

Listen to the voice of the children in the decision making: a challenge of the Child Protection System in Spain



The **right of children to participate in decisions that affect their lives is well established** (Convention on Rights of the Child 1989, and laws)

BUT

How are their voices considered in the decision making processes in the child protection system?

How we can encourage participation in this context?

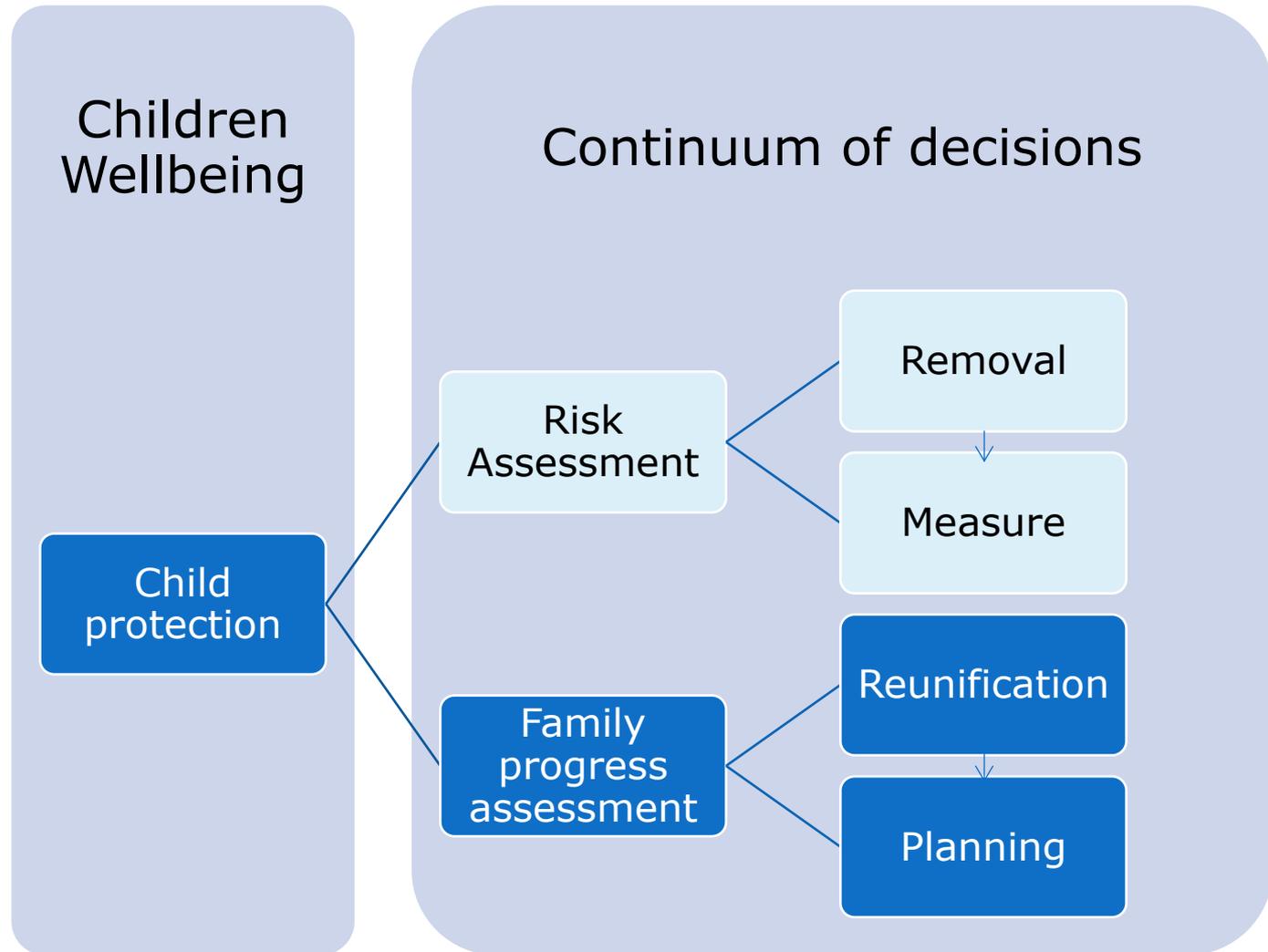
“Children in child protection services: socioeducative processes” (EDU2001-30144-C02-02).

The biological family in the child welfare system: educational processes” (EDU2011-30144-C02-01 2012 – 2014)”.

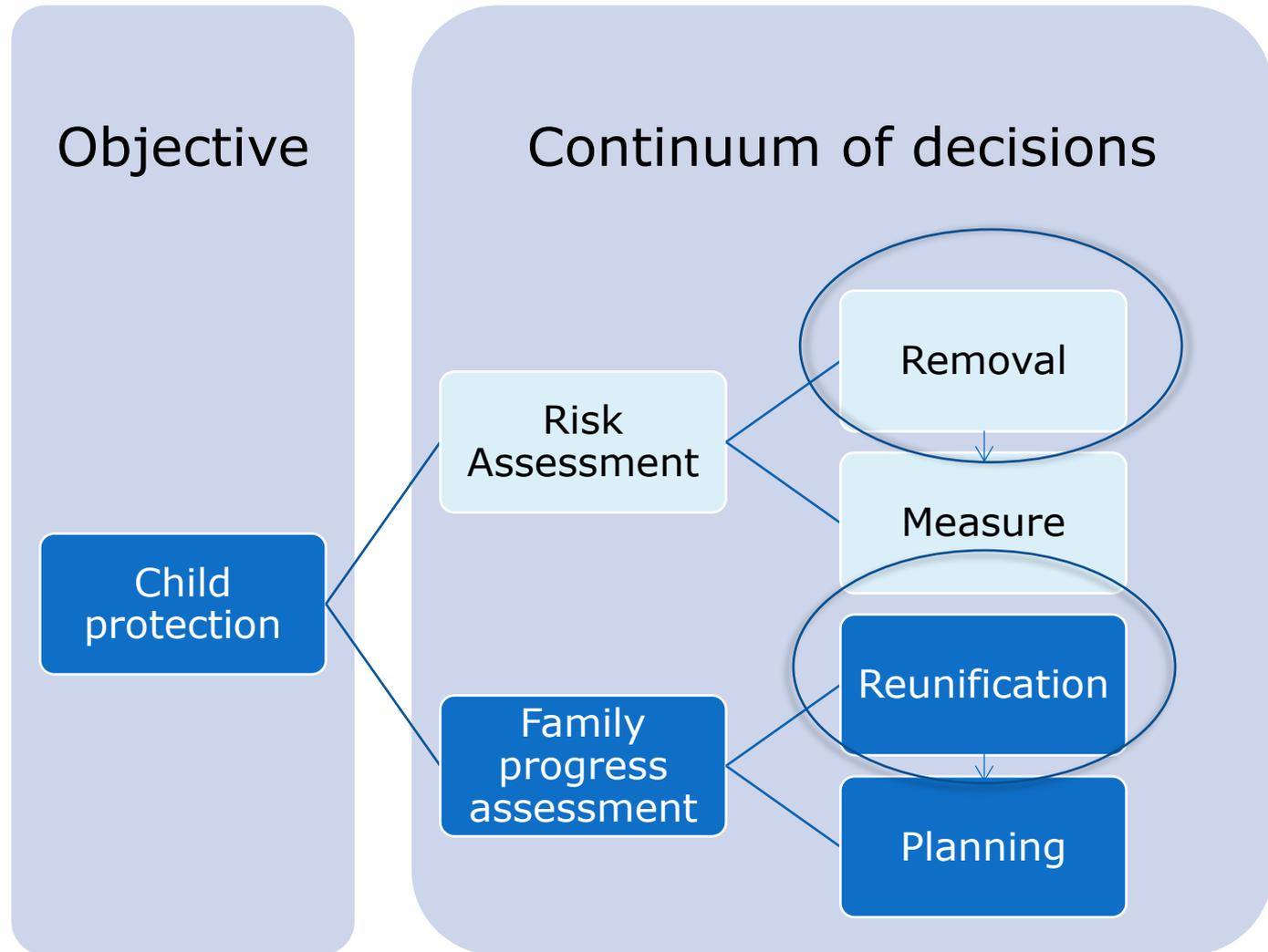
Aims of the presentation

- examine the "voice of the children" in moments of removal and reunification of the process of child protection in Spain
- identifying the most relevant aspects in the participation of children and adolescents in the two phases of intervention in child protection: the assessments and decision making

Decision making process



Decision making process



Participation



4. Influence

The view must be acted upon as appropriate

3. Audience

The view must be listened to

2. Voice

Children must be facilitated to express their views

1. Space

Children must be given the opportunity To express a view

Adapted from Lundy, L. (2007). Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927-42.

Levels of Understanding



3 levels of understanding of the processes of the protection system (Cossar, Brandon & Jordan, 2014):

- a) **Minimal understanding:** know they has a social worker who spoke to them, visit and takes notes, , but did not know what his role was

- B) **Partial understanding:**
know that the parents were going to meetings, but did not quite know why. They tried to gather information, like a puzzle, and many of them said they received more information about their family (parents and older siblings) than from the professionals. A lot of information they had was inaccurate

- C) **Clear understanding:**
were well aware of the protective system processes

- **Cope with the changes** that occur in their family situation and those which they themselves live (Fuentes-Peláez & Amorós , 2008; Jiménez, Martínez & Mata , 2010; Jiménez, Martínez Muñoz & León, 2013)
- Ensures **more positive and effective results in the protection plans** (Barnes, 2012; Mcleod , 2007; Schofield & Beek, 2005)
- **Positive feeling** in the child towards himself (Schofield et al., 2011)
- Participation can be **an element of protection** for children, as it can lead to increased confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Schofield & Beek, 2005; Limber & Kaufman, 2002).

Dilemmas on child participation

To **discern about the capacity thereof to participate relating it to their age** (Holland, 2006)

Professionals identify **age as a determining factor in the ability of the young to participate** (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Holland, S. & Scourfield, 2004; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998)

What happens when the **child's perspective contradicts the professional opinion** on what his primary interest is (Archard & Skivenes, 2009).

Participants

Professionals : 63

Families: 42

**Children &
adolescents: 30**



Children & Adolescents profile

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30 children & adolescents

Boys

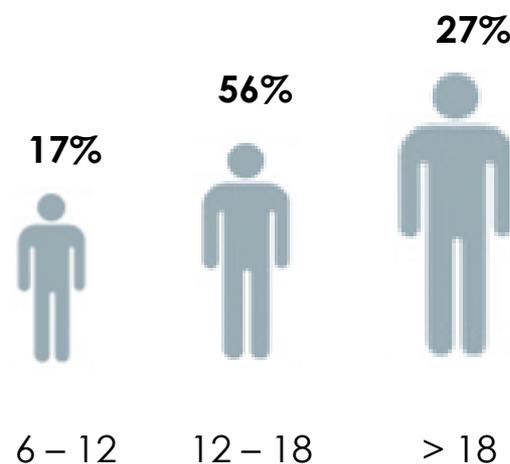
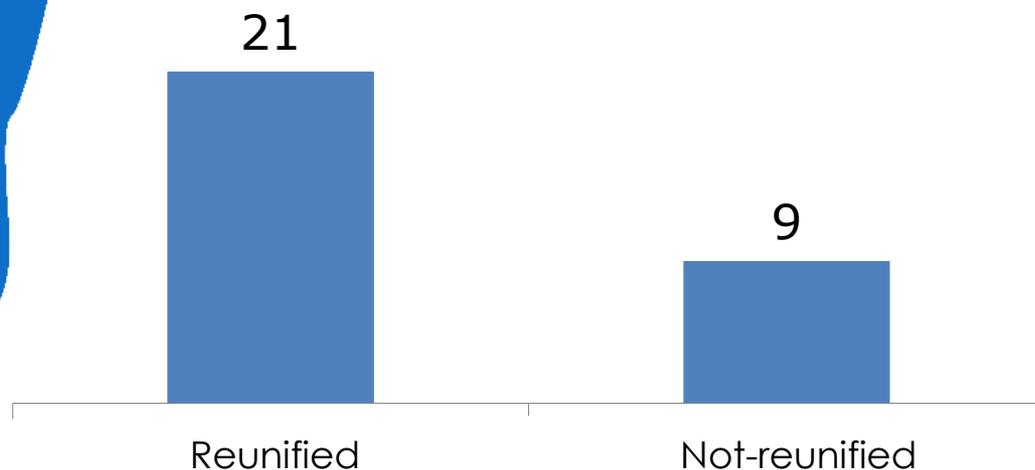


53,3 %

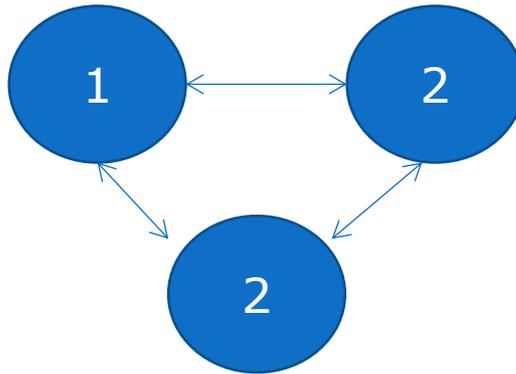
Girls



46,7 %



Multiple informants



Focus groups & interviews

Focus groups = 23

9 – birth families

5 – adolescents

9 – professionals

Interviews = 18

2 – birth families

16 – adolescents

Data collection tools:

- 1) an **identification form** for collecting basic data on participants;
- 2) a **guide** for developing the **discussion groups and semi-structured interviews**;
- 3) a **summary** form for collecting general aspects related to the groups or interview, such as date, duration and place of realization, participants' attitudes to participate in the research, group dynamics and any other relevant observation.

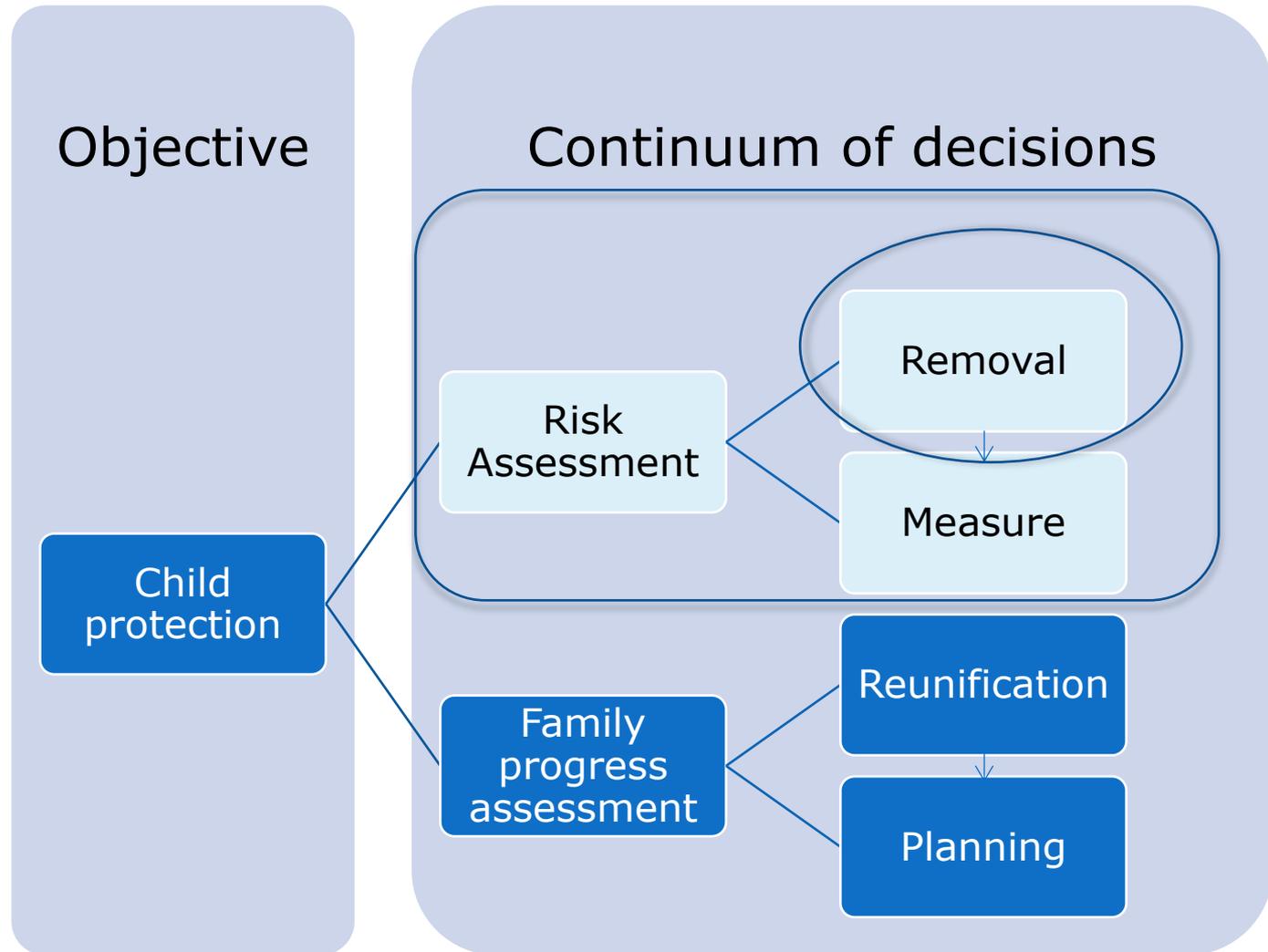
Procedures of data collection

- 1) 2 researchers for each group (moderator and technical aspects)
- 2) Recorded and transcript
- 3) Content analysis bottom up -> textual -> conceptualized
- 4) Peer review

Ethical considerations

Informed consent

Decision making process



Risk Assessment

- **Lack of information and no “voice”** of children and adolescents
 - *We know from the comments and they put things that are irrelevant. I didn't ask either but I have the curiosity to ask why accuse my mother of things that were not so. (Child)*
 - *So they hardly gave me any information, just that I was going away with my sister a while, not for long, and that was it”. (Adolescent interview)*
- **2 different levels of understanding:**
 - Family difficulties - lower age (Minimal U.)
 - Troubled parent-child relationship and behavior difficulties posed by adolescents - older children (Partial -Clear U.)
- **Need to understand to avoid the feeling of GUILT**
Professionals recognize the importance of understanding the reason for the removal, adjusting the explanations to the developmental level of the children

Removal and measure decision

NO SPACE specially in the removal decision:

- Participation of the children and adolescent is very limited

NO or poor information when the measure was taken

- little information received about the
- place where they are going to live
- Abruptly separation
- Confusion

Initial moment of
the placement
great impact ->
ANXIAXETY

MINIMAL UNDERSTANDING

Missinformation about the implications of the protection measure

Removal and measure decision

They did not tell me, they just sent me. (Child)

Well, I got almost no information, just that I was going to go with my sister for a while, a short while, and that's it. (Child)

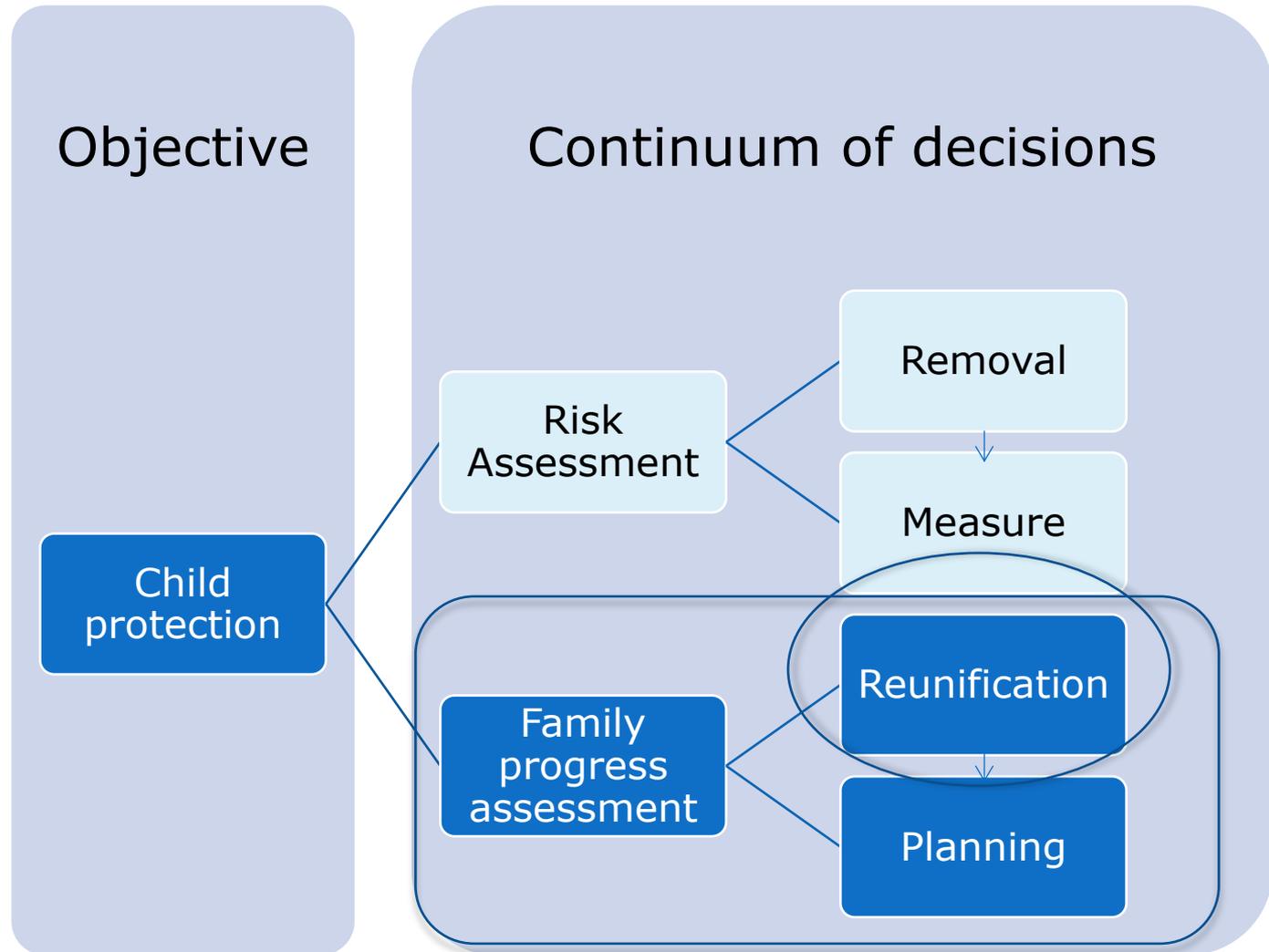
Well, not separate me in that way, because it was getting me out of the house and it's as if someone had taken me by my shirt and had dumped me into the street, and I wasn't given any explanations and that impacted me. (Child)

I would have liked that they had told me that instead of telling me that I was going to play, that they had told me that they were going to separate me from my mother, that I was going to play and then she was going to pick me up. (Child)

They should let us speak too, because we have the right to be listened to, just as we listen to them". (Child)

The communication to the children is also very important, that they can live it in peace and that the parents also understand that the children are living it with this tranquility. (Professional)

Decision making process



Family progress assessment

- General **lack of information** to children about the family evolution
- **Professionals dilemma**
Inform but not create false expectations
- **Different understanding -> age – involve on the problem**

Well, as my mother had a drinking problem, my mother went to a rehabilitation center. She was there just a few months and we went to visit her once a month or so, and when she recovered it was when we went to get together with my parents. (Older Child)

My mama found a better job, better house, and was reserving money to sustain us. (Your children Child)

Family progress assessment

- Different role -> **age – involve on the problem**
Adolescents have a greater role in the assessment progress because they know the reasons, they are involved in the change process and in many cases an awareness of the changes that have been made is achieved
- *...my mother is already better, before she had a lot of problems, she found a job, ..., she drank alcohol, she had problems with the police... I changed a lot, because I've always been nervous, I'm hyperactive, but I didn't do crazy things as I did before and the behavior and attitude of my mother... to do things right has made her get better.*
(Child)

Plan the reunification: when and how

- Children, families and professionals share the need to explain to the children how the reunification process will be and the implications it will have

BUT

- **No information** of the decisions relating to the reunification.
- Reunification communicate abruptly and sometimes without prior notice

Decide the reunification: when and how

No but in the centers it is different, they never tell you until the day you are going to leave, because they told me in September, but it can be on day one or it can be on day twenty, that is different, they do not tell you until the last day when you leave. The day that you leave they tell you in the morning when they wake you up, they say: "prepare your backpack because later you go there". (Child)

I was sent directly, they did not explain anything to me. They said, you have to pack because you are going back home, I packed my suitcase, they came for me and I left. My grandmother told me to go into the street that she had a surprise, she had made my bags and there was my mother with the car to go home. (Child)

Decide the reunification: when and how

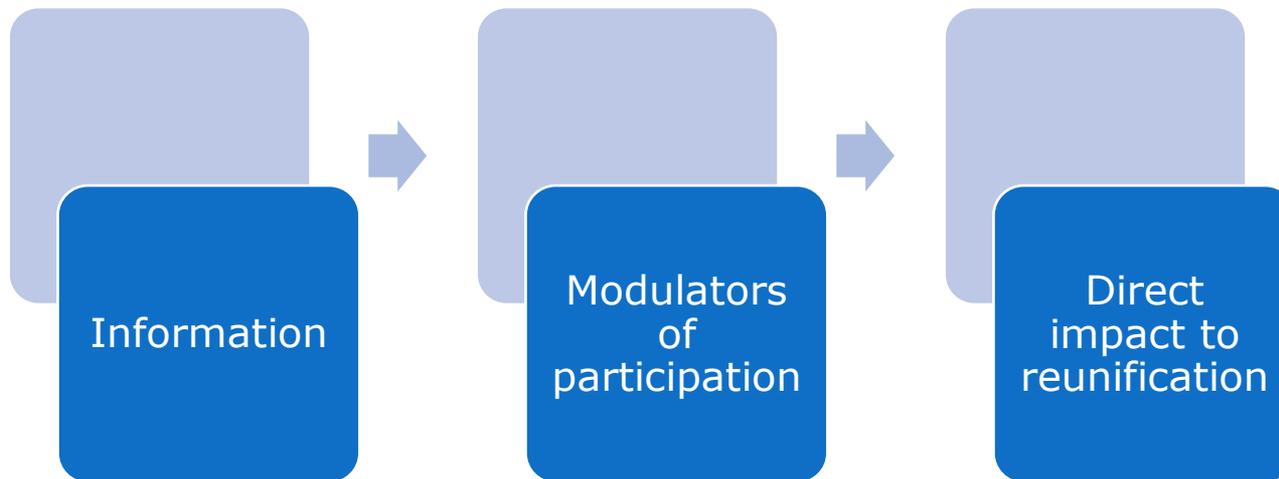
Forgotten:

- Bonds create during the placement
- Return is a New change and implies manage the loss

Uncomfortable, strange, I was not expecting it... They told me, they packed my bags and the following day we went to my mother's house and I felt uncomfortable. - If you are with your grandmother for years and then they send you to your parents, you feel a little weird, you do not have the same affection of your grandmother with your mother, you are treated differently. - I also felt strange, the house was smaller, it smelled different, my father was old, all very different... (Child)

Conclusions

Children want to be better informed throughout the process and want to be heard



is inaccurate
and
incomplete

reason for
removal and the
children's age

Participation in the
Reunification
contributes to success
And potential stability

Conclusions

" They should let us speak too, because we have the right to be listened to, just as we listen to them". (Focus group with children and adolescents)

- children and adolescents don't take an active part in either the assessment process or in the decision process
- the opinion and participation of children and adolescents have little or no impact on the decision making process

Implications to practice



- Training the professionals
- Improve relationship with professionals
- Facilitate the relationship with the biological family
- Establishing mechanisms to ensure participation, improve the level of understanding and include the “voice” in the ongoing development of the case plan

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Thank you for your attention!

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