


REUNIFICATION THERAPY COURT ORDERS



The
Foundation
of
Reunification
Therapy



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Introduction

In the complex landscape of family dynamics, where ruptures and conflicts can strain relationships, the emergence of reunification therapy brings hope for families seeking to mend the bonds that have been strained or broken. At the core of this therapeutic journey lies the critical element of a well-crafted court order, serving as the foundation that supports the process and guides the path toward healing and reconciliation.

Reunification therapy (RT) is court-ordered in cases of parent-child contact problems and holds the promise of rebuilding connections in separated or divorced families. However, the success of this delicate process hinges on the clarity, specificity, and foresight embedded within the court order that initiates and oversees the therapy. This resource delves into the pivotal role that a comprehensive court order plays in the context of (RT) and its profound impact on the outcome of family healing.

As we explore the multifaceted dimensions of (RT), we will uncover why a detailed court order is not a mere legal formality but an indispensable tool that shapes the trajectory of the therapeutic intervention. From setting the stage for therapist-parent collaboration to establishing expectations and responsibilities, the court order emerges as a linchpin in fostering an environment conducive to successful reunification.

The court order for (RT) cannot be overstated in these cases. This resource will help family law attorneys and judges understand the requirements of reunification therapy and the importance of a court order in ensuring the reunification process is supported and set up for success.

You will learn:

- Definition of (RT) and Overall Treatment Goals
- Reasons for Parent-Child Contact Problems
- Factors Contributing To and Maintaining Contact Problems
- The Important Role of the Family Law Attorney
- How Triaging (RT) Cases Lead to Better Outcomes
- Why a Court Order for (RT) Is So Important
- What Makes a Good Court Order for (RT)
- The Components of a Court Order for (RT)
- Additional Language for Court Orders

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A Brief Overview of Reunification Therapy (RT):

(RT) is a therapeutic intervention designed to repair and strengthen the bonds between parents and children that may have been strained or disrupted. Rooted in the understanding of attachment dynamics, the primary goal is to foster secure emotional connections by providing a safe and supportive environment for parent-child interactions. This process aims to address any ruptures in attachment, promoting a sense of trust, safety, and emotional responsiveness. Through guided interventions, (RT) seeks to enhance the attachment bond, facilitating a secure base for the child and promoting healthy familial relationships.

(RT) is a court-ordered form of family therapy utilized when a parent-child contact problem results in a child refusing to spend time with a parent. This form of child refusal commonly occurs in separated or divorced families.

(RT) differentiates itself from traditional therapy by necessitating active participation from all family members involved. Given that family members engaged in (RT) often possess varying historical perspectives of conflict and events, (RT) can present a challenging process for all those involved.

The primary objective of (RT) is to re-establish a healthy relationship between estranged parents and their child(ren). However, the outcome of (RT) doesn't always culminate in the reunification of the estranged parent with their child(ren).

The therapeutic process will almost always involve discussing unpleasant memories and events and processing difficult emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration, betrayal, guilt, and insecurity. It requires parents to set aside hurt feelings, old conflicts, or manipulation to collaborate in the best interest of the child(ren). If parent(s) cannot work together to support the healthy relationship of the child and each parent, resolve parent-child relationship problems (fictional or factual), and learn healthy co-parenting strategies, (RT) will fail and need termination before the child is “psychologically pulled apart” by the therapeutic efforts of the reunification therapist and the pathogenic parenting practices of one or both parents.

The Important Role Attorneys Play in Triaging and Crafting the Court Order for (RT):

For family law attorneys, recognizing the pivotal role of a detailed court order in (RT) is paramount. Such an order serves as the blueprint for navigating the complexities inherent in reuniting families. It clarifies the scope, objectives, and responsibilities of each party involved,

emphasizing collaboration in the therapeutic process and offering a roadmap for attorneys to guide their clients through the therapeutic processes.

Specific guidelines on communication, information sharing, a decision-making are vital to ensure a unified and supportive approach. Furthermore, the court order should provide mechanisms for monitoring compliance, addressing potential conflicts, and modifying the orders (reunification plan) as needed to adapt to the evolving dynamics of the reunification process when necessary.

By emphasizing the importance of specificity in court orders, attorneys contribute significantly to the success of (RT), ensuring the legal frameworks align seamlessly with therapeutic goals and ultimately, promoting the best interests of the families they represent.

In the practice of family law, reunification therapy is frequently sought by attorneys as a means to address parent-child relationship issues. However, the challenge often lies in the timing – it's sometimes ordered hastily, even before a comprehensive assessment of the family's needs.

To mitigate potential complications arising from prematurely ordered RT, attorneys must engage in proactive consultations with mental health professionals. These consultations, preferably conducted through a conference call, serve as a forum to analyze case intricacies, determine

suitable therapeutic approaches and assess the compatibility of the chosen therapist with the unique needs of the family.

The court order designating the reunification therapist should be meticulously crafted to avoid ambiguity. Key elements to be explicitly stated in the order include the duration and purpose of the appointment, the therapist's rights of access in accordance with the rule, and the agreed-upon compensation for their services.

By taking a strategic and collaborative approach, attorneys can ensure that the initiation of Reunification Therapy is aligned with the specific needs of the family, thus enhancing the likelihood of a successful resolution to the underlying issues.

Why the Court Order Is So Important in Reunification Therapy

1.) Continuity of Contact Between the Child and the Rejected Parent, & Timely Decision Making

In cases where alienation of a child is suspected, maintaining or initiating parent-child contact is crucial. Lack of access between the child and the rejected parent often exacerbates resistance.

Delays in court hearings and decisions can contribute to entrenchment of the child's refusal.

Aligned parents may intensify efforts to obstruct contact during court proceedings.

- This heightened resistance should not determine the decision about whether contact should occur. In many cases, despite initial vehement opposition to visiting, the child then has a benign or positive experience of visiting with the rejected parent.
- The aligned parent's attitudes and behaviors. For example, do they encourage and support the visits, use a variety of tactics to undermine or obstruct access, such as being late etc...
- The child's response to the visits. For example, do they protest, become more comfortable as the visits proceed, or do they negatively distort the experience of the visit.
- The behaviors of the rejected parent. For example, what are their parenting sensitivities and behaviors, or how do they handle the child's rejection?
- Besides the benefit of protecting the relationship, however precarious, between a rejected parent and child, such visits, even monitored, provide useful data about many factors.

2.) Clear, Detailed, and Enforceable Orders

- Contact between a rejected parent and child must be court-ordered, with very clear parameters specifying how, when, and where visits occur. Ambiguous orders with insufficient detail provide fertile ground for conflict, and acting out, thereby undermining and sabotaging well-intentioned interventions.
- The alienated child and the aligned parent should not have discretion about whether visits occur. The goal, however, is to set up a feasible arrangement, one that the child can tolerate.
- Once contact is clearly determined, more proactive management of visits can occur, anticipating that there will be undermining of them and challenge and opposition to them.
- Regardless of the temporary physical custody structure, both parents should have the legal authority to share important decisions in their child's life.

- Early court orders can be provided that mandate information sharing and shared decision-making. An appropriate burden can be placed on aligned parents to inform rejected parents of important education, health, and social domains.
- Specific orders should prohibit aligned parents from making any unilateral decisions regarding the children's healthcare (especially therapy), education, travel, and formally scheduled extracurricular activities that would interfere with the other parent's scheduled times with the child

3.) Manage, Minimize, and Avoid Conflict

- Interpersonal conflict polarizes parental positions and strengthens children's solidarity with the aligned parent.
- Children commonly interpret conflict as caused by the rejected parent and as abusive and victimizing of the aligned parent (and by extension, the child). This distortion occurs despite the reality of the dynamics of the conflict.

- Conflict can be best managed initially through structures in the court order that disengage the parents. Such orders can include transitions that do not involve face-to-face contact, automatic default arrangements such as which parent selects the first vacation period each year, how holidays alternate, alternating attendance at child activities, and so on, and by having a mediation or arbitration process established to resolve disputes in an efficient and timely manner as soon as they arise.

4.) Monitor Court Orders Closely to Assure Compliance and to Address Violations Immediately

- The courts and court-ordered professionals' authority cannot be weakened in the eyes of the child, the aligned parent, and the rejected parent. Mandates by the court and within the scope of the reunification therapist cannot be ignored or sabotaged.
- It is important to anticipate various tactics employed to undermine orders related to visits, treatment recommendations, and therapy designed to promote contact. Enforceable
-

orders and monitoring systems must be linked to the court's authority so that violations are quickly and effectively addressed.

- Why is it important to understand cases of Resist and Refuse Dynamics in a family?
Family law professionals, whether judges, attorneys, mediators, parenting coordinators or mental health professionals are likely to encounter these complex and frustrating cases. Family law professionals need a common vocabulary as well as a common approach to these cases to be of service to these families.
- It is essential for any family law professional in reunification cases to know family systems theory and practice as well as to understand how holding multiple hypotheses when sitting with members of the family can help keep natural biases and alliances in check. It is also essential to understand the levels of severity in these cases to tailor interventions to meet family goals.

“When a child must choose between two “good enough” parents (with whom they have had a positive relationship) he/she may suffer long-term consequences of the loss of one parent.”

Key Components of a Court Order for RT:

- 1.) **Acknowledgment of Behavioral Changes:** Parties should be advised that successful treatment may require behavioral changes to support their child(ren)'s needs. The court order should emphasize the importance of cooperation with the therapist's requests for changes in behavior.
- 2.) **Limited Role of Reunification Therapist:** The RT should not make parenting time decisions but assist in implementing the agreed-upon Parenting Plan outlined by the Court. Regular reporting to the Court on the progress of RT, including cooperation, compliance, and any concerns, is essential.
- 3.) **Status Updates and Communication:** Provision for regular status updates to attorneys and the Court, with fees for written reports divided equally between parties. Clarification that RT is not a substitute for Child Custody Evaluation or Social Investigation.

- 4.) **Children's Best Interest:** Emphasize the best interest of minor children in maintaining loving relationships with both parents. Identify the minor children subject to the order, specifying their initials and dates of birth.

- 5.) **Reunification Therapist Appointment:** Appoint the reunification therapist, stating the purpose of counseling and the need for repairing parent-child relationships. Direct parties to contact the therapist within 48 hours to initiate the process and cooperate with scheduling.

- 6.) **Cooperation and Attendance:** Explicitly state the parties' requirement to fully cooperate with scheduling, appointments, and all aspects of the reunification process. Mandate attendance of appointments and/or bringing the child(ren) as required by the therapist.

- 7.) **Confidentiality and Reporting:** Specify that RT is not private or confidential, subject to court oversight when necessary for the child's best interest. Reunification therapist to provide periodic written summaries to the Court and GAL, if applicable.

8.) **Therapeutic Process Details:** Outline the initial steps, including meetings with both parents and a review of relevant documents. Highlight that RT continues until therapy goals are met, further progress is not possible, or a different therapist is appointed.

9.) **Reunification Therapist Appointment:** Clearly appoint the reunification therapist, stating the purpose of counseling and the need for repairing parent-child relationships. Direct parties to contact the therapist within 48 hours to initiate the process and cooperate with scheduling.

10.) **Cooperation and Attendance:** Explicitly state the parties' requirement to fully cooperate with scheduling, appointments, and all aspects of the reunification process. Mandate attendance of appointments and/or bringing the child(ren) as required by the therapist.

11.) **Confidentiality and Reporting:** Specify that RT is not private or confidential, subject to court oversight when necessary for the child's best interest. Reunification therapist to provide periodic written summaries to the Court and GAL, if applicable

Detailed Court Order for Reunification Therapy Protecting the Family and the Integrity of Treatment

A detailed court order ensures the therapist has the support and authority required to create a healthy therapeutic environment, ensure all family members' participation, and protect the integrity of the reunification process. Reunification cases are highly complex and challenging for therapists. We are setting families up to fail without well-defined expectations, requirements, and consequences in the court order.

The following items should be considered by attorneys and the Court when drafting a court order for reunification therapy: (The Court or your attorney may change the language in the court order to meet legal requirements and the specific needs of your case).

The parties have been advised that successful treatment may require one or both parties to change their behavior to support their child(ren)'s needs.

The Reunification Therapist may request specific changes by the parents in such areas as setting appropriate limits for the child(ren), encouraging the child(ren) to express feelings to solve

problems appropriately, listening to the child(ren)'s concerns, actively supporting the child(ren)'s independent relationships, and shielding the child(ren) from parental conflict.

The parties are ORDERED to make reasonable efforts to cooperate with the Reunification Therapist's requests in these areas. _____.

The Reunification Therapist will not make any related parenting time decisions and will only be assisting in implementing a previously agreed upon Parenting Plan as outlined by the Court.

The Reunification Therapist shall report to the Court as deemed necessary regarding the progress of (RT). This may include but is not limited to the parties' cooperation, participation, compliance, payments, and/or any other issue(s)/concern(s) that the Reunification Therapist believes necessary to benefit the child(ren) in fostering and/or sustaining a healthy relationship with both parents.

The Reunification Therapist may elect to provide status updates to the attorneys and/or the Court at a duration(s) deemed at the sole discretion of the Reunification Therapist and/or at a minimum interval designated by the Court. Unless otherwise addressed above, the fee for the Written Status Report will be divided equally between the parties.

(RT) is not a substitute for a Child Custody Evaluation or Social Investigation, the Reunification Therapist shall not make recommendations as to the conservatorship of, the possession (i.e., Time-Sharing) of, or access to the child(ren) in question.

The Reunification Therapist may make recommendations to the parties regarding changes in the parent-child relationships (i.e., conduct) that may be helpful to the parties in implementing the Court's Orders. It is in the best interest of the minor children to have a loving, consistent relationship with both parents.

The minor children subject to this order are (initials of a minor child) (D.O.B.: date), (initials of a minor child) (D.O.B.: date), and (initials of a minor child) (D.O.B.: date).

Reunification counseling/therapy is necessary to repair and re-establish the relationships between the minor children and the Father / Mother (party's name) and to address any issues of parental alienation/estrangement that may exist as determined by the reunification therapist.

(Therapist's Name) is hereby appointed as the reunification therapist for all (#) minor children listed above.

The purpose of the reunification counseling is to repair and re-establish the relationship between the (initials of the minor child) minor children and the Father / Mother such that regular timesharing may once again commence.

The parties shall contact the office of (therapist's name) within 48 hours of entry of this order to schedule the first set of appointments and to initiate the process. The parties shall fully cooperate with scheduling appointments and all aspects of the reunification process and with all requests of and recommendations of (therapist's name).

_____, is hereby appointed as the reunification therapist for all ____ minor children listed above.

The purpose of the reunification counseling is to repair and to re-establish the relationship between the ____ minor children and the Father / Mother such that regular timesharing may once again commence.

The parties shall contact the office of Dr. Vick within 48 hours of entry of this order to schedule the first set of appointments and to initiate the process and the parties shall accept the first available appointment times offered.

The parties shall fully cooperate with the scheduling of appointments and with all aspects of the reunification process and with all requests of and recommendations of Dr. Vick.

The parties shall be required to attend appointments and/or bring the child(ren) as required by Dr. Vick.

The parties shall accept the first available appointment times offered.

Reunification counseling/therapy is necessary to repair and to re-establish the relationships between the minor children and the Father / Mother, _____ and to address any issues of parental alienation/estrangement that may exist as determined by the reunification therapist.

The parties shall fully cooperate with the requests, requirements, and recommendations of (the reunification therapist's name).

When appropriate, Dr. Vick may require meeting with the parties individually to provide each of them with recommendations intended to assist the parties in achieving the highest level of success.

_____ may meet with the parties or the children individually, jointly with the siblings, with one or both parents or with other household or family members as Dr. Vick deems appropriate.

Both parties are to provide written approval/HIPPA waivers satisfactory to _____ such that he may speak openly to the respective counsels for the parties and to the court-appointed GAL.

The reunification process is not private or confidential and shall be subject to the oversight and support of the Court when necessary and in furtherance of the best interest of the minor child.

_____ shall provide the Court and GAL, if applicable, with periodic written summaries of the status of the reunification process as well as to any completion of the process when appropriate.

Before the child(ren) meets with ____, the reunification therapist will first: (1) Meet with both parents (individually and/or jointly as deemed appropriate); (2) Review prior counseling, court orders, and other documentation to assess the circumstances and situations that have fostered conflict and/or maybe continuing to create conflict between the parties and the child(ren); and (3) The reunification therapist will discuss with both parents the reasonableness and appropriateness of reunification before requesting in-person appointments with the child(ren).

Reunification Therapy shall continue until the reunification therapist makes the recommendation that the goals of therapy have been met, that no further progress is possible at this time, or that appointment of a different reunification therapist is necessary.

Reunification Therapy is not like a traditional client-centered approach. The child(ren) or parent (do)does not determine the goal(s) of treatment. Therefore, it is highly recommended that individual therapists for the child(ren), the reunifying parent, and the custodial parent be utilized concurrently with RT.

In some cases, _____ may require the involvement of an individual therapist for either one of the parties and/or minor child(ren) if the needs of the family member _____. The child(ren) shall not have discretion about whether therapy/visits occur. The therapist shall have the ability to make these decisions.

The parties shall be required to attend appointments and/or bring the child(ren) as (therapist's name) requires. The parties shall fully cooperate with (therapist's name) requests, requirements, and recommendations.

When appropriate, (therapist's name) may require meeting with the parties individually to provide each of them with recommendations intended to assist the parties in achieving the highest level of success. (therapist's name) may meet with the parties or the children individually, jointly with the siblings, with one or both parents or with other household or family members as (therapist's name) deems appropriate.

Both parties are to provide written approval/HIPPA waivers satisfactory to (therapist's name) such that he may speak openly to the respective counsels for the parties and to the court-appointed GAL.

The reunification process is not private or confidential and shall be subject to the oversight and support of the Court when necessary and in furtherance of the best interest of the minor child.

Even though time-sharing may have been interrupted, both parents shall be able to share in important decisions in the child(ren)'s life. Except when supported by the parenting plan, neither parent should make unilateral decisions or withhold information about the child(ren)'s life i.e., education, healthcare, extracurricular activities, etc...

Should the parties be ordered to utilize "Our Family Wizard" or any other co-parenting tool, the parties are ORDERED to complete the necessary forms for _____ to have access.

All costs of the reunification process and _____ shall be equally divided however such cost apportionment shall be without prejudice and subject to reapportionment as determined by the agreement of the parties or order of the Court.

All payment for services shall be made prior to the commencement of any appointment.

All reunification therapy shall immediately cease if: (1) The parties enter into a written agreement to cease reunification therapy; or (2) the reunification therapy is found by the court to be contrary to the best interest of the minor child(ren) and the Court enters an order terminating the process.

It should be clearly stated who will handle the costs of reunification therapy, including each parent's sessions with the reunification therapist, the child's sessions, family sessions, co-parenting sessions, and any collateral work such as contacting other professionals.

Examples of Breakdown of Costs:

The foregoing payment provisions apply except for the following situations: Individual Parent Session(s). If a parent has an Individual Session with the Reunification Therapist, with or without the child(ren) in question, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Paid 100% by the party who has the Individual Session

Joint Adult Session(s). If parents have a Joint Session with the Reunification Therapist, with or without the child(ren) in question, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Divided equally between the parties

Document Review. If a party, the party's legal counsel, or anyone acting on the party's behalf requests that the Reunification Therapist reviews any documents, the cost shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Paid 100% by the party requesting the review.

If the request is made jointly, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Divided equally between the parties

If the request is made by the Reunification Therapist, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Divided between the parties.

Appearances. Requests for the Reunification Therapist's appearance in connection with the litigation, including depositions, hearings, trials, settlement conferences, or any other formal meeting, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Paid 100% by the party who requests the Reunification Therapist's appearance.

Written Reports. The cost of any written report that is requested shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Divided equally between the parties (or) Paid 100% by the party(s) who requests the Written

Report

Communication with the Reunification Therapist. If a party's legal counsel, or anyone acting on the party's behalf, requests to communicate with the Reunification Therapist, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Paid 100% by the party requesting the review.

If the request is made jointly, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Divided equally between the parties

Communication with Third Parties. If the Reunification Therapist communicates with a Parenting Coordinator, any of the parties or the child(ren)'s Therapist(s), or any other professional(s) in connection with this litigation, the costs shall be:

Divided between the parties as ORDERED above (or)

Divided equally between the parties.

Testimony

The Reunification Therapist shall testify at any hearing in this case at the written request of an attorney of record sent via subpoena, which may be delivered to the Reunification Therapist via fax, in-person, or email. Unless payment for testimony is already addressed above, the requesting party shall be responsible for the Reunification Therapist's customary and usual fees for testifying and said fees shall be paid at least seven (7) days before the hearing in the manner outlined by the Reunification Therapist.

ABSENT PAYMENT, THE REUNIFICATION THERAPIST IS UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO APPEAR OR PROVIDE TESTIMONY EVEN IF FORMALLY SUBPOENAED.

All reunification therapy shall immediately cease if: (1) The parties enter into a written agreement to cease reunification therapy; or (2) the reunification therapy is found by the court to be contrary to the best interest of the minor child(ren) and the Court enters and order terminating the process.

Before the child(ren) meets with (therapist's name), the reunification therapist will first: (1) Meet with both parents (individually and/or jointly as deemed appropriate); (2) Review prior counseling, court orders, and other documentation to assess the circumstances and situations that have fostered conflict and/or maybe continuing to create conflict between the parties and the child(ren); and (3) The reunification therapist will discuss with both parents the reasonableness and appropriateness of reunification before requesting in-person appointments with the child(ren).

(therapist's name) shall provide the Court and GAL, if applicable, with periodic (defined frequency, i.e., biweekly, or as needed to be determined by the therapist's name) written progress reports of the status of the reunification process, issues/concerns that require the Court's ____, and, when appropriate, the completion of the reunification process/recommendations.

Reunification Therapy is not like a traditional client-centered approach. The child(ren) or parent (do)does not determine the goal(s) of treatment. Therefore, it is highly recommended that individual therapists for the child(ren), the reunifying parent, and the custodial parent be utilized concurrently with RT. In some cases, (therapist's name) may require the involvement of an

individual therapist for either one of the parties and/or minor child(ren) if the needs of the family member _____.

The child(ren) shall not have discretion about whether therapy/visits occur. (therapist's name) shall have the ability to make these decisions.

Reunification Therapy shall continue until the reunification therapist makes the recommendation that the goals of therapy have been met, that no further progress is possible at this time, or that an appointment of a different reunification therapist is necessary.

Even though time-sharing may have been interrupted, both parents shall be able to share in important decisions in the child(ren)'s lives. Except when supported by the parenting plan, neither parent should make unilateral decisions or withhold information about the child(ren)'s lives i.e., education, healthcare, extracurricular activities, etc...

All costs of the reunification process and (therapist's name) shall be equally divided however such cost apportionment shall be without prejudice and subject to reapportionment as determined by the agreement of the parties or order of the Court.

All payment for services shall be made prior to the commencement of any appointment.

The child and both parents (rejected parent and favored parent) should attend reunification therapy as long as the reunification therapist determines that it is productive and in the child's best interest.

The parties shall attend all requested dates/sessions as recommended by the reunification therapist and shall ensure the child attends sessions.

Sessions may include, at the therapist's discretion, individual sessions with each parent, individual sessions with the child, and family sessions of any arrangement as determined by the therapist. Parties should expect both parents to be involved in the therapy process, to aid in being part of the solution to the current problem.

Parties should understand sometimes reunification therapy is a long process, and sometimes it is not; families differ greatly in this aspect. The goal of therapy is to create healthy parent-child relationships as soon as possible.

Both parents should sign all releases for information from any health care providers the reunification therapist wants to review or consult, past or current, having treated either parent or the child.

The therapist should be authorized to speak with counsel for both parents. Both parents should follow the recommendations of the reunification therapy process as directed by the reunification therapist.

The terms of this order are enforceable pursuant to the contempt powers of the Court.

Once this foundation is established, the professionals involved begin work with the family, refining goals and updating treatment plans.

Some families feel embarrassed, frustrated, angry, or confused about attending court-mandated therapy.

Other families interpret court-ordered reunification therapy as a punishment.

However, (RT) is an opportunity for positive change because the court orders are done with good intentions to help restore healthy parent-child relationships, allow for healing and prevent future difficulties/court involvement.

Additional Reunification Therapy Order Language

1. _____ shall be the reunification therapist for the parents and their children, with the primary goal of which is to repair the relationship between _____ and _____; all family members shall continue to attend therapy for so long as recommended by the reunification therapist or further order of the Court.

Some goals of the reunification therapy are:

- a. To foster healthy child adjustment;
- b. To restore adequate parent functioning, parenting, and roles;
- c. To restore and facilitate contact between the _____ and the minor child in a safe environment;
- d. To work with each parent and the child towards the goal of identifying and separating the child's needs and views from each parent's needs and views;

e. To assist the parents to fully understand the needs of the child and the negative repercussions for the child of a severed and/or compromised relationship with a parent in their young lives and as adults;

f. To protect and remove the child from parental conflict;

g. To work with each family member to help form more appropriate parent-parent and parent-child roles and boundaries;

h. To assist the child to differentiate self from others and exercise age-appropriate autonomy;

i. To help each parent distinguish valid concerns from overly negative, critical, and generalized views relating to the other parent;

j. To assist parents to resolve relevant parent-child conflicts; and

k. To improve parenting skills and family communication skills.

2. The entire family (both parents and the minor children) shall be involved, in various combinations with the reunification therapy as directed by the reunification therapist. The process will include meetings between the therapist and each of the parents and the child individually and jointly to the extent deemed necessary by the reunification therapist.

2. The role of the reunification therapist will be therapeutic in nature, to obtain the therapeutic goals mentioned herein; it is not the role of a therapist to implement Orders or custody schedules. The reunification therapist may make clinical recommendations to the parents, lawyers, and the Court, but as a therapist versus a custody evaluator or Parenting Coordinator, the therapist may not make specific custody recommendations. Nonetheless, the therapist may provide clinical information on how various schedules may impact a child's mental health, which the parents and Court can take into account when they make their custody-related decisions.

4. The reunification therapist may choose to contact other professionals involved with the family (specifically including but not limited to the Parent Coordinator, the children's therapist, and the parents' therapists) to both give and receive information to better meet the aforementioned objectives and goals for the therapy. Toward this end, the parents shall sign all releases of information required by the reunification therapist to implement the process. The parents shall provide all records, documentation, and information requested by the reunification therapist as soon as possible upon request.

5. Both parents shall support the therapy and the reunification therapist to the children. This includes fitting therapy sessions into their schedule and the child's schedule based on the frequency of sessions recommended by the reunification therapist. This support also includes the children's rights not to discuss with the parents their sessions with the therapist. To this end, the parents shall not ask for information about the therapy sessions or parenting .me with the other parent. Neither party shall do anything to undermine (to the children or otherwise) the reunification therapy process.

6. Where possible, the parties shall refrain from scheduling therapy during times when afterschool activities are scheduled, however, the parties shall not allow after-school activities to prevent the children from seeing the therapist at the recommended intervals recommended by the reunification therapist.

7. Given the risks of information being taken out of context or being incomplete, the parties shall not restate, summarize, or paraphrase in court documents any feedback provided by the reunification therapist to them or the child. If necessary, either party may request a report, and the reunification therapist shall be responsible for communicating any feedback or information about the therapy process to this Court.

8. While the reunification therapist is bound to maintain confidentiality and not disclose information to anyone not involved in the process, the parties understand that the process may involve the sharing of information between those involved in the process, as well as with various professionals and this Court. The reunification therapist may use her discretion to exchange information as necessary between parents and between either parent and the child. The reunification therapist shall be free to disclose all information, documentation, and correspondence generated by the process with the lawyer for each parent and with this Court. The reunification therapist may at her discretion exchange information with other relevant professionals currently or previously involved and may speak with the lawyers ex parte provided that any substantive updated information or recommendations are communicated to both lawyers. The parties shall sign all consents or releases to allow the reunification therapist to obtain or to provide information to this Court, the lawyers for either party, and the other parent.

9. The parties understand that the reunification therapist is required to report to the appropriate child welfare authority if she has a reasonable suspicion that a child is being abused and/or neglected. In addition, the reunification therapist is obliged to notify the proper authorities if she has a “reasonable suspicion” that a party or a child may harm himself, herself, the other party, or a child.

10. The parties shall divide the costs associated with the reunification therapy sessions which include the minor child with _____ paying XX% and _____ paying XX%. This percent split applies to all sessions that come under the umbrella of reunification therapy, be they individual or family sessions, and to all collateral services including but not limited to phone calls and emails with parties, attorneys, schools, therapists, etc.

11. The parties shall not at any time publish, or cause any third party to publish, by name or anonymously, any reviews, statements, opinions, or other commentary on any online internet website, including but not limited to review sites or social media websites, concerning the services provided by the Therapist and Practice Name under the terms of the Order dated _____.

In conclusion, the crafting of a detailed court order is paramount in the context of reunification therapy, where the delicate process seeks to mend fractured familial relationships. The intricacies involved in reunification therapy demand a carefully structured legal framework that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of all parties involved. A comprehensive court order serves as the guiding document, ensuring that the reunification therapist, parents, and legal professionals are aligned in their understanding of the therapeutic goals and procedural aspects.

Family attorneys play a pivotal role in this process, acting as facilitators and advocates for their clients navigating the challenging terrain of reunification therapy. Their proactive involvement in consultations with mental health professionals helps set the stage for a more informed and strategic approach, preventing hasty orders that may exacerbate rather than alleviate family conflicts. Attorneys contribute to the development of a court order that not only addresses the immediate needs of the family but also considers the long-term implications of therapeutic intervention.

The court order serves as a blueprint for successful reunification, providing clarity on the duration, purpose, and therapist's rights of access. Attorneys, through their collaborative efforts, ensure that the order avoids ambiguity and establishes a foundation for effective therapeutic engagement. Moreover, the order becomes a tool for mitigating potential conflicts and challenges that may arise during the reunification process.

In navigating the complexities of family law, attorneys act as advocates for the best interests of the child, fostering an environment conducive to healing and growth. By understanding the nuances of resist and refuse dynamics, attorneys play a crucial role in tailoring interventions to meet the unique goals of each family. Through their collaborative approach with mental health professionals, family attorneys contribute to the success of reunification therapy by promoting communication, cooperation, and a shared commitment to the well-being of the children involved.

In essence, a detailed court order is not merely a legal formality; it is a cornerstone of the reunification process, shaping the dynamics of family therapy. Family attorneys, as architects of these orders, hold the responsibility of creating a framework that supports the therapeutic journey, ultimately facilitating the re-establishment of healthy parent-child relationships.