
Family Reunification Plan



Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, KS
Emergency Management Department
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Family Reunification Plan Activation Checklist

This Family Reunification Plan Checklist highlights the immediate steps necessary to activate a Family Reunification Plan during an emergency. Responsible parties are identified for each step and approximate time frame to complete the tasks.

The checklist is designed to be used in tandem with the Family Reunification Plan Appendices.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION PLAN ACTIVATION PROCESS		
<input type="checkbox"/> Authorize and Initiate Activation of Family Reunification Center (FRC)	Responsible Party	Section/ Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Review activation triggers to ensure activation criteria has been met.	FRC Director/Incident Commander (IC)	Pg. 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Take immediate action to keep the public safe. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather individuals in safe/secure area and do an initial accountability assessment. • Establish command and control. • Request Mobile Command Vehicle and Communication's Trailer. • Establish Incident Command Post. • Establish security and maintain safety. • Issue initial press briefing. • Start process for reunifying unaccompanied children 	FRC Director/IC Safety Officer Logistics Chief Public Information Officer (PIO) Communications Unit	Pg. 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Follow ICS procedures	FRC Director/IC All staff & volunteers	Pg. 11
<input type="checkbox"/> Notify community partners (Emergency Management, Law Enforcement, Fire Service, EMS, Mental Health providers, Hospitals, COADS, etc.). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with a Joint Information System (JIS), if relevant, especially regarding public messaging. 	Liaison Officer PIO	Pg. 11
<input type="checkbox"/> Mobilize Staff		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review the FRC's ICS organizational chart based on the organization's unique character.	FRC Director/IC	Pg. 13
<input type="checkbox"/> Determine staffing needs, based on number of individuals that need to be reunited with family, the nature of the incident, the facility's proximity to the incident.	FRC Director/IC Logistics Chief Operations Chief	Pg. 13
<input type="checkbox"/> Make sure that you have adequate copies of the Job Action Sheets (JAS) for all FRC positions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>NOTE: One person may be assigned to several positions/JAS</i> 	Operations Chief	Pg. 13

<input type="checkbox"/> Review site plans for the pre-determined location(s) for the establishment of an Unaccompanied Minors Safe Area and mobilize staff to provide childcare and resources.	Operations Chief Child Support Unit Leader	Appendix E
<input type="checkbox"/> Review site plans for security issues and establish traffic flow pattern in conjunction with Law Enforcement.	Logistics Chief Operations Chief FRC Director/IC	Appendix E
<input type="checkbox"/> Implement pre-determined mechanisms for issuing notifications and document the strategy for issuing alerts.	Planning Chief Operations Chief Communications Unit	Pg. 14
<input type="checkbox"/> Set Up FRC/Coordinate Supplies and Equipment— (within 3 hours)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Review interior and exterior site plans and execute a set-up strategy for each area, beginning with these key locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Safe Area • Parent/Guardian Check-in-Area (out of line of sight of the Children’s Safe Area) • Counseling Area • Accessible Medical/First Aid Area with resources for children and parents with special or medical needs. (Ideally near outside access door). 	Operations Chief Logistics Chief Facilities Staff	Appendix E and Pg. 13
<input type="checkbox"/> Once key areas are equipped and staffed, set up following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incident Command Post • Reunification Area • Law Enforcement Area • Media Area • Overflow Waiting Area • Private out of the main flow area if family member is known to be deceased 	Operations Chief Logistics Chief Facilities PIO	Pg. 13
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for FRC Activation and Operations-- (within 4 hours)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct staff registration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register/credential staff • Issue ID badges/identify clothing 	FRC Director/IC Safety Officer	Pg. 14
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct Just-In-Time training for all staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure documentation process is being followed. • Basic ICS protocols (who they report to and who reports to them) • Job Action Sheets • Code of Conduct • Organizational Chart • FRC Fact Sheet • FRC Layout/Interior and Exterior Site Plans • Documents and forms 	Logistics Chief Operations Chief	Pg. 14

- Establish ongoing public messaging procedures:
 - Prepare emergency notifications/press releases.
 - Train staff on communications procedures and sample notification.
 - Coordinate with other PIO's in Joint Information System (JIS) if needed.

PIO
Communication Unit

Pg. 14

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

During the response to disasters, families often get separated for a variety of reasons. This will have impacts on the response phase as phone calls start to come from 9 local jurisdictions from concerned family, friends, and colleagues to locate individuals within the disaster-impacted area. The ability to reunite family members is key to response and recovery process particularly because it needs to happen in the first few hours of an event. A comprehensive reunification plan can help mitigate the burden of responding to the high volume of requests to locate evacuees.

These displaced persons can be scattered to numerous locations (i.e., injured in hospitals, fatalities, or unaccompanied minors who are overwhelmed by the event) making reunification of groups or families difficult. Family/Group reunification process can make normalcy out of chaos. This process has multiple elements within it, including common meeting locations, information sharing resources, and coordination/communication with the response leadership.

One of the most important elements of reunification is to proactively push messages about survivor status from inside the impacted area to outside alleviates some of the call volume issues while minimizing the concern of those seeking individuals. The success of reunification operations is dependent upon (a) survivor access to communications to include telephone, cellular phones, and/or internet to connect with email, social media, and reunification systems; (b) seamless coordination and the ability to share information among agencies and organizations with reunification responsibilities for evacuees, children, displaced adults, missing persons, emergency welfare inquiries, medical patients (to include those in facilities and those evacuated), and fatalities; and (c) timely and consistent public messaging to survivors and the public outside the disaster area on available reunification mechanisms.

This plan describes the County's response to the need for disaster reunification services when local resources are overwhelmed. Reunification services are defined as the process of assisting displaced disaster survivors to voluntarily re-establish contact with family, friends, and colleagues after a period of separation and providing facilitated assistance to children separated from their parent(s)/legal guardian(s) or responsible parties. This plan provides guidance and procedures to manage and/or support multi-agency activities and resources within a coordinated structure that supports reunification services in advance of, during, and after a disaster in the impacted areas of the jurisdiction.

Reunification Services is a mass care activity under the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #6 (or equivalent) and is one of many support functions established by the County Emergency Operations Plan (CEOP). ESF #6 provides coordination, collaboration, and resource identification for mass care/emergency assistance actions to support the local jurisdiction's capabilities to minimize the humanitarian impact of disasters and other emergencies. The Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas Emergency Management (UG WYCO EM), is responsible for supporting the reunification process in coordination with the ESF 6 coordinating agency.

Reunification partners that traditionally deliver reunification services in a disaster will respond with available resources in accordance with the requirements of their internal policies and in cooperation with emergency management officials. These agencies will respond as soon as a need is identified and often prior to the declaration, under their own authorities. These agencies and partners come from a variety of backgrounds and profit statuses. We will be referring to them as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) throughout the remainder of this document.

Under a Presidential declaration of major or emergency disaster and when conditions warrant, the State may request additional Federal support through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region. This support may include technical assistance, activation of Federal resources and contracts, and

coordination of national tools and resources when State and voluntary resources are insufficient to meet demand in disaster impacted areas.

Relevant authorities, statutes and regulations that may apply include the following:

- [Americans with Disabilities Act | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)
- [Children's Privacy Act | Federal Trade Commission \(ftc.gov\)](#)
- [Electronic Code of Federal Regulations \(eCFR\)](#), Title 44, Chapter 1
- [Executive Order 13166: Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency](#), Dec. 9, 2020
- [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)
- [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#)
- [Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006, Public Law 109-308](#)
- [Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Public Law 109-295](#)
- [Presidential Policy Directive 8, National Preparedness](#), August 14, 2018
- [Privacy Act of 1974](#)
- [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)
- [Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended, and Related Authorities \(fema.gov\)](#), FEMA P-592, May 2019, Sec. 774
- [Title VI Of The Civil Rights Act Of 1964 42 U.S.C. § 2000d Et Seq. \(justice.gov\)](#)

State and Local Laws:

- [Kansas Response Plan 2017, Pgs. 133 – 134](#)
- [K.S.A. 48 Chapter 9](#)
- [K.S.A. 38-2202 Kansas Code for Care of Children](#)
- [K.S.A. 38-2231 Child under 18](#)
- [K.S.A. 38-2232 Child under 18 taken into custody](#)
- [K.S.A. 75-7023 Juvenile Intake and Assessment System](#)

1.1 Purpose

This multi-agency reunification services plan has been developed as an integrated strategy and process for implementing coordinated reunification operations at the jurisdictional level. The multi-agency reunification services plan will help to limit duplication of efforts and maximize use of available local, State, Tribal, and Federal governments; the private sector; and non-governmental resources. The goal is to reunify members of families/groups in a timely manner, for the safety, security, and mental well-being of their members.

1.2 Scope

This plan describes the coordination steps and implementation procedures necessary to meet the reunification requirements within ESF 6 to respond to the needs of the population affected by a disaster.

This plan also describes:

- A holistic approach to reunification utilizing a multi-agency task force, which provides collaboration and coordination between participating agencies of the plan during a disaster.
- Response capabilities and strategy of the multi-agency reunification services plan participants to implement reunification services and meet the needs of affected jurisdictions.
- Roles and responsibilities of the organizations/agencies participating in reunification operations for missing adults, separated families, and unaccompanied minors; disaster welfare inquiries; patients; foreign residents and visitors; household pets; and fatality management.
- Legal responsibilities, roles, and tasks of the various organizations/agencies participating in reunification operations.
- Methods for scaling up operations and integration of State and national agencies/organizations into the response.
- State and national tools and resources available to support reunification and a process to integrate them into operations.
- A breakdown of specific populations and related challenges and resources to consider in reunification plans.
- Methods for implementing reasonable accommodations that will allow individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, and those who do not speak English to access reunification services.
- The provision of support and crisis counseling for mental health, bereavement, grief, and other needs of disaster survivors suffering long-term separation or loss of loved ones.

1.3 Assumptions

- Prior to a disaster, State and local emergency management will have coordinated with the local/State/Federal agencies, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to understand and define respective reunification roles, responsibilities, capabilities, and capacity of their jurisdictions.
- Reunification services will be needed in some capacity on disaster incident's where there is the potential of dealing with displaced person(s). In small incidents, reunification needs may be easily met by the deployment of personnel from local NGOs, such as the American Red Cross.
- In larger disasters or catastrophic incidents, reunification needs may exceed the resources and capability of any one agency or organization, requiring a combination of resources provided by Federal and State government, NGOs, and the private sector.
- Planning efforts have identified adequate accommodations and services required for the timely provision of reunification services, including people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. These efforts also include agencies that provide services for children, older adults, household pets and service animals.
- Agencies and organizations responsible for the temporary care of children including educational, childcare, medical, foster care, juvenile justice, and recreational facilities, and those who have guardianship of children separated from parents or legal guardians because of disaster, including those overseeing reunification efforts, have clearly identified roles and responsibilities.
- Schools, childcare providers, and residential facilities have established relationships and share emergency preparedness plans with first responders and/or local emergency managers to better coordinate overall reunification efforts in the event of a large disasters or catastrophic incident.
- Individual privacy rights will be respected, and information will be safeguarded as required by applicable Federal and State laws.
- Protocols to share information among agencies/organizations providing reunification services have been developed through MOUs and/or routine use agreements; these will reduce duplicative efforts and contribute to a more accurate common operating picture.
- A streamlined process for survivor access to reunification systems, as well as coordinated public messaging about availability and accessibility of reunification services to survivors and their families, will lessen public confusion and result in more effective reunification outcomes.
- Reunification activities are dependent upon adequate communication and technology infrastructure.
- Every effort will be made to make public messages supporting reunification thorough, timely, accurate, accessible, and compliant with all legal requirements for individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, those who do not speak English and others with access and functional needs.
- Mass casualty incidents will require enhanced coordination among reunification operations, health care facilities, and fatality management services.
- Many ad hoc reunification systems may be created during large events by private sector entities and some individuals. These databases, social media sites, and message boards may not be interoperable and may result in duplicative efforts often leading to frustration for survivors.
- Throughout this document the term "people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs" is used for consistency and clarity; use of the term is intended to align the guidance in this planning document with national doctrine as stated in the National Response Framework (NRF).
 - *The fourth edition of the NRF describes how the whole community contributes to and benefits from national preparedness and integrated incident response. This includes children; 10 older adults; individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs; 11 those from religious, racial, and ethnically diverse backgrounds;*

people with limited English proficiency; and owners of animals, including household pets and service and assistance animals. Their individual contributions and needs must be incorporated into response planning and delivery of the core capabilities (National Response Framework, October 2019, page 5).

- Additionally, the NRF addresses the importance of incorporating support for animals into planning and response operations. However, as a support plan to the jurisdiction's ESF #6 plan, this document addresses only the support provided to household pets and service/assistance animals as identified in the ESF #6 Annex to the NRF.
 - *"Staff must also consider those who own or have responsibility for animals both as members of the community who may be affected by incidents and as a potential means of supporting response efforts. This includes those with household pets, service, and assistance animals..." (National Response Framework, October 2019, page 5).*
- Every effort will be made to provide support and crisis counseling for behavioral health, bereavement, grief, and other needs will be available for disaster survivors suffering long-term separation or loss of loved ones and for workers providing reunification services to survivors and their families.

1.4 Situation

A major incident has occurred which requires reunification support to disaster survivors and their families. It will be either a notice or no-notice event and can be the result of a natural, man-made, or technological incident. The incident will disrupt communications and cause populations to disperse; incidents that occur during the work and/or school day and that may result in evacuations will separate families. Calls from many people outside the area seeking information on the status of loved ones will overwhelm local government, non-governmental organizations, and emergency dispatch centers.

Social media applications that survivors utilize to post status updates or obtain family contact information can be a reunification asset if they are accessible. Many groups may volunteer to assist by creating databases, websites, and message boards, which can result in duplicative efforts. When survivors do not have access to communications, cell phones, and other electronic equipment, especially in a catastrophic disaster, it may not be possible to use social media or these types of reunification tools. Lack of interoperability among systems used for reunification will contribute to the complexity of tasks such as validating, reconciling, cross-referencing, and sharing data and will affect the type and scope of reunification services required to support operations.

Emergency responders will be affected by the incident as well, and will seek information about their families, in some cases before reporting for duty. The effects of separation, particularly for children, and the lack of information about family members will likely cause some level of psychological distress among many populations.

This event may be located within one jurisdiction, may span multiple jurisdictions, or may encompass a very large (even national) geographic area if many survivors evacuate outside of the disaster area. Initial tracking data will likely be collected in silos by entities such as emergency medical services, law enforcement personnel, county and State emergency management, public health officials, hospitals and other healthcare facilities, the medical examiner's/coroner's office, animal control, non-profit disaster relief organizations, and private sector organizations such as Google.

The bullets below provide an outline that a jurisdiction may use as a guide for developing a situation summary and checklist for either a notice or a no-notice event.

Define the scope and scale of the disaster (see Table 1 Estimating Disaster Intensity for use in forecasting mass care resources in Appendix B).

- Determine which reunification intensity factors are applicable (see Table 2 Reunification Intensity Factors in Appendix B) and estimate the level of service needed.
- Determine the applicable reunification methods to meet the need (see Table 3 Intensity Factors and Reunification Methods in Appendix B).
- Determine resources required to implement the chosen reunification methods.
- Determine resources available from NGOs, the State, or the private sector.
- Identify any shortfalls.

1.5 Concepts of Operations

A. General

The success of reunification operations is dependent upon (a) survivor access to communications resources; (b) seamless coordination and the ability to share information among agencies and organizations with reunification responsibilities; and (c) timely and consistent public messaging to evacuees and the public outside the disaster area of the reunification process.

All emergencies and disasters begin and end locally, and initial response actions will be conducted by local jurisdictions and NGOs. The Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas Emergency Management agency will identify an Emergency Support Function #6 lead agency in the County Emergency Operations Plan who will have the primary responsibility for reunification, supported by the lead agency coordinating reunification support. That agency will ensure that adequate resources are available to meet the disaster reunification requirements. When the combined resources of the NGOs and impacted jurisdictions are insufficient to meet the actual or projected demand for reunification, then ESF #6 will take action to secure the necessary resources from the State and, if required, the Federal government. A Multi-Agency Reunification Task Force (MARTF) made up of members of law enforcement, schools districts, representatives from large event venues and other interested parties in the community.

Locating missing children and reuniting unaccompanied minors with their parent/legal guardian is a priority of reunification operations. The most effective method to reunite children is to provide an efficient and coordinated family reunification process with a goal to deliver reunification services and support to all evacuees and their families, friends, and colleagues. Accounting for all missing persons, whether alive, injured, or deceased, will require effective communication and coordination among multiple agencies and organizations, each of which may have responsibility for a different component of reunification.

The American Red Cross and other NGOs that traditionally provide family reunification services during a disaster response in accordance with the requirements of their charters will coordinate and work with emergency management officials. NGOs, such as the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), may provide services at the request of the local/state government. Local government officials provide guidance on the plan within their jurisdiction to these organizations.

A concerted effort is made to incorporate all agencies and organizations providing reunification services into the reunification plan and to identify ad hoc groups that may organize during a disaster to provide reunification services or tools and encourage them to participate in coordinated reunification operations.

All agencies with a reunification responsibility are expected to participate in a collaborative manner.

Resource Considerations

Medium or high intensity level incidents (as estimated in Appendix B Table 2 Reunification Intensity Factors) will trigger deployment of increased levels of reunification staff and equipment resources. Examples of resources that may be needed are listed below:

- The Multi-Agency Reunification Task Force may be activated.
- A designated reunification system of record may be activated.
- Large incidents, especially those that result in an overwhelming volume of calls to emergency dispatch centers from people unable to contact family and friends impacted by the disaster, and those where the population is dispersed across wide geographic areas, may require a dedicated call center and/or a family assistance center.
- Wide-spread communication outages may result in requests for private sector and voluntary resources such as telephones and mobile telephone banks, cell phones and wireless access (i.e., Cells on Wheels), charging stations, and/or computers with internet access for evacuee's communications at shelters, service and community sites, and evacuation sites.
- During evacuations, reunification staff may be deployed and integrated into the evacuation operation to ensure accountability and safety of unaccompanied minors.
- Reunification support teams may be assembled to assess reunification needs and to support multi-agency coordination, information sharing and reunification activities.
- Significant numbers of missing children and/or unaccompanied minors may trigger a request for activation of the NCMEC's National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC) and/or Team Adam as well as utilization of the Unaccompanied Minors Registry (UMR).
- Provision of behavioral health resources for evacuees separated from family members and for reunification workers providing services and support to these individuals under stressful and emotional circumstances may be needed.

All organizations participating in this plan retain operational control of their assets and resources.

The Multi-Agency Reunification Task Force (MARTF) may be used to coordinate the reunification support operation. The task force is activated in accordance with the requirements set forth in this plan.

Coordinating Reunification Systems

Operational decisions on the employment of family reunification systems are the responsibility and concern of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas. If State and/or Federal family reunification assets are employed, they are deployed in coordination and cooperation (at the State EOC) with the principal NGOs operating in the area.

In incidents where evacuees are evacuated to other jurisdictions, coordination with those jurisdictions and/or Host States should include provision of communications equipment at evacuation sites for evacuee use. Additionally, evacuee information collected through evacuation tracking systems and other mechanisms can be utilized by emergency management to aid reunification operations.

Information shared between multiple reunification and evacuation tracking systems will be subject to applicable local, State, and Federal privacy laws and data sharing agreements in place among participating agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions.

Planned Events

Special events, such as large community or athletic events, marathons, and political gatherings, may require a plan for reunification. Reunification services for such events may include a standby plan or a designated group taking an active presence to collect field inquiries. These events also may serve as a test for unplanned disasters, with the advantages of pre-planning and additional resources. This includes pre-staged resources, the advance availability of participant and emergency contact information for those participants, and early notification of and/or coordination with medical providers. The lead agency or the event organizer may have specific plans for reuniting unaccompanied minors with parents/legal guardians.

B. Operational Phases

The chart below outlines the operational phases as described in the [Response Federal Interagency Operational Plan, August, 2016](#) . The phases of a *notice* event include actions prior to the incident that increase readiness and available resources in preparation for the event. *No-notice* events will not include phases 1b and 1c.

The reunification phases are embedded in the three Operational Phases:

Phase 1 Pre-incident	Phase 2 Response	Phase 3 Recovery
Phase 1a: Normal Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Mitigation • Plans • Exercises • Public information 	Phase 2a: Immediate Response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activation, Mobilization • Protective actions • Assessment • Determine staging areas • Develop support plan 	Phase 3a: Short Term Recovery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration
		Phase 3b: Intermediate Recovery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition
		Phase 3c: Long Term Recovery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuilding
Phase 1b: Elevated Threat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased readiness • Coordinate threat information 	Phase 2b: Deployment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment • Movement to staging areas 	
Phase 1c: Credible Threat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-position resources 	Phase 2c: Sustained Response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment 	

Source: Multi-Agency Reunification Services Plan Template. Prepared by FEMA and the Red Cross; May 1, 2015, p.10.

Phase 1a: Normal Operations (Notice/No-Notice Events)

Reunification Phase: Planning, Public Awareness

Jurisdiction identifies a lead agency for reunification and completes/updates reunification plans.

Agreements, which will be essential to the success of Phase 2 operations, are developed between agencies and organizations detailing how and what information will be shared in relation to missing persons, children, fatalities, and patients. Public messaging promotes the development of Family Communication Plans in advance of a disaster.

Phase 1b-1c: Elevated Threat, Credible Threat (Notice Events Only)

Reunification Phase: Coordination, Public Messaging

Once there is an elevated or credible threat, agencies with reunification responsibilities review plans and initiate contact with supporting organizations. Public messaging encourages those within the affected disaster area to communicate their location and well-being to loved ones using traditional communications, social media, or disaster reunification technology. This phase is typically handled through local emergency management, NGOs, and the media leading up to an incident and typically continues until an incident subsides or occurs.

Phase 2a – 2b: Immediate Response, Deployment (Notice/No-Notice Events)

Reunification Phase: Short Term

Public messaging continues and the intensity of the incident and the corresponding resources required are determined. Resources are deployed to assist the affected population with re-establishing communication with loved ones and registering in reunification systems. This phase may be supported with State resources and capabilities. Additional resources during this phase may include systems like Facebook's Safety Check-in, requests for and deployment of NCMEC resources, FEMA's National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System (NEFRLS), Reunification Support Teams, and others.

Phase 2c: Sustained Response (Notice/No-Notice Events)

Reunification Phase: Employment of resources

Ongoing assessments and information are validated as the situation becomes better understood. Operations continue and often require continued or additional State and Federal support. Every effort is made to coordinate with all relevant agencies.

Phase 3a-3c: Short-term Recovery, Intermediate Recovery, Long Term Recovery Reunification Phase: Long Term (Notice/No-Notice Events)

Ongoing reunification process might be required to address; affected population displaced across vast geography, unaccompanied minors, missing children, and unclaimed fatalities. Individual unresolved cases are transitioned to local agencies when the situation becomes stable, and communications are restored.

C. Reunification Descriptions

It is important to understand the different methods of reunification service and support that may be needed during an incident. Identifying limiting factors associated with these methods can inform which of these types of services are provided/utilized. Typically, more than one of these types of support will be used.

2.0 PLAN ACTIVATION

The Family Reunification Plan should be activated as soon as possible following notification of an incident that impacts Wyandotte County and leads to the need for family reunification services. Initiating reunification can be a result of any abnormal occurrence at an organization's facility or in the surrounding area, including power or phone outages, weather events, hazmat incidents, bomb threats, criminal activity in the area, or active violence on the scene.

2.1 Authorize and Initiate Activation

During the planning process, the primary Family Reunification Center Director(s)/Incident Commander(s) who are authorized to activate the Family Reunification Center (FRC) in response to a crisis and identify the critical first steps to keep children in your organization's custody safe.

Considerations:

Review Activation Triggers

The FRC Director/Incident Commander assesses the situation and reviews a list of "triggers" for activating the FRC. The list of types of incidents that might trigger the need for family reunification services are extensive since we are planning for All Hazards. This list can be found in the Family Reunification Plan Activation Checklist page iii.

Take Immediate Action to Keep Children Safe

When the FRC Director/Incident Commander determines that the situation warrants the activation of an FRC, key staff in charge of safety and security and public messaging and information sharing should be notified and the following actions should be taken immediately to secure the safety of the children in their custody.

Children's Safe Area: Immediately gather the children in a safe, secure, restricted space with restroom access. The fixed facility should be located close in proximity to the incident but far enough away to ensure safety. Probably a facility that is owned by UG or readily accessible (i.e., schools and community centers) ideally with controlled ingress/egress and limited access points that can be manned by security forces.

Command and Control: Establish command and control, communications, and information sharing with response partners and incident command.

Security/Evacuation: Establish security and/or evacuate to a separate safe area located out of line of sight of the incident or at another pre-identified location.

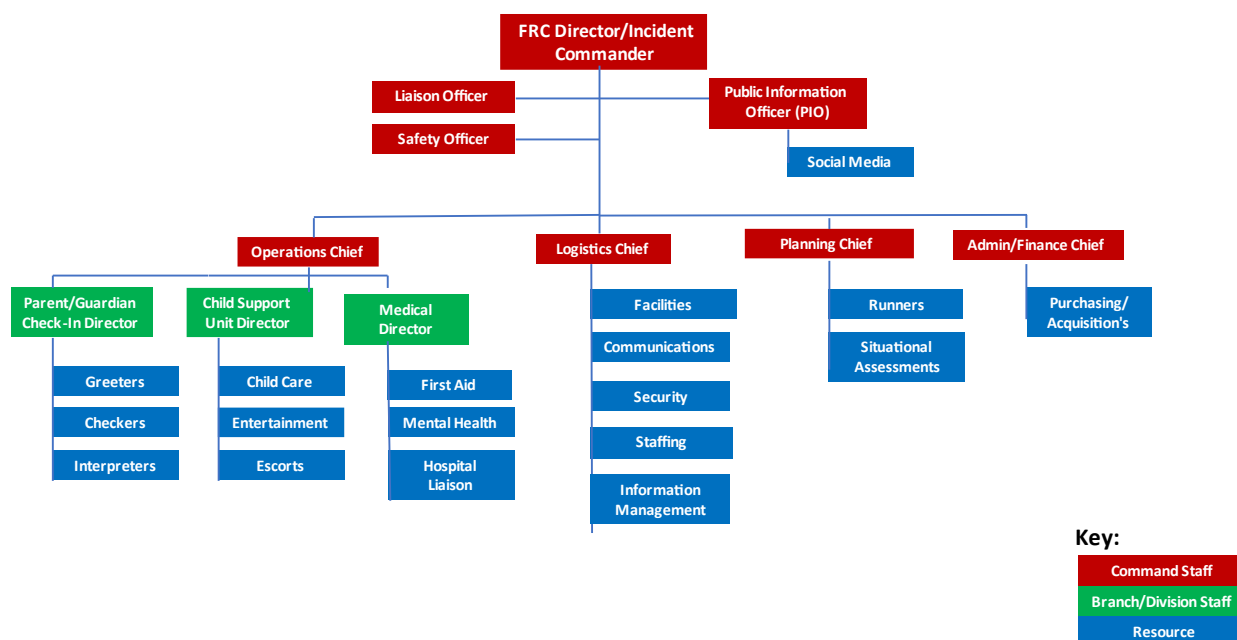
Public Information: As soon as possible initial media messages assuring the public that the people's safety is your organization's primary concern. If known, outline the protocols for parents/legal guardians to be re-united with their children and/or other family member's. Details should be included on when, how, and where further instructions will be provided or webpages where they can go for more information. Families, the media, and interested members of the public should be encouraged to wait for further details to be released and avoid overwhelming the 311 Call Center.

Parent/Legal Guardian Notifications: Orderly parent/legal guardian notifications should begin as soon as possible. Children with cell phones should be given explicit instructions on what to say or text to their parent/legal guardians.

Follow ICS Procedures

Plan activation and escalation are assumed to be conducted in compliance with ICS procedures. Positions titles listed in the following chart reflect an ICS-compliant activation. The Incident Commander serves/FRC Director unless the scale and scope of the incident warrants a broader disaster response and expanded ICS positions. As an incident evolves, first responders typically establish their own Incident Command and agency officials will become part of the “Unified Command.” While the responding Law Enforcement department or agency will likely assume primary Incident Command, custodial organizations remain responsible for reunifying family’s and unaccompanied children with their parents/guardians.

Figure 2: Typical Incident Command (ICS) Chart for a Family Reunification Center



Notify Community Partners

Notifying community partners of the planned activation, particularly public safety officials and partner agencies, is a key component of managing an efficient reunification effort, often in a chaotic crisis. Ideally, these partners were involved in the development of the Family Reunification Plan and participated in regular training and exercises.

Table 1: Key Partners Contact Information

Provider/Organization	Services Provided	Primary Contact Name	24/7 Access Phone Number
Emergency Management Director	Coordinator	Duty Officer	816-395-0120 p 913-573-6300 v
Law Enforcement	Security	Dispatch	913-573-3030
Juvenile Intake Center	Child Welfare	Dispatch	913-573-3030
Fire Department	Safety	Dispatch	913-573-3081
EMS	Safety	Dispatch	913-573-3081
Health Department	Safety	On call personnel	913-573-8855
University of Kansas Health System	Hospital Liaison	Dispatch	913-588-1227
Providence Medical Center	Hospital Liaison	Dispatch	913-596-4000
Mental Health Service Provider	Mental Health Liaison	Wyandot Center	913-788-4200
Medical Reserve Corp Unit	Additional Resources	On call personnel	972-955-1927
American Red Cross	Additional Resources	On call personnel	816-591-5136

In a broader incident involving multiple parties and the establishment of an Emergency Operations Center, the Family Reunification Center (FRC) Public Information Officer (PIO) should contact the Incident PIO and initiate coordination with the Joint Information System (JIS) being established for the overall emergency.

The Wyandotte County Sheriff's Office, Juvenile Intake and Assessment Center will be notified immediately of the activation of this plan. The JIAC will play a vital role when unaccompanied children are not immediately able to be reunited with parent/legal guardian. Their protocols will be followed during these extremely situations.

Juvenile Intake and Assessment Center

Juvenile Intake Assessment Center operates twenty-four hours a day, seven-day week. This program provides assessment services, coupled with advocacy efforts that focus on keeping children safe, families strong, and communities involved. JIAC assists Wyandotte County law enforcement agencies by providing a place to bring children, ages 0-17, and offer recommendations for processing, allowing officers to return to patrol while intake staff assess the youth's needs.

The purpose of Juvenile Intake and Assessment, as provided by K.S.A. 75-7023, is to assist juveniles and their families in obtaining appropriate services and to provide them access to appropriate resources with the goal of preventing further involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Assessments are conducted on both children in need of care (CINC) and juvenile offenders, who are taken in the custody of law enforcement agencies.

These assessments help provide early identification of at-risk behaviors and determines what community-based services may be appropriate for the youth and family. It is also determined if the youth can be returned home or if Police Protective Custody and emergency placement is appropriate pending an investigation by Department of Children and Families.

2.2 Mobilize Staff

Initial activation should include minimum staffing for reunification functions and provide for escalation of staffing as required. The FRC Director/IC and the FRC Operations Chief should review the FRC's ICS organizational chart in Figure 2 above and adjust it as necessary to reflect the unique characteristics and the emergency circumstances dictating which trusted staff and volunteers may be available to staff the FRC.

The FRC Director/IC, FRC Operations Chief, and FRC Planning Chief should determine staffing needs for full operations of the FRC, based on the number of children that would need to be reunited, the nature of the incident, the facility's proximity to the incident, the expected length of the emergency, etc. Based on anticipated staffing needs, sufficient copies of the Job Section Sheets should be prepared (in both digital and hard copy formats) for distribution to the staff when they register for service in the Family Reunification Center. The FRC Director/IC and the FRC Operations Chief should review site plans for the pre-determined location(s) for the establishment of a Children's Safe Area and delegate a responsible staff person to organize childcare staff and resources immediately upon activation.

Staff for the Family Reunification Team may come from one of the three sources, or a combination of sources, all of whom should have had background checks (Child Abuse Registry and Criminal history) completed in advance.

- Existing paid staff.
- Pre-credentialed Volunteer staff.
- Staff from a trusted source.

Depending on the nature of the incident and available resources, individual staff persons may be assigned to fulfill more than one role in the reunification process. Due to the sensitivity of family reunification operations, it is recommended that staff be from these trusted sources only. No "spontaneous" volunteers should be permitted in the Family Reunification Center.

The FRC Director/IC and FRC Operations Chief should work with FRC Planning and the FRC Communications staff to implement pre-determined mechanisms for notifying staff of the FRC mobilization and for issuing alerts to staff as the incident unfolds over time.

2.3 Set Up the FRC—Coordinate Supplies and Equipment

Upon activation of the FRC, the FRC Director/IC should immediately coordinate with the FRC Operations and FRC Logistics Chiefs to ensure that the setup of the FRC occurs in an efficient and timely manner. They should establish an Incident Command Post and initiate a review of interior and exterior site plans that identify the area within the facility (including alternates) to be used for the various activities associated with the FRC and work with the FRC Logistics Chief and FRC Facilities staff to execute a set-up strategy for each area. FRC Logistics should set up supplies first in the following key areas to facilitate an efficient activation of Family Reunification Services:

- Children's Safe Area (with secure restroom access)
- Parent/Legal Guardian Check-in Area (Out of the line of sight where the children will be located)
- Counseling Area (with restroom access separate from the children) and
- Accessible Medical/First Aid Area with resources for children and parents/legal guardians with special or medical needs, ideally near a door with outside access.

Once these key areas are equipped and staffed, supplies and equipment can then be set up in the areas designated for reunification, law enforcement interviews, media staging, etc. FRC Logistics should work with FRC Safety/Security Officers to set up signage and traffic control positions both outside and inside the FRC to maintain physical separation between the public, parents/legal guardians, and children.

2.4 Prepare for FRC Activation and Operations

Conduct Staff Registration

The FRC Director/IC and FRC Safety/Security Officer should establish the standard procedures for staff registration/credentialing and ensure that these protocols are consistently followed. All volunteers or non-agency staff should also be issued badges or other identification authorizing entry into the FRC consistent with facility policies. Unique apparel such as hats or vests would assist facility staff and family members in identifying family reunification staff and pre-credentialed volunteers.

Conduct Just-In-Time (JIT) Training

JIT Training should be conducted by the FRC Operations and/or FRC Logistics Chiefs for all staff at the beginning of each shift and/or when any one staff member is assigned. This is important not only for staff unfamiliar with FRC operations but also for previously trained staff who may need refresher training. JIT Training should address the overall mission and objectives of the Family Reunification Center. JIT Training for specific positions should address:

- Need to document everything
- Basic ICS protocols: who they report to and who reports to them
- Job Action Sheet(s)
- Code of Conduct
- Organization chart with names, positions, and missions, to include who reports to whom
- Fact Sheet regarding Family Reunification Center operation
- Family Reunification Center Layout (interior and exterior site plans)
- Documents and forms that will be utilized by the position

Establish Ongoing Public Messaging Procedures

The FRC Director/IC must approve all public messages before release. The FRC Public Information Officer (PIO) should establish outgoing messaging procedures, supervise the set-up of a Media Area separate from the children and families, and prepare emergency notifications/press releases for use throughout the incident. Public messaging procedures and pre-established notifications should be shared with all staff at the initial training and updated over the course of the emergency event. All staff should be reminded that all media inquiries should be referred to the PIO and sensitive information should not be broadcast over emergency radios and should be shared only on an as-needed basis using phones or escorts to protect the privacy of the children and families involved.

If the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) is not yet activated, the FRC PIO should coordinate with the incident PIO to assure deconfliction. In a broader incident, involving multiple parties, and the establishment of an EOC, the FRC PIO should coordinate with the Incident PIO and participant in a Joint Information System (JIS). The JIS should include all the active PIOs for the event (e.g., from local law enforcement, local schools, municipal officials, MEMA, MSP, etc.)

Another separate overflow waiting area may be needed for other concerned family members and interested parties, located out of the sight of the FRC, if large numbers of people are expected to respond to the crisis. Only parents or legal guardians with appropriate identification should be allowed into the FRC. However, many other family members may be concerned for the welfare of the children in question, and they will naturally flock to the organization's facility when an incident is occurring. Estimates of the numbers of concerned relatives expected to show up in a crisis range from 9 to 18 per child, suggesting a potential need for crowd control when large numbers of interested individuals show up at the FRC.

3.0 OPERATIONS

3.1 Family Notification

In the event of a reunification operation, parent/legal guardian notification is one of the first priorities. The primary tool to notify the community will be through mass media (i.e., television, wireless emergency alerting, radio and social media). It is imperative that accurate, information be delivered, starting with the crucial first message. While it may seem comforting to tell parents/legal guardians that everyone is okay, or to minimize the number of injuries, this first message not only begins the recovery process, but it may also be evidentiary for purposes of liability. Rather than saying “All children are safe,” it is probably more accurate to report that, “We are in the process of establishing the safety status of all children and staff.” Notifications to parents/legal guardians should include a reminder to bring photo identification with them to the reunification site and have it out and ready to show reunification staff at the Check-in Area.

With the number of cell phones available to ever-younger populations parents/legal guardians will likely be the first to arrive at the impacted facility. Prepare for the fact that this may occur prior to the transmission of any official notification by the organization. Children will call or text their parents/legal guardians immediately during a crisis, despite policies prohibiting mobile phone use. Additionally, some organizations may not have accurate contact information for all parents/legal guardians. It may be possible during a crisis to leverage this to the organization’s advantage by writing out reunification information for children to text to their parents/legal guardians. Children are also asked not to send multiple text messages either in or out of the facility or reunification area to keep the cellular network open during reunification operations.

Pre-prepared notification messages are vital. While anything written in advance may not exactly fit the circumstances of any given crisis, it will save time in the initial phase of crisis. These statements can be vetted in advance with the UG Public Information Officer and Legal counsel as part of the planning process.

3.2 Family Registration

For parents/legal guardians there are a couple of steps in the reunification process. If a parent/legal guardian is driving to the FRC, greater awareness of traffic and emergency vehicles is advised. The preferred traffic pattern should be publicized as part of the work of the FRC PIO. Parents/legal guardians should park where indicated and not abandon vehicles. Parents/legal guardians are asked to go to the Reunification Parent/Guardian Check-In Area and form lines based on the first letter of their child’s last name. While in line, parents/legal guardians are asked to fill out a Reunification Card. Some of the same information is repeated on both the top and separated bottom of the card. Parent/legal guardians are asked to complete all parts of the card (see Appendix F, Forms, for a copy of the Reunification Card).

If a parent or legal guardian is notified that reunification is needed, there are some expectations to parents or legal guardians should be aware of. First, they should be notified to bring identification as that will streamline things during reunification. Second, be patient and do not pick up your child without checking in. Reunification is a process that protects both the safety of the child and provides for an accountable change of custody from the organization to a recognized parent/legal guardian.

There are several strategies for identifying custodial privilege during a reunification. Utilizing the information provided by the children fill out the Family Reunification Card the information provided by the child should match the information provided by parent/legal guardian attempting to retrieve their child. Legal photo IDs should be used to verify the parent/legal guardian's name and address.

In some cases, parents/legal guardians may not have photo identification. They can be verified by the child with the assistance of staff. Another option is to solicit little known information about the children. The Standard Reunification Card has a space for the child's birthday. The area for this is on the Escort's part of the card which can be verified against the demographic/enrollment card during a Whitelist custody verification. Or it can be confirmed by the child when the Escort retrieves them from the Children's Safe Area.

3.3 Reunification

According to the Standard Reunification Method (SRM), the following is a description of the operations of the Family Reunification Center in a nutshell:

- Establish a Parent/Guardian Check-In Location
- Deliver the children to the Safe Area, beyond the field of vision of parents/legal guardians. "Greeters" direct parents/legal guardians to the Parent Check-In location and help them understand the process.
- Instruct parents/legal guardians on how to complete Reunification Cards.
- Establish procedure for parents/legal guardians to self-sort during check in, streamlining the process. Escorts bring children from the Safe Area.
- Control lines of sight to allow for communication and other issues to be handled with diminished drama or anxiety.
- Anticipate the need for medical or investigative contingency.
- All interactions should be documented on the appropriate forms in Appendix F.

Most organization use a demographic card to retain information on each child, which may be kept in binders or files. Ideally, it is beneficial to separate the cards into multiple, thinner binders separated alphabetically to be distributed to staff dealing with families whose children's names begin with letter. During a reunification, an organization may experience dozens or even hundreds of family members arriving at the site, seeking their child or family member. By separating demographic cards into smaller groups, the process tends to move faster, and the goal of reunification is greatly accelerated. The system should be focused on the ease-of-use for stress-filled incoming parents/legal guardians and the FRC staff assisting them.

3.4 Support Services

In addition to facilitating family reunification, the mission of the FRC includes the facilitation of support services to family members. The FRC Health Support Unit coordinates the facilitation of support services to children and their families. The provision of psychological first aid and mental health/behavioral health services provided to children, family members and FRC staff is a key element in organizing the FRC to respond to the short and long-term health consequences of disasters for children, family members, and staff.

3.5 Communication

Communications is a key element of managing an emergency requiring family reunification services. Communications includes information sharing among responders and staff as well as public information and risk communications. Once the initial notifications are sent out to the community and to children's families, there will be an ongoing need to monitor the evolving situation and keep everyone informed of the status of both the emergency incident and the family reunification process as well as control rumors. There are several aspects of this ongoing effort, including public messaging procedures for media and social media, communications with staff, and information sharing with emergency preparedness officials.

▪ *General Communication Procedure*

Once initial notification has been made and the reunification process is underway there will ongoing needs for continued information sharing with all the Unified Government key partners. Because of the extreme sensitivity of information concerning children, HIPAA and Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act policies, and the damage that can occur because of inaccurate or premature release of information, FRC staff should exercise great care in safeguarding information and disseminating appropriately only under the supervision of the Public Information Office.

A few general rules apply to information handling and dissemination:

- Disseminate information only to persons with a "need to know."
- Disseminate information about children only when authorized by proper authority.
- Sensitive information should not be transmitted by unencrypted radio, landline, or cellular telephone if it can be avoided.
- Only transmit sensitive information on the Internet via password-protected systems.
- Conduct verbal communications in a location and manner that ensure that unauthorized individuals do not overhear them.
- Use plain language. Speak clearly and slowly; avoid codes, abbreviations, acronyms and jargon.
- Be concise and be brief.
- Obtain pre-approval from the Incident Commander before releasing any public messaging.
- Assume that all written communications could be made public.

▪ *Communication with Staff*

This Family Reunification Plan outlines a communication policy aimed at keeping FRC staff informed of key decisions and updates. Internal staff communication may include:

- FRC staff meetings. Generally, these will occur at the beginning of each operational period or shift change, or because of an occurrence of an event that must be conveyed to all staff.
- Unit, Team and Group meetings. Called at the discretion of their supervisors.
- One-on-one and informal communications
- When communicating with other staff not in your unit, or in another physical location, verify and document the name, unit, and position title of the person you're communicating with. Document communications with person outside your Group using ICS Form 213 or equivalent (hard copy or electronic).

- *Communication with Senior Leadership and Elected Officials*

Local Officials should be notified when the FRC is:

- The FRC has been activated,
- The FRC is ready to receive family members.
- Additional assistance or security is need at the FRC.
- The FRC is being demobilized.
- Any significant event that might rise to the elected official's level.

In addition, during the emergency incident local officials should be kept apprised of the status of the family reunification process and any changes in the situation. If there is law enforcement element to the situation, FRC staff should maintain similar contact with those officials as well so that everyone is operating with the same situational awareness. In the event of a broader crisis, it is probable that an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will have been activated at the request of an Incident Commander. Communications with the EOC should generally occur at the peer level, i.e., the FRC Manager/ Incident Commander and specialists will coordinate with their counterparts in the EOC or through an appointed Liaison as determined by the Incident Commander or EOC Manager.

- *Communications with Public Media*

The FRC Public Information Officer (PIO) should handle all communications with the media. All staff should be cautioned not to provide information to any media representative without specific authorization from the PIO. A Media Center or area for media contacts, interviews, and briefings should be designated away from the reunification activities in the FRC. All communications with the media require pre-approval by the Incident Commander.

- *Communications via Social Media*

Communications via social media have become increasingly important in our society. While extremely valuable for communications purposes, communication via social media is virtually impossible to control, and is subject to misunderstanding and dissemination of misinformation. Social media is also a common source of rumors and speculation. FRC staff should adhere to their established social media policy. If no such policy exists, they should seek to minimize the potential harm of dissemination of misinformation via social media by:

- Urging family members to refrain from disseminating information concerning children, FRC conditions, or other sensitive information via social media.
- Directing staff to refrain from disseminating information concerning the FRC, family members, or children via social media.
- Requesting staff and family members to advise the FRC PIO if they discover inappropriate information concerning the FRC, family members, or children via social media.
- Advising staff and family members to be alert to rumors or speculation being disseminated via social media, and to inform the FRC PIO of any occurrence.

The ICS organizational chart includes a Social Media Coordinator (often a Twitter or other social media user), reporting to the Public Information Officer.

4.0 DEMOBILIZATION

4.1 Authorize Demobilization of FRC

During the planning process, the primary Family Reunification Center Director/Incident Commander responsible for reunification management at a reunification site was identified. That person is authorized to activate the plan, carry out reunification operations as described in this Plan, and has primary authority to determine when demobilization is appropriate. (See Appendix C for a list of Family Reunification Team Members and their contact information.)

The FRC Director/Incident Commander should assess the status of the ongoing emergency and review a list of “triggers” for demobilizing the FRC. Examples of triggers for demobilization include:

- fewer than three families remaining in the FRC
- no unaccompanied minors remaining

4.2 Notify Stakeholder’s

As soon as the decision to demobilize the FRC has been made by the FRC Director and Incident Commander at the scene and the demobilization date and time are decided the following notifications should be made to participating agencies, family members at the FRC, local emergency preparedness officials and other key partners.

4.3 Disseminate Final Media Message

The FRC Director/Incident Commander should provide all relevant information to the FRC Public Information Officer to prepare messaging regarding the demobilization. Final messaging should go out on all media platforms that have been operational during the emergency, including public media outlets and social media platforms. FRC staff should particularly ensure that information is provided in formats accessible to people with disabilities or those who have other access and functional need

4.4 Close Out Operation

Return all equipment and supplies to the appropriate storage area or other locations. Collect and secure all forms, checklists, and other written material utilized in the FRC and give them to the Operations Chief for disposition to the Information Management Unit Leader.

4.5 Conduct After-Action

As soon as possible following demobilization, a debrief should be scheduled to identify and document “lessons learned” and to recommend changes in the plan if indicated. This debrief is often referred to as an “after-action report” (AAR) and is a key element of the ongoing review and maintenance of the Family Reunification Plan, as well as of emergency planning in general. Everyone inside the organization and in the community that participated in the family reunification effort should participate in the AAR. This should include the staff of the FRC, other organization officials, community partners and local emergency preparedness officials, as well as representatives of the parents/legal guardians involved and the children themselves, where possible. The AAR should document significant events and issues, positive and negative concerning FRC operations.

5.0 RESOURCES

[Family Reunification Center, Planning Guide, 2017 \(Coyote Crisis Collaborative\)](#)

[K.S.A. 38-2202 Kansas Code for Care of Children](#)

[K.S.A. 38-2231 Child under 18](#)

[K.S.A. 38-2232 Child under 18 taken into custody](#)

[K.S.A. 75-7023 Juvenile Intake and Assessment System](#)

[Multi-Agency Reunification Services Plan Template, May, 2021](#) (Prepared by FEMA and the Red Cross)

[National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#), Unaccompanied Minors Registry

[Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach, Nov. 2013](#)

[Reunification Standards and Procedures, July 2017](#) (ARC)

[WRHSAC, Family Reunification Plan Template, Aug. 2017](#)