



POST REUNIFICATION SUPPORTS



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WHY IT MATTERS

Reunification is the most common goal for children and youth in foster care and it is also its most common outcome.¹ Rates of re-entry for children and families who do not receive sufficient post-reunification services are higher than for those families that receive in-home

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child welfare services during or after foster care.² Best practice literature on the topic indicates that effective post-permanency or after-care services should be provided for a least 12 months following reunification, and children and families should be matched with appropriate in-home and community supports prior to reunification.³ Without appropriate post-reunification services, the risk of re-entry is significant.

Casey Family Programs' *Supporting Lifelong Families*⁴ report notes that post-permanency programs should at minimum, include these components:

- **Basic family resources** including housing, employment, and income support.
- **Safety-focused practices**, which must become a major component of every service program to ensure that children are not put at further risk of maltreatment.
- **Trauma-informed approaches**, which involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.
- **Evidence-based clinical child supports** including programs that address 1) the trauma that led to the child's entry into foster care; 2) the trauma associated with removal itself; and, 3) the stresses associated with transition either back to the home from which they were removed, or to a new home, separated from their biological families.

- **Caregiver supports and services** including counseling or other clinical services, skills training, child care health care services, advocacy training, educational services, parenting skills training and substance abuse treatment.
- **Support networks** including support groups, child care referrals, and respite care.
- **Navigation services** including a point-person for families to connect to resources, supports and services.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

Research indicates that families receiving in-home child welfare services during or after foster care are considerably less likely to experience re-entry compared to children not receiving services.⁵

ACTIONS

- **Engage the family early** in planning for reunification. Partner with the family's social worker to ensure that everyone who can be a support to the family (e.g., relatives, current caregivers, and friends) are included in the planning. If the children are older (e.g., 11+) they should have involvement on the team and in the development of the permanency plan.
- **Advocate for more intensive and frequent visitation between parents and children.** Researchers, not sure whether more intensive and frequent visits are the reason for reducing re-entry or whether it is the parents' motivation for increased and intensive visits, but one of these factors is creating the outcome of fewer odds of the child re-entering foster care.⁶
- **Assess with the caseworker** the family's readiness to reunify to identify gaps and develop a plan for how to address the gaps.
- **Ensure that the family has concrete services** either in place or lined up prior to reunification. Services like respite care, transportation, housing, child care, food planning, budgeting/shopping, etc. will help the parent feel better prepared and ready to resume to role of parent.
- **Identify whether the family needs more intensive services** to be successful. Programs like functional family therapy, parent-child interaction therapy, and trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy may not be needed for all families but may be very helpful for some families who will struggle to reconnect with their children. Help them identify one point-person that they can connect to for resources, supports and services.

- **Engage fathers.** When fathers are engaged, families are found to be more likely to reunify and less likely to re-enter into the child welfare system. Ten years ago, there weren't many services to dads, and now there are many more. Continuing to engage fathers is a promising practice change.
- **Ensure that there are solid and healthy relationships** in place before ceasing your interactions with the family. Identify with the family and caseworker who these people are and what qualifies as a solid and healthy relationship.
- **Ensure you are keeping in contact with the family** especially in the initial months. Contact can be simple emails or weekly calls or text messages to let the family know you are thinking of them.

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- **Understand what the expectations are for your involvement post-reunification.** Ask your supervisor whether there are policies around how long you should stay involved with the family and what
- **Plan your exit strategy** and transition your support to supports available in the family's circle of important relationships as well as community supports.

BRIGHT SPOT

CATAWBA COUNTY CHILD WELLBEING PROJECT CATAWBA COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

With support and partnership from the Duke Endowment, in 2006 Catawba County Social Services began planning how to improve the long-term well-being of children who were and had exited foster care to reunification. With support from the University of North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, and after extensive discussions, literature reviews, and focus groups with staff, birth, adoptive parents and guardians, six areas of need were identified for families' post-care:

- Ongoing emotional support and case management for families;
- Mental health services for children to address children's attachment and externalizing behaviors;
- Educational services, supports, and advocacy to improve children's educational achievement;
- Material supports to provide financial assistance and child care;
- Parent education; and,
- Emotional supports.

The program utilized a "Success Coach" model wherein the Success Coach served as the foundation or hub for all post-care services. Additionally, an Educational Advocate helps track educational achievement and school moves for all children while they are in foster care and while they are served by the Success Coach after they leave care. Families served by Success Coaches are also eligible to receive material supports and if they meet service criteria, may be referred to Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Strengthening Families, and Adoption Support Groups. To ensure that the program is effectively meeting the needs of children and families post care, "Program Review Protocols" were developed to assure that data are used in decision-making and assessment and assessment, and that staff engages in problem solving that reduces or eliminates barriers to implementation.

Initial results show that there has been reduced rates of re-entry into foster care following the implementation of the project.

To learn more: <https://www.cssp.org/policy/body/Catawba-County.pdf>

SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
Family Centered Treatment ⁷	<p>Intensive services for families may include family-centered therapy. These interventions are generally used as a response to a crisis situation and are intended to diminish the impact of the crisis by stabilizing and strengthening the family structure.</p>
Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) ⁸	<p>The goal of CPRT is to strengthen the quality of the parent-child attachment bond as a means of reducing child behavior problems and stress in the parent-child relationship. CPRT was developed for children ages 3–8, but has been adapted for use with toddlers and preadolescents.</p>
Theraplay ⁹	<p>Based on principles of attachment, <i>Theraplay</i> enables parents and their children –of all ages—to experience reciprocal joy and interests, cooperation and delight. This provides them with safety and a sense of closeness which creates a context where ongoing conflicts and worrisome behaviors are more likely to decrease.</p>
Family Reunification Following Foster Care: Tracking Checklist ¹⁰	<p>This fact sheet was designed to support families being reunified after children are placed in foster care. It highlights helpful research and information to develop workable plans to aid families in reunifying and rebuilding. The checklist included in this document covers many of the strategy areas noted above.</p>
Homebuilders ¹¹	<p><i>Homebuilders</i> is a home- and community-based intensive family preservation and reunification treatment program, designed to avoid unnecessary placement of children and youth into foster care, group care, psychiatric hospitals, or juvenile justice facilities. The program model engages families by delivering services in their natural environment, at times when they are most receptive to learning, and by enlisting them as partners in assessment, goal setting, and treatment planning. Homebuilders showed faster rates of reunification, with comparatively lower rates of reentry that sustained over time in a Utah study.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Lee, S., Joson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2012). Foster care re-entry: Exploring the role of foster care characteristics, in-home child welfare services and cross-sector service. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(9), 1825-1833.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 See <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth2016/resources/webinar/postreunificationwebinar/>
- 4 See <https://www.casey.org/media/supporting-lifelong-families-full.pdf>
- 5 Lee, S., Jonson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2012).
- 6 Mallon, G. (2011). *Visiting the heart of reunification*. Presentation retrieved from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections website: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/family-child-visiting.html
- 7 <http://www.familycenteredtreatment.com/the-fct-model/>
- 8 <http://cpt.unt.edu/cprt-certification/cprt-overview>
- 9 <https://www.theraplay.org/>
- 10 <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/FY/FY136600.pdf>
- 11 <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/homebuilders/detailed>