



# WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF

# THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The primary goals of the child welfare system are to provide safety for children from abuse and neglect by parents or primary caregivers and to achieve permanency for the children who are removed. Child welfare agencies use a variety of strategies to achieve permanency for children by either reunifying children within their families of origin or placing them with other permanent families.

A continuous thematic shift between family preservation and child safety can characterize the history of child welfare in the United States. The 1970s saw several efforts to reduce children's time in foster care and expedite paths to permanency. The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (P.L. 105–89) marked the first time issues related to permanency were explicitly stated in legislation, which was pivotal in changing the landscape of child welfare practice. The law specified that states had to improve the safety of children, promote adoption and other permanent homes for children who needed them, and support families. ASFA also required child protection agencies to provide more timely assessment and intervention services to children and families involved with child welfare. Additionally, ASFA paved the way for the legal sanction of concurrent planning (simultaneously identifying and working on a secondary goal, such as guardianship with a relative) by requiring that agencies make reasonable efforts to find permanent families for children in foster care should reunification fail.

In 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110–351) amended the Social Security Act to improve outcomes for children in foster care, connect and support relative caregivers, and offer incentives for adoption. Fostering Connections enhanced services for youth aging out of care and created new programs to help children and youth in or at risk of entering foster care to reconnect with family members. The act also provided the opportunity for federally recognized Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and tribal consortia—for the first time in history—to directly operate Title IV–E programs.

## AFCARS

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and Children's Bureau are responsible for implementing and managing the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). State and tribal Title IV–E agencies must report AFCARS demographic, case-related, and service information on all children in foster care and children who have been adopted with Title IV–E agency involvement (per §479 of the Social Security Act). There are 7 seven national outcomes established by HHS to be monitored annually:

- Outcome 1:** Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect.
- Outcome 2:** Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care.
- Outcome 3:** Increase permanency for children in foster care.
- Outcome 4:** Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry.
- Outcome 5:** Reduce time in foster care to adoption.
- Outcome 6:** Increase placement stability.
- Outcome 7:** Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions.

[Concept and History of Permanency in U.S. Child Welfare](#)  
[Child Welfare Outcomes 2018: Report to Congress Executive Summary](#)

## Interested?

This brief was created by iFoster's transition-age foster youth TAY Peer Ambassadors who serve to support other youth aging out of the foster care system to achieve self-sufficiency.

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