

# Family Finding: *Process Guidelines*



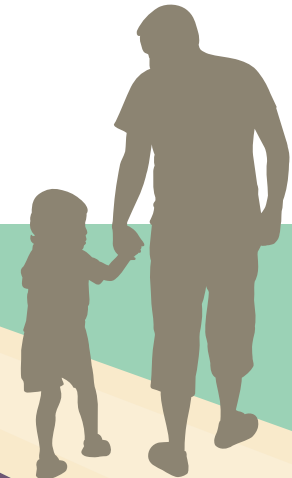
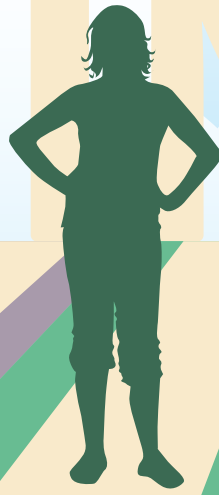
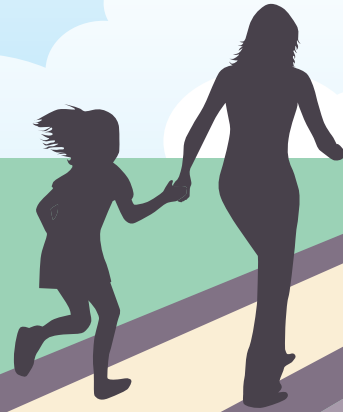
HB110 has focused attention among the child welfare community on the path to permanency, bringing several practices listed elsewhere in the Ohio Revised Code and the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) to a central bill that seeks to improve the lives of children through kinship care and permanency.

This Perspective will share best practices in family finding, relying on learnings, expertise and demonstrated results. **Developing relationships with kin is the single best method of ensuring that children find their forever family.** It doesn't seek to ignore or diminish foster care or adoption from outside the family; both of those tools have a critical role in the child welfare system, but they do not replace kinship care.

It is the role and responsibility of child welfare (PCSA) to ensure kin are contacted and engaged for every child served. Continuing to build awareness of and capabilities in kinship care is the path to permanency.

*What are you willing to do to help the children you serve maintain family and regain belonging?*

# KINSHIP



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## Start Now

### Begin immediately

Start family finding at the first meeting with a family.

- Who are their supports?
- Who do they reach out to in times of need?

Once a crisis has been identified, kin need to be engaged right away.

### For all children and families

It is never too early or too late for diligent searching and relentless engagement of kin to identify potential connections, supports, and kinship caregivers.

At every stage—prevention, assessment, ongoing, permanency—kinship needs to be a primary focus for the benefit of the child.

Ask all parents, young people, and kin about supports and connections during home visits, at court, around visitation or transportation... Any opportunity should be seized.

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## Intense Efforts

### Make ongoing, continued efforts

The children and families we serve deserve intense family finding efforts. We must act with urgency, diligence, and relentless work ethic. *Consider the mountains you would move to prevent the loss of family and belonging for the children closest to you in your own life.*

Exercise due diligence in family finding:

- **At point of serious risk of removal from the home**
- When the court has undertaken a plan of reasonable efforts to prevent such removal
- Upon removal from the home

Family Finding should be done early to divert children from foster care—into a safety plan or first placement with kin.

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## Priority Contacts

### Find and contact these people ASAP

- Parents (including blood, half-blood, step, adoptive, and alleged fathers)
- All maternal and paternal grandparents
- Aunts and uncles
- Adult siblings and/or caregivers of minor siblings, half-blood, and stepsiblings to the child
- Cousins
- Fictive-Kin (non-blood connections)

Push to identify many, not just 3-5 kin, and strive for equal search efforts on all sides of the family. Note that this includes searching to the 6th generation. Additionally, engage any non-relative adult that has a familiar and long-standing relationship or bond with the child or the family, to ensure the child's long-term social ties.

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## Technology

### Access, use, and document technology

Utilize all research tools at your disposal— electronic databases, search engines, social media, and web site searches. This includes SACWIS, LexisNexis (Accurant), Facebook, etc. **All searching should lead to contacting.** Once a kin has been identified you have created an obligation to notify them.

For social media use, set up professional profiles. Do not share confidential information from these accounts. These profiles should represent your organization and have no connection to your personal accounts.

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## Notification

### Share in person or by phone—not by letter

Letters are least likely to get a response.

You are required to share these 5 key pieces of information when notifying kin:

#### What is going on

- The child is being or has been removed.

#### How they can help

- Knowledge, support, caregiving

#### Why urgency is important

- Permanency is needed. Every day a child spends in stranger foster care, separated from their kin and community, is a day in crisis.
- There are resources and supports available for kinship caregivers.
- Not responding can have ramifications for the child and the kin. Offer to discuss any questions and barriers.

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## Supports & Caregivers

### Connections are just as important as a caregiver

Children going through crisis need support AND caregiving (placement).

When engaging with kin, consider all options— babysitting, companionship, emotional support, mentorship, respite care, transportation, etc. **Natural supports should outnumber professional supports.** Engaging kin is a relationship building process that requires intentional ongoing communication and outreach over time. All family have value.

During times of big transitions for families, it is understandable for people to have varying responses. They may need time and support from professionals to remain included in the process.

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## Accountability

### Accountability goes well beyond the courtroom

We are accountable to ourselves and others. We should be searching and engaging kin in the way we would want our own family to be engaged. All children have family, and we can find them if we try. Supervisory and court accountability should be safety nets, not guardrails.

Documentation is another source of accountability. **Kin information is critical to log for future use.** Put their names and contact information into SACWIS. Genograms are the best way to keep track of all the connections identified and engaged. These tools can be used for family and youth engagement as well as for historical references.

# Kinship is the best hope for permanency

When a child is at serious risk of removal from their home, family finding efforts need to start. It is key to divert children from foster care into a safety plan, or to kinship care, as soon as possible. Engaging early with the child's family reaps great rewards for both. The Kinnect to Family model has demonstrated that focused search and engagement efforts have significant impact—often in a matter of hours or days. Children have family, or people close to them who may be able to help. We owe it to them to act first.

## How? We act with more than mere 'due diligence.'

Use all tools, electronic databases, search engines, and social media searches, including: SACWIS, Lexis-Nexis (Accurint), and Facebook. These efforts are ongoing and continuous, focusing on finding kin and developing relationships with them. We use the word *relentless* on purpose. All children deserve intensive efforts and the best work we can do.

### We operate from a common set of values

- All children have family and we can find them if we try
- All children deserve to remain connected to their culture, community, and family
- All families have value, regardless of their ability to serve as the primary caregiver of a child



Every child has family. Finding them changes everything.

**Kinnect**  
to **Family**

[www.kinnectohio.org](http://www.kinnectohio.org)

[kinnectofamily@kinnectohio.org](mailto:kinnectofamily@kinnectohio.org)

216.692.1161