

7.6 Supporting Foster Carers

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Policy

[Foster Care Partnership Policy 2012](#)

[Foster Carer Support at Difficult Times Policy](#)

Purpose

To guide child protection workers in the practice requirements to work in partnership with general, relative and significant other foster carers, as per the Department's [Foster Care Partnership Practice Framework 2012](#).

Legislative Authority

[Children and Community Services Act 2004 - Section 79 Power of the CEO to arrange placement](#)

[Children and Community Services Act 2004 - Section 82 Payment for care under a placement arrangement](#)

[Children and Community Services Regulations 2006 - Regulation 4 Approval of carers](#)

Standards

[Better Care, Better Services - Standards for Children and Young People in Protection and Care](#)

Practice Requirements

- Department staff must support foster carers to formally participate as team members in assessment, planning and review of the child, and to participate in other child centred decision making that occurs outside of the Department's formal planning and review processes.
- Department staff must provide foster carers with full information about the foster child and their family (where available) to enable them to protect the foster child, their own children, other children in their care and themselves.
- Foster carers must be supported by department staff to raise children in their care in a stable and secure environment where their social, emotional, psychological and developmental needs are met.
- Contact visits between the child and their birth family must be managed by departmental staff in such a manner as to support the placement and the foster care partnership.
- Department staff must provide foster carers with the support and resources they require to meet the needs of the child in their care (as outlined in the child's care plan).
- Where a foster carer is engaged by a community sector placement service provider, departmental staff must work with both the service provider and the foster carer to provide consistent information and support.

Process Map

Not applicable.

Procedures

[Overview](#)

[The Foster Care Placement Partnership Agreement](#)

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[Exemption from the Centrelink activity test and work participation requirements](#)

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Procedure - 7.6 Supporting Foster Carers

Overview

In partnership with the Western Australian Foster Care Association (FCA), the Department has implemented the Foster Care Partnership Practice Framework and related tools to improve the support provided to, and engagement of, general, relative and significant other foster carers. Department staff should refer to the Foster Care Partnership Practice Framework (2012) for full details (see Departmental Frameworks in related resources).

In providing full time care and a family environment for children in care, the foster carer has the most pronounced impact on the child's wellbeing. The Department is committed to supporting and sustaining stable foster placements, and is therefore committed to a partnership through teamwork with foster carers.

Information for foster carers can be found on the [Foster Care Association of WA](#) website,

the [Department's website](#), and in the [Foster Care Handbook for Foster Families](#).

Enrolment of a child in the CEO's care in approved childcare may be a consideration to support a foster carer and the placement. For example, to provide stimulation and development for the child and respite for the foster carer, or it may be required to support a foster carer who has work commitments. Full details can be found in Chapter 10: Attendance of a Child at a Child Care Service.

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The Foster Care Placement Partnership Agreement

The child's needs are best met when the different roles and responsibilities of child protection workers and foster carers are undertaken in partnership.

It is the child protection worker's responsibility to discuss the Foster Care Placement Partnership Agreement (the Agreement) with the foster carer at the commencement of the placement..

The Agreement records how the child protection worker and the foster carer will work in partnership in the best interests of the child(ren). Both parties must sign the Agreement and a copy provided to the foster carer.

In situations where an urgent placement has been arranged for a child in care with a relative or significant other (under s.79(2)(b)), the Agreement should be discussed and signed by both parties within five days of the child being placed.

Care plans and Signs of Safety documentation form the background to this Foster Care Placement Partnership Agreement.

A copy of the Agreement can be found in related resources.

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The Foster Care Partnership Practice Guidelines

Assessment, planning and review

The foster carer is supported to formally participate as a team member in assessment, planning and review of the child's needs, and to participate in other child centred decision making that occurs outside of the Department's formal planning and review processes. The foster carer must be supported to participate in what may be unfamiliar and even daunting settings for them.

- The foster carer is to be supported to be present and participate in the placement assessment, planning and review processes. Foster carers are to be given at least two weeks' notice prior to formal planning and decision making forums (care plan or care plan review) with courteous consideration in setting the time and venue.
- The foster carer is to be afforded the opportunity to provide a 'Carer Report' to planning and review meetings. The reports of the other team members are to be provided to the foster carer at least three days in advance. The final care plan is to be provided to the foster carer and the child (age permitting).
- Care plan reviews will be undertaken at the request of the foster carer if they are experiencing significant problems or positive outcomes are being achieved that affect the child's care plan.
- Elements of care plans changed as a result of a review or modification will be discussed with the foster carer within one week if he or she has not been present at the meeting. A copy of the review or modification will be provided to the foster carer within 14 working days.
- When there is a difference of opinion between the foster carer and the child protection worker (or other department staff) regarding the behavioural management of a child, the senior child protection worker placement services (SCPWPS) may mediate the issue and facilitate any necessary professional specialist input.
- The annual foster carer review should be a joint process between the foster carer and child protection worker or SCPWPS (using the relevant form - Form 565 General Foster Carer Review or Form 560a Relative and Significant Other Carer Annual Review). Information gathered through regular visits during the year should be analysed and inform the annual review. The foster carer should have the option of developing an individual learning plan at this time.

Provision of information

The foster carer is provided with full information about the foster child and their family to enable them to protect the child, their own children, other children in care and themselves.

- The initial placement plan and Child Information Form (CIF) is to be given to the foster carer at the time of placement.

- At the time of placement, the foster carer is to be provided with as much information as possible about the child and his/her family. Information about the child's health needs is of particular importance. Where full information is not available at the commencement of the placement, the foster carer is to be told all that is known, and further information can be provided as it becomes available.
- The foster carer must be given clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical and dental treatment, and be provided with a Medicare card for the child once obtained.
- A Child Health Passport (Passport) will be provided for each child in care, and given to the foster carer to hold. If the child changes placement, the Passport will move with the child. The Passport will provide the foster carer with information to assist in meeting the child's day-to-day health needs. The child protection worker will update the Passport during the placement as required.
- The foster carer is to be provided with a copy of the Department's Documented Education Plan for each child placed in their care; this is updated during the placement and moves with the child.

Foster care placement and support

The foster carer is supported to raise children with a view to a stable and secure environment where their social, emotional, psychological and developmental needs are met.

- A home visit is to be undertaken within one week of a placement, with the child protection worker having familiarised themselves with the case file before undertaking the visit.
- The child protection worker and other department staff are to work with the foster family as a family unit. This includes acknowledging and interacting with other children in the home as appropriate, and ensuring gifts (including cards) provided by the Department to the child in care are discussed with the foster carer prior to giving so that children are not treated differently.
- When there is a change in child protection worker, the new worker is to be introduced to the foster carer within one week.
- The child protection worker is to have at least monthly contact with each foster carer, either face-to-face or by telephone.
- District directors are to provide a range of opportunities for foster carers to be introduced to the Department's work and processes, be engaged with the staff and management of districts, provide input to the district, and access formalised peer support. These opportunities are to be outlined in the district's annual operational plan.
- The Department will coordinate access to other support and mentoring activities for foster families (including both biological children and children in care), and opportunities for formalised peer support in which more experienced foster carers are linked with less experienced carers.
- The foster carer is to be provided with opportunities to debrief when required (ideally with a SCPWPS, department psychologist or by referral to an external agency).
- The foster carer is to be provided with a Resources for Foster Carer File which includes:
 - Foster Care Handbook for Foster Families
 - My Life Story Book - to assist the child in their care to keep information about themselves
 - Communication Book - used for communication between the foster carer and parents, and is passed to the parents at contact visits
 - Protective Behaviours Booklet - designed for use by foster carers to help them teach children protective behaviours
 - Information specific to the local district - includes key contacts, local resources and supports, and
 - Information sheets on a variety of matters - such as Co-Sleeping, Childhood Trauma and Permanency Planning.

Contact visits

Contact visits between the child and their biological family will be managed in such a manner as to support the foster placement and the foster care partnership.

- The child protection worker is to negotiate any variations in contact visit arrangements with the foster carer at least 24 hours in advance.
- Discussions should take place with the foster carer about the reasons for contact, the reasons a child might be distressed by contact, and how to manage this in the child's best interests.
- The SCPWPS is to support the foster carer in dealing with any difficult contact issues that arise, including undertaking a formal process with regard to any serious concerns (for example, neglect or abuse) raised by the foster carer in relation to biological family members.
- The Department appreciates the involvement of the foster carer in contact visits. When a foster carer requests that they undertake the contact visit/s, assessment of their capacity to do this is to be undertaken. Based on the outcomes of the assessment, support is to be

provided to the foster carer to undertake this role.

Diversity and equity

The foster carer is provided with the support and resources they require to assist them to meet the needs of the child in their care with regard to gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

- A non-Aboriginal foster carer is to be provided with the support, information and resources required to meet the cultural needs of an Aboriginal child in their care, including linking the foster carer with an Aboriginal practice leader.
- The foster carer is to be provided with information on the services provided by the Telephone Information Service and linked with culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) community groups and agencies when they have a child in their care from a CaLD background.

The Department's policies and services

Development of the Department's policies and services for children in care and foster families, at a district and organisational level, will involve input from foster carers and/or the Foster Care Association (FCA).

- Each district is to provide opportunities for foster carers to input into the district's systems and processes for children in care and carer support.
- Representative foster carers are to be invited to attend each district's conference and/or other key planning forums when addressing children in care issues.
- The FCA will meet regularly with the Director General and relevant Executive Directors to enhance strategic implementation of foster care related policies and services.

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Exemption from the Centrelink activity test and work participation requirements

A parent (the principal carer of a dependent child) who receives an income support payment from Centrelink, such as Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance, is required to look for or undertake part-time work for at least 15 hours per week once their youngest child turns 6 years of age.

However, if a general, relative or significant other carer receives an income support payment from Centrelink and is the principal carer for a child in care, they may be eligible for exemption from the Activity Test and work participation requirements for up to 12 months at a time. This includes a relative or significant other who provides an urgent placement for a child in the CEO's care (s.79(2)(b)).

Centrelink guidelines state that an approved emergency or respite foster carer, who is not the principal carer of a child, may be eligible to receive an exemption for the duration of any foster child placement, and for up to 12 weeks after a child has left the placement while awaiting the placement of another foster child.

In order to receive exemption from Centrelink, the child protection worker will need to provide the carer with a letter, Form 543 - Exemption from the Centrelink Activity Test and Participation Requirements, which states that he or she is currently a carer with the Department and is providing a placement for a child who is in the CEO's care.

Centrelink will exempt the carer from the activity tests and participation in work for up to 12 months. At such time, if the carer is still providing care for a child in the CEO's, the child protection worker will need to provide a further letter (Form 543).

Note: If a foster carer is on Newstart Allowance and intends to leave Australia temporarily, they should be advised to contact Centrelink before they travel as it may affect their payments.

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Supporting foster carers who have young people with mental health issues in their care

Flowcharts are available in related resources to assist child protection workers in supporting foster carers that have a young person in their care who has mental health issues and may have an acute mental health episode that requires immediate intervention and/or assessment. Refer to:

- The Acute Response Team – Referral Pathway (mental health information and triage), and
- PMH Emergency Department Contact Process for Children in Care (including mental health intervention).

The Acute Response Team (ART) is a metropolitan service that operates 24 hours per day, seven

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days a week. The service conducts acute health and mental health assessments in emergency departments and community settings in the metropolitan area, from Clarkson to Peel. The ART can be contacted as a first response option – telephone 1800 048 636.

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