

REUNIFICATION FOUNDATION · WORKBOOK

Reunification Ready

A step-by-step workbook for school teams building their student reunification process.

School Reunification Planning Workbook

Build your reunification capability, one phase at a time.



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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to assist a school or district with developing or improving its reunification plan. Whether you are starting from zero, have no reunification plan, no assigned roles, no practiced process, or you are looking to take your plan to the next level, this workbook can help. The goal is to take you from wherever you currently are to a team that is genuinely ready.

This workbook is organized around four phases. Work through them in order. Each phase opens with a brief overview of the concepts, then gives you worksheets, checklists, and planning tools to apply them to your own district. Write directly in it. Come back to it. The workbook is yours.

The four phases

- **Crawl — Build the Foundation.** Form your team, learn the process, choose your sites, and write or update your reunification plan.
- **Walk — Test in Small Steps.** Assign your people to roles, brief them, and test the process on a small scale.
- **Run — Full Practice.** Practice the whole process from start to finish under realistic conditions.
- **Refresh — Keep It Sharp.** Keep your team trained and your plan up to date over time.

This workbook is a guide, not a substitute for training

It gives you enough to understand each concept and start building. It is not a full training manual. Where a topic deserves more depth than a workbook can give, you will see a "Need a deeper dive?" note pointing you to our free resources or our consulting and training services. If your team gets stuck on a concept, that is exactly when to bring us in.

The workbook and the plan template work together

This workbook guides your thinking, what to decide, why it matters, and in what order. Your actual reunification plan is written into a separate document: the Reunification Plan Template, a fill-in-the-blank framework that captures the decisions you make here. The workbook is where you think it through; the template is where the plan lives.

Need a deeper dive?

Download the free Reunification Plan Template at reunification-foundation.org/templates. Have it open alongside this workbook when you reach the plan-writing section of the Crawl phase.

Why this matters

Reunification is the first moment of recovery for a family after a school emergency. How calmly, safely, and quickly students are returned to their parents shapes how a whole community recovers. A plan deliberately built, honestly practiced, and kept current is one of the most valuable things a school can offer the families it serves.

Need a deeper dive?

New to reunification entirely? Start with the free Reunification Kit User Guide and the introductory resources at reunification-foundation.org. They give you the big picture before you begin Phase 1.

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Crawl — Build the Foundation

In the Crawl phase, you start from nothing and build the foundation: you assemble your team, learn the reunification process, choose where reunification will happen, and write your first reunification plan. Everything that follows is built on this foundation.

Understanding Reunification

What reunification is

Reunification is the organized process of safely returning students to their parents or guardians after an emergency that separates them — an evacuation, a weather event, a hazardous materials incident, or an act of violence. It is an all-hazards function: any event that sends students off-site, for any reason, ends in a reunification.

Reunification is not the emergency response itself, and it is not simply "dismissal." It is a controlled process with its own structure, staff roles, and plan, designed so that every student is released only to a verified, authorized adult, and so that parents arriving in fear are met with order and clear information.

Why school districts lead it

School districts hold something no responding agency can replicate: they know their students and families. District staff can verify identities, recognize custody arrangements, account for every child, and communicate with parents who already trust them. For that reason, the district leads the reunification process regardless of who is managing the larger incident.

Where reunification fits in the Incident Command System

Most school emergency plans use the Incident Command System (ICS) — a standard structure for organizing a response. Reunification belongs in a branch within the Operations Section of that structure, led by a Reunification Director who is always appointed by the district, regardless of who is managing the overall incident.

You do not need to be an ICS expert to use this workbook. You only need to know that reunification is a defined role within your emergency plan, that the person leading it is school district-appointed, and that it should look the same no matter what kind of emergency you are responding to.

Need a deeper dive?

If your team is unsure how reunification connects to your existing Emergency Operations Plan or ICS structure, this is a good moment to bring us in. A short consultation can save weeks of guesswork.

The four stations of a reunification site

A reunification site is organized into four functional areas. Students and parents move through them in sequence:

- **Greeting Area.** Where parents first arrive. They are welcomed, oriented, and directed. Clear information here prevents panic everywhere else.
- **Check-In Area.** Where a parent's identity and authorization to pick up the student are verified against school records.
- **Reunification Area.** Where the verified parent and student are actually brought back together and formally released.
- **Student Assembly Area.** Where students wait, safely, supervised, and away from the parent queue, until they are called for reunification.

Need a deeper dive?

Our free resources walk through the four stations in more detail, including site layout diagrams. For hands-on instruction, our half-day Reunification Training Workshop covers the entire process. See reunification-foundation.org/training.

Build Your Planning Team

Reunification is not a one-person job. Before you go further, assemble a planning team that brings together everyone whose role matters during a reunification. A plan written without these voices will struggle when it is used.

Who belongs on your planning team

- Superintendent or designee
- Building principal(s)
- School safety coordinator or director
- Local law enforcement liaison
- Fire service liaison
- Transportation director
- Communications or public information lead
- School nurse, counselor, or mental health lead
- Special education representative
- Anyone else you think will have input specific to your area

Choose Your Reunification Sites

You need two reunification sites: a primary and a secondary. Both should be off-site when possible, within a reasonable distance of the school, with indoor space and parking. The secondary site exists because the primary will sometimes be unavailable.

Primary site

Site name and address:

Distance from school and estimated travel time:

Indoor capacity and parking capacity:

Site contact (name, role, phone):

Notes about this site:

Secondary site

Site name and address:

Distance from school and estimated travel time:

Indoor capacity and parking capacity:

Site contact (name, role, phone):

Notes about this site:

Formalize the relationship

Each site should be covered by a written agreement, typically a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), so that the space is reliably available when you need it. Begin that conversation early; the formal document can follow.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Made initial contact with the primary site Record the date and the person you spoke with.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Made initial contact with the secondary site Record the date and the person you spoke with.
<input type="checkbox"/>	MOU process started with both sites A signed agreement is the goal; an early conversation is the start.

Need a deeper dive?

Not sure what belongs in a reunification site agreement, or how to evaluate whether a site will actually work? Our training events include site selection guidance, and a consultation can help you assess candidate sites before you commit.

Write Your Reunification Plan

This is the heart of the Crawl phase: producing a written reunification plan where none existed before. Your reunification plan should become a written part of your district's Emergency Operations Plan.

You do not have to design the plan's structure from scratch. The Reunification Plan Template gives you a complete, fill-in-the-blank framework. This section of the workbook walks you through the decisions the template asks you to make; the template is where you record them.

Need a deeper dive?

Download the free Reunification Plan Template at reunification-foundation.org/templates. Open it now. The rest of this section is designed to be worked through with the template in front of you.

Gather your raw materials

You may not have a reunification plan, but your district already has materials the plan will draw on. Locate these before you start writing.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Your district's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) Your reunification plan will become a part of it and should align with it.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Your student information system and access to it Reunification depends on accurate student, parent, and authorized-pickup records.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Existing maps and facility information School layouts, candidate site layouts, and area road maps.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Current emergency contacts and partner relationships Law enforcement, fire, transportation, and neighboring districts.

Core decisions your plan must capture

A complete reunification plan addresses each of the elements below. Work through them with the Reunification Plan Template open, and use this checklist to track your progress as you fill the template in.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary and secondary reunification sites Named, with agreements underway — carried over from the site worksheet you completed earlier in this phase.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The four-station site setup How Greeting, Check-In, Reunification, and Student Assembly will be laid out at each site.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff roles and the chain of authority Who leads, who staffs each station, who reports to whom. You will assign specific people in the Walk phase.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation and traffic plans Moving students to the site; managing parent vehicle flow on arrival.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Notification and communication procedures How parents, staff, and partners are alerted and kept updated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student accountability and release verification How every student is accounted for and released only to authorized adults.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provisions for students with disabilities and specific needs Accessibility, medical needs, and individualized supports.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contingencies Missing students, no-show parents, custody disputes, media presence.

Need a deeper dive?

Writing a reunification plan from scratch is exactly what our Crawl phase training is designed for. The half-day Reunification Training Workshop walks your team through the full process and helps you turn the template into a finished plan. See reunification-foundation.org/training.

Before you move to Phase 2 - Walk

You should now have a planning team, two reunification sites with agreements underway, and a first draft of your written reunification plan, captured in the Reunification Plan Template, that covers the core elements above. The Walk phase turns that plan into trained people.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Planning Team Assigned
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reunification sites identified and agreement process initiated
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reunification plan draft written in template

Once all of the above are complete, you are ready to move on to Phase 2 - Walk

PHASE 2 OF 4

Walk — Test in Small Steps

In the Walk phase, you move from a plan on paper to people who know their roles. You assign staff to specific responsibilities, brief them, and test the process on a small scale before it is ever needed for real.

Understanding Roles

The two-path role split

During a reunification, every staff member follows one of two paths. Understanding this split is the foundation of role assignment:

- **Classroom staff stay with students.** Teachers and aides who are responsible for students maintain student accountability, keeping their group together, calm, and accounted for.
- **Staff without students assist the reunification team.** Central office staff, specialists, and anyone not directly supervising students staff the reunification stations.

This simple split means every adult knows, in advance, which path they are on the moment a reunification begins.

The station roles

Beyond the two paths, specific roles run the reunification site itself:

- **Reunification Director.** Leads the entire reunification operation. Always school-appointed.
- **Staging Manager.** Supervisor in charge of site setup. Supports the director.
- **Area Supervisors.** One supervisor each for the Greeting, Check-In, Reunification, and Student Assembly areas.
- **Reunifiers.** Move between the Student Assembly Area and the Reunification Area to bring students forward.
- **Support roles.** Greeters, Accountants, Flow Monitors, communications, security or law enforcement liaison, nurse or counselor, and special education support.

Need a deeper dive?

Our free resources describe each role in plain language. For staff to truly learn their roles, not just read about them, our Reunification Training Workshop trains your team directly. Reading a role and rehearsing it are different things. Also available is our free Reunification Kit User Guide that outlines each role.

Assign Your Roles

Assign roles by name, not by title. “The principal will run Check-In” is not an assignment. “Sarah Martinez will run Check-In, with James Chen as backup,” is. Every role needs a primary and a backup, because on any given day, someone will be absent.

Role assignment worksheet

Reunification Director	Name	Phone
Primary		
Backup		
Backup		

Staging Manager	Name	Phone
Primary		
Backup		
Backup		

Greeting Area Supervisor	Name	Phone
Primary		
Backup		
Backup		

Check-In Area Supervisor	Name	Phone
Primary		
Backup		
Backup		

Reunification Area Supervisor	Name	Phone
Primary		
Backup		
Backup		

Student Assembly Area Supervisor	Name	Phone
Primary		
Backup		
Backup		

Brief your team

Once roles are assigned, hold a short briefing. Each person should leave knowing three things: which station they belong to, who they report to, and what their actions are when a reunification is activated.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Held a role briefing with the full reunification team 30 minutes is enough. Every person hears their assignment out loud.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Each person knows their station, their supervisor, and their first actions If they cannot state these, the briefing is not done.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Walked the reunification site with the team Stand at each station. Walk the parent path and the student path. Sites look different in person than on paper.</p>

Prepare Your Communications

Under pressure, no one writes well. The core reunification messages should be drafted in advance, reviewed by your communications lead, and stored where they can be sent within a minute of a reunification being declared.

Draft your three core messages

First notification — what parents/guardians receive when the decision for reunification has been made:

Staff activation message — what staff receive when reunification is declared:

Follow-up message to parents/guardians — if your first message said you would follow up with location details this message should contain those:

Test the process on a small scale

The Walk phase ends with a small-scale practice event or events; drills and tabletops are the perfect tools. The goal is not a flawless performance. The goal is to make mistakes in practice so the wrinkles are ironed out before a real event. Practice any part of the process: site setup, student check-in, parent/guardian check-in, team communications, etc. Ideally, you will cover each of these in time.

Need a deeper dive?

Drills and tabletop exercises are far more valuable when designed and facilitated by someone outside your team - they see what insiders miss. Our training programs are built for exactly this phase. See reunification-foundation.org/training.

Before you move to Phase 3 - Run

You should have the leadership roles assigned with primaries and backups, a briefed team that has walked the site, drafted communications ready to send, and at least one small-scale drill or tabletop exercise under your belt. The Run phase tests the whole process at once.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Leadership Roles Assigned
<input type="checkbox"/>	Entire team briefed on their roles and responsibilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communications drafted
<input type="checkbox"/>	At least one drill or tabletop complete

Once all of the above are complete, you are ready to move on to Phase 3 - Run

PHASE 3 OF 4

Run — Full Practice

In the Run phase, you bring everything together and test your full reunification capability from start to finish, under semi-realistic conditions, with as many stakeholders as you choose to involve.

Understanding the End-to-End Drill

What it is

This drill will test your entire reunification process from start to finish: notification, transportation, site setup, every station, communications, and contingencies — as close to a real event as you can safely make it. Like every exercise, it is a learning event, not an evaluation. The goal remains to surface and fix problems before a real emergency does.

A note on involving students and parents

Early drills are usually best run with staff or volunteers standing in for students and parents. Practicing in front of the real school community before your team is confident can undermine the very trust you are trying to build. As your team matures, involving older students and parents can become a valuable next step, but it is a choice to make deliberately, not a default.

Need a deeper dive?

The end-to-end drill is the most complex event in this workbook to plan and run well. Our facilitated drills, available as half-day or full-day events, are designed and facilitated so your team can focus on performing, not coordinating. This is the Run phase done right.

Plan Your End-to-End Drill

Use this section to scope your drill. Decide what to include, who to involve, and when it will happen.

What will you test?

Check the components your drill will include:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Incident notification Testing how the reunification is triggered and announced.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Team communications Internal coordination among staff and stations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent and community communications The messages drafted in the Walk phase, sent live.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation process Moving students from the school to the reunification site.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Traffic plan setup Managing parent vehicle flow at the site.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Full four-station site setup Greeting, Check-In, Reunification, Student Assembly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Missing-student scenario A student unaccounted for during reunification (Advanced, not recommended for new teams).
<input type="checkbox"/>	No-show parent/guardian scenario A student whose authorized adult does not arrive (Advanced, not recommended for new teams).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior official or media briefing Communicating with leadership or press (Advanced, not recommended for new teams).

Exercise details

Target date:

Location:

Stakeholders to involve (law enforcement, fire, transportation, neighboring districts):

Who will design and facilitate the exercise:

Notes:

After-Action Review

Every exercise ends with an after-action review (AAR). Capture what you learned while it is fresh and turn it into specific improvements with owners and due dates.

What worked - Strengths to keep

What surfaced - Gaps that appeared

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Refresh — Keep It Sharp

Readiness is not a one-time achievement. In the Refresh phase, you keep your team trained, your plan current, and your capability alive year after year, so that the work of the first three phases does not fade.

Sustaining Readiness

Why this phase never ends

Staff change. Sites change. Lessons are learned from real events and from other districts. A reunification capability that is not maintained decays quietly; the plan goes stale, new staff never learn their roles, and the team's confidence fades. The Refresh phase is the ongoing work that keeps your readiness real.

What sustained readiness looks like

- **Regular training.** Brief refreshers built into staff meetings, plus a fuller training session at least once a year.
- **A living plan.** The reunification plan is reviewed and updated on a set schedule and after every drill or real event.
- **Onboarding for new staff.** Every new hire learns the reunification process and their role during orientation.
- **Continuous improvement.** After-action findings from drills and real events are tracked and actually implemented.

Need a deeper dive?

Our Refresh phase support includes custom refresher programs built around your district's needs and schedule. A short annual touchpoint with us keeps your team sharp without rebuilding from scratch each year.

Build Your Refresh Routine

Set your maintenance schedule

Decide how often each piece of maintenance will happen, and who owns it.

Maintenance activity	How often	Owner
Reunification plan review		
Full team training session		
Brief staff-meeting refreshers		
New-staff onboarding		
Reunification supply check		
Site agreement (MOU) renewal		
Drills		

Refresh checklist

<input type="checkbox"/>	Set a recurring date for reunification plan review At minimum once a year, and after every drill or real event.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Built reunification into new-staff onboarding Every new hire learns their role.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scheduled the next training or exercise Refreshers, a functional exercise, or a full-scale exercise.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assigned an owner for ongoing reunification readiness One person who keeps this from fading.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Created a way to capture lessons from real events and drills And a way to make sure they are acted on.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

You've Built Something Real

If you have worked through this workbook, your district is further along than most. You have a planning team, reunification sites, a written plan, assigned and briefed roles, drafted communications, exercises behind you, and a routine to keep it all current. That is genuine readiness, not a plan on a shelf, but a team that is prepared.

Readiness is a practice, not a destination. Keep cycling through the phases. Keep your plan alive. And when you want a partner in the work, we are here.

How The Reunification Foundation can help

We are the only organization in the world conducting applied research on all aspects of school reunification, and we use that research to support schools at every phase of this workbook.

- **Free resources.** Guides, articles, and tools to deepen any concept in this workbook, all at reunificationfoundation.org.
- **The Reunification Plan Template.** The free fill-in-the-blank framework for writing your plan, at reunificationfoundation.org/templates.
- **Crawl phase training.** The half-day Reunification Training Workshop or training presentation.
- **Walk phase training.** 3 separate offerings: team communication tabletops, half-day student triage and check-in training session with drill, and a half-day parent/guardian check-in training session with drill.
- **Run phase training.** A half-day or full-day End-to-End drill covering your entire process.
- **Refresh phase support.** Custom programs to keep your team sharp year after year.

Meeting you where you are

Wherever your district is in this workbook, we can meet you there. Reach out for a conversation about your reunification capability and the next step that makes sense for your team.

The Reunification Foundation

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