



Research on our Best Work in Reunification

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Protection versus Connection

- Policy and practice slide on a continuum between protection and connection concerns.
- Protection: ensure child's safety, health
- Connection: increase child's sense of trust and continuity, ability to form relationships, be trusted, be reliable
- Periods of protection show higher rates of foster care placement, no effect on fatalities.
- Periods of connection show lower rates of foster placement, no effect on fatalities.



How to Safely Reunify

- Re-abuse rates are estimated at 25%.
- Abuse rates in family foster care estimated at 7%.
- Concrete help is most predictive of reunification.
 - Provision of concrete resources is the service most predictive of a family's early, continuing cooperation.
 - Improvement of concrete indicators closes a case.
- Safety increases when parents have received experiential parent training that covers more areas of family life than parenting or discipline.
- Re-abuse rates decrease with the amount of time service providers have spent in the biological family's home during service provision.



How to Permanently Reunify

- Visitation is the critical predictor of return home.
 - Dissuaded or under-emphasized visitation increases parental ambivalence about working for a child's return.
- Likelihood of return home decreases with length of time in foster care.
- Likelihood of stable reunification is related to the resolution of parental problems, particularly in cases of child neglect or child governability problems.



Time in Foster Care That Leads to Reunification

- Re-entry to foster care is more likely when the child is returned home before 6 months have passed.
 - Foster care intervention typically follows a crisis, and agencies must allow time for services to ameliorate the precipitating conditions: deficits in parental skills, knowledge, and resources or child behavior.
- Re-entry to foster care is less likely when the biological family has received more than 50% of service time in the family home.

Characteristics of Foster Parents



- When foster parents feel well prepared and part of decision making, they go the distance.
- Kinship foster parents receive fewer supports, have more stability, but lower reunification rates; evidence on outcomes for children in kinship care is mixed.
- Single foster and adoptive parents receive children with more problems, but have equally positive outcomes in stability and permanence.
- Permanence and behavior outcomes are better when foster parents or adoptive parents are less well educated, or have a lower income.



Evidence-Based Practices for All Service Providers

- Tell the truth. Outcomes for biological parents, foster parents, and children are best when each feels they have information and choices.
 - written case plans
 - plans are shared with all parties
 - parties agree on case goals
 - importance of a commitment to shared decisions
- Make decisions with, not for, families.
 - Enhance, don't usurp, parental judgment.
 - Shared family care - foster parents working with biological families - is showing good outcomes.



Keys to Success

- Build a common understanding of foster care.
 - Protection and connection
 - Non-adversarial in the child's best interest
- Support good decision-making.
 - Complete information
 - Identification and use of best practices
 - Enhance caseworker efforts at connection
- Stand beside, not between, families.
- Time matters.









