



PRIDEbook

REUNIFICATION TRAINING FOR CAREGIVERS

Reunification Training Agenda

Part I: Welcome and Introductions

- A. Introductions
- B. Teamwork agreements
- C. Connect to PRIDE pre-service training
- D. The need for lifetime connections
- E. A “Child’s sense of time”

Part II: Legal Considerations Regarding Permanency

- A. Dual mandate of child welfare
- B. Foster care drift
- C. Key provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997
- D. Elements of concurrent planning
- E. Permanency goals
- F. Pathways to permanency

Part III: What’s the Problem?

- A. Renewed focus on reunification
- B. Child and Family Services Review results
- C. Child welfare talk and terms

Part IV: Making Reunification Happen

- A. Early reunification
- B. The Family Meeting
- C. Visits
- D. Teamwork
- E. Caregiver practices to support reunification
- F. Agency practices to support caregivers

Part V: Summing Up

- A. One family at a time
- B. Evaluations

Learning Objectives

- Know the importance of family in developing identity, culture, and values.
- Know the feelings that can result from separation and loss in children and parents.
- Know the importance of respecting children's connections to their birth families.
- Understand how children in family foster care risk not having permanency in their lives.
- Know the conditions and experiences that can affect a child's development.
- Know the dual mandate of child welfare.
- Know the key provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.
- Understand the concept of permanence.
- Understand the purpose and components of concurrent planning.
- Know that reunification is a primary child welfare goal.
- Know who has service plans and who has permanency goals.
- Know the pathways to permanency.
- Know the purpose of the first and second family meetings.
- Know the agency's policy on reunification.
- Understand the challenges of teamwork in working toward reuniting families.
- Know the members of the reunification team.
- Know how the professional team can support the reunification process.
- Know the terms of the reunification team agreement.
- Know that regular visits and other types of contact can strengthen relationships between children and their families.
- Know how to prepare children for visits with their families.
- Understand how visits with their families might affect children's feelings and behaviors.
- Know how to help children manage their feelings in response to family contacts.
- Know the steps to be taken to promote caregiver comfort and readiness to host parent-child visit in the caregiver's home.
- Know the ground rules for family visits in a caregiver's home.
- Understand the importance and value of developing a positive relationship with parents.
- Know the importance of being non-judgmental in working with children and families.
- Know some steps to take to help develop a positive relationship between caregivers and parents.
- Know that caregivers can provide mentoring and serve as role models for parents in learning how to have a successful family life.
- Understand the concept of shared parenting.
- Know some shared parenting activities that caregivers can practice to support reunification efforts.
- Know the purpose of the CFS1042-L.
- Know what the Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee (FRSSSF) covers.
- Identify some specific caregiver activities in a homelike setting that can support reunification.
- Identify some "choice" activities that can support reunification.
- Know the caregiver qualifications for receiving the FRSSSF.

PRIDE Competency Categories

1. Protecting and Nurturing Children

2. Meeting Children's Developmental Needs and Addressing Their Developmental Delays

3. Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families

4. Connecting Children to Safe, Nurturing Relationships Intended to Last a Lifetime

5. Working as a Member of a Professional Team

Thinking About Permanency

What three words come to mind when you think about belonging to a family?

Did you ever worry, while you were growing up, about who would take care of you?

Who are the people in your life now who will be there for you if you are in trouble, get sick or need emotional support?

Permanence means

- having a sense of one's past (where you came from; who "your people" are)
- having a legal and social status from being a family member (in the way that marriage and the title of "wife" confers a legal and social status that being "engaged" and the title of "fiancée" does not)
- having safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime (belonging; feeling cared about)

Definition of Permanency: "The joining of a child, both psychologically and legally, with a family who is committed, willing and able to provide a life-long relationship of safety, security and support."

Caregiver-Specific Factors to Enhance Permanency & Support Reunification

Factors to Enhance Permanency

1. Ensure the child's safety.
2. Work with the child's parents (including shared parenting and maybe parenting the parent) if reunification is the goal.
3. Maintain siblings together.
4. Support, facilitate and participate in the child's visits with siblings and family and maintain the child's connections with family, past caregivers and others significant to the child
5. Maintain proximity to child's home and community, including school district.
6. Meet the child's needs (medical, psychological, developmental, special talents and activities etc.). Consider the caregivers' physical ability, training, experience, "track record."
7. Help develop and support the permanency goal, and actively participate in the Child and Family Team.
8. Provide permanency if child is not reunified.
9. Provide transportation for the child's appointments, and participate in and document the child's activities by maintaining the Lifebook.

Factors to Support Reunification

1. Recognize, accept and support the child's connections with family.
2. Collaborate with the child's parents to build a positive relationship.
3. Support the parents' role and responsibility through frequent family visits and shared parenting..
4. Support visits in a family setting, including providing transportation for visits in the home of a parent or relative. Allow parents to visit their children in your home when appropriate.
5. Encourage parents in their improved parenting skills and enhanced relationships with their children.
6. Model and mentor good parenting practices with the child's parents..
7. Support the transition of responsibility for the child from caregiver to parents.
8. Continue to provide respite and support after the child is returned home until the case is closed.
9. Provide permanency if child is not reunified. If adoption or guardianship is not possible, support the child's transition to a permanent family.

Important Provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 was passed to improve the safety of children, to promote family reunification, adoption and other permanent plans for children who need them, and to support families. The law's provisions that affect permanency planning include:

1. **Reasonable efforts must be made to preserve families** before children can be placed in foster care, and to reunify families and make it possible for children to return home safely. Children's health and safety must be the paramount concern throughout this process.
2. **Permanency planning hearings must be held within 12 months** of children's entry into care. At the hearing, a permanent plan must be determined. The plan may be reunification, adoption, guardianship or other planned permanent living arrangement.
3. **A petition to terminate parental rights must be filed on behalf of any child, regardless of age, who has been in foster care 15 out of the last 22 months.** Exceptions can be made if the child is cared for by a relative or there is a compelling reason why filing is not in the best interest of the child.
4. States are permitted to place children for adoption or in other permanent placements **concurrently** with the efforts to reunify the child with his or her family.
5. Foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, or relatives caring for children must be given notice of and opportunity to testify at any reviews or hearings involving those children.
6. Agencies do not have to make reasonable efforts to reunify families under certain specific circumstances: when the child or a sibling has been severely abused, or the parent has previously had parental rights terminated. In these cases, a permanency hearing must be held within 30 days and the state must make reasonable efforts to place children permanently in families.

Components of Concurrent Planning

The primary goal for every child is **permanence at the earliest possible time**. Concurrent planning makes a child's sense of time and meeting children's developmental needs the priority.

1. Honesty, or **full disclosure**, with the birth parent is a key component of concurrent planning. The social worker informs the birth parents that the goal is early permanence—through reunification if possible, but if not, through an alternative plan. The social worker also educates parents about how temporary placement inherently means insecurity and uncertainty for their children and how damaging it is to the children.
2. Early in the history of the case, the agency makes a **diligent effort to locate absent parents or any relatives** who can take care of children.
3. The agency **initiates intensive services for the birth family early in the case** to assist them toward reunification.
4. Emphasis is placed on **frequent visits** between the parent and child because this helps them maintain their attachments to each other.
5. The agency works to achieve **reunification and establishes an alternative permanent plan concurrently**, that is, at the same time. These are sometimes called “Plan A” and “Plan B.” When the possibility of reunification seems good, Plan B is usually considered a back-up that will only be implemented if the situation deteriorates. However, where the agency considers successful reunification unlikely, Plan B may be implemented immediately upon placement. Children may be placed with permanency planning families who work toward reunification but who are also willing to make a long-term commitment to the child.

Adoption and Safe Families Act and Concurrent Planning

In 1997, the federal government passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) to address some of the problems that caused delays in permanence. The intent of the law was to promote safety and timely permanence for children.

ASFA encourages concurrent planning as a way of practicing permanency planning. Not all agencies are practicing concurrent planning yet. However, most agencies are beginning to incorporate some of the components of concurrent planning into their practice.

Before concurrent planning, reunification with the family was seen as the primary goal. Social workers focused on the parent's problems and directed services toward solving those problems. They were reluctant to change the goal if the parent showed any signs of improvement. Meanwhile, the child's clock was ticking.

Now, the primary goal for every child is "early permanence," a more child-centered focus that prioritizes the child's developmental needs.

Before concurrent planning, the social worker might not have been direct with the parent about the consequences of not making changes. When the agency changed the goal to adoption, it often came as a shock to the birth parent. Parents who held onto the hope of reunification often closed their eyes to the pain involved for the child.

Now, in concurrent planning, honest communication with the parents is key. The social worker educates the parent about the harm to the child that results from temporary placement and explains that the agency intends to work toward early permanence—either through reunification, kinship placement, guardianship, or adoption. The parents are encouraged to work with the agency to achieve permanence.

Before concurrent planning, the agency may not have searched for relatives and absent fathers until the goal was changed to adoption. This meant that children had to move from families to whom they had become attached in order to live with relatives.

Now, efforts are made to locate absent fathers and relatives even before placement is being considered so that children can be placed with them right away if necessary. However, if that isn't possible, a search is made immediately upon removal from the birth family. Children can then be placed with relatives without a long wait in foster care.

In concurrent planning, every effort is made to avoid delays by offering necessary services right away. Parents are told what changes they must make, and by when, to have their child returned.

Concurrent planning is based on an understanding of how important attachment is to children's development. Studies of children in placement indicate that reunification is more likely if there is frequent visiting between the child and parent. In concurrent planning, the intense work with the family also includes frequent visiting.

Child welfare agencies in Illinois practice concurrent planning and develop two plans when the child comes into family foster care. This means that the agency works on “Plan A” (efforts to reunify the family), and at the same time identifies “Plan B” (another permanent home for the child in case reunification is not successful).

The birth parent is included in this planning. The worker may say, “We want to help you reunite your family, but if that isn’t possible we want you to participate in planning for your child. Can you tell us who you would like to raise your child if he can’t go home?”

In some cases “Plan B” will be identified, but the child will not be placed with a new permanent family until it is clear that reunification is not possible. In other cases, especially when the probability of reunification doesn’t seem high, the concurrent plan may be implemented immediately when the child comes into placement while the agency is still working toward reunification. For example, the child might be placed with a relative who would provide a permanent family if the child could not return to the birth parent.

Foster families in Illinois are considered concurrent families. Foster families must be committed to the goal of permanence for the child, whether that means supporting the child’s return to the birth parent, adoption by another family or adopting the child themselves. As you can imagine, this is a role that presents many challenges.

Vignettes

Vignette 1:

Two friends are leaving tonight to go on a trip. They want to leave Chicago at 8:00 p.m. They have filled the car tank with gas, made sure they have a spare tire and packed enough clothing for a week away. They even made a picnic lunch and a thermos of coffee to eat along the way. They will probably need a rest stop halfway there. They plan to take turns driving and have books on tape to entertain them. They have been saving for this trip for a long time and are very excited about going.

Question:

What do you believe is the best route for these two friends to take?

Vignette 2:

Three friends—Jane, Joyce and Judy—are going to Disney World for vacation. They plan to leave Chicago tonight. They are very excited about the trip as none of them have ever been to Florida before. They plan to ride all the rides, see everything in Epcott Center, take a canoe down the rapids in Adventure Land, go to the beach and swim in the ocean surf, see Shamu (the “killer whale”) at Sea World, and, go on a Jungle Safari at Busch Gardens.

Question:

When can they expect to arrive at Disney World?

Insert Resource #10

Reunification/Concurrent Planning Framework “Pathways to Permanency”

Permanency Goals

Children have permanency goals. Birth parents have service plans—written plans developed by the caseworker and family, which specify the services the agency will provide and the actions the parents/family will take to correct the conditions which led to the child’s abuse or neglect. The service plan supports the child’s permanency goal. Permanency goals are set based on the **best interest of the child**.

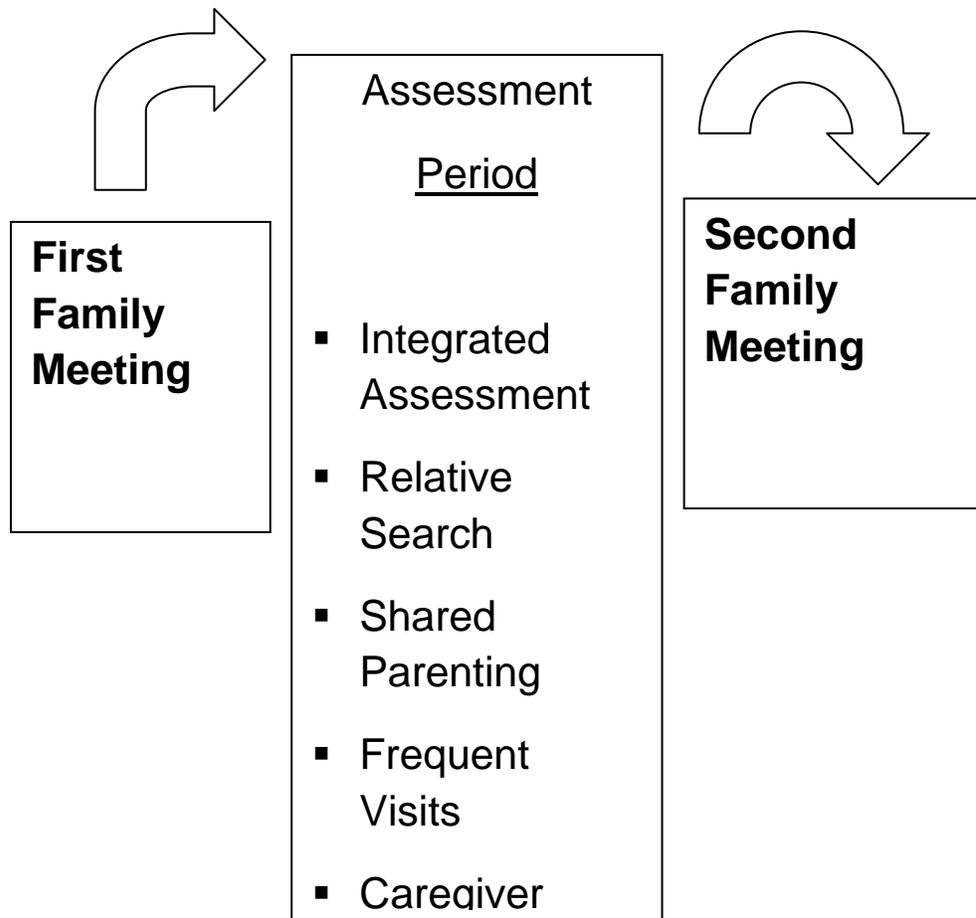
Permanency Goals emphasize that:

- A child’s sense of time is different; that what may seem to adults like a brief disruption in a family’s life or a short separation can be a painful and intolerably long period for a child.
- The limited duration of childhood and the developmental needs of children impart urgency for the child to have a safe, secure and nurturing permanent family.
- Such safe, secure, and nurturing permanent families are essential for the child’s healthy emotional and psychological growth and development leading to maturity.

Initially, the agency working with the family recommends a Permanency Goal based on the facts of a case. At the 12 month Permanency Hearing, if the child has not been returned home, the judge selects one of the following Permanency Goals based on the evidence presented and the recommendation of the caseworker. Once the court has set the Permanency Goal, only the court can change it.

- A. The minor will be **returned home** by a specific date **within 5 months**. This goal is chosen when the conditions that led to the child’s maltreatment are few and the parents are willing and able to change.
- B. The minor will be in **short-term care** with a continued goal to **return home within 1 year or less**, where the progress of the parent or parents is substantial, and considering the age and individual needs of the minor. This goal recognizes that change takes time. Some families need more time to correct conditions that led to the child’s maltreatment. For example, parenting classes require time to complete and time to practice new skills.
 - B-1. The minor will be in **short-term care** with a continued goal to **return home pending a status hearing**. When the court finds that a parent has not made reasonable progress to date, the court will identify what actions the parent and DCFS must take to justify a finding of reasonable efforts or reasonable progress. The court will set a status hearing to be held between 9 and 11 months from the date of adjudication, during which the parent’s progress will again be reviewed.
- C. The minor will be in **substitute care** pending court determination on **termination of parental rights**.
- D. **Adoption**, provided that parental rights have been terminated or relinquished.
- E. The **guardianship** of the minor will be permanently transferred to an individual or a couple, if **goals A through D have been ruled out**.
- F. The minor over age 15 will be in **substitute care** pending **independence**.
- G. If goals A through D have been ruled out, the minor will be in **substitute care** because s/he cannot be provided for in a home environment due to developmental disabilities or mental illness or because s/he is a danger to self or others.

INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT



Early Casework Events Related to Caregiver Responsibilities

Day 0

- Placement of child or children with **caregiver**
 - Geographically based rotation system with preference for reunification-prepared caregiver

Within 2 Days Of Case Assignment

- First Family Meeting
 - Part 1 – Parent/s and caseworker:
 - Discuss many aspects of the case, begin full disclosure
 - Discuss shared parenting, a right and responsibility of the parent
 - Complete “Let Me Tell You About My Child”
 - Part 2 – First family visit (Child or children, parent/s and caseworker)
 - Part 3 – **Caregiver** meets parent/s and parent, together with caseworker, shares information about the child or children and reviews “Let Me Tell You About My Child”

Within Days 2-35

- Integrated Assessment
 - Caseworker and clinical screener review the needs of the child and parent with the **caregiver** and discuss the **caregiver’s** role in supporting family reunification and other potential permanency needs
 - **Caregiver** participates with parent, caseworker and clinical screener in the development of a plan for shared parenting tasks and responsibilities, with a focus on continued parent involvement, improvement of parenting skills, and enhanced family relationships
 - Caseworker completes a comprehensive diligent search for family members in order to assess their willingness and ability
 - to care for the child while the family works toward reunification;
 - to provide other types of support in the reunification process; or,
 - to provide, as needed, an alternative permanent placement.
 - Integrated Assessment team makes recommendations regarding:
 - Pathway to permanency for the child and family
 - Selection of the most appropriate **caregiver** to meet the needs of the family based on the assessment results, the selected Pathway, and the willingness and ability of the **caregiver** to meet the needs of the child and family in working toward permanency

Within Days 35 – 40

- Second Family Meeting
 - Part 1 – Parent/s, caseworker, assessment screener, and casework supervisor meet to accomplish many tasks including:
 - Present the findings of the Integrated Assessment to parent/s and review the Readiness for Reunification Assessment Tool;
 - Recommend the permanency pathway for supervisory and court approval;
 - Develop the client service plan;
 - Develop **caregiver's** tasks to be included in the service plan in support of the family's reunification; and
 - Develop a plan for visits, mentoring, and shared parenting tasks and responsibilities.
 - Part 2 – **Caregiver** joins the group to:
 - Discuss visitation and shared parenting tasks and responsibilities; and
 - Establish a plan and schedule that supports the work toward permanency.

INSERT RESOURCES #14, 15 & 16

TOTAL OF 8 PAGES

First Impressions And Feelings

Situation #1:

You feel anxious about meeting the parent? . How would you handle your anxious feelings?

Situation #2:

You have an immediate negative reaction to the parent? . How will you deal with your reaction?

Situation #3:

You sense hostility toward you by the parent. What will you say or do?

Situation #4:

You feel that the parent is embarrassed. What would you say or do?

Situation #5:

You feel angry. How will you handle your feelings?

Situation #6:

You sense that the parent is jealous of you. What could you say or do?

Goals for Visits

Different team members will have different goals for visits.

1. The **child** wants to know that:
 - He/she is loved.
 - The parents are alright.
 - Everyone is working toward strengthening the family.
2. The **birth family** wants to know that:
 - The child is being well cared for.
 - The child has not forgotten them.
 - They are still meaningful in the child's life.
3. The **foster family** wants to:
 - Keep in touch with the changes in the family.
 - Better understand the child's relationship with his/her family.
 - Provide support.
4. The **caseworker** wants to:
 - Observe parenting skills.
 - Obtain data to use in decision-making for implementing the child's permanency goal.

Preparing Children for Visits

- The child needs to clearly understand the visiting arrangements. Too often children are taken to and from visits with little explanation and little idea of what is happening.
- The child needs as much information as possible about the visit ahead of time.
- The child needs to be prepared for the parent's reaction. If parents frequently fail to show up for visits, this needs to be discussed with the child.
- If a parent is likely to become very emotional, this too can be talked over with the child.
- The child needs to be prepared for his or her own feelings and reactions. Seeing the parents may bring on an overwhelming sense of guilt in a child who has made a seemingly smooth adjustment. Children who have not seemed to miss their parents may be overcome with grief at having to leave them.
- Since emotions are complicated and unpredictable, children need to be told that the visit may bring up a range of feelings. Reassure them that this is okay.

A child who has safety or protection concerns needs to be assured that the worker or foster parent will be there to help make sure everybody is safe.

Children's Reactions to Visits

How a child might feel inside. . .

When first taken away from parents:	When they first see their parents on a visit:	When they must say goodbye at the end of a visit:	When they return to the foster family:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ shock ▪ anger ▪ fear ▪ depression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ elation ▪ fear ▪ sadness ▪ anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ fear ▪ sadness ▪ anger ▪ relief ▪ anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sadness ▪ anger ▪ depression ▪ relief ▪ elation

How a child might behave...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ listless ▪ withdrawn ▪ distracted ▪ hostile ▪ aggressive ▪ tearful ▪ inconsolable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ hyperactive ▪ hostile ▪ aggressive ▪ talking too much ▪ not talking at all ▪ cowering ▪ avoiding parent ▪ clinging to parent ▪ clinging to other caregiver ▪ ignoring parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ crying ▪ angry ▪ hostile to parent ▪ whining ▪ leaving without saying goodbye ▪ clinging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ hyperactive ▪ hostile ▪ aggressive ▪ talking too much ▪ not talking at all ▪ avoiding family members ▪ clinging to family members ▪ crying ▪ not eating ▪ problems with sleeping, bed-wetting, or other regressive behaviors
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Locations For Visits

Agency:

Advantages:

- Easy for caseworker to observe
- Controlled situation if needed

Disadvantages:

- Can feel cold and impersonal
- Parents and children may feel uncomfortable
- Lacks privacy
- May not have appropriate toys or furniture

Caregiver's Home:

Advantages:

- Less disruption in child's life
- Familiar setting for child
- Satisfies parents' curiosity about how child is living
- Convenient for caregiver

Disadvantages:

- Parents may feel uncomfortable visiting their child in someone else's home
- Caregiver may feel uncomfortable hosting/supervising family visits
- May lack privacy

Parent's Home:

Advantages:

- Parents and children may feel more comfortable
- Offers privacy

Disadvantages:

- Problems with housing or housekeeping may not have been resolved
- Child may not be adequately protected or supervised by parents

Relative's Home:

Advantages:

- Maintains ties to kin
- Child and parents may feel comfortable there

Disadvantages:

- Occasionally, extended family is not safe for child
- Parents may feel relatives are critical of them
- May lack privacy

Neutral Setting:

Advantages:

- Setting may be less emotionally charged than caregiver's, parents' or relative's home

Disadvantages:

- Lack of privacy
- May lack appropriate toys or furniture for visits

Visits and Caregiver Safety

No visits will occur in a caregiver's home until all members of the team feel comfortable and ready for them.

The caregiver—no one else—extends the invitation and provides their address to the parent.

Several things must happen first to promote the caregiver's comfort and readiness to host visits at home.

- A completed CANTS check (Child Abuse & Neglect Tracking System).
- A completed LEADS check (Law Enforcement Area Data System).
- A completed Integrated Assessment.
- Visits have occurred at the agency.
- Visits have occurred in the parent's home with the caseworker present.
- For **E**arly Reunification cases, 2 family meetings have occurred.
- For concurrent planning reunification cases, the parent and caregiver have attended the quarterly Child and Family Team meetings together.
- The caregiver has a contact person at the agency for evenings and weekends in case anything unusual occurs during a visit
- Ground Rules have been established for family visits in the homes of caregivers.
- Each member of the team has signed a Reunification Team Agreement identifying the roles and tasks for which each team member will assume responsibility, to confirm their understanding of how they will work together.

The Reunification Team

A team is necessary for successful family reunification—it can't be achieved alone.

The team operates with a conviction that:

- The child should remain with his or her family whenever they can safely do so.
- Most families are able to care for their children if properly assisted.
- The impact of separation on children and parents is severe.
- Consistent visits can help parents and children cope with the loss.

Parents



Active team members, parents are ultimately responsible for making the changes necessary so ~~that~~ they can safely care for their children. Although the children are not in their care at this time, the parents ~~and~~ remain involved in the decision-making for their child. Many parents are reluctant to visit because of the range of negative feelings that may accompany visiting, including guilt, jealousy and shame.

Caregiver



The caregiver is a resource to the child and to the family. The caregiver helps the parents to improve their competence in caring for their children, ~~through~~ mentoring during visits that involve daily parenting tasks like going to the park, sharing a meal or getting a child ready for bed. Caregivers may provide support after reunification through visits, phone calls and respite care.

Caseworker



The caseworker supports parents and caregivers in effective visits and shared parenting and makes sure that the family receives the services it needs. The caseworker advocates for the family in court and assures that the parent has full documentation and information to share with the parent's lawyer and the court.

Reunification Team Agreement



The Parent Agrees:

- ___ I will do my best with my children during visits with them.
- ___ I will support the caregiver's efforts with my children.
- ___ I will be reliable and considerate during visits.
- ___ I will call the caregiver or caseworker as soon as possible if I must be late or miss a visit.
- ___ I will not engage in dangerous activity.
- ___ I will work with the caseworker to the best of my ability toward the safe return home of my children.

Signature

Date

The Caregiver Agrees:

- ___ I will accept and respect the parents of the children in my care.
- ___ I will not undermine the position of a parent with his or her child.
- ___ I will support the efforts of parents to parent their children.
- ___ I will respect the confidentiality of how each child came into foster care and of the problems that his or her parents face.
- ___ I will be a part of the support system of the parents of children in my care.
- ___ I will work together with the parents and the caseworker to achieve the safe return home of children in my care.

Signature

Date

The Caseworker Agrees:

- ___ I accept and support the parent(s) and the caregiver as valuable members of the team.
- ___ I will attend visits in support of the reunification effort on a regular basis.
- ___ I will plan visits and activities together with the parent and caregiver that help the parent to prepare for and achieve reunification.
- ___ I will review visit progress regularly and advocate with the court to permit unsupervised visits as soon as the parent has demonstrated and documented reliable ability to care for the children without supervision.
- ___ I will advocate with the court for return home of the children as soon as the parent has demonstrated and documented a change in the circumstances that caused the children to enter foster care and is able to adequately care for his or her child.

Signature

Date

Ground Rules for Family Visits in a Caregiver's Home



It is important that the caregiver be understanding and supportive of the parents. Caregivers will often be called on to be flexible. It is also important, however, that rules for visiting in the caregiver's home be respected. If problems arise (for example, frequent missed visits, intoxication or other substance abuse, maltreating or ignoring the child, or bringing others to the visit without caregiver permission) the caregiver will call on the caseworker to determine the appropriate intervention.

_____ **I will do my best with my children during visits with them.**

- I will not ignore my children.
- I will not make promises to my children about unsupervised visits or future living arrangements that may disappoint them.
- I will not use physical punishment or threaten to use physical punishment.

_____ **I will support the caregiver's efforts with my children.**

- I will cooperate with the caregiver while visiting with my children.
- I will not speak negatively about the caregiver during a visit.
- I will follow the suggestions of the caseworker while visiting with the children.

_____ **I will join with the caregiver in a brief written summary of each visit.**

- I understand that these are reports of my progress to DCFS and the court.

_____ **I will be reliable.**

- I will arrive at the agreed-upon visit time. If that is not possible, I will phone to explain the delay and the expected arrival time.
- If I need to cancel a visit, I will call to explain as soon as possible and make arrangements for the next visit.

_____ **I will be considerate.**

- I will not bring food to a visit without prior arrangement with the caregiver.
- I will not bring anyone with me unless the caregiver and the caseworker have approved that specific person to visit on that date.
- I will use my cell phone only for emergencies.

_____ **I will not engage in dangerous activity.**

- I will not use drugs or alcohol before or during a visit.
- I understand that the visit will be cancelled and I will be asked to leave the home if there is a suspicion of the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- I will not bring any weapons or articles that could be used as weapons to a visit.

If a parent is not sober the visit will be cancelled. If a parent violates the trust of the program, such as threatening a caregiver or threatening to take the child, parent participation in the program will be terminated.

When Can We Do It? What Can We Do?

Identifying Shared Parenting Times and Activities

Check the times that each could be available. For times that the parent, caregiver and at least one child could be available, brainstorm about how the parent might fit into the child's life. What activities could they do together? How can the caregiver help?

WEEK ENDS

SATURDAY

TEAM MEMBER	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING	NO TIME
Parent				
Caregiver				
Child				
Child				
Child				
Parent				

SUNDAY

TEAM MEMBER	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING	NO TIME
Parent				
Caregiver				
Child				
Child				
Child				
Parent				

DURING THE WEEK

MORNINGS

TEAM MEMBER	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	NO DAY
Parent						
Caregiver						
Child						
Child						
Child						
Parent						

AFTERNOONS

TEAM MEMBER	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	NO DAY
Parent						
Caregiver						
Child						
Child						
Child						
Parent						

EVENINGS

TEAM MEMBER	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	NO DAY
Parent						
Caregiver						
Child						
Child						
Child						
Parent						

Shared Parenting Activities

Brainstorm activities that the parent could do with the caregiver, parent and child with the caregiver, caregiver's family and parent's family. The emphasis should be on day-to-day activities (cooking, homework, visiting, playing games, etc.) rather than activities for special occasions.

Examples of activities that may be covered by the Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee:

Transportation for caregiver, child and parent as needed.

Child care for caregiver's children while caregiver is engaged in an activity with a parent or parent and child.

Entrance fees for caretaker, parent and all family children to activities that allow for parenting interaction, such as: zoo, museum, a class at the local Y or community center that all take together.

Food incidental to an activity—having a meal at a restaurant is not a covered activity on its own; having a meal while together on a shopping trip, trip to the beach, etc. is covered.

Making a meal together at home.

Washing and organizing the child's clothes and belongings. Expenses such as dividers for an underwear drawer, hangers that fit the child's clothes etc., may be covered. If you are doing this jointly you may get the same items for your children.

Snack prepared by the parent and child, or selected at grocery store, to bring to school or Headstart.

Making a Lifebook—taking pictures of parents and children together for the child's room, parent's home etc.

Celebration of a birthday—the child's or the parent's. Make cupcakes together for the child to take to school, bake a cake, or put together a small party at caregiver's or parent's home, inviting the child's relatives and foster family. If the birthday is too far away, celebrate the half-birthday.

Holiday celebrations—Sharing the 4th of July or other holiday with the child's parents, engaging the parent in planning and preparing for the event, and enjoying it with their child or children makes the expenses for both families reimbursable. Not the expenses for a barbeque for the entire block. But shopping for those groceries together is a great opportunity for modeling how to deal with the child in a grocery store.

Questions from Caregivers about the Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee

- ***Who is eligible to receive the Reunification Support Fee?***

Caregivers:

- for a child with a goal of return home,
- who are working directly with the parent in activities in support of return, and
- who have the approval of their caseworker

are eligible for the fee, as long as they meet monthly with the parent and caseworker to review activities, and the parent continues to make progress toward return home and case closure.

- ***What is the purpose of the Reunification Support Fee?***

The Reunification Support Fee is a reimbursement to you, the caregiver, for certain expenses incurred in reunification work with parents of children in your care. It is not a payment. It is intended to provide you with funds to engage in specific activities as you support parents working toward reunification. Details on eligible activities and instructions are on the back of the Family Reunification Special Service Fee Support Log (CFS 1042-L).

- ***What expenses does the Reunification Support Fee cover?***

The fee covers mileage, child care, and other incidental expenses incurred by the child, parent, yourself and your children as you take part in qualifying cultural, educational or recreational activities, or in activities that may include other family members such as children's birthday parties and observation of holidays.

- ***Can I bill my agency for mileage or for sibling visits if they are counted as activities on the Reunification Support log?***

No, that would be double billing. Activities included on the log for reimbursement cannot be billed for in any other way.

- ***Why is a family setting important? What counts as a family setting?***

A family setting is comforting to the child and allows the parent to practice or demonstrate parenting skills that are necessary for successful return home. The family setting could be the parent's or caregiver's home or the home of a child's relative. The family setting requirement is waived for the first two months to allow the parent and caregiver to get to know each other and to identify settings that are comfortable for all. If a parent is hospitalized, in a residential treatment center, or incarcerated, the visiting room of the institution counts as a family setting.

- ***What kinds of activities are we supposed to do in family settings?***

Anything that is a constructive part of a parent/child day—homework, doing hair, cooking dinner, learning to ride a bike, engaging in hobbies or having fun.

- ***What are choice activities?***

Eligible activities that do not take place in a family setting are called choice activities. They are listed on the back of the CFS 1042-L. You can only have a limited number of choice activities. These include shopping, medical appointments, school events, and some child welfare events including only the adults like family meetings, parenting classes, administrative case reviews and court appearances.

- ***What are levels? How do they work?***

Each level represents 3 activities with the parent. The level you achieve determines your reimbursement for the month. The amount will probably vary from month to month. Two of the activities at each level must be in a family setting; the third may also be in a family setting or may be a choice activity.

Level 1: 3 activities—\$75

Level 3: 9 activities—\$250

Level 2: 6 activities—\$150

Level 4: 12 activities—\$400

- ***What about caregivers who work outside the home?***

If both caregivers work, or if you are the only adult in your family and you work full time, think about your schedule and how it fits with the schedule of the parents and children. Think about your energy level and support system and what it takes to do this work. This may be too much for you to do. If you are still interested, talk with your caseworker about whether this program is appropriate for you.

- ***What about impact on other kids in my home?***

That is an important concern. If the presence of another child's parent, or the time that you will give to reunification support, causes concern about other children in your home, including your own, this is not the program for you at this time.

- ***What if I don't think that reunification is best for this child. Will I be heard?***

Preparation for reunification will be the subject of regular monthly meetings between you, the caseworker, and the parent when you meet to review the current month's Reunification Support Log and plan for the following month. This is a time to clarify issues related to the parent's ability to care for the child. All caregivers are, of course, full participants in Child and Family Team Meetings and have a right to be heard in court proceedings.

- ***Is reunification work with parents required for all caregivers?***

Caregivers for children new to the child welfare system are expected to support the permanency path for that child, including shared parenting and visits in a family setting. If the caregiver with whom the child is originally placed is unable to do this, it may be necessary to find a caregiver who can meet this need. Caregivers of children currently in the system are not required to do this work. They are encouraged, however, to offer support to whatever extent they can to parents of children in their care who are working toward return home.

INSERT RESOURCE #29

(2 Pages)

Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee

Tips to Caregivers for Successful Use of the Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee

- Do not begin until you have met with your caseworker to determine that you are eligible and to plan your activities for the following month.
- All activities for the calendar month must be on the same log. Only one activity per day will be counted toward the fee.
- Be sure to have the log with you for each activity. Enter each activity on the log and sign ~~the log~~ **it** while you and the parent are still together.
- Make sure that both you **and** the parent sign the log each time. Both signatures must be present for the activity to count toward reimbursement. A full signature is required; initials will not be accepted.
- Enter choice activities in a choice activity line. That way you can be sure that you have enough family setting activities to qualify for payment for each level.
- Enter only activities for which you are not seeking reimbursement from any other source. For example, if you ask for reimbursement for mileage from your agency for an activity, do not include it on the log.
- Set a date with your caseworker and the parent(s) to meet at the end of the month that you are reporting or early in the following month. At that meeting you will review the activities that you and the parent have entered on the log so the caseworker can sign off on it and take it to the supervisor for approval. You will also discuss with the caseworker how the parents and children are progressing in readiness for return home, and talk about activities you plan for the coming month. The meeting with the caseworker counts as a choice activity. Make a copy of the log to keep for your records.
- Submit your log early in the month for quick reimbursement. Reimbursement is included in your board check; the earlier the log is submitted, the sooner you will receive reimbursement.
- Give your log to the caseworker at the end of the month for reimbursement. Keep a copy for yourself so you have a record of your work.

Mentoring Parents

Some parents have never had good enough mothering or much of a family life. Caseworkers and caregivers can provide a nurturing relationship. Caregivers can provide a role model for family life. They can become a strong new link in the parent's support system.

Accepting We all need to be accepted as people of worth and dignity regardless of our problems or past failures. Parents of children in foster care are particularly sensitive to being judged. They usually feel guilty for having failed as parents, whether they say so or not. As caregivers start to build a relationship with the parents it is important not to be judgmental. They should create an atmosphere of acceptance, so that parents feel comfortable and safe enough to acknowledge problems and deal with them in a realistic way.

Role Modeling Caregivers are in the best position to model parenting for parents of foster children. As they provide a relaxed and friendly atmosphere for visiting in their home they will model child care and household management. They also model loving and caring; sharing and giving; structure and limits; appropriate discipline; mutual respect; tolerance of difference; fair play; dealing with feelings both painful and positive.

Nurturing Just as caregivers nurture children with warmth and understanding, they can do the same for the parents. Whether they are outgoing and demonstrative or quiet and thoughtful, their acceptance and respect will help parents develop the competence and self-esteem they need to care for their children.

Providing a Support System People rely on natural helping networks—neighbors, friends, family and fellow church members who can be relied on to help out in times of need. The caregivers are an important part of the parents' support system.

Respecting Confidentiality Parents need to know that their confidentiality will be respected. The circumstances of how the child came into foster care and the problems that the parent faces are personal, and it is not appropriate for the caregivers to share them with others.

Working Together Caregivers offer support to the parents and care for the child around the clock. There are roles that only the caregivers can play and roles that only the caseworker can play. Caregivers should use the caseworker for support. The caseworker is responsible for helping the caregivers solve their problems. Working together parents, caseworkers and caregivers can move toward the best possible outcome for the family.

With acknowledgement to *Walk A Mile in My Shoes* by Judith Lee and Danielle Nisivoccia, 1989, Child Welfare League of America

Supporting Connections and Developing Positive Relationships

Caregivers can support the child's connections with their parents in many ways that also help develop a positive relationship between caregiver and parent.

- Support family visits.
- Talk to the child about his or her family.
- Continue to recognize the importance of the parents' role in making decisions about the child's life.
- Encourage birth family participation in decision-making for the child (such as education, medical treatment, and services).
- Provide the child with a picture of parents and siblings
- Take the child back to visit his or her community/church/school.
- Plan for telephone calls, letters and e-mails.
- Have the child draw pictures or create artwork for the birth family.
- Respect the possessions given to the child by his or her family.
- Include the birth family in the child's prayers at bedtime.
- Reassure the child that the birth family cares for him or her despite the difficulties the family has had in meeting the child's needs.
- Be courteous and respectful to the birth family in front of the child.
- Do not talk negatively about the birth family in front of or to the child.
- Ask for the birth parents' input or assistance on a parenting issue (such as types of food the child eats, favorite toys, etc.).
- Use creative ways of supporting family connections. When parents are not available to a child (illness, death, or emotionally distant) the child can be encouraged to write letters, draw pictures, or make video or audio tapes.
- Provide the child with information about his or her family.

Helping the Caregiver-Parent Relationship Grow

A solid parent-caregiver relationship develops over time. You can help the relationship to grow by suggesting activities that move it forward. Suggestions should be made as needed and at appropriate times, not all at once.

Start off right:

- Speak positively about the parents
- Send pictures of child to parent
- Put pictures of parent in child's room
- Learn about the child's family, community and culture
- Remember child's family in prayers or through family rituals
- If you are not going to see parent at visits, send a greeting through the child, "Say hello to your father for me."

Get to know each other:

- Talk with parent on the phone about how the child is doing
- Take child to visit and talk positively about the visit with parent and child
- Talk with parent at visit about child's everyday life
- Take pictures of child and parent together

Begin shared parenting:

- Refer to child as "your child" when speaking with parents
- Ask parents for advice about care of the child, including haircuts
- Invite parents to appointments with doctors and to school conferences
- Share copies of art work, school papers and reports cards

Share Parenting:

- Shop for things for the child together
- Go to church together
- Attend school events—sports, plays, assemblies, etc.—together
- Go on outings—zoo, park, swimming
- Plan birthdays, holidays and other family gatherings together

Move visits to a family setting:

- Sign up for activities together in family-friendly settings—church, library, or community center.
- Get to know relatives of child who might host a visit. Plan for worker to join you the first time.
- Host visits in your home. Plan for worker to join you the first time.
- Attend visit in parents' home. Plan for worker to join you the first time.

Share parenting in a family setting:

- Share daily activities that involve the child such as making and serving a meal together or washing, folding and putting away child's clothes.
- Once all are comfortable, the parent can take over a number of parenting responsibilities during visits such as helping the child with homework, learning to ride a bike, doing her hair or working on hobbies.

Mentor:

- Reassure parents of child's love
- Discuss discipline efforts together
- Attend parenting classes with parent
- Provide positive feedback to parents on parenting skills
- Volunteer at child's school or Headstart together
- Model parenting skills naturally, with your child as well as your foster child
- Support parents in services
- Attend support groups to share ways to work with parents

Support the child's transition home:

- Speak positively about child's return
- Help plan child's return home
- Include parent in farewell activities
- Provide respite care for parents
- Serve as a part of family's support network after child's return home

Note: Caregivers are familiar with these concepts from Bridging the Gap, a tool used in PRIDE training sessions. This resource was adapted for PRIDE training with permission from the work of Denise A. Goodman, PhD., the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Evelyn Felker's Principles for Caregivers

Evelyn Felker was a foster caregiver in the 1980's. She developed five principles to guide her work helping parents and their children get back together. Keeping these principles in mind can help you to success as well.

1. Support the parents' effort to parent.

Look for the good in what the parent does. If the parent is trying, encourage the effort whatever the outcome.

2. Play second fiddle to the parents.

You are the person who will be meeting most of the child's needs while he is living with you. But he has one need that you cannot meet—the need to love his parents. The parents are primary to the child, and they must be allowed to come first in his heart.

3. Do not play games.

- ✓ Don't get caught between the parent and child.
Never undermine the parents' position with the child.
- ✓ Don't get caught between the parent and caseworker.
Be honest with the parents. You cannot enter into the unreal world of the impossible that some parents create. Being honest does not mean passing judgment or saying everything that you think. It does mean that you do not drift into support of the parents' evasions of their responsibility.

4. Support the caseworker-parent relationship.

- ✓ Parents often feel distrust and hostility toward their caseworker, even when he is doing his best to help them. You can help by explaining to the parent what the caseworker is doing. But be sure that this is clearly an effort to increase understanding and that you are not taking sides.
- ✓ Never conceal from the caseworker anything that you learn about the parent that will affect the child's welfare, and never agree with a parent not to tell the caseworker about such a fact.

5. Do not overreact to criticism

Parents often feel a need to belittle or undercut foster caregivers. Try to be tough enough to take this in stride. Remember that the parent knows that you are doing her job and this may be very hard for her to accept. She may be very picky with you. Don't let it get under your skin. If it gets to be too much, tell her that you are doing the best that you can and that her criticisms make it harder to help her child. Do not rebuke the parent in front of the child.

* Adapted from *Walk A Mile in My Shoes* by Judith Lee and Danielle Nisivoccia, 1989, Child Welfare League of America

Permanency Planning Toward Reunification

It has always been the policy of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to work to reunite children with their families. This initiative for Permanency Planning Toward Reunification does not change that policy. It does change the way that DCFS will work to achieve family reunification. It affects the work of supervisors, caseworkers, caregivers and parents.

These new practices apply to all new families as they enter the child welfare system. Caseworkers and caregivers will get used to the new approach one case at a time.

Caseworkers across the state have been trained in *Permanency Planning Toward Reunification*. Caregiver Institutes held in the spring of 2007 gave caregivers a preview of this initiative. Now, this training presents information specifically for caregivers.

The importance of permanency for children and the need to support reunification are not new to caregivers. Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE pre-service training mentions reunification in the first session and reinforces its importance throughout all nine sessions. Two of the five competency categories at the foundation of all PRIDE training are:

- Supporting relationships between children and their families, and
- Connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime.

Each of us—parent, caregiver and caseworker—has responsibility for seeing that a child has safety, permanency and well-being. In this training we emphasize the role caregivers play in reunification, including the early reunification of families. Reunification is more likely with the support and time caregivers can give not only to the children in their care but to the parents of those children as well.

Read the experience of Jacqueline Israel, whose children were returned home and who said this about having support from their foster caregiver:

“To get your children back, you have to be a part of your child’s life, and the foster mom can help you with that. It’s good if the foster mom can say in court, ‘I met the children’s mother at the children’s doctor appointment,’ or, ‘For open school night we met and went together to discuss the children’s education.’

When my kids were in care, the court could say to me, ‘Jacqueline, you were a bad parent for all these things you did in the past.’ But I could say, ‘Now I have a relationship with my children that’s nurturing, structured and not damaging.’ And the foster mom supported me in saying that.”



The Reunification Team



The Reunification team operates with a conviction that:

- The child should remain with his/her family whenever they can safely do so.
- Most families are able to care for their children if properly assisted.
- The impact of separation on children and parents is severe.
- Consistent visits can help parents and children cope with the loss.

Parents

Parents are the leaders of the team but need the support of other team members. Parents are responsible for making the changes necessary so that they can safely care for their children. They are responsible for engaging in services, visitation, and attending court hearings. Although the children are not in their care at this time, they remain the parents. As parents, they should be involved in the daily parenting responsibilities and empowered to make decisions for their child.

Caseworker

The caseworker supports the parent as the parent leads the team. The caseworker guides parents and caregivers in accomplishing effective visits and in determining opportunities for shared parenting. The caseworker makes sure the family receives needed services. The caseworker advocates for the family in court and ensures that the parent has full documentation and information to share with the parent's lawyer and the court.

Caregiver

The caregiver is a valuable resource to both the child and the family. The caregiver helps the parents to improve their competence in caring for their children through mentoring and modeling effective parenting skills during visits. Mentoring a child's parents may occur during activities such as a visit to a park, while sharing a meal or getting a child ready for bed. Caregivers may provide support after reunification through visits, phone calls and respite care.