

Multi-Ethnic Placement Act as amended by the Inter-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA-IEPA) Guide

Steps to Achieve Goals:

- Identify the child/youth's race, religion, national origin and ethnic background;
- Identify the family's race, religion, national origin and ethnic background;
- Assess the child's specific needs;
- Assess individual prospective parents' ability to meet those needs; and
- Match the child with the most appropriate family.

Who Does This Affect?

- All state and county child welfare agencies involved in placements that received federal Title IV-E and Title IV-B funds;
- Adoptive and foster parents; and
- Children in placement or adoptive care.

What Does It Require?

- Timely placement of a child for adoption or foster care in an appropriate home, not based on race, color or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved;
- Individualized determination for each child; and
- Diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state.

What Is the Purpose?

- Decrease in the amount of time children wait to be adopted;
- Prevention of discrimination based on race, national origin and ethnic background when making foster care and adoption placement decisions;
- Facilitation of resource families who can meet the child's needs;
- Creation of equitable and positive outcomes for children; and
- Affirmation of active, creative and diligent recruitment efforts.

Facts:

1. Nearly 500,000 children are in foster care in the United States;
2. Tens of thousands of children in foster care are waiting for adoption;
3. Two years and 8 months is the median length of time that children wait to be adopted;
4. Race, color and national origin should not override all other factors but may be considered as part of a child's specific needs if the following issues related to race, color or national origin have been considered and documented:
 - What are the child's special or distinctive needs related to these areas?
 - Can the child's needs be met in a readily available resource placement?

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- Why is it in the best interests of the child to take specifically take into account the child's needs surrounding race, color and ethnicity?
 - Can these needs be taken into account without placing the child at risk of other harms?
 - Can the child's needs be met only by a prospective resource or adoptive parent who shares the child's race, color or national origin?
 - If so, is some delay justified in order to search for a parent of the same race, color or ethnicity?
5. Other considerations may include:
- Age of the child or youth;
 - Ties to siblings and other relatives;
 - Health or physical considerations;
 - Educational, cognitive or psychological needs; and
 - Cultural needs, which may encompass religious, linguistic, dietary, musical, athletic or other issues.
6. When considering family preferences, agencies cannot deny or delay placement if the denial or delay is based on the family's preferences for a family with a family of similar race, color or national origin.
7. **Health and safety must be the paramount concern in child placement decisions.**
- ✓ **Note:** Tribal rights of placement supersede the MEPA-IEPA provisions.

What Agencies Can Do

- Promote good child welfare practice;
- Decrease delays in permanence caused by other factors;
- Review current state law;
- Issue clear agency policies;
- Monitor agency alignment with MEPA-IEPA intent and guidance;
- Implement a comprehensive (active, creative and diligent) recruitment plan;
- Provide training for workers; and
- Develop opportunities for discussion and value clarification.

What Child Welfare Professionals Can Do:

- Consider permanence from the first contact with the child;
- Read the statute and federal guidance;
- Review agency policy and ask for clarification;
- Make individual decisions based on sound child welfare practice and the best interest of the child;

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- Be honest and respectful toward prospective resource and adoptive parents; and
- Document the reasons for decisions.

Sources: *MEPA-IEPA*, 2006; and *The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act as Amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provision of 1996* by Joan Heifetz Hollinger & the American Bar Association (Retrieved from [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/mepa94/.](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/mepa94/))