

## Family Reunification

Circumstances may occur that require parents/guardians to pick up their children in a formalized, controlled release. The process of controlled release is called a family reunification and may be necessary due to weather, a power outage, hazmat or if a crisis occurs at the facility. This organization has adopted a protocol that makes this process more predictable and less chaotic for all involved and best guarantees the safety of your child. Depending on the nature of the event, reunification may occur at a secondary location.

## Notification

Parents/guardians may be notified in a number of ways. You may receive a message from a broadcast phone or text message system. In some cases, older children with cell phones may be asked to send a text message to their parents/guardians, such as: *“I am OK, please wait for further instructions on how and where to pick me up and do not call me back as we have to keep the phone lines open.”* If your child is to be picked up at an alternate location, the message will include information on where to go and what procedures to follow.

## Parent/Guardian Expectations

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

## What if a Parent/Guardian Can't Pick-up Their Child?

When a parent/guardian can't immediately go to the reunification site, children will only be released to individuals previously identified as a child's emergency contact. Otherwise, the organization will hold children until legal parents/guardians can pick up their child.

## What if the Child Drove to the Facility?

There may be instances where an older child may not be allowed to remove a vehicle from the parking lot. In this case, parents/guardians are advised to recover the child.

## How it Works

For children, the organization asks that they be orderly and quiet while waiting. Older children may be asked to text a message to their parents/guardians. Children are also asked not to send other text messages either in or out of the reunification area. Keeping the cellular network usage at a minimum may be important during a reunification.

## Reunification Cards

For parents/guardians, there are a couple of steps. If a parent/guardian is driving to the facility, greater awareness of traffic and emergency vehicles is advised. Parents/guardians should park where indicated and not abandon vehicles. Parents/guardians are asked to go to the “Parent/Guardian Check In Area” and form lines based on the first letter of their child's last name. While in line, parents/guardians are asked to fill out a reunification card.

This card is separated into two halves and will be separated during the process. Some of the same information is repeated on both the top and bottom of the card. Parents/guardians are asked to complete all parts of the card as directed. In the case of multiple children being reunified, a separate card for each child needs to be completed. When reunification with their child(ren) has been completed, the parent/guardian will return their portion of the card(s) for processing by reunification staff.

## Bring ID to Check In

During check in, identification and custody rights are confirmed. The card is separated and the bottom half given back to the parent/guardian. From the “Check-In Area” parents/guardians are directed to the “Reunification Area.” There, an escort will take the bottom half of the card and take it to the “Children's Safe Area” to recover the child(ren). Parents/guardians should be aware that in some cases, especially if they do not have an ID, they may be asked to provide further information before they can be reunified with their child.

## Interviews and Counseling

In some cases, parents/guardians may be advised that a law enforcement investigation is underway and may be advised that interviews are necessary. In extreme cases, they may be pulled aside for emergency or medical information. At any point, parents/guardians in need of counseling should alert reunification staff and they will be taken to the Counseling Area to receive assistance.