Encourage parents to believe they can succeed.
Parents can get discouraged. Reassure them that you want them to be successful and will help them connect with supports to make their family stronger. Encourage them by explaining that many parents succeed at having their children returned to them, and they can too.

Talk to parents about their hopes and fears.
Reunification is a time of readjustment. Parents may feel excited and happy, but also stressed, uncertain, rejected (if the child misses their foster family), sad about lost time or missed milestones, and afraid of losing their children again. Children might miss their friends and foster parents, and can struggle adjusting to different rules, schedules, and schools. Assure parents that these feelings are normal. Encourage parents to be patient with themselves and to let someone know when they feel uncertain or stressed.

Parents succeed when they are involved in developing their case plans, and have frequent contact with their caseworkers.
Create a written case plan in partnership with parents and youth. Asking parents for their input shows that you value their knowledge about their children’s needs, and believe in their potential to keep their children safe.
Ask the parents and youth to tell you about their family’s needs, strengths, support system, and goals. For example, ask the parent and/or children:
- What is your understanding about what needs to change before your child can return home?
- If you felt more confident as a parent, what would that look like?
- Describe a time when you felt successful as a parent – what did that look and feel like?
- Who are the important people in your life; who loves you and supports you; who do you call when things are hard or you feel scared?
- What do you worry about when you think about your child returning home?
- What services and people have you found most helpful and why?
- Are there different or additional services that could be helpful?
- What are your thoughts about having service providers in your home?
- What is your back-up plan if you experience relapse/recurrence?

Focus on permanency and progress toward reunification during each monthly contact with parents. Explain permanency – what it is, why it is important, types of permanency, and legal timeframes. Remind parents about the conditions or behaviors that need to change before their children can return, and ask what additional assistance they need to be successful. Encourage them to attend TDM, CFT, and case plan staffing meetings to ask questions and talk about their needs, strengths, goals, and progress. Help parents see their strengths and successes.

Parenting Time (visitation) and parent-child connectedness made readjustment at reunification easier.
Encourage parents to attend parenting time (visitation) with their children. Unless safety concerns cannot be controlled, encourage parents to be involved in the child’s daily life by attending sports games, holiday events, doctor appointments, or educational meetings. Encourage the foster/kinship caregiver to keep a journal or share notes, pictures, or videos with the parents about the child’s daily life, development, and important events. For more information, see the Practice Guidelines on Parenting Time (Visitation).

Strong social networks help parents in stressful times.
Develop the family’s informal social network so that parents feel more secure and have someone to turn to when they experience challenges. Identify and involve people in the parents’ network from the earliest possible point. Encourage parents to reconnect with positive people in their lives, join a community group or club, volunteer, or attend spiritual services that are in line with their cultural beliefs and preferences.
Carefully plan for everyday life to reduce stress after reunification. Ask about the family’s current daily routine, how it might change once reunification occurs, and what times of day might be stressful.

Discuss plans for:
- communication between the foster parent and parent during and after reunification;
- child care or after-school program;
- rules, expectations, bedtimes;
- housing and utilities;
- food, clothing, furniture, equipment;
- transportation;
- educational services/school;
- AHCCCS, TANF, counseling;
- community, recreational, and social activities;
- accessing community resources.

Encourage the parents to ask questions and share their concerns about reunification. Listen and have honest dialogue. A parent’s questions and concerns are normal and do not mean that the parents are not ready for reunification.

Maintain contact with the family and service providers to get updates on the family's progress, celebrate successes, and learn of barriers or concerns to address.

In-home family reunification services can support the family while a child is transitioning home.

Services can support reunification by increasing the parent’s knowledge of child development and parenting techniques, addressing child behavioral or emotional needs, improving parent-child relationships, increasing parent self-care and stress-management skills, and connecting parents with concrete supports and community resources. **Meet with the family at least sixty days before reunification is expected.** Together, create a transition schedule and plan, and identify the pre and post-reunification supports that will meet the family’s needs.

Before referring for DCS Family Reunification Services, determine if services to support reunification should be provided by the behavioral health (BH) system. Services through the BH system may be appropriate if:
- the child and/or parent is currently receiving behavioral health system services;
- the child and/or parent has behavioral health needs that are expected to increase during the reunification transition process; or
- the child and/or parent will require services to treat an ongoing behavioral health need, such as a chronic substance use disorder or a mental health condition.

**Consider whether the child will continue to be title XIX eligible after reunification, and plan for service continuity.** Request BH services early, at a CFT or ART. If a BH provider declines to provide requested services, consult your supervisor or the DCS BH Unit (dcsbhunit@azdes.gov).

DCS Family Reunification Services provide a Team Lead/Therapist and a Family Support Worker, who visit the family in the home. Services can last up to 120 days, and end before DCS case closure. Services can include:
- Crisis intervention counseling
- Family assessment, goal setting, and service planning to address safety threats and related behavioral changes identified by DCS
- Individual, family, and marital therapy
- Communication and negotiation skills
- Structured parenting and child development education
- Problem solving skills and stress management
- Home management and nutrition
- Development of linkages with community resources to serve a variety of social needs

Family reunification services are not required or needed in every reunification case before reunification can occur.

Each family and situation is different. Do not refer for DCS Reunification Services when any of the following are true:
- **The children are already home, and the reunification is stable.** If the reunification is unstable, consider placement stabilization services.
- **Services to meet the family’s needs are already in place.** Too many services can overwhelm a family. Do not add services when a parent aide and therapist, or RBHA services, are already in place and meeting the family’s needs. Consider moving existing in-office services to in-home.
- **The sole purpose is observation and documentation of child safety.** Family reunification services are to address family circumstances or improve parent protective capacities to improve child safety.
- **Family reunification is not expected to happen in the next 30-45 days.** File the reunification (CPC) motion as soon as the Family Reunification Team has been assigned, so that the team has an opportunity to support the family for at least 90 days after reunification.