

The Children's Advocacy Institute Presents
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The Pursuit of Permanency: The First 90 Days *Ethical Considerations and Obligations*

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Competent Representation Improves Outcomes

- Social science research shows that competent legal representation shortens the time to permanency and improves outcomes
- These studies have identified various attorney tasks that have a positive effect on the time to reunification or time to adoption or guardianship

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Competent Representation: Studies

- Parents' attorneys' tasks that are shown to improve outcomes:
 - Client contact and communication
 - Court preparation
 - Motions practice to require agency to do what the law requires it to do
 - Avoid continuances/observe timelines
 - Make sure services are appropriate
 - Pay attention to client's well-being
 - Address implicit bias, cultural competency, and trauma

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Competent Representation: Studies

- Children's attorneys' tasks that improve outcomes:
 - Client contact/communication/guidance
 - Client-directed representation
 - Facilitate appropriate assessments of needs of child and family and child safety
 - Effective advocacy
 - Motions practice
 - Develop a forward-looking theory of the case
 - Problem-solving and non-adversarial approaches when appropriate
 - Avoid continuances
 - Facilitate development of an effective case plan

Duties of Counsel-- Representation

- § 317(d): Counsel shall represent client at the detention hearing and all subsequent proceedings before the juvenile court, unless relieved by court upon substitution of other counsel or for cause.
 - (*Marsden/IAC*)
- Appointed counsel must be competent as defined by statutes and rules of court
 - W&I Code § 317.5(a)
 - Rule 5.660

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Competence Defined— All Attorneys

- Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) Rule 1.1:
 - (a) A lawyer shall not intentionally, recklessly, with gross negligence, *or* repeatedly fail to perform legal services with competence.
 - (b) For purposes of this rule, "competence" in any legal service shall mean to apply the
 - (i) *learning and skill*, and
 - (ii) *mental, emotional, and physical ability* reasonably necessary for the performance of such service

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Rule 5.660(d): Competence Defined

- Attorney in good standing with State Bar
- Training in juvenile dependency law
- Demonstrated adequate forensic skills
- Knowledge and comprehension of:
 - Statutory scheme
 - Purposes and goals of dependency proceedings
 - Specific statutes, rules, and cases
 - Procedures for filing writ petitions

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Duties of Competent Counsel Rule 5.660(d)(4)

- Meet regularly with clients
- Contact social workers and other professionals associated with child's case
 - *i.e.*, investigate
- Work with other counsel and the court to resolve disputed aspects of case without contested hearing (if possible)
- Adhere to mandated timelines

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Duties--Client Contact

- RPC, rule 1.4: A lawyer shall:
 - (a)(3) keep the client reasonably* informed about significant developments relating to the representation, *including promptly complying with reasonable requests for information*
 - (a)(2) reasonably consult with the client about the means by which to accomplish the client's objectives in the representation;
- rule 1.4(b):
 - explain a matter to the extent reasonably* necessary to permit the client to make informed decisions regarding the representation.
- rule 1.0.1:
 - "Reasonable" means the conduct of a reasonably prudent and competent lawyer.

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Duties--Client Contact Child's Counsel

- § 317(e)(3): If child is four or older, counsel *shall* interview the child to determine the child's wishes and assess the child's well-being, and *shall* advise the court of the child's wishes.
- Rule 5.660(d)(4):
 - Attorneys or their agents are expected to *meet regularly with child client*, regardless of age or child's ability to communicate verbally
 - Attorney for the child must have *sufficient contact* with the child to establish and maintain an *adequate and professional attorney-client relationship*
 - Some local rules require *attorney* to visit child in placement

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Duties--Client Contact Child's Counsel

- Attorney for child must provide contact information to caregiver no later than 10 days after receipt of caregiver's name, address, and telephone number § 16010.6(d), rule 5.660(d)(5)
- Attorney must also provide contact info to child if child is 10 or older
- Agency required to provide attorney with new placement info within 1 business day of placement decision; 10 days in advance if placement change will separate siblings. 16010.6(a), (b)

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Client-Directed Representation vs. Best Interests

- RPC, Rule 1.2, effective 11/1/18
 - A lawyer shall *abide by a client's decisions concerning the objectives of representation* and, as required by rule 1.4, shall reasonably consult with the client as to the means by which they are to be pursued.
 - New rule—no counterpart in old rules
 - No exception if client is a child

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Duties--Investigation

- All Counsel : *Contact social workers and other professionals* associated with client's case. Rule 5.660(d)(4)
- Child's counsel *shall* make or cause to be made any further investigation deemed reasonably necessary in good faith to ascertain the facts, *including interviewing witnesses, and shall examine and cross-examine witnesses.* § 317(e)(2)
- Exceptions authorizing contact with social worker and other county employees/agents when county counsel forbids it?
 - Formal discovery motion?

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Duties--Investigation

- Contacting caregivers, service providers, physician/pediatrician, therapists, visitation monitors/supervisors, etc. can often provide information that social worker does not have and/or did not include in reports or alert you to problems that should be addressed before the next hearing
- Request professional assessments when necessary for complete picture of clients' needs or circumstances
- Request discovery early and often

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Duties--Collaboration

- Rule 5.660(d)(4) All Counsel :
 - Work with other counsel and the court to resolve disputed aspects of case without a contested hearing (if possible)
 - Crowded court calendars often require contested hearings to be set out for months
 - Delays permanency
 - Disadvantages parents and children
 - Timelines
 - Share important info re: services problems, child's needs, etc., with SW and all other counsel between hearings for more timely adjustment to services and increased likelihood of reunification

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Duties--Collaboration

- The parties do not have to have court approval to hold a settlement conference
 - *Tip:* Set an informal settlement conference with other counsel a couple of weeks before date of contest (via Zoom or other virtual meeting options if necessary)
 - But . . . client has right to put agency to its burden of proof
 - *Caveat:* Any settlement agreement reached must be approved by the court before it is binding
 - Court may reject if not in best interests of child

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Duties--Timelines

- Rule 5.660(d)(4) Adhere to mandated timelines
 - Ignoring timelines major cause of delayed permanency
- § 352: No continuance if contrary to interests of child. Court must consider:
 - Child's need for prompt resolution of custody status
 - Need to provide children with stable environments
 - Damage to children of prolonged temporary placements

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Duties--Timelines

- Continuances disfavored § 352
 - Dispo in 60 days from detention unless court finds exceptional circumstances
 - 30 days for an Indian child
 - Parents' time to reunify begins running on the 60th day at the latest. § 361.49
 - Court may not grant a continuance if would cause disposition hearing to be completed more than six months from detention
- § 361.5(a)(1) Timelines for provision of reunification services—statutory requirements must be met to continue services to next review hearing

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Duties--Timelines

- § 352: Good cause showing required for a continuance
 - Must file *written motion* two days in advance of hearing, absent showing of good cause for not filing the motion
 - Separate good cause finding required
 - Motion must be supported by declarations or affidavits detailing specific facts showing that a continuance is necessary
- Things that are *not* good cause:
 - Stipulations of counsel
 - Convenience of the parties
 - Pending criminal or family law proceedings

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All Counsel— Conflicts of Interest

- RPC, Rule 1.7: (a) A lawyer shall not . . . represent a client if the representation is directly adverse to another client in the same or a separate matter.
- (b) A lawyer shall not . . . represent a client if there is a significant risk the lawyer's representation of the client will be materially limited by the lawyer's responsibilities to or relationships with another client, a former client or a third person, or by the lawyer's own interests.
- Rule 5.660(c)(1)(B) Attorney may not represent multiple siblings if actual conflict of interest or reasonably probable that conflict will arise

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Potential Conflicts of Interest

- Assess as soon as you are appointed
 - Need to appoint new counsel because of late discovery of conflict delays permanency
- Possible sources of conflict:
 - Prior representation of other parent or child (e.g., family law, guardianship, DV, prior dependency case)
 - Contract office representing more than one party to the case, including multiple siblings
 - Public law office exception: OK if sufficient separation from attorney who represented parent in prior proceeding to protect client confidences. Burden on law office to show.

➤ *In re Charlissee C.* (2008) 45 Cal.4th 145

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First 90 Days—Checklist for Competent Counsel

- Paternity determination
- ICWA inquiry and notice
- Relative search, notice, assessments of interested relatives
 - ICPC process initiated for out-of-state relatives
- Sibling placement/contact
- Absence of concurrent planning
- Appropriate services, including visitation, before and after dispo
 - Bypass and other immediate permanency options considered
- Appropriate placement that meets child's needs 22

First 90 Days Parentage Determination

- Early determination prevents delays later when ignored fathers appear
 - § 316.2. Paternity inquiry required at detention; must continue until determination is made
- Due diligence, Rule 5.635
 - Attempt to serve alleged father(s)? Requires adequate search
 - Served with JV-505?
 - JV-500 sent to child support services?
- Public policy favors at least two parents for each child 23

First 90 Days ICWA Inquiries and Notice

- An ICWA inquiry must be made at the detention hearing or first appearance
- Court must ensure that parent completes and submits ICWA-020 at detention or first appearance
- If it is possible that child is an Indian child, raise issue at every hearing until court can make a definitive finding as to whether ICWA applies
 - No more 60-day limit
 - Agency is obliged to show due diligence 24

First 90 Days ICWA Inquiries and Notice

- Copies of notices, all documents showing proof of mailing, and tribe's responses must be filed with the court and served on all counsel
- Required by § 224.3(a)
- Object early and often if notice is not being done correctly
- Court must proceed as if child is Indian child until ICWA determination is made

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ICWA--Parents' Counsel

- *In re S.B.* (2009) 174 Cal.App.4th 808:
"An attorney practicing dependency law in the juvenile court should be sufficiently familiar with ICWA notice requirements to point out a flaw in notice if the record shows that there is one."
- ICWA advantages for parents:
 - Agency has higher burdens of proof/active efforts required
 - No bypass because active efforts finding required at .26 hearing
 - TPR less likely
 - Tribal customary adoption does not require TPR

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ICWA--Children's Counsel

- ICWA inquiry/notice failure is one of the biggest impediments to timely resolution of custody status for dependent children
- If child is eligible for membership, explore whether child can or should be enrolled in the tribe
 - Cultural benefits
 - Gaming \$\$\$
 - College scholarships
 - Oil Money (Alaskan Natives)

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First 90 Days Relative Placement

- Relative placement efforts must start at detention § 309(e)(1)
- Agency expected to complete relative searches/vetting by disposition. § 309(e)
 - Late arriving relatives (post-dispo) cause delays in permanency § 361.3(d)
 - County not limited to assessing one relative at a time—must assess all interested relatives who come forward.
- If disposition is delayed, request a due diligence hearing § 358(b)(2), rule 5.695(e) and (f)

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First 90 Days Relative Placement

- Disposition report must cover relative search and a preliminary assessment under § 361.3 of any relative(s) considered for placement. § 358.1; rule 5.690(a)(1)(C)
- Agency has authority to make emergency placement with suitable relative pending RFA approval of relative's home § 309 (d)(1)
 - 2022: Secs. 319, 361.2, 361.4 amended to empower court to authorize placement pending RFA/criminal exemptions process if finds no risk to child

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First 90 Days Relative Placement

- Where more than one relative is seeking placement before disposition, court has authority to decide where child should be placed. § 361.3(a)
- Relative placement is advantageous to both parents and children
 - Child: placement with someone child knows instead of in stranger foster care
 - Social science: often leads to better outcomes
 - Parent: placement with relatives in the beginning can prevent TPR later in the case

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First 90 Days Relative Placement

- Parent's Attorney: Ask client for names of suitable relatives and state their names on the record at detention or first pre-dispo opportunity to document that information was provided to agency
- Suggest that interested relatives to file a JV-285 Relative Information form stating interest in placement-puts it on the record
- Child's attorney: Ask the child for names of relatives the child knows and likes

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First 90 Days--ICPC

- Regular process is too slow
- Rule 5.616(h). Ask court to expedite placement process at disposition, or later, if:
 - Proposed placement is stepparent, relative, or guardian and
 - Dependency due to unexpected incarceration, incapacitation, or death of parent or guardian;
 - Child is 4 or younger or part of sibling group including a child who is 4 or younger
 - Child or sibling has substantial relationship with proposed placement; or
 - Child is in an emergency placement

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First 90 Days--Sibling Contact

- Late attempts to place siblings together can delay permanency, especially if there was no previous sibling relationship
- § 16002 Should siblings be together?
 - Has agency searched for siblings already in the system or in permanent plan of guardianship or adoption?
 - Possible to place with those siblings?
 - Would visitation with those siblings be detrimental to the child?
 - Have visitation arrangements have been made? If not, why not?

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First 90 Days Concurrent Planning

- Is there a specific concurrent plan?
- Is placement one that can and is willing to provide permanency and meet child's needs on a long-term basis if parents are not able to reunify?
 - Required to be in dispo report x 3
 - § 358.1(b), (f) and (i)
- Is placement one that you or your client would approve of as a permanent placement?
- PAP after six months, § 366.26(n)

First 90 Days--Services

- The agency is required to offer services between detention and disposition.
§ 319(e), § 361(d)
- It is to the parent's advantage to engage in services from day one
 - Development/continuity of relationships is crucial for infants and toddlers
 - Time is of the essence
 - Parents' time to reunify starts running no later than 60 days after detention whether or not jurisdiction or disposition hearings have been held.

First 90 Days--Services

- Object to generic reunification plans
 - If requirement does not address a problem that was a reason for the dependency, it should not be in there:
 - Drug testing
 - Parenting classes
- Specific and measurable
 - Vague plans give too much weight to social worker's opinions about extent of compliance and progress
 - Specific plans prevent unwarranted extensions of services or early termination of services because of insufficient evidence of progress or lack thereof
- A good plan allows for an assessment of parents' understanding of the child's needs and parents' ability to meet those needs

First 90 Days--Services

- Adequately address problems that brought child into system?
- Appropriate services for child in timely manner?
 - Therapy
 - Assessments and treatment of other physical and/or emotional issues
- Monitor for compliance
 - Delays in getting child into therapy
 - Visitation problems

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First 90 Days--Visitation

- Visitation must be ordered starting at detention.
- Court may not delegate to agency whether there will be visits
 - Court must specify minimum number of visits per week/month.
 - "As frequently as possible consistent with the well-being of the child"
- Ask court to order a "step-up" visitation schedule
 - A parent who never progresses beyond supervised visits is unlikely to be able to reunify

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First 90 Days--Visitation

- As frequent as possible with progressive increases in time and responsibilities based on parental progress
 - Helps create and maintain a relationship with the child
 - Enhances engagement/attunement
 - Improves chances of successful reunification
 - Tenuous relationship with child sets up parents to fail
- Demonstrates ability to care for child
 - Increase parental responsibilities over time
 - Dr.'s visits, playgroup/school functions, etc.

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First 90 Days--Visitation

- Does visitation schedule/order meet needs of parent and child?
- Younger children need more frequent visits to develop or maintain emotional connection with parent
 - Shorter frequent visits where parent can play with baby, feed baby, change diapers, and put down for a nap are more likely to create a parent-child relationship than 1 hour visits once a week
 - Video visits for very young children are inadequate to develop emotional connection

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First 90 Days—Parent's Failure to Engage in Services

- Waiting until six month review when parent is not engaged in services delays permanency
- § 388(c)(1): Any party may file a § 388 petition to terminate services early.
 - Children's Attorneys: You won't know whether petition needs to be filed unless you are monitoring parents' engagement in services and/or you are in communication with your client

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First 90 Days--Placement

- Is placement appropriate and able to meet child's needs?
- Is placement close enough to facilitate frequent visitation?
- Would placement be an appropriate permanent placement?
 - Multiple placements are a source of trauma for kids
- Placement considerations require counsel to have personal knowledge
 - Visit child in placement at least once
 - Regularly is better.
 - Some local rules *require* child's counsel (not counsel's agent) to visit child in caregiver's home
 - Visit child whenever placement changes

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First 90 Days--Placement

- STRTP Placements: New procedures effective 10/1/21 § 366.22, Rule 5.618
- Assessment by “qualified individual” as to whether child needs STRTP placement and what services are needed
- CFT must be consulted
- Court review within 45 days of placement/may continue up to 60 days for good cause or to combine hearings
- Court must review at every review hearing
- If court does not approve, child must be transitioned to appropriate setting within 30 days

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