

National Reunification Month Supporting and Celebrating Reunification

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Speaker

- Education
- Professional Experience
- Personal Experience



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History of Reunification Month

Celebrated in June each year, National Reunification Month recognizes the people and efforts around the country that help families to stay together.

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History of Reunification Month

- National Reunification Month began in 2010 as a single day— June 19 (during Father's Day weekend).
- Early collaboration among a number of national organizations, including the ABA Center on Children and the Law, Casey Family Programs, National Association of Counsel for Children, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Center of State Courts, the Foster Care Coalition, Rise Magazine, and Judge Connie Cohen from Iowa.
- These groups joined together to let States know that reunification is important and worthy of celebration. In 2012, the initiative's leaders decided to focus on June as Reunification Month.



History of Reunification Month

Guiding Principles

- Reunification with family is the preferred outcome for children who must be removed from their homes and placed in foster care.
- For most children in foster care, reunification with their family is their best option for a permanent and loving home
- Every year, thousands of children are successfully reunified with their families.



History of Reunification Month

Guiding Principles

- All children need the care, love, security, and stability of family unity—including parents, siblings, grandparents, and other extended family members—to provide a solid foundation for personal growth, development, and maturity
- Reunification takes work, commitment, and investment of time and resources by parents, family members, social workers, foster parents, service providers, attorneys, courts, and the community.

2022 National Reunification Month Website

The American Bar Association host the Reunification Month Website:
https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/project-areas/national-reunification-month/

In 2015 the work of Mimi Laver, Scott Trowbridge and their student interns from the ABA Help manage the website. The original artwork was created Shante Bullock.

This year's theme is Reunification: ***Shifting Power and Reconnecting Families All Year Long***

• Reunification Heroes

One special aspect of the month and the website is honoring Reunification Heroes from around the country. These heroes are parents, other professionals, lawyers, and case workers who have gone above and beyond in the reunification process. These heroes demonstrate a compassion and perseverance to keep families together.

State Reunification Events:

Another important part of Reunification Month is the state and local events that will happen in June. 29 states have conducted at least one event over the last few years, and most of these have held multiple events.

The celebrations ranged from picnics honoring families, to rallies on the steps of State capitols, Reunification events, training, webinars and Reunification Proclamations.

Maryland- Prince George's County- Annual Reunification Ceremony , VA , DC

2022 National Reunification Month Website

National Webinars-

Webinar 1: Supporting Families through Reunification and Beyond
June 9, 2-3 pm ET. This webinar, hosted by Georgia and Oregon's Reunification Program Managers, will explore four key areas that support successful and lasting reunification: Family Team Meetings (Building a Team), Conditions for Return, Discharge Planning/Post-Reunification Supports, and Case Worker/Family Relationships. Click the link to the Recording and Resources for the webinar [Supporting Families through Reunification and Beyond \(americanbar.org\)](https://www.americanbar.org/resources/webinars/supporting-families-through-reunification-and-beyond)

Webinar 2: Building Parent Leadership and Power to Support Faster, Lasting Reunification and Prevent System Involvement
Tuesday, June 21, 3-4:30 pm ET. This webinar, hosted by Rise, a NYC advocacy organization, will introduce the Rise CORE Program, which equips Parent Advocates to help parents navigate the system and equip them with skills, tools, and resources to reunify quickly and avoid re-entering the system. **Recording and Resources** [Building Parent Leadership and Power to Support Faster, Lasting Reunification and Prevent System Involvement \(americanbar.org\)](https://www.americanbar.org/resources/webinars/building-parent-leadership-and-power-to-support-faster-lasting-reunification-and-prevent-system-involvement)



How Can Resources Parents Support Reunification?

- [Equipping foster parents to actively support reunification – AdoptUSKids for professionals:](#)

This tip sheet suggests key questions to explore while assessing your system's approach to **working with foster parents and offers strategies, tips, and ideas** from the field to help you support them as they work toward reunification and make them feel supported after children return home.

How Can Workers Support Resources Parents regarding Reunification?

- Use consistent messaging in family recruitment, response, engagement, and orientation to convey the temporary nature of foster care and the role foster parents play.
- Provide opportunities for peer support from foster parents who have experience actively supporting reunification.
- Provide clear guidance and support on birth family contact and visitation.
- Ensure training includes skills that foster parents need to support reunification.



How Can Resources Parents Support Reunification?

Best Practices that Support Reunification

- **Bridging the Gap** is the process of building and maintaining relationships and communication between birth and foster families involved in a youth's life with the goal of supporting family reunification or another permanency plan.
- **Comfort Calls:** The practice of facilitating a phone conversation between the child's Parents and the Resource Parents, immediately following separation to confirm the safety of the child, to introduce caregivers to one another, and to exchange critical information needed to best meet the immediate needs of the child (medical needs, mediation, allergies).



How Can Resources Parents Support Reunification?

Best Practices that Support Reunification

Icebreaker Meetings: An icebreaker meeting is a facilitated, child focused meeting held shortly after a child is placed (or replaced) in out-of-home care to provide an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents to meet each other and to share information about the needs of the child.



What Happens After The Icebreaker

There are many ways foster parents can support parents and the parent-child relationship. Children in foster care benefit greatly when their resource parents are able to develop authentic co-parenting relationships with their parents. Below are some of the many ways foster parents can partner with and support birth families.

Continuum of Contact

SUPPORT--Minimal Contact

- Have a positive view of the child's family
- Dress up the child for family time
- Exchange letters with child's family via caseworker
- Request pictures of child's family to display in child's room

HELP--Supportive Contact

- Attend training to learn how to work directly with parents
- Have a non-threatening and non-judgmental attitude
- Talk with parents at family time

What Happens After The Icebreaker

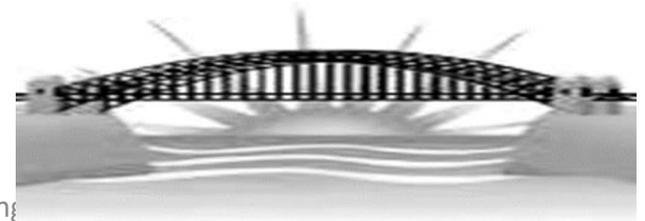
Continuum of Contact

Teach-- Mentoring Contact

- Invite child's family to attend school programs
- Give parents verbal progress reports
- Ask parents to come to appointments

Participate -- Family Participation

- Attend parenting classes with parents
- Welcome parents into your home
- Include parents in farewell activities



Reunification Resources

[National Reunification Month \(americanbar.org\)](http://americanbar.org)

[Equipping foster parents to actively support reunification – AdoptUSKids for professionals:](#)

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Comfort calls-QPI

<http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/video/qpi/2020nationalconf/comfortcalls/start.html>

Bridging the Gap, definition and rationale

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/va-btg-definitionrationale.pdf

Resources

Icebreaker Video:

www.aecf.org/icebreakers

The Toolkit

[Icebreaker Meetings Guide](#)

[Appendix 1: Icebreakers: Things to Consider Before or During Implementation](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 2: Sample grid of roles and responsibilities](#) (PDF)

Appendix 3: (3 files): Information forms for youth and parents:

[All About Me: Child](#) (DOC)

[All About Me: Teen](#) (DOC)

[All About My Child: Parent](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 4: Sample Meeting Summary Form](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 5: Sample Meeting Evaluation](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 6: Use of Birth Parents in Pre-Service Training](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 7: Use of Youth in Pre-Service Training](#) (DOC)

Appendix 8: Sample “Bridging the Gap” handouts (DOC)

[Handout for Foster Parent and Social Worker](#) (DOC)

[Handout for Birth Parent](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 9: Sample parent training outline](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 10: Icebreaker Web Resources and Training Materials](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 11: Tips for Youth Participating in Icebreakers](#) (DOC)

Appendix 12: 10 Tips for Supporting Youth During Icebreaker Meetings

[For Social Workers](#) (DOC)

[For Resource Parents](#) (DOC)

[For Birth Parents](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 13: Sample Icebreaker Meeting Brochure](#) (PDF)

Reunification Resources

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Reunification Podcast: The Children's Bureau recorded a [podcast about reunification](#) featuring Mimi Laver, Scott Trowbridge, and Chauncey Strong. Listeners will hear a conversation focusing on the current reality of reunification across our public child welfare system.

Thank you for all you do for children and families.

Keep Celebrating Reunifications!!



Strong Training and Consulting
Building **Strong** Families Together!

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