

REFLECTIVE TOOL

For actioning the Reunification
Practice Guide

FIND MORE INFORMATION & RESOURCES: [REUNIFICATION PRACTICE GUIDE](#)

About this tool

The Reunification Practice Guide is one in a series of guides setting out the best available evidence for leaders in the children's social care sector to support effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed, and delivered. The Department for Education has commissioned the Practice Guides to help local areas achieve the outcomes of the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) (National Framework).

The Reunification Practice Guide should be considered within the wider context of children's social care reform, which emphasises the importance of family networks, enduring relationships, coordinated family support, and early intervention. Reunification should be understood as part of the wider family help and safeguarding system, rather than as a standalone process. Achieving safe and sustained reunification requires coordinated planning, support, and decision-making before, during, and after a child returns home.

The Reunification Practice Guide sets out the best available evidence on interventions that support safe return home, sustained stability, and ongoing support for children and young people. By implementing the Guide's key principles and recommendations, local areas can contribute to achieving outcomes 1, 3, and 4 of the National Framework, enabling families to stay together where it is safe to do so, supporting children within their family networks, and ensuring children experience stable, loving homes.

The key principles and recommendations provide a framework for ongoing review, planning, and decision making, helping local areas embed a consistent, planned, and well-supported approach to reunification.

As responsibility for reunification sits within a range of service areas across local authorities, this reflective tool is designed for professionals with corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities who are involved in planning, commissioning, delivering, or overseeing reunification support. This may include senior leaders, commissioners, practice supervisors, practitioners, Independent Reviewing Officers, Family Help and Edge of Care services, and partners across the multi-agency system.

This reflective tool is designed to support local areas to assess current practice, identify strengths and gaps, plan improvements, and monitor progress over time. It provides a structured approach to implementing the key principles and recommendations set out in the practice guide, helping local areas strengthen support for children, young people, and families involved in the reunification process.

The tool supports leaders to facilitate strategic discussions and co-production with key stakeholders, including partner organisations, children, young people, and families. It also supports practice supervisors and practitioners to reflect on how evidence informed reunification practice can be embedded more consistently in day-to-day work.

Recognising that reunification support and practice vary across local areas, the reflective tool focuses on the use of evidence-based recommendations for children's social care to improve practice and support outcomes for children. Leaders are encouraged to use this tool to map existing provision, assess how well it meets local need, and prioritise actions for service development, commissioning and de-commissioning of interventions. The Practice Guide and reflective tool should be used alongside local population data, organisational data, professional knowledge, and lived experience to inform commissioning and de-commissioning cycles, ongoing service development, and continuous improvement.

The children and young people in scope for this Practice Guide

Throughout the Practice Guide and this companion reflective tool, we are focusing on the children and young people who return to live with their parents following a period in care, including foster care or residential care. This includes children and young people of all ages and circumstances with additional or intersecting needs.

A fuller explanation of the families in scope for this Practice Guide, and what we mean by parents and care-experienced, can be found in the [full Practice Guide](#).

Who should use this tool?

This tool is designed for leaders across social care, education, and health to enable a strategic and shared approach to implementing the key principles and recommendations. This approach is likely to include, but is not limited to:

- **Senior leaders** including Directors of Children's Services, lead members for children's services, commissioners, and senior leaders across children's social care, health, education, housing, and youth justice
- **Practice supervisors** including team managers, service leads, and heads of service responsible for safeguarding, children in care, Family Help, and related services
- **Practitioners** including social workers, family support workers, early help practitioners, residential staff, foster carers, and practitioners in partner agencies who support children and families before, during, and after reunification
- **Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)** who play a key role in ensuring reunification is considered, appropriately planned, and that support is in place to sustain a child's return home.

Practice supervisors and practitioners can also use this tool in supervision and day to day practice to support reflection on how the key principles are consistently embedded.

This resource is structured around the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach:

STEP 1: ASSESS

Improve your understanding of the needs, strengths, and circumstances of children and families involved in the reunification process. Reflect on your current offer and how well it meets these needs, before, during, and after a child's return home. Gather and analyse information about current and projected reunification needs; work with multi agency partners to map available support; and consider how well local provision aligns with the evidence set out in the Practice Guide. Actively seek and incorporate the views of children, young people, and families. Critically evaluate outcomes such as reunification stability, re-entry to care, and engagement with support, alongside measures of family experience and satisfaction. Bring together the right people across the partnership to develop a shared understanding of current practice, ways of working and collective responsibility for supporting safe and sustained reunification.

STEP 2: PLAN

Use the information from Step 1 to identify and agree priorities for improving reunification practice. Work with partners across the system to develop a clear, co-produced plan, focusing on strengthening support before and after return home and reducing re-entry to care. Ensure plans are aligned with local policy, available resources, and wider system reforms. Set clear roles, responsibilities, and actions, taking into account local capacity and context. Agree how progress will be measured, including feedback from children, young people, and families.

STEP 3: DO

Implement the co-produced plan and address any challenges that arise. Be clear about who will be involved in each agreed action and when progress will be reviewed. Establish governance and partnership oversight. Ensure children young people and parents are heard and are meaningfully involved through implementation.

STEP 4: REVIEW

As you progress through the plan, review the changes you have made and consider what can be learned from the process. This may involve gathering new information, revisiting existing evidence or seeking additional feedback from children, young people or families. Remember that improvement is an ongoing, cyclical process.

As local contexts are continually changing, and it is important for services to be responsive, the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach in this resource is intended to be ongoing and cyclical. Following a structure like this allows you to clearly keep track of the progress you are making, and your rationale for making the changes you do.

How to use this tool

Each stage of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach has questions to guide you in reflecting on your local context, acting as a starting point for prioritising the implementation of the key principles and recommendations in the Guide. The aim is to support local areas in refining and developing support for children and families experiencing reunification. As local contexts continually change, it is important for services to remain responsive.

We use symbols throughout this resource to indicate how questions relate to one, more, or all the Key Principles and Recommendations outlined in the Reunification Practice Guide, as in the example below:

- What is your process of understanding and acting on the views of children, young people, and families? **KP1**

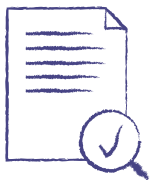
Where a question applies to all of the key principles and recommendations in the Practice Guide, this is indicated by this symbol: **ALL**

Our approach to equality, diversity, inclusion and equity (EDIE) in support for reunification has been to embed EDIE across the tool, but specific EDIE reflective prompts are highlighted by this symbol:

- Are there particular groups of children or families who are more or less likely to reunify successfully? **EDIE**

As with the structure of the Practice Guide, each section of the reflective tool addresses both strategic and practice lines of enquiry to facilitate a holistic and end-to-end approach.

USE THE AUDIT TOOL ALONGSIDE THIS REFLECTIVE TOOL



The Assess, Plan, Do, Review approach in this reflective tool is designed to be an ongoing and cyclical process. Following a structure like this allows you to keep track of the progress you are making and your rationale for these changes.

The **Audit Tool** can support you with this. The reflective questions can help to structure conversations with key stakeholders to prompt discussion and agree a shared action plan.

The Key Principles and Recommendations are summarised in the following tables, alongside the symbols associated with each one.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Key Principle 1 KP1

Ensure reunification practice is based on partnership, trust, and shared decisions with children, young people, and families, throughout a child’s care journey and continued beyond a child’s return home.

Key Principle 2 KP2

Develop a reunification policy which draws on existing practice models that can support reunification.

Key Principle 3 KP3

Ensure reunification support is flexibly offered and tailored to the racial, cultural, linguistic, mental health, and SEND needs and preferences of children, young people, and parents.

Key Principle 4 KP4

Build the organisational and multi-agency capacity needed to deliver reunification support effectively.

Key Principle 5 KP5

Have strong training and monitoring systems in place to support consistent reunification practice.

Key Principle 6 KP6

Ensure reunification practice is shaped through the meaningful involvement of children, young people, and families, recognising the impact of trauma and understanding of risk.

Key Principle 7 KP7

Invest in high-quality reunification support to increase the chance of stability for children, young people, and families, reduce the chance of breakdowns, and prevent costly care re-entry for local area budgets.

Key Principle 8 KP8

Recognise how systemic pressures can affect long-term permanence, and ensure reunification planning includes support to help families address these challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 R1

NO RATING ²

Ensure support is made available and matched to the assessed needs and experiences of children and families.

Recommendation 2 R2

GOOD EVIDENCE

Offer evidence-based interventions to support children to remain safely at home and reduce re-entry into care.

Recommendation 3 R3

PROMISING EVIDENCE

Link parents to appropriate specialist treatment and support through early intervention, following a child being placed into care, to increase the later likelihood of safe return home.

Recommendation 4 R4

PROMISING EVIDENCE

Target multi-agency reunification support to families with multiple needs, where coordinated, wraparound support is most needed to sustain reunification.

* Statistical analysis conducted as part of the underpinning systematic review indicates that intervention type was not a significant factor in the efficacy of reunification support. This suggests that commissioners, service leads and practice supervisors should be guided by thorough assessment of needs at the family level to choose appropriate intervention approach/es.

STEP 1: ASSESS

Start to develop your approach by gaining a better understanding of the current offer for children and their families being supported through reunification in your area. Consider who you should engage and collaborate with to collate your baseline information.

This section will support you in building a holistic picture of the needs of children and families in your area, including those where children have entered care, where reunification is being considered or has taken place.

The guided questions will enable you to draw on what you already know and help deepen understanding by bringing together insights from children, young people, and families; the knowledge and practice experience of practitioners involved in supporting pre- and post-reunification plans; and the strategic perspective of leaders across Early Help, Family Hubs, and corporate parenting. These sources of local evidence will help you shape an evidence-informed approach to reunification that meets the needs of children and families.

The reflective tool can help you assess your starting point, identify areas of improvement, and understand what effective, safe, and sustainable reunification looks like in your local context.

Knowing your children and families

Strategic

- What information do you currently collect about children who return home from care, and how confident are you that this provides a clear picture of reunification activity and outcomes? How is this analysed and used to inform decision making? **KP2** **KP5**
- How well does your data capture the full reunification journey (before, during, and after return home)? **KP2** **KP5**
- How many children return home from care in your area each year? **KP2** **KP5**

TIP

You can begin by making achievable changes and setting longer-term strategic goals.

- Start by assessing whether existing programmes meet the needs of your families being supported through reunification.
- Use the recommendations to inform future strategic planning and decision making.
- Elements of the key principles can be implemented immediately to bring about positive culture and practice change.

- What proportion of reunifications are stable, and what are your rates of re-entry to care? **KP5**
- What factors appear to support reunification stability, and what is different in where reunification is not sustained? **KP5 KP7**
- What do you know about the needs and experiences of children involved in the reunification process (e.g. mental health, SEND, disability, culture, language, identity, and belonging)? **KP3 EDIE**
- What do you know about the needs and experiences of parents and families involved in the reunification process (e.g. mental health, substance use, domestic abuse, poverty, housing, culture, and language)? How are these needs identified, recorded, and monitored at a population level? **KP3 KP5 KP8 R1 EDIE**
- What differences do you see in reunification stability and re-entry to care across different groups of children and families, and what can be learned from these outcomes? **KP3 KP5 EDIE**
- How are current and projected needs of children and families used to shape your local support offer and commissioning decisions? **KP4 KP7 R1**

Practice

- How do you know practitioners understand and value the needs, strengths, and circumstances of the children and families they work with, and how is this reflected in practice? **KP1 KP3 KP5 R1 EDIE**
- How do practitioners use assessment, evidence, and professional curiosity to understand whether reunification is appropriate and what support is needed? **KP2 KP3 KP6 R1**
- Where might assumptions, bias or historical practice influence decision making rather than evidence and assessment? **KP1 KP3 EDIE**

USING DATA INSIGHTS TO SHAPE YOUR EVIDENCE-BASED REUNIFICATION SUPPORT

You may want to consider collecting and reviewing information such as:

- Reunification rates and re-entry to care
- Duration and stability of reunifications
- Engagement with support before and after return home
- Characteristics and needs of families
- Feedback from children, young people, and parents
- Practitioner insights and case trends.

At this stage, you may need to review the information you have been collecting and/or revisit the information you collated in Step 1.

- Is there any other data collection you might want to consider moving forward?
- How are you analysing your data and using it for decision-making?
- What are children, young people, parents, and practitioners telling you about their experiences of the changes to support? What about other partner agencies?

- How is information about family strengths needs, risks, and progress gathered, shared, and used to inform reunification planning? **KP2** **KP4** **KP6** **R1**
- How do practitioners apply learning from local data, trends and outcomes (e.g. reunification stability and re-entry to care) in their work with families? **KP5**
- How do practitioners ensure children's experiences, views and perspectives are central to assessment, planning, and decision-making? **KP1** **KP6** **EDIE**
- How are parents supported to understand decisions, articulate their needs and strengths, and contribute to reunification planning? **KP1** **KP6** **R1** **EDIE**

Reunification in care planning

Strategic

- How do you know that reunification is routinely considered as part of care planning from the point at which a child enters care, and what processes support this? **KP2** **KP4** **KP5**
- Do you have a clear, shared framework or policy for reunification planning across the local area? **KP2**
- How is oversight provided to ensure decisions about reunification are timely, evidence-informed and clearly recorded? Who is responsible for this oversight, and how are these responsibilities communicated across the partnership? **KP4** **KP5**
- Where is there evidence of drift or delay in decision making or planning for return home? **KP5**
- How do you ensure that decisions about reunification are based on progress against identified needs, rather than assumptions or optimism? **KP5** **KP6** **R1**
- How is risk to the child assessed and reviewed over time? **KP5** **KP6**
- How are thresholds, expectations, and decision-making processes for reunification communicated across the partnership? **KP2** **KP4**
- Are there differences in how multi-agency partners view or approach reunification? **KP4**
- How are Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) providing challenge and oversight in relation to reunification planning? **KP5**
- How do you ensure that reunification planning considers the full journey, preparation for return home and support following reunification? **KP7** **KP8** **R1**

Practice

- When and how is reunification discussed with children, young people, and parents, and how do practitioners ensure children understand what is expected and what will happen next? **KP1** **KP6**
- How are children, young people, and families meaningfully involved in care planning and decision making? **KP1** **KP6** **EDIE**
- How do practitioners assess whether the issues that led to care entry have been sufficiently addressed? **KP5** **KP6** **R1**
- How is progress against identified needs evidenced and reviewed over time? **KP5** **R1**
- Are practitioners developing clear, structured reunification plans that set out: what needs to change, how the change will be supported, and how progress will be measured? **KP2** **KP5** **R1**
- How do practitioners balance risk and the child's best interests when considering reunification? **KP5** **KP6**
- Where do practitioners experience uncertainty or lack of clarity in decision-making? **KP2** **KP5**
- How is planning for reunification coordinated across services and practitioners and is there a clear lead professional responsible for overseeing reunification planning? **KP4** **KP5**
- How do practitioners plan for the transition home, including practical arrangements and ongoing support? **KP7** **KP8** **R1** **R4**

Support before return home

Strategic

- What support is available to families before reunification to address the issues that led to care entry, and how do you know practitioners understand and can navigate the support offer? **KP7** **R1** **R3**
- How is access to support ensured, including where families face barriers such as waiting lists, thresholds, or availability? **KP4** **KP8** **R1**
- Is there a clear pathway to the local support offer for parents whose child(ren) have entered care and how quickly are families linked to appropriate services (e.g. mental health, substance, domestic abuse, and parenting support)? **KP2** **KP4** **R3**

- How do you ensure that support is timely, coordinated, and aligned with reunification planning? **KP4** **KP7**
- Are there gaps in provision that may delay or prevent safe return home? **KP4** **KP7** **KP8**
- To what extent is support matched to the complexity and level of need within families? **KP3** **KP7** **R1** **EDIE**
- How do you identify families with multiple needs and how do you assure yourselves that coordinated multi agency support is in place where required? **KP4** **R4**
- How are wider factors such as housing, finances, and practical support addressed prior to reunification? **KP8** **KP7** **R1**

Practice

- How do practitioners identify what support families need before a child can return home safely and how is this agreed with the relevant multi-agency partners? **KP3** **R1** **EDIE**
- How is this clearly set out and agreed with parents and young people? **KP1** **KP6** **R1**
- How are parents supported to engage with services and sustain participation over time, and how are barriers to engagement (transport, cost, or accessibility) identified and addressed? **KP3** **KP7** **R1** **EDIE**
- How do practitioners monitor and review progress against identified needs, and how is progress shared and agreed across relevant agencies? **KP5** **R1** **R4**
- How is readiness for reunification assessed and evidenced? **KP5** **KP6**
- How do practitioners work with children, young people, and families to build skills, confidence, and readiness before return home? **KP1** **KP7** **R2**
- Are families given sufficient time and tailored support to demonstrate sustained change, including where there are additional or more complex needs? **KP3** **KP7** **R1** **EDIE**
- How are children, young people, and parents involved in reviewing readiness for reunification, and do they understand what progress has been made and what still needs to happen by when? **KP1** **KP6**
- How do practitioners plan and prepare children, young people, and families for the practical transition home (e.g. routines, schooling, contact, support arrangements), and how is the quality of this preparation reviewed? **KP1** **KP5** **KP7** **KP8** **R1**
- How is support coordinated with other agencies to ensure a joined-up approach before return home? **KP4** **R4**

Support after return home

Strategic

- What support is available to children and families after reunification, and how consistently is this offered across the local area? **KP7** **R1**
- How is support sustained beyond the point of return home, and how is the duration and intensity of support determined? **KP7**
KP8 **R1**
- Are there clear expectations or minimum standards for post reunification support? **KP2** **KP5**
- How do you ensure that support is coordinated across agencies following a child's return home? **KP4** **R4**
- Are there gaps in provision that limit the ability to respond to emerging needs? **KP4** **KP7** **KP8**
- How are risks monitored and managed after reunification, and what processes are in place to identify families at risk of breakdown and respond early? **KP5** **KP6**
- How are outcomes such as stability, wellbeing, and re-entry to care tracked and reviewed over time? **KP5**
- How are practical needs (e.g. housing, finances, access to services) addressed following reunification? **KP7** **KP8** **R1**

Practice

- How do practitioners develop a clear post-reunification support plan with families before the child returns home, and how are the quality and consistency of these plans assured? **KP5** **KP7** **R1**
- Do families understand what support will be available and how to access it? **KP1** **KP6** **R1**
- How do practitioners maintain relationships with children and families after return home? **KP1** **KP7**
- Is support experienced as consistent and reliable? **KP7**
- How do practitioners respond to emerging difficulties or increased risk after reunification, and how is support adapted quickly and proportionately when concerns arise? **KP5** **KP6** **KP7** **R1**
- How are children and young people supported emotionally following their return home, and how is support adapted to meet their cultural, communication, SEND, and mental health needs? **KP3** **KP7** **R2** **EDIE**
- How are their views and experiences monitored over time? **KP1** **KP6**

- How do practitioners support parents to sustain changes and manage challenges after reunification? **KP7** **R1** **R3**
- How are relationships from the child's time in care (e.g. foster carers, residential staff) maintained where appropriate? **KP1** **KP7**
- How do practitioners plan for the reduction or ending of support, and are families involved in decisions about when support reduces, and how to re-access help if needed? **KP1** **KP7** **KP8** **R1**

Relationships and continuity

Strategic

- How do you ensure children, young people, and families experience consistent, trusting relationships with practitioners throughout the reunification journey and what processes support this? **KP1** **KP7**
- What approaches are in place to minimise changes in key workers and promote continuity of practitioner involvement? **KP4** **KP7**
- How is the role of a lead practitioner, key worker, or mentor defined and maintained before, during, and after reunification? **KP4** **KP7**
- How are relationships between children and their families supported and strengthened during care and in preparation for reunification, and how are enduring relationships identified and maintained throughout the child's journey? **KP1** **KP7**
- How do you ensure continuity between services (e.g. children in care, safeguarding, family help) so that families experience a joined up and seamless transition? **KP4** **R4**
- How is the importance of relational practice reflected in workforce planning, allocations, and service design? **KP4** **KP7**
- What expectations are set around maintaining important relationships for children, including those built during their time in care? **KP1** **KP7**

Practice

- How do practitioners build and maintain trusting relationships with children, young people, and families throughout the reunification process? **KP1** **KP7**
- How do practitioners manage transitions (e.g. between teams or services) so that relationships are not disrupted? **KP4** **KP7**
- How are children and families prepared for changes in workers, where these cannot be avoided? **KP1** **KP7**

- How do practitioners support children to maintain meaningful relationships with parents and family members while in care? **KP1** **KP7**
- How are relationships with foster carers or residential staff maintained where this is important to the child following reunification? **KP1** **KP7**
- How do practitioners ensure that children and young people feel heard, understood, and supported during the transition home, including how communication and support are adapted to meet different learning and communication needs? **KP1** **KP3** **KP6** **EDIE**
- How do practitioners provide consistent communication and reassurance during periods of uncertainty or change? **KP1** **KP7**
- How do practitioners balance professional boundaries with building authentic, empathetic, and supportive relationships? **KP1** **KP7**
- How do practitioners ensure that relational support continues after reunification and is not withdrawn too quickly? **KP7** **KP8**

For further support for children in care please refer to the [Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide](#).

Multi-agency working

Strategic

- Is there a shared understanding across the partnership of the purpose of reunification, its risks and benefits, and what good reunification support looks like? **KP2** **KP4**
- How clearly defined are roles and responsibilities for different agencies in supporting reunification? **KP4**
- How are agencies held jointly accountable for reunification planning, delivery, and outcomes? **KP4** **KP5**
- How effectively are services such as education, health, housing, mental health, and youth justice involved in reunification planning and support? **KP4** **R4**
- Are there differences in how partner agencies understand or respond to risk in reunification? How are these differences addressed and resolved? **KP5** **KP6**
- How are multi-agency pathways, referral processes, and information sharing arrangements supporting or hindering reunification? **KP2** **KP4** **R4**
- How are system barriers (e.g. thresholds, eligibility criteria, waiting times) across agencies affecting reunification outcomes? **KP4** **KP8**

Practice

- How do practitioners work with colleagues in other agencies to develop coordinated, joined-up plans for reunification? **KP4** **R4**
- How effectively is information shared between professionals to support safe decision-making? **KP4** **KP5**
- How do practitioners manage differing professional perspectives, particularly where partners may be risk-averse or resistant to reunification? **KP4** **KP6**
- How are families supported to navigate different services and systems, and do they experience support as coordinated or fragmented? **KP1** **KP4** **R4**
- How do practitioners ensure that all relevant agencies are involved at the right time, particularly before and after return home? **KP4** **R4**
- How do practitioners communicate roles, responsibilities, and expectations clearly to families and partner agencies? **KP1** **KP4**
- How are delays in accessing services identified and escalated? **KP4** **KP8**
- How do practitioners work with partners to respond quickly to emerging needs or risks after reunification? **KP4** **KP6** **R4**

System and organisational factors

Strategic

- What organisational and system-level factors support or hinder effective reunification in your area, and how does organisational culture, including leadership expectations, influence reunification practice and decision-making? **KP4** **KP5**
- How do workforce capacity, caseloads, and staff turnover impact the ability to plan and deliver consistent reunification support? **KP4** **KP5**
- To what extent are differences in reunification outcomes or decisionmaking patterns linked to factors such as ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic circumstances? **KP3** **KP5** **EDIE**
- How is reunification prioritised within local strategies, commissioning, and service design, and is there clear leadership and accountability for improving reunification outcomes? **KP2** **KP4** **KP5**
- How do thresholds, eligibility criteria, and service availability affect access to support for families before and after reunification? **KP4** **KP8** **R1**

- What gaps exist in local provision (e.g. mental health, substance use, parenting support, housing)? How are these being identified and addressed? **KP4** **KP7** **KP8** **R3**
- How are housing, financial hardship, and wider social determinants considered in reunification planning? What systems are in place to support families with these challenges? **KP8** **R1** **EDIE**
- How are resources allocated to ensure support is sustained beyond the point of return home? **KP7**
- How is data used to understand how system factors (e.g. poverty, service access, workforce capacity) affect reunification outcomes? **KP5** **KP8**

Practice

- How do capacity pressures affect practitioners' ability to provide consistent, relational support to families? **KP4** **KP7**
- How do practitioners navigate system barriers such as waiting times, thresholds, and service gaps and adapt their practice when services are unavailable or difficult to access? **KP4** **KP8** **R1**
- How are families supported to access practical resources (e.g. housing, financial support, transport)? **KP8** **R1**
- How do practitioners identify when system issues (rather than family factors) are affecting reunification progress? How are these concerns escalated? **KP4** **KP5** **KP8**
- How do practitioners work across services to reduce delays and avoid duplication of assessments or support? **KP4** **R4** **KP1**
- How transparent are practitioners with families about what support is available and any limitations within the system? **KP6**
- How are lessons from frontline experience fed back into strategic planning and service development? **KP5**

Lived experience of children, young people, and families

Strategic

- How do you gather and use the views of children, young people, and families about their experiences of reunification? **KP6**
- What do children, young people, and families tell you about their experiences of planning for reunification, the transition home, and support after return, including what helps reunification work well and what makes it more difficult? **KP1** **KP6**
- How are children, young people, and parents involved in shaping local reunification policy, service design, and practice development? **KP1** **KP6**

- How do you ensure that feedback is representative of different groups, including those who may be less likely to engage with services? **KP3** **KP6**
- How is feedback used to inform service improvement, commissioning, and workforce development? **KP5** **KP6**

Practice

- How do practitioners ensure children, young people, and parents feel listened to, respected, included, and involved in decisions about reunification? **KP1** **KP6**
- Do children and young people understand why reunification is being considered, what will happen next, and whether they will be safe and supported? **KP1** **KP6**
- How are children supported to express their views and ask questions throughout the reunification process? **KP6**
- How do practitioners check families' understanding of plans and expectations? **KP1** **KP6**
- How do practitioners respond when children or parents express concerns about returning home? **KP1** **KP6**
- How do practitioners recognise and respond to the emotional impact of separation and reunification on children and families? **KP6**
- How do practitioners create opportunities for ongoing feedback during and after reunification, not just at key decision points? **KP6**
- How are experiences of those less frequently heard (e.g. fathers, younger children, families with additional needs) captured and responded to? **KP3** **KP6**

TIP

When actioning the information gathered in Step 1 – Assess, you may want to:

- Identify a core group of representatives from across Early Help, Family Hubs, and the corporate parenting partnership including parents
- Work towards reaching a consensus on priorities listed in the Assess section of the  [Audit Tool](#)
- Establish Task and Finish groups to address two to three local priorities
- Develop a work plan, set timelines and allocate tasks.

STEP 2: PLAN

Once you have looked more closely at your existing offer for supporting reunification, you can consider where there are gaps in support to help you identify which recommendation(s) and key principle(s) you need to prioritise and plan for. You can use the  [Audit Tool](#) to summarise priorities, reflections, progress, and actions. The following prompts can support your thinking as you plan your next steps.

Identifying priorities for improvement

Strategic

- Based on your assessment, what are the key strengths and gaps in your current reunification practice? **KP5**
- Which areas have the greatest impact on reunification stability and re-entry to care? **KP5** **KP7**
- How will you prioritise which improvements to focus on first? **KP5**
- How are priorities informed by data, evidence, lived experience, and feedback from children, young people, and families? **KP5** **KP6**
- How will you ensure priorities are shared and agreed across the partnership? **KP4**

Practice

- How are practitioners involved in identifying improvement priorities and how is frontline insight used to inform planning decisions? **KP5** **KP6**
- How are children, young people, and families involved in identifying what needs to change? **KP1** **KP6**
- How do practitioners understand and engage with the agreed priorities? **KP5**

Developing your reunification approach

Strategic

- How will you translate priorities into a clear and coherent reunification approach across the system? **KP2** **KP4**
- How does your approach align with the key principles and recommendations in the Practice Guide? **ALL**
- How will you ensure that reunification support is tailored to meet the diverse cultural, linguistic, mental health, disability, and SEND needs of children, young people, and families? **KP3** **R1** **EDIE**
- How will you ensure reunification is considered early and throughout a child's time in care? **KP2** **KP4**
- How will support, including evidence-informed interventions, be structured across the whole reunification journey (before, during, and after return home)? **KP7** **R1** **R2**

Practice

- How will practitioners be supported to deliver consistent, structured reunification planning? **KP2** **KP5**
- How will assessment, planning, and support be aligned in practice? **KP2** **R1**
- How will your approach respond flexibly to the diverse needs of children, young people, and families, including cultural, linguistic, mental health, disability, and SEND needs? **KP3** **R1** **EDIE**
- How will practitioners know what good reunification practice looks like in day to day work? **KP5**

Co-production and partnership working

Strategic

- How will you involve children, young people and families including those who are less frequently heard, shaping your reunification approach? **KP3** **R1** **EDIE**
- How will you ensure meaningful co production rather than one off consultation? **KP1** **KP6**
- How will you secure buy in from multi agency partners across the system? **KP4**
- How will you address differences in professional perspectives, particularly around risk? **KP4** **KP6**

Practice

- How are practitioners supported to work collaboratively with families in planning support? **KP1** **KP6**
- How will communication and expectations be aligned across partner agencies? **KP4**
- How will practitioners support families to engage with and navigate support from multiple services? **KP1** **KP4** **KP6**
- How are roles and responsibilities clearly understood across partners? **KP4**

Workforce and system readiness

Strategic

- Does the workforce have the capacity, skills, and support needed to deliver the planned changes? **KP4** **KP5**
- How will you ensure practitioners receive appropriate training and supervision? **KP5**
- What system barriers (e.g. thresholds, service gaps, housing) need to be addressed as part of your plan? **KP4** **KP8** **EDIE**
- How will resources be aligned to support sustained reunification? **KP4** **KP7**

Practice

- How confident are practitioners in delivering evidence-informed reunification support? **KP5** **R2**
- How will practitioners be supported to manage workload and competing demands? **KP5**
- How will teams adapt their practice where services are unavailable or limited? **KP8** **KP4**
- How will practitioners escalate system barriers affecting families? **KP4** **KP5** **KP8**

Planning for implementation and impact

Strategic

- What are the key actions, timelines, and milestones for delivering your plan? **KP5**
- Who is responsible for leading and overseeing implementation? **KP4** **KP5**

- How will progress and impact be measured (e.g. stability, re-entry, family experience), and how will you understand outcomes for different groups of children and families? **KP5** **KP7** **EDIE**
- How will you ensure ongoing oversight and governance across the partnership? **KP4** **KP5**

Practice

- How will practitioners be supported to implement changes in practice? **KP5**
- How will progress be monitored at a case level? **KP5**
- How will feedback from families and practitioners, including those less frequently heard, be gathered during implementation? **KP1** **KP3** **KP6** **EDIE**
- How will learning be used to adapt and improve the approach over time? **KP5**

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TIPS

- Facilitate cross-agency workshops to build shared understanding of reunification and commitment to the local offer.
- Embed feedback loops with children, young people, families, and practitioners throughout implementation.
- Develop place-based systems that coordinate services across organisational boundaries.
- Use joint training and a shared language across agencies to promote consistent understanding and collaboration.
- Involve education, health, and housing in the co-design of pathways and support arrangements.
- Use supervision and reflective discussions to explore complex dynamics, challenge assumptions and support workforce staff development.
- Ensure engagement approaches are inclusive and accessible to diverse communities and those less frequently heard.
- Build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the local communities and can respond to a range of cultural, linguistic, and communication needs.
- Co-produce and adapt information, resources, and intervention materials with children, families, and community partners to ensure they are culturally relevant and accessible.

STEP 3: DO

Now that you have assessed, prioritised, and planned, it is time to take action to strengthen your local offer for children and families throughout the reunification journey. It is normal to encounter challenges and barriers during this stage; however, there are steps you can take to mitigate and successfully navigate them.

The questions below can help prompt your thinking if you start to feel stuck:

- Think about any barriers you're facing. How can you overcome them?
- Is there anyone you still need to seek support from, such as corporate parenting partnerships?
- Consider the progress you have made so far. Is it happening as you expected?
- Are you managing to capture the information you need to know whether the changes made are having a positive impact on foster carers?
- What is the feedback from both fostering services and foster carers?
- Do you need to revisit the Practice Guide to make sure you remain aligned with the key principles and recommendations?
- If you are offering support that you weren't before, how have you integrated it with existing fostering support? Is any troubleshooting required?

TIP

Make sure you are clear on who is taking action and by when. Regular check-in points and sharing of updates, progress and challenges can help keep you on track. Using the  [Audit Tool](#) as a record of discussions can support this.

STEP 4: REVIEW

Once your plan is in action, begin reviewing the changes you have made and impact they are having. Remember that this is an ongoing, cyclical process. The  [Audit Tool](#) can support you in recording reflections, learning and next steps.

The questions below can help you reflect on your support offer during the review stage.

- What impact have the changes had so far on reunification stability, re-entry to care, and family experience? **KP5** **KP7**
- What have you learned from the data and information you have gathered about the changes you have made? How are you interrogating this and asking 'so what?' **KP5**
- What does your data tell you about what is working well? **KP5**
- What is not working as expected, where are the gaps, and how can these be addressed? **KP5**
- How are the reflective tool findings and actions being fed into wider quality improvement processes? **KP5**
- How are you closing the feedback loop with parents, children, and young people? What are they telling you about the changes that have been made and their impact? **KP1** **KP2** **KP6**
- How are you celebrating early successes and sharing these across the multi-agency system and workforce? **KP4** **KP5**
- What additional action is needed to overcome barriers and sustain progress? **KP4** **KP8**
- What is missing? Are there partners or communities that you still need to hear from? Are there gaps in your data or information that make it difficult to understand the experience of some groups? How will you address these and reach those communities? **KP3** **KP5** **KP6** **EDIE**
- Do you need to revisit the Practice Guide to ensure you remain aligned with the key principles and recommendations? **ALL**
- How are you reviewing and updating the local offer to reflect the changes and distance travelled? **KP2** **KP5**
- How is this reunification support offer helping you to achieve the outcomes of the Children's Social Care National Framework? **KP4** **KP5** **KP7**

TIP

Make sure you are clear on who is taking action and by when. Regular check-in points and sharing of updates, progress and challenges can help keep you on track. Using the  [Audit Tool](#) as a record of discussions can support this.

This resource is part of a set of publications linked to the Reunification Practice Guide:

- Reunification Practice Guide: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/reunification>
- Full Guide (PDF): <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/reunification-practice-guide-full-guide.pdf>

Find out more about the series of Practice Guides: foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides

We want to hear from local leaders who are engaging with the Practice Guides.

Get in touch at practice_guides@foundations.org.uk.

