

Permanency Planning**Reunification****25-4****Policy**

If children cannot be safely maintained in the home, reunification with legal parent(s) and/or guardian(s) is the preferred permanency option for children in out-of-home care.

Reunification practice is aimed at supporting parents in addressing conditions that precipitated the child's separation from their family and ensuring the child is stable and cared for while the child is in out-of-home care.

Reasonable Efforts

In every case, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) shall make reasonable efforts to prevent the unnecessary placement of children in care.

Once children have been separated, DCF must make reasonable efforts for the children to safely return home by providing and referring the family to appropriate services and resources in the community, unless the Juvenile Court has determined that reasonable efforts are no longer required.

Cross-reference: DCF Legal Policy 6-6, Superior Court for Juvenile Matters

Reasonable Efforts Not Required

DCF or any other party may, at any time, file a motion with the court for a determination that reasonable efforts to reunify the parent with the child are not required. The court may determine that such efforts are not required if the court finds upon clear and convincing evidence that at least one of the following aggravating circumstances exists:

- the child has been abandoned
- the parent has inflicted or knowingly permitted another person to sexually abuse, exploit or severely physically abuse the child or engaged in a pattern of abuse of the child
- the parent has killed another child of the parent or sibling (non-accidental)
- the parent has knowingly permitted another person to kill or assault, (non-accidental) that resulted in serious bodily injury of the child, another child of the parent, or sibling

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- the parental rights of the parent to a sibling have been terminated within three years of the filing of a petition, provided DCF has made reasonable efforts to reunify the parent with the child during a period of at least ninety days
- the parent was convicted of sexual assault
- the child was placed in the care and control of DCF pursuant to the Safe Havens Act whereby DCF assumes care and control of an infant, aged 30 days or younger who is voluntarily surrendered at a hospital emergency department.

Legal reference: C.G.S. sections 17a-57 through 17a-60.**Cross reference:** DCF Legal Policy 6-6; DCF Policy 21-12 Safe Haven**Legal reference:** Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, Public Law 96-27 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Public Law 105-89.**Cross reference:** Share Parenting Policy 25-2**Reunification Services**

In accordance with federal regulations, reunification services are time limited. If the permanency goal for the child is reunification, the timeframe is, in most situations, within 12 months from the date the child entered care.

Reunification must occur as soon as possible when parents can demonstrate their ability to adequately provide care and ensure child safety.

There are case situations in which reunification cannot occur within 12 months, but it is not appropriate to abandon reunification efforts. It is acceptable to extend reunification efforts if the parent(s) has been diligently working towards reunification and DCF expects that reunification can occur within a time frame that is consistent with the child's developmental needs.

Assessing Readiness for Reunification

A thorough assessment of the areas described below are necessary to minimize the likelihood of repeat maltreatment and avoid the child's re-entry into care. These areas will be discussed in supervision to assess the family's readiness for reunification.

The decision to reunify a child with their legal parents is based on the following key areas:

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Readiness
for
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- assessing child safety
 - utilization of the ABCD paradigm
 - SDM safety assessment
 - assessing for service interventions that can mitigate safety concerns

Note: Safety is the primary determining factor when making the decision to reunify a child with the child's legal parents. If safety concerns remain that cannot be effectively mitigated or controlled through safety interventions, the child should not be reunified.

- assessing risk
 - consider risk factors that are impacting child safety and whether they can be controlled or managed through service interventions and supports.
- consistency and quality of parent/child visitation (family time)
 - consider consistency of contact and the parents' ability to respond to the child's needs and provide safe and nurturing care

Cross reference: DCF Permanency Planning Policy 25-6, Family Time

- family's progress with case plan goals and specific steps
 - assessing parental engagement and involvement in services and determining whether the parents are benefiting from service interventions, evidenced by:
 - ◆ the demonstration of new skills
 - ◆ changes in behavior
 - ◆ improved family functioning
 - ◆ increased protective capacities

Cross reference: Permanency Planning Practice Guide, 25-0 PG

**Supporting
Reunifica-
tion**

To ensure a successful reunification, DCF must develop a plan to monitor and support the family once the child is returned home. Ongoing communication with service providers and team members is critical during this time.

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continued

Post reunification services and supports must be tailored to the specific needs of the child and family and are designed to maintain family functioning and protective capacities, minimize risk, strengthen natural family supports, monitor safety and access needed resources.

The intensity of service provision may vary as the family experiences challenges or crisis after the child is reunified. It is imperative DCF plan accordingly and assist the family and team members in developing strategies that are effective in addressing the crisis or issues in a timely manner and is supportive of both the child and family.

DCF recognizes the importance of the relationships that may have developed with the child's foster family. Staff should encourage and support efforts to continue these relationships, if appropriate.

Specific timeframes for continued DCF involvement following reunification will be determined in supervision.

Cross-reference: DCF Policy 23-1, Ongoing Services Overview

Trial Home Visit

A "trial home visit" is the temporary placement of a child or youth committed to DCF in the home of such child's or youth's parent or guardian.

Timely reunification within 12 months remains the preferred permanency plan when children are separated from their primary caregivers. The assessment for reunification readiness incorporates an ongoing safety and risk assessment developed through the utilization of the ABCD Child Safety Practice Model paradigm, Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools, as well as permanency teaming meetings to ensure collaboration with all key stakeholders.

Trial home visits may be used as a mechanism to transition committed children safely home prior to legal revocation of commitment under the conditions outlined below.

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Trial Home Visit, continued

- Notify all parties of the decision to proceed with a trial home visit at least 15 days in advance of initiating the trial home visit. Social worker must complete and file with the court form DCF-25-4F, "Notification to the Court and Parties of Record of a Trial Home Visit."
- File a petition for revocation of commitment within 30 days of the trial home visit unless the court has established a timeframe.
- End out-of-home care placement and create trial home visit in the electronic case record.
- Document the visitation plan for the trial home visit in a supervisory narrative which shall include both announced and unannounced home visits.

If there is no agreement between legal parties to proceed with a trial home visit, consultation should occur with the Assistant Attorney General assigned to the case.

Legal Reference: C.G.S. section 46b-129 (j)

Frequency of Contact

Frequency of home visits will be determined in supervision based on the following:

- emerging safety concerns
- risk factors
- child vulnerability
- feedback from family and providers
- involvement of the family's support network.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 20-1-1, Purposeful Visitation and Contact Standards

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent Planning will be actively pursued for all children in DCF's care with a permanency goal of reunification.

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25-4, Continued**Concurrent Planning**, continued

Concurrent planning is the process of developing and implementing a plan to achieve the child's permanency goal (typically reunification) while simultaneously developing and implementing an alternative or "back up" permanency plan, in the event reunification is not possible or not in the child's best interest.

It is developed and implemented in tandem with the reunification plan, not instead of it.

To be effective, concurrent planning requires not only the identification of an alternative plan but also the implementation of active efforts toward both plans simultaneously with the full knowledge of all participants.

Concurrent planning is a structured, family-centered process that honors a child's attachments and best interests and actively engages the family in planning to expedite legal permanency.

Legal reference: C.G.S. section 17a-110

Key Components of Concurrent Planning

When implementing a concurrent permanency goal, the social worker shall actively pursue the following:

- individualized and early assessment of parent's strengths, needs, safety concerns, and risk factors which precipitated child's separation from the home. Targeted services and interventions are provided based on the results of these assessments
- purposeful and progressive visitation
- early family search and engagement
- their team together for planning and shared decision-making
- establishing clear and firm timelines in the case plan for permanency decisions
- frequent and ongoing assessment of progress with case plan objectives
- collaboration between service providers, licensed caregivers, legal parents and team members
- making placement and permanency decisions that consider race, culture and ethnicity to help minimize the negative impact of removal
- placing child in a permanent home that will commit to the child long-term.