

Assessment of Program Continuation

When a family's eligibility review is conducted during a six-month review, and a family is determined to be eligible, Specialists and Coordinators, in collaboration with the family, should assess the family's progress and determine if the FaDSS program is still appropriate for the family using the Assessment of Program Continuation.

The Assessment of Program Continuation must be documented in the Supervision tab in Iowa FaDSS. If an involuntary exit is determined to be appropriate, the assigned State Program Manager must be consulted prior to exiting the family.

A family not making progress towards their goals does not automatically justify a planned exit. A comprehensive review of the family situation and the services and supports provided by the Specialist should be conducted prior to determining that exit is appropriate. This includes discussion with the family. This should occur in conjunction with eligibility reviews and staffing the family every six months.

A family who exits after the Assessment of Program Continuation may reapply if there are changes to their situation or they identify new goals to pursue. There is no limit to the number of times a family can re-enroll in the program. Families who disagree with their Assessment of program continuation have the right to appeal the decision.

Shared Commitment to Progress

Progress in FaDSS depends on two things:

- Specialists and Coordinators providing consistent, high-quality support.
- Families staying engaged and following through.

If either side loses commitment, progress can stall. Sometimes, families make progress by working or going to school but don't want to leave FaDSS because of the strong bond they've built with their Specialist. Specialists may also find it hard to close a case when they've seen a family succeed.

This document helps FaDSS grantees decide when it's time for a family to leave FaDSS either because they are doing well or because the program is no longer helping them move forward.

Purpose of This Tool

This document is designed to help local FaDSS programs determine when it is appropriate to transition a family out of FaDSS, either because of limited progress or

because the service is no longer needed. It provides reflection questions and guidance to support sound decision-making.

In general, families should be enrolled in FaDSS **no longer than three years**, with exceptions determined collaboratively by the Coordinator, Specialist, and State staff.

- Exiting too soon or due to poor-quality services can be unfair to the family.
- Keeping families enrolled too long can limit space for new families on the waiting list.

The goal is to find the right balance.

Guidance for Promoting Progress and Exiting Families from FaDSS

1. Is the Specialist providing quality, responsive services?

Before assessing family progress, confirm that services are being delivered effectively. If families are disengaged, the issue may stem from the quality of services rather than a lack of motivation.

Reflection Questions for Coordinators and Specialists:

- Is the Specialist making enough attempts to communicate and meet with the family?
- Has the Specialist identified a general direction for the family (e.g., stability, work, education/training)?
- Has the Specialist tapped into the parent's motivation and clarified their desired outcomes?
- Are action steps specific, achievable, and time-bound?
- Does the Specialist follow up between visits, particularly with families struggling to make progress?
- Has the Specialist explored barriers to progress and problem-solved with the family (e.g., using If-Then or "Potholes & Detours" planning)?

If the Specialist is struggling, structured supervision and tools such as Stepping Stones for Specialists Success can help strengthen skills.

Table 1. Identifying and supporting a Specialist who is struggling

What you might see when the Specialist is struggling	Strategies for support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work quality declines (doing the bare minimum, lack of planning, failure to complete tasks) • Negative attitudes toward families • Signs of burnout (fatigue, procrastination) • Resistant to change • Going through the motions—not a lot of intentionality during the visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent, proactive check-ins. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Professional development sessions and reflection on progress – Building trust and accountability – modeling consistency • Peer support and collaboration (co-working, shadowing, team-building activities) • Training and professional development activities • Encouragement and recognition • Self-care (taking time off, trauma-informed check-ins, setting clear boundaries)

Decision point:

- If the Specialist is providing strong, consistent services, move to the next reflection question. If not, address service quality before assessing family progress.

2. To what extent is the family engaging in services?

Consistent engagement in Home/Quality visits is crucial for progress. Specialists should set clear expectations for participation during recruitment and enrollment and reinforce them throughout service delivery.

Family Engagement Scenarios and Guidance

Behavior: Consistently Engaged

- Keep them moving forward.
- Use visits to strengthen skills for managing work, school, and family life.
- Help parents teach goal setting to their children.

Behavior: Sporadically Engaged

- Find out why—are they unable to engage (due to challenges) or unwilling (low motivation)?
- Build trust and be consistent.
- Make expectations clear from the beginning and throughout services.

- Talk openly about the impact of disengagement.
- Hold them accountable but stay supportive.

Behavior: Disengaged (Physically or Emotionally)

- Try the same steps as for sporadic engagement.
- Document all contact attempts (for example, 2 times per week).
- Follow the form letter guidance so families are aware of the expectations.

Decision Point:

- Families who do not have contact for 45 days should be exited. Families who do not meet for two consecutive months should be exited.
- For families who engage off and on, hold a case meeting with the Coordinator, Specialist, and family to decide what's next.

3. To what extent is the family making progress toward **stability or **mobility**?**

FaDSS aims to help families move forward—either toward **stability** (e.g., securing housing, accessing supports, addressing mental health needs) or **mobility** (e.g., engaging in work, education, or training). Families may exit the program for two primary reasons: **success** or **lack of progress**. Both decisions require thoughtful coordination.

Scenario #1: Family is doing well but reluctant to leave FaDSS

The family is thriving—working, pursuing education, or in vocational training but hesitant to exit due to strong ties with their Specialist and limited external supports.

What to Do:

- Explain that FaDSS is a **time-limited program** meant to help families become independent.
- Start talking early about what comes next and build a **transition plan**.
- Include **If–Then (Potholes & Detours)** planning to help the family prepare for setbacks.
- Offer a three-month **transition period** with quick check-ins by phone or video.
- **Celebrate success** and remind families of how far they've come.
- If the Specialist is hesitant to close the case, discuss it in supervision.

Decision Point:

- If the family has been in the program for **two years or more** and is thriving, it's time to help them transition out. Exceptions can be made after consultation with the coordinator and State staff.

Scenario #2: Family not making steady progress:

The family seems stuck. They often cancel or reschedule visits, set goals that aren't realistic, or continue operating in crisis mode. They may not be motivated to take next steps.

What to Do:

- Revisit goals—are they realistic and appropriate for now?
- Help the family find their motivation again.
- Bring in the Coordinator or another Specialist for extra support or to join a home visit.
- Try new activities or approaches to re-engage the family.
- Be honest about their lack of progress and talk together about whether FaDSS is still the right fit.

Decision Point:

- First, confirm that the Specialist has done everything possible to provide quality support.
- If so, hold a case meeting with the Coordinator, Specialist, and family.
- Define what progress looks like, set clear timelines, and explain what will happen if there's no improvement.
- Keep conversations realistic and time-bound.
- If the family still doesn't move forward, plan a supportive exit.