**Building Family Connections**

Oxfordshire County Council Children’s Services want all children and parents to have the best possible relationships with each other, filled with warmth, care, and connection. However sometimes, for many different reasons, these relationships can break down, leading to children moving into the care of other family members, foster parents, or the local authority.

This information leaflet describes the process that Children’s Services use to guide the building and re-building of connections between parents and children following these family breakdowns. This process is based on research by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) into the factors which strengthen parent-child relationships, and the factors that increase the risk of family breakdown. By using this evidence, we aim to support parents to have a safe relationship with their children, and as this relationship develops, to work collaboratively with families to understand what is possible in terms of their future contact with each other.

**Why don’t we call this process the ‘reunification framework’?**

Whilst this process is adapted from the NSPCC Reunification Framework (2015), we feel that the term ‘reunification’ can be misleading for families, as it suggests that the process is intended to end in reunification and the child returning to living at home. In cases when this is not possible, this can then lead parents and children to feel like they failed, which is not the case. Instead this process focuses on the parent-child relationship itself. There are many different ways to have a strong parent-child relationship, and what makes up a safe and connected relationship for one family might not feel right for another.

It is important to emphasise for families that there are many different forms of contact and connection that they may be able to have. For example, it might feel safer and more comfortable at the moment for them to contact each other over the phone, or to visit each other every other week. They might go out on day trips together, or the child might spend a couple of nights living at their parents’ house and spend the rest of the week with another carer.

By working with families to explore what they would hope to be different about their relationships in the future and aiding them to access the support and services needed to make these changes, this process aims to help parents to have the safest and most connected relationship possible with their child, whether they are living at home or not.

**How long will this process take?**

The breakdown in the relationship between a parent and child is often accompanied by a range of difficult and intense emotions, such as loss, anger, relief, guilt, sadness, and shame. Understandably, children and parents often miss each other so much that they want to be reunited as soon as possible. However, the research tells us that these kinds of rushed returns home can often lead to high levels of distress, and further family breakdowns, which is an outcome that nobody wants.

The process discussed in this guidance can take a long time, as it attempts to gain a full understanding of each family’s risk and protective factors, and the kinds of change and support that they might need to have the safest possible relationship with your child. This period of time might feel very difficult for families, but by taking this measured approach, and not making any rushed decisions, this process aims to avoid any further breakdowns in their relationships with each other.

**Where can I find out more?**

We hope this guidance has provided a useful summary of this process. This is intended for use alongside the [NSPCC Reunification Framework Practice Guidance](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1095/reunification-practice-framework-guidance.pdf), which provides a comprehensive account of the process. In particular, we would like to direct you to the Annexes of this guidance (p.72-125) which feature useful templates such as ‘Definitions of risk & protective factors’ (p.72), ‘Chronology template’ (p.80), ‘Written parental agreements’ (p.93), and ‘Setting and reviewing goals’ (p.96). The Annexes also include additional guidance, such as on using this process when working with babies and adolescents (p.106 & 108), along with tips for engaging parents (p.113) and assessing parental capacity to change (p.116). If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a particular family that you are using this process with, then please feel free to contact the Clinical Team.