

Policy: Reunification

Policy Purpose

Reunification is the planned and timely process of safely returning a child to their parents, or to other family or kin who had been exercising parental responsibility prior to the child coming into care. This policy identifies the process to assist successful reunification of children with their family following a period of statutory care.

Policy Statement

The process of reunification commences when a child enters care. The [Care and Protection of Children Act 2007](#) includes the guiding principle that the family of a child has the primary responsibility for the care, upbringing and development of the child, s8(1).

A child who has been placed into care should eventually be returned to their family, provided that it is in the child's best interests and safety issues have been addressed. When a child is removed from their parents, all of the possibilities for their reunification must be fully explored in order to determine what the best interests of that child are s10(2)(cb).

The best interests of the child will be the paramount concern. This requires case management activities to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child, their parents, family members, kinship groups and other person's significant in the child's life s10(2)(ca).

Aboriginal children's best interest also includes the child's right to enjoy the culture and tradition of their family and community and maintain ongoing contact with family and connection to country and language s10(ha).

Cultural consultation must be demonstrated in all key decision making points and interactions with Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families.

Active efforts to explore all possibilities and provide the necessary supports to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child and their parent and family in order to reunify the child with family will be evident in the *Reunification Plan*.

The reunification process is complete when the following milestones have been achieved:

- A child safely returns to their parents;
- Parental responsibility and daily care and control has been returned to the parents;
- The Protection Order expires or is revoked;
- Reunification is determined to be no longer viable and the care plan goal changes to permanency planning for long term care; and
- Territory Families no longer has any involvement and the case is closed.

Reunification efforts are to include:

- Establishing, preserving and strengthening positive family relationships while children are in short-term care;
- Maintaining child's contact with their parents, family members, kinship groups and other person significant in the child's life.
- Establishing strong engagement and collaboration between Territory Families and the family;
- Introduction of activities and services to support reduction or resolution of protective concerns to enable the process of reunification;

- Planning to consider sustained involvement of a range of appropriate services and supports from the point where a child first enters care and beyond the child's return home, to meet the child and their family's needs.

Role of Carers in Reunification

Case Managers must ensure that Kinship and Foster Carers are fully informed about their **critical role as part of the care team in supporting the successful reunification of the child** they are providing care for. It is essential Carers are active partners with Territory Families to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child and their parents, family members, kinship group and other significant persons in the child's life.

CEO responsibility to inform families

Parents and extended family should have access to appropriate and timely services necessary to facilitate their child's successful reunification.

Consideration will be given to specific language and cultural needs of a child and their family. An interpreter must be provided for any individual who does not have a sufficient understanding of English or who prefers to speak in another language, so they can meaningfully engage in care planning discussions.

Family members will be provided with accurate information about reunification processes, timeframes, and expectations, their tasks and responsibilities, communicated in language and style they understand, and be engaged in care planning in order to develop a realistic understanding of what needs to happen in order for their child to safely return home.

Legislative Basis

[Care and Protection of Children Act 2007](#) s8(4)(b); s10

Related Procedures

Procedure: Foster and Kinship Care Payments.

Procedure: Monitoring Wellbeing of Children.

Guidance: Using Interpreters, Translators and Assisted Communication Services.

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