
OVERVIEW

Once it has been determined that the presenting problem has been alleviated and a safe return of the child(ren) to his or her parent is possible, the caseworker must begin a planned process to reunite the family.

**PERMANENCY
PLANNING TIME
FRAME**

The goal of reunification must be formally reassessed at different decision points throughout the case to determine if the current goal is still appropriate.

**Permanency
Planning at Six
Months**

Once a child has been in out of home care for six months, if the permanency goal remains reunification, the caseworker must hold a Family Team Meeting (FTM) to review the permanency plan. At this meeting, the parent's progress on addressing barriers to reunification will be reviewed to determine what barriers still need to be alleviated; see FOM 722-06B, Family Team Meeting. This meeting can also be an opportunity to review whether the permanency goal needs to change and to determine if a concurrent permanency plan has been or needs to be developed; see FOM 722-07A, Concurrent Permanency Planning.

**Permanency
Planning at 12
Months**

The caseworker must complete a formal permanency goal review annually from the acceptance date, or at any time a goal change is being considered. The DHS-643, Permanency Goal Review, must be used to document the current permanency goal, any barriers to the goal, and the action steps that will be taken to meet the goal. A copy of the form must be filed in the narrative section of the case file.

**Maintaining a
Permanency Goal
of Reunification
Beyond 12 Months**

For any child who has a permanency goal of reunification for more than 12 months, the child's caseworker, with written approval from the supervisor, must include in the case service plan a written explanation justifying the continuation of the goal. Identification of any additional services necessary or circumstances which must occur in order to accomplish the goal must also be documented.

No child may have a permanency goal of reunification for more than 15 months unless there are compelling reasons to believe that the child can be returned home within a specified and reasonable time period. These compelling reasons must be documented in the record and approved by the caseworker's supervisor; see FOM 722-07D, Termination of Parental Rights for a Child Out-of-Home for Fifteen of the Last 22 Months.

Note: The reunification goal is not to be extended or delayed because of a change in the caseworker or a case transfer. A parent's resumption of contact or overtures toward participating in the case service plan in the days or weeks immediately preceding the permanency planning hearing are also not sufficient grounds for retaining reunification as the permanency plan.

**CASEWORKER
RESPONSIBILITIES
IN REUNIFICATION**

Prior to returning a child to the home from which he/she was removed or to the home of the other parent, the caseworker must:

- Determine the motivation and capability of the parent or legal guardian to provide for the ongoing safety and well being of the child.
- Consider whether return home would cause a substantial risk of harm to the child's life, physical health or mental well-being. When the child is placed within his/her parent's home, the court must make a written finding that the "Conditions of the placement are adequate to safeguard the child from the risk of harm to the child's life, physical health or mental well-being."

- Provide documentation that appropriate rehabilitative, remedial services have been consistently provided to the parent, other relevant adults in the home, and the child to minimize the potential for further abuse or neglect. Overall, barrier reduction must be either partial or substantial.
 - Collateral resources from service providers must be utilized in helping the caseworker arrive at a decision to return the child home. Documentation of collateral contact results is to be entered in the case service plan.
 - Include a statement in the case service plan that a decision to return the child home has been reviewed and agreed upon by the supervisor.

Parenting Time

There must be a plan for progression of parenting time for children with the permanency goal of reunification. Gradually increase the amount of parenting time with parent(s) or guardian(s) to including overnight and weekend visits. Increased parenting time will help ease the transition from foster care.

Monitor, evaluate and document the results of increased parenting time to aid in determining the projected timing and success of the child returning home; see FOM 722-06I, Maintaining Family Connections Through Visitation and Contact.

Case Planning

Develop/renegeotiate the Parent-Agency Treatment Plan and Service Agreement portion of the case service plan with the parent or legal guardian.

- Outline in concrete, behaviorally specific terms what can reasonably be expected of the parent, custodian or guardian, and of the child to maintain placement in the child's own home.
- Assist the parent with developing goal directed and time limited objectives, with clear expected outcomes.
- Negotiate post placement services with the parent prior to the child's return home. Revise the Parent-Agency Treatment Plan to reflect unmet and updated goals, steps and the time frames needed to reach goal attainment and case closure. Post placement services that are paid for through DHS are not to continue beyond 90 days without documented supervisory

approval and/or through a Family Division of Circuit Court order.

Community Resources

Assist the family with establishing, or re-establishing, community support systems for the family.

Example: Prevention services, educational services, day care, employment services, or recreational services; see FOM 722-09B, Protecting Interventions.)

LEIN Check

Conduct a LEIN check on all adult household members and non-parent adults within the parental home; see FOM 722-06A, Criminal Record Check - Law Enforcement Information Network.

Safety Assessment

Complete a DHS-149, Safety Assessment; see FOM 722-09B, Safety Assessment.

The Safety Decision must be either Safe or Safe With Services for a child to return to the parental home. Documentation must include how the presenting problem(s) causing removal have been resolved to the extent that the child will be returning to a safe home.

POST REUNIFICATION

After reunification, families must receive help and support in making necessary readjustments in daily living patterns. Services to the family must continue until safety and stability are achieved and the family is not at risk for a re-removal; see FOM 722-09B, Protecting Interventions.

Visitation Requirements

The caseworker must continue to monitor the family and visit the child(ren) after they are returned home until case closure. For visit requirements; see FOM 722-06H, Caseworker Contacts with Child Returned Home.

**Family
Reunification/
Families First**

If the family is referred for Family Reunification or Families First services, those two programs are responsible for complying with some visitation requirements; see FOM 722-06H, Family Reunification/Families First.

**Continued
Relationships**

Caseworkers must be sensitive to the relationship that has developed between the child and caregiver(s). Whenever it is possible and constructive, the means for continuing a relationship are to be developed.

**Post Placement
Safety**

If the caseworker finds that the parent has not benefited from services and the child(ren) are at imminent risk after return home, the caseworker must file a motion for a re-hearing or a petition for removal with the court requesting a hearing to consider a change in placement.

If the caseworker has reasonable cause to suspect that the parent has abused or neglected the child, a complaint to CPS must be made and a CPS investigation must be completed. If CPS determines that the child has been abused or neglected, CPS must file a supplemental petition with the court; see FOM 722-13, New Complaints of Abuse and/or Neglect.

**Medicaid Coverage
for Children
Returning Home**

When a child is reunified with his/her parents, the parents must complete a DHS-1171, Assistance Application, prior to the child's return. If the parent is unable to complete and return the form to the DHS office in their area, the caseworker must facilitate this process by assisting the parents in completing the information and returning it to the local DHS office for assignment process.

Once the DHS-1171, Assistance Application, is returned to the local DHS office, the eligibility determination will be completed by an eligibility specialist to ensure Medicaid can be redetermined without

a lapse in medical coverage for the child; see FOM 803, DHS-1171, Assistance Application.