



A Team Approach to Reunification Therapy
Dr. Katrina Kuzyszyn-Jones

Reunification therapy is often ordered in situations where allegations of abuse are inconclusive. While there are no standards for how to conduct the actual therapy, there are guidelines regarding the best practices for the structure of reunification therapy. As the keystone of the intervention, the court order should specify: (1) the goals for the intervention, (2) the court's expectation that *all* family members shall participate and cooperate, (3) the necessary structure for the implementation of the intervention, and (4) the court's role in monitoring the family's progress, thereby creating and insuring accountability of each family member to work towards these goals. In addition, the court, not the therapist, needs to determine the final goal for reunification. Often, reunification counselors are ordered to begin counseling, and they are told to initiate a stair step visitation schedule. However, the schedule is not clearly defined or a long-term goal is not established, and the counselors cannot make parenting plan recommendations or rulings per the current standard of practice, so they need the court's guidance in order to proceed ethically.

It is particularly important that there is agreement upon the major goal of the intervention, that is, the family work be directed to restoring family functioning so the child can attain and maintain the best possible relationship with both parents, and that this statement be put into the court order. The parents must sign the therapist's treatment agreement, which reiterates the court's statements about treatment goals, providing yet another chance for them to affirm their understanding, acceptance, and willingness to work toward these goals. The court order should include details such as the dates when the court will be reviewing the progress of the family within the intervention, a provision that neither parent has the power to unilaterally terminate treatment, as well as a statement that there will be consequences and sanctions, financial or related to the parent's time with the child—for a parent's failure to meet the court's expectations.

In order to facilitate this process, KKJ uses a team approach. Dr. KKJ is the lead for the treatment team as the reunification therapist. Our other therapists, Dr. Wall and Ms. Foss, then work with the 'favored' parent and the child. Research supports that the most important person in the process is the 'favored' parent; they must buy into the process in order for it to be successful. This is why KKJ takes this approach to reunification therapy. While the disenfranchised parent should also be engaged in individual therapy, this can be an outside therapist with whom Dr. KKJ consults regularly.

Want more information? Please contact drkatrina@kkjpsych.com or call 919-493-1975.

KKJ Forensic and Psychological Services
5317 Highgate Drive Ste. 213
Durham, NC 27713
919-493-1975
www.kkjpsych.com