Reunification Support
Service (RSS) –
Stage Guide

Key –

Area Team Responsibility

RSS Responsibility

Joint Responsibility

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| Shape  Description automatically generated with low confidence**Stage 1 Identification – Assessment of need with consideration of risk and protective factors and parental capacity to change with the child’s voice being central to this assessment. This is undertaken by the allocated social worker and agreed by their managers.*** Social Workers (with the agreement of their team manager & service manager) identify children/young people whose care plan could be reunification, in consideration of the child’s needs and wishes. Early identification is preferable so early assessment can be completed, and guidance given to parents about what else they need to do.
* Young person, parents, Independent Reviewing Officer and key linked professionals' views on the proposed reunification care plan should be sought. Advice can be sought from the Reunification Manager when reunification is not the current agreed care plan, but may be considered within the next 12 months, to allow for advanced planning.
* The Social Worker must have completed an updated assessment/ review of the child’s needs to inform the changed care plan.
* **Within 48 hours of request for support,** Reunification Manager to consider the request for RSS input and accept or decline the request or offer further guidance for the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager to progress the child’s care plan. Where further information or clarification is needed this will be requested from the allocated Social Worker/Team Manager and discussions held **within 5 working days.**
* Reunification Manager to record on ICS that request for RSS has been agreed/not agreed and if not rationale.
* Where the assessment does not support reunification at the current time, the Social Work team should agree a timescale for review of the risk classification and make recommendations for further work with the parents/ child in the interim.
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| Shape  Description automatically generated with low confidence**Stage 2 Planning – Professional and Child & Family agreements, goal setting and support plan to be agreed by all parties.****2a – Professional Planning*** Area and RSS practitioners/managers discuss reunification plan **within 5 working days of request being agreed**, including rationale and timescale for return home, revocation of Care Order, key timescales in child’s life such as moving school, placement moves. Rationale and risk areas identified for why the child was accommodated under S20 or Care Order. Identification of what existing support systems are in place for the child and / or their family and what is needed to enable successful sustainable reunification without the need for an Order. Note of any challenge areas known for reunification and/or discharge of the Care Order.
* Plan of RSS support and timescales are agreed with clear timescales of review points. **RSS support should not exceed 12 weeks.**

**2b – Child and Family Planning*** Allocated Social Worker and Reunification Practitioner meet with the child and their family **within 5 working days of professional planning** and collaboratively devise a SMART plan of support including how to measure success to enable sustainable reunification.
* A SMART child’s plan including, monitoring & review, who does what and timescales and how success will be measured as well as identification of what would deem it necessary to change the care plan back from reunification to remaining in the LA care. The child and family as well as key professionals would own this plan and work to implement. It is imperative to note that the child subject of a Care Order would not remain at home with the parent with a Care Order in place in the long term – the reunification plan would need to be robust and successful to enable evidence to the Court to agree a discharge of the Care Order.
* At any time in the reunification planning, if a child is returning to birth family for extended periods the “Placement with Parents” (PWP) process should be completed by the allocated Social Worker and agreed by their Team Manager, Service Manager and Assistant Director - this is a legal requirement where a child is subject of a Care Order – if the child is S20 then the child would cease to be in the LA care or be planned to enable time at home without ceasing to be CLA. It is imperative to differentiate between extended family time and returning home.
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| Shape  Description automatically generated with low confidence**Stage 3 Implementation – RSS to work directly with the child and their family to implement the agreed support plan alongside allocated team.*** RSS will undertake much of the direct work with the child and family to enable the reunification plan to progress however it is imperative that the child’s allocated Social Worker continues to undertake all statutory visits, and Child Looked After reviews and works alongside the RSS practitioners with the plan to assess progress and impact on the child of this plan and decisions for change of the plan should this be necessary.
* The reunification practitioner will work directly with the child and their family and carers (and other key professionals) to implement the SMART plan for reunification.
* Allocated SW and RSS practitioners will monitor and review regularly the reunification and support plans with the child and their family and other key professionals as needed.
* Support is provided to the child, family, wider network as identified in the child’s SMART plan for reunification - this will include consideration of the rationale for why the child was originally placed in the local authority care and evidencing how those risks are now no longer evident or mitigated sufficiently for the child to be reunified with their family without the need for a Care Order.
* Reunification Practitioner support is reviewed and supervised by Reunification Manager and any issues of concern to be immediately shared with the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager. The RSS practitioner will also be invited to the child’s supervision with the allocated Social Worker and Team Manager to reflect on the progress of the plan.
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| Shape  Description automatically generated with low confidence**Stage 4 Review - Continued review and assessment of impact of the support plan on the child and their family.*** Regular review points identified within the child’s SMART plan for reunification will be provided to monitor progress and impact on the child of the reunification SMART plan (minimum Midway Review and Final Review) - reunification practitioner and their manager will be involved in those formal review meetings/ discussions.
* Maintaining contact with key linked professionals to update them of progress and where necessary to arrange an earlier Child Looked After review to change the care plan or timescales of reunification.
* At each review, timescale for discharge of the Care Order or ending the period of S20 accommodation must be considered and arranged by the area team including application to court for discharge of the Order.
* Reunification Practitioner contributes to all review sessions to ensure progress is evidenced and next steps agreed with allocated Social Workers. When all actions for RSS involvement are completed on the plan, the service withdraws.
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| Shape  Description automatically generated with low confidence**Stage 5 Reunification – Child to be reunified home with their family with Placement with Parents (PWP) Agreement in place agreed by the AD (where child is subject of a Care Order). The agreement will include clear timescales for revocation of Care Order, a robust monitoring plan and consideration of what future support may be needed post discharge of the order. If the child is S20, then the child ceases to be CLA.** * PWP to be completed (or updated to reflect full-time return home) by allocated Social Worker and agreed by their Assistant Director prior to the child returning home – plan must include details of the support provided by all, including the allocated Social Worker, timescales, monitoring, support plan as well as what success looks like and what would trigger removal of the child from their home and change of care plan back to remaining in the LA care.
* When satisfied that all outstanding issues/ needs are addressed through the Stage 4 plan, the PWP needs to be completed and authorised.
* PWP must set out clear expectations for the child and their parents, for SCC to continue to support reunification and the child remaining in the parents’ care without a need for a Care Order.
* Visiting frequency will be bespoke to meet the child and family’s needs, and is likely to reduce over time but until the child is no longer in our care (S20 fully returned to parents care or Care Order revoked) a high-level visiting pattern must be in place to ensure we evidence the application for discharge or assure ourselves the child no longer being in our care is safe enough for the child.
* Discharge of Care Order /Revocation of S20 to be agreed and undertaken by the allocated Social Worker and their management.
* It is recommended that a Care Planning Meeting is held 3 monthly to review progress alongside considering of applying for discharge.
* Reunification practitioner and their manager will provide their views to the allocated Social Worker on what, if any, support is needed post discharge of an Order or that might be needed ongoing under early help or CIN support.
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