

# *Individualized Case Planning Overview*

***“Pennsylvania’s child dependency system shall: recognize that each family is both unique and diverse and provide services tailored to its unique and diverse strengths and needs by respecting its economic, ethnic, class, cultural and religious beliefs, values, practices, and traditions.”***

***- Mission and Guiding Principles for  
Pennsylvania’s Child Dependency System***

Families enter Pennsylvania’s child dependency system when safety threats become so significant that Court oversight is needed. Each family is different with strengths, concerns, and needs unique to their specific experiences, culture, and beliefs. By the Dispositional phase of the dependency process, the Court must identify a primary goal for the child, what improvements are necessary and what services are likely to facilitate the needed improvements.

In the vast majority of situations, the initial Court established goal is reunification. In these situations early and accurate identification of the safety threats existing in a family and the services needed to alleviate those threats is critical. Once identified these services are memorialized into a written document, known as a Family Service Plan, which becomes the “road map” for change.

This section provides information regarding the creation of this important document through two primary articles. The first article, written by a Pennsylvania judge, provides a brief overview of a planning process known as Family Group Decision Making (FGDM). The practice brings together family, friends, and others who care about the child to plan for his/her safety, well-being and permanence. Unlike the historical practice of “boiler plate” plans that recommend the same or very similar services for most families, FGDM leads to family plans that are unique, creative, and safe. The article highlights the critical role of the juvenile court judge in implementing this innovative practice. The second primary article discusses the concept of concurrent planning, which simultaneously identifies and pursues a primary and a secondary case goal.

Additional section resources include a concurrent planning checklist and an accompanying article. Finally, the Judicial Safety Guide (Section 10) provides supplementary considerations for case planning. Used in conjunction with the Dependency Benchbook, information in this section will support the development of plans which accurately identify safety threats and services likely to mitigate such.

