

Reunification Process Guidelines

STEP ONE- INTAKE PROCESS: You MUST have your court order before the process begins. This is to protect all parties involved as it provides the guidelines directed by the judge. You must also pay your retainer as a great deal of work is done by the reunification therapist preparing to assist your family before they even meet you. A proper intake process includes reading of all court orders, psychological evaluations, and any other documents/ reports that may be important. After reviewing the reports and orders, I also must contact any attorneys and GAL's involved to collaborate goals for my work with your family.

STEP TWO: Contact the parents and set a meeting with each parent individually to hear "both sides" of the stories including goals and possible concerns as well as discussion of reunification process, go over forms, agreement regarding possible co-parenting if appropriate or ordered and any other issues in court order.

STEP THREE: Meet the child(ren) in the office. This is an informal, unstructured interview where I can meet the child(ren) and gain a better understanding of the family system and / or parenting issues that may be occurring without parents in the session.

STEP FOUR: (NOTE- if possible during this stage, for the first week, it is best if the family spends as much time as possible attending sessions to attempt the re-establishment of bonding. Of course, finances and time are considered. This is a strong recommendation based on scientific research.) Set up another meeting with the parent that is seeking reunification with their child(ren). After collateral parties have been contacted, the parent(s) seeking reunification will be contacted again and a reunification meeting will be scheduled with the parent(s) and child(ren). This process may take a while because many factors need to be considered, especially when the child(ren) is/are emotionally distraught over the estranged parent(s). Additionally, I may spend more time with the estranged parent(s) because of parenting issues (blame, anger, grief, etc.) and work through those issues prior to integrating the family unit. Every case is different and therefore the time frame will be different with each case.

STEP FIVE: After the estranged parent has a good understanding of the process, parenting, and is or has worked on their prior issues, integration of the family outside of the office will begin. Therapeutic supervised visitation and semi-supervised visitation may be included if allowed in the court order. These sessions are necessary in only specific cases.

STEP SIX: Once sessions are becoming more comfortable, semi-supervised off-site visits, if allowed by court order will begin, followed by in office sessions to discuss the outings. Sessions will be spread farther apart until the parent and child(ren) are consistently having healthy visits without concern. A follow up of every three months twice and then every six months twice is the usual plan.