

STATE OF VERMONT  
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

**DCF**

**Department for Children and Families**

**BULLETIN NO.:** 18-12

**FROM:** Sean Brown, Deputy Commissioner  
Economic Services Division

**DATE:** 10/10/18

**SUBJECT:** Reach Up and Reach Up Services Procedures

**CHANGES ADOPTED EFFECTIVE** 10/15/18

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- Maintain Manual - See instructions below.**
- Proposed Regulation - Retain bulletin and attachments until you receive Manual Maintenance Bulletin: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Information or Instructions - Retain Until \_\_\_\_\_**

**MANUAL REFERENCE(S):**

P-2270                      P-2352                      P-2370

Language in the Temporary Absence procedures has been clarified. The Customer Service Survey requirement has been removed as part of the Case Management Supervisory Case Review process.

**Manual Maintenance**

Vertical lines in the left margin indicate significant changes.  
Dotted lines in the left margin indicate changes in formatting rather than content.

**Reach Up Procedure**

<b><u>Remove</u></b>		<b><u>Insert</u></b>	
P-2270	(17-04)	P-2270	(18-12)

**Reach Up Services Procedure**

P-2352	(17-22)	P-2352	(18-12)
P-2370	(17-04)	P-2370	(18-12)

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

A. General Procedures

In certain cases, where a child or parent/caretaker is or will be absent from the home for a period greater than 30 days, but not expected to exceed 180 consecutive days, the household may continue to receive Reach Up assistance.

Temporary absence may be allowed for a parent when they are absent from the home to receive inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical treatment institution. Temporary absence may be allowed for a child when a child(ren) is placed in the custody of Family Services Division (FSD); when they are absent from the home to receive care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical institution; or when the child is incarcerated. Temporary absence based on the parent's voluntary agreement to place the child in someone else's care may also be eligible.

*Example of a voluntary placement:*

*Mom has been experiencing an increase in mental health symptoms and is considering checking into Brattleboro Retreat for a period of time. Mom is supported by her mental health clinician and her primary care provider. Family Services is not involved. Providers write letters of support asking that it is in Mom and child's best interest child be separated from Mom and returned within 180 days. Child can stay temporarily with maternal grandmother, but Mom continues to need financial assistance so she can maintain her apartment. Case may be eligible for Temporary Absence.*

Shared custody and Conditional Custody Orders (CCO) do not necessarily indicate a need for temporary absence unless the child(ren) is out of the household more than 50% of the time.

Homelessness alone does not disqualify the parent for continued benefits if the intent is for the parent and the child to be again living together within 180 days.

1. Reporting Temporary Absence

The household is responsible for reporting an absence, but if reported by FSD, Economic Services must act on the information.

- a. In cases involving children in FSD custody, FSD can either provide:

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

A. General Procedures (Continued)

- i. form [FS201FC-M](#) indicating if household is receiving Reach Up.
  - ii. an email to ESD stating that a child(ren) were removed and that the current case plan includes reunification.
- b. If the household reports to Case Management, the Reach Up Supervisor or Case Manager reports temporary absence to Eligibility if not already reported.
- c. Eligibility and case management will share the responsibility of explaining the temporary absence process with families, though in cases where case management is involved, the case manager will take the lead in this conversation. It will be assumed that participants will want their Reach Up benefit continued, but participants can opt out. In these cases, a voluntary withdrawal will be entered as soon as possible.

2. Determining Eligibility

- a. The most common Temporary Absence cases involve FSD custody. In these cases contact should be made with the local FSD office to ensure that the current plan includes reunification. District offices may have different methods for making this contact and may include District Management, Eligibility or Case Management staff. All contact should be clearly noted in catn (and case notes as applicable).
  - i. If child is placed in out of state care but remains in the custody of the State of Vermont, the child is eligible for Temporary Absence.
  - ii. If child is placed in out of state care and custody is no longer held by the State of Vermont, then the child will not be eligible.
- b. Request verification that reunification is the intent within the next 180 days.
- c. A Waiver of Confidentiality (form 201WC) is not necessary to approve the temporary absence, but can be requested to help coordinate the case. In cases where the parent is absent from the home the [201WC](#) should indicate the facility(ies) where the parent is staying as well as the temporary caretaker(s) of the child(ren) and the protective payee

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

A. General Procedures (Continued)

(may be one and the same) for the case. In cases where the child(ren) is absent from the home, but not in FSD custody the [201WC](#) should indicate the name of some professional who is advocating for the absence and would be willing to speak to ESD regarding the status of the reunification plan. When available, case managers can be an integral part in ensuring this paperwork is completed and understood.

- d. If verification is requested and is not returned the grant shall be closed or reduced (if other children remain in the household).
- e. BPS submits all requested verification to their local management team to make the determination if the grant remains open, needs to be closed, or should be approved or denied.
- f. District management teams will designate who is responsible for determining temp absence eligibility. The 180 Day Temporary Absence Calculator can be found on the RUFA tab of the ESD Calculator located on the [ESD Intranet Homepage](#).
- g. The management team designee will email the decision to the BPS for processing. The following blurb can be used:

*(Name, SSN) has been approved for continued Reach Up benefits due to the temporary absence of a (parent/caretake or child(ren)) for up to 180 days. The absent household member will remain active for Reach Up. Please enter a left date on the MEMB panel in ACCESS, with a code of 6 -"allowable for RU". The absent household member must be removed however, for 3SVT and FUEL.*

*The full Reach Up grant that the household is receiving must be counted for 3SVT and FUEL. Enter a UNEA panel countable for 3SVT and Fuel just for the portion of the Reach Up grant that isn't being counted (see example below), and write RU Temp. Absence in the "description" field.*

*Example: Reach Up grant is \$640. The 3SVT budget is only counting \$426.70 (because of the person being removed for RUFA). A UNEA panel needs to be created for \$213.30 (\$640-426.70).*

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

A. General Procedures (Continued)

*The 180 days will max out on (date). If DCF-FSD is involved and informs us at any point between now and then that the court approved case plan has changed to no longer include reunification, the Reach Up grant must close or be reduced by removing the code 6 on the MEMB panel.*

*Lastly, please put a WARN on this case indicating the temporary absence of the appropriate household member and enter a CATN as well.*

*IMPORTANT: If at any time during the temporary absence, another parent or caretaker applies for and is granted Reach Up Financial Assistance for the child(ren), make sure to inform the District Management team so the information can be added to the tracking sheet.*

3. Special Circumstances

New Reach Up applicants, and current recipients adding an absent child (that is not already considered temporarily absent) to the grant, can also apply/add the child to grant requesting Temporary Absence eligibility. If reunification is expected to be within 30 days approve without Temp Absence. If reunification is expected to be more than 30 days but less than 180 days, look at the date of the first RU payment as the start of the 30 or 180 -day period.

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren)

ESD will use a teaming approach to monitor those cases where the temporary absence is due to custody or placement of the child by FSD. The Family Services social worker assigned to the family, the parent/caretaker's Reach Up case manager, and Eligibility will work together to assist the family. In cases of a child only Reach Up grant, case management will not be set up and communication will remain between FSD and the District Management Team.

1. Granting Temporary Absence

- a. BPS enters a left date on the MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code of 6 "allowable for RU." Left date will be the first day that the child is consecutively absent, or the first day that the child is consecutively not in the household 50% of the time or more.

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren) (Continued)

- b. BPS removes the child(ren) for 3SVT and the full Reach Up grant that the household is receiving must be counted for 3SVT and FUEL.
- c. BPS enters a UNEA panel countable for 3SVT and Fuel just for the portion of the Reach Up grant that isn't being counted (see example below), and write "RU Temp Absence" in the "description" field.

Example: Reach Up grant is \$640. The 3SVT budget is only counting \$426.70 (because of the person being removed for RUFA). A UNEA panel needs to be created for \$213.30 (\$640-426.70).

- d. BPS enters a WARN on case indicating the temporary absence of a child(ren), and enters a CATN as well.
- e. BPS sets up a future TO DO that indicates when the maximum of 180 days will be reached.
- f. BPS will inform RUCM (as appropriate)
  - i. Any change to the parent/caretaker's plan for the child to return home at the end of the absence.
  - ii. Indications or reports that it is no longer the parent/caretaker's intent to maintain a home for the child during the absence.
  - iii. Changes in the parent/caretaker's living situation.
  - iv. Information regarding the child's incarceration, medical care, or DCF custody status.
  - v. Changes affecting the parent/caretaker's eligibility for Reach Up.

2. Ending Temporary Absence

- a. If child(ren) is returned to household within 180 days the BPS will

10/15/18

Bulletin No. 18-12

P-2270 p.6

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren) (Continued)

- i. remove the left date and code 6 on the MEMB panel
  - ii. add the child(ren) back to 3SVT household effective the date of return
  - iii. remove the UNEA panel for “RU Temp Absence”
  - iv. remove the temporary absence WARN
  - v. enter CATN indicating child(ren)’s name and date of return
  - vi. Contact COPS if a 666 number was used to "trick" the system and they will correct ACCESS to say that yes indeed this child is the same. Do not merge these cases—ask COPS instead.
- b. If an FSD custody case and FSD reports to BPS at any point that the court approved plan for the family has changed to no longer include reunification prior to the 180<sup>th</sup> day, the BPS reports this to the case manager and Reach Up Supervisor who will send an email to [AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov) for review of the case. If the decision is to close, Supervisor will inform the BPS and the Reach Up grant must close or be reduced.
  - c. Cases that are closing prior to the 180<sup>th</sup> day for other eligibility related reasons should be treated as any ongoing Reach Up case.
  - d. Cases which are not reunited within 180s days should be closed as soon as possible after the 180<sup>th</sup> day.

C. Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker

1. Granting Temporary Absence

- a. In two parent households, BPS enters a left date on the parent’s MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code of 6 “allowable for RU”. Left date will be the first day that the parent is consecutively absent. See B (1) c above and follow instructions to count full RUFA grant amount in 3SVT and SF budgets.

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

C. Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker (Continued)

- b. For single parent household BPS enters a left date on the parent's MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code 6 "allowable for RU" and approves closure of 3SVT and SF benefits, unless parent is maintaining eligibility on their own. If parent is remaining active on 3SVT or SF, BPS must enter a left date on the child (ren)'s MEMB panel with a code 6.
- c. A participant who is out of the household for Temporary Absence must assign a protective payee and complete a form [207 Protective Payment Agreement](#) otherwise the grant will close.
  - i. BPS sets up protective payments for housing (if housing is included in the grant). Housing includes rent, mortgage, property taxes, insurance, allowable maintenance and repair.
  - ii. BPS sets up the protective payee who will receive any remainder of the Reach Up grant. Parent should not retain access to benefits. When selecting EBT Alternate Payee Status select 1C "Cash Only First Alternate" See [SOP 2104 Entering an Alternate Payee in ACCESS/Processing a 139AP form](#) and follow directions with information from form [207 Protective Payment Agreement](#).
  - iii. BPS can inform protective payee that they may apply for 3SVT and SF for themselves and the child(ren) if income eligible. They should not gain access to the Absent Parent/Caretaker's 3SVT or SF benefit. If protective payee is also caring for children outside of the child (ren)'s typical house they may also be eligible for a caretaker grant. See 2270 D below.
- d. BPS enters a WARN on case indicating the temporary absence of a parent/caregiver, and enters a CATN as well.
- e. BPS sets up a future TO DO that indicates when the maximum of 180 days will be reached.
- f. BPS will inform RUCM
  - i. if parent will be absent more than 180 days,



P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

C. Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker (Continued)

- ii. any change in the parent/caretaker's plan to return home,
- iii. reports that it is no longer the parent/caretaker's intent to maintain a home and be responsible for the child,
- iv. a change in the designated responsible adult and alternate payee,
- v. information regarding the parent/caretaker's inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution and/or
- vi. changes affecting the parent/caretaker's eligibility for Reach Up.

2. Ending Temporary Absence

See above Procedure B as applicable. If a protective payee was assigned follow the directions for "Removing or Making Changes to an Existing Alternate Payee" in the [SOP 2104](#) referenced in 2270 C (1) d above.

D. Setting Up Caretaker Grant for Child (if applicable)

In cases where the parent will be absent from the household, and the children are being cared for by a caretaker outside of their parents' home, the caretaker may be able to apply for a caretaker grant.

1. BPS will set up a caretaker case for the designated responsible adult (use real SSN if they are not already or have never received Reach Up for themselves).
2. BPS give the child(ren) 666#s and keep all other information as is. BPS indicates "no" when ACCESS asks if this child is really the other child in temporary absence household. Do not merge cases.
3. Create WARN and enter CATN that this child(ren) is really open in another household.

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

D. Setting Up Caretaker Grant for Child (if applicable) (Continued)

4. BPS will contact COPS if a 666 number was used upon closure of the caretaker grant so cases can be merged.

E. Continuation of Temporary Absence Eligibility

1. Case closes for Eligibility related non-coop:

- a. If verification comes in before the closure date, case would be reopened with no changes to Temp Absence eligibility.
- b. If verification comes in after the closure date, the participant must reapply. Use the date of the anticipated first Reach Up payment as a starting point for the time period:
  - i. If the children will return to the household within 30 days case can be approved.
  - ii. If the children will not return to the household within 30 days, BPS or Case Manager should connect with FSD (if child is in custody) to determine if the goal is still reunification. If absence is related to reasons other than FSD custody, verification should be requested from collateral sources to determine if reunification is still the goal. Consider how much time the household already utilized under Temporary Absence eligibility.

For example: Someone was granted a temp absence and had been on RU for 90 days under the temp absence before closing for failing to return an IR. If they reapply the next month, use the remaining 90 days as the time frame for when the child must return to the home.

2. If reopened case is about to be sanctioned—make sure to allow 10 days for household to receive notice of reduced sanction amount (sanction may need to be put in place for following month depending when case is reopened).

10/15/18

Bulletin No. 18-12

P-2352

P-2352 Reach Up Supervisory Case Reviews

Supervisory case reviews are completed by Reach Up Supervisors and used as a tool to promote best practice among Reach Up Case Managers.

A. General guidelines:

1. Each Reach Up Supervisor chooses number of cases asked for by Central Office. Reviews must be completed by the last day of the month each month.
2. Cases should be chosen from every case manager in the district, including contracted case managers. Choose different case manager's cases to review each month until everyone has had a case reviewed and continue in this manner.
3. Complete the 242CR-RU.
4. Log the review on the "Supervisory Case Review Tracking Sheet" located on the shared drive in the SCR folder (Y:\AHS ALL SHARE\ESD\SCR). Scan or save the original document to the share drive.
5. If applicable, complete the "Next Steps/Due Date" section of the spreadsheet. Note any issues in need of follow up. For example, no UNCOPE or PHQ2 was found in the file. This should be highlighted as a next step with a due date for the Reach Up Supervisor to follow up on.
6. District Operations Directors will choose 3 of the case reviews that the Reach Up Supervisor has completed to review and log that on the "Supervisory Case Review Tracking Sheet".

B. 242CR-RU Guidelines

1. Identifying information
  - a. Date Completed: Actual date the supervisor is completing the review.
  - b. Month of Review: Same date as the date completed. Best practice is to review 4-6 months back in the case, or as long as the case manager has held the case.
2. Intake and Ongoing Assessment

P-2352 Reach Up Supervisory Case Reviews

B. 242CR-RU Guidelines (Continued)

- a. SSOM 613M: Is it in file and for new applications was it completed within 30 days of first case manager appointment, or had it been completed in the last 6 months of case reopening? Has latest SSOM been completed within last 6 months? Has each of the sections been completed? Record the actual date it was completed in comments section.
  - b. Assessment Summary in ACCESS 613: Has the Assessment Began Date been updated in ACCESS to match the date the SSOM was completed? Have the results been correctly entered in ACCESS—matching Domain Strengths, Neutrals and Interferes?
  - c. Orientation Screening 604: Is it in file and does the date match the last time the case was opened? If last opening was prior to Case Manager mark as N/A.
  - d. UNCOPE & PHQ2 604SUPP: To be completed during initial assessment or within 30 days of the first case management appointment if not appropriate at first meeting. For new applicants who have already been screened, only do a rescreen if there is reason to believe things have changed, or to expect different screening results and the participant is amenable to completing it again. Can be rescreened if changes in participant's life warrant rescreen. If not in file, Case Manager should complete. Concerns should be followed up with referrals. If participant is currently in treatment, screening does not have to be completed, but case notes should clearly indicate why screening was not done and what type of treatment participant is in.
  - e. FDP: Latest FDP is signed and includes current activities. Activities include tasks and are written with strength based language. Only time N/A should be used is if it is within 30 days of the grant opening. FDP in file matches what is entered in ACCESS (activity name, dates and hours).
  - f. Scheduled within 30 days of being assigned a case manager.
3. Progressive Assessment (these include assessments that are not mandated, but instead are used as appropriate)
    - a. Appropriate Assessment tools chosen

P-2352 Reach Up Supervisory Case Reviews

B. 242CR-RU Guidelines (Continued)

- b. Assessment results used in planning with participant

4. Activities/Support Services

- a. Realistic Highest Capability: if working at less than work requirement, case notes explain why and indicate plan to increase.
- b. Appropriate Deferments: FDP includes activities to help improve or resolve interfere; appropriate codes are used, deferments end on last day of month whenever possible.
- c. Appropriate Referrals: case notes provide clear identification of services providers and next steps; signed releases in file.
- d. Progressive Employment: referral to Job Coach; case notes indicate plan for increased level of work activity.
- e. Support Services used appropriately, including incentives. Ensure support service discussions are in case notes and indicate when approved or denied. Documentation is available in case file—driver information, estimates, receipts, ACCESS check issuance.
- f. Worksite Placements: paperwork for placement is in file, including participant evaluations.
- g. Scheduled/verified hours entered: Timesheets are entered by the 12<sup>th</sup> of the following month; participants are held accountable for late timesheets when appropriate.

5. Contact with Participant

- a. Intake case notes/Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> meeting with Case Manager
- b. Ongoing Case Notes: Entered for each contact with participant; notes are legible, up to date, no big gaps in time, language is professional and relevant; includes summary of discussions around Reach Up requirements (i.e. time limits, conciliation process, mandatory youth young child deferments); good cause and use of excused absences are noted; participants plan should be clearly stated in notes.

P-2352 Reach Up Supervisory Case Reviews

B. 242CR-RU Guidelines (Continued)

- c. Appropriate level/type of contact: Minimum of monthly contact with Case Manager, more as situation requires. Community visits/home visits offered when appropriate; text messaging and email utilized when available.
- d. CATN notes: used appropriately, TODOs sent when necessary.

6. Conciliations/Sanctions

- a. Good Cause: pursued and documented, if good cause is found—conciliation/sanction is removed.
- b. Conciliation forms: resolution matches reason for conciliation.
- c. Sanction: 606 is signed and dated; Reasons letter is available; sanction is entered into ACCESS.
- d. Timeframes followed: 10 days to determine good cause; 10 days if verification of good cause reason is needed.
- e. Documentation: in case notes, copies of forms, Conciliation and Sanction are included on FDP with clear plan on how to resolve/cure.

7. Miscellaneous

- a. Case file organization: documents are in appropriate brads and in chronological order.

P-2370 Case Management Procedures for Temporary Absence

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*Example of a voluntary placement:*

*Mom has been experiencing an increase in mental health symptoms and is considering checking into Brattleboro Retreat for a period of time. Mom is supported by her mental health clinician and her primary care provider. Family Services is not involved. Providers write letters of support asking that it is in Mom and child's best interest child be separated from Mom and returned within 180 days. Child can stay temporarily with maternal grandmother, but Mom continues to need financial assistance so she can maintain her apartment. Case may be eligible for Temporary Absence.*

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1. Reporting Temporary Absence

The household is responsible for reporting an absence, but if reported by FSD, Economic Services must act on the information.

- a. In cases involving children in FSD custody, FSD can either provide:

P-2370 Case Management Procedures for Temporary Absence

A. General Procedures (Continued)

- i. form [FS201FC-M](#) indicating if household is receiving Reach Up.
  - ii. an email to ESD stating that a child(ren) were removed that the current plan includes reunification.
- b. If the household reports to Case Management, the case manager reports temporary absence to Eligibility if not already reported.
  - c. In all cases where case management is involved, the case manager will help explain the temporary absence process to the family. It will be assumed that participants will want their Reach Up benefit continued, but participants can opt out.

2. Determining Eligibility

- a. Eligibility will follow procedures to gather verification of absence. If case manager receives any verification it will be shared with Eligibility.
- b. The most common Temporary Absence cases involve FSD custody. If FSD reports at any point that the court approved plan for the family has changed to no longer include reunification as a goal, the case manager reports this to the Reach Up Supervisor who will send an email to [AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov) for review of the case. If the decision is to close, the case manager will inform Eligibility and the Reach Up grant must close or be reduced.
- c. Each District will keep a list of all Temporary Absence decisions and submit a copy to Reach Up Central Office on a quarterly basis.

3. General Case Management Responsibilities:

- a. Case manager continues to administer the services component of the Reach Up Program.
- b. Family Development Plan requirements that were applicable prior to the absence still apply, unless in direct conflict with what is being required of the participant by FSD. FDP activities that support the parent's engagement with Family Services is recommended.



P-2370 Case Management Procedures for Temporary Absence

A. General Procedures (Continued)

- c. If it is unlikely that reunification will occur before the 180 days is completed, but the household remains eligible for a Temporary Absence, it is best practice to help the participant plan ahead for their transition off of Reach Up after their 180 day period has expired.

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren)

ESD will use a teaming approach to monitor those cases where the temporary absence is due to custody or placement of the child by Family Services. The Family Services social worker assigned to the family, the parent/caretaker's Reach Up case manager, and Eligibility will work together to assist the family. In cases of a child only Reach Up grant, case management will not be set up and communication will remain between Family Services and the District Management Team.

1. Case Management Responsibilities

- a. The case manager will assist in obtaining a [201WC](#) release from the parent/caretaker in situations where the child's absence is due to incarceration, medical care, or a voluntary placement and contact the appropriate parties (including the parent/caretaker) two or more times per month including face to face, phone and email contact.
- b. In cases of FSD custody, case manager will have contact two times or more per month with the parent/caretaker and the Family Services social worker. This will include a monthly team meeting, as well as phone and email contact.
- c. Case manager will specifically inquire
  - i. Is the absence still expected to be less or no more than 180 days?
  - ii. Does the parent/caretaker still plan on having the child return home?
  - iii. What is the parent/caretaker's living situation? (Is she maintaining a home for the child's return? Up-to-date on rent? Looking for housing if "homeless"? ...etc.)

10/15/18

Bulletin No. 18-12

P-2370 p.4

P-2370 Case Management Procedures for Temporary Absence

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren) (Continued)

- d. Case manager will share pertinent information received from Eligibility or an institution with the Family Services social worker.
- e. Case manager will report any changes to Eligibility that might affect continuing eligibility for the Reach Up grant.

C. Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker

1. Case Management Responsibilities

- a. The case manager will assist in obtaining a [201WC](#) from the parent/caretaker and contact the hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution.
- b. Case manager will code absent parent/caretaker as medically deferred from the work requirement.
- c. Case manager will have a minimum of contact two times per month with the absent parent/caretaker, if the facility and situation permit, in part to monitor the parent/caretaker's continuing ability to return within 180 days. This requirement can be waived in situations where it has been verified with the hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution, that contact is not allowed, would be unreasonably difficult to arrange, or would be detrimental to the parent/caretaker's treatment plan.
- d. See B (1) c and d above.