



What is Family Finding?

Family Finding is a program aimed at reestablishing family connections between children in foster care and their relatives. Based on a national model, Family Finding provides strategies to find and engage relatives of children living in foster care.

Every child deserves a special connection only family can provide. Every child has a family and a meaningful connection to family helps a child develop a sense of belonging. The most important factor contributing to positive outcomes for children in foster care is meaningful connections and lifelong relationships with family.

Family Finding uses technology developed by US Search, an experienced search agent, to identify and locate family members using multiple databases. Once family members are found, Family Finding Specialists work to reestablish relationships where appropriate and explore ways to establish lifelong connections with family and/or find a permanent family placement for the child.

Who is considered a relative?

Chapter 48.02(15) “Relative” means a parent, stepparent, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, half brother, half sister, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, first cousin, 2nd cousin, nephew, niece, uncle, aunt, stepuncle, steppaunt, or any person of a preceding generation as denoted by the prefix of grand, great, or great-great, whether by blood, marriage, or legal adoption, or the spouse of any person named in this subsection, even if the marriage is terminated by death or divorce. For purposes of the application of s. 48.028 and the federal Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 USC 1901 to 1963, “relative” includes an extended family member, as defined in s. 48.028 (2) (am), whether by blood, marriage, or adoption, including adoption under tribal law or custom.

What is considered success?

*Success is achieved when 6 or more people that fit the definition of a “relative” make a lifelong commitment to a child.

Lifelong commitment could include regular contact through phone calls, letters, visits, inclusion on holiday celebrations, and providing support and assistance as a child transitions out of the foster care system at age 18.

*Success is when you can have family doing your job:

Social worker:

“I had a case where a teenage girl was on the run. The police picked her up and called me at 7am on a day I could not cancel scheduled appointments. I needed help. I had used the time when she was on run to work with her two aunts, so, when this call came, I called her aunt at 7 am. “Eunice,” I said, “I need your help.” And she helped - she came, she took the girl! Before, I never would have done that but I had gotten to know Eunice as we worked on the case, so I felt that maybe I could call her and ask for help, even at 7am. You do need a family to be involved as much as you are. I’m less stressed and anxious about having to do everything myself, less fearful that I’m making a mistake. I think maybe I’m more comfortable with my judgment because I have more tools and I’m not doing it all alone.”

*Success is following the spirit of Child Welfare Law which is: Do what is in the best interest of the child. This includes making sure non-family supports are included when appropriate and beneficial for the child.

When Does a Case Close?

- ***A Family Finding case closes when the following steps have been completed:***
 - 40 or more relatives have been located
 - The Family Finding Specialist has engaged as many relatives as possible
 - At least one blended perspective meeting was held
 - A decision making meeting was held in which a Network for Life was established for the child
 - After the meetings, the Family Finding Specialist continued to engage relatives through phone calls and/or email

In addition...

- ***Plans are developed to strengthen the lifetime supportive network of the child***
 - The child is placed with a relative or is in the process of transitioning to a relative placement as the result of Family Finding services
 - Regular or occasional day, weekend or overnight visits have been established with the child's relative(s)
 - Regular or occasional communication in the form of letters, emails, card, telephone calls or texts have been established with the child's relative(s).

A Family Finding case may also close for the following reasons:

- The child is being adopted by a non-relative.
- The child or parent declines the use of Family Finding Services
 - sometimes a child does not wish to participate in Family Finding. Although some discovery activities might be appropriate in order to locate family information that the child can use in the future, the child's wishes are ultimately respected and they are not forced to participate in the service.
- The Ongoing Case Manager or Family Finding staff determines that Family Finding services are not appropriate
 - if the child is chronically unstable, frequently AWOL or under a JIPS order, Family Finding services may no longer be feasible or the referral may be held until a later date.
- The child is moved out of the original county of service