

CARER REVIEW PRACTICE GUIDELINE



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Purpose

The following is a guide to assist all personnel involved in the review and ongoing approval of authorised Out of Home Care carers. In particular the guidelines give pointers and directions for the key components of the review process.

The meaning of terms and words used in this document

In the context of this procedure the following definitions apply:

- A **Reviewer** is a person with designated responsibilities for the review of carers and preparation of information on Carer Reviews for the Carer Assessment Panel. The Reviewer may be a member of personnel, for example a Supporter of Carers, who is assigned review responsibilities, or they may be specifically appointed or contracted to undertake carer reviews.
- An **Authorised Carer** is a carer who is currently authorised by Life Without Barriers to provide out of home care to children and young people in New South Wales.
- The **Care Team** is comprised of a range of positions, with identified roles and responsibilities, each of which provide specific supports and functions to enable the child or young person to have a successful experience in care and to achieve agreed goals and outcomes.
- The **Carer Assessment Panel** is comprised of an identified group of employees who provide advice in relation to the authorisation/de-authorisation of carers. The Panel is governed by a Terms of Reference.
- A **Prohibited Person** is prohibited to apply for or obtain child-related employment. A prohibited person is a person convicted of a serious sex offence, the murder of a child or a child-related personal violence offence, as well as a registrable person under the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act.

Periodic Review Requirements

As a part of our commitment to ensuring that children and young people are receiving appropriate care, and to support the continuing development of carers, a regular Carer Review must be undertaken. It is important to note that ongoing carer authorisation is contingent on carers engaging in the carer review process.

The Carer Review is designed to indicate the appropriateness of the continuation of the carer in their carer role and the continued placement of a child or young person within the carer's household. Additionally the review can be used to identify additional needs in terms of support or development.

At minimum the Carer Review must occur:

- 6 months after the initial carer approval.
- Every two years following the first review.
- When risk factors indicate the need for a review.

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Please note: where a carer is unwilling or unable to engage in the process a review must be completed, citing the reasons the carer has not been involved.

Triggers for Immediate Risk Assessment & Review

There are some circumstances which will trigger the use of a risk assessment and immediate Carer Review. These are typically circumstances which either may place a child or young person at risk or which may relate to the approval status of a carer being altered and the person/s being ineligible to be a carer.

Please note: in the event that an authorised carer becomes a prohibited person, the situation needs to be immediately subject to a risk assessment – a Carer Review is not required.

The circumstances under which both a risk assessment and Carer Review must be undertaken immediately include:

- Any household member or frequent visitor becomes a Prohibited Person.
- An immediate Carer Review is recommended by the Investigations and Complaints Unit following a reportable conduct investigation.
- A Carer Review should be completed if a particular incident report or incident trends indicate a risk factor may be present.

Additionally Indicated Carer Reviews

Indications that a Review Should Occur

There are some changes to carer's circumstances that *must* result in a carer review being undertaken:

- Whenever a significant change to carer circumstances is identified. The type of change and the circumstance will determine whether it is appropriate to conduct a review, a re-assessment or some other action.
- Carers authorised as a couple separate. If both carers wish to remain authorised then reviews must be done separately and thoroughly assess their capacity to continue to meet the needs of children and young people as single carers, taking into account the impact that separation can have, and the instability this may cause.
- Carers identify they have a significant illness that could impact on their capacity to continue to meet the needs of children and young people.
- A significant event occurs that could impact on the carers capacity to continue to meet the needs of children and young people such as, but not limited to, a serious illness of a family member, the loss of a loved one (in particular the loss of a partner), the loss of employment or other events that could signify significant stress.
- A carer identifies that they have a new partner, either who lives in the home, will be living in the home in the near future, or who spends regular time in the home, and is in regular contact with any children placed with/maybe placed with the authorised carer (see below on assessing a new partner of an authorised carer).
- A risk assessment recommends that a review occur.

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- There is evidence that the carer is not providing care in line with Life Without Barriers' policies, procedures and guidelines.
- There is evidence that caring is placing significant stress on the carers or other family members.

Assessing a New Partner of an Authorised Carer

When a carer identifies that they have a new partner (this could be a defacto partner or a partner who spends significant time in the carer's home and has involvement with children and young people in care) the review *must* involve the reassessment of the authorised carer with the new partner, using the Step by Step carer assessment tool, and with a focus on:

- Gathering evidence to support the new partner's authorisation;
- Assessing the authorised carer and the new partner's capacity to provide care as a couple and the stability of the relationship; and
- Ensuring the new partner undertakes the required pre-approval and induction training.

A Carer Moves Home

Where an authorised carer moves to a new home a house safety check must immediately be completed on the new home.

A New Household Member is Identified

Where a new household member (who is not a partner) is identified, probity checks must be completed in line with the household member probity requirements.

Conducting a Carer Review

The following are suggested guidelines only and should be considered in conjunction with the Step by Step Assessment tool and the Life Without Barriers Carer Assessment Practice Guidelines.

It is important to collect, review and analyse all the available information about a carer to assess their suitability and eligibility to continue to provide care to children and young people. Carers should be encouraged to engage in the review process and must be given an opportunity to read the completed review, record any additional comments and sign the review record.

Preparing for the Carer Review

Key to the success of a Review is undertaking preparation and planning. This will enable a Reviewer to be well informed about what to cover in the Review and additionally how to go about the Review.

In particular, where a Carer Review is to be conducted by an independent reviewer with no prior knowledge of the carer and the carer's abilities, strengths and weakness, it is very important to gather information prior to conducting the review.

The Reviewer must gain as much evidence as is available from the Supporter of Carers, Case Manager, and other member of the Care Team including clinicians and any other staff working with the carer.

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The Reviewer must ensure that they have sufficient information to enable them to have an understanding of the issues pertinent to the Review. Information should be sought from the investigating officer/Investigations and Complaints Unit if the review is conducted following an investigation or a misconduct matter.

If particular areas of concern have been raised, especially as a result of a reportable conduct or misconduct investigation, these must be thoroughly addressed in the Review. Additionally, there may be a risk assessment that has been undertaken in response to risk factors being identified. The Review should consider the risk assessment and where appropriate discuss it with the staff member/s who undertook the assessment.

It is recommended that the carer's files are viewed to gain any relevant background information. All the information gathered should inform the review plan.

Evidence must also be gained from the carer. In order to do this in a comprehensive manner it is important to thoroughly investigate any areas of concern with the carers. To do this it is important to be well prepared. Having pre-prepared questions and feedback that focus on areas of concern will assist with this. It is important to prepare relevant questions for each individual situation. When using information provided by carers to demonstrate competence it is important that this is in the form of examples. It is not adequate to say, for example, that a carer functions well in a team without thoroughly exploring this and providing examples of how the carer has demonstrated this.

Taking a Competency & Evidence Based Approach

Life Without Barriers takes a competency and evidence based approach to the assessment and review of carer. What this means is that we look for evidence of competency and we record this in order to inform decision making about carer approvals and the support we provide to carers to enable them to develop their carer abilities.

For this reason it is important to provide enough information and evidence for the reader to determine a carer's suitability and eligibility. It is not okay to make statements such as "the carer demonstrated competency" without providing details of how they did this. It will also be important that a reviewer addresses the competency of both carers if they are a carer couple.

Having prepared for the Carer Review, and following discussions with other staff members/the Care Team and a review of the files, relevant questions should be formulated that will elicit information from the carer addressing the following five core competencies:

- Attitudes and Connections
- Personal resilience
- Team work
- Child focussed care
- Safe environment

When assessing competence consider the needs and capacity of all family members to continue caring, as well as the impact that caring is having on natural children. If fostering is having a negative impact on any family members this must be addressed in the Review.

There may be areas where the carer has not been able to demonstrate competency due to a lack of opportunities (e.g. they may not have cared for a child or young person from a different cultural background

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before). In this instance similar questions to those used in the Step by Step assessment can be asked to gain some understanding of a carer's views, experience and potential capacity in this area. It is also recommended that it is recorded in the Review that the carer has not had an opportunity to demonstrate the competency. This information can then inform the future training needs of the carer.

Indeed, while it is important to focus on carer's strengths and provide evidence of competence it is also important to provide information about where a carer can improve competence. This does not mean the carer will not be re-authorized but will rather it will provide information about what the Supporter of Carers and the Organisation can do to support the carer to improve and develop in these areas. As with employees, carers deserve to be given honest feedback about their performance and assistance to continually improve and upgrade their skills. A Carer Review provides an opportunity to do this.

To reflect the focus on competency, when writing up the Review include direct quotes used by carers where they have provided some direct evidence of competency, or where they have made a statement that may indicate they are not competent.

Once the report is complete it is important to analyse all the information gathered to determine whether the carer has demonstrated competency. Remember it is important not to make statements such as "I think" or "I believe" the carer is competent. Good evidence will determine whether a carer is competent or not. When considering whether the evidence suggests a carer is competent it is important to ensure that the evidence demonstrates a clear focus on the needs of children and young people.

Engaging the Care Team in the Review

Unlike during the Step by Step Assessment, when completing a Carer Review we have the additional benefit of sourcing direct evidence from a variety of workers and the Care Team engaged with the carer.

A Supporter of Carers who has been providing support to the carer should have a vast knowledge of the carer's strengths and weaknesses. When completing the Review this knowledge should be drawn on to provide detailed and robust evidence of the carer's competence and to identify weaknesses. Evidence of both strengths and weaknesses will assist with future placement matching and will inform training and development needs of the carers.

Evidence should also be gathered from other Care Team members or personnel working with the carer, for example the Case Managers and Clinicians. These people will be able to provide additional evidence of competence or may highlight areas of weakness. Remember – we all have areas of weakness. There is nothing wrong with raising these concerns, particularly when it is done in the interest of performance feedback and skills development, or in fact if they demonstrate that a carer is not competent.

Completing the Review

If at any point during the review the carer demonstrates that they clearly are no longer competent to provide care to children and young people the review can be finalised. All review documentation to this point must be completed, including an analysis of the information provided and the recommendation for de-authorization for presentation to the Carer Assessment Panel.

Having gathered sufficient and appropriate evidence to inform the outcomes of the Review, carers are to be given an opportunity to discuss the report with the author. Carers should be encouraged to make any additional comments and to sign the report. Where carers do not agree with any comments made in the report they are given the opportunity to record this at the end of the report.

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Documentation Requirements

The following documents are required before a review is deemed complete:

1. Competency interview notes – these are required to demonstrate due process.
2. Signed, dated and witnessed back page of Code of Conduct and Carer Rights and Responsibilities.
3. Insurances – Home and Contents (dates of currency, home address and other important dates must be legible).
4. Comprehensive Motor Vehicle Insurance (dates of currency, home address and other important dates must be legible).
5. Current NSW Drivers Licence or interstate equivalent (dates of currency, home address and other important dates must be legible).
6. Current car registration (dates of currency, home address and other important dates must be legible).
7. Relevant consents to access information from external sources.
8. House safety checks as per Life Without Barriers Carer Review requirements.
9. Probity checks as per Life Without Barriers Carer Review requirements.

Related Policy, Legislation and Key Documents

Organisational

- Carer Recruitment, Assessment Authorisation Policy
- Carer Recruitment, Assessment and Authorisation Procedure
- Carer Assessment Practice Guidelines
- Information Management Policy
- Records Management Procedure
- Business Implementation Policy
- Service Provision Framework – NSW FSO: The Role of Life Without Barriers Care Teams
- Life Without Barriers Code of Conduct
- Upholding Rights and Responsibilities Policy
- Consent to Collect and Release Information Procedure
- Life Without Barriers Carer Review Tool

External

- NSW Standards for Statutory Out of Home Care
- Children and Young People (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- Step by Step Assessment tool

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DOCUMENT NAME	NSW FSO 10.2 Carer Review v2 0		
DOCUMENT TYPE	Practice Guideline		
SERVICE SECTOR/S	OOHC		
VERSION	[Number ##.##]		
APPROVAL DATE	[Approval Date]	REVIEW FREQUENCY	[Review (years)] Frequency
APPROVED BY	[Approver] The signatory (lead Executive) is accountable to implement, maintain and monitor appropriate systems to achieve the objectives of this document.		
BUSINESS PORTFOLIO	[Business Portfolio]		
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