

At a Glance

	Required Participation	Adversary	Status	Permanency Hearing Before Final Order	Permanency Hearing After Final Order
Hearing set timely	14 days	14 days	60 days	1st at 180 days, thereafter, 120 days	180 days, except 1st at 90 days if TPR
Court of Continuing, Exclusive Jurisdiction	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Child AAL and GAL appointed	Required before Temporary Orders Hearing (AAL only)	No later than 14-day Hearing	Required before 14-day Hearing	Yes	Yes
Parent Attorney appointed	Required before temporary orders hearing	Yes	Yes	No	No
Notice of Hearing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Court Report filed and provided	Not Required	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Identify all parties and swear witnesses	Yes	Not Required	Not Required	Yes	Yes
Inquire about absent parties	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Inquire about diligent efforts	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Address service on parties	Yes	Yes	Yes, if outstanding	Yes, if outstanding	No
Address parentage issues	No	Yes	Yes, if outstanding	Yes, if outstanding	No
Issue orders regarding service	Yes	Yes	Yes, if outstanding	Yes, if outstanding	No
Admonish parents of right to attorney	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Admonish parents of TPR	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Aggravated circumstances	No	Yes	No	No	No
Inquire about and document Indian heritage	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No, unless new information
Indian Child Welfare Act, if applicable	No	Clear and convincing, expert testimony	Active efforts	Active efforts	No
Child Placement Resources Form	No	Yes	Yes, if outstanding	No	No
Child asked about potential placements	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Initial Home Studies on file	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Child present	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

At a Glance *continued*

	Required Participation	Adversary	Status	Permanency Hearing Before Final Order	Permanency Hearing After Final Order
If AAL hasn't seen client, determine good cause	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Review current and alternative placement	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Determine if able to place with relative, cite evidence	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
If with relative, inform about PCA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Temporary Visitation Plan on file	No	Yes	No	No	No
Review Visitation Plan	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Service Plan development	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Review Service Plan	Yes	No	Yes	Review Compliance	Review Compliance
Review permanency goal	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Review education goals, progress, and needs	No	No	If needed	Yes	Yes
Education Decision-Maker identified	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Review medical care	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Medical Consenter identified	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's opinion on medical care known	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Normalcy activities	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Reasonable Efforts findings required	No	Yes, to determine evidence sufficient for TMC to DFPS	Yes, as relates to Service Plan Requirements	Yes, as relates to execution of Permanency Plan	Yes, as relates to execution of Permanency Plan
Determine dismissal date	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Transitional Living Plan on file if child is 16 or older	N/A	No	No	No	Yes
Independent Living Skills Assessment conducted, if required	N/A	No	No	Yes	Ye
Review Extended Jurisdiction	N/A	No	No	No	Yes
Set next hearing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue order and provide to parties	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Court Ordered Services Hearing Checklist

15 minutes; up to 25 suggested best practice

Statutory

Prior to the Hearing:

- Hearing within 14 days of petition unless good cause for extension
- Child's GAL/AAL appointed
- Parents' AAL appointed
- Parties served

At the Hearing:

- Identify parties present and served
- Determine indigence
- Determine need for language interpretation
- Determine good cause if AAL has not seen child
- Ensure services are specific and narrowly tailored

Court Findings

At the End of the Hearing:

- Determine if sufficient evidence to order participation in services by parent(s) or caretaker(s) for the child; if not, deny required participation in services. Evidence sufficient to satisfy a person of ordinary prudence and caution that:
 - Abuse or neglect occurred, or
 - Substantial risk of abuse or neglect, or
 - Continuing danger to the physical health or safety of child caused by an act or failure to act by named party/parties; and
- Services necessary to ensure the physical health or safety of child.
- ISSUE COURT ORDER
 - State findings;
 - Make appropriate temporary orders under Chapter 105 to ensure safety of the child;
 - Order the participation in services narrowly tailored to address court findings;
 - Set dismissal deadline of 180 days; and
 - Schedule review hearing within 90 days.

Review Hearings:

- Address continued need for temporary order and dismiss if no longer a continued need.
- Set review hearing within 90 days if temporary order continued.
- Determine if good cause to extend dismissal deadline if DFPS shows continued need for services beyond original 180-day dismissal deadline.

Best Practices

- Engage parties with direct questions
- Review services with parents
- Set Review Hearing date within 90 days
- Give notice in open court
- Engage parties with direct questions:
 - *Do you understand the purpose of the court ordered services?*
- Ask the following questions:
 - *How are these services specific to this family and child?*
 - *Are there cultural issues we need to understand?*
 - *Is there a need for ongoing services or can we dismiss today?*

Adversary Hearing Checklist

15 Minutes; up to 25 suggested best practice

Statutory

Prior to the Hearing:

- Hearing within 14 days of removal unless temporary order extended
- Child's GAL/AAL appointed
- Parties served
- CCEJ identified

At the Hearing:

- Identify parties present and served
- Inform parents of right to attorney
- Determine indigence
- DFPS provided notice to relatives
- Need for language interpretation
- Child Placement Resources Form/efforts to identify/locate parties not present
- Child provided opportunity to provide information about possible relative or other caregiver
- Determine if child can be placed with relative and note evidence
- CPS and criminal background checks conducted and home studies initiated
- If child with relative, inform about Permanency Care Assistance (PCA)
- Inquire about Indian/Native American Heritage
- Temporary Family Visitation Plan
- Determine good cause if AAL has not seen child

Best Practices

- Engage parties with direct questions
- Review services with parents
- Set Status Hearing date
- Open court notice
- Ask the following questions:
 - *What is preventing this child from returning home today?*
 - *How is my decision specific to this child and this family?*
 - *Are there cultural issues we need to understand?*

Court Findings

At the End of the Hearing:

- Determine sufficient evidence regarding the parent from whom the child was removed to grant DFPS TMC of child; if not, return child to that parent
- Document danger to child to return to home or remain in home and remaining in home is contrary to welfare; reasonable efforts to prevent removal and to return child home
- If TMC to DFPS, inform parents that rights may be terminated or limited
- If cite by pub needed, may render temporary order anyway
- Determine aggravated circumstances alleged or exist
- If family violence, protective order necessary or available
- If child victim of human trafficking, placement in secure agency foster or group home
- Place the child with a parent not involved in the removal unless there is evidence that the parent cannot be located or is unwilling to take possession of the child or possession of the child by the parent constitutes a continuing danger to the child despite reasonable efforts to enable possession
- Place child with a relative unless not in best interest
- Determine whether DFPS is able to place child with relative or other designated caregiver; note evidence supporting finding either way
- ISSUE COURT ORDER
 - Service
 - Notice of removal
 - Parentage or DNA testing
 - Dismissal date
 - Transfer CCEJ, if applicable

Well-being Issues

- School stability, education goals, progress, and issues, and Education Decision-Maker
- Medical care and behavioral or psychiatric care
- Young adult presence at hearing or opinion about education or medical care

Status Hearing Checklist

15 Minutes; up to 25 suggested best practice

Statutory

Prior to the Hearing:

- Hearing 60 days after DFPS appointed TMC, unless aggravated circumstances
- Persons given 10 days' notice of hearing
- Visitation Plan filed at least 10 days before
- Family Plan of Service filed no later than 45th day after DFPS appointed TMC
- Notice of Education Decision-Maker (Form 208-E) filed
- Designation of Medical Consenter (Form 2085-B) filed
- If parent is unrepresented, inform of right to counsel, determine indigency, and appoint attorney if indigent and in opposition to suit
- Dismissal date set
- Child "3 in 30" exam trio performed no later than 30th day after child entered TMC of DFPS.

At the Hearing:

- Identify parties present and served
- DFPS due diligence to locate parties
- DFPS provided notice to relatives
- Need for language interpretation
- Inform parents of right to attorney
- If AAL hasn't seen client, determine good cause
- Child Placement Resources Form filed
- Child provided opportunity to provide information about possible relative or other caregiver
- If child with relative, inform about Permanency Care Assistance (PCA)
- Paternity issues/Paternity Registry
- Home studies initiated
- Review current and alternative placements
- Review conservatorship and substitute care of the child
- Inquire about Indian/Native American Heritage
- DFPS held or plans to hold Permanency Planning Meeting
- Address citizenship issues, consulate notified
- Review child's medical care

Family Plan of Service (SP)

- Determine if:
 - SP developed jointly with parents
 - Each term reviewed/discussed with parents; parents understand
 - Parents informed of rights with SP process
 - Noted if parent not able or willing to participate in development of SP
- Plan has primary and concurrent goal
- Plan is signed by parents and DFPS
- Parent has opportunity to comment on SP
- Court can modify SP at any time

Visitation Plan (VP)

- Review VP:
 - Age and safety of child at/during visitation
 - Desires of each parent regarding visitation
 - Location of each parent and child
 - Transportation to/from visits
 - DFPS/other resources available to support visitation
- Court may modify VP at any time
- If find visitation not in child's best interest, include in order reasons and specific steps parent must take to have visitation

Status Hearing Checklist

continued

Court Findings

At the End of the Hearing:

- Determine whether SP narrowly tailored for specific issues identified by DFPS
- Determine whether any SP with goal of reunification adequately ensures that reasonable efforts made to enable parents to provide safe environment for child
- Advise/warn parents & parties:
 - Custodial rights and duties subject to restriction or termination or child not returned unless parent demonstrates willingness and ability to provide child with safe environment
- Progress under SP reviewed at all hearings, including review of newly acquired knowledge or skills
- Incorporate SP into court order and render additional, appropriate orders to require compliance with or implement SP
- ISSUE COURT ORDER:
 - Dismissal date
 - May transfer to court of continuing, exclusive jurisdiction, if CCEJ exists

Best Practices

- Set first Permanency Hearing Before Final Order and announce in open court
- Engage parties with direct questions
 - *Do you understand the purpose of the Service Plan?*
- Ask direct and specific questions of the Department about reasonable efforts
 - *What about this plan is narrowly tailored to address specific issues present in Ms. Smith's case?*
- Ask the following questions:
 - *What is preventing this child from returning home today?*
 - *How is my decision specific to this child and this family?*
 - *Are there cultural issues we need to understand?*

Well-being Issues

- School stability, education goals, progress, and issues, and Education Decision-Maker
- Medical Consenter may need to be identified or updated
- Review psychiatric care, especially if child or youth prescribed psychotropic medication
- Young adult presence at hearing or opinion about education or medical care

Permanency Hearing Before Final Order Checklist

15 Minutes; up to 25 suggested best practice

Statutory

Prior to the Permanency Hearing (PH):

- If first PH, scheduled within 180 days after DFPS named TMC
- If subsequent PH, scheduled within 120 days of last PH
- 10 days' notice provided
- DFPS Permanency Progress Report filed at least 10 days before PH and includes:
 - Child's Permanency Plan
 - Summary of Medical Care
- The court file includes:
 - Notification of Medical Consenter Form 2085-B
 - Education Decision-Maker Form 2085-E
 - Visitation Plan

At the Hearing:

- Identify those present
- Child in attendance
- DFPS due diligence to locate and serve parties not present
- Parent, alleged father or relative provided locating information for absent parents, alleged fathers, or relatives
- Child provided opportunity to provide information about possible relative or other caregiver
- If child with relative, inform about Permanency Care Assistance
- Paternity issues/Paternity Registry
- Need for language interpretation
- If parent unrepresented, inform of right to counsel, determine indigency, and appoint attorney
- Inquire about Indian/Native American Heritage
- Citizenship issues, consulate notified
- Compliance with orders/Service Plan and progress made
- Parties and those present heard and provided opportunity to present evidence
- If caregiver is present, must be given opportunity to provide information about the child.
- If AAL has not seen child, determine good cause
- Review Permanency Progress Report:
 - Safety and well-being of child
 - Child's needs (medical/special)
 - Child's placement
 - Evidence as to whether DFPS is able to place with relative
 - Child's primary and alternative permanency goals
 - DFPS reasonable efforts to finalize permanency plan
 - Child provided opportunity to express opinion about medical care
- For child receiving psychotropic medication, whether child has:
 - been provided non-pharmacological interventions.
 - seen prescribing physician every 90 days for review
- Child's Education Decision-Maker identified, education needs and goals identified and addressed, and major changes in school performance or disciplinary events
- If 14 or older, transition services to assist from care to independent living
- For child with goal of APPLA:
 - child's desired permanency outcome; and
 - whether APPLA best permanency plan; if so, provide compelling reasons why not in child's best interest to:
 - return home,
 - adoption,
 - placed with legal guardian, or
 - placed with a fit and willing relative
 - whether DFPS has conducted an Independent Living Skills (ILS) assessment for all youth 16 and older in TMC
 - whether DFPS has addressed the goals identified in the youth's permanency plan
 - For youth 16 years of age or older, whether DFPS has provided documents required by Section 264.121(e)
 - For youth 18 years or older, or has had disabilities of minority removed, whether DFPS has provided youth with documents and information listed in Section 264.121(e-1)
- Child receiving appropriate medical care
- Child has regular, ongoing opportunities for age-appropriate normalcy activities, including those not in child's service plan

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Permanency Hearing Before Final Order Checklist

continued

Court Findings

At the End of the Hearing

- Return the child to the parent or parents unless, with respect to each parent, there is a continuing danger to the health and safety of the child and returning home is contrary to the welfare of the child.
- Advise/warn custodial rights and duties subject to restriction or termination
- Incorporate changes or modifications to Service Plan into order
- Likely date child returned home, placed for adoption, or placed in PMC
- Set next PH within 120 days or sooner
- Announce dismissal date and any upcoming hearings

Best Practices

- If lack of notice, consider resetting hearing to secure attendance
- Engage parties with direct questions
- Engage youth
- Ask DFPS direct, child-specific questions about primary and concurrent goal
- If not moving to positive permanency, set timelines and tasks to be completed prior to next hearing
- AAL knowledgeable about child's needs and legal objectives
- Set next PH at 90 instead of 120 days
- For Older Youth:
 - Family Group Decision Making
- Preparation for Adult Living (PAL)
- If will turn 18 while in foster care:
 - discuss extended foster care and trial independence
 - ensure referrals to Texas Workforce Commission
 - ensure appropriate documents in possession before leave care
- Ask the following questions:
 - *What is preventing this child from returning home today?*
 - *How is my decision specific to this child and this family?*
 - *Are there cultural issues we need to understand?*

Well-being Issues

Medical Care and Mental Health

- Summary of medical care:
 - Nature of emergency medical care
 - All medical and mental health treatment receiving and progress
 - Any medication prescribed/progress
 - Caregiver compliance with treatment plan
- Adverse reaction or side effects
- Diagnosis or diagnostic tests
- Activity to avoid that affect effectiveness of treatment
- Other info required

Education and Educational Decisions

- Enrolled and in appropriate grade
- Remain in current school, even if placement changes
- If change placement, determine:
 - Where child wants to attend school
 - Whether transportation is available
 - Whether change coordinated with grading and testing periods
 - Whether records/credits transferred
- If 0-3, child assessed for developmental milestones through ECI
- If 0-5, enrolled in Early Head Start, Head Start, or Pre-Kindergarten
- Education Decision-Maker Form 2085-E on file
- School supports and disciplinary issues
- Extracurricular activities/normalecy
- Evaluated for/receiving special education
- If 14 or older, postsecondary education plan

Final Hearing Checklist for Non-Jury Trial

Statutory

Prior to the Final Hearing:

- Notice provided to parties within 45 days of trial
- All parties served
- Legal relief properly plead
- Compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act, if applicable

At the Hearing:

- Note appearances of all parties present
- Take announcements about readiness to proceed to trial
- Rule on any pending pretrial motions
- Opening Statements, unless waived
- Presentation of evidence
- Closing arguments, unless waived
- Evidence
 - Grounds for termination
 - *Holley v. Adams* best interest factors:
 - desires of the child
 - emotional and physical needs of child now and in future
 - emotional and physical danger to child now and in future
 - parental abilities of individuals seeking custody
 - programs available to assist those individuals to promote best interest of child
 - plans for child by these individuals or by agency seeking custody
 - stability of home or proposed placement
 - acts or omissions of parent which may indicate that existing parent-child relationship not a proper one
 - any excuse for acts or omissions of the parent

Court Findings

At the End of the Hearing:

- Determine if met burden of proof:
 - Termination of Parental Rights: Clear and Convincing Evidence
 - Conservatorship: Preponderance of the Evidence
 - If ICWA applies: Beyond a Reasonable Doubt
- If termination, appoint DFPS or individual as managing conservator (MC)
- If no termination and DFPS awarded MC, must find that:
 - Appointment of parent not in child's best interest because would significantly impair child's physical health or emotional development; and
 - Not in child's best interest to appoint relative of child or another person as managing conservator
- If no termination and DFPS awarded MC, consider whether:
 - The child will turn 18 in not less than 3 years;
 - The child is at least 12 years old or has continuously expressed a strong desire against being adopted; and
 - Needs and desires of child
- Advise parties of right to appeal
- Set Permanency Hearing After Final Order (PHAFO) within 90 days if MC granted to DFPS with termination
- Set PHAFO within 180 days if MC granted to DFPS without termination
- Continue appointment of child's attorney ad litem (AAL), or guardian ad litem (GAL), or attorney in the dual role as long as the child is in the conservatorship of DFPS

Best Practices

- Remind Parent Attorney of appellate duties
- Set initial hearings sooner than statutorily required to ensure progress toward child's permanency goal

Permanency Hearing After Final Order Checklist

15 Minutes; up to 25 suggested best practice

Statutory

Prior to Permanency Hearing (PH)

- If parental rights terminated, first PH within 90 days of final order
- If parent rights not terminated, first PH within 180 days of final order
- 10 days' notice of hearing
- DFPS Permanency Progress Report filed 10 days before hearing; includes
 - Summary of Medical Care
- The court file includes:
 - Notification of Medical Consenter Form 2085-B
 - Education Decision-Maker Form 2085-E

At the Hearing:

- Identify those present
- Child in attendance
- Review DFPS efforts to notify of hearing
- If AAL has not seen client, form filed
- Review Permanency Progress Report:
 - Child's safety and well-being
 - Child's needs (medical/special)
 - Child's placement, noting evidence as to whether DFPS can place child with relative
 - If in institutional care, efforts to ensure least restrictive environment
 - Primary/alternative permanency goals
 - DFPS reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan:
 - due diligence to place for adoption if rights terminated and child eligible; or
 - APPLA, including appointing relative as PMC or returning the child to parent, if appropriate for child
 - For child with APPLA goal:
 - desired permanency outcome; and
 - whether APPLA best permanency plan; if so, compelling reasons why not in child's best interest to:
 - return home,
 - be placed for adoption,
 - be placed with legal guardian, or
 - Be placed with fit and willing relative.
 - whether DFPS has conducted an Independent Living Skills (ILS) assessment for all youth 16 and older in TMC or PMC
 - whether DFPS has conducted an ILS for all youth 14 and older in PMC
 - whether DFPS has addressed the goals identified in the youth's permanency plan
 - for youth 16 years of age or older, whether DFPS has provided documents required by Section 264.121(e)
 - for youth 18 years or older, or has had disabilities of minority removed, whether DFPS has provided youth with documents and information listed in Section 264.121(e-1)
 - If 14 or older, services to assist in transitioning from care to independent living in community
 - Receiving appropriate medical care and provided opportunity to express opinion on medical care
 - If receiving psychotropic medication:
 - provided appropriate non-pharmacological interventions, therapies, or strategies to meet needs; or
 - seen by prescribing physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice nurse at least once every 90 days
 - Education Decision-Maker and education needs and goals identified, major changes in school performance or serious disciplinary events
 - For child in PMC without termination, whether DFPS to provide services to parent for up to 6 months after PH if:
 - child not placed with relative or other individual, including foster parent, seeking PMC; and
 - court determines further efforts at reunification with parent:
 - in best interest of child; and
 - likely to result in child's safe return to parent
 - DFPS identified family or other caring adult with permanent commitment to child
 - Child provided opportunity to provide information about possible relative or other caregiver
 - If child with relative, inform about Permanency Care Assistance

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Permanency Hearing After Final Order Checklist

Continued

- Review DFPS efforts to ensure the child has regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age-appropriate normalcy activities, including activities not listed in the child's service plan.
- Address citizenship issues, consulate notified, SIJS
- Ensure those present given opportunity to be heard and if caregiver is present, must be allowed to provide information
- Confer with child about permanency plan
- Regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age-appropriate normalcy activities

Court Findings

At the End of the Hearing:

- Issue court order
- Set next PH within 180 days

Best Practices

- If inadequate notice, consider resetting hearing to secure attendance
- Engage parties with direct questions
- Engage youth
- Ask DFPS direct, child-specific questions about both primary and concurrent goal
- Next PH by 90 or 120 instead of 180 days
- For youth who will turn 18 while in care:
 - Discuss extended foster care and trial independence
 - Ensure referrals to Texas Workforce Commission
 - Ensure delivery of documents *before* leave care
- Youth advised of eligibility for Family Group Decision Making or Circles of Support to discuss future plans
- Youth enrolled in PAL or provided transitional services after 14th birthday
- Ask the following questions:
 - *What is preventing this child from achieving positive permanency?*
 - *How is my decision specific to this child and this family?*
 - *Are there cultural issues we need to understand?*

Well-being Issues

Medical Care and Mental Health

- Summary of medical care:
 - Nature of emergency medical care
 - All medical and mental health treatment receiving and progress
 - Any medication prescribed/progress
 - Caregiver compliance with treatment plan
 - Adverse reaction or side effects
 - Diagnosis or diagnostic tests
 - Activity to avoid that affect effectiveness of treatment
 - Other info required

Education and Educational Decisions

- Enrolled in school/in appropriate grade
- Remains in current school, if placement change
- If placement change, determine:
 - Where child wants to attend school
 - Whether transportation available
 - Whether change coordinated with grading and testing periods
 - Whether records/credits transferred
- If 0-3, child assessed for developmental milestones through ECI
- If 0-5, child enrolled in Early Head Start, Head Start, or Pre-Kindergarten
- Educational Decision-Maker Form 2085-E on file
- School supports and disciplinary issues
- Extracurricular activities/normalcy
- Evaluated/receiving special ed services
- If 14 or older, postsecondary education plan

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Foster Care & Education Judicial Checklist

School Readiness

- Children ages 0-3 assessed for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services.
- Children ages 0-5 enrolled in Early Head Start, Head Start, or Pre-Kindergarten.

School Stability

- Child remains enrolled in and has transportation to the school the child attended prior to removal.
- Child remains in the school where the child is currently enrolled unless it is not in their best interest, regardless of additional placement changes.
- School changes occur at the end of grading periods.
- School changes do not conflict with standardized testing or final exams.

Education Decision-Making

- DFPS has conservatorship and designated an Education Decision-Maker (EDM).
- Parent retains or other person given specific education-related rights as appropriate.
- DFPS provided EDM Form 2085-E to child's school and information regarding the EDM filed with court.
- Surrogate parent appointed to make decisions regarding special education if a foster parent is unwilling or unable to fulfill that role.

School Enrollment

- Child attends their current school or is enrolled in a new school within three school days.
- Education record or credit transfer issues addressed by court as necessary.

School Placement and School Success

- What does the child say about school and where wants to attend?
- Child in an appropriate school.
- Child progressing academically and on grade level.
- Additional school supports addressed as needed.
- Child involved in extracurricular activities.
- Discipline issues addressed (truancy, suspension, expulsion, restraints).
- Caregiver signed annual form to prohibit corporal punishment at school.

Post-Secondary Education

- If the youth is at least grade 9, personal graduation plan created and graduation endorsement chosen (this is in addition to the Foundation High School Program in STEM, Business & Industry, Public Services, Arts & Humanities, or Multi-Disciplinary Studies).
- Child has a college or career plan.
- Child and his caregivers know about high school graduation requirements and how to prepare and apply for post-secondary education.

Special Education

- If needed, child evaluated for special education services.
- If eligible:
 - Date of child's last Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee meeting.
 - Child has Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is current, appropriate, and in place.
 - Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee meets at least one time annually.
 - Transition planning coordinated, beginning no later than age 14.

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Checklist

When Does ICWA Apply?

- In a “child custody proceeding” defined as any action, other than an emergency proceeding, that may result in a foster care placement, termination of parental rights, pre-adoptive placement or adoptive placement; and
- Involving an “Indian child” defined as
 - Unmarried, under the age of 18, and a member of an Indian Tribe; or
 - Unmarried, under the age of 18, eligible for membership in an Indian Tribe and is the biological child of a member of a federally recognized Indian Tribe.

Note: Each Tribe determines eligibility criteria for membership or enrollment (not the court). If ICWA applies, please also refer to the [NCJFCJ ICWA Checklists](#).

Notice Requirements

- The child’s parent, Indian custodian, and Tribe must be notified by registered mail or certified mail, return receipt requested, with copies to the appropriate BIA Regional Directors. Upon request of a party, the BIA will make a reasonable attempt to identify and locate the Tribe, parents, or Indian custodian.
- Finding on the record that timely notice was or was not provided as required.

Best Practice: If not sure, but there is reason to believe the child might be an Indian child, NOTIFY all of the above and make a finding on the record.

Foster Care or Pre-adoptive Placement Preferences

- Child must be placed in the least restrictive setting that most approximates a family, taking into consideration sibling attachment, allows the Indian child’s special needs (if any) to be met; and is in reasonable proximity to the Indian child’s home, extended family, or siblings.
- Where the Tribe has not established a different order, preference for placement must be given in descending order to (1) extended family; (2) a foster home approved by the Tribe; (3) an Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non-Indian licensing authority; or (4) an institution for children approved by an Indian Tribe or operated by an Indian organization which has a program suitable to meet the child’s needs.
- The court must, where appropriate, also consider the preference of the Indian child or the Indian child’s parent.
- If any party asserts that there is good cause not to follow the placement preferences, the reasons for that belief or assertion must be stated orally on the record or provided in writing to the parties and the court. The party seeking departure from the placement preferences should bear the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that there is “good cause” to depart from the placement preferences. A court’s determination of good cause to depart from the placement preferences must be made on the record or in writing and should be based on one or more of the following considerations:
 1. The request of one or both of the Indian child’s parents, if they attest that they have reviewed the placement options, if any, that comply with the order of preference;
 2. The request of the child, if the child is of sufficient age and capacity to understand the decision that is being made;
 3. The presence of a sibling attachment that can be maintained only through a particular placement; or
 4. The extraordinary physical, mental, or emotional needs of the Indian child, such as specialized treatment services that may be unavailable in the community where families who meet the placement preferences live.

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Checklist

continued

Special Evidentiary Rules

□ **Threshold for Removal of the Child**

- *Clear and convincing evidence* that custody of the child by the parent or Indian custodian is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child. The evidence must show a causal relationship between the particular conditions in the home and the likelihood that continued custody of the child will result in serious emotional or physical damage.
- Must include testimony of a “qualified expert witness” who is qualified to testify about whether the child’s continued custody by the parent or Indian custodian is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child and should be qualified to testify as to the prevailing social and cultural standards of the Indian child’s tribe.
- Finding of “Active Efforts” to prevent to prevent the breakup of the Indian family and that those efforts have been unsuccessful.

□ **Threshold for Termination of Parental Rights**

- *Evidence beyond a reasonable doubt* that custody of the child by the parent of Indian custodian is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child and a causal relationship between the particular conditions in the home and the likelihood of serious emotional or physical damage to the child as a result.
- Supported by testimony of a “qualified expert witness.”
- Without a causal relationship identified, evidence that shows only the existence of community or family poverty, isolation, single parenthood, custodian age, crowded or inadequate housing, substance abuse, or nonconforming social behavior does not by itself constitute clear and convincing evidence or evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that continued custody is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child.
- Finding that “Active Efforts” have been made to prevent the breakup of the Indian family and that those efforts have been unsuccessful.

Best Practices for Active Efforts Include: (i) early contact and active engagement with the child’s Tribe; (ii) higher level of efforts using methods and providing services that are culturally appropriate; and (iii) commitment to the spirit of ICWA in the context of the historical trauma. Remember that active efforts must be documented in detail in the record.

Medical and Mental Health Care for Foster Youth Checklist

Note: Physical (including immunizations), dental, vision, behavioral health, prescription drugs, and long-term services and supports for children in foster care are covered by Superior HealthPlan Network, contracted by HHSC to administer the STAR Health program.

Eligibility

- All children in DFPS conservatorship and young adults in extended foster care or those young adults who have returned to extended foster care, up to age 22.
- All youth who turned 18 in foster care and received health care through Medicaid (STAR Health or other), but who did not return to extended foster care, are covered under STAR Health under the Affordable Care Act up to Age 21, and STAR or STAR+PLUS Medicaid up to age 26.
 - Former foster care children who are under the age of 21, but who are not eligible for the FFCC program because the youth did not receive Medicaid at the time they aged out of care, receive coverage through the Medicaid for Transitioning Youth (MTFCY) program if they do not have other health care coverage and meet program rules.

Information Required in DFPS Permanency Review Hearing Court Reports:

- Nature of any emergency medical care provided to child and circumstances necessitating care, include injury or acute illness of child.
- All medical and mental health treatment child is receiving and child's progress with treatment (this includes ANY physical, dental, vision, mental health issues, and long-term services and supports).
- Any medication prescribed for child, condition, diagnosis, and symptoms for which medication was prescribed, and child's progress with medication.
- For child receiving psychotropic medication:
 - Any psychosocial therapies, behavior strategies, or other nonpharmacological interventions provided to child; and
 - The child has seen or is seeing his/her prescribing physician, physician assistant or advanced practice nurse every 90 days.
- Degree to which child or foster care provider complied or failed to comply with any plan of medical treatment for child.
- Any adverse reaction to, or side effects of, any medical treatment provided to child.
- Any specific medical condition of child diagnosed or for which tests are being conducted to make diagnosis.
- Any activity child should avoid or engage in that might impact effectiveness of treatment, including physical activities, other medications, and diet.
- Other info required by DFPS or rule of court.

Additional Requirements that Courts Should Monitor:

- Child has been provided the opportunity to comment on the medical care being provided.
- DFPS has provided any parent who retains rights notice of initial prescriptions or changes in dosage.
- Each GAL and AAL has reviewed the medical care provided to the child.
- Each GAL and AAL has elicited from client his/her view on the medical care being provided.
- AAL has advised youth 16 and older of the right to request medical consent designation from the court.
- Child received initial comprehensive, preventive Texas Health Steps medical checkup within 30 days of entering conservatorship.
- Child received 3-Day medical examination by the end of the third business day after the child is removed from the child's home.
- Child received a Texas Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) 2.0 behavioral health assessment within 30 days of entering conservatorship if aged 3-17 years.
- For youth 17 or older taking medication, whether the youth's transition plan includes a program supervised by a health care professional to assist the youth with independently managing their medication.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Judicial Checklist

Has child been victim of sex trafficking?

- A person knowingly transported, enticed, recruited, harbored, provided, or otherwise obtained the child by any means; AND
 - Caused the child to engage in, or become the victim of, an enumerated sex offense;
 - Received a benefit from participating in a venture that involves an enumerated sex offense; OR
 - Engaged in sexual conduct with a trafficked child
- Child under 18 years of age, regardless of trafficker's knowledge of child's age

What is child labor trafficking?

- A person knowingly:
 - Trafficked child with intent that the child engage in forced labor or services; OR
 - Received a benefit from participating in a venture that involves forced child labor or services including knowingly receiving forced child labor or services
- Child under 18 years of age, regardless of trafficker's knowledge of child's age

Under what circumstances will DFPS investigate trafficking?

- If a person traditionally responsible for child's care, custody, or welfare:
 - Compelled or encouraged the child to engage in sexual conduct including child sex trafficking, prostitution, or compelling prostitution;
 - Knowingly caused, permitted, encouraged, engaged in, or allowed a child to be trafficked for sex or labor; OR
 - Failed to make a reasonable effort to prevent the child from being trafficked for sex or labor

If child has been missing from foster care, were the following steps taken?

- DFPS made report:
 - To law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) no later than 24 hours after learning a child is missing or abducted
- Within 24 hours of learning child missing or returned to care after missing, DFPS notified law enforcement, court, child's AAL and GAL, and parents (unless no known location, TPR, or relinquishment)
- While a child is missing, DFPS makes continuing efforts to locate the child including monthly contacts with law enforcement and former caregivers and supervisory-level review
- After a missing child returns to care, DFPS interviewed the child about why the child was missing, where the child stayed while missing, and whether the child was a victim of sex trafficking while missing

Are there any red flags to help identify child trafficking victims? (Note that this list is non-exhaustive)

- Multiple runaways from foster care placement in a short period of time
- Changes in school attendance habits, appearance, socio-economic status and possessions, friend groups, interests, school activities, vocabulary, demeanor, attitude, and sexual behavior
- Unexplained injuries such as bruising, swelling, redness, cigarette burns
- Tattoos or branding; and/or
- Hotel key cards or refillable gift cards

Practical First Steps to Address Disproportionality and Implicit Bias

Reflections to Protect Against Implicit Bias

Ask yourself, as a judge...

- What assumptions have I made about people based on their race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender, profession, or background?
- How might my assumptions influence my decision-making?
- How have I challenged any assumptions I might have made based on race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender, profession, or background?
- Have my assumptions created inequitable outcomes in my Court?
- Have I maintained accountability for myself and my courtroom practices in checking and removing bias?

Talking about race is a Courageous Conversation.

1. Stay engaged.
2. Experience discomfort.
3. Speak your truth.
4. Expect and accept non-closure.

Tips to Improve Decision-Making in Child Welfare Hearings

- Make sure parties and key witnesses are present and if they are not present, verify whether they were properly served/subpoenaed.
- Review petition out loud with all parties present to ensure it includes allegations specific to each parent. If there is no dangerous act or omission on part of a parent, the child goes home with that parent.
- Engage the parents by name and allow opportunity for parents and youth to inform the Court of their pronouns, if desired.
- Inquire if reasonable efforts were made to prevent removal. Assure family decision making tools were utilized, such as a Family Team Meeting (FTM).
- Ask yourself if the family's cultural background, customs, and traditions have been taken into account with the events and circumstances that led to the removal. Think about whether these aspects of the family actually make a child unsafe or at risk, even if they are different from your own expectations of family life and parenting.
- Ask what is preventing the child from returning home to a relative TODAY? And consider whether any of the barriers preventing the child from returning home are related to a systemic issue that is making it more difficult for the parent or child to access the support they need.
- Consider the appropriateness of current placement and whether it is culturally responsive and provides trauma responsive supports and services.
- Allow opportunity during the hearing for discussion and concerns related to systemic issues for parents and/or children involved in the case.
- Close the hearing with a specific question to ensure that the parties understand what happened or allow an opportunity for parents to ask questions about anything they did not understand.

Adapted from NCJFCJ Courts Catalyzing Change Bench Book and Dr. Jeffrey Rachlinski, Professor of Law

Practical First Steps to Address Disproportionality and Implicit Bias

continued

What is Disproportionality?

Disproportionality is a term to describe when a particular racial or cultural group is represented within a social system at a rate or percentage that is not proportionate to their representation in the general population.

What is Implicit Bias?

- Implicit bias “refers to subconscious feelings, attitudes, and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decision-making processes in an unconscious manner.”
- Research shows that individuals naturally develop unconscious attitudes and stereotypes as a routine process of sorting and categorizing the vast amounts of sensory information they encounter on an ongoing basis.
- “Implicit” (as opposed to explicit) attitudes and stereotypes operate automatically, without awareness, intent, or conscious control, which is common to the human experience.
- These unconscious associations can influence judgment. For example, results from the Implicit Association Test showed that 80% of white adults more closely associated white faces with regular household items and black faces with weapons.
- Relying on data by counting outcomes, using tools to engage deliberate thinking, training, and judicial leadership can all counterbalance the bias which is frequently inherent in our intuition.

What are the Differences Between Equality, Equity, and Justice?

Seeking to provide families before the court with the best opportunity to achieve permanency requires a review of court practices to ensure each family receives the support and services based on their individual needs and resources. This graphic demonstrates how courts can examine system practices with a goal towards equity and justice.



Graphic recreated by the Busara Center from Tony's Ruth's depiction of Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*.

Updated September 2022

Remote Hearing Checklist

Scheduling Remote Proceedings:

- Schedule the court proceeding either using a unique [Zoom Meeting](#) or a [Personal Meeting Room](#) (suggested use only with trusted participants).
 - Remember to adjust calendaring practices to ensure sufficient time for each case. Remote hearings may take longer than in-person hearings for a variety of reasons including participants being unfamiliar with the technology, login issues, and poor internet connectivity.
 - The “Topic” line for your hearing should be recognizable to the parties without including sensitive information.
 - In addition to using the Waiting Room, consider using a passcode for your meeting as an added level of security for the hearing. Do not include Zoom Meeting ID Numbers or passcodes in published dockets.
- Email notice of the hearing with the Zoom Meeting ID or Personal Meeting Room ID and login information only to the participants.
 - For public access, the hearing should be viewed on the court’s YouTube Channel.

Starting the Hearing:

- Sign into the Court Zoom account prior to your hearing and check that your default settings are appropriately set.
 - Make sure to [remove filters](#) and [change Zoom backgrounds](#), if needed.
 - If not using a Zoom background, be mindful of what is visible behind you when you are on camera. Choose a solid neutral wall, if possible.
 - OCA has a [Judicial Background](#) available for use by Texas Judges.
 - [Test your audio and video](#) before starting your Zoom meeting.
 - Position your camera at eye level or slightly above eye level.
 - Check the lighting. Ideally, position a lamp or sit facing a window so that light is directly on your face.
 - Note whether an interpreter will be participating in the hearing.
- Start the meeting in Zoom, admit all hearing participants, and verify that they are properly connected.
 - When speaking, remember to look directly at your camera.
 - Once your meeting has started, make sure to “[Go Live](#)” on your [Court’s YouTube channel](#) so that it is available for viewing by the public.
 - Procedures for limiting public access via Livestream are available on the OCA [Livestream Bench Card](#).
- Begin the formal part of the hearing.
 - Verbally state the case number and title;
 - Verbally state the start time of the hearing;
 - Ask for party announcements and require participants to spell their names for the record;
 - Remind participants to pause before they begin to speak in case there is any audio/video lag and to speak slowly, clearly, and one at a time.
 - Encourage participants to mute themselves when they are not speaking in order to avoid any potential background noise.
 - Admonish participants and viewers that recording court proceedings is not permitted and can be enforced with contempt.
 - If the Rule has been invoked, admonish any witnesses, including giving an instruction that they are not to log on to the Court’s YouTube channel to watch the proceeding.

Remote Hearing Checklist

continued

Conducting the Hearing:

- Throughout the hearing, the meeting [host](#) (the court) will use in-meeting controls to manage logistics of the hearing such as [muting and unmuting](#) participants, bringing in and sending participants and witnesses to the [waiting room](#), and managing [breakout rooms](#).
 - Be cognizant of maintaining order and decorum throughout the proceeding.
 - Stop the testimony immediately upon noticing that a participant has left the meeting to determine if there are any connectivity issues and to assist with getting them back into the hearing.
 - Be mindful that due to varying internet speeds and other potential lag issues, objections may be slightly delayed. Stop testimony as soon as practicable upon hearing an objection.

Ending the Hearing:

- Make all necessary findings on the record and announce upcoming statutory hearing dates.
- Conclude and state the end time of the hearing.
- If using a Personal Meeting Room, ask participants to leave the meeting when the proceeding is over; if using the schedule meeting function, the host should end the meeting for all participants. This should also stop the YouTube livestream.
 - If you do not want your court hearings to be archived on your YouTube page, you may [delete the video](#) after livestreaming. There is also an option to keep your video recordings archived without making them available for viewing on your page.

Additional Resources:

- The Office of Court Administration (OCA): [Zoom Information and YouTube Support](#)
- State Bar of Texas: [Zoom and Videoconferencing Resources](#)
- National Center for State Courts: [Conducting Fair and Just Remote Hearings Bench Guide](#)