## Wisconsin's Child Welfare Process Explained: Ongoing (Out of Home)



Wisconsin's child welfare system is divided into three stages - access, initial assessment, and ongoing. The ongoing stage is where services are provided based on the initial assessment and conversations with the family. A subset of cases require a child to be removed from their family home. In these circumstances, children being able to return home safely, is a priority. This is accomplished by supporting children in family settings with those who know and love them and maintaining connection to a child's tribe when identified. The below infographic highlights the case flow for a child in out-of-home care in the child welfare system.



The child welfare professional (CWP), the family and the Indian child's tribe (when applicable) work collaboratively throughout the case. Together, they build on parent/caregiver strengths and eliminate safety related issues identified in the most recent safety assessment.

A CWP meets with the family to learn about safety concerns and needs.

Family interaction must be set up within 5 working days from the day of removal and must include sibling contact when applicable, at least once per month.

The CWP partners with the family, their support network, and the Indian child's tribe to create a permanency plan. The plan outlines conditions of return and what it takes for the family to be reunified. It must be completed 60 days from placement in out of home care.

The primary goal of the plan is reunification. If reunification is not possible, alternative options may need to be explored.

Partnering with an Indian child's tribe in planning is critical.

The CWP has face to face contact with the parents, the child, and the placement providers at least once per month.

Regular contact with the family occurs to maintain engagement. Families continue to receive services until there is a safety finding by the CWP and connections to resources are made and can continue post-child welfare involvement.

The permanency plan must be reviewed in partnership with the family. The permanency plan must be reviewed by the court or review panel at least every 6 months.

Children are returned home when one of the following can be met:

1. A child is considered safe: Family may continue to receive services from the agency as determined by family needs and resources.

2. A plan can be put in place: Children are returned home with a plan that ensures child safety.

See in-home ongoing case flow.

If reunification is not possible, alternative options including but not limited to, transfer of guardianship or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) and adoption will be explored. Engaging an Indian child's tribe in planning is critical.

Case closure occurs when permanency and goals for the child and family have been achieved and child welfare services are no longer needed. The CWP will partner with the family to identify and connect with community and cultural supports, formal supports, and natural supports that can remain involved with the family after child welfare services end.

For ICWA cases best practice includes that a letter must be sent to the tribe indicating the case has been closed.

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Tribal child welfare agencies may have a different process that is guided by tribal law or code. Additionally, county child welfare agencies must follow policy and/or guidance related to tribal families, which includes collaboration with the Indian child's tribe.