

Internal Procedure 515: Permanent Separation of Siblings for Adoption

02/2025

DCFS prioritizes keeping siblings together which is paramount in adoptive considerations to maintain familial bonds. However, in cases where separation is determined to be in the best interest of one or more siblings, a structured decision-making and approval process must be followed to ensure transparency, through assessment, and compliance with best practice and policy. Sibling relationships should be considered in each placement decision, along with the child or youth's needs. Simply because siblings were separated once in foster care, they do not have to remain separated throughout foster care or into adoption.

Some viable reasons siblings may not be placed together include:

- Safety Concerns
 - A sibling poses a risk of harm to another sibling due to severe behavioral issues, including aggression, abuse, or violence.
 - There is documented evidence of one sibling victimizing another.
- Specialized Needs
 - A sibling has complex medical, emotional, or psychological needs that require individualized care, making joint placement impractical.
- Conflictual Relationships
 - Evidence from therapists or other professionals indicated that separation would benefit the children's development or healing.
- Age and Developmental Differences
 - Significant age differences between siblings may create challenges in identifying a family capable of addressing their diverse needs.

Each of these reasons must be thoroughly documented and supported by evidence, such as:

- Evaluations from therapists, counselors, or psychologists
- Input from resource parents, teachers, and other professionals
- Efforts made to locate and secure a family capable of adopting all siblings together


Maintaining sibling groups will be paramount in adoption considerations. Siblings will be placed together in the same pre-adoptive home unless:

- A current mental health professional for one of the siblings provides written documentation that adoptive placement as a sibling group is not in the best interest of one or more of the siblings, and
- The DCFS Adoption Manager has executed a CFS-412: Request and Waiver for Permanent Separation of Siblings, and

- There is a current judicial ruling (court order) that adoptive placement of the siblings together would be detrimental to their best interests or is otherwise not possible at the time of placement due to treatment needs of one or more of the siblings (one of the children is currently in a residential treatment facility and will need to be placed with the siblings in the adoptive home upon completion of treatment).

Prior to placement of any sibling into a pre-adoptive home, the Adoption Specialist will:

- A. Request from the primary FSW and review provided documentation of reasonable efforts to maintain a sibling bond for all siblings placed in separate resource homes.
- B. Review the CFS-305: Relative and Fictive Kin Efforts Log as well as all documentation of reasonable efforts to locate relatives and fictive kin, ensuring that all individuals who should have been considered have been properly considered as permanency options for the sibling group:
 - 1) Do not move forward with discussions of pre-adoptive placement until all individuals have been properly evaluated as placement options:
 - a) Document all evaluations in the Division information management system
- C. Request and review documentation that the siblings have been consulted regarding potential permanent separation from their siblings for purposes of adoption. Verify that:
 - 1) Each sibling has been advised that they have a right to placement with their siblings, so long as the placement is not detrimental to the safety of any sibling
 - 2) Each sibling has been consulted and advised that separation of siblings for the purpose of adoption means they will no longer be guaranteed, and in some cases allowed, to have contact with their siblings
 - 3) The response and desires of each sibling
- D. Consider the validity of reasons for recommendation for permanent separation of siblings with the understanding that the following must be considered as part of a best interest decision:
 - 1) Routine sibling contact is mandated by law and siblings must have a minimum of bi-weekly contact while in out-of-home placement
 - 2) The relationship between a resource parent and a child is not a factor in the consideration of the separation of siblings for adoption
 - 3) Arkansas is not an open adoption state, and statements of intent to continue sibling contact after adoption should not be taken at value
 - 4) Siblings are likely to be the longest standing life connection for one another and to sever the sibling bond is a loss
 - 5) Relative and fictive kin options are preferred in permanency, to include in adoption, because they allow a child to hold a connection to their origin story, family genetic history, and community which results in better outcomes for the child

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- E. If, after review of documentation and consideration of best interests, permanent separation of siblings is necessary to ensure the safety of one or more of the siblings:
- 1) Schedule and conduct a Separation of Siblings Family Team Meeting (FTM).
Invite:
 - a) Primary FSW
 - b) FSW Supervisor
 - c) Adoption Supervisor
 - d) Area Director
 - e) Adoption Manager
 - f) Program Administrator for Foster Care and Adoption
 - g) Assistant Director of Placement Supports and Community Outreach
 - 2) If the FTM results in agreement for permanent separation of siblings:
 - a) Complete CFS-412: Request and Waiver for Permanent Separation of Siblings
 - b) Obtain signatures from all required attendees on CFS-412
 - c) Provide any additional information as requested by the Adoption Manager
 - 3) Complete an adoption court report recommending permanent separation of the siblings for purposes of adoption
 - 4) Attend the court hearing and follow subsequent recommendations of the court regarding pre-adoptive placement of the siblings