

CALIFORNIA
SDM® REUNIFICATION REASSESSMENT
POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of the reunification reassessment is to help assess whether children in placement who have a reunification goal should:

1. Be returned home to the removal household or another household with a legal right to placement; or
2. Be maintained in placement while reunification services continue; or
3. Have a permanency alternative implemented and reunification services terminated.

Research indicates that children are less likely to suffer subsequent harm and re-enter care when the three sections of the assessment are satisfied.

Which Cases

All ongoing cases in which at least one child is in placement with a goal of return home. If more than one household is receiving reunification services, complete one assessment on each household.

Who

The ongoing worker.

When

At a minimum, every 6 months from point of removal. If adequate time has passed to demonstrate progress on the case plan, is recommended this assessment be completed every 90 days.

The reunification assessment should be completed sooner in the following circumstances:

- Prior to any court hearing at which the permanency goal or progress toward case plan goals is being reviewed.
- At any time a child is being considered for return home (e.g. formal case consultation, change of circumstances affecting ability to plan for safety in home).

If inadequate time has passed to show progress on case plan, but circumstances related to safety in the household have changed, use SDM Safety Assessment to re-assess for a safe return home.

Decision

The reunification reassessment guides the decision to:

1. Return a child to the removal household* or to another household with a legal right to placement (non-removal household);
2. Continue family reunification services; and/or
3. Pursue alternate permanency plan.

Appropriate Completion

Following the principles of family-centered practice, the reunification reassessment is completed in conjunction with each appropriate household and begins when a case is first opened. The case plan should be informed by the structure and criteria in this assessment and shared with the household at the beginning so that the household understands what is expected. The reunification reassessment form should be shared with the household at the same time so that the family members understand exactly what will be used to evaluate reunification potential and the threshold they must reach. Specifically:

- Inform the family of their original risk level, and explain that this will serve as the baseline for the reunification reassessment (unless a new referral is received, in which case the new risk level will be used).
- Explain that a new substantiated investigation or failure to progress toward case plan goals will increase their risk level, and that progress toward case plan goals will reduce their risk level.
- Explain that both the quantity and quality of their visitation with the child will be considered, and that they must attend at least 65% of their visits and those visits must have at least adequate quality (provide the definition for adequate quality).
- Provide information on the reunification safety assessment and explain that if everything else would permit reunification, the final consideration is safety. They must demonstrate that the safety threats that led to placement have either been mitigated or can be controlled by a safety plan, and that either no safety threats

*Removal household is that household from which the child was removed, or, if due to joint custody that designation is unclear, then the household where the most serious maltreatment occurred. Non-removal households are those households other than the removal household with legal rights to the child (father's home, mother's home).

are currently present or there is a safety plan in place to address any identified safety threats.

For each household participating in reunification services, using the definitions and instructions, complete the following.

A. REUNIFICATION RISK REASSESSMENT

Complete all risk items using the definitions, determine the scored risk level, consider overrides, and determine the final risk level.

B. VISITATION PLAN EVALUATION

Complete the visitation plan evaluation for each child in the household based upon the participation of the caregiver demonstrating the least progress, using the definitions, and consider overrides for each child. It is recommended that efforts be made to behaviorally describe visitation quality within the family's case plan relevant to the specific safety threats, risk factors, and underlying family functioning that account for the children being in out-of-home care.

C. REUNIFICATION SAFETY ASSESSMENT

Complete the safety assessment if required by the results of the reunification risk reassessment and visitation plan evaluation. Risk must be either low or moderate and visitation must be acceptable. Consider how the safety threats that led to removal have been mitigated; whether additional safety threats have been identified since removal and if so, whether those threats have been mitigated; or if current safety threats can be controlled in home through a safety plan. Note that safety threat items that should be assessed when considering any new threat in the home are the same as on the original safety assessment.

D. PLACEMENT/PERMANENCY PLAN GUIDELINES

After completing the reunification risk reassessment, visitation plan evaluation, and reunification safety assessment (if indicated), select the appropriate decision tree, based on the child's age at the time of removal.

Begin at the top of the tree. Proceed to the left if the reunification risk level is high or very high, and to the right if the reunification risk level is low or moderate.

Continue following the pathway answering all questions until a recommendation is reached.

Recommendations include:

- Return home
- Continue family reunification services
- Pursue alternate permanency plan

OVERRIDES

Consider whether any overrides are applicable, using the definitions. If no overrides apply, select "No overrides applicable (policy or discretionary)." If an override will be applied, indicate whether it is a policy or a discretionary override and select the specific reason. Provide explanation where required.

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