

# Evidence-Based Factors for Effective Reunification of Children and Dependent Adults

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## Abstract

- **Background:** Reunification Centers are activated in the event of a mass casualty incident (MCI) and exist to house children and dependent adults in a safe environment until they can be reunited with their guardians. University of Iowa's Center for Disabilities and Development (CDD) has a reunification procedure for dependents in place to be deployed if an MCI occurs which includes the transfer of these dependents from University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics to the CDD following medical triage for safe housing until the individuals can be reunited with their guardian(s).
- **Objective:** To generate evidence-based recommendations for the CDD based on reported best practices for the inquiry and reunification process following a disaster.
- **Methods:** We conducted a narrative summary review by identifying relevant documents on the inquiry and reunification process. Our findings of best practices and standard procedures were aggregated into a process improvement map.
- **Results:** The best practices for unification were grouped into three categories: governmental agency involvement; private organization involvement; and reunification procedure based on the documents analyzed. The results were compiled into a process map to illustrate the current state of the CDD reunification plan and an ideal reunification plan.
- **Conclusions:** The CDD does have a reunification process in place should an MCI happen. However, there are ways to improve the current protocol to ensure effective and safe reunification of children or dependent adults with their guardian(s).

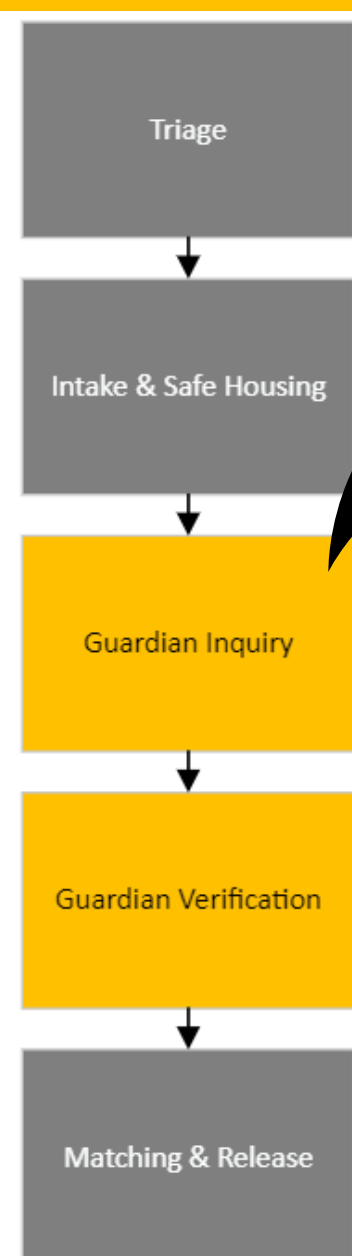
## Methods

We conducted a narrative summary review with a goal to provide an overview from a variety of materials on reunification. We used a purposive search strategy to identify relevant documents through bibliographic databases, internet search engines, websites, and forward citation searching. Initial terms for document inclusion were "hospital-based reunification center," "inquiry process," and "guardian verification." Included documents were analyzed based on the Population-Context-Concept (PCC) method. Best practices outlined in the literature were compared to the current practices at the CDD to identify current areas of success as well as opportunities for improvement. The findings were reported via a process map comparing the current state of the CDD reunification process to an ideal reunification process based on the practices found in the literature.

## Summary of Findings

Best Practices	
<b>Federal, State, and Local Government Agency Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share patient lists with Public Health Department</li> <li>• Report separated children and adults to National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC)</li> <li>• Verify legal guardians in partnership with U.S. State Department</li> <li>• Ensure local law enforcement is present at reunification site</li> <li>• Communicate with community</li> </ul>
<b>Private Organization Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with school districts, childcare facilities, and Adult Day/Habilitation Programs to cross-reference guardian lists</li> <li>• Connect with Red Cross's Patient Connection program</li> </ul>
<b>Reunification Procedure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procedure for guardians inquiring about children</li> <li>• Place ID badge with ID number on the child or dependent adult</li> <li>• Request that the guardian show ID of the child/dependent adult and a photo of them with the child/dependent adult</li> <li>• Conduct family interviews with multiple family members</li> <li>• Have child/dependent adult pick out guardian in picture line-up</li> <li>• Security questions that both guardian and child/dependent adult would know (i.e. name of sibling or family pet, favorite toy)</li> <li>• Once match occurs, add photo of child with guardian to records</li> </ul>

## Evidence-Based Recommendations



- Ask guardian:
  - Are you the child's legal guardian?
  - Does the child live with you full time?
  - Will the child recognize you in a photo?
  - Do you have a picture of you with the child?
  - Do you have an ID of the child?
  - Security question: Do you have a family pet? If so, what is their name? Does the child have a sibling? If so, what is their name?
- Request that the guardian or neighbor/friend provide an ID of the child and a photo of them with the child
- Direct the child/dependent adult to pick out their guardian in a picture line-up
- Ask the child/dependent adult the same security questions the guardian was asked
- If adult cannot be confirmed as guardian:
  - Do not release the child/dependent adult to the inquiring individual
  - Use discretion to consult the appropriate organization for guidance:
    - Locally – Red Cross
    - State – U.S. Dept of State
    - Nationally – National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's National Emergency Child Locator Center
  - Partner with law enforcement to communicate that the child/dependent adult cannot be released until guardianship is confirmed

## Future Considerations

- Community Education and Engagement
  - Partner with local schools and Adult Day/Habilitation Programs to receive verified list of guardians each year
  - Education for first responders, 911 operators to increase awareness of reunification center
- Have translators or Globo services on-site and signage in multiple languages
- Ensure different sensory settings and clear communication (with visuals) are provided, which can be especially helpful for individuals with Autism or for non-English speakers

