

Developing a Reunification Plan in an Abuse Case: A Provider's Perspective

Everyone should know the Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina programs in your county. You may contact them at: info@preventchildabusenc.org or 919-829-8009.

1. 7-day Hearing – when you meet your client find out what they have done and what they have been requested to do by CPS (they should have a safety assessment at the minimum)
2. Ask the judge to order DSS to send you a copy of the current safety assessment and case plan (In-Home or Out-of-Home); and to send you updates of these items as they are completed – stress to your client the need to be compliant and complete the case plan, also explain the benefit of doing more than required, be sure that the client understands that the judge will make the decision about returning the child and it is their job to impress the judge, tell them not to wait for the social worker to make referrals – have them make referrals themselves or you can make them
3. Referrals - make referrals to appropriate services, be sure the service providers are teaching classes that are evidence based, don't wait for the client or the social worker to make the referral, if providers are teaching Nurturing Classes find out if the providers are giving the AAPI2 and if you can get a copy of it, most CPS cases will require substance abuse evaluations, mental health evaluations, domestic violence evaluation, and parenting education , be sure you know what services your DSS considers appropriate, be sure of the wording in the order (a psych eval is different from a psych assessment), be sure to engage the GAL in the process or you may be missing important information at the subsequent hearings.
4. Child and Family Team Meeting – request that your client invite you or someone from your office to the meeting and if you cannot attend request that copies of the notes and the Plan of Action be sent to you immediately.
5. Subsequent Hearings – meet with your client and find out what they have accomplished, call the agencies they have worked with and find out how they did, subpoena the service providers if at all possible.
6. Increased Visitation – request this as soon as your client begins to make progress or comply with recommendations, find out what your county has available, Parent-as-Teachers programs can help, without increased visitation time parents do not get a chance to demonstrate and practice new skills, bonding is affected and reunification becomes more difficult.

7. Unsupervised Visitation – request this as soon as your client is able to demonstrate new and appropriate skills during visitation, always consider the new developmental stages of the children when considering this request, be sure the client understands all the safety restrictions put in place by DSS and who they should call if they have any problems at all.
8. Change of Case Plan – be sure the client understands the legal implications of the different plans (guardianship, termination, kinship, adoption, etc.)