



Reunification Readiness Assessment

Source: This information has been taken from Reunification Policy documents of the Department of Child Protection, Western Australia.

Factors that identify when a family is ready for reunification

If a parent/caregiver/family has achieved most of the following factors it is a good indication, and likely, that they are ready for the reunification of their child/children to their care:

- Adequate changes have been made by the parent to address the child's safety needs
- A reunification plan is in place (or will be developed with the parent) to support the child's safety and return to family. The parent understands and is willing to follow the strategies in the plan
- The parent demonstrates a desire and willingness to reunify
- The child indicates that they would like to reunify with their parents
- The parent have actively maintained contact with the child whilst separated
- The parent is fairly knowledgeable of services provided to the child during their out-of-home care and has some understanding of the reason for the services
- The parent has made some progress toward internalising the need for change, is engaged in the process of resolution with appropriate and realistic expectations and is prepared to address their own intrinsic characteristics which impede their parenting capacity (Donald & Jureidini, 2004).

The parents has an understanding of the child's needs, the capacity to provide empathetic, child focussed parenting and adequately meet the challenges posed by their particular child's temperament and development (Donald & Jureidini, 2004). This includes ensuring that the following is likely to occur:

- Parent is willing to administer medication and/or seek future social services for the child's wellbeing where identified e.g. for health, cognitive/developmental, psychological problems, or for educational support services
- Parent has some plans in place to provide basic supervision of the child or to access services on an emergency basis

- Parents/family are willing to provide for their child's socialisation/recreational needs
- The parent has made some progress toward achieving the practical logistical goals in order to commence reunification and is moving in the right direction toward achieving other goals
- That a parent/family's practical needs have been addressed (such as food, clothing, furniture, housing, schooling, financial and transportation)
- Support services are in place, or can be accessed, to support the parent/family during and after reunification
- The parent has some social/extended family supports in place.

Factors that identify when a family is not ready for reunification

The following factors should be taken into consideration when determining whether it is in the child's best interest to reunify him/her to parents/caregiver/family. If any of the following factors apply to the parents or family, the degree to which it applies and the effect it will have on the child's safety and wellbeing needs to be considered carefully.

The parent does not demonstrate a wish or willingness to reunify with the child.

The parent has not actively maintained contact with the child during separation.

The parent has continued behaviours and relationships which place the child at risk and the family under extreme stress, including:

- destructive, abusive or inappropriate relationships within the family or with other adults or the perpetrator (even where restraining orders exist)
- high risk living situations which could result in legal intervention such as continued use of drugs or alcohol, prostitution or criminal lifestyle etc.

The parent has failed to participate meaningfully or attempt the goals set out in the case and care plan, including:

- continually blaming others including service providers, adult partner(s) or the child for problems which exist in order to justify their non-participation
- strongly denying the need for and are oppositional to providing child medication or receiving other social services including medical, psychological or educational services.

The parent is not prepared to address their own intrinsic characteristics which impede their parenting capacity and do not have the capacity to provide empathetic, child focussed parenting or to adequately meet the challenges posed by their particular child's temperament and development (Donald & Jureidini: 2004).

The parent shows a lack of understanding of the child's treatment needs by blaming the child for cognitive or developmental disabilities, or holding the child responsible for progress that may not be attainable (Donald & Jureidini: 2004).



The parent views normal child developmental processes as deliberately oppositional to caregiver authority or lack of respect (Donald & Jureidini: 2004).

The parent is unwilling to engage in discussion of the child's experiences in out-of-home care and expect the child to return "fixed" or "cured" (Donald & Jureidini: 2004).

The parent has made no plans or ineffective plans for child care and supervision.

The parent remains socially isolated or estranged from extended family or other social or emotional supports.

Critical indicators that may suggest reunification should not be pursued or should no longer be pursued by the Department or a service provider include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Parents are not demonstrating a desire or willingness to reunify with their child,
- parents are unable or unwilling to understand the harm experienced by their child as a result of their behaviour and are not displaying a willingness to act on the issues that led to their child being removed,
- the nature of the abuse prior to intervention was so severe and/or repeated that it is likely to pose an unacceptable risk of further harm to the child,
- parents have not actively maintained contact with their child and/or the relationship between the parent and child is not mutually responsive,
- parents are unable or unwilling to understand and prioritise their child's needs,
- parents are unwilling to accept assistance to adequately care for their child and protect them from future harm,
- parents have not demonstrated a sustainable capability to care for their child,
- parental capacity is unlikely to benefit or respond to intervention and treatment to achieve necessary change,
- the child continues to express their wishes not to be reunified with his/her birth family.

Reference:

Donald, T., Jureidini, J. (2004). Parenting capacity. *Child Abuse Review* (13), 5 – 17.

