Promoting Reunification

Even when parents are committed to reunification, it can be a difficult and time-consuming process, particularly when the child has been out of the home for an extended period of time or when the child and parents do not know each other well.

- The worker must prepare the family for reunification. The nature of the parent-child relationship must be fully explored. Parents must be prepared to experience initial rejection and frustration, and perhaps a re-occurrence of negative feelings about the child related to earlier episodes of abuse or neglect. The worker must assure these are identified, explored, and resolved for the parent.

- The steps in the reunification process must be carefully planned, including pre-placement preparation and visits with discussion and supportive feedback to the parent. ***All family members and caregivers must be included in the development of this plan.***

- Caregivers must support the child and the child's family during the reunification process. They may experience changes in the child's behavior from the stress and uncertainty that accompanies reunification. Proper training and support of foster caregivers can help them cope with the stress of losing the child and participate constructively in reunification activities.

- Where several children are to be reunified, the plan might include the permanent return home of one child at a time at intervals of several weeks. This gives parents the opportunity to readjust to the children being home a little at a time and prevents their becoming overwhelmed.

- Intensive, in-home supportive services should be considered a valuable agency resource to help prevent placement disruption once a child has been returned home.

- The reunification of a child with her family after a lengthy absence changes the family structure and functioning in significant ways. Families should be linked to with parent support groups and formal counseling services, such as those developed for step- or "reconstituted families." The family should also be linked to community support networks and services.