



Fact Sheet N° 7

A global policy for Children and the Family

ELABORATING A LIFELONG PLAN: FAMILY REINTEGRATION

Family reintegration is the return on a permanent basis to the family of origin of a child who has been provisionally separated (by a family placement or a stay in an institution) as a result of the initially unfavourable circumstances for his upbringing having taken a turn for the better.

Except for keeping the child in his family of origin and preventing him from being institutionalized, **family reintegration constitutes the most desirable permanent solution for the child**. It should be sought as a priority, even if the family of origin does not seem “ideal” or their customs and ways of life are different from those of the majority of the population. The aim of child protection does not consist of stereotyping family ways of life but rather of permitting each child to develop in the best way depending upon his specificities which include his family.

Preparations for the return

From the moment a provisional protective measure has been adopted for a child (admission to an institution or a family placement) the social workers must:

1. **Locate the members of the child's family of origin**, including the members of the extended family, if the information provided by the police is correct.
2. **Learn how to get to know the child's family**, especially through home visits and with the cooperation of the local authorities (sanitary and social workers, etc...); learn how to get to know the community they live in.
3. **Determine the real reasons for the separation** of the child from his family (medical, economic, social,

psychological...), identifying the significant factors for determining the relevance or contraindication of reintegration.

4. **Identify and give a sense of value to measures of protection and existing potentialities** in the family or in his environment that could increase the chances of improving the family and helping the child's reintegration.
5. **Check the psychic, social and legal aspects** that might make reintegration difficult.
6. Draw up, with the participation of the child (depending upon his age and degree of maturity) and of his family, a **plan for the future** that envisages in a more or less long term, a permanent family reintegration

If, after evaluating the case with the different actors involved (child, family of

origin, institution or temporary foster family) the reintegration of the child in his family of origin seems possible, the social workers should prepare the child and the family for the return. With this end in view, a plan is drawn up for the family and the child since, in certain cases, reintegration should be gradual (for example, at the beginning, the parents will keep the child in their house at weekends or during the holidays). It is essential that the social workers accompany the family and the child during these changes and in the months that follow. With this in view, while the child is still in an institution or a family placement, they will revive relations, visits with the child.

Operational techniques and the order of business

The **operational techniques** for the task of reintegrating the child should be built on the methodology already described for family intervention (see Fact sheets no. 4 and 5)

When the child has brothers and sisters, they need special attention and the right preparation that helps them to give the child back his place in the family.

In developing the plan for reintegrating the child in his family one should count on the preparation of a **contract or a document** that lists the aims of the reintegration and

the family's various priority tasks to make sure that the conditions in the family change and the process of reintegration can succeed.

Note should also be taken of **the commitments made by the social services or other entities that intervene** to provide support as a contribution to the successful conclusion of the reintegration and as tools to ensure the welfare of the child.

The order of business should make a distinction between two phases:

1. The pre-reintegration: the work of preparing the reintegration during which the child remains in the institution or family placement but is visited by the parents, even spending weekends, vacation time etc. with them; increasing the frequency of the outings and their duration; a period in which the social workers observe both the family's living conditions as well as the change in interpersonal relationships, particularly with the child.
2. The post-reintegration refers to the psychic, social work to be undertaken once the child is reincorporated in the family home, and which includes support and follow-up tasks.

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For more information:

HERST Beth, *Permanency Planning in the Child Welfare System*, The Canadian Resource Centre on Children and Youth, 75 Albert Street - Suite 209, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7, 2002, 187 pp

POWELL John Y. *Family-Centered Services in Residential Treatment: New Approaches for Group Care*, The Haworth Press, Inc., 10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904-1580, USA, 2000, 146 pp

We are interested in your opinion! To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at irc-cir@iss-ssi.org. We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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