

Case Closure

What is case closure?

Case closure planning is the process of setting measurable conditions or outcomes that must be achieved in order for the family to exit the child welfare system.

When do we start planning for case closure?

A successful family change process requires that a family select, own, and support the desired outcomes of adequate family functioning and well being leading to independence.

Planning for case closure starts when DHS initially becomes involved with a child and family. At the onset, DHS and the family's team needs to identify the specific changes that must occur in order for the case to be closed.

The desired conditions and outcomes should be documented in the domain areas of the family's plan: Child Well-Being; Parental Capabilities; Family Safety; Family Interactions; Home Environment; and Other. The family's plan must include a sequence of strategies, supports, and services designed to help the family make the needed changes in each domain that is applicable.

How do we define measurable conditions for case closure?

Measurable conditions for case closure are specific outcomes related to child safety and well-being. These conditions must be achieved in order for the family, the court, and service system practitioners to know and reasonably believe that the safety and well-being of the children is both adequate and can be reasonably expected to continue without disruption following the completion of services.

See the table on the following page for ideas on how to incorporate "measurable conditions" regarding safety and well-being into the family's plan.

Making a decision about case closure

Assess whether the family change and parental functioning can adequately sustain safety and well-being for the child/ren. When there is a family team, the team should review the questions below and agree that case closure is safe for the child and family. Before closing a case, the worker and supervisor should review the following questions:

- Is the home environment safe and stable? Are the basic needs of the children met?
- Are the parents or caretakers able to manage risks or threats to safety to the children and others in the home?
- Are the parents or caretakers able to sustain the behavior changes that keep the children safe and stable? For example, will they continue to follow safety plans and relapse plans even if DHS is not involved?
- Does the family have a reliable support system that will remain, even after DHS exits?
- Are court issues related to permanency involved? Specifically, if juvenile court has ordered a change in guardianship or custody, is there now a district court order in place that will make these changes permanent?
- If the case involves a youth "aging out of the system," does the youth have adequate supports to successfully transition to independent living?

What Needs to Change for Kids to be Safe and for This Case to Close?

From the onset, incorporate into the family's plan strategies and steps to achieve safe case closure. These include:

- *Protective provisions* that must be put into place to keep people in the home safe.
- *Behavioral patterns* that must be acquired and then adequately, consistently demonstrated by the caregiver to preserve or reunify a family and to maintain family stability and daily functioning.
- *Recovery/relapse prevention, advance care directives, safety plans with response capacities* that must be put in place and work reliably.
- *Sustainable family supports* (e.g., housing, health care, adequate supervision, etc.) that will preserve and sustain the family following case closure.
- *Resolution of legal issues and court requirements* (e.g., court orders, guardianship, adoption) that must be achieved before family independence, case closure, and permanency can occur.
- *Measures and schedules* for determining progress, outcomes, and satisfaction of *case closure* requirement. These elements define for the family and practitioners and providers: *how we will know what's working and when we're done?*

Practice note:

In applying conditions for case closure, it is understood that perfection is an unlikely standard for achieving family change. As a basic condition for case closure the family, the family team, the court and service system practitioners, should be assured of adequate child safety and well being and possess a reasonable expectation that these conditions will be sustained by the family following independence from the service system.