One Minute Guide



Re-unification

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**What is Reunification?**

Reunification is when a looked after child returns home to live with their birth family. Returning home is the most common outcome for children in care; the Department for Education state that nationally, in 2017, 32% of children who ceased to be looked after returned home to live with their parents or relatives. Reunification is most successful when it is well planned, based on robust assessment of risk which includes the child and the birth family, which allows children to go home

slowly over a period of time and where appropriate services are put in place to support the family for as long as they are needed.

**Why is effective reunification work important?**

Many returns home break down and children are subsequently taken back into care. The reasons include: lack of (or poor quality) assessment on whether the child should return home; a lack of appropriate services and support for children and their family; and inadequate planning and preparation for return, monitoring and support post-return. Other reasons can include the parent’s problems not having been addressed or which were unresolved or hidden, especially alcohol or drug problems.

Effective reunification work is important first and foremost because it is in the best interest of the child or young person that any consideration of the possibility of a return home to their birth family is structured, evidence based, well planned and involves the child, their family and key multi-agency practitioners.

In addition, in March 2015, the Department for Education made [amendments](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/495/pdfs/uksiem_20150495_en.pdf) to the Care Planning Regulations and issued new statutory guidance on Permanence, long-term fostering placements and ceasing to look after a child. These amendments specify the requirements of whether or not a return home would safeguard and promote the child’s welfare, and that of their parents.

Supporting reunification can be cost effective when it is the right plan for the child.

**What do we all need to know?**

We all need to be aware about the reunification framework and that children are being identified where it may be appropriate for them to return home. Social workers, together with others involved with the child will use the reunification framework and practice guidance to support the work to consider reunification. Other practitioners working with the child will become involved at different stages of the process.

The reunification framework has five stages:

1 Assessment of risk and protective factors and parental capacity to change;

2 Risk classification and decision on potential for reunification;

3 Parental agreements, goal setting, support and services;

4 Reclassification of risk, decision making and planning for reunification; and

5 Return Home.

**Key contacts and more information**

For more information about reunification, you can contact Pauline Barrett, Service Lead for Children Looked After: Pauline.barrett@westsussex.gov.uk

Department of Education [Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2017](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664995/SFR50_2017-Children_looked_after_in_England.pdf) .