

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013    TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES    JULY 2013**

**I.    INTRODUCTION**

**A.    HISTORY**

In August 1993, under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Public Law 103-66, (H.R. 2264), Congress amended Title IV-B to extend the range of child and family services to include family preservation and support services. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (H.R. 867) (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-105hr867enr/pdf/BILLS-105hr867enr.pdf>) re-authorized the Family Preservation and Support Program of 1993, and renamed it the Safe and Stable Families Program. ASFA was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton on November 19, 1997. It clearly defined national goals in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being for children in the child welfare system. The law addressed the realization that human services systems impacting families need to work in partnership with one another to better meet the needs of both children and their families. The law also gave renewed impetus to overcome the multitude of barriers that exist between children lingering in out-of-home placements and the stability of permanency. It has since become known as the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), and was reauthorized within the Children and Family Services Improvement Act of 2011.

PSSF promoted several key principles for implementation:

1. The safety of children is the paramount concern that must guide all child welfare services;
2. Foster care is a temporary setting and not a place for children to grow up;
3. Permanency planning efforts for children should begin as soon as a child enters foster care and should be expedited by the provision of services to families;
4. The child welfare system must focus on results and accountability;
5. Innovative approaches are needed to achieve the goals set in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being.

With emphasis on permanence and a major overhaul of the child welfare system, PSSF significantly expanded the scope of services set forth by the previous Family Preservation and Family Support Program (FP/FS). This expansion included requirements for more adoption promotion and support and family reunification, in addition to the continued investment in ongoing FP/FS services.

The term “family reunification” is defined as “the planned process of reconnecting children in out-of-home care with their families by means of a variety of services and supports to the children, their families, and their foster parents or other service providers. It aims to help each child and family achieve and maintain, at any given time, their optimal level of reconnection—from full reentry of the child into the family system to other forms of contact, such as visitation—that affirm their child’s

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013 TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES JULY 2013**

membership in his/her family.” (Maluccio, Krieger, & Pine, *The Child Welfare Challenge*, page 341.)

The Time-Limited Family Reunification Services (FRS) will provide services to families who have one or more children in out-of-home placement with the county child welfare agency having custody or placement authority and with the goal of the Out of Home Family Services Agreement being reunification. FRS will be provided to families of children that have been found to be abused, neglected, dependent or in need of services.

**B. VALUES**

The Division believes that the family is the fundamental resource for the nurturing of children and children have a right to their own families. Parents should be supported in their efforts to care for their children in ways that assure the safety and well being of the child. The family’s cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious heritage should be respected throughout the provision of services.

The catalyst for developing goals of service delivery through a system of care to support the family is the Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting. Child and Family Team meetings are family members and their community supports that come together to create, implement and update a plan with the child, youth and family. The plan builds on the strengths of the child, youth and family and addresses their needs, desires and dreams. This includes engaging parents that may have been considered non-custodial/non-residential to involve them in the planning to meet the family’s needs. For additional information about CFT’s, please refer to Chapter VII: Child and Family Team Meetings (<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-55/man/CSVII.htm>)

Judgments about families are often based on incomplete information, and can wait. A crisis can be an opportunity for change; inappropriate intervention can do harm. Individual workers and agencies can and should instill hope because even families who feel hopeless can grow and change. Agencies working with the family should arrange schedules to accommodate the child and his/her family. This models that the family’s ideas and resources are given the same legitimacy as those proposed by professionals, and that mutual agreement in decision making is a primary goal. For youth and families whose supports may exist outside the family unit, this means allowing and encouraging them to invite those whom they wish to attend CFT Meetings.

Shared parenting meetings are another opportunity to encourage partnerships between caregivers and birth families that enable families to best parent their children. Shared parenting emphasizes foster parents as being a support to birth families instead of substitute caretakers. By cultivating a nurturing relationship with the family, the foster parents begin to mentor the birth parents in appropriate practices. For additional information on shared parenting, please refer to Chapter IV:

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013 TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES JULY 2013**

Child Placement (<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c11.pdf>.)

Service delivery does not exist in a vacuum. In order to best serve the needs of children and families, all agencies that work with the family should work cooperatively in ways that maximize service delivery and resources. To the fullest extent possible, service providers should be within the family's community, convenient for the family and child.

It is important to note the foundational philosophy of North Carolina's Multiple Response System (MRS) is family-centered practice delivered within a System of Care (SOC) framework. The six family-centered principles of partnership are:

- Everyone desires respect;
- Everyone needs to be heard;
- Everyone has strengths;
- Judgments can wait;
- Partners share power;
- Partnership is a process.

The six SOC principles are:

- Interagency collaboration;
- Individualized strengths based care;
- Cultural competence;
- Child and family involvement;
- Community based services;
- Accountability.

**C. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The primary goal of family reunification services are to support the family in eliminating the conditions which led to the child's removal and to build protective factors that enable the parent(s) to safely parent the child in their own home.

These services are designed to meet the following objectives:

1. Help families develop the skills, competencies and resources necessary to effectively parent the child(ren) in a safe and nurturing environment.
2. Help families develop the skills, competencies and resources they need to handle future crisis situations more effectively.

Undeniably, the ideal family for a child is the child's own family, but this is true only if his/her family can provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. Once the parent(s) receive the assistance and services necessary to not only remove the barriers that keep them from raising their children in their own home, but also to build protective factors, there is a greater likelihood that the family can be safely restored and, eventually, thrive. Protective factors are conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013 TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES JULY 2013**

of children and families. These attributes serve as buffers, helping parents to find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress<sup>1</sup>. Research has shown that the following protective factors are linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect:

- Nurturing and attachment
- Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development
- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Concrete supports for parents

**II. THE PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION**

Delivered within a System of Care (SOC) framework, the definition of FRS leads to the following principles which form an important foundation for the development of sound policies, programs, and practices.

1. With its emphasis on ensuring continuity of relationships and care for children, family reunification is an integral part of the philosophy of permanency planning.
2. Children are best reared in families, preferably their own. Most families can care for their own children if properly assisted.
3. Family reunification practice must be guided by SOC principles and a family-centered competence perspective that emphasizes:
  - Promoting family empowerment,
  - Engaging in advocacy and social action,
  - Reaching for and building on family strengths,
  - Involving any and all whom the child considers family as partners,
  - Providing needed services and supports.
4. Teamwork among the many parties involved in family reunification is critical.
5. All forms of human diversity including ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, life-style, physical and mental challenges must be respected.
6. A commitment to early and consistent child-family visiting is an essential ingredient in preparing for and maintaining reunification.
7. The family, foster parents and child welfare workers must be involved as members of the service delivery team. In keeping with the SOC principle of Interagency Collaboration, the local child welfare agency should share the same information with family reunification workers about the child and family that is shared with

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Welfare Information Gateway, <http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/factors/protective.cfm>

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013 TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES JULY 2013**

- other service providers and include them in Child and Family Team meetings. Many families will have continuing service needs in multiple areas even after case closure. Services to meet these needs must be provided to assist children and families with reunification efforts. Appropriate linkage and referrals to other community agencies will also be required in order to continue supporting reunification as cases are completed.
8. Agencies must empower their staff members by providing adequate training and supervision and by using a team approach in making case decisions.

**A. TIME-LIMITED REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

The term “Time-Limited Family Reunification Services” means the services and activities described below are provided to a child that is removed from the child’s home and placed in a foster family home or a child care institution and to the parents or primary caregiver of such a child, in order to facilitate the reunification of the child safely and appropriately within a timely fashion, but only during the 15-month period that begins on the date that the child is considered to have entered foster care<sup>2</sup>. 475(5)(F)  
([http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title04/0475.htm#act-475-5-f](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0475.htm#act-475-5-f))

Eligible services and activities include:

1. Individual, group, and family counseling;
2. Inpatient, residential, or outpatient substance abuse treatment services;
3. Mental health services;
4. Assistance to address domestic violence;
5. Services to provide temporary child care and therapeutic services for families, including crisis nurseries;
6. Peer-to-peer mentoring and support groups;
7. Facilitation of access to and visitation of children with parents and siblings;
8. Transportation to or from any of the services and activities listed above.

Reunification services are directed to families in which one or more children have been removed from their home and placed in foster care. The target populations include children who are found to be abused, neglected or dependent or in need of services; and are currently in the custody of a county child welfare agency. A child is legally removed from both parents when the county child welfare retains custody of the child even if the child may have been in the physical and or legal custody of just one of the parents at the time of the removal.

---

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Social Security Administration, Title IVB-Child and Family Services, Subpart 2-Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Section 431-Definitions. [http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title04/0431.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0431.htm)

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013 TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES JULY 2013**

Eligibility for services must be certified through documentation of the following referral/acceptance criteria:

1. The criteria for parent(s)/caregiver(s) to participate in the program are as follows:
  - a. At least one of the child's parents/caregivers whom the child was removed from must be willing to participate in reunification on a voluntary basis; and
  - b. Must be willing to work to achieve goals of the Out of Home Family Services Agreement.
  
2. The criteria for child(ren) to participate in the Program are as follows:
  - a. The child must be in the custody or placement authority of a county child welfare agency; AND
  - b. The child must either be in a current out of home placement when services are initiated or just recently moved from an out of home placement within a foster home or residential child care facility to the home of the parent/caregiver to be reunified (for example a "trial basis" where the child welfare agency still has legal custody/placement authority);
  - c. The child must be age birth through 17 years.

**B. DEFINITIONS**

1. **Primary Caregiver**  
Acting in loco parentis (has assumed the status and obligation of a parent) in relation to the children, or legal guardian.
  
2. **Legal Guardianship**  
"A judicially created relationship between child and caretaker which is intended to be permanent and self-sustaining as evidenced by the transfer to the caretaker of the following parental rights with respect to the child: protection, education, care and control of the person, custody of the person, and decision-making. The term 'legal guardian' means the caretaker in such a relationship." Sec. 475 [42 U.S.C. 675].  
([http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title04/0475.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0475.htm))
  
3. **Foster Care**  
"Foster Care" means the continuing provision of the essentials of daily living on a 24-hour basis for dependent, neglected, abused, abandoned, destitute, orphaned, undisciplined or delinquent children or other children who, due to similar problems of behavior or family conditions, are living apart from their parents, relatives, or guardians in a family foster home or residential child-care facility. The essentials of daily living include but are not limited to shelter, meals, clothing, education, recreation, and

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

**CHANGE #05-2013 TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES JULY 2013**

individual attention and supervision [G.S. §131D-10.2]  
(<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/statutes/statutelookup.pl?statute=131D>)

4. **Entering Foster Care**

A child shall be considered to have entered foster care on the earlier of:

- the date of the first judicial finding that the child has been subjected to child abuse or neglect; or
- the date that is 60 days after the date on which the child is removed from the home (Sec. 475. [42 U.S.C. 675]).  
([http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title04http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title04/0475.htm/0475.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0475.htm/0475.htm))

5. **Family Foster Care**

"Family Foster Care" means a planned, goal-directed service in which the temporary protection and care of children take place in a family foster home. Family foster care is a child welfare service for children and their parents who must live apart from each other for a period of time due to abuse, neglect, dependency, or other circumstances necessitating out-of-home care.

6. **Residential Child-Care Facility (Child Care Institution)**

"Residential Child-Care Facility" means a staffed premise with paid or volunteer staff where children receive continuing full-time foster care. Residential child-care facility includes child-caring institutions, group homes, and children's camps which provide foster care (G.S. §131D-10.2)  
(<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/gascripts/statutes/statutelookup.pl?statute=131D>).

7. **Child Placement**

Services are designed to:

- Strengthen, preserve and/or reunite families after children have come into agency custody or placement responsibility by helping families improve the conditions in the home that caused agency intervention;
- Ensure a single, stable, safe, nurturing, and appropriate temporary living arrangement for children removed from their homes;
- Achieve an alternative safe, permanent home for all children in agency custody or placement responsibility who cannot return home.

8. **Reunification:**

The primary consideration for the child's return home should be whether or not the child can be assured of at least a minimally sufficient level of care. Society can require that parents provide this level of basic care, and

**NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANUAL**  
**CHAPTER II: TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES**

---

**CHANGE #05-2013    TIME-LIMITED FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES    JULY 2013**

---

the County Department of Social Services has been given the authority to intervene when that level of care is not provided. Conversely, social workers should recognize that personal values can lead them to feel that children deserve the “better” life offered by placement than can ever be provided by the parents. Social workers should be careful that their personal standards do not cloud their professional judgment about removal or decisions about reunification. See 1201 Child Placement Services ([http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4-03.htm#P151\\_14149](http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c4-03.htm#P151_14149)) for further information.

**C.    RECORD-KEEPING & DOCUMENTATION**

Please see Section 1201 Child Placement Services, Sub-Section X <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c10.pdf> for more information on record keeping during family reunification services. Guidelines for Out of Home Placement cases and cases involving family reunification services should mirror each other.