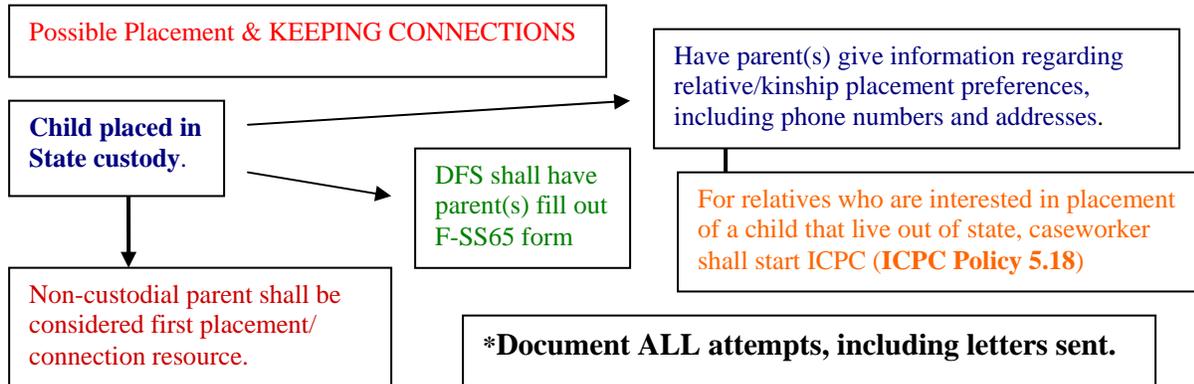


WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY SERVICES	CHAPTER: Placement and Permanency POLICY: Diligent Search for Relative/Kinship Care-Family Finding POLICY NUMBER: 5.7
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Resources that may be useful to search:

- Family Partnership meeting;
- Review existing DFS case records, including, but not limited to social services, juvenile justice, WYCAPS/EPICS, Benefit Specialist (POWER, etc);
- Search court, school, and records of child care;
- Obtain information from the child-may use Form [F-SS65b](#);
- Internet search resources;
- Submit the [F-SS65a](#) form to the Permanency Consultant to conduct an Accurant Search
- Attempt to contact and assess any relative/kinship whose name and information is obtained during this process.

A. Purpose

Relative/kinship placements are less restrictive and are preferable to other types of out-of-home placements. Within thirty (30) calendar days of placement due diligence must be made to notify all adult relatives (defined as grandparents, aunts/uncles, and any other relatives suggested by the parent) the child was removed from the parent’s home. The DFS caseworker is responsible for conducting an initial and ongoing diligent search for relatives/kinship for any child in DFS custody until permanency is achieved. DFS shall consider relative/kinship families as both temporary and permanent resources for a child unable to live safely with their parent.

DFS recognizes relative/kinship families are important to a child’s sense of identity, belonging, and long term connections. Even though relatives/kinship families may not be able to safely provide care for a child, DFS should consider ways the relatives/kinship families can be safely and meaningfully involved in the child’s life.

If the child meets the definition of an Indian Child, refer to the **ICWA policy (5.3)**.

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Relevant Laws/Statutes:

Wyo. Stat. § 14-3-208(a)(ii)

Wyo. Stat. § 14-3-431

Wyo. Stat. § 14-3-440

Wyo. Stat. § 14-6-429

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008

B. Procedure

1. The DFS caseworker assigned to the child’s case will have the primary responsibility for conducting the diligent search for relatives/kin. The process shall begin when the case is opened and shall continue until the child achieves permanency.
2. The non-custodial parent (to include biological and/or legal father and biological mother) shall be the first placement/connection resource explored. If a parent is absent, refer to the **Diligent Search for Absent Parent Policy (5.6)**.
 1. If paternity is not established, efforts shall be made to establish paternity as soon as possible (see **Diligent Search for Absent Parent Policy 5.6**).
 2. Paternity must be established **prior** to notifying the relatives of any father.
3. Within thirty (30) calendar days from the date the child was removed from the home, the DFS caseworker shall exercise due diligence to provide notice to grandparents and adult relatives (defined as aunts, uncles, any other relatives suggested by the parent) that the child was removed from the custody of the parent(s).
 - a. **Safety exception**-This is subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence.
 - b. DFS shall obtain from each parent a list of all relatives, kin or other important people in the child’s life by requesting the parent complete the *Important People in the Child(ren)’s Life* (F-SS65) prior to or at the time of the first court hearing (i.e., hearing within 48 hours).
 - 1) If this form is not completed prior to or at the time of the first hearing, the DFS caseworker will provide the *Important People in the Child(ren)’s Life* (F-SS65) form to the parent as soon as possible after the first hearing.
 - 2) If the parent will not cooperate with the DFS caseworker, DFS shall request the court to order the child’s parent to share information regarding the identity and contact information For all relatives, kin or other important people in the child’s life.

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- c. If the parent is not able or willing to provide the DFS caseworker with information on relatives or information obtained is not sufficient, the DFS caseworker shall complete a *Parent Locate Request Form* (F-SS65a) and request an Accurant search be completed by the Permanency Consultant. Information gathered in the Accurant report shall be used to contact relatives by phone or by letter using the *Notice to Relatives* (F-SS65c).
- d. If the relatives live out of the country, and are unable to be located by gathering information from the family or other common search methods, the DFS caseworker shall consult with their supervisor and district manager on how to proceed with the diligent search. The district manager shall work with financial services in order to contract with an agency (such as International Social Services, (ISS)) to complete an international search and home study.

Note: ISS may be contacted at 443-451-1200 or
online at <http://www.iss-usa.org/>

- 4. The DFS caseworker shall solicit information from the parent regarding placement preferences. The parent shall be advised that consideration is given to these preferences but no assurances shall be made.
- 5. For each person who the parent or other relatives provided a phone number or address, the DFS caseworker is responsible for contacting and documenting contact with the individual contacted.
- 6. If efforts to locate relative(s) or kin have been unsuccessful based on the information provided by the parent and relative(s), the DFS caseworker may:
 - a. Hold a Family Partnership meeting to facilitate the diligent search process and also to obtain releases to address the confidentiality issues;
 - b. Review existing DFS case records, including, but not limited to social services, juvenile justice, WYCAPS/EPICS, Benefit Specialist (POWER, SNAP, Medicaid, child care);
 - c. Search court, school, and child care provider's records;
 - d. Obtain from the child, if age appropriate, location information of any relative or kin known to the child. (The *People Remembered Chart*, F-SS65b, may be used to help the DFS caseworker and child in identifying important people.);
 - e. Utilize internet search resources (ex. www. 411.com, Google, Ancestry.com);

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- f. Submit the *Parent Locate Request Form* (F-SS65a) to the Permanency Consultant to conduct an Accurint search (in order to locate relatives using this search the DFS caseworker may provide the name of the parent, because the name of the relatives will be attached to the report, and/or name of specific relative); and
- g. Attempt to contact and evaluate any relative whose name and information is obtained during this process.
7. If the DFS caseworker is unable to make contact with the relatives, either in person or by telephone, the DFS caseworker shall follow up with a letter *Notice to Relative* (F-SS65c). It is best practice to send a certified letter in order to track your diligent efforts.
8. The DFS caseworker shall not determine if the relative or kin is inappropriate based solely on the relative/kin's failure to contact the DFS caseworker.
9. The DFS caseworker shall not assume the relative or kinship placements do not exist based solely on the parent statement or unwillingness to locate relatives or kin.
10. If a parent objects to DFS caseworker contacting relative/kinship families for safety reasons, the local DFS region/district manager of the child's local office shall make a determination as to whether relative/kinship families should be contacted. In making this determination, the local DFS office manager shall consider the following factors:
 - a. Whether the safety of the child or the parent will be jeopardized, due to family or domestic violence, if relative/kinship families are contacted; and
 - b. Whether contacting relative/kinship families is in the best interest of the child.
11. In any situation where the local DFS office elects to contact relative/kinship families over the objections of the parent, the DFS caseworker shall notify the parent DFS will contact the relative/kinship family(ies).
12. The DFS caseworker shall not determine whether sufficient efforts to contact an individual have been made until:
 - a. The DFS caseworker has spoken with the relative/kin by telephone or in person;
 - b. The telephone number has been disconnected and efforts to obtain a new number were unsuccessful;

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- c. The letter was returned as undeliverable or no response is received and efforts to obtain a new address were unsuccessful; and
 - d. The child achieved permanency. Monthly efforts of searching for and documenting contacts of relatives/kinship should continue over the life of the case.
13. Once contact is made with each relative the following information shall be provided:
- a. Notification the child was removed from the custody of the parent,
 - b. Explanation to the relative/kinship of the options that the relative has to participate in the care and placement of the child,
 - c. Requirements for the relative/kinship to become a foster home,
 - d. Description of services which may be available to help the relative/kinship safely and effectively care for the child, and
 - e. Explanation of guardianship and how that agreement may be retained;
 - f. The DFS caseworker should maintain confidentiality and divulge only the information necessary to help identify additional relatives/kinship and evaluate their interest in accepting placement of the child.
14. During contact, if the relatives/ kinship are interested in placement of the child, the DFS caseworker is responsible for explaining the relative /kinship placement options, and if the relative lives out of state, initiating an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (**ICPC Policy 5.18**) referral as soon as the relatives/kinship definitively expresses interest in placement of the child.
15. If the relatives/kinship are not interested in placement or it is determined to be inappropriate, the DFS caseworker shall:
- a. Attempt to obtain information about other relatives/kinship who were not previously provided by the parent; and
 - b. Determine if ongoing contact between the child and relatives/kinship is appropriate.
 - c. If appropriate, invite the relatives/kinship to participate in the family partnership.

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16. The initial diligent search shall be initiated by DFS caseworker within thirty (30) calendar days of the out-of-home placement. However, the diligent search process is ongoing until permanency is achieved for the child.
17. If a child's placement is disrupted, the DFS caseworker may make efforts to reconsider all relatives/kinship previously contacted or evaluated even if they were not previously considered a placement resource.
18. Protocol for relatives who reside out-of-state
 - a. If relatives/kinship are located out of state, or outside of the child's home community, and indicates a desire to be a placement resource, the DFS caseworker shall:
 - b. Advise the relatives/kinship, when the case plan goal is reunification, a factor in the decision regarding placement of the child is whether the placement will enable the parent and child to have visitation and whether the child will be able to remain in their home school. The child will remain in the child's home state or in the child's home community if visitation is not feasible in the out-of-state placement;
 - c. Inform the family of the ICPC process (see **ICPC Policy 5.18**) and initiates the ICPC referral within thirty (30) calendar days;
 - d. Facilitate contact between the relatives/kinship and the child while the child is in out-of-home placement in order for the relatives/kinship and the child to maintain their parent-child relationship;
 - e. Keep the relatives/kinship informed of the progress on the case plan goal and whether the anticipated return of the child to their home continues to be feasible;
 - f. Advise the placement provider(s) if reunification is not feasible, the permanency plan will be to move the child to the out-of-state placement with relatives/kinship; and
 - g. Recommend moving the child to the out-of-state placement if the relatives/kinship's home is approved by ICPC and efforts to reunite the child with the parents were made and failed.

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19. Document all efforts on WYCAPS in the narrative and in the contacts screen. Use the “Diligent Search Relatives” contact type for all narrative entries related to diligent efforts to contact relatives. The DFS caseworker may also utilize the *Diligent Search Log* (F-SS65e) to keep track of efforts made to contact relatives/kinship.