



# ARIZONA DEPARTMENT of CHILD SAFETY

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## Aftercare planning only works if you have dialogue with the family.

Include all parents, children age six and older, and supportive extended family.

Ask the family what worries they have. Be sure to address those in the planning process.

Ask the family what they need to be successful at keeping the children safely in the home after DCS services end.

Discuss any issues you see that the family may not have identified.

## Start the aftercare planning process early.

By starting early, everyone has a say in the process, there are no surprises, and all participants know what to expect when the DCS case is closed.

Start the discussion during reunification planning and transition. Consider beginning the conversation at a CFT, TDM, or case plan staffing. Also, involve service providers in the discussion and solicit their input.

## Aftercare Planning in Ongoing and In-Home Cases

### Meaningful aftercare planning helps families handle stressors, preventing future child maltreatment or reentry to foster care.

- Anticipate possible future issues and include a plan for the family to resolve their difficulties using resources and supports available to them. For example, for parents struggling with substance abuse, a good aftercare plan will account for a potential relapse, helping the family protect the children and ensuring the parents have access to needed services/supports available in the community.
- Complete an aftercare plan prior to closing every case.
- Tailor the aftercare plan to the individual needs of each family.
- Refer to the Reunification Planning and Services Practice Guidelines for additional suggestions and tips. Recognize that accessing services can be difficult and confusing. Take sufficient action to ensure families have the opportunity to practice this skill with providers nearby for encouragement and support.
- Emphasize commitment to the plan by providing the family with a written copy of the aftercare plan, including names of specific agencies or individuals and their contact information.

### Critical services for most families are those that develop protective factors in the five areas belows.

Consider and address the needs of the whole family. In partnership with service providers and the family, explore the following protective factors to guide aftercare planning efforts

- *Parental Resilience:* Ask the parents to identify situations they find stressful and make a plan in advance for how they will keep themselves calm and centered in these circumstances. Encourage them to apply these same techniques to unanticipated stressful situations as well.
- *Social Connections:* Work with the parents to identify the people and institutions they find supportive and those they find stressful. Brainstorm ways to utilize the supportive ones in times of need and alternatives to those that cause stress. If the parents need more support, problem-solve with them how to develop their network.
- *Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development:* Help the parents identify a few sources of reliable information they can turn to when they need parenting information. Connect parents to parenting education classes or support groups, or a home visiting program, as appropriate for their situation.
- *Concrete Support in Times of Need:* Help the family to navigate complex systems by explaining eligibility requirements, filling out forms, or connecting them with an individual who can help them negotiate getting access to the services they need. Educate the parents about accessing community resources so they can do so independently. Consider coaching them through the process of requesting a service to meet a specific need.

### Ensure the aftercare plan is comprehensive and as effective as possible

If the aftercare plan will be developed in a CFT or TDM, prepare family members and other participants ahead of time by explaining what will be discussed.

If given time to consider their circumstances and resources, parents will have more time to think about what issues might come up and how they can best resolve them.

Extended family and other supports will have better ideas if they've had time prior to the meeting to consider how they are willing/able to support the parents and children.

#### Additional Information:

*Protective Factors Action Sheets (general child welfare version) Protective Factors Action Sheets for Youth*

*Family Reunification Planning and Services Practice Guidelines*

*DCS Policy Manual, Chapter 3, Section 10, Aftercare Planning and Services*

*Strengthening Families*

Home visiting programs:  
[Strongfamiliesaz.com](http://Strongfamiliesaz.com)

- *Social and Emotional Competence of Children*: Connect families to resources that can help support their children's social-emotional development (classes, books, or games that help children recognize their emotions, or counseling). Help parents understand how trauma affects children and how they may be "acting out" due to trauma.

#### When families have input and ownership of their plan, they are more likely to follow it.

- In collaboration with the family and any relevant service providers, develop a plan that builds upon the individual family's strengths and existing resources.
- Listen to each family member, and demonstrate empathy and respect.
- Validate the importance of each member's participation and voice.
- Understand the family's history and current situation; focus on strengths and progress.
- Reassure caregivers that talking about worries or concerns is a safe conversation. Help them recognize that everyday life can present a challenge for anyone, and that it is not a weakness to want or need help.
- Be aware of one's own biases and do not allow this to become a barrier to the planning process. Be consistent and honest.
- Identify the family's strengths and use those as resources to support the plan.

#### Special considerations in aftercare planning differ by case type.

##### *In-home (voluntary or court-involved)*

- During the initial service planning meeting with the family and treatment providers, in addition to discussing the immediate needs of the family, consider each of the five areas in the Protective Factors Framework. Develop a plan to address any identified areas of need.

##### *Reunification*

- Aftercare planning should support reunification stability and case closure. What will the family need to have in place prior to case closure?
- Remember that it may take time for community service referrals to be processed; be sure to submit them early enough for the service to be in place when needed.
- Ask parents who they turn to when they need support of any kind. If an adequate network is not in place, give them practical suggestions for developing a support network. During monthly contacts, ask about progress developing the support network. Start this early, as it can take a long time to create relationships.
- Work with the providers to ensure the parents have sufficient knowledge and resources to meet the children's needs in these areas: physical health, mental health, educational, developmental, behavioral, and/or substance use.

##### *Guardianship or Adoption*

- Have a discussion with the prospective guardians or adoptive parents regarding the child(ren)'s trauma history, medical history, educational history, mental health diagnoses as well as current and prior treatment.
- Discuss current or potential future worries the caregivers and child(ren) have that could cause significant stress or jeopardize permanency.
- Make sure that the caregivers have been provided all health, physical health, and educational records (e.g. IEPs, psychological evaluations, court reports, etc.).

##### *Young Adult*

- Involve the youth at every step of the planning process.
- Refer to *Chapter 5: Section 31* and *Chapter 5: Section 34* of the DCS policy manual for specific requirements for young adults

**Adapted from:**

Child Welfare Information Gateway: Supporting Reunification and Preventing Reentry Into Out-of-Home Care, Feb. 2012 Center for the Study of Social Policy: *Protective Factors Action Sheets*

Child Welfare Information Gateway: *Family Reunification: What the Evidence Shows*, June 2011