PART XI
TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS

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39.801 Procedures and jurisdiction; notice; service of process.--
(1) All procedures, including petitions, pleadings, subpoenas, summonses, and hearings, in termination of parental rights proceedings shall be according to the Florida Rules of Juvenile Procedure unless otherwise provided by law.

(2) The circuit court shall have exclusive original jurisdiction of a proceeding involving termination of parental rights.

(3) Before the court may terminate parental rights, in addition to the other requirements set forth in this part, the following requirements must be met:

(a) Notice of the date, time, and place of the advisory hearing for the petition to terminate parental rights and a copy of the petition must be personally served upon the following persons, specifically notifying them that a petition has been filed:

1. The parents of the child.
2. The legal custodians of the child.
3. If the parents who would be entitled to notice are dead or unknown, a living relative of the child, unless upon diligent search and inquiry no such relative can be found.
4. Any person who has physical custody of the child.
5. Any grandparent entitled to priority for adoption under s. 63.0425.
6. Any prospective parent who has been identified under s. 39.503 or s. 39.803.
7. The guardian ad litem for the child or the representative of the guardian ad litem program, if the program has been appointed.

The document containing the notice to respond or appear must contain, in type at least as large as the type in the balance of the document, the following or substantially similar language: "FAILURE TO PERSONALLY APPEAR AT THIS ADVISORY HEARING CONSTITUTES CONSENT TO THE

TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS OF THIS CHILD (OR CHILDREN). IF YOU FAIL TO APPEAR ON THE DATE AND TIME SPECIFIED, YOU MAY LOSE ALL LEGAL RIGHTS AS A PARENT TO THE CHILD OR CHILDREN NAMED IN THE PETITION ATTACHED TO THIS NOTICE."

(b) If a party required to be served with notice as prescribed in paragraph (a) cannot be served, notice of hearings must be given as prescribed by the rules of civil procedure, and service of process must be made as specified by law or civil actions.

(c) Notice as prescribed by this section may be waived, in the discretion of the judge, with regard to any person to whom notice must be given under this subsection if the person executes, before two witnesses and a notary public or other officer authorized to take acknowledgments, a written surrender of the child to a licensed child-placing agency or the department.

(d) If the person served with notice under this section fails to personally appear at the advisory hearing, the failure to personally appear shall constitute consent for termination of parental rights by the person given notice. If a parent appears for the advisory hearing and the court orders that parent to personally appear at the adjudicatory hearing for the petition for termination of parental rights, stating the date, time, and location of said hearing, then failure of that parent to personally appear at the adjudicatory hearing shall constitute consent for termination of parental rights.

(4) Upon the application of any party, the clerk or deputy clerk shall issue, and the court on its own motion may issue, subpoenas requiring the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production of records, documents, or other tangible objects at any hearing.

(5) All process and orders issued by the court must be served or executed as other process and orders of the circuit court and, in addition, may be served or executed by authorized agents of the department or the guardian ad litem.

(6) Subpoenas may be served within the state by any person over 18 years of age who is not a party to the proceeding and, in addition, may be served or executed by authorized agents of the department or of the guardian ad litem.

(7) A fee may not be paid for service of any process or other papers by an agent of the department or the guardian ad litem. If any process, orders, or other papers are served or executed by any sheriff, the sheriff's fees must be paid by the county.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 1, ch. 92-96; s. 32, ch. 94-164; ss. 6, 11, ch. 97-276; s. 83, ch. 98-403; s. 42, ch. 99-193.
Note.--Former ss. 39.46, 39.462.

39.802 Petition for termination of parental rights; filing; elements.--

(1) All proceedings seeking an adjudication to terminate parental rights pursuant to this chapter must be initiated by the filing of an original petition by the department, the guardian ad litem, or any other person who has knowledge of the facts alleged or is informed of them and believes that they are true.

(2) The form of the petition is governed by the Florida Rules of Juvenile Procedure. The petition must be in writing and signed by the petitioner or, if the department is the petitioner, by an employee of the department, under oath stating the petitioner's good faith in filing the petition.

(3) When a petition for termination of parental rights has been filed, the clerk of the court shall set the case before the court for an advisory hearing.

(4) A petition for termination of parental rights filed under this chapter must contain facts supporting the following allegations:

(a) That at least one of the grounds listed in s. 39.806 has been met.

(b) That the parents of the child were informed of their right to counsel at all hearings that they attended and that a dispositional order adjudicating the child dependent was entered in any prior dependency proceeding relied upon in offering a parent a case plan as described in s. 39.806.

(c) That the manifest best interests of the child, in accordance with s. 39.810, would be served by the granting of the petition.

(5) When a petition for termination of parental rights is filed under s. 39.806(1), a separate petition for dependency need not be filed and the department need not offer the parents a case plan with a goal of reunification, but may instead file with the court a case plan with a goal of termination of parental rights to allow continuation of services until the termination is granted or until further orders of the court are issued.

(6) The fact that a child has been previously adjudicated dependent as alleged in a petition for termination of parental rights may be proved by the introduction of a certified copy of the order of adjudication or the order of disposition of dependency.

(7) The fact that the parent of a child was informed of the right to counsel in any prior dependency proceeding as alleged in a petition for termination of parental rights may be proved by the introduction of a certified copy of the order of adjudication or the order of disposition of dependency containing a finding of fact that the parent was so advised.

(8) If the department has entered into a case plan with a parent with the goal of reunification, and a petition for termination of parental rights based on the same facts as are covered in the case plan is filed prior to the time agreed upon in the case plan for the performance of the case plan, then the petitioner must allege and prove by clear and convincing evidence that the parent has materially breached the provisions of the case plan.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 15, ch. 90-306; s. 14, ch. 92-170; ss. 29, 30, ch. 94-164; s. 13, ch. 97-276; s. 84, ch. 98-403; s. 43, ch. 99-193; s. 2, ch. 2001-3; s. 31, ch. 2006-86.

Note.--Former ss. 39.461, 39.4611.

39.803 Identity or location of parent unknown after filing of termination of parental rights petition; special procedures.--

(1) If the identity or location of a parent is unknown and a petition for termination of parental rights is filed, the court shall conduct the following inquiry of the parent who is available, or, if no parent is available, of any relative, caregiver, or legal custodian of the child who is present at the hearing and likely to have the information:

(a) Whether the mother of the child was married at the probable time of conception of the child or at the time of birth of the child.

(b) Whether the mother was cohabiting with a male at the probable time of conception of the child.

(c) Whether the mother has received payments or promises of support with respect to the child or because of her pregnancy from a man who claims to be the father.

(d) Whether the mother has named any man as the father on the birth certificate of the child or in connection with applying for or receiving public assistance.

(e) Whether any man has acknowledged or claimed paternity of the child in a jurisdiction in which the mother resided at the time of or since conception of the child, or in which the child has resided or resides.

(2) The information required in subsection (1) may be supplied to the court or the department in the form of a sworn affidavit by a person having personal knowledge of the facts.

(3) If the inquiry under subsection (1) identifies any person as a parent or prospective parent, the court shall require notice of the hearing to be provided to that person.

(4) If the inquiry under subsection (1) fails to identify any person as a parent or prospective parent, the court shall so find and may proceed without further notice.

(5) If the inquiry under subsection (1) identifies a parent or prospective parent, and that person's location is unknown, the court shall direct the petitioner to conduct a diligent search for that person before scheduling an adjudicatory hearing regarding the petition for termination of parental rights to the child unless the court finds that the best interest of the child requires proceeding without actual notice to the person whose location is unknown.

(6) The diligent search required by subsection (5) must include, at a minimum, inquiries of all known relatives of the parent or prospective parent, inquiries of all offices of program areas of the department likely to have information about the parent or prospective parent, inquiries of other state and federal agencies likely to have information about the parent or prospective parent, inquiries of appropriate utility and postal providers, and inquiries of appropriate law enforcement agencies.

(7) Any agency contacted by petitioner with a request for information pursuant to subsection (6) shall release the requested information to the petitioner without the necessity of a subpoena or court order.

(8) If the inquiry and diligent search identifies a prospective parent, that person must be given the opportunity to become a party to the proceedings by completing a sworn affidavit of parenthood and filing it with the court or the department. A prospective parent who files a sworn affidavit of parenthood while the child is a dependent child but no later than at the time of or prior to the adjudicatory hearing in the termination of parental rights proceeding for the child shall be considered a parent for all purposes under this section.
History.--s. 85, ch. 98-403; s. 33, ch. 2000-139.

39.804 Penalties for false statements of paternity.--Any male person or any mother of a dependent child who knowingly and willfully makes a false statement concerning the paternity of a child in conjunction with a petition to terminate parental rights under this chapter and causes such false statement of paternity to be filed with the court commits a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s. 775.083. A person who makes a statement claiming paternity in good faith is immune from criminal liability under this section.
History.--s. 34, ch. 94-164; s. 86, ch. 98-403; s. 34, ch. 2000-139.
Note.--Former s. 39.4627.

39.805 No answer required.--No answer to the petition or any other pleading need be filed by any child or parent, but any matters which might be set forth in an answer or other pleading may be pleaded orally before the court or filed in writing as any such person may choose. Notwithstanding the filing of any answer or any pleading, the child or parent shall, prior to the adjudicatory hearing, be advised by the court of the right to counsel and shall be given an opportunity to deny the allegations in the petition for termination of parental rights or to enter a plea to allegations in the petition before the court.
History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 242, ch. 95-147; s. 87, ch. 98-403; s. 44, ch. 99-193.
Note.--Former s. 39.463.

39.8055 Requirement to file a petition to terminate parental rights; exceptions.--

(1) The department shall file a petition to terminate parental rights within 60 days after any of the following if:

(a) At the time of the 12-month judicial review hearing, a child is not returned to the physical custody of the parents;

(b) A petition for termination of parental rights has not otherwise been filed, and the child has been in out-of-home care under the responsibility of the state for 12 of the most recent 22 months, calculated on a cumulative basis, but not including any trial home visits or time during which the child was a runaway;

(c) A parent has been convicted of the murder, manslaughter, aiding or abetting the murder, or conspiracy or solicitation to murder the other parent or another child of the parent, or a felony battery that resulted in serious bodily injury to the child or to another child of the parent; or

(d) A court determines that reasonable efforts to reunify the child and parent are not required.

(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the department may choose not to file or join in a petition to terminate the parental rights of a parent if:

(a) The child is being cared for by a relative under s. 39.6231; or

(b) The department has documented in the report to the court a compelling reason for determining that filing such a petition is not in the best interests of the child. Compelling reasons for not filing or joining a petition to terminate parental rights may include, but are not limited to:

1. Adoption is not the appropriate permanency goal for the child.

2. No grounds to file a petition to terminate parental rights exist.

3. The child is an unaccompanied refugee minor as defined in 45 C.F.R. 400.111.

4. There are international legal obligations or compelling foreign-policy reasons that would preclude terminating parental rights.

5. The department has not provided to the family, consistent with the time period in the case plan, services that the department deems necessary for the safe return of the child to the home.

(3) Upon good cause shown by any party or on its own motion, the court may review the decision by the department that compelling reasons exist for not filing or joining a petition for termination of parental rights.

History.--s. 24, ch. 2006-86; s. 15, ch. 2008-245.

39.806 Grounds for termination of parental rights.--

(1) Grounds for the termination of parental rights may be established under any of the following circumstances:

(a) When the parent or parents have voluntarily executed a written surrender of the child and consented to the entry of an order giving custody of the child to the department for subsequent adoption and the department is willing to accept custody of the child.

1. The surrender document must be executed before two witnesses and a notary public or other person authorized to take acknowledgments.

2. The surrender and consent may be withdrawn after acceptance by the department only after a finding by the court that the surrender and consent were obtained by fraud or under duress.

(b) Abandonment as defined in s. 39.01(1) or when the identity or location of the parent or parents is unknown and cannot be ascertained by diligent search within 60 days.

(c) When the parent or parents engaged in conduct toward the child or toward other children that demonstrates that the continuing involvement of the parent or parents in the parent-child relationship threatens the life, safety, well-being, or physical, mental, or emotional health of the child irrespective of the

provision of services. Provision of services may be evidenced by proof that services were provided through a previous plan or offered as a case plan from a child welfare agency.

(d) When the parent of a child is incarcerated in a state or federal correctional institution and either:

1. The period of time for which the parent is expected to be incarcerated will constitute a substantial portion of the period of time before the child will attain the age of 18 years;

2. The incarcerated parent has been determined by the court to be a violent career criminal as defined in s. 775.084, a habitual violent felony offender as defined in s. 775.084, or a sexual predator as defined in s. 775.21; has been convicted of first degree or second degree murder in violation of s. 782.04 or a sexual battery that constitutes a capital, life, or first degree felony violation of s. 794.011; or has been convicted of an offense in another jurisdiction which is substantially similar to one of the offenses listed in this paragraph. As used in this section, the term "substantially similar offense" means any offense that is substantially similar in elements and penalties to one of those listed in this subparagraph, and that is in violation of a law of any other jurisdiction, whether that of another state, the District of Columbia, the United States or any possession or territory thereof, or any foreign jurisdiction; or

3. The court determines by clear and convincing evidence that continuing the parental relationship with the incarcerated parent would be harmful to the child and, for this reason, that termination of the parental rights of the incarcerated parent is in the best interest of the child.

(e) When a child has been adjudicated dependent, a case plan has been filed with the court, and:

1. The child continues to be abused, neglected, or abandoned by the parent or parents. The failure of the parent or parents to substantially comply with the case plan for a period of 9 months after an adjudication of the child as a dependent child or the child's placement into shelter care, whichever occurs first, constitutes evidence of continuing abuse, neglect, or abandonment unless the failure to substantially comply with the case plan was due to the parent’s lack of financial resources or to the failure of the department to make reasonable efforts to reunify the parent and child. The 9-month period begins to run only after the child's placement into shelter care or the entry of a disposition order placing the custody of the child with the department or a person other than the parent and the court’s approval of a case plan having the goal of reunification with the parent, whichever occurs first;

2. The parent or parents have materially breached the case plan. Time is of the essence for permanency of children in the dependency system. In order to prove the parent or parents have materially breached the case plan, the court must find by clear and convincing evidence that the parent or parents are unlikely or unable to substantially comply with the case plan before time to comply with the case plan expires.

(f) The parent or parents engaged in egregious conduct or had the opportunity and capability to prevent and knowingly failed to prevent egregious conduct that threatens the life, safety, or physical, mental, or emotional health of the child or the child's sibling.

1. As used in this subsection, the term "sibling" means another child who resides with or is cared for by the parent or parents regardless of whether the child is related legally or by consanguinity.

2. As used in this subsection, the term "egregious conduct" means abuse, abandonment, neglect, or any other conduct that is deplorable, flagrant, or outrageous by a normal standard of conduct. Egregious conduct may include an act or omission that occurred only once but was of such intensity, magnitude, or severity as to endanger the life of the child.

(g) The parent or parents have subjected the child or another child to aggravated child abuse as defined in s. 827.03, sexual battery or sexual abuse as defined in s. 39.01, or chronic abuse.

(h) The parent or parents have committed the murder, manslaughter, aiding or abetting the murder, or conspiracy or solicitation to murder the other parent or another child, or a felony battery that resulted in serious bodily injury to the child or to another child.

(i) The parental rights of the parent to a sibling of the child have been terminated involuntarily.

(j) The parent or parents have a history of extensive, abusive, and chronic use of alcohol or a controlled substance which renders them incapable of caring for the child, and have refused or failed to

complete available treatment for such use during the 3-year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition for the termination of parental rights.

(k) A test administered at birth that indicated that the child's blood, urine, or meconium contained any amount of alcohol or a controlled substance or metabolites of such substances, the presence of which was not the result of medical treatment administered to the mother or the newborn infant, and the biological mother of the child is the biological mother of at least one other child who was adjudicated dependent after a finding of harm to the child's health or welfare due to exposure to a controlled substance or alcohol as defined in s. 39.01(32)(g) ~~s. 39.01(31)(g)~~, after which the biological mother had the opportunity to participate in substance abuse treatment.

(l) On three or more occasions the child or another child of the parent or parents has been placed in out-of-home care pursuant to this chapter, and the conditions that led to the child's out-of-home placement were caused by the parent or parents.

(2) Reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families are not required if a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that any of the events described in paragraphs (1)(e)-(l) have occurred.

(3) If a petition for termination of parental rights is filed under subsection (1), a separate petition for dependency need not be filed and the department need not offer the parents a case plan having a goal of reunification, but may instead file with the court a case plan having a goal of termination of parental rights to allow continuation of services until the termination is granted or until further orders of the court are issued.

(4) If an expedited termination of parental rights petition is filed, reasonable efforts shall be made to place the child in a timely manner in accordance with the permanency plan, and to complete whatever steps are necessary to finalize the permanent placement of the child.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 16, ch. 90-306; s. 4, ch. 90-309; s. 7, ch. 92-158; s. 35, ch. 94-164; s. 1, ch. 97-226; s. 12, ch. 97-276; s. 88, ch. 98-403; s. 2, ch. 98-417; s. 45, ch. 99-193; s. 35, ch. 2000-139; s. 3, ch. 2001-3; s. 25, ch. 2006-86; s. 16, ch. 2008-245; s. 2, ch. 2009-21.
Note.--Former s. 39.464.

39.807 Right to counsel; guardian ad litem.--

(1)(a) At each stage of the proceeding under this part, the court shall advise the parent of the right to have counsel present. The court shall appoint counsel for indigent parents. The court shall ascertain whether the right to counsel is understood and, where appropriate, is knowingly and intelligently waived. The court shall enter its findings in writing with respect to the appointment or waiver of counsel for indigent parents.

(b) Once counsel has been retained or, in appropriate circumstances, appointed to represent the parent of the child, the attorney shall continue to represent the parent throughout the proceedings or until the court has approved discontinuing the attorney-client relationship. If the attorney-client relationship is discontinued, the court shall advise the parent of the right to have new counsel retained or appointed for the remainder of the proceedings.

(c)1. No waiver of counsel may be accepted if it appears that the parent is unable to make an intelligent and understanding choice because of mental condition, age, education, experience, the nature or complexity of the case, or other factors.

2. A waiver of counsel made in court must be of record. A waiver made out of court must be in writing with not less than two attesting witnesses and must be filed with the court. The witnesses shall attest to the voluntary execution of the waiver.

3. If a waiver of counsel is accepted at any stage of the proceedings, the offer of assistance of counsel must be renewed by the court at each subsequent stage of the proceedings at which the parent appears without counsel.

(d) This subsection does not apply to any parent who has voluntarily executed a written surrender of the child and consent to the entry of a court order therefor.

(2)(a) The court shall appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the best interest of the child in any termination of parental rights proceedings and shall ascertain at each stage of the proceedings whether a guardian ad litem has been appointed.

(b) The guardian ad litem has the following responsibilities:

1. To investigate the allegations of the petition and any subsequent matters arising in the case and, unless excused by the court, to file a written report. This report must include a statement of the wishes of the child and the recommendations of the guardian ad litem and must be provided to all parties and the court at least 72 hours before the disposition hearing.

2. To be present at all court hearings unless excused by the court.

3. To represent the best interests of the child until the jurisdiction of the court over the child terminates or until excused by the court.

(c) A guardian ad litem is not required to post bond but shall file an acceptance of the office.

(d) A guardian ad litem is entitled to receive service of pleadings and papers as provided by the Florida Rules of Juvenile Procedure.

(e) This subsection does not apply to any voluntary relinquishment of parental rights proceeding.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 17, ch. 90-306; s. 36, ch. 94-164; s. 89, ch. 98-403; s. 46, ch. 99-193; s. 36, ch. 2000-139.

Note.--Former s. 39.465.

39.808 Advisory hearing; pretrial status conference.--

(1) An advisory hearing on the petition to terminate parental rights must be held as soon as possible after all parties have been served with a copy of the petition and a notice of the date, time, and place of the advisory hearing for the petition.

(2) At the hearing the court shall inform the parties of their rights under s. 39.807, shall appoint counsel for the parties in accordance with legal requirements, and shall appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the interests of the child if one has not already been appointed.

(3) The court shall set a date for an adjudicatory hearing to be held within 45 days after the advisory hearing, unless all of the necessary parties agree to some other hearing date.

(4) An advisory hearing is not required if a petition is filed seeking an adjudication for termination of parental rights based on a voluntary surrender of parental rights. Adjudicatory hearings for petitions for voluntary termination must be held within 21 days after the filing of the petition. Notice of the use of this subsection must be filed with the court at the same time as the filing of the petition to terminate parental rights.

(5) Not less than 10 days before the adjudicatory hearing on a petition for involuntary termination of parental rights, the court shall conduct a pretrial status conference to determine the order in which each party may present witnesses or evidence, the order in which cross-examination and argument shall occur, and any other matters that may aid in the conduct of the adjudicatory hearing to prevent any undue delay in the conduct of the adjudicatory hearing.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 33, ch. 88-337; s. 18, ch. 90-306; s. 37, ch. 94-164; s. 90, ch. 98-403; s. 47, ch. 99-193.

Note.--Former s. 39.466.

39.809 Adjudicatory hearing.--
(1) In a hearing on a petition for termination of parental rights, the court shall consider the elements required for termination. Each of these elements must be established by clear and convincing evidence before the petition is granted.

(2) The adjudicatory hearing must be held within 45 days after the advisory hearing, but reasonable continuances for the purpose of investigation, discovery, or procuring counsel or witnesses may, when necessary, be granted.

(3) The adjudicatory hearing must be conducted by the judge without a jury, applying the rules of evidence in use in civil cases and adjourning the case from time to time as necessary. For purposes of the adjudicatory hearing, to avoid unnecessary duplication of expense, the judge may consider in-court testimony previously given at any properly noticed hearing, without regard to the availability or unavailability of the witness at the time of the actual adjudicatory hearing, if the recorded testimony itself is made available to the judge. Consideration of such testimony does not preclude the witness being subpoenaed to answer supplemental questions.

(4) All hearings involving termination of parental rights are confidential and closed to the public. Hearings involving more than one child may be held simultaneously when the children involved are related to each other or were involved in the same case. The child and the parents may be examined separately and apart from each other.

(5) The judge shall enter a written order with the findings of fact and conclusions of law.
History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 19, ch. 90-306; ss. 8, 10, ch. 92-158; s. 38, ch. 94-164; s. 91, ch. 98-403.
Note.--Former s. 39.467.

39.810 Manifest best interests of the child.--In a hearing on a petition for termination of parental rights, the court shall consider the manifest best interests of the child. This consideration shall not include a comparison between the attributes of the parents and those of any persons providing a present or potential placement for the child. For the purpose of determining the manifest best interests of the child, the court shall consider and evaluate all relevant factors, including, but not limited to:

(1) Any suitable permanent custody arrangement with a relative of the child. However the availability of a nonadoptive placement with a relative may not receive greater consideration than any other factor weighing on the manifest best interest of the child and may not be considered as a factor weighing against termination of parental rights. If a child has been in a stable or preadoptive placement for not less than 6 months, the availability of a different placement, including a placement with a relative, may not be considered as a ground to deny the termination of parental rights.

(2) The ability and disposition of the parent or parents to provide the child with food, clothing, medical care or other remedial care recognized and permitted under state law instead of medical care, and other material needs of the child.

(3) The capacity of the parent or parents to care for the child to the extent that the child's safety, well-being, and physical, mental, and emotional health will not be endangered upon the child's return home.

(4) The present mental and physical health needs of the child and such future needs of the child to the extent that such future needs can be ascertained based on the present condition of the child.

(5) The love, affection, and other emotional ties existing between the child and the child's parent or parents, siblings, and other relatives, and the degree of harm to the child that would arise from the termination of parental rights and duties.

(6) The likelihood of an older child remaining in long-term foster care upon termination of parental rights, due to emotional or behavioral problems or any special needs of the child.

(7) The child's ability to form a significant relationship with a parental substitute and the likelihood that the child will enter into a more stable and permanent family relationship as a result of permanent termination of parental rights and duties.

(8) The length of time that the child has lived in a stable, satisfactory environment and the desirability of maintaining continuity.

(9) The depth of the relationship existing between the child and the present custodian.

(10) The reasonable preferences and wishes of the child, if the court deems the child to be of sufficient intelligence, understanding, and experience to express a preference.

(11) The recommendations for the child provided by the child's guardian ad litem or legal representative.
History.--s. 31, ch. 94-164; s. 18, ch. 95-228; s. 92, ch. 98-403.; s. 26, ch. 2006-86.
Note.--Former s. 39.4612.

39.811 Powers of disposition; order of disposition.--
(1) If the court finds that the grounds for termination of parental rights have not been established by clear and convincing evidence, the court shall:

(a) If grounds for dependency have been established, adjudicate or readjudicate the child dependent and:

1. Enter an order placing or continuing the child in out-of-home care under a case plan; or

2. Enter an order returning the child to the parent or parents. The court shall retain jurisdiction over a child returned to the parent or parents for a period of 6 months, but, at that time, based on a report of the social service agency and any other relevant factors, the court shall make a determination as to whether its jurisdiction shall continue or be terminated.

(b) If grounds for dependency have not been established, dismiss the petition.

(2) If the child is in the custody of the department and the court finds that the grounds for termination of parental rights have been established by clear and convincing evidence, the court shall, by order, place the child in the custody of the department for the purpose of adoption.

(3) If the child is in the custody of one parent and the court finds that the grounds for termination of parental rights have been established for the remaining parent by clear and convincing evidence, the court shall enter an order terminating the rights of the parent for whom the grounds have been established and placing the child in the custody of the remaining parent, granting that parent sole parental responsibility for the child.

(4) If the child is neither in the custody of the department nor in the custody of a parent and the court finds that the grounds for termination of parental rights have been established for either or both parents, the court shall enter an order terminating parental rights for the parent or parents for whom the grounds for termination have been established and placing the child with the department or an appropriate legal custodian. If the parental rights of both parents have been terminated, or if the parental rights of only one

parent have been terminated and the court makes specific findings based on evidence presented that placement with the remaining parent is likely to be harmful to the child, the court may order that the child be placed with a legal custodian other than the department after hearing evidence of the suitability of the intended placement. Suitability of the intended placement includes the fitness and capabilities of the proposed legal custodian to function as the primary caregiver for a particular child; and the compatibility of the child with the home in which the child is intended to be placed. If the court orders that a child be placed with a legal custodian under this subsection, the court shall appoint a legal custodian as the guardian for the child as provided in s. 744.3021 or s. 39.621. The court may modify the order placing the child in the custody of the legal custodian and revoke the guardianship established under s. 744.3021 or another relationship if the court subsequently finds the placement to be no longer in the best interest of the child.

(5) If the court terminates parental rights, the court shall enter a written order of disposition briefly stating the facts upon which its decision to terminate the parental rights is made. An order of termination of parental rights, whether based on parental consent or after notice served as prescribed in this part, permanently deprives the parents of any right to the child.

(6) The parental rights of one parent may be severed without severing the parental rights of the other parent only under the following circumstances:

(a) If the child has only one surviving parent;

(b) If the identity of a prospective parent has been established as unknown after sworn testimony;

(c) If the parent whose rights are being terminated became a parent through a single-parent adoption;

(d) If the protection of the child demands termination of the rights of a single parent; or

(e) If the parent whose rights are being terminated meets any of the criteria specified in s. 39.806(1)(d) and (f)-(1).

(7)(a) The termination of parental rights does not affect the rights of grandparents unless the court finds that continued visitation is not in the best interests of the child or that such visitation would interfere with the permanency goals for the child.

(b) If the court terminates parental rights, it may, as appropriate, order that the parents, siblings, or relatives of the parent whose rights are terminated be allowed to maintain some communication or contact with the child pending adoption if the best interests of the child support this continued communication or contact, except as provided in paragraph (a). If the court orders such continued communication or contact, which may include, but is not limited to, visits, letters, and cards or telephone calls, the nature and frequency of the communication or contact must be set forth in written order and may be reviewed upon motion of any party, or, for purposes of this subsection, an identified prospective adoptive parent. If a child is placed for adoption, the nature and frequency of the communication or contact must be reviewed by the court at the time the child is placed for adoption.

(8) If the court terminates parental rights, it shall, in its order of disposition, provide for a hearing, to be scheduled no later than 30 days after the date of disposition, in which the department shall provide to the court an amended case plan that identifies the permanency goal for the child. Reasonable efforts must be made to place the child in a timely manner in accordance with the permanency plan and to complete whatever steps are necessary to finalize the permanent placement of the child. Thereafter, until the adoption of the child is finalized or the child reaches the age of 18 years, whichever occurs first, the court shall hold hearings at 6-month intervals to review the progress being made toward permanency for the child.

(9) After termination of parental rights, the court shall retain jurisdiction over any child for whom custody is given to a social service agency until the child is adopted. The court shall review the status of the child's placement and the progress being made toward permanent adoptive placement. As part of this continuing

jurisdiction, for good cause shown by the guardian ad litem for the child, the court may review the appropriateness of the adoptive placement of the child.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 34, ch. 88-337; s. 21, ch. 90-306; s. 73, ch. 91-45; s. 39, ch. 94-164; s. 2, ch. 97-226; s. 1, ch. 98-50; s. 93, ch. 98-403; s. 48, ch. 99-193; s. 37, ch. 2000-139; s. 4, ch. 2001-3; s. 27, ch. 2006-86; s. 28, ch. 2008-245.
Note.--Former s. 39.469.

39.812 Postdisposition relief; petition for adoption.--
(1) If the department is given custody of a child for subsequent adoption in accordance with this chapter, the department may place the child with an agency as defined in s. 63.032, with a child-caring agency registered under s. 409.176, or in a family home for prospective subsequent adoption. The department may thereafter become a party to any proceeding for the legal adoption of the child and appear in any court where the adoption proceeding is pending and consent to the adoption, and that consent alone shall in all cases be sufficient.

(2) In any subsequent adoption proceeding, the parents are not entitled to notice of the proceeding and are not entitled to knowledge at any time after the order terminating parental rights is entered of the whereabouts of the child or of the identity or location of any person having the custody of or having adopted the child, except as provided by order of the court pursuant to this chapter or chapter 63. In any habeas corpus or other proceeding involving the child brought by any parent of the child, an agent or contract provider of the department may not be compelled to divulge that information, but may be compelled to produce the child before a court of competent jurisdiction if the child is still subject to the guardianship of the department.

(3) The entry of the custody order to the department does not entitle the department to guardianship of the estate or property of the child, but the department shall be the guardian of the person of the child.

(4) The court shall retain jurisdiction over any child placed in the custody of the department until the child is adopted. After custody of a child for subsequent adoption has been given to the department, the court has jurisdiction for the purpose of reviewing the status of the child and the progress being made toward permanent adoptive placement. As part of this continuing jurisdiction, for good cause shown by the guardian ad litem for the child, the court may review the appropriateness of the adoptive placement of the child. When a licensed foster parent or court-ordered custodian has applied to adopt a child who has resided with the foster parent or custodian for at least 6 months and who has previously been permanently committed to the legal custody of the department and the department does not grant the application to adopt, the department may not, in the absence of a prior court order authorizing it to do so, remove the child from the foster home or custodian, except when:

(a) There is probable cause to believe that the child is at imminent risk of abuse or neglect;

(b) Thirty days have expired following written notice to the foster parent or custodian of the denial of the application to adopt, within which period no formal challenge of the department’s decision has been filed; or

(c) The foster parent or custodian agrees to the child’s removal.

(5) The petition for adoption must be filed in the division of the circuit court which entered the judgment terminating parental rights, unless a motion for change of venue is granted pursuant to s. 47.122. A copy of the consent executed by the department must be attached to the petition, unless waived pursuant to s. 63.062(7). The petition must be accompanied by a statement, signed by the prospective adoptive parents, acknowledging receipt of all information required to be disclosed under s. 63.085 and a form provided by the department which details the social and medical history of the child and each parent and includes the social security number and date of birth for each parent, if such information is available or readily

obtainable. The prospective adoptive parents may not file a petition for adoption until the judgment terminating parental rights becomes final. An adoption proceeding under this subsection is governed by chapter 63.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 41, ch. 94-164; s. 14, ch. 95-228; s. 94, ch. 98-403; s. 5, ch. 2001-3; s. 1, ch. 2004-389; s. 1, ch. 2008-151.
Note.--Former s. 39.47.

39.813 Continuing jurisdiction.--The court which terminates the parental rights of a child who is the subject of termination proceedings pursuant to this chapter shall retain exclusive jurisdiction in all matters pertaining to the child's adoption pursuant to chapter 63.

History.--s. 95, ch. 98-403.

39.814 Oaths, records, and confidential information.--

(1) The judge, clerks or deputy clerks, and authorized agents of the department shall each have the power to administer oaths and affirmations.

(2) The court shall make and keep records of all cases brought before it pursuant to this part and shall preserve the records of proceedings under this part pursuant to the Florida Rules of Judicial Administration. Records of cases where orders were entered permanently depriving a parent of the custody of a child shall be preserved permanently.

(3) The clerk shall keep all court records required by this part separate from other records of the circuit court. All court records required by this part shall not be open to inspection by the public. All records shall be inspected only upon order of the court by persons deemed by the court to have a proper interest therein, except that, custodians of the child and their attorneys, law enforcement agencies, and the department and its designees shall always have the right to inspect and copy any official record pertaining to the child. The court may permit authorized representatives of recognized organizations compiling statistics for proper purposes to inspect and make abstracts from official records, under whatever conditions upon their use and disposition the court may deem proper, and may punish by contempt proceedings any violation of those conditions.

(4) All information obtained pursuant to this part in the discharge of official duty by any judge, employee of the court, authorized agent of the department, or law enforcement agent shall be confidential and exempt from the provisions of s. 119.07(1) and shall not be disclosed to anyone other than the authorized personnel of the court, the department and its designees, law enforcement agents, and others entitled under this part to receive that information, except upon order of the court.

(5) All orders of the court entered pursuant to this part shall be in writing and signed by the judge, except that the clerk or deputy clerk may sign a summons or notice to appear.

(6) No court record of proceedings under this part shall be admissible in evidence in any other civil or criminal proceeding, except that:

(a) Records of proceedings under this part forming a part of the record on appeal shall be used in the appellate court in the manner hereinafter provided.

(b) Records necessary therefor shall be admissible in evidence in any case in which a person is being tried upon a charge of having committed perjury.

(c) A final order entered pursuant to an adjudicatory hearing is admissible in evidence in any subsequent civil proceeding relating to placement of, access to, parental time with, adoption of, or parental rights and responsibilities for the same child or a sibling of that child.

(d) Evidence admitted in any proceeding under this part may be admissible in evidence when offered by any party in a subsequent civil proceeding relating to placement of, access to, parental time with, adoption of, or parental rights and responsibilities for the same child or a sibling of that child if:

1. Notice is given to the opposing party or opposing party's counsel of the intent to offer the evidence and a copy of such evidence is delivered to the opposing party or opposing party's counsel; and

2. The evidence is otherwise admissible in the subsequent civil proceeding.

(7) Final orders, records, and evidence in any proceeding under this part which are subsequently admitted in evidence pursuant to subsection (6) remain subject to subsections (3) and (4).

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 14, ch. 90-360; s. 17, ch. 96-406; s. 3, ch. 97-226; s. 96, ch. 98-403; s. 49, ch. 99-193; s. 6, ch. 2005-239.
Note.--Former s. 39.471.

39.815 Appeal.--

(1) Any child, any parent or guardian ad litem of any child, any other party to the proceeding who is affected by an order of the court, or the department may appeal to the appropriate district court of appeal within the time and in the manner prescribed by the Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure. The district court of appeal shall give an appeal from an order terminating parental rights priority in docketing and shall render a decision on the appeal as expeditiously as possible. Appointed counsel shall be compensated as provided in s. 27.5304(6).

(2) An attorney for the department shall represent the state upon appeal. When a notice of appeal is filed in the circuit court, the clerk shall notify the attorney for the department, together with the attorney for the parent, the guardian ad litem, and any attorney for the child.

(3) The taking of an appeal does not operate as a supersedeas in any case unless the court so orders. However, a termination of parental rights order with placement of the child with a licensed child-placing agency or the department for subsequent adoption is suspended while the appeal is pending, but the child shall continue in an out-of-home placement under the order until the appeal is decided.

(4) The case on appeal must be docketed and any papers filed in the appellate court must be titled with the initials, but not the name, of the child and the court case number, and the papers must remain sealed in the office of the clerk of the appellate court when not in use by the appellate court and may not be open to public inspection. The decision of the appellate court must be likewise titled and may refer to the child only by initials and court case number.

(5) The original order of the appellate court, with all papers filed in the case on appeal, must remain in the office of the clerk of the appellate court, sealed and not open to inspection except by order of the appellate court. The clerk of the appellate court shall return to the circuit court all papers transmitted to the appellate court from the circuit court, together with a certified copy of the order of the appellate court.

History.--s. 9, ch. 87-289; s. 22, ch. 90-306; s. 1, ch. 90-309; s. 15, ch. 92-170; s. 42, ch. 94-164; s. 97, ch. 98-403; s. 50, ch. 99-193; s. 59, ch. 2003-402; s.22, ch. 2007-62.
Note.--Former s. 39.473.

39.816 Authorization for pilot and demonstration projects.--

(1) Contingent upon receipt of a federal grant or contract pursuant to s. 473A(i) of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. s. 673A(i), enacted November 19, 1997, the department is authorized to establish one or more pilot projects for the following purposes:

(a) The development of best practice guidelines for expediting termination of parental rights.

(b) The development of models to encourage the use of concurrent planning.

(c) The development of specialized units and expertise in moving children toward adoption as a permanency goal.

(d) The development of risk assessment tools to facilitate early identification of the children who will be at risk of harm if returned home.

(e) The development of models to encourage the fast-tracking of children who have not attained 1 year of age, into preadoptive placements.

(f) The development of programs that place children into preadoptive families without waiting for termination of parental rights.

(2) Contingent upon receipt of federal authorization and funding pursuant to s. 1130(a) of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. s. 1320a-9, enacted November 19, 1997, the department is authorized to establish one or more demonstration projects for the following purposes:

(a) Identifying and addressing barriers that result in delays to adoptive placements for children in out-of-home care.

(b) Identifying and addressing parental substance abuse problems that endanger children and result in the placement of children in out-of-home care. This purpose may be accomplished through the placement of children with their parents in residential treatment facilities, including residential treatment facilities for postpartum depression, that are specifically designed to serve parents and children together, in order to promote family reunification, and that can ensure the health and safety of the children.

(c) Addressing kinship care.

History.--s. 98, ch. 98-403.

39.817 Foster care privatization demonstration pilot project.--A pilot project shall be established through The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida to contract with a private entity for a foster care privatization demonstration project. No more then 30 children with a goal of family reunification shall be accepted into the program on a no-eject-or-reject basis as identified by the department. Sibling groups shall be kept together in one placement in their own communities. Foster care parents shall be paid employees of the program. The program shall provide for public/private partnerships, community collaboration, counseling, and medical and legal assistance, as needed. For purposes of identifying measurable outcomes, the pilot project shall be located in a department district with an integrated district management which was selected as a family transition program site, has a population of less than 500,000, has a total caseload of no more than 400, with and without board payment, and has a total foster care caseload of no more than 250.

History.--s. 99, ch. 98-403.