

## Handout

### Summary of Key ASFA Timetables

Some children initially remain with their parents and receive in-home services that will prevent removal. States determine the timetable for these services. Most of these children are in and out of the child welfare system within 3 months. Some may return several times for in-home services and may eventually move into foster care. Some States require that these cases be brought to the court's attention after a certain period of time if services are not successful.

The Federal foster care requirements follow a series of timetables that are estimates of the length of time it takes to ensure a reasonable decision can be made about the best interests of the child to either return to the family or move into an adoption status.

The timetables are built into the service plans that are developed with parents and represent conditions that parents must successfully meet to have their children returned to their care. The timetables are supervised by, and parents are under the jurisdiction of, the dependency courts as these decisions are made:

Time-limited family reunification services are those provided to a child and family where the child has been removed and placed in foster care. Family reunification services must be provided in the first 15 months from the date the child enters foster care.

Each child must have a case plan that places the child in a safe environment that has the least restrictive (most family-like) setting available and is in close proximity to the parents' home, consistent with the best interests of the child. A case review is conducted on the status of each child in foster care no less than once every 6 months, either by a court or by the child welfare agency, to determine: safety of the child, continuing necessity for placement, extent to which the parents have complied with the case plan, progress toward alleviating the circumstances that required placement, and projection of a likely date by which the child may be returned.

Each child must have a permanency hearing, usually held in a family or juvenile court, no later than 12 months after the child enters foster care and not less than every 12 months thereafter during continuation of foster care, depending on the State Statute. This hearing determines the permanency plan for the child.

When a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the State must file a petition to terminate parental rights, unless one of the following three conditions applies: (1) a relative is caring for the child, (2) there is a compelling reason that termination would not be in the best interests of the child, or (3) the State has not provided the family the needed services within the required deadlines.