

# Placement Overview

***“Group care is expensive and restrictive and should be used only when there is clear and convincing evidence that the outcomes will be superior to those of foster care and other community-based services. Group care should only be considered for those children who have the most serious forms of mental illness and self-destructive behavior.”***

**- Richard P. Barth, Ph.D**

Placing a child in out-of-home care is one the hardest decisions a judge must make. The judge has to carefully weigh evidence presented and balance the need for safety with the need to reduce, to the extent possible, trauma. But the decision as to whether a child should live outside his/her own home is only the first of many associated decisions when a child enters placement. These include the “best” placement setting for a child, the location of that setting, the duration of the placement, and the purpose or goal of the placement, to mention a few.

The need to make initial placement decisions, review those decisions and make ongoing decisions is discussed throughout the Dependency Benchbook with almost all major hearings requiring a review of this issue. In addition, Dependency Benchbook “best practices” encourage the use of least restrictive placements that maintain healthy relationships and activities for a child. Where possible, the “best practices” encourage the use of kinship care within a child’s community. When more restrictive care is needed, Dependency Benchbook “best practices” encourage their use for specific issues with specific timeframes.

Understanding the various placement options and the outcomes of each can help. This section provides specific information regarding the potential impact of placement with a focus on increasing the safe use of kinship care while simultaneously reducing the use of congregate and stranger care as a mechanism to reduce the trauma experienced by children who must be temporarily placed. This section also provides compelling information that underscores the importance of securing safe, permanent families for children in a timely manner, rather than allowing a child to “grow up” and “age out” of foster care.

Finally, the concept of “placement stability” is discussed throughout the Dependency Benchbook. This section provides a foundation for why placement stability is important in the lives of dependent children and provides information related to “placement disruption”. Used in conjunction with the Dependency Benchbook, this section can assist all involved in thoughtful analysis of placement decisions and the impact those decisions will have on a child’s development.