



Policy: Reunification Process

ChildNet Number: CN 007.022

Original Approved Date: June 30, 2003

Policy Revised Date(s): May 1, 2006, June 24, 2010, July 9, 2014, January 11, 2017

Policy Sunset Date:

COA Standard(s): FKC 5.06, 8.02, 8.03, 8.04, 15.06

Statement of Policy:

Reunification is the primary goal to be reviewed and considered for all children. When reunification is determined to be the appropriate goal, diligent efforts will be made to reunify the child safely and expeditiously.

Board Chair's Signature:

Date:

1/20/17



Procedure: Reunification Process

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Original Approved Date: June 30, 2003

Procedure Revised Date(s): May 1, 2006, June 24, 2010, April 10, 2013, July 9, 2014, October 14, 2015, January 11, 2017, August 9, 2017, February 21, 2018

Procedure Sunset Date:

COA Standard(s): FKC 5.06, 8.02, 8.03, 8.04, 15.06

Definitions (If any):

Statement of Procedure:

This procedure applies to all cases of out-of-home placement where the goal is reunification.

A. Critical Factors to ensure safe and expeditious reunification:

1. A significant factor for successful reunification is parent-child contact, e.g., letters, calls, visits. Regular, frequent contact is to begin expeditiously after removal unless otherwise indicated by the court. Please refer to CN 003.068 Visitation Development Plan for all Children Under ChildNet Supervision.
2. Face to face contact with the parent(s) is required a minimum of every 30 days and is to be documented in the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) within **two (2) business days** of contact. If unable to complete face to face contact with the parent(s), documented diligent efforts to contact parents must be entered into CCWIS at a minimum monthly. During these face to face contacts with the parent (s), the progress of the case/service plan and compliance with visitation are to be discussed with the parent (s) and documented in CCWIS.
3. The Ongoing Family Functioning Assessment in conjunction with the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Assessment (CBHA) are utilized in the creation of the case/service plan with the family and filed with the court. Child Advocate/ Dependency Case Manager is responsible for providing referrals for services to the parent (s) and/or the child before the case plan's acceptance by the court. Factors to be considered include but not limited to: Conditions for Return; parent(s) compliance will be reviewed and substantiated by progress reports; verbal confirmation from providers and visual observations of desired behaviors. (Please see CN 004.016 Family Assessment and CN 003.042 Behavioral Health Services)

B. Transition from Out of Home Placement to Reunification

1. Since the safety of the child is foremost, careful consideration to recommend unsupervised day visits is to be made by the Child Advocate (CA)/ Dependency Case Manager (DCM) and the Child Advocate Supervisor (CAS)/ Dependency Case Manager Supervisor (DCMS). Factors to be considered by the CA/DCM shall include



but not limited to review of reports from service providers in evaluating the parent (s) readiness for unsupervised visits, case plan compliance in ameliorating the reason the child came into out of home care, conditions for return, and Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) reports. The CA/DCM will file a legal request with the CLS Attorney with ChildNet's recommendation to obtain an agreed order or a motion to reunify. CA/DCM is to follow-up with CLS Attorney to ensure court hearing set or order obtained **within 5 working days**.

2. Prior to an overnight stay or reunification with the person responsible for the abuse or neglect of the child, the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager is to complete the Progress Update and the Conditions for Return/ Progress Update Checklist. Once completed the CA/DCM will submit to the Director/Manager/Permanency Specialist or designee for approval. The Director/Manager/Permanency Specialist or designee will schedule a staffing or Case Review, for a disabled child or child five years and under to include the next two levels of supervision and may include Children's Legal Services (CLS), GAL, ChildNet Legal, parents, child (if age and developmentally appropriate), service providers and BSO if applicable. It is at the discretion of the Director/Manager/Permanency Specialist or designee to request a staffing on a case by case basis. The staffing decision for a child to begin overnight visitation or to be reunified will be approved by the Director/Manager/Permanency Specialist or designee.

During the staffing, the information listed on the Conditions for Return/Progress Update Checklist and progress update are to be reviewed.

3. Prior to reunification, the parent or other legal custodian receives assistance to obtain the following services and/or document for the child:
 - a. child care;
 - b. homemaker and home health aide services;
 - c. parent education;
 - d. respite care;
 - e. transportation services;
 - f. vocational and educational assistance;
 - g. health and mental health care;
 - h. substance use treatment services;
 - i. domestic violence services; and
 - j. housing referral and assistance.
4. Prior to recommending reunification, a staffing is to be requested unless a previous staffing was held for overnight visitation and approval was given at the time for a plan to begin overnight visitation to transition to reunification. The process noted above in paragraph two (2) is to be followed. In addition, the following is to be taken into consideration:
 - a. Identified risk factors have been reduced to the extent that reunification is considered safe for the child and any other children in the family, as well as appropriate for parents.



- b. The parents and child have spent extended periods of time together including if applicable, overnight and weekend visits without any incidents of abuse, abandonment, or neglect.
 - c. The parents and child indicate demonstrate that they are ready for reunification.
 - d. The family has a support system made up of individuals such as family members, extended relatives, church members, neighbors, friends, foster parents, employers, and providers to aid in the safety and wellbeing of the child as needed.
 - e. Conditions for return have been met.
5. A child is to reunify with the parent immediately upon the order of the court. If the court reunifies without ChildNet recommendation, a staffing consistent with 2 above must be conducted **within 5 days** of the order for reunification.
 6. If the event, a General Master recommends a reunification, a ratification order must be obtained prior to reunifying the child.

C. Post-Placement Supervision.

After the child is returned home the court exercises a minimum 6 month continued jurisdiction.

1. Updating CCWIS **within 48 hours** of placement to include the change from substitute care to post-placement supervision.
2. Developing a post-placement plan with the child, parents, other household members or other support persons identified by the parents or directed by the court as to the participants of the plan. The plan must include any services and/or support system that the family needs in order to maintain or increase parenting skills and resources that enable reunification if the child is to be reunified.
3. Filing the plan with the court:
 - a. For those cases in which reunifications is recommended the case plan for post-placement supervision shall be completed, and filed with the court within 72 hours prior to the court hearing. If the court returns custody to the parent without ChildNet's recommendation, the post-placement supervision case plan shall be completed, and filed with the court **within 14 working days** of the court hearing.
 - b. At a minimum, the case plan for post-placement supervision shall include:
 - i. An assessment of family strengths, protective capabilities, safety and risk factors with recommendations that alleviate possible risks;
 - ii. Routine health care as well as follow-up care for physical health, mental health or substance abuse service needs that have been identified;



- iii. Services and activities necessary to remedy any of the initial problems that remain;
 - iv. **At a minimum within five (5) business days** after the child is reunified, the case manager and supervisor will confirm that the ongoing safety plan is sufficient. Post placement supervision in court-supervised cases will be provided for no less **than six (6) months** and frequency of visits is based on the in-home safety plan. The case manager will actively monitor and modify the in-home safety plan as required. . .
4. The home visits are mandated **every 30 days**. All visits are to be face-to-face with the child. The purpose of the visits are:
 - a. Observing and documenting the child's condition, appearance and development;
 - b. Observing and documenting child/parent interaction;
 - c. Monitoring the child's safety and well-being;
 - d. Continuing implementation of the case plan objectives; and,
 5. Supporting the family in their reintegration.

If a parent or person responsible will not allow observation of the child, for whatever reason, the person making the home visit shall immediately contact their supervisor for guidance as to possible law enforcement involvement to gain access to or remove the child.
 6. If the child is age five and under and not already enrolled in a licensed child care program or licensed early education program, the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager will assess the need regarding child care services to help ensure their safety following reunification and a recommendation made to the court as outlined in Florida Law.
 - a. If the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager determines that additional oversight of the child is needed, intensive in-home services may be recommended to the court as an alternative to a licensed child-care program or licensed early education program.
 - b. Following reunification if the child is between three years of age and school age and already enrolled in a licensed early education or child-care program or the court ordered shall be followed according to Florida Law.
 7. Following six months of post-placement supervision, ChildNet must collaborate with the parent, child, and other involved persons and entities included in the aftercare plan to assess status of the case and the court must be advised in writing. When post-placement supervision continues beyond six months, a written assessment of the



status must be submitted to the court at least every six months and justification for continued supervision provided.

- a. If previously identified or new risk factors are present to the extent that continued supervision is warranted, these risk factors must be specified with a recommendation for continued supervision; and,
- b. A case plan update or amendment in collaboration with the family to address the risk factors must be submitted to the court along with the recommendation for continued supervision; or,
- c. When the assessment indicates that case plan requirements have been met and any remaining risk factors have been satisfactorily resolved, ChildNet must file a motion to terminate supervision. See ChildNet Procedure 003.062 Termination of Services.
- d. The court order terminating supervision must be received by ChildNet before supervision is terminated or the case is closed.
- e. The court order terminating supervision must be filed in the child's case record and Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) must be updated to indicate case closure **within 48 hours**.

D. Interstate Placement of Children.

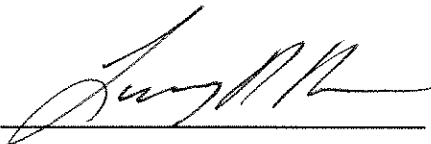
Pre-placement planning with a parent or relative who lives in another state must include a request for a home study through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. An understanding must exist that the child may be reunified with the parent or custodian from whom the child was removed, and that the out-of-state person must agree to cooperate in returning the child to Florida for reunification purposes. Also, the other state's social services contact person and the out-of-state person with whom placement is being made must understand that parent/child contact may be limited to telephone calls and letters with few or no face-to-face visits.

1. Reunification of children (returning children to Florida) who have been legally placed in another state through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children requires careful planning to ensure that all aspects of inter-family communication, coordination with the local social services worker in the other state (who is supervising the child for ChildNet) and travel arrangements take place.
2. Florida's court jurisdiction over the child remains in effect during a legal placement in the other state, through the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children, and is legally sufficient to cause the return of the child for the purpose of reunification. However, if the parent or relative in the other state will not cooperate with ChildNet in the return of the child, then the court may have to assert jurisdiction by issuing a pick-up order. The pick-up order should also direct the Sheriff to put the pick-up order on the Criminal Information Computer (CIC) System.



3. Written progress reports by the supervising case manager in the other state are essential for judicial reviews. Accordingly, communication with the case manager and the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager are necessary, such as, telephone contact and notification of court dates will ensure the availability of reports in time for court hearings. Direct transmission of reports is encouraged as long as a copy is also provided to the central Interstate Compact Office in each state. Frequency of progress reports may be determined in case staffings or directed by court order, but must occur quarterly at a minimum.

4. Children who have been placed, or allowed to be placed, into another state by ChildNet, or a Florida court, without the approval of the other state's Interstate Compact Office lose protection of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children law. This means that the Florida court cannot exercise its jurisdiction over the child through the Interstate Compact law. It also means a case manager in the other state will have no legal authority to represent ChildNet in supervising the child under the Interstate Compact law. An illegal child placement could seriously delay reunification, or even prevent it, especially if the out-of-state parent or relative applies for legal custody in the other state's court.

President's Signature:  Date: 02-27-18