



**• 201 Advanced:
Search, Engage, and Evaluate
The Power of Kinship Care**

Learning Goals

Define and Understand

Understand the importance of kinship, including relatives and suitable persons.

Apply

Apply Policy and Practice:

- Implement policy and best practices when searching, engaging, and evaluating kinship caregivers.

Identify

Identify Best Interest of the Child:

- Demonstrate how to identify the best interest of the child in relation to placement.

Support

Support Placements:

- Identify caregiver needs and provide necessary resources to support placements.

Understand and Address

Understand and Address Biases:

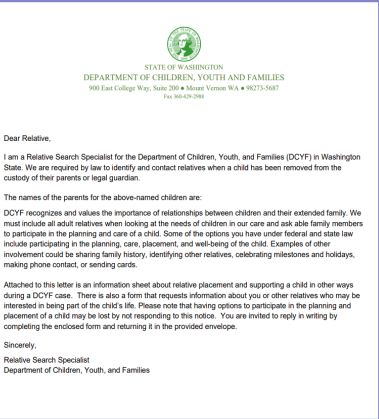
- Recognize and address biases in decision-making processes.

Explore

Explore Skills Through Case Studies:

- Use case studies to apply and explore the skills learned.

Kinship Care Requirements



Throughout the life of the case.

Relative Search & Notification

Engagement

Fair Evaluation

Best Interests of Child

Placement

Permanency

Legal Requirement

1

Legal Requirement

- DCYF must engage with all relatives
- Evaluate potential placements

2

Active Engagement

- Actively involve all interested relatives
- Work with relatives for placements

3

Fair Evaluation

- Every relative must be fairly evaluated
- Consider connections and support



Federal Law

- Relative Search
 - Title IV-E Of the Social Security Act42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29)
 - Within 30 days of Removal of a Child DCYF Must Exercise Due Diligence to Provide Notice to the Child's Relatives

State Statutes

- The Statutory Scheme of Chapter 13.34 RCW Generally Requires Preference to Relative Placement When in the Child's Best Interest
 - Shelter Care
 - RCW 13.34.060(2); RCW 13.34.065(4)(c); RCW 13.34.065(5)(c); RCW 13.34.065(5)(d)
 - Fact Finding
 - RCW 13.34.130(3); RCW 13.34.130(6)
 - Review and Permanency Planning Hearings
 - RCW 13.34.138(2)(c)(ix); RCW 13.34.145(7)(b)

Case Law

- *In re Dependency of K.W.*, 199 Wn.2d 131 (2022)
 - The Preference for Relative Placement in RCW 13.34.130 continues throughout the life of the Dependency
 - Even after Parental Rights are Terminated
 - Dependency Courts are Charged with Actively Ensuring that Relative Placements have been Fairly Evaluated at Each Review Hearing
 - Placement Decisions Must be Made Based on the Best Interests of the Child
 - Highly Fact Dependent
 - Cannot use Factors that Serve as Proxies for Race to Deny Placement

D.S. Settlement



Class Action Lawsuit Brought Against DCYF by Disability Rights Washington and Four Dependent Youth

Alleged DCYF Violated Federal Law and Youth's Constitutional Rights by Not Providing Appropriate Placement for High Needs Youth



Settlement Included Development of Kinship Engagement Unit to

Conduct Initial and On-Going Family Engagement to Enlist Support of Extended Family and Family Friends Identified by the Youth

- Even if the Identified Family and Friends Cannot be Placement

Provide Information about Available Supports and Resources for Immediate and Extended Families

Offer Peer Support to Address Barriers to Engagement and Assist in Accessing Resources

Guide Family Placements Through the Licensing Process

Assist Family Placements with Navigating Legal Requirements



Kinship Policies



4250. Out-of-Home Placements

4251. Relative Search and Notification

4260. Placement Moves

4526. Placement and Support for Licensed Relatives, Suitable Persons, and FPs

4527. Placing with and Supporting Unlicensed Relatives and Suitable Persons



Relative Search & Notification



**Relative
Search and
Engagement
work has
continued to
evolve at
DCYF**



Search and Engagement work increases early identification of kin placement providers and supports.

2013-2014	
Licensed Non-Kin placement	Relative/Kin Placement
58%	42%
2025-2026	
Licensed Non-Kin placement	Relative/Kin Placement
39%	61%

We are all responsible in creating and maintaining kin-first connections

Intake/CPS/FAR/FVS

Afterhours

Relative Search and Engagement Unit

CFWS/Adoptions



Relative Search statewide annual roll-up	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Relative Search referrals	4477	3682	4052	3974	3865	4982
Relative Searches completed	4198	3658	3,217	3555	3157	3291
Letters sent to potential relatives	137,374	121,791	141,157	163,220	158,463	161,587
Telephone calls/emails from relatives	15,744	11,232	10,659	9976	8155	9199
Outcomes						
Relatives interested in placement	4511	4113	3,677	4475	3791	3931
Relatives interested in providing support	4229	3375	3140	4059	4089	3641
Relatives unable/unwilling to help at this time	6191	4226	4621	5945	3981	3576

Engagement



What does it mean to engage with relatives?

Communicating

Communicating with Interested Relatives: Reach out to relatives and involve them in the case.

Explaining

Explaining the Process: Clearly explain the situation, the steps involved, and the needs of the child.

Answering

Answering Questions: Be responsive to relatives' queries and provide them with necessary resources and information.

Including

Including Relatives in SPMs: Ensure relatives are part of Shared Planning Meetings (SPMs) to support relationship building with the parent, child, and caregiver.

Supporting

Supporting Relationship Building: Facilitate and encourage strong connections between the child, parents, and caregivers.

Reach out

Re-engaging Relatives: Before each permanency planning hearing and when the child is legally free, reach out to relatives again to update and involve them.





Wait what is the Purpose of Engagement?

Is Engagement for Placement only? NO!

Maintain Connection

Cultural Ties

Advocacy

Support for Placement

Respite Care

Life Skills

Educational Support

Celebrate

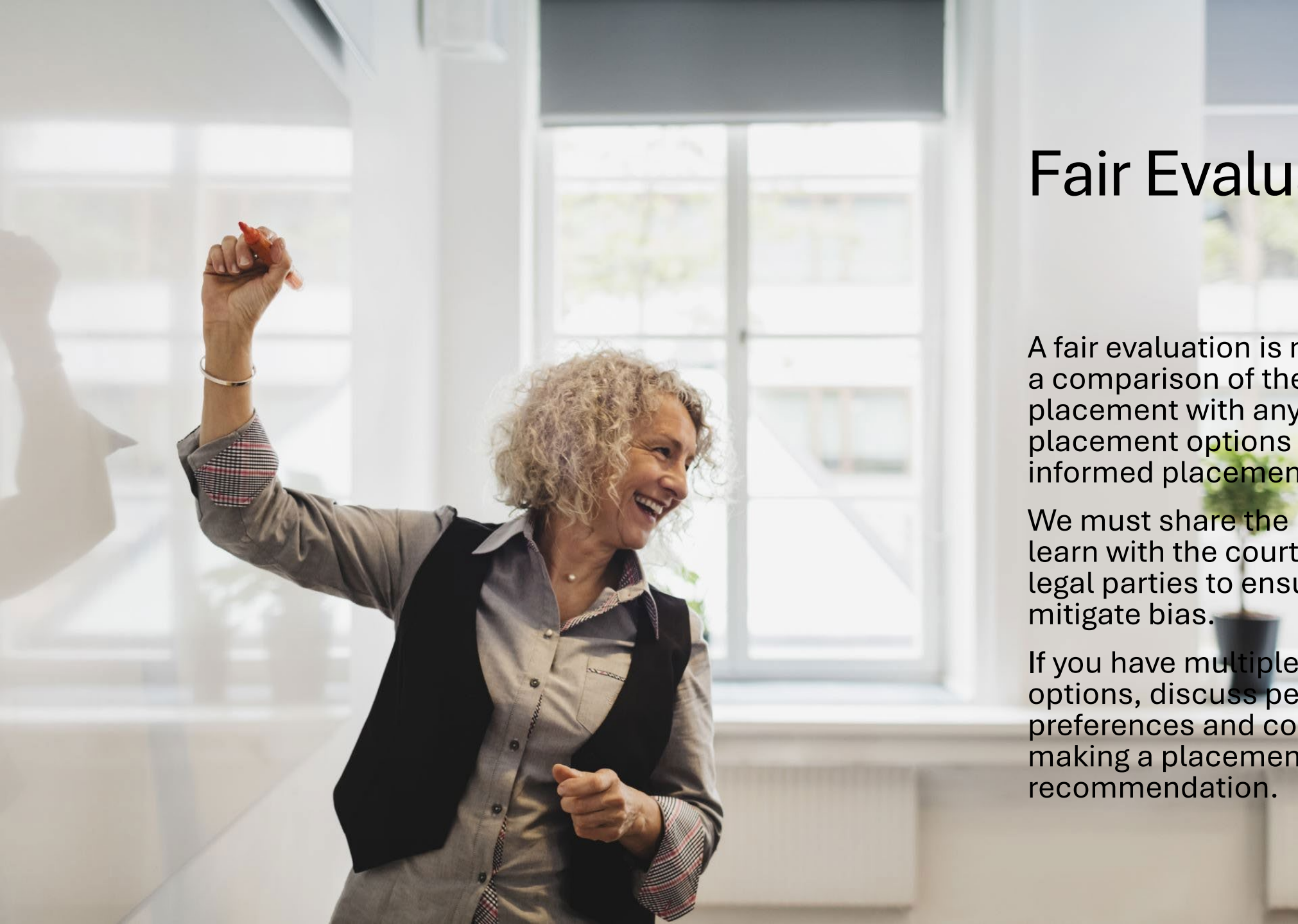
Family Medical Information

Visitation



Fair Evaluation





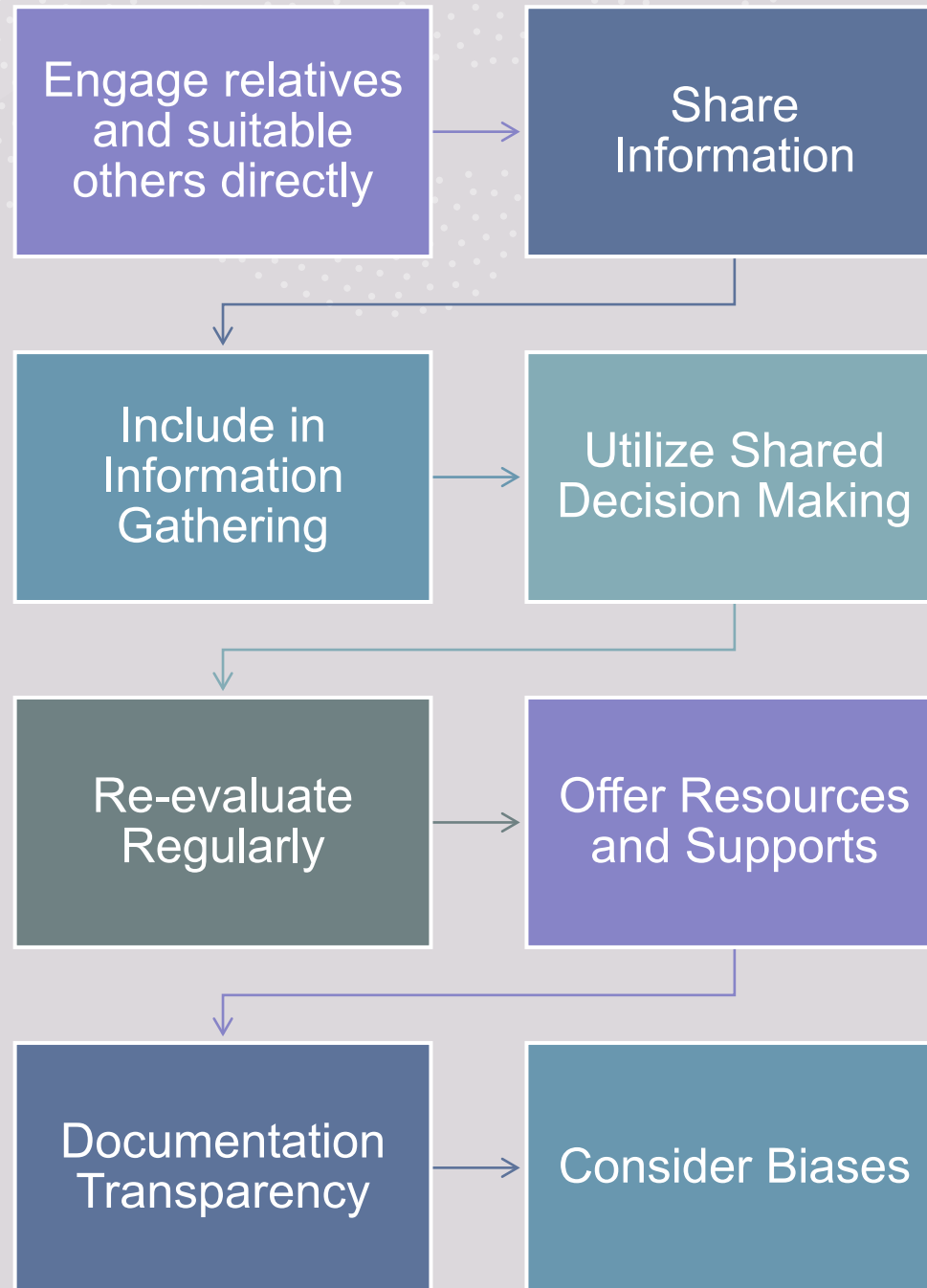
Fair Evaluation

A fair evaluation is needed to make a comparison of the relative placement with any other placement options and make an informed placement decision.

We must share the information we learn with the courts and other legal parties to ensure equity and mitigate bias.

If you have multiple placement options, discuss permanency preferences and consider it when making a placement recommendation.

How do we gather the information that goes into a Fair Evaluation ?



What is the Difference Between Fairly Evaluating a Relative for Placement vs a Home Study?

Child Welfare

- Legally required to assess all relatives to evaluate potential placements.
- Legally required to ensure every possible family member is considered.

Licensing Division

- The home study assess the competence and suitability of the caregiver/applicant as well as the physical conditions of the placement setting.

Think of it like this.....

- Licensing staff assess if a family CAN be placement
- CW staff assess if a family SHOULD be placement.

Best Interests of the Child



If you are NOT Placing with a Relative or Kin Articulating Efforts Your Efforts

Describe the efforts in searching for kinship or suitable persons.

Have you identified another kinship or suitable person?

If the child/youth has special needs, can the new placement meet those needs?

Why is it in the child's best interest not to be with a kinship or suitable person?

If not another family member or suitable person, why is it in the child's best interest to be placed in a foster home?

What are best interests?

An individualized evaluation of the child- and case-specific facts and circumstances to identify the best option for a child.

Best interest of the child is the most important factor when looking at a plan other than return home. Considerations:

- Emotional Growth and Stability
- Physical Health and Mental Care
- Least Restrictive Setting
- Parent Child Preferences
- Support for Reunification
- Cultural and Familial Continuity
- Permanency and Long-term Stability

Other Child Best Interests Factors When Considering a Change in Placement

Unique Cases

Psychological and Emotional Bonds

Potential Harm from Severing Contact from
Current Caregiver

Attachment to Prospective Caregiver

Prospective Caregiver's History and
Circumstances

Effect of Abrupt and Substantial Change on
Child/Youth

Arriving at “Best Interest”



DCYF STAFF



**SHARED
PLANNING
PROCESS**



**LEGAL
REPRESENTATION
AND ADVOCACY**



**THE COURTS
(THE FINAL
ARBITER)**





Impact of Bias

- On the Child
- On the Family
- On the Case Process



Thank you!

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