



**DIVORCE RISE**

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# IN REUNIFICATION THERAPY



EVERYONE PLAYS A ROLE

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# EVERYONE PLAYS A ROLE

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*"Helping families before, during, and after divorce."*

## SERVICES PROVIDED BY DR. VICK

### FORENSIC SERVICES

(ALL require a court order)

Reunification Therapy  
Family Integration Therapy  
Court-Qualified Parenting Coordinator  
FL Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator  
**Parenting Plan Evaluations (NEW)**  
Expert Witness Services  
Professional Consultation  
Collaborative Divorce Coach / Neutral Facilitator  
Specialized Treatment & Consultation with Court-Involved Children & Families  
Court-ordered Mental Health Evaluations / Psychological Evaluations  
Competency Evaluations (Juvenile & Adults)

### CLINICAL SERVICES

(no court order required)

Individual Therapy  
Family Therapy  
Psychological Testing  
Giftedness Evaluations  
Co-Parenting Divorce Consultant

**\*Accepting New Clients**

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## Introduction

Reunification Therapy (RT) is a vital process designed to mend fractured family relationships and facilitate the reintegration of estranged members. The ultimate goal of (RT) is to support the child's emotional well-being by reintegrating them into healthy, supportive relationships with both parents. From fostering open communication to providing emotional support and guidance, the collaborative efforts of each family member and the professionals involved play distinct yet interdependent roles crucial to its success.

### *The Child Needs Healthy Relationships With Both Parents.*

In this resource, we will describe the pivotal roles played by family members, attorneys, therapists, and judges in facilitating the process of reunification. By understanding the multifaceted roles of each participant, and underscoring the significance of their contributions in achieving healing and restoration within the familial unit, those involved in navigating this sensitive terrain can gain clarity and support on the path toward healing and restoration.

**In this guide, you will learn about the roles and responsibilities of each family member and the professionals involved in the reunification process.**

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## Role and Responsibilities of Each Parent

For therapy to be successful, both parents must work towards goals designed by the reunification therapist to help build or rebuild the child's comfort level with the non-preferred parent.

- The therapeutic work requires genuine effort on the part of each parent.
- Both parents must deeply examine their attitudes and behaviors and work hard to shift those contributing to the child's reactions.



- Each parent is expected to support and encourage the child in the therapeutic endeavor, refrain from questioning the child about his/her individual sessions or time spent with the other parent, and be as open-minded as possible about making changes in attitude.

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*In the context of (RT), both the favored parent and the rejected parent assume critical roles in the process of healing and reconciliation.*

- Each parent is expected to prioritize treatment and work on helping their child make it a priority.
- Continuity of services is crucial to success, especially in the beginning. Frequent or long interruptions in attendance will undermine the effectiveness of the treatment.
- Generally, you can expect that there will be weekly sessions, tapering to less frequent sessions as soon as indicated.
- The parents are responsible for ensuring that the child is present & on time for sessions.
- Each parent is expected to cooperate with the therapist's recommendations for how transportation to the sessions will be structured. It is sometimes requested that neither parent brings the child to sessions
- Both parents will be responsible for obtaining help and support for their own reactions to the process, and the reunification therapist will assist with providing that support and will refer you to other therapists or support services as indicated.

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## Role of the Favored (Aligned) Parent



- The favored parent, typically the one with whom the child has maintained a closer bond or allegiance during the period of estrangement, nurturing environment for the child's emotional growth.
- The parent aligned with the child will be urged to encourage the child to engage fully in the process.
- This parent is asked to model cooperation and openness by supporting the child in taking steps that may feel risky to the child.

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- This parent will be urged to keep his or her fears and resistances in check as the child engages in therapy.
- This parent often feels that the process is advancing too quickly, especially when the child is observed dealing with the discomfort of approaching a previously avoided source of stress.
- They must demonstrate empathy, patience, and understanding toward the child's feelings while also encouraging open communication and facilitating positive interactions between the child and the rejected parent.
- Additionally, the favored parent may need to address any lingering perceptions or misconceptions the child holds about the rejected parent, helping them to understand and empathize with the other parent's perspective.
- Fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for the child's emotional growth. Demonstrate empathy, patience, and understanding towards the child's feelings while also encouraging open communication and facilitating positive interactions between the child and the rejected parent. May need to address any lingering negative perceptions or misconceptions the child holds about the rejected parent.



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## Role of the Rejected (Targeted) Parent



- **The parent who is the target of the child's resistance** will be urged to be patient with the process, as this parent frequently feels the process is too slow.
- This parent will be urged to keep his or her needs for a speedy reunification in check, understanding that the therapy will move at a pace appropriate to the child's needs and readiness.
- This parent will be urged to concentrate on restoring the parent-child relationship instead of restoring parenting time.

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- The rejected parent faces the challenging task of rebuilding trust and repairing the ruptured relationship with the child.
- This parent must approach the reunification process with patience, resilience, and a willingness to acknowledge past mistakes or shortcomings without placing blame on the child.
- The rejected parent can gradually rebuild a sense of trust and security within the parent-child relationship through:
  1. Consistent efforts to reconnect with the child
  2. Demonstration of love
  3. Commitment
  4. Establishment of healthy boundaries
- The rejected parent faces the challenging task of rebuilding trust and repairing the ruptured relationship with the child.

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- This parent must approach the reunification process with patience, resilience, and a willingness to acknowledge past mistakes or shortcomings without placing blame on the child.
- Through consistent efforts to reconnect with the child, demonstrate love and commitment, and establish healthy boundaries, the rejected parent can gradually rebuild a sense of trust and security within the parent-child relationship.
- Moreover, they can benefit from therapy to address their own strategies for managing any challenges that arise during the reunification process.

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## Role and Responsibilities of the Child

- The role of the child is central and multifaceted, characterized by their emotional journey, needs, and capacity for growth.
- First and foremost, the child is an active participant whose emotions, perceptions, and experiences shape the trajectory of the reunification process. They may harbor complex feelings of anger, confusion, fear, or sadness stemming from the family's history of conflict or estrangement. As such, the child's willingness to engage in therapy, express their emotions, and participate in activities aimed at rebuilding relationships is crucial.



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- Moreover, the child's role encompasses their capacity to develop empathy, understanding, and forgiveness towards both parents. Through therapy, they can explore and process their emotions in a safe and supportive environment, gradually unraveling any negative beliefs or misconceptions they may hold about the rejected parent.
- This journey often involves encouraging the child to voice their thoughts and concerns, validating their emotions, and providing them with age-appropriate explanations about the complexities of adult relationships.
- It is common for children to be reluctant or resistant to participating in RT, especially if one parent is opposed to it and/or the court has ordered it.
- The child will receive a high level of support and encouragement by the therapist.
- The therapist will make great effort to hear the child and understand his or her experience.
- The pace of the therapy will be in accordance with the needs and readiness of the child, although that does not mean that the child will never experience discomfort or feel some degree of pressure.

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- Additionally, the child's active involvement in reunification therapy includes their commitment to practicing effective communication and conflict resolution skills. Therapeutic interventions such as role-playing, storytelling, and guided discussions empower the child to express their needs assertively, set boundaries, and navigate familial dynamics constructively.
- By learning to communicate openly and honestly with both parents, the child plays a vital role in fostering mutual understanding and trust within the family unit.
- Furthermore, the child's role extends beyond the therapy sessions to their daily interactions and experiences within the family environment. They may be encouraged to engage in shared activities, rituals, and bonding exercises with both parents, promoting a sense of belonging and connection. Through consistent reinforcement of positive behaviors and reinforcement of healthy boundaries, the child contributes to the gradual rebuilding of familial bonds and the cultivation of a supportive, nurturing family environment.
- Overall, the child's role in reunification therapy is one of resilience, growth, and transformation. By actively participating in the therapeutic process, expressing their emotions, and engaging in constructive interactions with both parents, the child becomes an agent of change, paving the way for healing, reconciliation, and lasting familial harmony.

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- Like both parents, The child's responsibility will be to prioritize family therapy.
- The child will be expected to attend sessions and engage in child-centered ways of exploring family relationships and trying new ways of dealing with problems.
- In most cases, when both parents are committed to the process, children are likely to engage in it as well.
- Be respectful to their parents.
- The child will be expected to attend sessions and engage in child-centered ways of exploring family relationships and trying new ways of dealing with problems.
- In most cases, when both parents are committed to the process, children are likely to engage.

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## Role and Responsibilities of the Therapist

The reunification therapy is bound by:

- The court order defining the scope of their role (limits and expectations)
- His or her ethical obligations (of the state they are practicing in as well \_\_\_\_)
- His or her legal obligations as a licensed mental health provider in the state in which they are practicing.





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## The Reunification Therapist should NOT:

- Gather data to give an opinion of whether alienation / estrangement / alignment exists
- Conduct a psychological assessment
- Engage in dual roles
- Make attempts toward settlement
- Make recommendations for possession or access
- Work without a court order
- Have inconsistent or blurred boundaries
- Make timesharing or custody recommendations or decisions

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- The reunification therapist will assess the family to determine the needs and strengths of each family member involved and to identify the barriers to reunification.
- If evaluations have already occurred the reunification therapist will want to review those previous reports and other relevant documents and records.
- The reunification therapist is likely to coordinate care with other professionals involved in your case., as well as, contact past providers for additional information needed to treat the family.
- Will meet with each parent individually to conduct an intake interview. During this interview, the reunification therapist will gather data to help him or her understand the needs of the family and begin to set goals for treatment.
- Will have individual (RT) sessions with the child(ren).
- The reunification therapist strives to work in a time and cost-efficient manner but paces the process per the needs of the child(ren).

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- Will ensure that any contact outside of therapy sessions is planned and structured in a predictable manner, defines everyone's roles and responsibilities, and supports healthy contact,
- Will ensure both parents understand their parenting plan and are following it to avoid any barriers to the parent-child relationships.
- The reunification therapist also provides the court and other professionals involved, as well as the parents with updated progress notes regarding the reunification process.
- Is a mandated reporter and is required to report suspected abuse, neglect etc..
- **IMPORTANTLY** a reunification order should not include putting the therapist in the role of making custody recommendations or creating visitation schedules, because that hinders the therapeutic process by interfering with the therapeutic relationship. The therapeutic relationship, which is very important, is strained when a therapist is asked to create visitation schedules or recommendations regarding visitation outside of therapy because parents and children seek to convince the therapist that the schedule they want is ideal versus focusing on truly engaging in the therapeutic process. This almost always impedes in some ways therapeutic rapport and directly hinders progress in therapy

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When (RT) participants see the therapist as the person who determines the custody/visitation schedule, it serves to keep them entrenched in their positions and closed to emotional healing and positive change, as they consciously or unconsciously focus more on persuading the therapist to support their preferred custody/visitation schedule than they focus on the therapeutic work of improving family relationships and mental health

## The reunification therapist should possess the following skills:

- Strong foundation in family therapy techniques and strategies
- Proven ability to diffuse conflict
- Ability to appropriately confront where needed
- Possession of motivational interviewing skills
- Ability to use Cognitive/Behavioral Therapy techniques, tools, and homework
- A solution-focused orientation

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- Participation in ongoing education and experience in family law
- Ongoing knowledge and experience working with attorneys and judges
- Ability to write clearly and succinctly and to document for the Judge, the attorneys, and the family an accurate reflection of the therapeutic process
- Ability to work as a member of a therapeutic team
- Ability to set boundaries that are stronger than ever before
- Continual refinement of processes and monitoring to guard against bias
- Ferocious appetite for the literature to possess the most reputable knowledge of the spectrum of alienation/estrangement/alignment in families
- Strong resiliency for being the “bad guy”
- Continual self-monitoring to prevent burnout

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## Role and Responsibilities of Attorneys

Attorneys play a crucial role in (RT) by providing legal guidance, advocating for their client's rights, providing support for both the parent and the child, and facilitating communication between the parties involved. They help navigate complex family dynamics, ensuring that the reunification process complies with court orders and legal requirements. Attorneys also work to protect the best interests of their clients and any children involved, addressing concerns such as custody arrangements, visitation rights, and potential conflicts that may arise during therapy sessions.

### 1. Legal Consultation:

- Attorneys can provide parents with legal advice and guidance regarding their rights and responsibilities in the reunification process.
- They can help parents understand court orders, custody agreements, and any legal implications related to reunification therapy.

### 2. Advocacy:

- Attorneys advocate on behalf of their clients during court proceedings or negotiations related to reunification therapy.
- They ensure that their client's interests and concerns are represented and addressed effectively within the legal system.

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## 3. Mediation and Negotiation:

- Attorneys can assist in negotiating terms and conditions for reunification therapy, including scheduling, logistics, and financial arrangements.
- They may facilitate communication and mediation between parties to reach mutually agreeable solutions.

## 4. Compliance with Court Orders:

- Attorneys ensure that their clients comply with any court orders related to reunification therapy, including attending sessions, providing necessary documentation, or facilitating access to the child.
- They help navigate any legal consequences or disputes that may arise from non-compliance.

## 5. Protection of Rights:

- Attorneys protect their client's legal rights throughout the reunification therapy process, including parental rights, visitation rights, and privacy rights.
- They intervene if there are concerns about the safety or well-being of the parent or child during therapy sessions.

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## 6. Liaison with Therapists and Legal Professionals:

- Attorneys may collaborate with therapists, social workers, and other legal professionals involved in the reunification process to ensure effective communication and coordination of efforts.
- They provide legal documentation or information as needed to support the therapy process.

## 7. Post-Therapy Legal Support:

- Attorneys offer ongoing legal support and guidance after the completion of reunification therapy, particularly in cases where modifications to custody or visitation arrangements are necessary.
- They assist in enforcing agreements reached during therapy and address any legal issues that may arise thereafter.

In summary, attorneys play a multifaceted role in reunification therapy, offering legal expertise, advocacy, and support to parents and children navigating the complexities of family dynamics and legal proceedings. By working collaboratively with therapists and other professionals, attorneys help facilitate a smoother and more effective reunification process for families in need.



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## Role and Responsibilities of Family Court Judges

Family Court Judges play a role in overseeing and facilitating the (RT) process. Their primary responsibility is to ensure the well-being and best interests of the children involved.

Judges may order (RT) when there are issues of estrangement or alienation between a parent and child, or when there are some concerns about the child's relationship with one or both parents.

## The Judge's Role

### Ordering Reunification Therapy:

The judge assesses the situation based on evidence presented in court and may order (RT) as part of a broader custody or visitation arrangement.

### Setting Expectations and Guidelines:

Judges establish expectations and guidelines for the reunification process, including the frequency and duration of therapy sessions, the roles and responsibilities of each party, and any court-mandated requirements.

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## **Monitoring Progress:**

Judges monitor the progress of (RT) through regular status hearings or progress reports submitted by therapists. They may modify court orders based on the recommendations of the therapist or the parties involved.

## **Enforcing Compliance:**

If one or both parties fail to comply with court-ordered reunification therapy or engage in behavior that undermines the process, the judge has the authority to enforce compliance through sanctions or other legal measures.

## **Protecting the Child's Best Interest:**

Throughout the reunification process, the judge remains focused on the child's well-being and safety. They may intervene if there are concerns about the child's emotional or physical safety during therapy sessions.

## **Making Final Determinations:**

Ultimately, the judge may make final determinations regarding custody, visitation, or other parental rights based on the outcomes of the (RT) process and other relevant factors presented in court.

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In conclusion, successful (RT) relies on the collaborative efforts of each family member, the guidance of a compassionate family law attorney, and the impartial decisions of a knowledgeable judge.

Through dedication and cooperation, and by understanding and embracing their respective roles professionals and families can navigate the complexities of reunification with empathy, communication, and commitment to healing.

Thus allowing the reunification process to foster lasting bonds, promote growth, and ultimately lead to a brighter future for all involved.

