
- The Corporate Parenting Service will work with the RAA and other partners to ensure sufficient permanent and adoption placements are available to meet the needs of children.
- CSFH will strive to ensure that the child's first placement is their last placement.

## 4 CSFH strategy to achieve early permanence

### **Early identification and planning of the child's permanence options**

- Early permanence will be an expectation for all cases regardless of the child's status and written into all policies and procedures in order to raise awareness with social workers of the need to consider the child's future care and how this can be secured.
- Child and family assessments and subsequent reviews should be used as an opportunity to explore how the child's needs will be met in the future and whether this is likely to be within the birth family or in alternative care arrangements.

- An Early permanence clinic organised by the Fostering and Kinship service and providing expert advice from permanence practitioners will be available on a 6 weekly basis for social workers who are looking at permanence options for children on the edge of care or where early consideration to alternative care is being considered.
- Cases should be referred to the Early permanence clinic where there is a need to explore a range of permanence options for the child; this may be at the following points:
  - following the child and family assessment
  - following a pre-birth assessment
  - where a child will become looked after
  - following a CIN review or CP conference where current care arrangements may not be meeting the child's needs
  - where consideration is being given to pre-proceedings under the PLO.

### **Working towards reunification**

- Where the permanence plan is for a child to remain or return home, child in need, child protection and care planning frameworks will be used to facilitate this and a package of whole-family support from statutory services or Early Help will be put in place for as long as is needed.
- CLA social workers will follow the division's *Reunification practice guidance* when planning for the return home of a looked after child. [reunification-policy-and-practice-guidance.pdf](#)

### **Promoting the use of concurrent planning and foster to adopt placements**

- Where appropriate, social workers should pursue more than one option for permanence, for example exploring family and friends care or looking into adoption or long-term fostering whilst supporting the child and family to remain or return home.
- The Early Permanence clinic should be used as a forum for exploring suitable alternative options as part of the concurrent planning framework. The child's review should be the forum for making decisions on permanence options and setting out how these will be pursued within the child's plan.

## Early Permanence Strategy

- Social workers will actively pursue foster to adopt placements for those children for whom adoption is likely to be the permanence plan.
- Social workers should refer to the RAA *Early Permanence, fostering for adoption and concurrent planning* policy for procedures on approval and matching of carers in early permanence placements. [Early Permanence: Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent... \(trixonline.co.uk\)](http://trixonline.co.uk)

### Early exploration of family and friends carers

- Social workers will explore potential family and friends care to achieve permanence at an early stage and carry out assessments of potential carers in a timely manner in order to inform planning.
- Family Group Conferences will be offered to all families to help them explore support for the child to remain or return home as their permanence plan or as a mechanism to enable families and CSFH to identify and assess potential alternative carers for children at an early stage, preferably without the child becoming looked after.

## 5 Scope of strategy

Early permanence principles should be applied in the following cases and brought to an Early Permanence clinic for advice from the Family, Friends and Fostering service:

- all pre-birth cases with permanence options explored as part of the pre-birth assessment
- all CIN and CP cases focussing on how to support families so that the child can remain at home
- all CIN and CP cases where care proceedings are being considered and the child's long-term care may not involve living with birth parents and/or the case has entered pre-proceedings.

## 6 Responsibilities under this strategy

- Permanence practitioners in the Fostering and Kinship service will offer advice to children's social workers at an Early Permanence clinic on suitable permanence options for the child and how to pursue them.

- Social workers and their supervisors should ensure eligible cases are brought to the Early Permanence clinic in a reasonable timescale to begin the permanence conversation.
- Team managers and IROs should ensure permanence is addressed and decisions and plans made in a timely manner within the CIN, CP and CLA planning and review frameworks and steps taken to achieve agreement on permanence as early as possible.

## 7 Foster to adopt placements

All CSFH social workers should refer to the RAA *Early Permanence, fostering for adoption and concurrent planning* policy when considering early permanence for a child that involves placing them with a dually approved foster to adopt carer.

[Early Permanence: Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent... \(trixonline.co.uk\)](#)

Social workers will work in partnership with foster to adopt carers in order to support them in their role in respect of the child's permanence journey and to help them adapt to the changing status of the placement.