

## Changes to Reunification Practice Standards

In April of 2021, the DHS Service Business Team (SBT) sponsored a LEAN event intended to address inconsistent practices across service areas in achieving successful reunification. Various internal and external stakeholders were engaged to develop statewide practice standards that focused on effectively preparing children and their parents for a safe, stable return home when this is their permanency goal. The practice standards start with planning in advance of physical reunification, continue through the reunification process, and include additional follow up activities. Anticipated benefits include a reduction in re-entry within 12 months of reunification, a decrease in the amount of time to achieve reunification, and a reduction in the rate of abuse after reunification.

Two additional processes are being put into place to consistently facilitate a planful and supportive reunification process. These include:

- A reunification staffing prior to children returning home to develop a clear plan and identify support activities for the parents and key team members.
- A post reunification staffing within 30-45 days after reunification to further support the family and address any unanticipated concerns or barriers.

These staffings should include all key decision makers and team members and will result in a clear plan that will be made available to all parties after the staffing.

The outlined reunification standards are considered best practice and encouraged to be worked into all reunification efforts. For the initial role out, they will be required in the following situations in which reunification is the permanency goal and parents are actively working toward reunification:

- Children aged 0-3 who have been out of home for four or more months.
- Children aged 4-17 who have been out of home for six or more months.

Additional tools and resources have also been developed to add to the existing “Case Worker Tool Box.” These include:

- Guidance for an extended observation visit option prior to reunification
- Family Interaction Observation Checklist
- Guidance for quality drop-in visits
- Standards for communication between DHS and FCS staff
- Reunification staffing guide
- Reunification follow-up staffing guide

Training was held throughout October of 2021 for implementation January 1, 2022. A recording of the training will also be made available through the CWPTA.