



Child Advocacy 3

Assessment

Families have said the following strengths were essential to their ability to reunify, remain intact, and maintain healthy functioning: commitment, insight, communication, humor, initiative, boundary setting, creativity, flexibility, social support (receiving and giving), and spirituality (Lietz & Strength, 2011).

Family Reunification Process



Identify Strengths

Recognize key family strengths for reunification



Assess Risks

Evaluate potential stressors and risks for re-entry



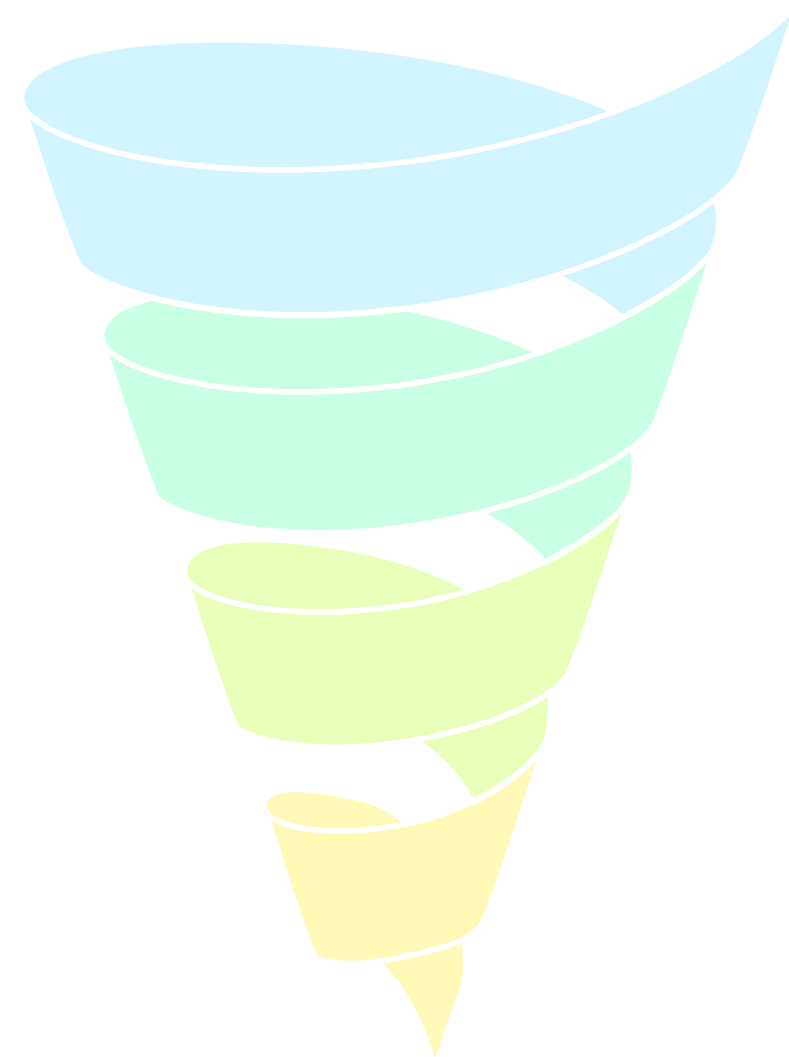
Reduce Risks

Implement strategies to mitigate identified risks



Prepare for Reunification

Plan and coordinate reunification with family



Intensive Preparation

What do parents need to be thinking about to prepare for their children's transition back home?

How can social workers help parents get ready?

Housing

A family's physical home environment can have a big influence on the success of reunification. According to Miller and colleagues (2006):

The overall quality of the physical home environment was significantly linked with success of reunification. Children were more likely to stay reunified in homes that were rated by observers as well kept and not cramped. Access to stimulating play options was significantly positively linked with success of reunification. Children rated by observers as having greater access within

Steps to Successful Family Reunification



8/25/2019 Reunification: Focusing on the Process

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their immediate home environment to child-oriented play options such as books, puzzles, and balls were more likely to stay reunified.

Social workers are vital partners in helping a family find and afford housing, and in making sure the

physical environment in the home is appropriate. We can do this by:

Advocating for appropriate housing for families

Helping families rearrange and use available space differently. This may involve providing families with concrete resources such as developmentally appropriate games and books--some

families don't know what is appropriate or helpful for children's development and for building

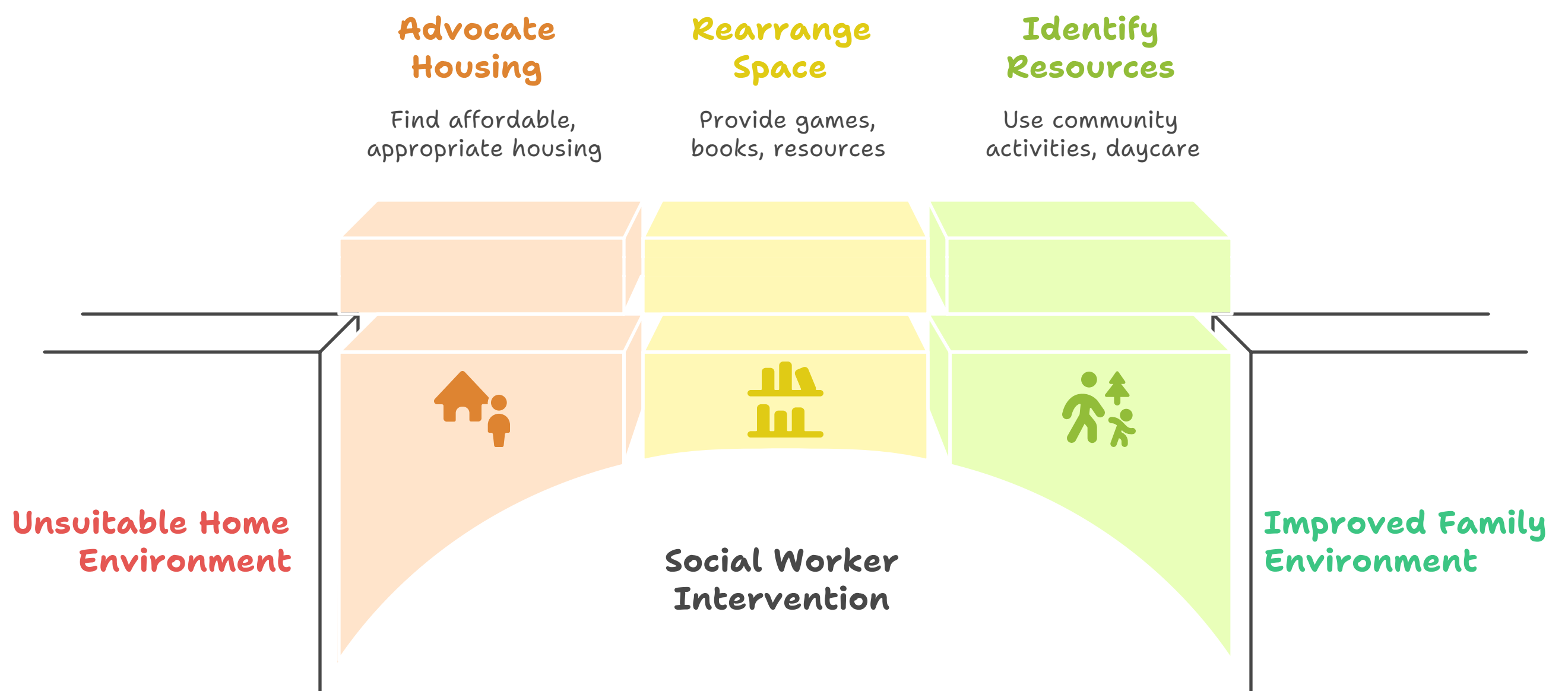
a more positive relationship, and may not know to provide space for this in the home.

Helping families identify and use community resources that provide good space for family activities, such as quality day care, parks, libraries, community centers, and church-based activities.

Rather than penalize parents for housing resources they don't have, our system can recognize when

parents are working to meet their children's developmental needs despite housing problems.

Improving Family Reunification Success



Social Supports

Another concrete way parents prepare for reunification is to build a strong, ample support network.

Social workers should use the time prior to reunification to explore and plan with parents the types

and levels of support the family will need to maintain a successful reunification.

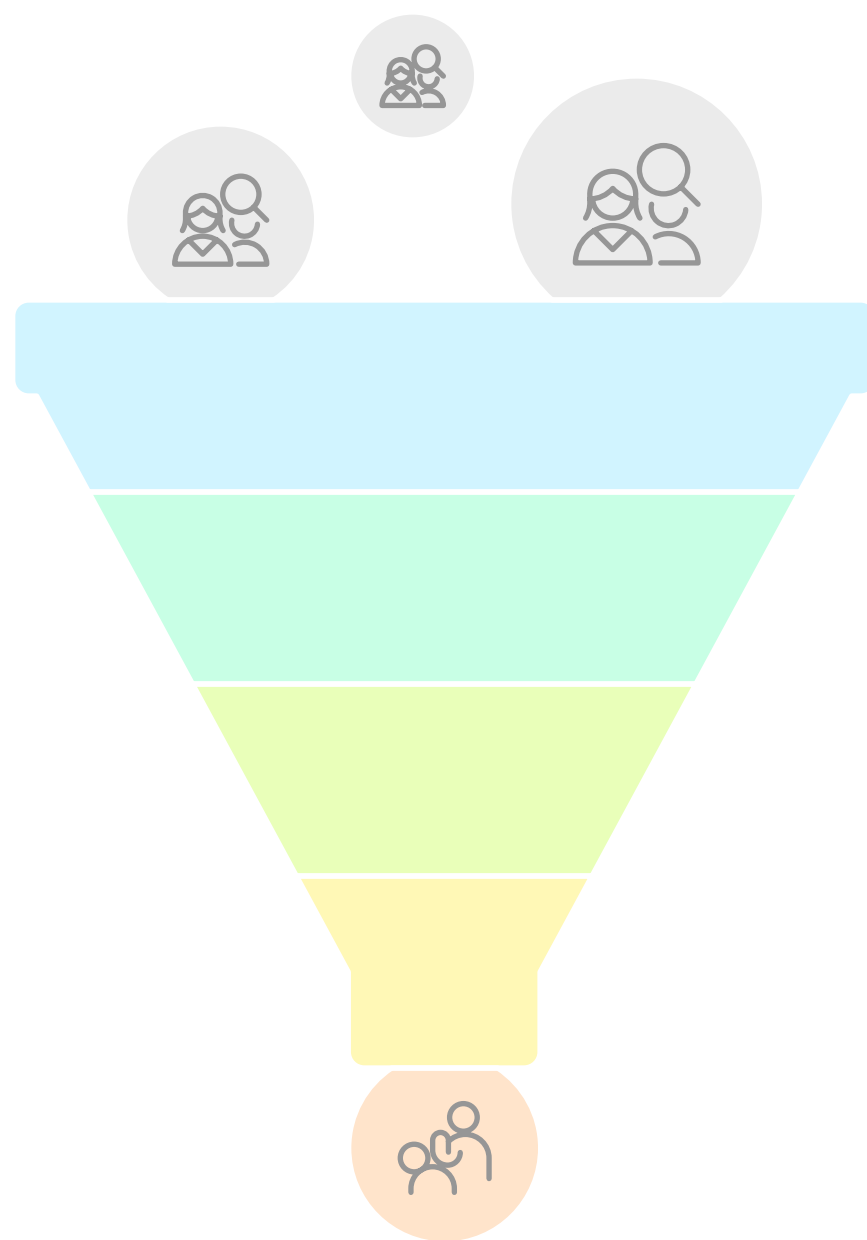
Completing a visual tool with a family, such as a genogram or a schedule of a parent's typical day,

can be especially helpful at this point, since it allows parents to visualize what help they have, what

help they need, and how to fill in the gaps. Don't forget to ask parents which social supports they

would like at each CFT, since this might change over time.

Building a Support Network for Reunification



Explore Support Options

Investigate available support resources and options.



Visualize Support

Use tools like genograms to map existing and needed support.



Plan Support Strategies

Develop strategies to fill support gaps.



Implement Support Plans

Put the support strategies into action.

Parenting Skills

Before reunification, therapy and other formal supports will be valuable for many families, as will

supports that help parents learn and use effective parenting skills. Parents need information that will

help them understand the kinds of behaviors they may see once children come home, and practical

skills for helping children manage behavior, as well as respite services.

Emotional Preparation

Preparing for reunification also means learning about the emotional side of reunification and coming

to terms with what that experience might be like for different family members.

It's common for parents and children to have a mix of feelings about the upcoming transition--

excitement, relief, joy, ambivalence, anxiety, stress, hope, anger, and insecurity. Parents and children

may not be ready or willing to talk with a social worker about their feelings, but social workers can

nonetheless explain to all family members that it's normal and OK to feel a wide range of emotions.

Setting Expectations

Workers should help parents examine their expectations about reunifying.

Do parents envision that children will forget about the time they spent in foster care? Or do they

think their children will miss living with their aunt and uncle or foster family? Do they picture their

family bonding right away, or do they think it will take time?

Preparing Families for Reunification



Parenting Skills Development

Learning effective parenting techniques



Emotional Preparation

Understanding and managing emotions



Setting Expectations

Aligning expectations with reality



Support After Reunification

Parents often need help understanding and working through their children's reactions, responding to children's physical and behavioral needs, and dealing with the stress of unforeseen challenges.

Studies tell us that the following kinds of support and services are closely connected with reunifications that last:

Provision of information and services to parents by the child's primary service provider [Miller et al., 2006]

Special educational services for the child [Miller et al., 2006]

Therapy [Miller et al.] and intensive family-based services [Dougherty, 2004]

Coaching and information for parents about children's developmental stages [Catalyst, 2006]

The child welfare worker's involvement with a family should continue for some time after reunification to ensure the family's needs are addressed and that the child is safe.

Strengthening Family Reunification

- **Information Provision**
Providing parents with necessary resources
- **Educational Services**
Ensuring child's educational needs are met
- **Therapy and Support**
Offering therapeutic services for family
- **Developmental Coaching**
Guiding parents on child's development
- **Ongoing Welfare Involvement**
Continued support from child welfare worker



Research indicates that after reunification parents may be more receptive to and satisfied with practical help (such as financial support, transportation, and respite) and less interested in anything that looks to them like statutory visits for the purposes of monitoring families (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007). With this in mind, social workers should examine their efforts, making sure they assist with concrete support and coaching that the family acknowledges has value for them. Even if a worker's efforts are rejected, there may come a time after the reunification "honeymoon period" when a worker's involvement is exactly what's needed to keep the child at home.

Post-reunification support

← Pros

Cons →



Practical help

Parents appreciate financial support, transportation, and respite post-reunification.

1

Concrete support

Families value tangible assistance that addresses their specific needs.

2

Coaching

Coaching helps parents manage challenges and maintain family stability.

3

1

Monitoring visits

Parents dislike statutory visits perceived as monitoring.

2

Rejected efforts

Initial rejection of support may occur during the "honeymoon period."

3

Timing issues

Timing of support is crucial for its effectiveness post-reunification.