

# HIERARCHY OF 12 PLACEMENT PRINCIPLES

from

**DR. RICHARD DELANEY**

*Adapted by Gayle Ward, M.A.*

Dr. Richard Delaney, noted psychologist working a professional lifetime in the field of adoption and foster care, lays out a clear cut and logical ordering of Placement Hierarchy Principles that make good sense.

Decision makers who are in charge of moving children in many ways have amazing power. We in that position must step back, clear the deck of personal preference/bias, and look at each choice with delicate care.

In deciding on where to make a permanent plan for a child, considering options that might range from relative to non-relative adoption, to remaining in foster care, Dr. Delaney gathers the following as factors that be given top consideration, in order of significance.

## **Child's own attachment hierarchy**

Who does the child consider important, who does he see as rarely significant? How does he define family? Where are his most important relationships that have lasted more than a year, more than two years, five years?

## **Protection of continuity of care**

What new caregiver will most respect his history, and the people in it? Will they be able to help him stay connected even to people with whom they might not like?

## **Best interests of the child**

This is such a generic, often over used term. It is critical to be aware how much bias comes into play on the part of the decision makers as to defining "best." Taking a look at the personal values of those making the placement choice means keeping safety and enrichment, affection and history foremost over one person's attitude about lifestyle or status.

## **Least detrimental alternative**

Minimizing change of community, loved ones and all that is familiar needs to be key, even when that choice is not necessarily "optimum" by another set of standards.  
Recognition of psychological parent

The rooted history of the child with a particular adult must be given foremost consideration. Discarding the influence of that parent in the eyes of the child in favor of a new family, one that might "look better" to those making assessment, can cause irreversible bruising to the child's heart.



# ACT

Participant  
Resource  
Notebook

A

Developmental  
Perspective-

Practice  
Tools



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## Participant Resource Notebook

### A Developmental Perspective- Practice Tools

### **Access to ancillary attachment figures**

Would a move interrupt intimate relationships that have grown over time and are crucial to the child feeling claimed by caregivers/community?

### **Parental capacity**

Aside from carefully considering emotional skills of the parent, their knowledge of traumatized children, and their ability to measure success in tiny steps, is the factor of *time*.

Specific attention needs to be given to simple time availability, how many hours a week can this parent be completely available to this youngster? Many disruptions evolve from the “overwhelm” factor, where a parent takes on a child to adopt without realistically mapping out their calendar, literally taking a look from morning til night each day when they might do therapy appointments, recreational fun time, tutoring, meetings with relatives, visits with social workers, court appearances.

### **Needs of other children in the home**

Too often, the needs of other children in the family are minimized. When considering either a removal from a family, or adding to a family, the day to day needs of the siblings already in the home must be given fair consideration. Are they being hurt by the child, or could they be? Is the need of the child being adopted so intense as to obliterate emotional room for the other children? Is there a child in the home that will be on a mission to push the new child away? Can the children stand up for themselves? What is their support system aside from the parent? Is there a particular dynamic with the newly placed child and a child previously in the home that is increasingly hostile, unrelenting or mean spirited? Are the other children likely victims?

### **Stated preferences of the child**

For our youngsters who have rarely gotten what they wanted, we must listen to them. By asking their help in choosing a family, they are invested, and empowered.

### **Least restrictive environment**

### **Maintenance of kinship ties**

Will the prospective parents not only verbally support but take action to make family connections actually happen? Can Auntie come to a barbeque? Can Grandma share a holiday? Can the child go to their home? Will the new parent feel safe and comfortable in initiating contact?

## **Sensitivity to cultural factors**

If the new parent is not of same ethnicity, how far out of their own comfort zone can they go? Will they “borrow” other adults to be mentors, can they include extended birth family to help balance their cultural differences? Does the culture from which the child comes respect adoption? If it is a very foreign concept, can the family grasp the reasons for that disparity, without judgment?

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