



# Promoting and Maintaining Family Relationships and Connections

Capacity Building Center for Courts | U.S. Children's Bureau

Child & Family Services Review Round 3

This spotlight is drawn from [CFSR Round 3 Report for Legal and Judicial Communities](#), which summarizes states' performance in meeting safety, permanency, and well-being needs of children and families as a result of the federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) conducted between 2015 – 2018. The report shares results in four areas in which the legal and judicial communities play a key role: achieving timely permanency, **promoting and maintaining family relationships and connections (this spotlight)**, meaningfully engaging families, and keeping families together.

## What the Federal Reviews Assessed

The federal review assessed states' efforts to promote and maintain family relationships and connections using the following information:



### Performance on Permanency Outcome 2:

*The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.*



### Case reviews in five practice areas associated with Permanency

**Outcome 2:** *placement with siblings, family time with parents and siblings, preserving connections, relative placement, and relationship of child in care with parents.*

When a child is removed from home and placed in the child welfare system, maintaining the child's family connections can have the following benefits:\*

- ✓ lessen the traumatic impact of removal, family separation, and loss for the child;
- ✓ improve the child's and parent's emotional well-being;
- ✓ increase the likelihood of reunification and achievement of timely permanency for the child;
- ✓ support the child's healthy development, secure attachments, and sense of self;
- ✓ reduce behavioral problems by the child;
- ✓ lower levels of depression in children; and
- ✓ help the child adjust to out-of-home placement.

\* See Children's Bureau (2020). IM-20-02. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/policy-guidance/im-20-02>

Round 3 of the federal government's Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) assessed how well states preserve family relationships and connections for children in the child welfare system. As a lawyer or judge handling child welfare cases, your understanding of the CFSR results in this area may guide your inquiries into the child welfare agency's efforts to maintain family relationships.

## This spotlight highlights:

- ✓ what the federal reviews reveal about how well states promote and maintain family relationships and connections for children in the child welfare system
- ✓ states' practice strengths and concerns related to maintaining family relationships and connections
- ✓ how the legal and judicial communities can incorporate practice changes to help maintain family relationships and connections

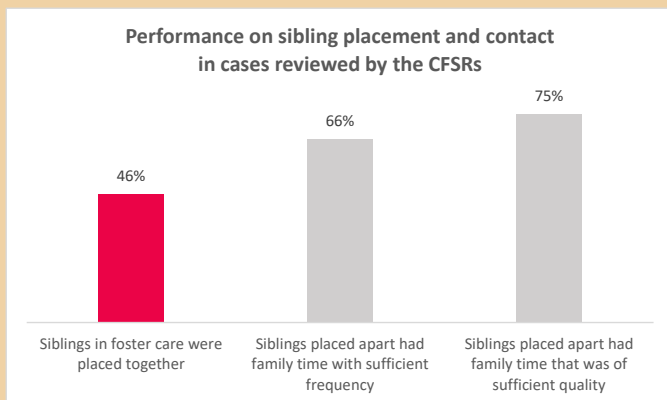
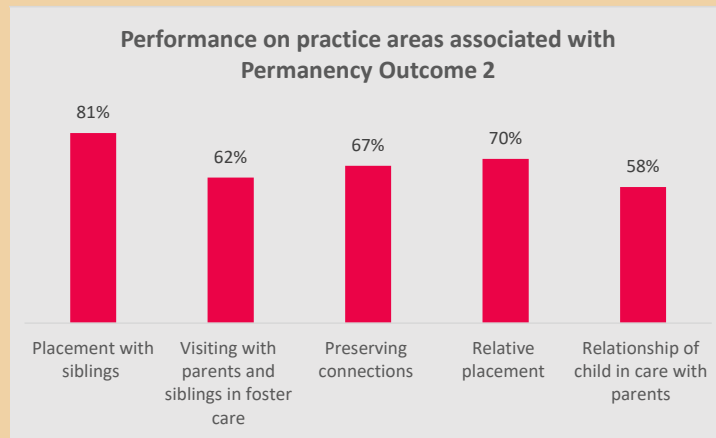
## What the Federal Reviews Tell Us



**No state performed well in all five practice areas associated with preserving family relationships for children.** The CFSRs

examined states' child welfare system performance on Permanency Outcome 2: *the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.*

- ▶ Across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, 61% of the 2,482 cases in CFSR Round 3 involving children in foster care substantially achieved Permanency Outcome 2.
- ▶ Case reviews across five practice areas showed performance on individual items was stronger than combined performance across the five practice areas associated with Permanency Outcome 2.



**Maintaining sibling relationships must be prioritized.** The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

requires that states make reasonable efforts to place siblings together in foster care and arrange for family time or other ongoing contact when they are placed apart.

While there are sometimes valid reasons for siblings to be placed apart, the results showed that less than half of siblings placed in foster care were placed together. While many maintain contact through family time, not all siblings see one another regularly or consistently have quality interactions.



**Strengthening family-finding efforts is key.** Federal law requires state agencies to identify family members as potential caregivers for children in foster care. The CFSRs found family-finding efforts to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate maternal relatives as potential placement resources occurred in 56% of the cases reviewed, and in 47% for paternal relatives. Relatives can also play a valuable role by hosting family time between the parent, child, siblings, and other family members.

### What some states are doing well

- ✓ Taking responsibility for locating relatives to serve as placement resources for siblings and nurturing sibling and family bonds.
- ✓ Providing high-quality and frequent family time for the child, siblings, and parents.
- ✓ Adjusting the frequency of family time between children and parents to be less restrictive and to meet the needs of the child and case circumstances.

### What some states need to improve

- ✓ Placing siblings in foster care together, as appropriate.
- ✓ Providing regular and quality family time for siblings placed apart.
- ✓ Providing frequent and quality parent-child family time, especially for fathers.
- ✓ Reuniting siblings after initial separation.
- ✓ Ensuring efforts are made to identify, locate, inform, and evaluate relatives, especially paternal relatives.
- ✓ Adjusting the level of supervision for family time based on case circumstances (i.e., not supervising family time when there is a lack of safety concerns).

## How to Get Involved



### ✓ Learn more.

Read the [full CFSR report for judicial and legal communities](#). How is your state and jurisdiction doing? What reforms are needed? What are other jurisdictions doing to address areas in need of improvement?"

Visit the [Children's Bureau's](#) and the [Capacity Building Center for Courts'](#) websites for information on the Child and Family Services Reviews.



### ✓ Join or initiate systems change.

Join collaborative systems reform work between courts, attorneys, and child welfare agencies already happening in your jurisdiction. Take the initiative to create and lead systems change.



### ✓ Improve your own practice.

Steps to take include:

- ▶ Know that parent-child separation, even when necessary or for short periods, causes trauma to children and parents.
- ▶ Request that siblings in foster care be placed together, as appropriate.
- ▶ Request that parents and children have contact as soon as possible after removal to help mitigate child trauma and ambiguity of loss.
- ▶ Ask what efforts have been made to find maternal and paternal family members to serve as resource families and support family time. Ensure family finding is done in every case.
- ▶ Help locate and involve relatives or fictive kin as resource families or to host family time.
- ▶ Consider family time a critical reasonable or active effort that the agency must make to finalize permanency goals of reunification.
- ▶ Establish and continually assess the frequency and quality of sibling contact and when family time may be unsupervised.
- ▶ Request and arrange frequent family time in natural settings. Be creative in bringing families together, including asking parents and children for input on family time activities.
- ▶ Ensure family time is not used as reward or punishment.



### ✓ Get involved in your state's federal Child and Family Services Review.

Contact your local [Court Improvement Program](#) (CIP) administrator or CIP multidisciplinary task force member to learn more about the federal Child and Family Services Review and how to get involved.



This document was produced by the [Capacity Building Center for Courts](#) (CBCC) with funding from the Children's Bureau. CBCC focuses on building the capacity of court improvement programs to improve child welfare practice in the courts and legal community.