

# How to Promote Successful Reunification and Reduce Re-entry: A Research Summary

Reference:

Bronson, D.E., Saunders, S., Holt, M., Beck, E. (2008). [A Systematic Review of Strategies to Promote Successful Reunification and to Reduce Re-entry to Care for Abused, Neglected, and Unruly Children](#). Columbus, OH. Office of Children and Families, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

# At A Glance...

- General strategies that promote family reunification and reduce re-entry
- Factors associated with successful family reunification and reduced re-entry
  - Pre-reunification services
  - Reunification services
  - Reducing re-entry to care
- Future directions and next steps

# General Strategies Promoting Reunification and Reduce Re-entry

- Increase contact and communication between workers and parents (small worker to family ratios, 24-hour availability)
- Parental contacts with child
- Parenting skills training (including cognitive-behavioral models)
- Mental health and substance abuse services to parents
- Concrete services to the family
  - Transportation, job training, housing, respite care, day care, home-maker assistance
- Social support networks
- Conclusion: The research suggests that these services decrease the amount of time children spend in out-of-home care, improve family functioning, and increase family stability.

# Factors Associated with Successful Reunification and Reduced Re-entry

- Pre-reunification services
  - Assess parental ambivalence about reunification and reunification readiness similar to that included in the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale for Reunification (NCFAS-R)
  - Prepare a detailed service plan for families
  - Involve parents in case planning and arranging regular contact with the child
  - Schedule regular home visits for the child
  - Identify family needs and matching them with available community services prior to reunification
  - Provide parenting skills training to prepare parents to deal with behavioral difficulties exhibited by the child
  - Develop training programs for workers on how to engage parents
  - Work with parents, children, kinship caregivers, and foster parents to prepare for reunification

# Factors Associated with Successful Reunification and Reduced Re-entry

- Reunification Services
  - Offer intensive, in-home services with low worker-to-family ratios.
  - Match services to client-identified needs for individualized programming
  - Offer multi-component services to address the complex issues presented by family reunification
    - These include mental health services for the parents, stress management support, concrete services (housing, financial, job, transportation), substance abuse programs, counseling, and homemaker assistance
  - Anticipate family issues and provide preventive services based on pre-reunification assessments of family strengths and needs
    - Services should be in place at the time of reunification
  - Provide special health care services for children with health needs. such as respite care. nurses and aides. and social

# Factors Associated with Successful Reunification and Reduced Re-entry

- Reunification Services (continued)
  - Provide special health care services for children with health needs, such as respite care, nurses and aides, and social supports
  - Provide concrete services in an effort to minimize family stresses
  - Offer different services for families
    - Children in care due to neglect require different services than children in care due to abuse or dependency

# Factors Associated with Successful Reunification and Reduced Re-entry

- Reducing Re-entry to Care
  - Use assessment tools, such as NCFAS-R, to determine the appropriateness of reunification and the best time for reunification
  - Identify family factors that have been correlated with re-entry and providing specialized services
    - For example, developing programs for older youth who are reunifying and for parents with infants and young children
  - Introduce cognitive-behavior programs to deal with child behavior problems and training parents in the use of behavioral parenting methods
  - Maintain reunification services for at least 12 months after reunification

# Factors Associated with Successful Reunification and Reduced Re-entry

- Special considerations for unruly children
  - Work with courts to create expedited review processes
  - Deal with parental ambivalence about reunification with an unruly child
  - Provide services similar to the Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care program in Oregon and working with parents and foster parents to implement a consistent behavior management program.

# Future Directions and Next Steps

- Possibilities
  - Modify the CAPMIS family assessment tools by adding items on parental ambivalence and readiness for reunification to help workers determine the best time for reunifying families and to help them anticipate special services or supports that may be needed during and after the transition period
  - Add content to the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program on reunification and re-entry
  - Work with community agencies to develop reunification services for families that provide supportive services and contacts for up to one year after reunification

# Future Directions and Next Steps

- Possibilities (continued)
  - Develop specialized reunification programs for those at greatest risk of re-entry:
    - Families reunifying with young children (under two) or adolescents,
    - Families dealing with child health or behavioral issues, substance abuse or mental health services that incorporate reunification goals,
    - Families dealing with neglect, or families needing concrete, material resources
  - Create and implement reunification services that are provided to all families engaged in reunification that includes individualized pre-reunification services and post-reunification services