

Reunification

Policy

Document title	Reunification	Version 2.0
Contact details	Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities Operational Policy tfhc.policy@nt.gov.au	
Approved by	Director, Operational Support	
Date approved	19/05/2021	
Document review	24 months from date of approval	
TRM number	61:F2020/952	

Version	Active from	Author	Changes made
1.0	16/03/2015	Operational Policy	Describes how reunification can be successfully planned and executed.
1.01	21/07/2017	Operational Policy	Minor administrative updates.
1.02	2/03/2017	Operational Policy	Revised and updated to align with legislative amendments and Signs of Safety practice approach.
1.04	11/09/2020	Operational Policy	Revised to include information about cultural consultation.
2.0	19/05/2021	Operational Policy	Added information regarding five core elements of SNAICC decision making and the requirement to notify the Central Intake Team if concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child are identified during reunification process.

Acronyms	Full form
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Department	Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
The Act	Care and Protection of Children Act 2007

Contents

1. Policy Purpose	4
2. Policy Statement	4
3. Role of Carers in Reunification.....	5
4. Chief Executive Officer's responsibility to inform families	5
5. Safety of the child during reunification.....	5
6. Legislative Basis and related resources.....	5

1. Policy Purpose

Reunification is the planned and timely process of safely returning a child to their parents, or to other family or kin who had been exercising parental responsibility prior to the child coming into care. This policy directs the process to assist successful reunification of children with their family following a period of statutory care.

2. Policy Statement

The process of reunification commences when a child enters care. The *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* (Act) includes the guiding principle that the family of a child has the primary responsibility for the care, upbringing and development of the child (refer to s8(1) of the Act).

A child who has been placed into care should eventually be returned to their family, provided that it is in the child's best interests and safety goals have been achieved. When a child is removed from their parents, all of the possibilities for their reunification must be fully explored in order to determine what the best interests of that child are (refer to s10(2)(cb) of the Act).

The best interests of the child will be the paramount concern. This requires case management activities to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child, their parents, family members, kinship groups and other person's significant in the child's life (refer to s10(2)(ca) of the Act).

Aboriginal children's best interest also includes the child's right to enjoy the culture and tradition of their family and community and maintain ongoing contact with family and connection to country and language (refer to s10(ha) of the Act).

Cultural consultation must be demonstrated in all key decision making points and interactions with Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families. The five core elements of the [Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care](#) (SNAICC) decision making - **Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation and Connection** will be applied throughout the Department's engagement with Aboriginal children, their families, members of their natural support network and their communities. Refer to the Department's *Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework*.

Active efforts to explore all possibilities and provide the necessary supports to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child and their parent and family in order to reunify the child with family must be evident in the Reunification Plan.

The reunification process is complete when the following milestones have been achieved:

- A child safely returns to their parents care;
- Parental responsibility and daily care and control has been returned to the parents;
- The Protection Order expires or is revoked by the Court;
- Reunification is determined to be no longer viable and the care plan goal changes to permanency planning for long term care; and
- The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (the Department) no longer has any involvement and the case is closed.

Reunification efforts are to include:

- Establishing, preserving and strengthening positive family relationships while children are in short-term care;

- Maintaining child's contact with their parents, family members, kinship groups, natural connected network, appropriate community members nominated by the child or their family, and other people significant in the child's life.
- Establishing strong engagement and collaboration between the Department and the family;
- Introduction of activities and services to support reduction or resolution of protective concerns to enable the process of reunification; and
- Planning to consider sustained involvement of a range of appropriate services and supports from the point where a child first enters care and beyond the child's return home, to meet the child and their family's needs.

3. Role of Carers in Reunification

Case Managers must ensure that authorised Family and Foster Carers are fully informed about their critical role as part of the Care Team in supporting the successful reunification of the child they are providing care for. It is essential Carers are active partners with the Department to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child and their parents, family members, kinship group and other significant persons in the child's life.

4. Chief Executive Officer's responsibility to inform families

Parents and extended family should have access to appropriate and timely services necessary to facilitate their child's successful reunification.

Consideration will be given to specific language and cultural needs of a child and their family. An interpreter must be provided for any individual who does not have a sufficient understanding of English or who prefers to speak in another language, so they can meaningfully engage in care planning discussions.

(Refer to Using Interpreters, Translators and Assisted Communication Services Guidance).

Family members will be provided with accurate information about reunification processes, timeframes, and expectations, their tasks and responsibilities, communicated in language and style they understand, and be engaged in care planning in order to develop a realistic understanding of what needs to happen in order for their child to safely return home.

5. Safety of the child during reunification

A child may be placed with their family as part of the reunification process. A report must be made to the Central Intake Team if concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the child have been identified.

6. Legislative Basis and related resources

[Care and Protection of Children Act 2007](#)

Procedure: Foster and Kinship Care Payments.

Procedure: Monitoring Wellbeing of Children.

Procedure: Responding to Safety and Wellbeing Concerns for Children in Care.

Guideline: Reunification.

Guidance: Using Interpreters, Translators and Assisted Communication Services.