

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**


Distribution: X and Z

**Policy Guide 2007.06**

**Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee**

**DATE:** June 20, 2007

**TO:** DCFS and POS Child Welfare Workers and Supervisors and Rules and Procedures Bookholders

**FROM:** Erwin McEwen, Acting Director 

**EFFECTIVE:** Immediately

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Policy Guide is to announce the implementation of a special service fee for family reunification support. This special service fee provides reimbursement of foster and relative caregivers participating together with parents of children in their care in specified activities in support of family reunification. The caseworker for the child(ren) reviews past activities and guides planning for future activities together with parents and caregivers at monthly meetings or supportive visits. The fee is available as long as a parent is making progress toward reunification.

This special service fee strengthens Department support of reunification of children with their family of origin. Child and Family Service Reviews indicate that family engagement activities involving families of children in care in planning and decision making, encouraging caregiver support of birth families and facilitating visits between children in foster care and their parents contribute to the success of family reunification efforts. Family engagement activities have the greatest impact when initiated soon after the child is removed from the family.

**II. PRIMARY USERS**

The primary users of this Policy Guide are foster and relative caregivers for children with a goal of return home who are engaged in qualifying activities with the parent(s) of the child(ren) in their care, DCFS and Purchase of Service (POS) permanency caseworkers and supervisors.

**III.**



## **ELIGIBILITY AND DOCUMENTATION**

All activities must meet the requirements set out on the **CFS1042-L, Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee Log**. They must be recorded on the log along with the signature of the participating parent(s) and caregiver(s) at the time of the event, and reviewed by the parent, caregiver and caseworker together monthly. Eligibility for reimbursement requires caseworker and supervisor approval of the CFS 1042-L documentation of caregiver and parent engagement in activities, together with supervisor confirmation that the parent(s) are progressing toward reunification. Instructions for reimbursement and specific requirements are set out on the reverse side of the CFS 1042-L.

### **IV. ATTACHMENTS**

CFS 1042-L, Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee Log

### **V. QUESTIONS**

Questions regarding submission of required documentation and/or payment should be directed to the DCFS Child Payment Unit at 1-800/525-0499, option 2. Other questions should be directed to the Division of Placement and Permanency at (312) 814-6861.

### **VI. FILING INSTRUCTIONS**

File this Policy Guide immediately following Appendix B of Procedures 359, Authorized Child Care Payments.



## Caregiver Qualification for Reunification Support Special Service Fee

A caregiver qualifies for the Reunification Support Special Service Fee for activities engaged in together with the parent(s) of his or her foster child(ren) in work toward family reunification. Reimbursement is available at 4 levels based on the number of parent-caregiver activities during the month, with 3 qualifying activities required at each level. Parent and caregiver must both participate and sign off on the log for the activity to qualify for the Reunification Support Special Service Fee.

### Family Setting Activities

At least 2 activities at each level must engage parents in activities with their children in a family setting. The activity qualifies for caregiver reimbursement if the caregiver provides the location, supervision, mentoring or transportation for these activities. Family setting means the home of the caregiver, parent, relative, friend or a church or community institution that offers an appropriate environment for parenting activities such as help with homework, hobbies, meal preparation, grooming, chores, getting ready for nap or bedtime. If a parent is hospitalized, in a residential treatment facility or incarcerated, then a visit in the visiting room of the institution is credited as a visit in a family setting.

The requirement that two activities at each level be held in a family setting is waived for the first two months of the Reunification Support fee to permit caregiver and parent to get to know one another and to identify appropriate settings for parenting activities. Caseworkers are encouraged to begin the reunification support special service fee log with caregivers and parents at the first family meeting when planning for visits and shared parenting activities or as soon thereafter as is appropriate for the parties involved.

### Choice Activities

The third activity in each level may also be in a family setting or may be any of the following:

- Shared parenting activities related to medical, educational, religious or social needs of the child, see Permanency Planning Policy and Practice Guide 9.5.5.
- Planning meeting with caseworker and parent, supportive visits, Child and Family Team meeting, or Administrative Case Review with parent.
- Participation in parenting classes with parent.
- Attendance at court hearing for child with parent.
- Participation in family counseling toward reunification.
- Respite or other services rendered in support of the family between return home and case closure.

## Instructions for Use of Reunification Support Special Service Fee Log

Caregivers seeking reimbursement for Reunification Support Special Service Fee must document completion of qualifying activities on the log on the reverse side of this page. Reimbursement acknowledges 4 levels of frequency of Reunification Support activity and is designed to reward the effort required to achieve continuity of contact. To qualify for reimbursement the log must have at least 3 approved events. Each level of reimbursement must include at least 2 family setting activities.

Level 1	3 activities	\$75
Level 2	6 activities	\$150
Level 3	9 activities	\$250
Level 4	12 activities	\$400

The Reunification Support log tracks reimbursable activity for an entire month. A new log is required for each month of reimbursement. An entry is made for each activity and is signed by the caregiver and participating parent at the time that the activity occurs. The log is submitted by the parent and caregiver to the child's caseworker, and together they review the past month and plan for the coming month. Each log must be approved by the supervisor. The amount of the fee is calculated monthly based on the reported activity. Payment is based on levels completed. The minimum payment is \$75 for completion of Level 1. The maximum is \$400 for completion through Level 4 with 12 qualifying activities within the month, 8 of which engage parents in activities with their children in a family setting.

Reimbursement for Reunification Support includes mileage, child care, incidentals that occur as a result of caregiver time spent in this activity, expenses incurred in qualifying cultural/educational/recreational activities with the parent(s) and child(ren) and activities that may include other family members such as children's birthday parties, family reunions, and observation of holidays.

**Reunification Support Special Service Fee Not to Duplicate Sibling Visit or Other Special Service Fees--**If reunification is sought and siblings are in separate placements, all siblings should be included in the family visits and reimbursement sought under the Reunification Support Fee whenever possible. In the case of a no contact order or other circumstances requiring sibling visits separate from family visits, both reunification support and sibling visits may qualify for special service fees. In no case may a visit be considered as a Reunification Support Special Service Fee required activity and be considered for any other special service fee.

**Caseworker and supervisor must submit a completed 906-4 with reason code 17, along with a copy of the signed CFS\_\_, Reunification Support Special Service Fee Log reflecting the activities for the entire previous month to Central Payment Unit at FAX 217/557-0639. All activity for the month must be on one log.**